



## **1. Access to Collections principles**

### **1.1 IWM's approach to collections access**

- 1.1.1 IWM is a global leader in developing and communicating a deeper understanding of the causes, course, and consequences of war. Using the personal stories and experiences in our unique collections, our objective is to challenge people of all ages to look at war and conflict from different perspectives. We enrich people's understanding of the causes, course and consequences of war through all methods of access to our art, material culture and artefact collections, archives of documents, film, photographs and sound recordings, and a library with reference publications.
- 1.1.2 We encourage and enable public access to our extensive collections of over 33.5 million objects, artworks, archives of documents, film, sound and photographs and other material through long term galleries and seasons of changing short term exhibitions at our five branches; lending objects for public display at other venues across the UK and worldwide; publishing over 1.8 million collections records on our website; in-depth access to our collections on request in our Research Room; publication of books and guidebooks; use on social media; and licensing to broadcasters, publishers and individuals.
- 1.1.3 The delivery of collections access at IWM is delivered through the specialist contributions of many teams. In particular the teams within Collections and Curatorial deliver access to our collections through:
- **Collections Access and Research** provide expertly facilitated physical access to our collections in the Research Room and support the work of researchers in-person and remotely.
  - **Exhibitions, Interpretation and Design** realise visually and physically ideas addressed by our remit and collections, interpreting complex concepts in compelling ways.
  - **Narrative & Content** thread our collections through every physical display and further highlight them through publications, digital content, and public lectures and conference papers.
  - **Collections Operations** deliver specialist collections care, preserving our collections for access and creating digitised surrogates and new imagery to enable instant global access.
  - **Collections Management** manage a programme of loans out around the world to share our collections in new perspectives and publish object records online.

### **1.2 Policy Review and Audit**

- 1.2.1 The Collections Access Policy will be published and reviewed periodically, at least once every five years. It was approved by the Collections Management Board on 26 November 2024. The policy is next due for review in November 2029.
- 1.2.2 Revisions to this policy will be referred to IWM's Collections Management Board for approval.
- 1.2.3 Policy reviews are informed by results of audits and evaluations of compliance to legal requirements that govern IWM or that it subscribes to; feedback from external parties; the extent to

which objectives have been met; follow-up actions from previous management reviews; recommendations for improvement; and changing circumstances, including developments in legal requirements that govern IWM and other requirements relating to the collections.

### 1.3 Legal and other requirements

- 1.3.1 IWM ensures that the legal requirements that govern IWM, and other requirements to which IWM subscribes, are taken into account in all planned collections access. We are committed to identifying and complying with relevant legislation and ethical codes in relation to the broadest possible access to our collections, including the Public Sector Equality Duty and the Equality Act 2010.
- 1.3.2 This policy is informed by the Collections Management Policy, which has been written following BS EN 17820:2023 *Conservation of Cultural Heritage: Specifications for the management of moveable cultural heritage collections*.
- 1.3.3 This policy specifically focusses on the access that we provide to our collections. Wider policy and strategy exists on our corporate access and inclusion activity.

## 2. Our audiences

- 2.1 IWM is committed to providing and increasing access to our collections that meets the needs of all our current and future audiences. These audiences include people across the world. Our audiences include communities of multiple types and a broad range of stakeholders.
- 2.2 We identify the differing needs of our users, and those who do not currently use our services, through regular surveys and studies and benchmarking across the sector.
- 2.3 We are committed to offering the highest possible standards of service, as described on our website: [IWM Policies | Imperial War Museums](#). Our Standards of Service include the following aims:
  - to maximise all forms of access to the museum's collections, displays, and educational resources
  - our staff are helpful, courteous and efficient
  - our displays are well presented and informative
  - every effort is made to provide access for visitors with disabilities
  - all branches of the museum are kept clean and well maintained
  - all our services are of a high standard and good value for money.
- 2.4 Our audiences incorporate multiple communities, including local, national and international visitors, members and users of our varied services; different communities of researchers (from academics and authors to broadcasters to family historians); and those interested in and invested in IWM's remit, including civilians affected by conflict, military personnel/ veterans and their families, and NGOs. Some of these communities may access our collections regularly and in person, others may do so only once and online.
- 2.5 Our stakeholders include people alive today and people in the future who will be able to access the objects, archival collections and information we preserve and create. We recognise the importance of the donors, creators, lenders and subjects of our collections and our obligations to preserve their stories.
- 2.6 We enable audience feedback on the collections records that we publish through the 'share your feedback' button underneath each object record. These comments are all read and where

appropriate changes are made to object records. They enable us to make corrections and connections between people and our collections.

### 3. Methods of access and use

- 3.1 Our website acts as the portal to the information we provide on accessing our collections through the many channels we make available. We are committed to making our collections available as widely as possible.
- 3.2 We provide public access to our collections through our five branches which are open to everyone throughout the year, offering access to and interpretation of selected objects and archives throughout our galleries and exhibitions. Some objects and archives are displayed for many years in long term galleries (with vulnerable objects protected through the use of surrogates as needed); others are shown for a shorter period in our dynamic exhibition offer. Information on our current exhibitions and galleries at each branch is available on our website.
- 3.3 We currently publish over 1.8 million collections records on our website, covering all areas of our museum, archive and library collections, accompanied by digital images, sound or film where possible. The number of records accessible online is increasing every year.
- 3.4 We share our collections across the world for access to the public through a programme of loans out. Lending and borrowing enables our collections to have social impact within a range of locations and geopolitical contexts.
- 3.5 We actively share appropriate and engaging examples from our objects and archival collections (especially film and photographs) through our social media channels. Details of our channels are available here: [Connect with IWM | Imperial War Museums](#)
- 3.6 We publish guidebooks for each branch to help visitors engage with the objects and archives that they see in greater depth.
- 3.7 We are committed to publishing fiction and non-fiction books drawn from our vast collections, often enabling themes to be interpreted in greater detail. Among these titles, we have created a series of publications which gives rich insight into parts of our photograph collections selected by our curators.
- 3.8 We licence our collections (particularly but not exclusively photographs, film and sound) to broadcasters, filmmakers, publishers, other creative industries and individuals for use across all media types. Public access to these documentaries and creative projects (notably including Peter Jackson's *They Shall Not Grow Old*), enables wide engagement with our collections.
- 3.9 We encourage everyone to have direct access our collections by visiting our Research Room at IWM London. Open five days a week, the Research Room provides access to original documents, sound recordings, books, journals, photographs, and IWM's administrative archive records. One day a week, objects and artworks can be accessed subject to availability. Details of opening times and how to book an appointment are available on our website: [Research Room | Imperial War Museums \(iwm.org.uk\)](#). Guidelines for users on what to expect from their visit and how to safely handle the items they view are published on our website, with FAQs and a helpful video. Users of the Research Room can take their own photographs of the material they view, subject to copyright and GDPR restrictions. Personal support and additional guidance is available from the expert staff of the Research Room. Where access to original material cannot be provided due to its physical condition, surrogates (in the form of microfilm, photocopies or digital versions) may be provided. We conduct periodic user surveys to ensure we respond to user's needs and requirements within existing resource. We gather individual feedback from users of the Research Room to demonstrate the impact of our services and to seek opportunities for improvement where appropriate.
- 3.10 We host inductions for undergraduate and postgraduate students to introduce them to the Research Room and how to use our collections for research purposes.

- 3.11 As an Independent Research Organisation, we have an active and long-standing cohort of Collaborative Doctoral Partnership students who are researching their PhDs through the Arts and Humanities Research Council's scheme. These academic research projects, based on access to our collections and co-supervised by our expert staff and academic partners, shed new light on our vast archival and object collections, enriching them for future access and use. Further details are available on our website: [Collaborative Doctoral Partnership | Imperial War Museums \(iwm.org.uk\)](https://www.iwm.org.uk/collaborative-doctoral-partnership)
- 3.12 We publish a Research Strategy ([IWM RESEARCH STRATEGY, 2020-25 | Imperial War Museums](https://www.iwm.org.uk/research-strategy)) and lead and co-lead on a wide range of research projects in partnership with leading universities (see these webpages for further detail [Research | Imperial War Museums \(iwm.org.uk\)](https://www.iwm.org.uk/research)) and academic partners. Through our research programme we are able to shed new light into our collections, improve access to them, and widen their reach and appeal to diverse audiences.
- 3.13 We offer remote scanning options for our library and document collections, subject to copyright restrictions, any other restrictions, and the condition of the original object, at cost. Details of this service are available on our website: [Image and Film Licensing | Imperial War Museums \(iwm.org.uk\)](https://www.iwm.org.uk/image-and-film-licensing)
- 3.14 We provide a paid-for digitisation on demand service, which anyone can use to obtain photographs of objects in our collections, scans of our films or digital copies of analogue photographs, for example. Details of this service are available on our website: [Digitisation on Demand | Imperial War Museums \(iwm.org.uk\)](https://www.iwm.org.uk/digitisation-on-demand)
- 3.15 Occasionally, selected original objects and surrogates of our archival collections are made accessible in IWM's programmes of learning sessions, events and lectures.
- 3.16 We have partnered with AccessAble to create detailed accessibility guides to each of our branches, available through our website.
- 3.17 IWM has several directory entries on the Discovery platform hosted by the National Archives ([Discovery | The National Archives](https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/discovery)) to enable users of UK archives to find our collections and branches.

#### **4. Restrictions to access and use**

- 4.1 Use of any of the methods of access above is dependent on the specific nature of the object or archival item. IWM carefully balances the care and preservation of our collections with our ambition to provide the widest possible access.
- 4.2 The specific nature of our collections, containing both contemporary and public record material, means that elements of our collections cannot be widely accessible due to copyright, GDPR and security restrictions. These are dynamic and under regular review to ensure that access is provided when restrictions are no longer in force.
- 4.3 Where objects and archival items are still in copyright we work with the rights holder to acquire the rights in full or to obtain a license to enable educational access. Where we are not successful, certain methods of access and use will not be possible but the material can still be displayed in our branches and made available in the Research Room. We have a Delegation of Authority from the Keeper of Public Records to enable us to make the Crown copyright material in our collections accessible.
- 4.4 Much of the more recent and contemporary material that we hold, especially the MOD-generated official film and photographs, are held in our collections as public records. Within the frameworks that apply to these archives we make them as accessible as possible, but in most cases there are restrictions based on operational or personal security and data protection which mean that broad access to these collections is not yet possible. Records for these collections are not typically published online until access can be enabled. Supervised on-site access for accredited researchers can be permitted in some cases. Curators use a sensitivity review assessment to

determine the access that can be provided. For the most recent collections material, we also use the Post-2001 Collection Use Risk Assessment which enables us to carefully make more of the post-2001 material available under controlled conditions in the Research Room.

- 4.5 Some of our objects and archival collections, for example a personal memoir or oral history recording, are not yet accessible based on agreements made with the donor or subject to protect their privacy. These are kept under review and are made accessible when possible. Records for these objects are not typically published online until access can be enabled.
- 4.6 Small proportions of our archival collections (especially film) are inaccessible in their analogue format as IWM does not hold the hardware that enables play back, for example video tape formats. These objects are made accessible in digital form.
- 4.7 Our collections contain content which can be distressing. As our specialist staff review this content the sensitivity of the material is documented to support informed and appropriate future access. Not all material of this nature may be published online, some may only be accessible in the Research Room.
- 4.8 Our collections contain hazardous and licensed collections. Direct physical access to these by a variety of means is not usually possible to protect health and safety and comply with relevant legislation and regulation. Objects are risk assessed before display or other methods of access. Requests to view hazardous and licensed items will be assessed in collaboration with the named license holders and in house specialists, and any viewings will have either a named license holder or in house specialist present. To enable us to comply with the legislation governing these collections, we may carry out additional security and identity checks on any person who requests access. If this is the case we will contact them to ask their permission. We may also ask the requestor to disclose medical information if the items that they want to access are hazardous, so that we can manage the risk to them in a commensurate way. We will maintain records of their visit. To manage risk and compliance, it may not be possible to allow the visitor to handle the item or to take photographs.