




De-accession & Disposal Policy

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Approval Date	19 th June 2025
Review Date	June 2028

Responsibility: Director of Collections & Access

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1.0 Introduction

This policy covers all disposals of objects by The National Museum of Ireland (NMI) from its Core Collections. For the purposes of this policy, 'disposal' refers to the permanent removal of ownership of an object from the National Museum of Ireland.

This policy will not address the considerations made for acquiring (or not) an object, or to decline to acquire archaeological objects. These are covered under the specific Acts and NMI's Acquisition Policy. Specific issues around de-accessioning, reburial, or repatriation of human remains are covered in the Human Remains Policy.

The NMI will not acquire, whether by purchase, gift, transfer, bequest or exchange, any object or specimen unless the governing body or responsible officer is satisfied that the NMI can acquire, on behalf of the State, a valid title to the object in question, and that in particular it has not been acquired in, or exported from, its country of origin (or any intermediate country in which it may have been legally owned) in violation of that country's laws. (For the purposes of this paragraph 'country of origin' includes Ireland). However, in certain circumstances the NMI will acquire or accept donations of lately deceased Natural History specimens. All acquisitions will be documented in accordance with best museum practice.

The NMI may wish to dispose of Museum Heritage Objects in its collections from time to time for a variety of reasons. The acquisition and possession of collections impose obligations founded on public trust and for this reason, any decisions concerning the deaccessioning and disposal of collections require careful consideration and appropriate justification.

De-accessioning is the process used to formally approve and record the removal of an object or group of objects from the catalogue of accessioned collections.

Disposal is the act of physically removing an object or group of objects from a collection and disposing of it/them.

The term 'de-accession' is used to signify that an object has been removed from the Core Collection, however it may be retained/rehoused within the ownership of NMI (e.g. Handling Collection).

2.0 Legislative basis

The State owns the collections managed by the NMI and has done so since the [Dublin Science and Art Museum Act, 1877](#) established what is now known as the National Museum of Ireland. Further provisions relating to State ownership of Museum Heritage Objects were provided under the terms of statutes including but not restricted to, [The National Monuments Acts 1930 to 2014](#) and [The National Cultural Institutions Act, 1997](#).

The National Cultural Institutions Act 1997 establishes how disposals are to be managed in relation to the National Library of Ireland but does not cover this for the NMI. The following principles are based on best practice as outlined in the Museum Standards Programme for Ireland (MSPI) operated by the Heritage Council, the Museums Association disposal toolkit

and guidelines, and the international museum standard SPECTRUM 5.0.

2a. Disposal of an Archaeological Object: Historic and Archaeological Heritage and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023

99. (1) *Subject to subsection (6), an archaeological object which is owned by the State shall not be disposed of by a person except in accordance with subsection (2).*

(2) *Subject to subsections (3), (6) and (7), where the Board is of the opinion that an archaeological object is not, or has ceased to be, of sufficient archaeological, historic, cultural or scientific interest to justify its continued retention by the State, the Board may consent to the disposal of the object in such manner as may be specified in the consent.*

(3) (a) *Subsection (2) shall be in addition to, and not in substitution for, any authorisation of any other person that is necessary to make lawful the disposal of the archaeological object concerned.*

(b) *In paragraph (a), “authorisation of any other person” includes the giving or granting of a licence, consent, approval, permission or direction, whether under an enactment or otherwise.*

(4) *Where an archaeological object is the subject of an order under section 96 (7), the Board shall not consent to its disposal other than—*

(a) *with the consent of the Minister, and*

(b) *either—*

(i) *in conformity with any conditions to which such order is subject, or*

(ii) *with the leave of the court which made the order.*

(5) *Where the disposal of an archaeological object under this section is by way of, or includes, the transfer of the object to another person—*

(a) *the transfer may be made subject to such conditions as are specified in a notice in writing given by the Board to the person,*

(b) *subject to paragraph (c), the person (and the person’s successors in title to the person’s interest in the object) shall comply with any such conditions, and*

(c) *the Board may, by notice in writing given to the person (or the person’s successors in title to the person’s interest in the object), specify one or more than one of such conditions with which the person (or those successors) need no longer comply from the date, or the occurrence of the event, specified in the notice for the purpose.*

(6) *Subsections (1) and (2) shall not apply to the disposal, or proposed disposal, of an archaeological object pursuant to—*

(a) *section 7 or 9 of the National Archives Act 1986, or*

(b) *section 18 of the Act of 1997.*

(7) *Where the Board is minded to give consent under subsection (2) to the disposal of an archaeological object which was found during the course of carrying out a licensable activity, it shall—*

*(a) consult with the Minister to seek his or her views (if any) on the proposed disposal, and
(b) if those views (if any) are received within the period prescribed for the purposes of this paragraph or, if no such period is prescribed, within 21 days from the date of consultation, have regard to those views in deciding whether or not to give such consent.*

3.0 Core collections

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'.

Also 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 Museum Heritage Objects accessioned into the NMI Core Collection.

4.0 Principles for de-accessioning

1. The NMI will retain all Museum Heritage Objects in its Core Collection unless there are specific exceptional reasons put forward in a written proposal for their de-accession.
2. Any proposal to de-accession a Museum Heritage Object will be submitted in writing and be assessed by an internal panel and referred to the Director before being submitted to the Board of NMI for consideration. The procedure will include a recommendation from the panel indicating a preference for de-accessioning and/or disposal.
3. Reasons for de-accession of a Museum Heritage Object may include:
 - a. **Legal:** Lack of title or other legal reasons where the holding of an object in the core collection is called into question.
 - b. **Repatriation:** Response to a valid/Bonafide request to repatriate an object.
 - c. **Suitability:** The object may be more appropriate to another NMI department (e.g. for use in handling collections for public engagement) or for another museum/gallery and transferred accordingly.
 - d. **Error:** Reconciliation of collections accessioned in error. Circumstances demonstrating unethical acquisition may include items that were stolen, taken under duress or removed without consent of the owner.
 - e. **Condition:** lack of facilities or resources to carry out necessary level of remedial work to passively care properly for, and/or carry out interventive treatment for an object.
 - f. **Duplication** or redundancy or excess of collection material.
 - g. **Depreciated Condition:** damaged or deteriorated beyond usefulness. Physical deterioration may be inherent in the object such as the life span of certain

plastics.

- h. **Hazardous Condition:** the object represents a hazard to other objects, and or a health and safety threat to staff or the public.
4. All actions pertaining to the de-accession of objects will be documented in full. Object records for items that have been de-accessioned will be maintained.
5. The NMI will follow appropriate professional guidelines (SPECTRUM 5.0) when de-accessioning objects.
6. Due diligence will be undertaken to ensure that any object put forward for de-accessioning is the property of NMI. This will include appropriate scrutiny of any factor that may be raised as a challenge to the rightful ownership of any object or collection of objects (including but not restricted to; proof of ownership, legal title, permits, legislation, ethics, copyright, usage agreements, health and safety, and as appropriate to the nature of the object).
7. For objects originally belonging to parent institutions and those responsible for major 19th century transfers (Royal Dublin Society, RDS, Royal Irish Academy, Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland, Trinity College Dublin,) the views of the relevant collection stakeholders will be sought.
8. A written request to de-accession an object or objects may be sent in the first instance to the Director of Collections and Access who will bring the request to the attention of the Director. The request must be accompanied by a detailed report, with images, to include input from Curatorial, Conservation, and Registration, along with Facilities/Operations where appropriate. The request will then be brought to the attention of the NMI Board for approval or otherwise.

5.0 Principles for disposal

Before disposal can be considered it must be established that the object/s concerned have not yet been accessioned in NMI Collections or have been deaccessioned from NMI Collections. Approval for deaccessioning will be sought from the Board through the Director. A decision to dispose of a specimen or object, whether by exchange, gift, transfer, or destruction (in the case of an object too badly damaged to be of use) will be the responsibility of the Board acting on the advice of the Director and professional staff and not of the curator of the collection acting alone.

An amendment to the National Monuments Act 1994 in the National Cultural Institutions Act 1997 (Section 68 (2)) outlines the disposals procedure in the case of archaeological objects which are the property of the State as follows: "The Director may, at his or her discretion, if he or she is of the opinion that the object is not of sufficient archaeological or historical interest to justify its retention by the State, dispose of the object by whatever means he or she thinks fit." Furthermore, the same section of the Act states: "Where an archaeological object becomes the property of the State and the Director is of opinion that

the object is predominantly more of local rather than national interest, the Director may place the object in the care of a designated museum.” It goes on to state: “An archaeological object that has been placed in the care of a designated museum ... shall not be disposed of other than by means of its transfer into the care of another designated museum or the National Museum of Ireland”. NMI will not dispose of Collections by sale.

The NMI will retain all Museum Heritage Objects in its ownership unless there are specific exceptional reasons put forward for their disposal. If the object is accessioned in the core collection, its de-accession will form part of the disposal proposal process. Any accessioned object must first be de-accessioned before disposal.

1. Any proposal to dispose of a Museum Heritage Object will be submitted in writing and be assessed by an internal panel and referred to the Director before being submitted to the Board of NMI for consideration. The internal panel will comprise the Director of Collections and Access, the Head of Conservation (or nominee), the Head of Registration (or nominee), the four Divisional Keepers (or nominees), and the Head of Education (or nominee). The internal panel will make a written recommendation for disposal or otherwise to the Director who will bring the recommendation to the Board. With Board approval, the process will move to the disposal phase.
2. The Board would only consider that an object was unfit to be retained in the Collection if it was no longer useful or relevant to the Museum’s purpose and if its retention would not be of benefit either to researchers or the general public, whether for display, education and learning, or research, or any other purpose for which the Museum is established, or the hazardous condition of the object poses too great a risk for its retention within the collection.
3. Reasons for disposal of a Museum Heritage Object may include:
 - a. **Legal:** Lack of title or other legal reasons where the holding of an object in the possession of NMI is brought into question.
 - b. **Repatriation:** Response to a request to repatriate an object.
 - c. **Error:** Reconciliation of collections accessioned in error. Circumstances demonstrating unethical acquisition may include items that were stolen, taken under duress or removed without consent of the owner.
 - d. **Suitability:** The object may be more appropriate to another museum or gallery and transferred accordingly.
 - e. **Condition:** lack of facilities or resources to carry out necessary level of remedial work to care properly for an object
 - f. **Duplication** or redundancy or excess of collection material.
 - g. **Depreciated Condition:** damaged or deteriorated beyond usefulness. It has become useless for the purposes of the Museum by reason of damage, physical deterioration, or infestation by destructive organisms. Physical deterioration may be inherent in the object such as the life span of certain plastics.

- h. **Hazardous Condition:** the object represents a hazard to other objects, and or a health and safety threat to staff or the public.
4. All actions pertaining to the disposal of objects will be documented in full and records retained. Object records for items that have been disposed of will be maintained.
5. The NMI will follow appropriate professional guidelines (SPECTRUM 5.0) when disposing of objects.
6. Due diligence will be undertaken to ensure that any object put forward for disposal is the property of NMI. This will include appropriate scrutiny of any factor that may be raised as a challenge to the rightful ownership of any object or collection of objects (including, but not restricted to; proof of ownership, legal title, permits, legislation, ethics, copyright, usage agreements, health and safety, and as appropriate to the nature of the object).
7. For objects originally belonging to parent institutions and those responsible for major 19th century transfers (RDS, RIA, RSAI, TCD) the views of the relevant collection stakeholders will be sought.
8. The proposal will address any specific risks, costs or other relevant constraints that may relate to the safe disposal of the object(s).
9. The destination of objects selected for disposal by NMI may include other (but may not be limited to) Irish museums, museums overseas, return to donor, organisations in the public domain, recycling, destruction.
10. Objects will not be disposed of in any way that results in financial or commercial gain.
11. The ownership of any collection item that has been removed from the collections must not be transferred, either directly or indirectly, to any employee, volunteer, or affiliated person of the NMI.
12. If disposing of an object NMI will do so ethically and in line with best practice in waste management or those objects that are beyond repair or hazardous.

6.0 Disposal of objects that NMI may not own

NMI acknowledges that there may be occasions when it is deemed necessary to dispose of objects that do not belong to the Museum (not accessioned into the Collections), or whose ownership is uncertain. These objects may include:

- **Uncollected enquiries:** Objects that have been brought into the Museum for identification and have not then been collected by their owners. The 'Conditions of Deposit' on NMI's Object Entry Form states that uncollected items may be disposed of by the Museum if not collected within four months. NMI will make reasonable efforts to contact the owner. NMI may decide to return the item by registered post or dispose

of the item.

- **Unsolicited or unwanted gifts:** Objects that have been brought into the Museum as gifts, but which do not align with the Museum's collecting and acquisition policies. Such objects may be left at the reception desks, be given to staff while working offsite, or arrive by post/deliver, often with no return address.
- NMI does not encourage the donation of unsolicited objects. If a donor does not leave an address NMI will assume that they intend to give the item to the Museum. NMI will then decide whether the object fits within acquisition strategies or whether to dispose the object. In the case of an unsolicited object sent to the Museum by a known source, but that source will not agree to its return, NMI will decide whether the object fits within its acquisition strategies. If it does not, NMI will send a registered letter to the would-be donor notifying them of the intent to dispose if the item is not collected within six weeks.
- **Recently loaned objects:** Objects that have been loaned to NMI with formal loan agreements, for a temporary exhibition, for example, where the conditions of the loan return are not met by the lender and there is no engagement from the lender to facilitate the loan return.
- **Objects with no documentation:** Objects with no accompanying documentation to show how they were acquired.
- **Long standing loans where the owner cannot be traced:** While it does not happen now, in the past many museums took objects into their collections on the basis of 'permanent loan' or 'long term loan'. These objects do not belong to the Museum even if they have been in the collections for many years. While museums do record the address of lenders now, if the address was not recorded at the time of the 'long term loan' or 'permanent loan' it can be difficult to find the owner of the object many years after the original loan was agreed.
- NMI will research all known sources, including staff recollection, catalogue lists, and databases, for the name of the owner. If an owner cannot be found NMI will advertise on its website without giving details of the object, specifying that the object will be disposed of within a given timeframe.

Associated policies, legislation, and documents

- Historic and Archaeological Heritage and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023
- NMI Acquisitions Policy
- NMI Collections and Documentation Policy NMI Human Remains Policy
- NMI Object Entry Form
- NMI Provenance Research Policy
- [Off the Shelf: a toolkit for ethical transfer, reuse and disposal - Museums Association](#)