




Provenance Research Strategy

Approved by	 Prof. Cathal O Donoghue Chair of the Board of the National Museum of Ireland
Approval Date	3 rd October 2024
Review Date	October 2027

Responsibility: Director of Collections & Access

Contents

1.0 Introduction.....	3
2.0 Legislative basis	3
3.0 Core values	4
4.0 Core collections	4
5.0 Policy.....	5
6.0 Relevant collections to this strategy	5
7.0 Resources and process	5
8.0 Associated legislation, standards, and conventions	6
Associated NMI policies.....	7

1.0 Introduction

As part of its strategic plan, *Increasing Accessibility, Engaging Community* (2023-2028), the National Museum of Ireland (NMI) has developed clear objectives around excellence in collections care, meaningful stakeholder and community engagement, and growing opportunities for research on the collections. Building upon this work, the NMI Collections Provenance Research Policy will enable provenance research on ownership and acquisition history, collections interpretation, and dissemination of information on collections and objects within the Museum that have a colonial context, an otherwise contested context, or are subject to legislation, standards and conventions pertaining to endangered wildlife, or the illicit import, export, or transfer of ownership of Cultural Property.

2.0 Legislative basis

The State owns the collections managed by NMI and has done since the Dublin Science and Art Museum Act, 1877 established what is now known as the National Museum of Ireland. That legislation was superseded in 1997 and while the State still owns the collections, NMI now acquires objects under powers conferred by section 11 of the National Cultural Institutions Act 1997. This states that:

12. — (2) *The Board shall have all such powers as it considers necessary or expedient for the performance of its functions under this Act including, but without prejudice to the foregoing, the following powers:*

(m) to acquire, borrow or accept a donation or bequest of museum heritage objects

The term “museum heritage object” is defined in the 1997 Act as:

(a) any object in the collection of the Museum on the Museum establishment day,

(b) any object (including archaeological objects, objects relating to the decorative arts or natural sciences or to history or industry or folklife) over 25 years old considered appropriate by the Board for inclusion in the collection of the Museum concerning human life in Ireland, the natural history of Ireland, and of the relations of Ireland with other countries, and

(c) any other similar objects;

The NMI has a statutory role under the National Monuments Acts 1930 to 2014 and the Historic and Archaeological Heritage and Miscellaneous Provision Act in relation to archaeological objects.

1. All archaeological objects found in the State without a known owner are property of the State and the NMI is the repository for all such objects.
2. Archaeological objects must be reported to the NMI within 72 hours of discovery.
3. Designated Museums may (on behalf of the State) acquire archaeological objects that are primarily of local importance.
4. The Director NMI has the option to waive the claim of the State in relation to such

objects.

5. The NMI is the State's repository for all archaeological objects from excavations.
6. The definition of 'archaeological object' is very broad. It governs not only artefacts but also archaeologically significant ecofacts (remains of plants or animals), and human remains, and is not limited by the date or age of an object.

3.0 Core values

This policy is a statement of principle of actions that will provide a framework for provenance research throughout the NMI. It is informed by a commitment to our five organisational values, which provide the principles through which we deliver our mission and vision.

1. Stewardship
2. Innovation
3. Transparency
4. Accessibility
5. Collaboration

It is also informed by the ethical principles of best practice produced by organisations outlined in the Associated Legislation, Standards, and Conventions section, below.

4.0 Core collections

1. Museum Heritage Objects (including 'Archaeological Objects') that have been acquired by the NMI are registered in systems dating back to the implementation of the Science & Art Museum Act on 14 August 1877. All objects acquired by NMI since that date and registered in these systems are considered 'Accessioned Objects' that are part of the NMI 'Core Collection'.
2. Included in the NMI Core Collection are major collections of objects transferred from the Museum of Irish Industry (MII), Royal Dublin Society (RDS), Royal Irish Academy (RIA), Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland (RSAI) and Trinity College Dublin (TCD). These transfers and deposits in the 19th century into what is now the National Museum of Ireland are considered part of the NMI Core Collection. The objects in these collections are not well documented in many cases and were not itemised or catalogued at the point of transfer of custodianship to NMI. So, too, the nature of transfer may be variable and, in some cases, also poorly documented.

5.0 Policy

The NMI will actively address such material culture in our care by examining our collections through the principles of provenance, transparency, and ethics. Like many museums established in the 19th century, the NMI holds collections that do not reflect contemporary collecting practices and ethics.

As an institution that holds collections and objects that were acquired in ways that do not reflect contemporary collecting practices, we have a responsibility to understand how this material was acquired by the Museum. For example, whether it was connected with colonialism, other contested contexts, or subject to conventions pertaining to endangered wildlife, or includes objects that are regulated by rules and principles pertaining to import and export, or transfer of ownership of cultural property. We will research the provenance and assess the future for such objects within the institution. In this process of research we will;

- Seek and be open to guidance from local, national, and international individuals and communities.
- Acknowledge the transactions, events, language, and histories through which the objects came into our collections.
- Be transparent and open in how we engage, discuss, and speak of such material today.
- Be truthful in recognising that some collections and objects may have been acquired in unethical or unfair ways.

6.0 Relevant collections to this strategy

We will make a broad, encompassing, and holistic assessment of collections across all NMI departmental Divisions to understand and contextualise material associated with all colonial violence and dispossession, and unethical or harmful collecting practices. This will include, among others, and where possible within given resources, Ethnographic, Asian, Textile, Arms and Armor, Classical Archaeology, Decorative Arts, Military, Natural History, Folklife, and oral history collections across all Divisions of the Museum.

We will transform how we work with our collections, with our data and how we record information in our database, our use of language and labels, with our research partners, and with our local, national, and international communities and community experts whose heritage is represented within the Museum. This work will be guided by existing legislation and best practice and lead to new perspectives and narratives on NMI historic collections. Concurrently, we do recognise that occasionally it is not possible to unearth collection or acquisition histories through research on extant documentation or in consultation with our many communities. In these cases, we will acknowledge this in our labels, texts, and online collections data.

7.0 Resources and process

We note that this work is dependent on NMI having available the required capacity resources within its collection departments to deliver on this strategy. In carrying out this work we note that we will work ethically, and with care and consideration through the contemporary

practices of transparency, recontextualisation, shared authority, partnership, co-creation, collaboration, consultation with source communities, restitution, and repatriation.

8.0 Associated legislation, standards, and conventions

- CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora)
[Code of Ethics - International Council of Museums -International Council of Museums \(icom.museum\)](#)
- EU Rules for the Protection of Cultural Heritage
[Cultural Goods - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)
- Historic and Archaeological Heritage and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023
[Historic and Archaeological Heritage and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023](#)
- Human Tissue (Transplantation, Post-Mortem, Anatomical Examination and Public Display) Act 2024
<https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2024/act/5/enacted/en/html>
- ICOM Code of Ethics
[Code of Ethics - International Council of Museums -International Council of Museums \(icom.museum\)](#)
- ICOM Code of Ethics for Natural History Museums
[COUVNATHCODEANG \(icom.museum\)](#)
- Museum Ethnographers Group
[Museum Ethnographers Group | Resources & support for ethnographers](#)
- National Museum Directors' Council, UK
https://www.nationalmuseums.org.uk/what-we-do/contributing-sector/cultural-property/spoliation/spoliation_statement/
- Natural Sciences Collections Association
<https://www.natsca.org/natsca-decolonising>
- UNESCO 1970 Convention (On the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export, and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property)
[About 1970 Convention | UNESCO](#)
- SPECTRUM Collection Management Standards
[Introduction to Spectrum – Collections Trust](#)
- Irish Wildlife Legislation and Licensing

[Legislation | National Parks & Wildlife Service \(npws.ie\)](#)

- The Nagoya Protocol (On access to genetic resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from the Utilization).
[About the Nagoya Protocol \(cbd.int\)](#)

Associated NMI policies

- Acquisitions Policy
- Collection Care and Conservation Policy
- Collections Documentation and Information Policy
- Disposal Policy
- Divisional Acquisitions Policies
- Exhibitions Policy
- Human Remains Policy
- Loans Policy
- Location Movement and Control Policy
- NMI Strategic Plan, *Increasing Accessibility, Engaging Community* (2023-2028)
- Object Exit and Dispatch Policy
- Risk Management Policy
- Storage Management Policy.