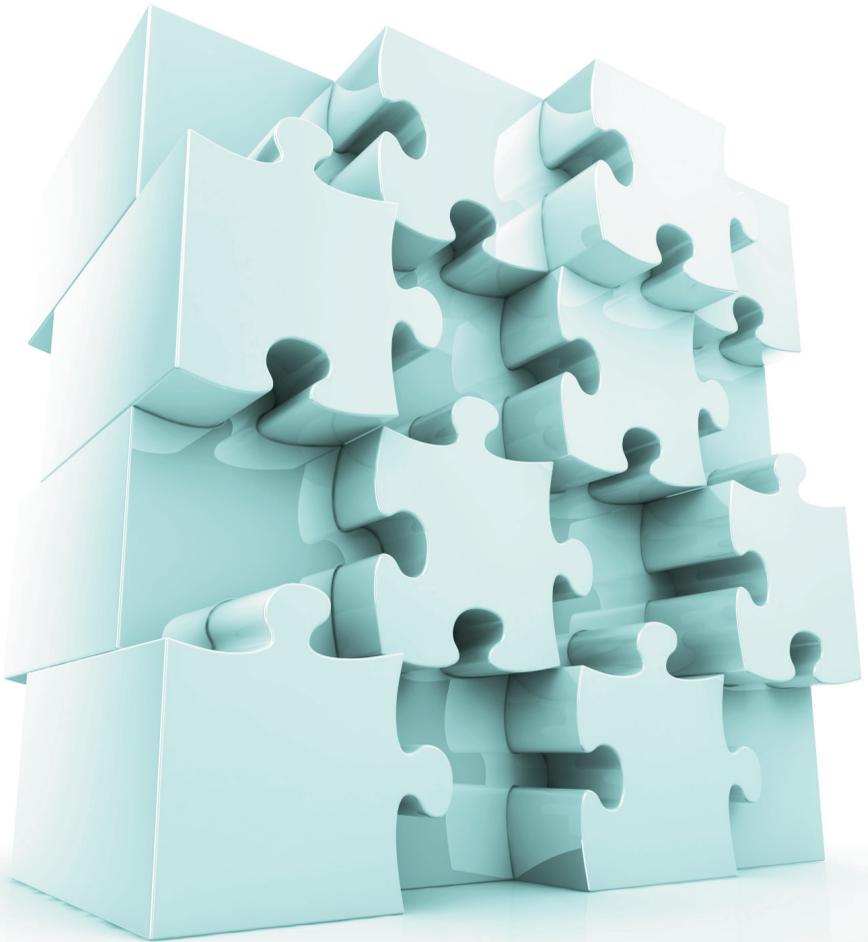


Building a preservation policy



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1 Introduction

Preservation is the art of ‘keeping safe’, ‘maintaining’, ‘retaining’, and ‘keeping alive’. Preservation, as it applies to library and archive collections, can be defined as ‘all managerial, technical and financial considerations applied to retard deterioration and extend the useful life of (collection) materials to ensure their continued availability¹’.

A preservation policy is an essential component of a collections management framework, regardless of the size of the collection or organisation. It sets out an organisation’s approach to preservation, addressing the questions of what needs to be preserved, why, for what purpose, and for how long. The policy clarifies the responsibilities of all concerned, staff, volunteers and users alike. It enables organisations to set and validate priorities, and to review long-standing practices. Preservation strategies, work plans, procedures and processes should all follow from a preservation policy.

Building a successful preservation policy relies on a clear sense of purpose, widespread collaboration and good communication. This booklet provides a framework for setting out an organisation’s approach to achieving the sustainable use of its collections through a preservation policy. It outlines the benefits of a preservation policy, describes its relationship to other policies, and provides guidance on structure and content.

¹ Eden, P. et al., A model for assessing preservation needs in libraries, London: British Library Research and Innovation Centre, 1998

2 Benefits of a preservation policy

The need for a preservation policy is not new, but it has become more acute in recent years. With ever-dwindling resources and many more claims on those that are available, the need for accountability and the need to prioritise and justify expenditure have become more pressing. Clear statements, agreed at the highest level in an organisation, about what needs to be preserved, why, and for how long, are essential for long-term collections management.

A strong preservation policy will:

- clarify the relationship between the organisation's mission and preservation activity
- clarify the scope of preservation activity by identifying the collections to be preserved, their significance and the desired retention period
- act as a focal point for collaborative working across organisations and in some cases between organisations
- clarify relationships with other aspects of collections management such as collections acquisition, access and security
- provide a statement of accountability against which performance can be monitored
- demonstrate the organisation's long-term commitment to its collections to funders and users, internal and external
- act as a communication tool, internally and externally
- provide a basis for the development of preservation strategy and preservation programmes
- provide a basis for establishing priorities and justifying investment
- demonstrate responsible stewardship for the benefit of current and future users
- explain to users why certain actions are taken and others are not.

3 Relationship to other policies, strategy and action plans

The length of a preservation policy and the level of detail included will vary from organisation to organisation. A short, high-level document is much more likely to be agreed, read and acted upon than a very lengthy or complex document. For these reasons, it is generally most effective to limit a preservation policy to short

statements of intent that are agreed at a **senior level** in the organisation, and to highlight other relevant organisational policies, strategy, or sub-policies to provide greater levels of detail as needed.

Given the variety of activities involved in slowing the deterioration of collections and ensuring their continued availability, a preservation policy must relate to other organisational policies, such as collection development, security and access policies. Guidance on how these aspects can be successfully managed together can be found in *PAS 197: 2009 Code of practice for cultural collections management*².

A preservation policy is likely to impact on the work of more than one person or department, e.g. retrieval staff, reading room staff, collection care staff, curators, estates & facilities staff, reprographics staff and volunteers. For the preservation policy to be successful, it is important to involve colleagues in its creation as well as its on-going communication.

4 Foundations for a preservation policy

Before identifying the sections and content for your policy you need to give careful thought to the questions: what needs to be preserved, why, for what purpose, and for how long?

Purpose of the organisation

There are many different kinds of libraries and archives, ranging from national institutions and large research collections, to specialist libraries and archives, local record offices and public lending libraries. They cater for a wide variety of users, from academics, businesses and private researchers, to children and all others who want to be educated and entertained. What needs to be preserved and why are directly linked to the purpose and function of the collections and of the organisations in which they are kept.

² PAS 197:2009 Code of practice for cultural collections management, London: British Standards Institution, 2009

Purpose of the collection

A broadly-based, international collection will comprise original sources and secondary material, as well as basic research material and ephemera, all in a variety of media and formats. It is the purpose of the collection, more than its physical format, which determines its preservation needs at policy level. Different formats and different media may need different preservation strategies and demand different technical solutions, but the aims and the purpose of the library or archive and its functions determine its preservation policy, which must cover all formats and all media.

Functions of the organisation

The purpose of a collection will strongly influence the actions taken to preserve it, but other library and archive functions that are closely linked to preservation must also be considered, such as acquisition, retention, access and use. The strength of these links and the relative importance of these functions again depend on the purpose of the organisation, as well as on the nature of the material.

Acquisition

Decisions made at the point of acquisition have an impact on the preservation requirements during an item's lifecycle. Preservation decisions will be influenced by both the format, e.g. hard copy or digital format, paperback or microfilm; the condition, e.g. good or poor; and the purpose of the acquisition, e.g. for short term use to be replaced when worn out, for the primary purpose of lending or remote access, or for long term retention, to become the national archival copy or master.

Retention

In most libraries, as opposed to archives, material is not always acquired with a retention decision clearly in mind. Frequently, the decision to retain an item for medium term, long term or indefinite use, can only be made once its short term usefulness has been proven. Before any preservation decision is made, a retention decision is vital. Without a clear retention policy, preservation rapidly becomes a haphazard and potentially wasteful exercise. The decision on the format in which an item is to be retained is equally important.

Access

The kind of access required will need to be considered when formulating a preservation policy. Access can take many forms. Access to information about holdings, through good and accessible catalogues, and wider library and archive networks will increase use and thereby the need for good handling policies, conservation treatment, protection and good storage policies. Catalogues can also help by defining what is in a collection, preventing readers from asking for the wrong material and thereby minimising unnecessary handling. They can also be used to refer readers to surrogates, to be used in preference to the originals.

Use

Use can take many different forms such as direct or remote consultation, or as part of an exhibition. The needs of the users will determine whether the original document (provided it is in a fit state to be used) or a surrogate is issued, while the kind of use will determine the security measures needed. The concept of use is an important one for most libraries and archives, and many organisations take the amount of use as an indication of preservation need. Heavily used material is commonly recognised as needing protection and/or treatment to keep it in a usable state. However, low use alone is no justification for neglect: regular preservation surveys will ensure an awareness of the needs of all collections. The shift in many libraries and archives from ownership and collecting to the provision of access means we must be very clear that the responsibilities for long term preservation are shared by all staff, users and volunteers.

Collaboration

Cooperative acquisition, collection management or preservation programmes may be planned, or already in place. A preservation policy must incorporate such commitments.

Collection assessment

Good knowledge of the collection, its significance and the way it is used is very valuable when building a preservation policy. There are a number of different ways in which this information can be collected. Each has a slightly different emphasis so be clear about what you are seeking to gain from an assessment before choosing a methodology.

Risk assessment

A risk management framework provides a good approach to collection care³. By identifying the threats to collections, understanding the likelihood and impact of the risk, and thinking about the strategies needed to mitigate or eliminate the risk, you will gain knowledge of the vulnerability of the collections and the elements that need to be addressed by the preservation policy⁴.

Significance assessment

Significance refers to the values and meanings that items and collections have for people and communities⁵. PAS 197: 2009 advocates significance assessment as part of collections development processes. Understanding the significance of collections helps the prioritisation of preservation management activities.

Preservation needs assessment

A preservation needs assessment combines information on access, significance, use, condition and preservation measures in place, to determine preservation needs and

³ PAS 197:2009 recommends that documented collections care procedures should be in place for conducting an assessment of the risk to items from (where applicable) their inherent instability, other collection items, actions by people, disasters, environment and technological factors, and an assessment of the risk from the collection to people and environment. ISO 31000:2009 provides principles and generic guidelines on risk management and can be applied to a wide range of activities, including strategies and decisions, operations, processes, functions, projects, products, services and assets.

⁴ Refer to the *Ten agents of deterioration* published by the Canadian Conservation Institute www.cci-icc.gc.ca/caringfor-prendresoindes/articles/10agents/index-eng.aspx

⁵ Refer to *Significance 2.0: a guide to assessing the significance of collections*, Collections Council of Australia, 2009 www.environment.gov.au/heritage/publications/significance2-0/pubs/significance20.pdf

priorities. Use a standardised methodology such as the Preservation Assessment Survey⁶ or commission an assessment from an accredited conservator⁷.

Benchmarks in Collection Care

This is a self-assessment checklist which can be used to plan and assess collection care activity. The checklist covers many different areas of activity, both policy and practice. It identifies current achievements and gives an indication of which improvements in collection care might be needed, thus providing a useful planning tool⁸.

Condition surveys

Condition surveys can be carried out item-by-item, or on a sample of the total collection. They provide useful information to gauge conservation requirements and will also help to inform preservation needs. However, they provide an assessment of current condition (damage) and do not assess the causes of damage and are therefore are of limited use when planning future preservation activity.

5 Checklist for a preservation policy

When structuring a preservation policy, think about its intended audience and how it will be used as well as what it includes. Will the policy be available on the organisation's website, in reading rooms, as part of reader welcome packs and staff inductions? Remember that the preservation policy is a living document and its strength comes from being tailored to the organisation, its collections and users.

The headings below provide a checklist to work against when building a preservation policy. You may not need to use all of them; you may wish to give some sections more emphasis than others; you may want to group sections together, or cover some headings as sub-policies separate from your main policy document.

⁶ Refer to the Preservation Advisory Centre website www.bl.uk/blpac/paslib.html

⁷ A conservator accredited by Icon, the Institute of Conservation or the Archives and Records Association

⁸ Refer to the Collections Link website www.collectionslink.org.uk/programmes/benchmarks-for-collections-care

1 Purpose and function of the organisation

Look at founding documents, Acts, legal requirements, mission and vision, strategic plans and corporate business plans.

- Describe the purpose and function of the organisation.
- State the rationale for the preservation policy.
- Ground the preservation policy within its organisational context and establish clear links to the organisation's goals.

2 Definitions

The audience for a preservation policy is usually diverse. It is useful to define key terms at the outset to ensure common understanding e.g. preservation, collections management, conservation, preventive conservation, surrogacy⁹.

3 Scope

Does the preservation policy apply to all collections and all formats? What time (retention) period does it cover? Is this the same for all collections? Who is the policy for?

Review collections acquisition, development, management, access, and retention policies to ensure that the policies are consistent. If digital and analogue collections are treated separately make sure policies cross-reference and are consistent.

- Identify the collections and formats to which the preservation policy applies.
- Identify the retention period or include a link to the organisation's retention policy.
- State who the policy applies to (e.g. all staff and users).

⁹ A list of terms and definitions is provided in *PAS 197: 2009 Code of practice for cultural collections management* and a glossary of terms is provided in *Benchmarks 2.0* on the Collections Link website

www.collectionslink.org.uk/programmes/benchmarks-for-collections-care

4 Preservation philosophy, standards and ethics

The policy should contain a statement of preservation philosophy, balancing preventive conservation with interventive conservation. It should be supported by accepted standards, ethics and a high level of professional performance. Include a statement on the organisation's approach to risk management, or a link to the risk assessment and risk management strategy.

Key resources include:

PAS 197: 2009 Code of practice for cultural collections management

PD 5454: 2012 Guide for the storage and exhibition of archival materials

PAS 198: 2012 Specification for managing environmental conditions for cultural collections

ISO 31000: 2009 Risk management – principles and guidelines

5 Access

The preservation policy should include a statement on how the organisation provides access to its collections, or a link to the access policy.

6 Security

The preservation policy should include a statement on responsibilities for the security of the collections, both those of the staff and the users. It should address the following aspects directly, or through a link to the organisation's security policy:

- physical security, such as building and perimeter security
- security of access (e.g. access by staff, contractors and users to storage areas, and decisions on closed versus open access)
- reading room security
- security during lending and transport
- exhibition security
- security of computer systems, including authorised access to and manipulation of data.

Remember how your preservation policy will be used. It may not be appropriate to include this section in a publicly available version of the document.

7 Surrogacy and reformatting

Where items are in poor condition, actively deteriorating or subject to heavy use, the creation and use of a preservation surrogate can help prolong the life of an original by protecting it from over handling and repeated copying. The preservation policy should include a statement on the availability of surrogates and their role.

In some instances, access to the original format is as important as, or sometimes even more important than, the information it contains. Physical format can provide information over and above its content and there are a number of library and archive users who have a real need to consult material in its original format. In other cases users may simply be disappointed by not being able to see 'the real thing'. Be clear in your surrogacy policy about the circumstances in which users can consult original documents for which surrogates exist.

Whether or not the original format should be retained once a surrogate has been made requires careful consideration. Where difficult decisions are necessary, they should take into account the nature of the material in question, whether it is unique (or one of only a few copies in the UK), its significance, the likely use it will get and on the likely purpose of such use.

For born digital material it is not possible to distinguish between retention and preservation. Preservation of the intellectual content must begin at the time of acquisition, or before in order to ensure sustainable access. The lack of longevity of storage media, together with the inevitable obsolescence of retrieval hardware and software pose significant digital preservation challenges¹⁰.

8 Exhibition and loan

Exhibitions and loans can be an important method of increasing access to collections and broadening enjoyment of them. The preservation policy should state whether or not material can be exhibited or loaned (there may be depositor restrictions or other reasons why this activity cannot be carried out).

¹⁰ Refer to the Digital Preservation Coalition's *Digital Preservation Handbook*
www.dpconline.org/publications/digital-preservation-handbook

Any reasons for restrictions on lending certain types of material must be clear. It must be decided whether loans will be restricted to duplicates and surrogates, or whether original and rare material can be lent.

The preservation policy should cover the following points, or link to a separate exhibitions and loans policy:

- restrictions on the type of material that can be exhibited or loaned
- restrictions on the duration of exhibitions or loans
- conditions for security and handling
- environmental standards required and levels of illumination
- design of exhibition cases, furniture and stands
- security provision during transport
- responsibility for insurance.

Guidelines for support materials and the handling of objects are also needed and procedures must be in place for conservation reports and for monitoring the condition of the material before, during and after the exhibition.

9 Use

Risks assessments carried out on collections of library and archive materials commonly find that the greatest risk is use. Of course use takes many forms, but it is worth investigating the amount and kind of use that collections receive when formulating preservation strategies. At the policy level consider whether the organisation will provide the following:

- guidelines for the proper handling of the collections by staff and readers
- the provision of book supports and related equipment in reading rooms, together with guidelines on their use
- procedures for removing and replacing items on shelves
- guidelines for packing and moving items, and the provision of appropriate equipment
- regular training on handling and use to staff and/or readers¹¹.

¹¹ Refer to the Preservation Advisory booklet *Using library and archive collections* www.bl.uk/blpac/pdf/handling.pdf

10 Self-service copying

Photocopiers and/or reprographics services have been provided by libraries and archives for many years. Increasingly though, there are demands for scanning facilities, self-service digital imaging facilities, and the use of personal cameras in reading rooms. The preservation policy should include a statement on self-service copying, or link to a separate reprographics policy. Consider the following points:

- measures to safeguard original materials from damage
- copyright and re-use of images
- conditions of use of any equipment provided¹².

11 Storage

The long term retention of collections requires suitable storage accommodation to protect against physical and chemical deterioration. The preservation policy should outline how the organisation approaches the storage of its collections. The format, structure, size, and shape, as well as the age, rarity and value of the collections, will also influence the way in which they should be stored. Some types of material will need greater security, others a different and/or better controlled environment or extra protection. For guidance on the storage of conventional library and archive material refer to *PD5454: 2012 Guide for the storage and exhibition of archival materials*. For guidance on the storage for digital objects refer to the Digital Preservation Coalition's *Digital Preservation Handbook*¹³.

12 Environment

The organisation's approach to the management of the environment in which collections are stored, used and exhibited should be stated in the preservation policy, with reference to appropriate standards. Ideally, environmental conditions should be determined by the materials in the collection. *PAS 198: 2012 Specification for*

¹² Refer to the Preservation Advisory booklet *Self-service copying of library and archive materials* www.bl.uk/blpac/pdf/photocopy.pdf

¹³ www.dpconline.org/advice/preservationhandbook/organisational-activities/storage-and-preservation?q=storage

*managing environmental conditions for cultural collections*¹⁴ advocates the development of an environmental management strategy for the collection, to include a statement of the expected collection lifetime and the energy demand arising from the environmental conditions needed to achieve this, taking into account the sensitivity, significance and use of individual collection items.

13 Integrated pest management

The preservation policy should include a statement on its approach to managing pests, including Integrated Pest Management (IPM) strategies, quarantine procedures and treatment policy¹⁵.

14 Housekeeping

The preservation policy should include a statement on the organisation's approach to housekeeping including dust monitoring, cleaning routines, guidelines for cleaning and the provision of training to staff, contractors or volunteers¹⁶.

15 Emergency response

The preservation policy should refer to the organisation's emergency planning and response procedures, and business continuity plan¹⁷. The detailed plan and procedures should not be included in a publicly available version of the preservation policy.

16 Conservation

The preservation policy should include a statement on the organisation's approach to conservation which should cover:

- how conservation priorities are established
- the creation and retention of conservation documentation
- policy on treatment decisions

¹⁴ PAS 198: 2012 Specification for managing environmental conditions for cultural collections, London: British Standards Institution, 2012

¹⁵ Refer to the Preservation Advisory booklet *Managing pests in paper-based collections*
www.bl.uk/blpac/pdf/pests.pdf

¹⁶ Refer to the Preservation Advisory booklet *Cleaning books and documents*
www.bl.uk/blpac/pdf/clean.pdf

¹⁷ Refer to the Preservation Advisory booklet *Salvaging library and archive collections*
www.bl.uk/blpac/pdf/salvage.pdf

- the use of appropriately trained professionals¹⁸
- the conservation principles, professional standards and ethics employed.

17 Training

The range of areas covered by a preservation policy means that its implementation cannot be the responsibility of one member of staff. There must be a constant emphasis on raising awareness of preservation throughout an organisation and throughout the community. The preservation policy should outline the organisation's commitment to training for:

- all library staff and volunteers
- contractors as appropriate
- users.

18 Research and development

Include a link to the policy for, or statement on, research and development in preservation and conservation.

19 Finance

No preservation policy or strategy, however well conceived, can be implemented without sufficient funding. Preservation is only one of many library and archive functions that require funding. For a proper balance between the funding of preservation activities and those of other library and archive functions, consider how they are related. Collection life-cycle models can be useful in this respect, particularly for the ongoing management of electronic materials. Ensure that the organisation maintains a distinct preservation budget.

20 Responsibility, monitoring and review

- The preservation policy should be agreed at the highest level in the organisation, and this should be identified in the policy.
- Its communication throughout the organisation should be endorsed by senior management.

¹⁸ A conservator accredited by Icon, the Institute of Conservation or the Archives and Records Association

- Progress on implementing the policy should be monitored regularly. It should form the basis for the development of preservation strategies, procedures and action plans.
- A named individual should be responsible for reviewing the policy on a specified date.

These measures ensure that the document remains relevant and is used.

6 Conclusion

A preservation policy will clarify the relationship between an organisation's mission and preservation activity. It provides the basis for establishing priorities and justifying investment, and for the development of preservation strategy and preservation programmes. It also provides a statement of accountability against which performance can be monitored, and demonstrates an organisation's long-term commitment to its collections to funders and users. There are many resources that will help you write a policy. In addition to the publications referred to in the text, a number of organisations have published their own policies online. Remember that a preservation policy is a living document and its strength comes from being tailored to an organisation, its collections and users.

Preservation guidance booklets

The following booklets can be downloaded free of charge at www.bl.uk/blpac/publicationsleaf.html.

Free printed copies are also available.

Basic preservation for library and archive collections

Building a preservation policy

Cleaning books and documents

Damaged books

Library and archive storage furniture

Making the most of funding opportunities for preservation and conservation projects

Managing pests in paper-based collections

Managing the library and archive environment

Moving library and archive collections

Mould outbreaks in library and archive collections

Preservation of photographic material

Salvaging library and archive collections

Self-service copying of library and archive materials

Understanding and caring for bookbindings

Using library and archive collections

The Preservation Advisory Centre promotes the benefit of good preservation practice and provides support in the form of information services, training and preservation management tools.

www.bl.uk/blpac

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