

Statement of principles of museum documentation version 6.2

Executive summary

CIDOC is the International Committee of ICOM for the documentation of museum collections.

CIDOC believes that collections without adequate documentation cannot be considered to be true “museum” collections. This is because:

- they cannot be adequately safeguarded and cared for
- the museum cannot demonstrate its accountability for them
- their value for research and interpretation is greatly reduced

(The numbers below refer to sections within the full Principles document.)

An adequate documentation system has these characteristics:

A *policy framework* which sets standards and defines procedures for documentation work, and which respects the legal and ethical environment within which the museum operates (1, 17)

Sufficient *staff resources* to operate the documentation system effectively, and manual and/or computer-based *systems* to hold the information within it (2-3)

Adoption of national and international *standards* where appropriate, taking account of local requirements (4)

Complete and *up-to-date* records (14)

Effective *access to information* so that staff and users of the museum can find what they need, but with *access controls* to prevent inappropriate access to restricted information (5-7)

Security measures to preserve and protect the information within the documentation system, and to ensure that it remains usable (20)

An adequate documentation system offers the following *practical benefits*:

- evidence of the ownership of objects (8)
- information about the history of objects in the collection is available (9)
- each object is uniquely identified (10)
- the current whereabouts of any object is easy to find (10)
- instant access to descriptions which help with the recovery of stolen objects (11)
- control over intellectual property rights issues (12)
- a full account of research and publications relating to the collection (13)
- supporting information about themes of relevance to the collection (15)
- collections information can be used for educational purposes and exhibitions (16)
- a full audit trail of work done on the collections (18)
- information about how objects no longer in the collection were disposed of (19)