

# NMSI Collecting Strategy

## Context

NMSI exists to develop, manage and make useful for the public the UK's national collections relating to science and technology, incorporating industry, medicine, transport and the media.

The National Heritage Act 1983 requires us to preserve, care for and add to the objects in the collections, to exhibit them to the public and to make them available for study and research, and to promote the public's enjoyment and understanding of science and technology and of the development of those subjects. NMSI's Corporate Plan commits us to delivering a life enhancing experience through a high impact creative offer, based on the management, development and use of world class collections that are relevant to audiences both today and in the future. We interpret both the Act requirements and Corporate Plan aspirations within our museums' master plans and strategies.

NMSI holds the National collections in science and technology. All new collecting is conducted with reference to these often definitive holdings.

## Vision

NMSI permanent collections will consistently provide the UK with the world's best material and visual record of science and technology.

## Scope and Content

NMSI Collections will contain:

- Icons<sup>1</sup> of continuing scientific, technological and industrial change, with particular emphasis on those developments in which Britain has played a leading role
- Objects that represent working lives and the everyday practice<sup>2</sup> and products of science, technology and industry, especially in Britain.
- Artefacts and records representing the impact of science and technology on people and on the planet
- Records and archives of individuals and organisations in science and industry.
- Material not meeting any of these criteria will not be acquired for the permanent collections.

NMSI collects to enhance the collections' capacity to communicate with its audiences about its subjects, whether scientific, technical, social, or cultural. There are also some subject areas where it is appropriate to hold comprehensive type collections.

It develops collecting strategies that target areas of known weakness ('active collecting') and also take selective advantage of the hundreds of unsolicited offers it receives each year ('reactive collecting').

It will develop partnerships with other museums and archives to ensure that the wider national collection is fully representative of the fields our collections represent, without creating excessive duplication and to share resources for access and collections care.

NMSI staff will exercise due diligence – legal, ethical and intellectual – in acquisitions.

The museums will not normally collect items that are duplicates, useless by reason of damage, physical deterioration or infestation by destructive organisms, unsuitable and capable of disposal without detriment to the interests of the public<sup>3</sup>, or, posing a significant hazard because of constituent

materials.

However, where appropriate, NMSI will hold non-accessioned secondary collections, which will be documented and managed in line with NMSI Collections Management Policy and Procedures. This class of material may include, for instance:

- items used for demonstration or handling,
- examples of contemporary consumer products or artworks.

Such objects will ultimately be reviewed and evaluated for retention, and either added to the accessioned collection or disposed of without joining the accessioned collections.

#### Resources and Limitations

Collections acquisitions will be resourced through donation, application of the collections purchase fund, specific grant aid and, occasionally, through public appeal. The Trustees will set a level for the annual contribution to the collections purchase fund and limits of authority for Museum Directors in the field of collecting.

The NMSI Collections will be limited in overall volume in line with long-term resource capabilities. There will be no overall limit on size because partnerships and loans will create additional capability. However, the Trustees will expect the Directors to deliver collections that can be housed in the organisation's existing storage facilities in London, York, Bradford, Wroughton, and Shildon and with collections partners.

#### Framework for Collecting

NMSI's three museums have separate collecting policy statements which are congruent with each other and form a suite of statements which take into account those specific differences in the subjects that NMSI represents.

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1 Icons are defined as highly significant objects that are either unique (Stephenson's Rocket, for example) or representatives of highly significant classes (Model T Ford, for instance).

2 Icon vs. everyday is a key distinction, in which icons often stand for inventions and discovery, where everyday items stand for use and impact.

3 National Heritage Act categories.