



UCL

The UCL Collections Review Toolkit



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Introduction

This toolkit has been put together as a practical guide to help you review your museum collection. It documents the Collections Review process carried out by UCL Museums & Collections from 2007 to 2009, and contains instructions and tips on how to adapt our method for use at your own collection.

To make the toolkit as user-friendly and useful as possible, the format includes a series of 'boxes' containing the most common questions we were asked.

It is important to note that the UCL Collections Review was designed specifically for UCL Museums & Collections, and, although all of the examples contained in this Toolkit are valid in their own context, they may not necessarily apply to every organisation with a museum collection.



Background

In 2007 UCL Museums & Collections developed an original method for reviewing the numerous and varied collections spread across UCL. The primary objective of the Review was to survey all aspects of collections care, use, and significance in one continuous project. We wanted to use this information to inform future management of the collections, including priority planning for collections care and developing the collections as an important resource for teaching, research and public engagement at UCL. The Review also considered the historical significance of the objects and their relationship with UCL, and their potential for use in future UCL projects. As a result of the Review, we have, for the first time, a clear and accurate picture of the contents of all these collections, where and how they are housed, and to what degree they are integrated into the work of the university.

For the process to be fair, open and responsible, a number of different stakeholders were involved.

These included:

- The UCL Museums & Heritage Committee (now the Museums, Heritage and Cultural Property Committee)
- UCL Museums & Collections staff
- Heads of relevant departments
- Audience advocates
- UCL Internal Audit Services
- External partners, including the Museums Association

Representatives of these groups composed a Steering Group especially established for the project. The Collections Review Manager and the Review Assistant were responsible for undertaking the Review and reporting their findings to the Steering Group.

The Steering Group

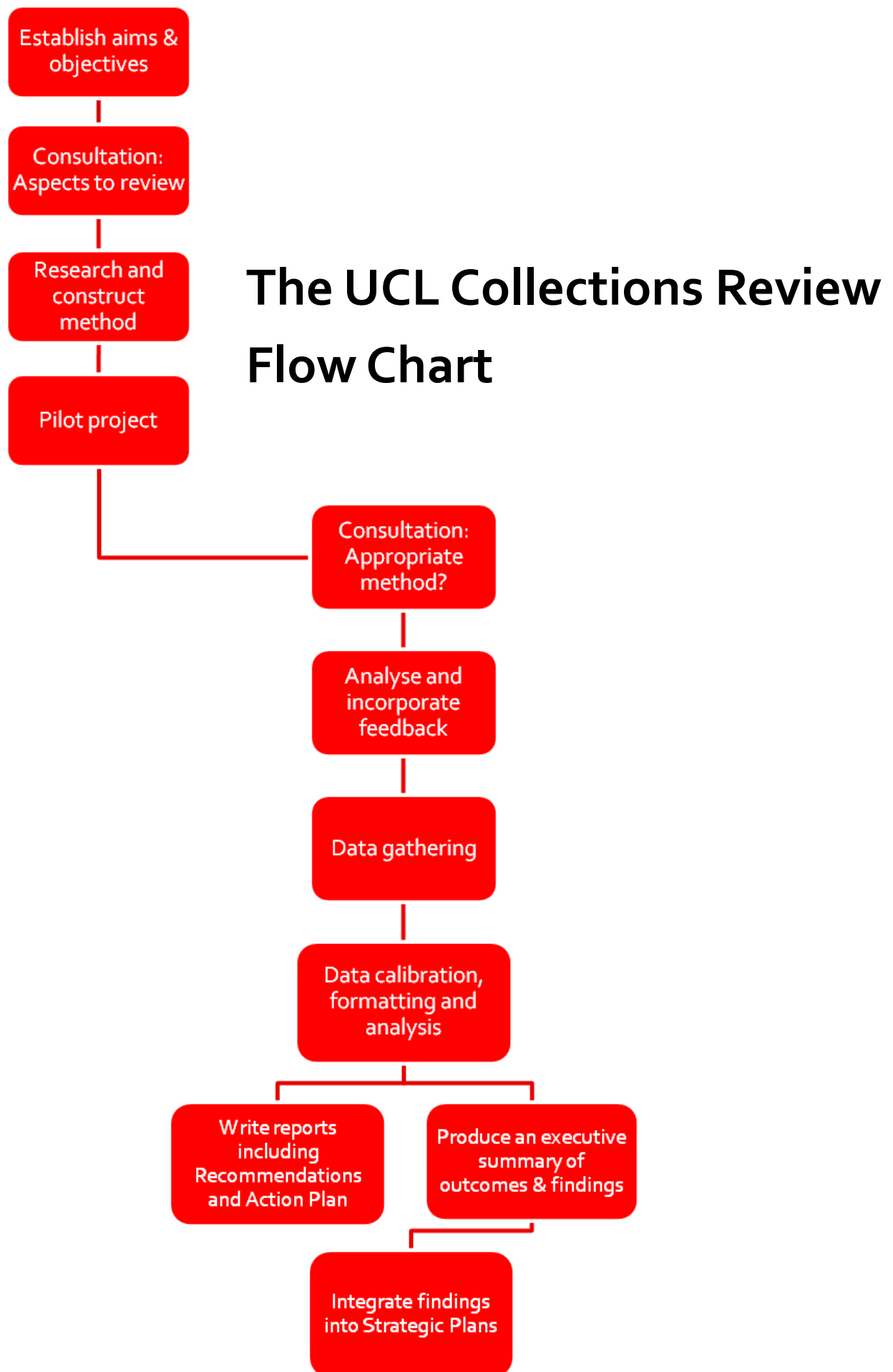
We strongly recommend setting up a steering committee. At UCL, we invited people who could give the project practical, informed advice. The final group included an external representative from the museum sector, an internal manager from UCL Museums & Collections, and an internal member from the UCL Museums, Heritage & Cultural Property Committee. We also wanted to include intended end-users of the project – lecturers at UCL, for example – who use objects in teaching and research. We also invited a member of Internal Audit Services to give advice on data collection and analysis.

The Collections Review Manager chaired the group which met twice a year during the set up and pilot stage of the Review, and as required when the Review got up and running.

A good steering group meeting can bring out probing questions, useful ideas and an appropriate sense of perspective to a project team that is often working at a highly detailed level

A steering group is useful for establishing the timescale and charting the project's progress. At UCL, the steering group provided support and advice by:

- Providing a forum for discussing project related issues, e.g. what would an end user of the collections need to know? and operations
- Providing a high level of debate, drawing on members' experience and knowledge
- Helping the project to see more effective ways of getting things done
- Motivating project staff and contributors
- Troubleshooting bureaucracy



1. Establishing objectives

The first and most important step in any collections review is to establish what you want to know, why you want to know it, and the level of resolution you need to meaningfully interpret the data.

Aims & Objectives

Steering Committee discussions established the aims the Review was to inform. These were:

- To ensure that UCL has the collections it required to fulfil its short and long-term strategic objectives
- To develop an overarching acquisition and disposal policy for each of the collections and for UCL Museums & Collections as a whole
- To dispose of those collections UCL no longer required, openly and responsibly, in a manner which clearly serves the strategic aims and overall mission of UCL
- To develop a method for assessment, disposal and renewal that could be adopted by other universities and museums.

In short, we wanted to know more about our collections so that we could take better care of and make better use of them. To meet these broad aims, we needed to know certain specific things about each of the collections.

We had to:

- Identify all collections material held by UCL and the type and extent of the collections. How many objects did UCL hold? What were the highlights?
- Identify the number and location of on-site and off-site stores. What were the environmental conditions and security levels of these stores? How much material was on display, and how much in kept in storage?
- Identify current curatorial activity and standards, e.g. What was the extent of any documentation backlogs? What condition were the collections in? Were appropriate disaster -planning measures in place?
- Identify what material we used for teaching, research and public engagement. Did the collections need to be more fully integrated into UCL as a resource and service? Was there the potential in the collections to do this?

We wanted to use this information to strategically manage the collections in order to ensure our success as working university collections. This included:

- Generating greater, better use of the stored collections
- Providing a framework within which individual collections to benchmark themselves for future development and identify future needs
- Developing a new standards framework for forward planning, teaching and research, documentation, storage provision, collections care, and conservation.



What do you want to review?

What do you need to know about your collection to run it more effectively? What would you like to do with your collection? If your organisation has established clear objectives, these should guide your collections review.



I already know everything I need to know about my collection – why should I invest staff time and other valuable resources into reviewing when these could be better used actually getting on with proper work?

There are very few collections that can account for every single object they contain; consider, for example, the loose, random objects stored in boxes in rooms that haven't been visited for years. If you are lucky enough to be able to access any desired information about any part of your collection at will, a review is still a useful way to develop and prioritize collections management strategies.

For example, reviewing your collection can help you to ensure you comply with current legal requirements, as well as planning for the future. Are all the valuable objects in your collection stored according to the regulations outlined in your insurance policy? If there are human remains in your collection, are they stored and documented in accordance with the Human Tissue Act of 2004? Is there appropriate safety equipment in store rooms containing large, heavy or awkward to move objects?

2. Developing a framework

Now that you know what you want to achieve, the next step is to develop a framework that will allow you to gather the information you need.

Different types of reviews

At the beginning of the Collections Review at UCL, we looked to other museums to see how they had approached reviewing their collections. A number of museums had developed grading systems to determine value and significance. These included:

- The Tank Museum, Bovington, Dorset
- Glasgow Museums Service
- The National Maritime Museum Collections Reform Programme

These organizations had approached assessing collections in different ways to suit different purposes. Some established ways of ascribing value to a collection both theoretically and practically. Others concentrated on issues such as use and storage and embarked on a series of rationalization programs in which collections were graded in terms of their significance. Many methods were based on the idea of having a central 'core' of collections.

By looking at these case studies we worked out what we did and did not want from the UCL Review and how we wanted the review method to work. We wanted:

- An objective grading system which highlighted problems and allowed for comparisons between different collections so that work could be prioritised.
- An intuitive, practical and logical system that was easy to use.
- Dynamic data, i.e. information which could be presented as statistics as well as allowing for easy analysis and being written up as a summary of conclusions and recommendations.
- A system that was comparatively easy to establish and maintain. Annual checks would only need to note any progress or change, not repeat the whole assessment process.
- Many of the case studies and standards focused on collections care; we wanted something that looked at the use, value and significance of the collections too.

Designing the UCL Rubric

Having it all: collections management vs. use and significance

With these principles in mind, we developed an original assessment tool and method with which we could review our collections. Called the *UCL rubric*, this assessment tool and accompanying *review form* enabled us to rate collections care, use and significance of all the material held by the collections. Assessment criteria covered all aspects of collections care, such as storage, security, environmental conditions, housing material, documentation and ownership, as well as the ways in which the collections were used in teaching, research and public engagement, their historical connection to UCL, and their uniqueness.

The *review form* allowed for the recording of basic details – such as the name and location of a store room and the number of objects – along with the review data, which was entered with reference to the *UCL rubric*.

We wanted to open up the format of a yes/no questionnaire, and reduce the bias that may be seen in open answers. As a result, the *UCL rubric* is a matrix composed of 13 *review categories*, each containing 5 *review ratings* listed from A to E. Where possible, the *review ratings* reflected established systems, e.g. SPECTRUM for documentation. By incorporating these into the Review framework we were able to benchmark each of the collections in relation to established standards. This allowed us to plan for future improvements while keeping accepted standards, like Accreditation, in mind.

To make assessment easier, the *UCL rubric* was divided into two parts: 1) looked at collections management and care, while 2) looked at the value and significance of the collections. Each part appeared on either side of a sheet of paper.



	Storage Room Security	Storage Security	Storage Environmental Condition	Storage Space	Storage Housing Materials	Condition Assessment	Documentation
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secure room Locked and/or alarmed 24 hour security cameras or guards Strict access controls, with key access limited to selected group of authorised individuals Frequently visited 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secure storage Displays fitted with alarms or security glass Cabinets and drawers locked Strict access controls for keys Security camera, guards or museum attendant at all times 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protection from dust and daylight Good environmental control, stable temperature, and humidity. Constant environmental monitoring and condition checks. Regular cleaning Dedicated disaster plan Full integrated pest management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dedicated, safe storage area with customised racking/shelves and suitably labelled individual objects easily retrievable, no overcrowding Provision for easy movement of large/heavy objects Location plan available Area health and safety compliant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inert store furniture and other building materials Conservation grade housing/materials used Objects on display well supported or mounted with inert materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stable material Good condition No conservation problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fully accessioned Full and complete supporting documentation Information held on computer database following IMDA Standards Documentation procedural manual
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secure room Locked and/or alarmed Strict access controls Frequently visited <p><i>Security cameras or attendant available during opening hours/visits only</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secure storage Displays fitted with alarms or security glass Cabinets and drawers locked Strict access controls for keys 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protection from dust and daylight Regular condition checks and environmental monitoring Basic pest management No environmental control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dedicated, safe storage area, adequate racking, suitably labelled Individual objects easily retrievable, no overcrowding Provision for easy movement of large/heavy objects Area health and safety compliant <p><i>No location plan, racking is not customised</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Objects have conservation grade housing/support <p><i>Furniture not inert</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stable material Minor cleaning: stable and not at risk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accessioned Material listed on basic computer database Supporting documentation
C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secure room Locked Strict access controls <p><i>No security cameras or attendant or infrequently visited</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Room locked Cabinets and drawers locked Strict access controls to keys Displays non-secured, not alarmed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Selective dust and daylight protection Selective environmental monitoring, condition and pest checks No environmental controls, no dedicated disaster response plan for this area, little or no cleaning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dedicated, safe storage area, adequate racking, suitably labelled <p><i>No location plan, racking not customised, some overcrowding and access restrictions, not fully health and safety compliant</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conservation-grade materials and housing for selected objects/objects at risk <p><i>Furniture not inert</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stable material but needs monitoring Some risk: some restoration or repair conservation desirable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accessioned Not on database Paper documentation
D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Doors locked <p><i>No security cameras or guards</i> <i>Multiple key access or infrequently visited</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Room locked Cabinets and drawers not locked, displays non-secured, not alarmed, easy access to keys 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Erratic environmental monitoring and condition checks Daylight and dust not excluded No environmental control No disaster planning No pest management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dedicated, safe storage area <p><i>No location plan, unsuitable racking, overcrowding and access restrictions, inadequate labelling, not health and safety compliant</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Objects given some support or protection using non-conservation grade materials Basic boxing/sheeting etc <p><i>Furniture not inert</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unstable material High risk: immediate action required Specialist conservation required Major restoration, additions or loss 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not accessioned Not on database Paper documentation
E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No security 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No security 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unstable and unmonitored environment Daylight and dust not excluded No environmental/pest control or monitoring No disaster planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unsuitable storage <p><i>No dedicated storage area, no organisation of boxes or racking, overcrowding and objects not accessible, no labelling, not health and safety compliant</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Furniture not inert No conservation grade housing/packing No support or mounting for objects Objects stored unprotected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very unstable material Beyond repair Poses immediate risk to other specimens 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not accessioned Object not marked Lacking documentation

The UCL Rubric Side 1: Collections care

Storage Room Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assesses the security for the entire store room Flags up deficiencies in overall security e.g. lack of access systems or key control
Storage Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assesses the security of the individual storage units within the store room Flags up deficiencies in the storage security e.g. no locks on cabinets/ racking <p><i>Storage Security</i> was considered separately from <i>Room Security</i> to provide greater resolution and to make it easier to fix storage problems. For example, important objects kept in open storage within a highly secure store room do not require the same level of action as the same objects stored kept in open storage in a room accessible by a common access key.</p>
Environmental conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assesses the environmental conditions within the store room Flags up deficiencies in the store environment e.g. no environmental controls
Storage Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assesses the suitability of the storage within the store room, e.g. is there dedicated storage or are objects stored on the floor? Flags up deficiencies in general storage conditions e.g. overcrowding of objects on shelves Flags up health and safety implications of storage, including accessibility and appropriate equipment
Housing material	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assesses the suitability of the housing materials used to support objects or groups of objects Flags up deficiencies in the housing of individual objects or groups of objects e.g. non conservation-grade materials used
Condition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assesses the condition of objects or groups of objects Flags up objects or groups of objects that require monitoring, conservation, cleaning or repair e.g. fragile objects in need of regular monitoring <p>Although the Review was not a conservation audit, the data gathered under this heading could be used to build future, more detailed conservation audits.</p>
Documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assesses the level of documentation of objects or groups of objects Flags up areas where documentation could be improved e.g. objects lacking accession numbers/documentation not digitised.

	Teaching	Research	Public Engagement	Historical & Intellectual Development	Uniqueness	Ownership
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actively used in teaching at UCL Part of running undergraduate / graduate programme Fosters interdisciplinary teaching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actively used in research at UCL and the wider community International excellence, research innovation Fosters interdisciplinary research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Permanently on display with access to the general public Engaged in outreach teaching programmes, widening participation in wider community, e.g. loan box use Regularly used in public events, workshops and demonstration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Of international importance, making a fundamental and long-term contribution to intellectual thought or the study of a discipline, and integral to UCL history, for example, its iconicity or historical / cultural value 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Object one of a kind, unique, rare, unusual or example of extinct species High media profile High wow factor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Owned by UCL Proof of purchase, letters of ownership / documentation
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential use in teaching at UCL Has been used for teaching within last 5 years Proposals to integrate into undergraduate / graduate programmes Potential to foster aspects of interdisciplinary teaching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential use in research at UCL or wider community Potential to foster some aspects of interdisciplinary research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Permanently displayed but not accessible to the general public Often displayed with access to the general public Occasionally used in public events, workshops, demonstrations, talks etc Occasional handling / loan box use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Of national importance, making a significant or short-term contribution to the study of a discipline, and integral to UCL history Related to important person / intellectual event or development at the university or in university department 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unique to UCL and London 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Owned by UCL No letters of documentation as incorporated within collection over time
C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collected and used as part of teaching collection but no longer used Potential for use in future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collected as part of research collection but no longer used, potential for use in future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have been displayed in past as part of loans boxes in the past, but not currently in use Potential for future exhibitions and increased handling/loan box use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Of importance to the history of a department at UCL through its intellectual/ historical association 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unique to UCL, similar objects held in other London institutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collected by UCL staff for research/teaching with no letters of ownership
D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Little potential for current use, but could be relevant in future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Little potential for current use, but could be relevant in future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Never used in display and exhibitions Never used in handling or as part of loans boxes, but has potential to be used in this way 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Of little importance to the history of a department or tangentially related to UCL through its intellectual/ historical association 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Duplicate objects, one of many held at UCL or in London 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Permanent loan, not owned by UCL Needs reviewing
E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Never used for teaching and no potential to do so No future value in teaching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Never used for research and no potential to do so 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not suitable for display Not suitable for loan box / handling use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No historical/intellectual importance to UCL department and/or wider community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multiple objects held at UCL, representative sample of a common type or types Low wow factor 	<p>E1 Not owned by UCL, to be investigated</p> <p>E2 Ownership Unknown</p>

The UCL Rubric Side 2: Collections use and significance

Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicates objects or groups of objects that are currently or recently used for learning activities at all levels of education Highlights objects with the potential to be used for learning activities e.g. multiples or duplicates
Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicates objects or groups of objects that are used currently or recently used in research Highlights objects or with the potential for use in research e.g. objects unique to the organisation or a specific region
Public Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicates objects or groups of objects that are used for display, outreach and other public engagement activities Assesses the public accessibility or potential accessibility of an object or group of objects Highlights objects that have potential for display e.g. complete sets of objects/objects that are particularly fine examples of their type
Historical & Intellectual Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refers specifically to the object's historical situation in the context of UCL Indicates the degree of historical connection objects have to UCL, notable people, departments and developments.
Uniqueness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicates objects or groups of objects with a 'wow factor' Highlights 'star' objects e.g. objects that are deemed iconic with respect to the organisation, internationally or historically important objects
Ownership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicates the level to which ownership of objects or groups of objects is documented Indicates how objects were acquired, e.g. fieldwork or loan Flags up situations where ownership is disputed or unknown, and where items are on undocumented/indefinite loan e.g. accessioned objects that have no ownership documents



THE LANGTON COLLECTION
The numbers here refer to the
edition in N. & S. Langton's
The Old Egyptian Statues, 1922, 1923,
a copy of which is displayed
below.
The private collection was a
bequest to this museum by
Mrs E. Langton in 1973.

We deliberately listed the *review ratings* alphabetically (A – E) rather than numerically (1 – 5) because we wanted to emphasize that this was not a simple grading exercise e.g. Rating 1 objects are ‘better’ than Rating 5 objects. Each *review rating* contains bullet points relating to different aspects of the collections and their care. The whole rating acts as ‘shorthand’, concisely and effectively conveying lots of information about a group of objects. Any decisions or recommendations were based on the bullet points, not assumptions about the relative superiority or inferiority of objects in the different categories. By doing this we got a sense of the ‘temperature’, of the collection rather than a simple categorization of the good, the bad and the ugly.



Build your own Rubric

You can construct your own review framework by looking at your aims and objectives, working out the kind of information you need to make them workable, and breaking these down into meaningful categories.

Imagine you have received funding to overhaul one of your main storage areas. To make the best use of this new resource, you want to review your collection and ensure the objects are stored and cared for appropriately. To do this, you may want to consider basic factors such as object size and weight.

Each of these categories can be broken down into review ratings, e.g.



	Object Size	Object Weight
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extremely large objects such as train carriages or fire engines Requires large, specially dedicated storage space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extremely heavy object Requires specialist knowledge and equipment to move
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large objects e.g. sculptures Too large for general storage, require purpose-built storage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Heavy object requiring a minimum of 5 people to carry safely
C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medium size object which fits across several divisions of a single shelf Little or no room for other objects on the same shelf 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Heavy object requiring a minimum of 2 people to carry safely
D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small object which can fit in a single division of a single shelf Room for other objects on the same shelf 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Light object Can be carried by one person unaided
E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very small objects where multiple versions of the same object type exist, e.g. buttons, beads Objects can be stored in multiples 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very light object Several objects can be carried by one person unaided

The number of categories and ratings under each heading is entirely up to you. The most important thing to note at this stage is that the division between ratings has to be meaningful enough to render a specific recommendation. For example, if an object is reviewed as being medium-sized and heavy, it could be recommended that this object is stored on a low shelf to allow for easy access and safe movement.

You may also want to consider other factors that could affect how you organize your new store room such as:

- Object condition – fragile or damaged objects could benefit from specially designed storage. Also, any major conservation problems, e.g. incidence of bronze disease should be isolated and dealt with prior to the move.
- Environmental requirements – Is your collection made of up lots of different types of objects composed of different types of materials? You may want to consider their environmental requirements and how these will mitigate how the objects are stored.
- Security requirements – Do you have highly valuable objects in your collection? Are their security needs greater than less valuable objects? Will they require purpose-built secure storage?

You can also consider how objects are used and how this could impact storage, e.g. objects frequently used in public engagement should be stored in locations and housing materials that make them easy to access and carry.



We have a social history collection with objects relating to the history and work of the local community. Although we do lots of public engagement work and support the work of local historians and other researchers, there is very little scope for teaching using our objects – do we need to include this heading too?

Not if you think it won't be useful! As university collections at UCL, our primary role is to facilitate higher education teaching using our objects. This is a very specific role which probably does not apply more widely to other types of museums. In the same way that we gathered data to help us to work more effectively, you need to collect information that will help with future planning and strategy building for *your* organization.



11.43

SYRIAN SURVEY

 **Heavy
Drawer**
CAUTION



Almond 15
11.4.201



3. Collecting Data

Now that you have worked out your aims and objectives and designed a bespoke review framework, it is time to start collecting data. At UCL, our first step at this stage was to run a Pilot Project. This was followed by consultation with the Steering Group and curators to ensure the Review was generating valid and useful data. Once the final adjustments to the *UCL rubric* had been made, we began reviewing all of the material held across all UCL Museums & Collections. The Review proper began in September 2007, and all data collection was complete by the end of 2008.

The Pilot Project

With an early version of the Rubric in place, we began work on a Pilot Review in the summer of 2007.

The Pilot included two phases. The first and most intensive of these was the Pilot Review of the Grant Museum of Zoology. This involved going into all of the storage areas used by the Grant Museum and using the Rubric to reviewing all of the collections material stored there.

The second part of the pilot involved all of the collections directly under the control of UCL Museums & Collections, i.e. the museums and some of the teaching collections, reviewing small sub-collections or storage areas within their collection. This two-pronged approach was designed to account for differences in the subject matters of the collections. It also helped us to iron out the kinks in the *UCL rubric* and find practical solutions to problems we encountered.

Establishing review units

Given the large number of objects and collections to be covered by the Review (original estimates hovered around the 1 million mark), the original plan was for the Review to operate at the subcollection level. We thought this would be quicker than an object-by-object review, while still providing enough resolution to form an accurate and useful picture of the collections.

When it came to applying this practically, we immediately encountered a problem. Most of the sub-collections at the Grant Museum were stored in different parts of the building and used for different purposes. It could take as long as three days to track down a single sub-collection, and this investment of time was disproportionate to the amount of information gathered.

To remedy this, we decided to conduct the Review **by location**.

To do this we defined *review units* based on storage types, which would form the building blocks of the whole Review. A *review unit* can be part of or the whole of a storage area which can be reviewed most effectively as a single unit. *Review units* can vary in size depending on their situation and can be anything from a single large specimen mounted on a plinth, to a drawer or shelf containing several objects, to a whole room containing a specific sub-collection of objects.

This approach had several advantages, including the ability to work through a single storage area from beginning to end without interruptions. It also helped to highlight problems with specific parts of the collections within the different stores.



Highs and lows

In order to answer the questions set out in our aims and objectives, and having decided to conduct the Review based on *review units*, we needed to make sure that all of our assessments highlighted work that needed to be done, as well as picking out important and heavily used objects in the collection. To do this we applied a different assessment rationale to each side of the *UCL rubric*.

or at	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stable material but needs monitoring• Some risk: some restoration or repair conservation desirable	•	•
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unstable material• High risk: immediate	•	•
not blic to	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Of national importance, making a significant or short-term contribution to the study of a discipline, and integral to UCL history• Related to important person / intellectual event or development at the university or in university department	•	•
ox			
t er	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Of importance to the history of a department at UCL through its	•	•

For assessments on the collections management side (from 'Store Room Security' to 'Documentation,' plus 'Ownership') we decided to assess each *review unit* by the lowest category which applied to it. For example, if the *review unit* was a single drawer containing 17 starfish specimens, 16 of which were in good condition and the remaining one requiring conservation, the assessment for the whole unit would be at *review rating* 'C' for 'Condition'.

Conversely, we used the highest applicable assessment for the use and significance side of the *UCL rubric*. In this case, if 16 of our starfish were normal, mildly interesting starfish and the one remaining starfish was Darwin's pet starfish (for example), the assessment for the whole unit would be at *review rating* 'B' for 'Historical & Intellectual Development'.

By applying the highest and lowest assessments we built up a clear picture of work that needed to be done, as well as highlighting 'star' objects in the collections. It also helped us to isolate 'hotspots' within the collections, flagging up important objects stored poorly or good store-rooms used to house little-used objects.



I've invested many years of hard work to improve the management of my collections. If I assess all the practical aspects on the worst possible rating it will make it look like all my hard work has come to nothing! Shouldn't we be focusing on the positive rather than highlighting the negative?

No part of the Collections Review process is designed to make museum staff look bad.

Our goal in conducting the Review was to assess the current state of our collections and plan improvements. To do this, it was important to highlight what work needed to be done. Although this method of assessment makes collections appear to be in a worse state than they actually are, focusing on the negative at this stage will help to make positive changes in the long term.

Review reconnaissance

Before starting to use the Framework, your museum's relevant staff, volunteers, and perhaps external advisers and user groups, should take time to consider, agree and record how they want to interpret some elements of the terminology used on the rubric. For example, it needs to be agreed how the collection or objects will be counted and to what resolution the assessment will take place. Would you consider counting all the objects in a jar or just count the jar?

Similarly, a group including curatorial, outreach, education, exhibition, conservation and documentation staff should consider the review criteria and decide how they wish to define and apply these.

The UCL Collections Review was designed to be carried out by people who have a good understanding of and/or who have been given basic training in general collections care and management. As part of the pre-planning for the process, it is essential the review team is given basic training so they can broadly assess the preservation needs for and potential for use of any specific collection types to be reviewed. They need to understand what to look out for, and to know when to ask for specialist support.

The relevant specialist staff, volunteers and perhaps external advisers, need to agree on how best to conduct the review process. It may be decided, for example, that fields such as 'ownership' and 'documentation' will be filled in retrospectively from the collection database, in order to speed up the review process within the store.



In the field

Before beginning the Review for each collection, we met with the curator and collections management staff for a debrief and scheduling meeting. This gave us the chance to discuss the practical and technical aspects of conducting the Review. This included:

- An introduction to the collection, including a brief history of the collection, where the objects came from, notable figures associated with individual objects or parts of the collection, and a description of key objects and themes
- Listing and making notes about all of the storage areas containing the collections
- Collection management strategies, e.g. how to tell an accessioned object apart from an unaccessioned object
- Agreeing standards to apply across the collection, e.g. what constitutes a pottery sherd or zoological specimen in 'good condition' vs. one which requires conservation?
- Clarifying and negotiating access requirements, e.g. when were good or bad times to be in the collections spaces? What were the security and access issues?
- Scheduling Review work and future meetings

Having established the main parameters for work, we began to review each collection and every store. All data-gathering was done on paper, entered in pencil. This was primarily for pragmatic and health and safety reasons – it is unfeasible and dangerous to balance a laptop at the top of tall ladders or scrabble across shelves in poorly lit store rooms while trying not to trip over a lead – but it was also a useful way of archiving the Review process.

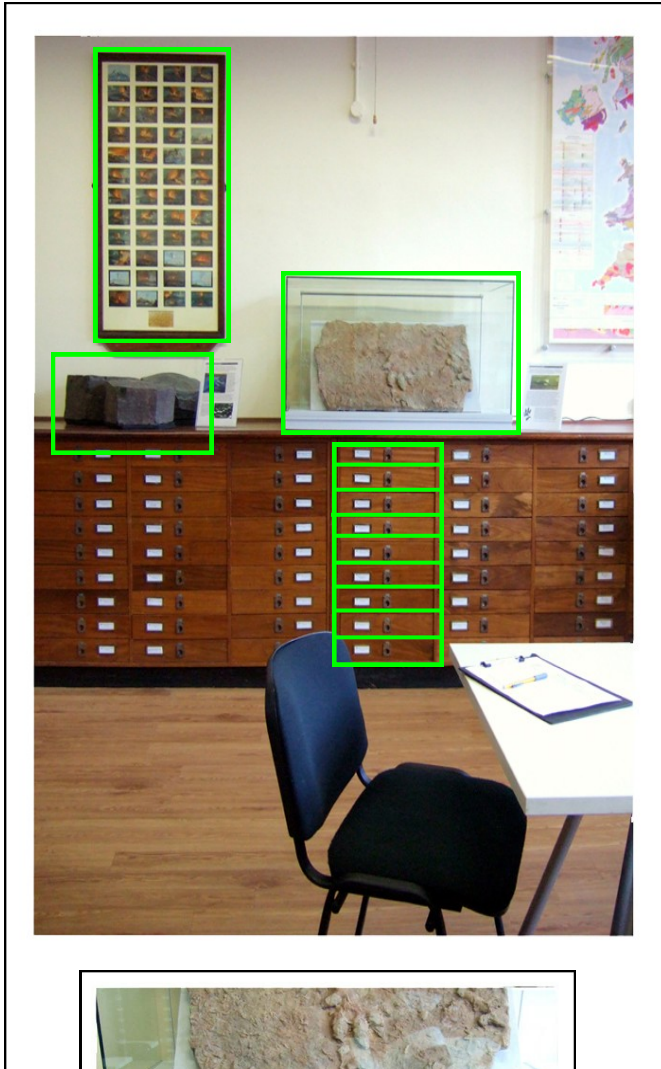
Collections management information could be entered by the Review staff. When it came to the detailed use and significance aspects of the collection, these were completed with input from the curators. As university collections we were very lucky to have specialists in house – you may need to ship in a specialist if there are parts of your collection for which you have no in-house knowledge (see the box below).

Most of the Review work was carried out by two members of staff: the Collections Review Assistant, who worked full-time, and the Collections Review Manager, who worked two days a week. We also enlisted Museums Studies students on work placements and, on occasion, colleagues who wanted to help and learn more about the process.



This is how we did it...

We have found that the easiest way to learn how to review using our method is by doing. This special box shows our thinking behind the Review process and how it worked.

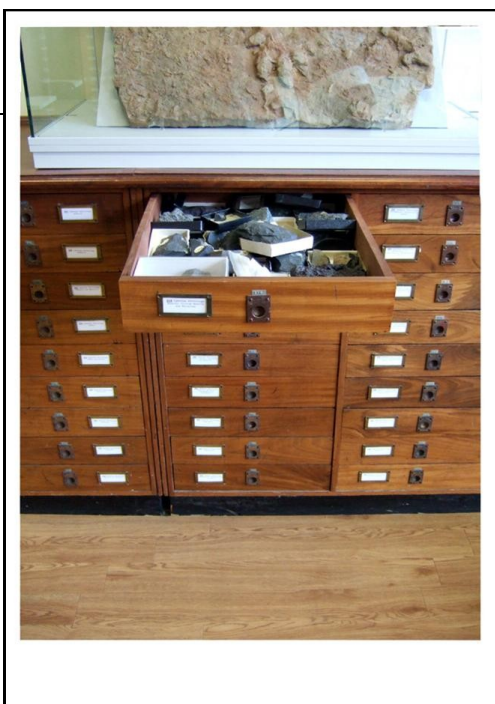


This is the Rock Room— a collections storage area, teaching lab, common room and display space which is part of the UCL Earth Sciences Department.

When approaching any collections space, our first step was to define the review units.

1. Establishing review units

Here, it's pretty straight forward: most of the objects are organised by category and stored in drawers. There are a few oversized objects on the cabinet top, along with a series of postcards mounted in a frame—each of these can be a single review unit in and of themselves.



The next step is to work through the *review units* and assign *review ratings* . We've chosen a single drawer to carry on the example.



2. Reviewing

When you get to a review unit, fill in the Review form with details of the location, who is doing the assessment and the date. Then consider each of the *review categories*.



Storage Room Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D: The room is locked by a key-code lock when unoccupied, but all students and staff in the department are issued with the code.
Storage Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E: The drawers are kept unlocked so that students can access the objects.
Environmental conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • C: When the drawer is closed, the objects are protected from dust and daylight; there are no environmental controls in this room, and its role as a common room mean that pests are a potential hazard.
Storage Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D: Although a dedicated storage space, the drawer is particularly overcrowded
Housing material	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D: One of the objects has conservation-grade housing, but the rest are, at best, in cardboard boxes.
Condition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A: The robust nature of these objects mean they are in good condition despite regular handling.
Documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A: All of these objects are accessioned and recorded in the UCL Adlib database.
Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A: Teaching is the primary role of these objects, especially the sample in the bottom left of the drawer, which is part of a specially designed teaching trail for undergraduates.
Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D: As these rocks are typical, they do not have much research potential.
Public Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D: Given the specialist interest, it is unlikely these rocks will ever feature in an exhibition, but their teaching value means that they could be incorporated into a handling collection.
Historical & Intellectual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • C: The fact that they were collected by members of staff creates a link with the department.
Uniqueness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • C: Although not duplicated anywhere else at the university, similar institutions are likely to have samples like these in their teaching
Ownership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • C: These samples were collected by members of staff on field trips

Frequently asked questions

What goes in the 'Object Number Notes' column?

While reviewing the UCL Collections, we counted objects as accurately and efficiently as possible. In most cases this meant counting according to accession number, e.g. if 7 fragments of pottery came from a single vessel and all had the same accession number, these would be counted as 1 pot. When we came across large numbers of objects stored together, e.g. several hundred flint flakes in a single box, we would count this as 1 box. To indicate this counting technique, we would write '1' in the 'No. of Objects' column and 'box' in the 'Object Number Notes' column.

What do you put in the 'Notes' field?

Any information that will help you remember details of the 'Review Unit' can be noted in this field. This can be anything from the label on a box – 'Slade Drawings Box 6' – to a list of the objects in the *review unit* – '3 reptile skulls, fish skeleton in a box.' This can help a curator enter use and significance *review ratings* later in the process, and can be useful as labels when writing recommendations.

In our museum, the display cases are secure, with the drawers locked, strict access for keys and with security cameras and guards around at all times. They don't have security glass or alarms, though – does this automatically make them 'C' for Storage Security? This follows the 'lowest possible assessment' principle, but it seems a bit harsh.

The bullet points in the Rubric can be applied on an either/or basis, so you can choose the *review rating* that seems the 'best fit'. The most important thing to remember at this stage is that you will be looking at the data at a later date and making decisions based on them. Do you feel that there is a need to improve the security of these display cases? If so, then you may want to list them at 'B' or 'C,' to send yourself the message that something needs to be done. If you think that the current storage security is adequate and no further improvement is required, then it's fine to list them at 'A'.

Why do I have to rate objects 'D' for storage security when they are in a high security storage room? Shouldn't they be at rating 'A' too? They are very secure, and categorizing them 'D' gives a false impression.

In this case, it is important to remember that none of the data you are gathering stand by or speak for themselves. Although the storage security is at 'D,' the review datasheet will also show that the security rating for the whole store room is 'A.' When analyzing the data, it is up to you to make decisions about what is or is not appropriate for the care of your collections. In this case you may decide that it is worthwhile improving the storage security for objects in this store, but you can also say that because the general level of room security is so high, there is no need for a change at storage level.

We have a social history collection with lots of different objects made up of different types of material. How do you review the environmental conditions of a watercolour painting against that of a piece of antique furniture or a train engine? Each of these has different requirements – why should we have to lump them together?

The Rubric was designed to assess factors like environmental condition and storage independently from the nature of the material in store. This means that the environmental condition and other collections care categories will be the same for any object regardless of what they are. The time to make a distinction between objects is at the analysis stage, where you can state that while the marble statue in the main gallery is not suffering as a result of exposure to direct sunlight, the same cannot be said for the Turner watercolour in the same gallery, and something should be done to safeguard the condition of the latter.

How do you tie in review data into existing databases or catalogues?

The short answer to this is: 'With a lot of technical know-how and help from your database administrator. '

A longer answer – which is as concise as it can be without descending into technicalities – is: digital museum catalogues (e.g. Adlib Museum, which we use at UCL) can maintain data for subsets of records within the database. If this subset is defined by location,

the digital catalogue will allow you to tie in review data for each *review unit* and apply these to individual objects within that review unit. Changes to the condition, documentation, etc. of individual objects can be inputted into their objects records and the corresponding data for the whole *review unit* can be updated automatically.

How much specialist knowledge do you need?

It depends on what you are reviewing. If, like us, you need a review with a wide scope to outline future work, this should be enough to pick out and highlight objects which require further, specialist research. If, on the other hand, you are reviewing a specific section of your collection, you will need specialist knowledge to give enough context and make valid decisions.

If you have no in-house specialist in the subject area you require, e.g. Egyptian Archaeology or British Prehistory, it is possible to ship in a specialist. You can find someone to help with your review by referring to the Museums Association or a relevant Subject Specialist Network.



Data gathering results

From September 2007 to the end of 2008, we collected review data for 18 separate collections in subjects across the social, historical and natural sciences. This covered nearly 380,000 objects in 190 different stores. Despite 180 years of collecting, none of this information had previously been collated in a single place. We were able, for the first time, to look at all of our collections in all their aspects and make informed decisions about their future care and use.

4. Analysis and Recommendations

Congratulations! You now have all the data you need to manage your collections effectively and strategically. Now all that is left to do is to analyze these data, write a series of recommendations and write an action plan prioritizing those recommendations.

Data compilation, calibration and formatting

Once the data gathering on paper was completed at UCL, the data were entered into an Excel spreadsheet. Each collection had its own workbook, with results from each store room appearing on a separate worksheet.

We also calibrated the data once it had all been compiled. This involved cross comparisons between the various store rooms to ensure that conditions were reported accurately and in appropriate relation to each other. For example, a store room considered extremely poor at the beginning of the 15-month review may have appeared not so bad – or worse – at the end of that period.

Having attempted some basic analysis, we realized that while the data in its raw form was useful in some ways – for example, it was easy to calculate the numbers of objects in each collection and draw up pie charts of review categories, e.g. how many objects

were on display vs. in storage on and off-site – it was not so easy to glean detailed information about the state of specific parts of the collection. It was particularly difficult to pick out problem areas.

We discovered the easiest way to make the data more manageable was to conditionally format the datasheets, colour coding each review category.

We had avoided numbering the *review ratings* in the *rubric*, choosing instead to label them alphabetically from A to E. This was because we wanted to emphasize that each review category is shorthand for a series of attributes rather than a straightforward grading system. We had to change to numbers, with A being 1 and E being 5, as this was the only way to conditionally format the data within Microsoft Excel.

Writing recommendations and action plans

The colour-coding made it considerably easier to pick out 'hotspots' and write recommendations accordingly. It also made it easy to suggest correlations between different categories, and isolate areas requiring further investigation. The following diagrams show some classic scenarios and their accompanying recommendations.

- Highlight the good news.** In this store room it is easy to pick out that there has been a dedicated effort to sort out the documentation of some of the objects stored here. While the Review is useful for highlighting good work done in the collections, it is also useful for establishing context. In this case, the most obvious question is: why has there been special effort devoted to a selection of objects which has no use potential and little or no historical significance?

Normal Location	Normal Location Room	Normal Location Type	Normal Location Number	Normal Location section	Notes	Number of Objects	Storage Security	Environment	Storage Space	Housing Materials	Condition	Documentation	Research	Public Engagement	Historical	Uniqueness	Ownership
Museum	Basement Store	Shelf	6			10	4	4	3	2	1	4	3	5	5	2	
Museum	Basement Store	Shelf	7			6	4	4	3	2	1	4	3	5	5	2	
Museum	Basement Store	Drawer	9			20	3	3	1	1	1	4	3	5	5	2	
Museum	Basement Store	Drawer	10			34	3	3	2	1	1	4	3	5	5	2	
Museum	Basement Store	Drawer	11			31	3	3	2	1	1	4	3	5	5	2	
Museum	Basement Store	Drawer	12			14	3	3	2	1	1	4	3	5	5	2	
Museum	Basement Store	Drawer	13			44	3	3	2	2	1	4	3	5	5	2	
Museum	Basement Store	Drawer	14			8	3	3	1	1	1	4	3	5	5	2	
Museum	Basement Store	Drawer	15			12	3	3	3	3	1	4	3	5	5	2	
Museum	Basement Store	Drawer	16			12	3	3	2	1	1	4	3	5	5	2	

Good news! Excellent documentation ratings.

Not so good... why were these objects a priority for accessioning when they have such low potential for use?

- **Highlight anomalies or problems.** In this *review unit*, there is at least one nationally important object stored in non-conservation grade housing material, and it is possibly in poor condition. Here it would be good to recommend that the situation be investigated and the object moved to more appropriate storage and given conservation if needed

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W
1	Storage Room Security: B																						
2	Normal Location	Normal Location Room	Normal Location Type	Normal Location Number	Normal Location section	Notes	Number of Objects	Storage Security	Environment	Storage Space	Housing Materials Condition	Documentation	Teaching	Research	Public Engagement	Historical Uniqueness	Ownership						
3	Museum	Store 1	Shelf	9			21	3	3	4	4	4	4	3	3	2	2						

- **Correlations.** In these *review units*, the fact that some objects are in need of conservation may be because conservation-grade housing material is used sporadically, or because the objects are frequently used in public engagement activities. In either case, it would be good to recommend an upgrade in housing material and possibly decommissioning the objects from public engagement use. Recommending conservation for the objects would also be a positive step.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W
1	Storage Room Security: D																						
2	Normal Location	Normal Location Room	Normal Location Type	Normal Location Number	Normal Location section	Notes	Number of Objects	Storage Security	Environment	Storage Space	Housing Materials Condition	Documentation	Teaching	Research	Public Engagement	Historical Uniqueness	Ownership						
3	Museum	Store 2	Shelf	4			15	4	2	3	3	3	2	4	2	4	4	2					
4	Museum	Store 2	Shelf	5			4	4	2	3	3	2	4	2	2	4	3	3					
5	Museum	Store 2	Shelf	6			23	4	2	3	3	2	4	2	2	4	6	2					
6	Museum	Store 2	Shelf	7			30	4	2	3	3	2	4	2	2	4	4	2					
7	Museum	Store 2	Shelf	8			25	4	2	3	3	2	4	2	2	4	3	3					



The Review ratings for one of our boxes of brachiopods is consistently low across the board except for one category. The fossils are used intensively in teaching, but overall the colours don't look very positive. Although they are not in pristine condition, their current storage, etc. is adequate for our purposes. Do we have a problem here?

The screenshot shows an Excel spreadsheet titled 'UCL Collections Review - Analysis - Microsoft Excel'. The table has columns for location, type, number, section, notes, and various review categories. The data row shows a 'Museum' in 'Store 2' on a 'Shelf' with a 'Normal Location Number' of 4 and a 'Normal Location section' of 4. The 'Notes' column contains 'Brachiopods - teaching collection'. The review categories and their ratings are: Number of Objects (34), Storage Security (5), Environment (3), Storage Space (4), Housing Materials (4), Condition (3), Documentation (5), Teaching (1), Research (5), Public Engagement (5), Historical (5), Uniqueness (5), and Ownership (3).

Normal Location	Normal Location Room	Normal Location Type	Normal Location Number	Normal Location section	Notes	Number of Objects	Storage Security	Environment	Storage Space	Housing Materials	Condition	Documentation	Teaching	Research	Public Engagement	Historical	Uniqueness	Ownership
Museum	Store 2	Shelf	4	4	Brachiopods - teaching collection	34	5	3	4	4	3	5	1	5	5	5	5	3

It would appear not! If the objects have a clear use and current storage is adequate then there is nothing to worry about; in this case a high rating in a single *review category* is enough.

The same would be true for any of the *review categories* on the use and significance side of the *UCL rubric* (with the possible exception of 'Uniqueness' – just because we're the only collection to have something, that doesn't necessarily make it good or special if it isn't being used or isn't historically significant).

The same would not be true on the collections management side of the *UCL rubric*. If an object is low on use potential and historical significance and nonetheless well-stored, it is time to consider a) if it would not be better to store this material elsewhere, e.g. off-site? or b) whether we need to keep hold of it at all, as it is a clear drain on limited resources.

Most recommendations in the UCL case were indications of and solutions to problems and shortfalls, e.g. 'There is a need to improve the security of the historically important objects stored in Cupboard X in Store Room Y as this is an open access storage unit in a room which is accessible by a departmental key.'

They also highlighted issues to do with the profile of collections, e.g. 'There is a need to consider the role of this group of material in relation to the rest of the collection. If there is any potential for future use, there is a need to improve current documentation. If there is no potential for future use (some of the objects are in very poor condition), the objects should be considered for disposal.'

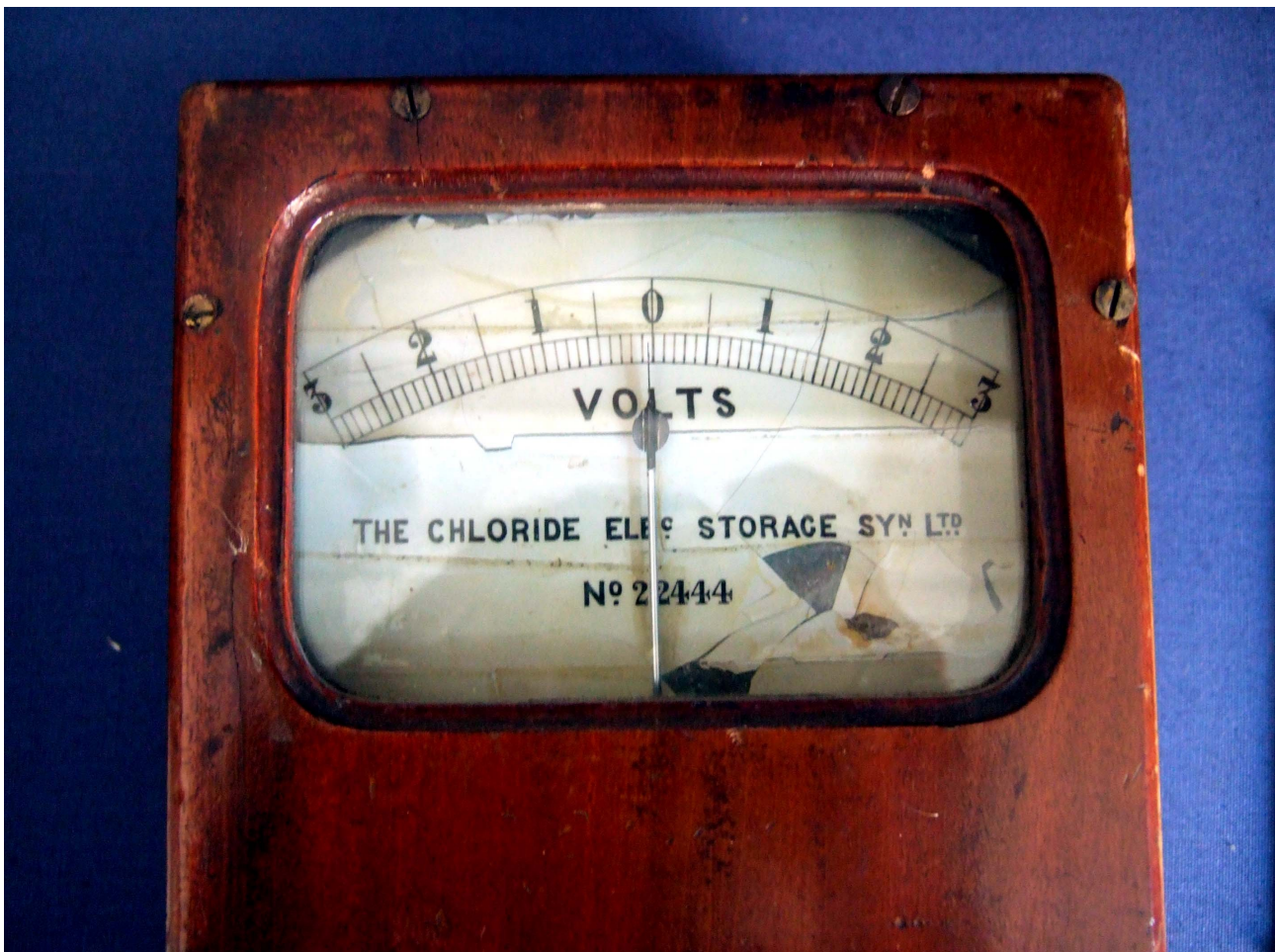
Significance of Review Recommendations

Having consulted UCL Internal Audit Services (who were represented on our Steering Group), we developed the following Significance of Review Recommendations Key. By assigning a level of significance to each recommendation we were able to write prioritized action plans complete with appropriate deadlines respecting to the urgency and strategic value of each task.

Having drafted the action plan, we met with curators and collections managers to establish that these recommendations were valid and had been prioritised correctly. With the exception of a small number of instances

where individual recommendations were moved up or down the priority list, the Review process was validated by this being the case.

Once these final changes had been signed off, copies of the complete report were sent to management and to the collection itself. From here, each of the Review recommendations could be integrated into the annual and five-year plans for each collection and into the strategic plans for the organisation as a whole.



Significance of Review Recommendations

LEVEL 1 - HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

There is a substantial shortcoming, which represents a significant risk to the collection if the matter is not addressed urgently (i.e. usually within 6-12 months). Examples are as follows:

No Assurance

The range and substance of Level 1 issues identified represent such shortcomings in the collection that it is the reviewers' opinion that there is an immediate and serious risk (or evidence) of significant loss or damage to the collection which requires immediate action.

Partial Assurance

The Level 1 issue(s) identified represent a material deficiency in a key part (s) of the overall collection, but there is no immediate threat of significant loss, censure or damage, as long as urgent action is taken to address the matter.

LEVEL 2 - STRONGLY RECOMMENDED

Generally similar circumstances to those described above, representing an appreciable (but not substantial) deficiency in the collection that needs to be addressed within a reasonably urgent timeframe (i.e. usually within 1-2 years), but the findings are unlikely to materially affect the collection. Examples include:

Partial Assurance

The cumulative effect of the number of Level 2 issues identified indicate that there are major deficiencies across various aspects of the collection, but there is no immediate threat of significant loss, censure or damage, as long as reasonably urgent action is taken to address the matter.

Standard Assurance

Appropriate controls are in place and operating effectively throughout most the collection, but with some Level 2 issues that need to be addressed.

LEVEL 3 - GOOD PRACTICE

The findings suggest that the collection reviewed is well-managed and controlled, although there may be minor deficiencies that would benefit from change or adjustment to reflect good practice, but with minimal risk in the context of the overall collection. Examples of Level 3 issues include:

Standard Assurance

Appropriate controls are in place and operating effectively in all areas of the collection, but with some Level 3 issues that need to be addressed and are committed to doing so within a reasonable time frame.

Substantial Assurance

Appropriate controls are in place and operating effectively in all areas of the collection, and the few Level 3 issues noted are suggestions for consideration more than Collections Review Recommendations.

Action Plan for the Example Collection

Recommendation	Agreed Action	Who?	Implementation Date
Level 1: No Assurance			
The piece of medical equipment containing mercury and in poor condition in Box 5 in Storeroom G7 requires immediate conservation and re-housing	Relocate object to secure storage and prioritize this work on conservation action plan.	CM, CC	
Asbestos specimens require more secure sealed storage and better labelling	Isolate specimens in appropriate housing material in the lockable cupboard in Store 3	CC	
Human remains in Storeroom 93 need to be moved to licensed premises until their provenance has been thoroughly researched and established.	Liaise with neighbouring licensed premise to arrange for the material to be housed with them on long-term loan while research is carried out	CU	
Level 1: Partial Assurance			
Collections material in Storeroom 1.17 should be re-housed as soon as possible as current storage conditions are very poor and constitute a threat to the condition of the objects	Investigate other storage options and apply for external funding if necessary	CM, MM	
Implement a Bronze disease Audit of Small Finds drawers in the Artefact Store and conserve affected objects	Prioritize on conservation action plan	CC	
There is a need for a conservation audit to build on the findings of the Review in the following Review units:	Develop in conjunction with existing action points, following emergency measures to remedy below	CC	
Polstore E Drawers 10 – 17, Room 2			
Display Case 3 Shelf 1, Room 7			
Cabinet 3 Shelf 4, Room 2			
Most of the material in Room 5			
Stack 8 Drawer 38, Artefact Store			
Stack 8 Drawer 51, Artefact Store			
Level 2: Standard Assurance			
Need to institute an environmental monitoring program for Store Room 6.18	Acquire appropriate monitoring equipment	CC	
Need to clarify the position of material on long-term loan in Cupboard 3, Storeroom 3	Contact lending organization and organize return	CU, CM	
Level 3: Standard Assurance			
Need to address the overcrowding of objects in Drawer 12 of Cupboard 2, Room 314 as this may have long term benefits for their condition.	Organize overhaul of storage space in Room 314	CM	
Level 3: Substantial Assurance			
It would be good practice to develop/increase the use of the ceramic collection as this material has good potential and is currently underused	Work with local historical society to develop a handling collection/new display or exhibition	CU, EO	



How do you keep the data up to date?

Museum collections exist in a constant state of flux, with the layout and composition of store rooms changing daily. In these circumstances it is likely that parts of the review data will be out of date even before you had a chance to compile, format and analyse it.

Our goal was for the Review data to provide a 'snapshot' of the state of our collections and use this information to plan further work. In several instances, we were able to tick off recommended actions as soon as we produced the report (it is nonetheless important to include these points to demonstrate thorough analysis). As the Review covered all aspects of collections care and use, we don't plan to update the data itself (this

would involve starting the Review all over again!) but to update the Action Plans for each collection as and when tasks are completed. So, it is the Action Plans rather than the Review data which will be kept up to date.

Having reached this stage, it is important to remember to remain flexible, with each collection working on, completing and updating their action plans as resources – particularly staff and money – allow. Ideally these aspects should have been considered while writing the original action plan, but it is possible that circumstances dictate some recommendations are carried out more slowly – or quickly – than originally planned.

Conclusion

The UCL Collections Review generates a systematic overview of your museum's collections quickly and efficiently – what is where, how are you currently using and managing it, and its potential for use. This could be a vitally important tool for forward planning and also for communication – e.g. to governing bodies, funders, incoming staff. It could also be a hugely useful knowledge transfer tool when preparing for a change of curators – especially if there is likely to be, or there has been, a staffing gap. It can be used for:

- Identifying key collections management / collections information management issues and prioritising the use of resources - including curatorial time and budgets.
- Quickly identifying objects / object groups which would benefit from closer scrutiny for issues such as conservation and documentation backlogs, and building action plans based on these.
- Preparing for Museum Accreditation: although not a substitute for tools such as the MLA Benchmarks in Collections Care self assessment checklist, the Review process could give you a quick, clear picture of where you are and where you need to get to. This picture could inform and assist the development of relevant action plans e.g. for documentation and preservation.
- Providing clear evidence to support funding bids
- Creating accurate profiles of the collection to enable appropriate acquisition and disposal in order to develop active and effective collections.
- Develop a clearer understanding of the collecting histories and general history of each collection.

