

Edinburgh City Archives
Department of Corporate Services
The City of Edinburgh Council
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www.edinburgh.gov.uk/CEC/Corporate_Services/Corporate_Communications/archivist/Edinburgh_City_Archives.html

Introduction

Benchmarks in collection Care is a self-assessment checklist developed by Museums Libraries and Archives (MLA) www.mla.gov.uk, the national development agency working for and on behalf of museums, libraries and archives and advising government on policy and priorities for the heritage sector. This tool aims to help organisations identify how well they are caring for their collections, give an indication of where and what improvements might be needed, and provide a practical framework for measuring future progress.

Benchmarks has three distinct levels. Basic practice; a minimum level of practice, which all museums, archives and libraries should be able to achieve. Good practice; a standard that is achievable by the majority of institutions. This level represents a consensus of current professional good practice, tempered by realistic expectations. Best practice; the highest standard a museum, archive or library can aspire to, it reflects a consensus of professional practice, much of which is enshrined in published standards e.g. BS5454. Museum registration requires organisation to be measurable at GOOD or BEST levels.

This audit was carried out using the Basic level in association with considerable assistance and co-operation from Richard Hunter, City Archivist, who also provided copies of relevant policy documents.

Current staffing at Edinburgh City Archives; 1 archivist and 12.5% of administrative assistant. Both posts are permanent.

The City Chamber and Murrayburn stores were audited, reference images recorded and environmental conditions logged for the period 10/8/2005 to 10/9/2005 (please see appendices). Not all stores or collections relating to the City Archives were viewed, such as the collections held within the National Monument Record.

Total metres over two sites given as 850² metres including 89 plan chests at the Murrayburn site.

Departmental budget exclusive of salary costs approximately £9.5k to be confirmed.

Recommendations for consideration

Request an internal comprehensive Health and Safety Audit to ensure environmental issues, specifically mycological problems can be identified; institute full clean of premises to removed cement dust contamination; and reappraise and risk evaluate shelving and support systems and security procedures currently in use.

Actively utilise the internal appraisal system to improve communication and foster support networks with line management, internal departments and stakeholders within Edinburgh City Council.

Investigate use of volunteers e.g. establish friends of ECA; archive courses in Scotland and UK; Scottish Conservation Bureau Internships; National Association Decorative and Fine Art Societies www.nadfas.org.uk; professional peer group; Business Archives Council; Ballast Trust; Association of Scottish Local Authority Archives Working Group.

Consider and investigate sourcing financial support and approval to recruit casual staff of archive/diploma students to allow focus on designated collection priorities; cataloguing; storage; cleaning. **Employment of more permanent archive staff.**

Investigate retrospective input to Scottish Archive network and promotion of service.

Liaise with the National Archives of Scotland to gain support; inward NAS staff secondment; assistance; advantage of discounted purchasing supplies etc.

Consider seeking grant aid e.g. NAS Conservation Grant; The National Manuscripts Conservation Trust <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/preservation/trust/> etc.

Full records of conservation work carried out on ECA collections to be retained for future reference.

Investigate possibility of assistance from Scottish Museums Council via Edinburgh City Archives membership with sister departments Huntly House etc.

Investigate and consider purchasing imaging and microfilm facilities with and from other national institutions for priority collections and objects and as a means of recycling revenue to the collections.

Revenue generation from reprography should be investigated however small this can be politically a good thing to bring in funds.

Transportation of records from Murrayburn is a problem. Arrangements could be investigated to provide use of a council van.

Inadequate shelving in several areas needs addressing, e.g. Dean of Guilds plans (see attached images). Investigate the future possibility of using West Register House, once vacated by The National Archives of Scotland.

Further investigation and dialogue with archivist recommended on; fire suppression; evaluation of air quality and general staff training.

Key Reference Texts

British Standard 5454:2000

Historical Manuscripts Commission; HMC Standard for Record Repositories, third edition 2001.

The National Archives Standard for Record Repositories, first edition 2004.

British Archives, fourth edition; A Guide to Archive Resources in the United Kingdom, Janet Foster and Julia Sheppard. ISBN 0333 735366

An Archival Account of Scotland; Public and Private Sector Archive services in Scotland: Funding Opportunities and Development Needs
©Archive Services in Scotland Mapping Project Board; ISBN 1 870874 39 0