




Collections Acquisition Policy

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| 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

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1.0 Introduction

The National Museum of Ireland (NMI) supports an active programme of acquisition. This policy covers all acquisitions of ‘museum heritage objects’ by the NMI for its core collections. For the purposes of this Policy, ‘acquisition’ refers to the permanent transfer of ownership of an object to the National Museum of Ireland (for information relating to the temporary transfer of objects in or out of NMI, see the Loans Policy). The term ‘accession’ is used to signify that an object has been formally inducted into the core collection. This policy does not address the collections of the NMI Archives, Library or Education Handling Collections, for which there are separate policies.

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 That legislation was superseded in 1997 and while the State still owns the collections, NMI now acquires objects under powers conferred by section 11 of the National Cultural Institutions Act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,

(a) 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

(b) any other similar objects;

The NMI has a statutory role under the National Monuments Acts 1930 to 2014 (and under the Historic and Archaeological Heritage and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023) 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, with the approval of the Board of NMI (delegated to the Director).
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 and other sources.

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.

Associated legislation

- National Monuments Amendment Acts 1930 to 2014
- Historic and Archaeological Heritage and Miscellaneous Provision Act 2023
- UNESCO Sustainable Development Goals <https://www.unesco.org/en/sdgs>

Associated NMI policies

- Acquisitions Policy
- Collection Care and Conservation Policy
- Collections Documentation and Information Policy
- Disposal Policy
- Divisional Acquisitions Policies
- Divisional Contemporary Collecting Policies
- Exhibitions Policy
- Loans Policy
- Location Movement and Control Policy
- Object Exit and Dispatch Policy
- Provenance Research Policy
- Risk Management Policy
- Storage Management Policy.

3.0 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 in many cases not well documented and were not itemised or catalogued at the point of transfer of custodianship to NMI. The nature of transfer may be variable and, in some cases, also poorly documented.
3. The Curatorial Divisions of the NMI shall prepare Acquisition Strategies for approval

by the Director of NMI. These acquisition strategies shall take consideration of the NMI Statement of Strategy and be subject to periodic review.

4.0 Selection of objects for acquisition

1. NMI will acquire objects and their accompanying data that support and expand upon the existing collections, as outlined for each Curatorial Division (covering the disciplines of archaeology, decorative and applied arts, history, Irish folklife, contemporary life, and natural history).
2. NMI will take resources into consideration when making decisions on acquisitions, to ensure that an appropriate standard of care can be delivered. This will include storage space, conservation, and staff time required for managing the receipt, documentation and subsequent care of an object or collection of objects.
3. NMI will consider all fiscal implications when considering acquisitions. This pertains to purchase or acquisition or donation of the object(s), conservation, movement of the object(s), and storage of the object(s).
4. NMI will consider the environment and sustainability when making decisions on acquisitions.
5. NMI will take due consideration of the acquisition policies and strategies of other state bodies responsible for the acquisition of portable heritage objects, to avoid duplication of effort.

5.0 Acquisitions processing & professional guidelines

1. The NMI will follow its Collections Acquisition Guidelines when processing acquisitions. These cover the processes to be followed in making decisions to acquire specific objects, or collections of objects. These include the levels of delegation in terms of decision making, from routine acquisitions processed by curators to major acquisitions with significant implications for NMI that are approved at the level of Director.
2. The NMI will follow appropriate professional guidelines (SPECTRUM 5.0, published September 2017) when accessioning objects, with a focus on capturing all relevant information at the point of acquisition.
 - a. Due diligence will be undertaken by members of the curatorial team as part of the acquisition process. This will include provenance research appropriate scrutiny of any factor that may be raised as a challenge to the rightful transfer of ownership of any object or collection of objects (including, but not restricted to; proof of ownership, permits, legislation, ethics, copyright, usage agreements, health and safety, and legal title as appropriate to the nature of the object).
 - b. Upon entry to an NMI building an entry number will be allocated to all objects or groups of objects.
 - c. Upon entry the object or objects will be added to the collections management database by registration staff to ensure an audit trail exists.
 - d. Upon entry the object or objects will be added to the collections management

database in Irish Antiquities by curatorial staff.

- e. Each object or group of objects will be registered by the curator acquiring the object(s) into the appropriate collection using a unique NMI register number, which should be securely associated with the objects.
- f. A museum record will be prepared by the acquiring curator for all new acquisitions and associated with the register number no later than three months after acquisition.
- g. The systems used to manage records will be tamper-proof, with an appropriate audit trail and secure backup.

6.0 Right to reject

The Director of the NMI, acting on behalf of the Board, reserves the right to reject the offer of any museum heritage object, or any object less than twenty-five years old, but as standard practice the NMI will:

- a) not accept objects under circumstances that would be damaging to the Museum's standing and reputation.
- b) not accept objects that are known or suspected to have been illegally or unethically acquired by the current holder unless these are Irish archaeological objects where the museum has a duty to receive them.
- c) not accept any object where it has good cause to believe that the current holder is not legitimately entitled to retain the object, unless these are archaeological objects where the museum has a duty to receive them.
- d) not accept objects that do not meet the criteria set out above.
- e) not accept objects that do not align with Divisional Acquisition Strategies.
- f) consider for acquisition objects of any age as part of NMI's Contemporary Collections Acquisition Strategy.