



Coordination Centre
for Scientific
University Collections
in Germany



Quality Criteria
for University Collections

Quality Criteria for University Collections

In its 2011 Recommendations on Scientific Collections as Research Infrastructures¹, the Wissenschaftsrat (German Council of Science and Humanities) identified a lack of assessment criteria for university collections and suggested that these should be developed. Such criteria would contribute to assessing collections qualitatively and, where necessary, enable appropriate measures to improve collections.

The quality criteria presented here were developed in October 2012 at a joint workshop of the Coordination Centre for University Collections in Germany and representatives of German collections who are currently active at university level. Thus they are based on the expertise and experience of key players in the university collections network.

Criteria

N.B.: The following order of criteria does not imply degree of significance nor should it be understood as a ranking.

A university collection should above all be relevant to and/or have the potential to be used for research, teaching, and education. Relevance and/or potential arise from fundamental criteria with which determine the value and quality of objects and collections. Of essential importance is the usability of the collection. This results from structural, conceptual, and contextual criteria.

Fundamental criteria:

Collection is/Objects are:

- unique
- exemplary
- exceptional

Collection possesses/Collection objects possess relevance and/or potential because of their:

- specific materiality
- relevance for epistemology and history of science and the humanities
- facility for establishing identity
- representative importance
- didactic usability
- aesthetics

The market value of a collection is **not** a criterion of quality.

¹ Wissenschaftsrat: Recommendations on Scientific Collections as Research Infrastructures (Drs. 10464-11), Berlin, January 2011 (http://wissenschaftliche-sammlungen.de/files/3613/7112/8178/WR_Empfehlungen_en.pdf)

Structural Criteria:

- The collection is managed either full or part-time by one or more of the following: custodians/scholars/scientists/conservators.
- The collection has its own budget.
- The collection can be accessed and used.
- The premises housing the collection are adequate and user-friendly.
- Requirements of conservation are fulfilled.
- The security of the objects is ensured.
- An emergency plan exists.
- The objects in the collection are documented and indexed/catalogued.

Conceptual Criteria:

- An overall concept for collections at the university exists.
- There is a profile/main focus.
- There is a collection concept.

Contextual Criteria:

The collection is:

- used for research, teaching, and education.
- adheres to the university's overall collection concept.
- part of one or more networks.

Comment

The quality criteria can be understood as general criteria for the assessment and evaluation of university collections. The authors view quality criteria as a necessary instrument for developing university collections and for advocacy to the wider academic community as well as other relevant actors/stakeholders.

The criteria can form the foundation of collection concepts, overall concepts, strategies, and perspectives. They are a suitable basis for evaluation. At the same time they do not make explicit or implicit recommendations with regard to possible consequences of such assessments — whether positive or negative. Such decisions must be taken on a case-by-case basis with due consideration of local conditions and the general situation.

It is the remit of the collections themselves to substantiate in what ways certain criteria are met..

Explanatory Notes on Terms Used

The following explains certain terms used in this document; it should not be understood as normative.

Fundamental criteria

A collection is **unique** if the loss of certain objects, or parts of the collection, would leave unfillable gaps.

A collection is **exemplary** when its holdings, parts of its holdings, or the collection's concept is exemplary for a subject area, a field or subject of collecting, a geographic region, an epoch, and so on.

A collection is **exceptional** when its holdings, parts of its holdings, or the collection's concept are of exceptionally high quality.

The term **specific materiality** refers to when data stored in the physical presence and material constitution of objects is potentially relevant for present and future research in fields of disciplines and subjects that as yet have not been defined.

The **relevance for epistemology and history of academic disciplines** refers to collections or parts of collections whose objects are material documents and testimony for historical and epistemological research. This relevance may be based on the objects themselves or historical contexts of a collection's origin, its custodial history, or the history of its use.

Collections can have the facility of **establishing identity** when they are closely connected to the history of the university, an institute, or a person.

Representative importance is given when a collection or its objects can be used for exhibitions, teaching, educational formats, or public relations/outreach.

The term **didactic usability** refers to the potential of holdings or parts of holdings for use in university teaching.

The term **aesthetics** refers to culturally conditioned sensory perceptions of objects beyond the sphere of the primary collection focus.

Structural criteria

The structural criteria comprise parameters for professional management and use of a collection. They provide information on possibilities for optimisation and serve to identify deficits.

Documentation of a collection's objects: This comprises the extent of the documentation (which percentage or how many objects are documented?), type of documentation (analogue, digital, which systems?), and extent of detail documented/documentation system (which data have been recorded?).

Contextual criteria

Using collections in education also includes activities in the areas of exhibitions, teaching, public relations and outreach..

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