



Internal Audit Report

York Museums Trust

Collections Management 2011/2012

Responsible Officer: Commercial Director, Director of Knowledge & Learning
Date Issued: 6 March 2012
Status: Final
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1 Introduction

- 1.1 An Internal Audit review of collections management procedures has recently been completed, in accordance with the agreed audit plan. Work was undertaken between September and November 2011.
- 1.2 The main focus of the audit was systems used to record the Trust's collections, including the electronic inventory management system (Adlib) and related procedures.
- 1.3 It was found that there are adequate policies and procedures in place for recording the items in the Trust's collections; however weaknesses were identified which require addressing. Our overall opinion of the controls within the system was that they provided Substantial Assurance.
- 1.4 Section two of the report sets out the detailed findings from the review.

2 Detailed findings

Recording of Items on Adlib

- 2.1 Testing was undertaken to evaluate the extent to which items are correctly recorded on Adlib. The auditor met with curators from art, natural history archaeology and history, discussed the general issues related to the collection within their area and then tested a sample of items to check the accuracy of their records. Testing was partly limited by the storage and locations of some items, as not all objects and locations were accessible.
- 2.2 Overall it was felt that the standard of record keeping was acceptable. There were differences in the accuracy of recording across the four areas; however this was expected due to the nature of the collections. Some areas are much more straightforward to catalogue than others, for example art is more likely to be fully catalogued than history due to the art collection being made up of specific higher value items and history being made up of a much larger volume of a variety of items.
- 2.3 The testing highlighted some issues with the records. These included minor errors in reference numbers from item to Adlib and a small number of items that couldn't be located on the day of the audit. It was felt that this reflected record keeping errors rather than missing objects. It was also found that parts of the collection have previously been accessioned, often in bulk, from paper records without checking to actual objects. This has led to inconsistencies like accession numbers with no corresponding items and items in accessioned groups not having reference numbers.
- 2.4 The audit highlighted additional issues with the recording of the collections. These included some locations at the James Street History store not being listed on Adlib, and other systems of recording items in operation instead of entry onto Adlib for costumes and some archaeological items.
- 2.5 In some areas, there are long standing problems with recording items on Adlib caused by various factors including physical barriers and ease of access to items. Examples of this are history where items are large and require handling by more than one person and archaeological stores of stone items where items need equipment to move or gain access to areas. Time constraints due to recent reductions in curatorial staff have exacerbated some of these issues.
- 2.6 The curators demonstrated awareness of the policies and procedures for managing the Trust's collections. The issues highlighted during testing were known to the curators; however there was not always a formal approach to address them. It is felt that a long term strategy should be devised to tackle the problems.

Collection Management Meetings

- 2.7 Monthly collection management meetings are held between the curators and the collections management team. The meetings are used to highlight problems with the documenting of items. During the audit, meetings were held with the collections management team and with the curators of art, natural history, archaeology and history. There was a general agreement that the improvements could be made to collections management meetings to increase their effectiveness.
- 2.8 From discussion and review of the list of issues and errors that are raised during the meetings it was clear that some of the actions are current and should be the focus of remedial action while others are long standing issues. The report should be separated by the age of the outstanding issues, so it is clear which actions should be prioritised, and the long standing issues moved to a separate sheet.
- 2.9 The focus of the Collection Management meetings should be reviewed so that the meetings can be effectively used to address any issues relating to the management of the collections, for example by highlighting recurring errors or additional training needs. Suggested improvements are that the purpose and content of the meetings be discussed by attendees and a revised agenda drawn following discussions. During the meetings realistic timescales for actions should be agreed.

Adlib User Guide

- 2.10 There is a comprehensive user guide for Adlib and staff demonstrated that they were aware of the requirements for the recording and moving of items. It was suggested that having a short guide for use by volunteers or temporary staff would prove useful. The curator of art has used a similar guide in the past which could be used as an example.
- 2.11 Section 3 sets out recommendations to address the weaknesses identified.

3 Management Action Plan

	Action to be Taken	Priority	Responsible Officer	Timescale
3.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A long term strategy should be devised for addressing the known issues with the recording and management of the Trust's collections 	3		
3.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Collection Management meetings should be reviewed so that all members of staff can make best use of the meeting to address issues and improve the management of the collections. This should include review of the content of the meeting and format of the list of Adlib issues to be addressed 	3		
3.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A short guide for recording items on Adlib should be produced for use by temporary staff 	3		

Annex 1

Audit Opinions and Priorities for Actions

Audit Opinions	
<p>Audit work is based on sampling transactions to test the operation of systems. It cannot guarantee the elimination of fraud or error. Our opinion is based on the risks we identify at the time of the audit.</p> <p>Our overall audit opinion is based on 5 grades of opinion, as set out below.</p>	
Opinion	Assessment of internal control
High Assurance	Overall, very good management of risk with no significant weaknesses identified. An effective control environment appears to be in operation.
Substantial Assurance	Overall, good management of risk with few significant weaknesses identified. An effective control environment is in operation but there is scope for further improvement in the areas identified.
Moderate assurance	Overall, satisfactory management of risk with a number of weaknesses identified. An acceptable control environment is in operation but there are a number of improvements that could be made.
Limited Assurance	Overall, poor management of risk with significant control weaknesses in key areas and major improvements required before an effective control environment will be in operation.
No Assurance	Overall, there is a fundamental failure in control and risks are not being effectively managed. A number of key areas require substantial improvement to protect the system from error and abuse.

Priorities for Actions	
Priority 1	A fundamental system weakness, which presents material risk to the system objectives and requires urgent attention by management.
Priority 2	A significant system weakness, whose impact or frequency presents an unacceptable risk to the system objectives, which needs to be addressed by management.
Priority 3	The system objectives are not exposed to significant risk, but the issue merits attention by management.