

# **SOAS Collections Management Policy**

**Date at which policy due for review: October 2018**

(5 years after approval date)

*(The following document is based on Museums Association and the Museums, Libraries & Archives Council guidelines)*

## **1. Introduction**

1. The School of Oriental and African Studies Mission Statement is:

**The mission of the School is to be a leading centre of excellence in research and teaching relating to Asia and Africa.**

The aims of the School are:

- To advance through teaching and research the knowledge and understanding of Asia and Africa
- To contribute to the development of the School's academic disciplines
- To provide high quality education so that our students achieve competence in their chosen subject or subjects and develop their intellectual and other core skills
- To provide high quality training in languages and other expertise related to Asia and Africa specific to the needs of individuals, official agencies, companies, non-governmental organisations and the media
- To encourage and inform understanding of Africa and Asia in the United Kingdom and beyond

SOAS's collections exist to support the mission, and are dedicated to promoting a better understanding of the art, culture, history and contemporary contexts of Africa, Asia and the Middle East. They include manuscripts, rare books, wall-hangings, textiles, ceramics, metalwork, sculptures, maps, photographs, documents of historical interest and records on other media which relate directly to the regions and subjects studied by the School. These are held in the Archives and throughout the School.

1. The purpose of this Collections Management Policy is to be a guide for SOAS staff, supporters, and the public, to the professional standards the School will observe towards the objects in its care. It seeks to reassure the public that the School is operating within an ethical framework and is publicly accountable.
2. This document will be published on the School's Internet website and a copy on paper will be supplied to any person who wishes to receive it at no greater charge than is sufficient to cover the expenses of stationary and postage in so doing.
3. This policy relates to objects, artefacts and works of art offered to the School. Although the policy summarises the procedures regarding the acquisition and management of archives and manuscripts, these items come under the auspices of

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the Special Collections department of the Library. There is a separate collection policy for both books and archives held by the Library.

4. The Brunei Gallery Advisory Panel will consider all art and artefacts offered to the School for inclusion in the School Collections (excluding Library and Archival material) reporting to the External Relations Committee as the governing body of the SOAS collections.

## 2. Policy Review Procedure

1. This policy will be reviewed at least once every five years and is therefore due for review in 2013 or sooner. The Museums, Libraries & Archives London (as agent for the Museums, Libraries & Archives Council) will be notified of any changes to the Acquisition and Disposal Policy, and the implications of any such changes for the future of existing collections.

## 3. The Existing Collection

1. The School's collections include objects related to history, art, archaeology, anthropology, ethnography, sociology, religion, language and exploration. The School also holds archives which contain papers, maps, photographs, audio and video tapes.
2. Specific areas in which the School has a collection of artefacts are: Africa, South Asia and Tibet, South East Asia, East Asia, the Middle East and Oceania.
3. The School recognises that it has an obligation to care for its collections as part of its stewardship of these.

## 4. Chronological and geographical scope of collections

1. There are no chronological boundaries for objects from Africa, South Asia and Tibet, South East Asia, East Asia, the Middle East and Oceania, or European material relating to these regions.
2. There is a strong bias towards acquiring items which originate from or are otherwise connected with the regions studied by the School. However, the School will not forbear to collect items from other areas which are representative of items of a type used throughout these regions, or which help to illuminate the general context of the history of these.
3. Items related will only be acquired if they illustrate a general point or the interchange between subject and region studied by the School.
4. The School does not normally acquire material from the Americas and Australasia.
5. Although objects with mechanical or electronic parts are acquired, they are not intended to chart the history of technology. It is therefore not essential for such objects to be in functioning order.

## 5. Acquisition Policy

1. The School will acquire artefacts which can be used to preserve and interpret the history and culture of regions studied by the School. This may include objects, archives, photographs and other related media.
2. Objects acquired should be considered “Objects of Instruction” in relation to the Schools existing Collection.
3. In acquiring objects, the School is influenced by its existing collections, but it must always be open to the possibility of acquiring new types of object resulting from technological and social developments.
4. The School may acquire artefacts by means of gift, bequest or exchange. It may also accept loans (See **section 11**, below). Under the National Heritage Act 1983, the School “may acquire (whether by exchange or gift) any objects which in their opinion it is desirable to add to their collections”.
5. The School will not acquire, whether by gift, bequest or exchange, any object or specimen unless the Governing Body or Responsible Officer is satisfied that the School can acquire a valid title to the item 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 the United Kingdom).
6. In cases of doubt the decision for or against the acceptance of any artefact which is offered will be made by the Brunei Advisory Panel on advice from the Responsible Officer. In so deciding consideration will be given to the value which the object could potentially offer to future generations. If under special circumstance an urgent decision is necessary it may be made by the School Director & Principal who will consult other members to the extent that is practicable in the circumstances.
7. Generally the School will not actively seek to acquire duplicate artefacts. However duplicates are considered of value and are actively collected where there is scope for them to be offered for temporary loan to other museums etc., or where the value of the items is enhanced by the holding or display of several such items together. In the case of printed ephemera which are potentially vulnerable duplicate copies will be collected where available.
8. So far as biological and geological material is concerned, the School will not acquire by any direct or indirect means any specimen that has been collected, sold or otherwise transferred in contravention of any national or international wildlife protection or natural history conservation law of treaty of the United Kingdom or any other country, except with the express consent of an appropriate outside authority (e.g. British court in the case of a specimen seized from a third party under the Protection of Birds Acts).
9. So far as foreign archaeological antiquities (including excavated ceramics) are concerned, in addition to the safeguards under sub-paragraph 5.5 above, the School will not acquire objects in any case where the Brunei Advisory Panel or responsible officer has reasonable cause to believe that the circumstances of their recovery involved the recent unscientific or intentional destruction or damage of ancient monuments or other known archaeological sites, or involved a failure to disclose the finds to the owner or occupier of the land, or the proper authorities.

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10. The School will not accept every artefact and work which may be offered to it. The following practical considerations must be taken into account when deciding whether to add an object to the collections:

### **Physical Condition**

If necessary conservation measures are not feasible, an object will not normally be acquired. Where the item is infested with pests or disease, unless it can be easily treated or the item is rare and the cost or difficulty of treating it is judged worthwhile.

### **Practical issues**

If suitable space is not available meaning the School cannot provide long term care for the artefact, where the proposed gift is encumbered by conditions considered unacceptable and if accepting the item would be prejudicial to the health and safety of School staff or visitors, an object will not normally be acquired.

### **Resources**

The total cost of an object covering the purchase price, transport and handling charges, costs of conservation, documentation, curation, display and storage should be considered when assessing the acquisition of an object.

### **Provenance**

The School will not acquire or exhibit any stolen or illegally exported works. The School will not acquire, whether by gift, bequest or exchange, any object unless it is satisfied that the School can obtain a valid title to the item in question. The School will adhere to the 1970 Unesco Convention (on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property), rejecting items if there is any suspicion that, since 1970, they may have been stolen, illegally excavated or removed from a monument, site or wreck contrary to local law or otherwise acquired in or exported from their country of origin (including the UK), or any intermediate country, in violation of that country's laws or any national or international treaties, unless the School is able to obtain permission from authorities with the requisite jurisdiction in the country of origin.

### **Copyright**

The copyright owner should be identified, wherever possible, and either copyright assigned to the School or a copyright licence obtained.

11. The School will take due account of the collecting policies of other institutions acquiring in the same or related areas or subject fields and will consult with such organisations where conflicts of interest may arise or to define areas of specialism, in order to avoid unnecessary duplication and waste of resources. Specific reference is made to the following other Collections:

- Ashmolean Museum, Oxford
- British museum
- British Library
- Hornimann Museum
- Museum of East Asian Art, Bath
- Pitts Rivers museum, Oxford
- Petrie Museum of Egyptology, London
- Victoria and Albert Museum

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12. The Development Office is to be advised of all donations of objects, artworks and artefacts. Considered as 'gifts' to the School, the Development Office will record the gifts on the Development database. The Development Office will also advise on the stewardship of these donations.
13. Proposed gifts with unacceptable conditions attached to their acquisition will be declined.

## **6. Acquisitions not covered by the Collections Management Policy**

1. Acquisitions outside the current stated policy will only be made in very exceptional circumstances, and then only after proper consideration by the School, having regard to the interests of other museums.
2. The School may acquire collections of items, some of which are outside the collection policy, where the donor wishes to deal with a single institution only, and has a variety of different items to donate, especially if the items could be at risk of destruction by the owner if not accepted. In such cases every effort will be made to pass such items to the most suitable other institution or museum, giving preference to Accredited Museums. Such items will either be accessioned or passed to another institution or museum within a timescale agreed with the donor, failing which they will be returned to him or her.

## **7. Material not accepted for the permanent collections.**

1. The School may acquire certain items which are not intended to be retained for the permanent collections. These items may be used if appropriate for educational or promotional purposes, including loans to schools and other educational groups.

## **8. Models/reproductions**

1. Models/reproductions can be of value in conveying information and understanding more vividly than other means, and they allow representation of large objects which could not be displayed. The School will only acquire models if they are considered to be reasonably accurate or demonstrative representations of the original or are themselves of historical interest. If of historic interest they will be accessioned.

## **9. Management of Archives**

1. The School holds archives separately within the SOAS Library, including historical documents, manuscripts, maps, printed material, audio-visual material, photographs,

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prints and paintings. It is guided by the Code of Practice on Archives for Museums in the United Kingdom, and also aims to meet the standards outlined in the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts' Standards for Record Repositories. Storage for the archives and special collections complies with British Standard 5454 (2000) governing the storage and exhibition of archives. Other legislation that informs the management of archives includes UK Copyright legislation, the Data Protection Act 1998, and the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

2. The Library seeks to acquire archives, manuscripts and other primary source materials of research value relating to African and Asian studies, particularly to East Asia (where the Library has a special strength), relating to the following categories:
  - Missionaries, missionary organisations and religious groups
  - Business organisations and individuals involved in business
  - Humanitarian organisations and political non-governmental groups
  - Individuals whose life or work has been of special relevance to the study of Africa or Asia
3. The School seeks to avoid competition with other archive repositories and will work closely to ensure that archives are placed in the most appropriate home. An informal agreement exists between the India Office Records (British Library) and SOAS over the acquisition of archives relating to India and other territories governed by the East India Company and its successors. In general, when advising potential depositors, the Library will draw attention to the existence of other repositories with similar or overlapping interests, to ensure that material is offered to the most appropriate institution.
4. The repository does not normally seek to acquire manuscripts in fields which fall outside the existing strengths of its holdings. However, in respect of archive materials the School will not be constrained by geographical considerations in accepting material offered to it where this is of potential value to persons conducting research who may wish to use the archive collection.
5. The acquisition of archives and special collections will comply with the School's Acquisition Policy for artefacts (see **Section 5**). In addition, only documents which in the judgement of the Head of Archives are of sufficient quality for permanent preservation will be accepted
6. The School shall maintain a catalogue of its archive collection on a computer database, and update it as often as possible, subject to resources being available. Cataloguing standards will be compliant with the General International Standard Archival Description, Second edition (ISAD-G).
7. As SOAS does not have the staff resources to process large archival deposits, these can only be accepted if the donor supplies accompanying finding aids for the collection, or funding for them to be created. Similarly, organisations and individuals seeking to deposit large quantities of archives must make provision for adequate packaging and preservation of the collection using archival standard materials. (The Head of Archives & Special Collections can advise on this).
8. The School's own administrative records are separately maintained by the Directorate's Information Compliance Manager, although storage and access facilities to these records are shared with the Library.
9. The disposal policy for archives complies with that for artefacts (see **Section 10**).



## 10. Disposal Policy

1. By definition, the School has a long term purpose, and must possess permanent collections in relation to its stated objectives. The School accepts the principle that there is a strong presumption against the disposal of any items in its collection except as set out below.
2. Disposal will be considered where it is believed that another institution would be better able to offer long term care for the object concerned or where the item is of limited value to the School but of greater value to the collections of another institution/museum.
3. All disposals will preferably be by gift or exchange, rather than by sale unless covered by point 10.5. In those cases where the School is legally free to dispose of an item (if this is in doubt, advice will be sought) any decision to dispose of material from the collections will be taken only after due consideration. Once a decision to dispose of an item has been taken, priority will be given to retaining the item within the public domain, and with this in view it will be offered first to accredited museums before disposal to other interested individuals or organisations is considered.
4. In cases in which an arrangement for the exchange or gift of material is not being made with an individual accredited museum, the museum community at large will be advised of the intention to dispose of material. This will normally be through an announcement in the Museums Association's *Museums Journal* and other professional journals if appropriate. The announcement will indicate the number and nature of the specimens or objects involved, and the basis on which the material will be transferred to another institution. A period of at least two months will be allowed for an interest in acquiring the material to be expressed.
5. Under the *National Heritage Act 1983*, as amended by the *Museums & Galleries Act 1992*, the School may dispose of an object by sale, exchange or gift, unless specific restrictions apply, only if it falls into one or more of the following categories:
  - a) It is a duplicate of another object.
  - b) The object is unsuitable for retention and can be disposed of without detriment to the interests of students or other members of the public, i.e. it is no longer relevant or useful to the purpose of the Museum/institution and falls outside the scope of the relevant Collecting Plan.
  - c) Although not falling into the above categories, an object (including a document) may be given, sold to or exchanged with an institution specified in Schedule 5 to the *Museums & Galleries Act 1992* supplemented by subsequent Statutory Instruments (see Appendix 3). Any object may be disposed of in this manner, notwithstanding a trust or condition, subject to the terms of Section 6 of the 1992 Act.
  - d) The School may destroy or otherwise dispose of an object if it has deteriorated beyond usefulness for the purposes of the collections, because of damage, physical deterioration or infestation by destructive organisms and if it cannot be conserved or preserved within a reasonable time scale or with the use of available resources. An object may be disposed of in this manner notwithstanding a trust or condition prohibiting or restricting the disposal of the object.

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6. A decision to dispose of a specimen or object, whether by exchange, gift, or destruction (in the case of an item too badly damaged or deteriorated to be of any use for the purposes of the collections) will be the responsibility of the Brunei Advisory Panel, after taking appropriate curatorial advice and not of any individual acting alone. Such decisions will be recorded in the minutes of Brunei Advisory Panel. Full records will be made of the items involved and arrangements will be made to preserve or transfer, as appropriate, all documentation relating to the items concerned, including photographs where practicable.
7. To maintain an adequate safeguard against injudicious disposal a formal disposal board must consider each case, this will be the responsibility of the Brunei Advisory Panel. The board will consist of the Brunei Advisory panel members and the relevant subject specialist, if deemed necessary also with either a knowledgeable adviser from a different collection, the Art & Archaeology Department or an outside expert. In addition, the Head of Archives, where deterioration is the reason for disposal, must agree to disposal of any item drawn from the Archives. The recommendation of each disposal board must be reported to the External Relations Committee for approval. If the current market value of the disposal is greater than £100,000 it must be presented to the Governing Body for approval, on recommendation of the External Relations Committee.
8. Where an object has been acquired with the aid of an external funding organisation or individual, permission from that organisation or individual will be sought before the object is de-accessioned or transferred to another collection.
9. Any monies received by the School in compensation for the loss of or damage to any item in the collections will be applied for the benefit of the collections. This will normally mean the purchase of further acquisitions but in exceptional cases improvements relating to the care of the collections may be justifiable. Advice on these cases may be sought from the London Museums, Archives & Libraries (MLAL).

## 11. Loans to the School

1. The School will accept items on loan from individuals or organisations, including other museums, for the purpose of temporary and long term exhibition, where no suitable alternative artefact owned by the School is available. Items will not be accepted on loan if they are not required for display, or likely to be so required in the foreseeable future. Loans will be authorised either by the Brunei Advisory Panel, or if under special circumstance an urgent decision is necessary it may be made by the School Director & Principal who will consult other members to the extent that is practicable in the circumstances.
2. Loans of photographs and other media may also be accepted on a short term basis for copying.
3. Loans will be accepted only if the School is able to offer a standard of care equivalent to that given to items in the permanent collection, and has the resources so to do.
4. In all cases a loan agreement in writing shall be signed by the owner and a representative of the School. Such agreements will be for specified terms of no more than ten years (and normally no more than five) and in no circumstances will



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be described as permanent loans. Loan agreements may be renewed for a further period by agreement with the owner, when they expire.

5. Items on loan will be recorded as loans on a computer database in like manner to items which are accessioned to the permanent collection.
6. Items may be accepted on a temporary loan basis for examination or assessment prior to a decision being made on acceptance of the item as a gift or longer term loan.

## 12. Loans by the School to others

1. Loans of artefacts in the School's permanent collection may be made. The School may impose conditions on the loan. All loans must be authorised by either the Brunei Advisory Panel or if under special circumstance an urgent decision is necessary it may be made by the School Director & Principal who will consult other members to the extent that is practicable in the circumstances, who may refuse at their discretion.
2. The loan period shall be decided according to circumstances but for a maximum of five years.
3. In all cases a loan agreement will be signed by the borrower and a representative of the School. The agreement must cover:
  - o The duration of the loan
  - o Any questions of copyright which arise
  - o Requirements for security if applicable
  - o Requirements for transport of the item
  - o Care of the item during the loan period
  - o Requirements for insurance
  - o If applicable, whether the item may be worked or used.
4. Loans will only be made for inclusion in exhibitions to other parties where the full provenance of all other exhibits included can be guaranteed. (As defined in the 1970 Unesco Convention on Cultural Property)
5. Loans will only be made if by so doing the School's exhibitions are not seriously diminished.
6. For material from the Archives and collections of the SOAS Library there is a separate Loans Policy and Agreement shown in Appendix 1.

## 13. Access to collections

1. A proportion of the School's collection is on regular exhibition to the public. Where objects are held in store, persons wishing to view may do so only by prior arrangement. Such appointments will not be unreasonably withheld but persons wishing to see objects will be offered appointments when appropriate School staffs are available and they may not be possible at short notice.
2. Access to the School's Library and Archive collections are subject to the conditions and regulations outlined on the Library's website ([www.soas.ac.uk/library](http://www.soas.ac.uk/library)). The

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School reserves the right to refuse access to vulnerable material in the interests of its safe preservation.

### 14. Education Handling Collection

1. It is intended the School will develop and maintain a separate Education Collection for the purpose of providing material for handling and outreach work.
2. In the case of such material, documentation will clearly show the intended use of the object and donors will be made aware of the possibility of use in this way.
3. These objects will be recorded separately outside the main collection and shall not be treated as part of the permanent collection since their intended use implies that preservation cannot be guaranteed.
4. When such materials are loaned to schools or other organisations for educational purposes, the policy described in section 14 above will not apply. Reasonable arrangements will be made by the Education Officer appropriate to the circumstances.

### 15. Documentation

1. The School will maintain the following documentation in respect of its collection:
  - o Records to indicate what items are held, whether owned or on loan, and where each item is located
  - o Records of all objects leaving the premises and in transit
  - o Records in an Object Entry Register of all in-incoming items, whether for accession, identification or loan,
2. The School will maintain procedures for the return of items received for identification or possible acquisition once a decision has been made.
3. Artefacts in the permanent collection and on long term loan are assigned with an accession number recorded in a computerised Accessions Register and where practicable without risk of damage to the item are discretely labelled, tagged, or otherwise physically identified by the number. The computer records include a detailed description, and as much information as available on the provenance of the artefact, together with a record of the current location.
4. A backup copy of the registers will be kept in a bound paper volume and also in an electronic format.

### 16. Security and insurance

1. The School strives to educate its staff, including casual volunteers, to make them aware that it is their responsibility to protect and preserve the items in their care and of issues of security in relation to theft, accidental damage and danger from the elements.
2. Staff involved in the handling of objects will receive appropriate basic training.

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3. Rooms housing archive materials and collection items in store are kept locked at all times except when in use. The keys to these rooms are in restricted circulation. Risks to other items are minimised by practical, common sense procedures and good 'house keeping'.
4. The School maintains a comprehensive insurance policy covering the buildings, their contents, and liabilities to volunteers and the public

John Hollingworth, Brunei Gallery, SOAS

## Appendix 1.0 Archives Loan Agreement