Guidance

Collections: Increasing access, limiting risk



Background

For a number of years now policies linked to Lifelong Learning and Access have been at the forefront of Government thinking and action, both at a UK and Scottish level. Within the museums sector this has been mirrored by the creation of the Scottish Museums Council's (SMC's) Learning and Access Policy in 2001 and subsequent Learning and Access Strategy in 2005, as well as within a growing body of National, Local Authority and Independent museums. More recently the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council's (MLA's) Accreditation Scheme has placed a new emphasis on access in the minimum standards museums are being asked to meet.

As these objectives have permeated into accepted educational and cultural thinking, museums and heritage organisations have sought practical ways to achieve them. Museums both large and small are already proving their ability to provide increased access to collections, through innovative access and outreach projects or through major refurbishments. And always such developments are balanced against the inherent duty to protect and preserve, within the limitations of space and resources, both human and financial.

Introduction

These guidelines have been produced by the Scottish Association of Museums Security (SAMS) in association with SMC to offer guidance on how to increase access to collections whilst still maintaining that duty of care. SMC and SAMS believe that addressing the issue of security within this context is important precisely because increased access extends beyond the traditional museum environment defined by cases, alarms, cameras and gallery staff. The intention is to provide a practical tool to support and underpin access developments.

These guidelines will

- raise awareness that increasing access has implications for security procedures and can increase security risks
- offer practical advice on preventative actions for a variety of scenarios
- offer a practical tool for the assessment of security risks to collections
- inform staff who make decisions on access to collections
- provide signposts to further sources of advice and information.

Because these guidelines deal with visitor access, which by definition occurs during opening hours, they won't address security issues related to non-public hours. Other publications, listed in the References section at the end of this document, cover these areas in detail, if required.

1. Security Basics

Before concentrating on security issues specifically concerned with access, it is helpful to consider the general measures that build a secure public gallery environment. Relevant concepts can then be transferred to access-increasing scenarios.

It's often only when a high profile theft occurs, like the Da Vinci painting from Drumlanrig Castle in 2003, that thoughts turn to security. Many thefts are opportunistic, carried out during opening hours, and taking advantage of fairly elementary oversights in security systems or procedures.

Museums have responded to the risk of theft and other threats to security in a range of ways, investing in both physical and electronic security systems, as well as in staff training and improved procedures. Major institutions may be the most likely to be at the cutting edge of security developments but effective security is a serious issue for all museums, no matter what their budget.

For convenience, security measures can be broken down into three key areas; physical, electronic and human.

1.1 Physical security

Display cases

Glazed display cases provide a layer of physical security for exhibits and help to maintain a closed environment to aid conservation. Cases should be chosen with care.

- Glass A high standard laminate glass is essential (check specifications produced by MLA), although it is actually quite rare for the case glass itself to be attacked. Thieves seem deterred by either the effort involved, the noise created or by the risk of the broken glass damaging the items they're after.
- Locks and hinges Much more likely is a surreptitious attack on locks, hinges or framing/beading, so choose good quality locks when specifying or building a case and try and design it so that hinges and locks are inaccessible.
- Frames Metal frames are ideal, but if using wooden framing, use security screws, countersinking the screw heads and covering them with putty to make it easier to detect tampering.

Many popular display cases commonly used in museums are not security cases at all. Some commercial cases have an inbuilt design weakness caused by using exposed glue-bonded joints which are open to easy attack,

either chemically or with a simple craft knife. Others have accessible locks that are easy to pick, or a simplistic range of keys that are easily obtained.

Strange but True

After a theft from a display case, it was discovered that the thief had apparently made numerous visits, on each occasion removing one or two screws from the wooden frame. The heads of the screws were then nipped off and replaced in their holes with Blue-Tack, leaving no obvious trace. On the final visit, all that was needed was to quickly remove the final securing screws, remove the glass and steal the exhibit.

Hanging systems

Mirror Plates are the standard Ω shaped brass fittings that can be screwed into the frame of a painting and screwed into the gallery/screen wall to enhance security. These can be particularly helpful in protecting smaller paintings. Also available are security hanging brackets where one part, fixed to the frame, interlocks with a second part fixed to the wall providing a secure bond. Glazed paintings are preferable, from a security point of view, because of the extra protection the glass offers the canvas from both vandalism and theft but this option is not always practical for larger works of art.

Barriers

Physical barriers are another aid to security, and are particularly useful if you have exhibits on open or uncased display. Even a low barrier rope can create a psychological cordon around or in front of an object or painting, and will deter most visitors from getting too close. However, there is always a balance to be found between protection and the display aesthetic. A ring of police crush barriers in front of your gallery walls would provide excellent physical security but at what cost to the visitor experience? Open display is always the least secure but can be protected by a combination of barriers, electronic measures and invigilation.

1.2 Electronic security

CCTV

Closed Circuit TV technology has developed significantly in recent years. It is a large subject area requiring specialist advice, but basic installation might include:

- One camera which can collect good 'head and shoulder' shots of every visitor, ideally located at the front door. This can be used to refer back to in the event of any incident and as evidence in any subsequent proceedings. A clear recorded image will be important.
- Two cameras in each display space or gallery, located in opposite diagonal corners. These should each give a view down the long sides of the space, and show the opposite 'far' wall.

 Optional plug-in points for each camera, to provide greater flexibility for changing room layouts, or to monitor specific high value exhibits.
 Alternatively, an existing camera could be redirected, but at the expense of losing coverage elsewhere.

Localised Alarms

Installing individual or gallery-specific units to provide tailored security solutions will enhance detection. These are normally low voltage or battery powered detectors, which can detect vibration or movement in any case or object to which they are fitted (e.g. case core, picture frame, display screen), activating an internal audible alarm. The more advanced of these detectors can beam an activation signal to a central monitoring point, or even to a gallery attendant's pocket pager, giving details of which case or object alarm has been activated.

1.3 Human security

Invigilation

In many museums, front-of-house or volunteer staff hold multi-skilled positions, incorporating security invigilation, cleaning, portering, retail and reception duties. In balancing these responsibilities, the safety of visitors and the collections should remain paramount. Staff training and awareness is probably the most crucial element in any museum's security provision, and on-the–job wisdom from peers can be the best training of all. This might be accessed from within your organisation or from other organisations that have greater experience and/or dedicated security staff.

Staffing levels will obviously impinge on the effectiveness of invigilation, but front-of-house or volunteer staff should always be made familiar with the museum areas for which they have responsibility. The condition of the area, and the exhibits within it, should be checked at the start of each shift, and then rechecked at regular intervals. Any damage or theft that occurs might not be directly witnessed, but at least will be picked up on with a minimum of delay. Similar levels of vigilance are also desirable for CCTV monitoring, although the provision of a member of staff dedicated to this task is not always possible. Effective invigilation by and communication between staff, combined with the overview offered by the CCTV system, can be crucial when an incident does occur.

Strange but True

In institutions that operate on a seasonal basis, thieves have been known to target the start of the season when the presence of new and inexperienced staff members or volunteers can make security vulnerable.

In one case, an elderly gent in tweeds introduced himself to a new guide as the owner, chatting away amiably before he removed an item from display for 'cleaning'. In another case, a visitor was easily recalled by a guide because of his pronounced limp, which went some way to explaining the earlier disappearance of a 3ft sword from a gallery wall.

Gallery/Display Design

Each change in gallery layout or change of display should be audited for its security implications. This might include consultation with a Security Manager, or discussion with a museum adviser, or reference against published security guidance. Points to consider include sight lines, positioning of specific exhibits and the current security parameters, for example staffing levels, CCTV camera locations and flexibility. Design proposals might increase the security risk in a display area, but at least by discussing it there is the potential to find solutions, or to increase the awareness of staff involved in day-to-day monitoring.

2. Increasing Access in a Museum Context

In the context we are addressing, increasing access means undertaking an action or process that augments people's ability to interact with our collections.

This is a challenge increasingly taken up by museums, encouraged as much by the promptings of the Disability Discrimination Act, as by their own desire to be relevant and accessible to a broad range of audiences. The following are just some examples of work already undertaken.

- Scran in Scotland is leading the way in making museums collections accessible as images and object records via the internet. Other museums are echoing the move, delivering photographs and interpretation on their own websites, for example Shetland Museum, and the Hunterian Museum with its Whistler exhibition.
- In Glasgow, the perception of museum storage has been transformed by Glasgow Museum's Nitshill open store development, where the public are now able to access extensive reserve collections that might never be seen on display.
- Dundee Museums and Art Galleries conducted an award winning outreach programme as part of the 'Coming to our Senses' travelling exhibition, encouraging visitors to interact more fully with exhibits through the use of sound, touch and other senses.

With external demands and the desire to increase access to collections, there is inevitably a consequence for security. For example, where a museum has displayed a fairly similar number of items in a controlled environment over a number of years, security will have been largely a fixed element. Even if the simplest method to increase access was used, that of extending opening hours, the issue of overtime for security staff would need to be addressed.

In fact, for each scenario that aims to increase access to collections in some way, there are risks and implications to be discussed. The risks may be fairly generic – theft or damage, either accidental or intended – but the level of risk and the actions taken to limit those risks will vary according to the situation. Some potential access increasing situations and the actions that can be taken to limit likely risks are shown below.

Increase in access	Action to limit risk						
Extend opening hours	 Consider staffing issues. Do you need to alter invigilation rotas or take on more staff or volunteers? Ensure the running time of CCTV tapes is long enough for your open period. 						
Display more of the collections	 During exhibition planning consider line of sight for CCTV cameras and gallery staff. Consider security of display cases. Increase barriers or level of invigilation for unglazed paintings or collections on open display. 						
Involve groups/communities in creating exhibitions	 Plan how and where people will have access to stores/collections and how the process of involvement will be managed. Induct those involved in object handling techniques. 						
Allow sensory exploration of collections	 Consider what type of exhibits you feel safe in showing - refer to your Collections Management Policy or Plan and carry out risk assessments. Consider what sort of physical or electronic protection you can provide and/or what level of invigilation is required. Ensure staff / volunteers are aware of and comfortable with your museum's policy on increasing access. (see Scenario 2) 						

Open new areas to the public	 An ideal starting point is to carry out a complete security risk assessment. Assess the physical area in terms of line of sight, blind corners, egress etc. Will you require CCTV or electronic protection? Consider the implication on levels of staffing or volunteer rotas. (see Scenario 1)
Take collections to the community	 Consider which collections are sufficiently robust or replaceable – refer to your Collections Management Policy or Plan and carry out risk assessments. Carry out a security assessment of any new temporary exhibition venues and develop exhibition plans accordingly. Consider how secure your transport is and whether your insurance covers what you intend to do.
Develop the role of front of house staff/volunteers to include greater public interaction / live interpretation	 Consider the balance between time spent engaging with the public and performing a security role. Review monitoring procedures. Install electronic systems / change staff rotas to compensate? Review display methods to reflect changes in levels of monitoring by staff.
Create virtual experiences	 Consider the copyright issues relating to any images made available on-line. For on-line collections databases, be sure to exclude fields that contain sensitive data.

3. Assessing Risk

In all situations where you aim to increase access to collections, the nature of the objects being used will ultimately define the level of risk. However, you can try to predict this in advance.

The exhibits most at risk of theft will be those that are portable and valuable, for example the Da Vinci painting stolen from Drumlanrig Castle that was actually smaller than an LP record. Gold and silver, watches, jewellery, coins, medals and eggs will all be attractive to thieves. Other items will appeal to specific collectors without necessarily correlating with a curator's perception of 'value'. Generally, as the size of an object

increases beyond the 'in the pocket' or 'under the jacket' scale, the likelihood of theft then begins to decrease.

Objects most at risk from touching or vandalism will include those constructed of organic materials such as paper, textiles and clays, or painted canvasses and metals. If you are using an exhibition to provoke a response or challenge perceptions, items in your collection that have a particular political, cultural or religious meaning might also become a target for malicious attack.

The nature of the object to be used should also be weighed against the security measures in place. The size of an object might be a major deterrent for a thief facing the prospect of smuggling it past CCTV, gallery staff, down the stairs and out of the front door. That deterrent might lessen if the object is in an unmonitored gallery, two feet from a street level fire exit with a fast car parked outside.

You can undertake a simple security risk assessment of your objects using the following process.

- Decide what the greatest risk to your object is likely to be
 - > theft resulting in loss
 - > touching or vandalism resulting in damage.

For some objects, you might feel the risks to be equal and will need to carry out two separate assessments.

- Allocate a numeric value between 1 and 10 to the perceived risk.
- Then allocate a value to the perceived impact on the object, should theft or touching / vandalism occur, again between 1 and 10.
- Multiply these figures to find your risk assessment product. The higher this end value, the greater the need for action.

For example:

You are considering displaying a relatively valuable glazed painting at a new community exhibition venue where there is a low level of invigilation. Because of its size and the proposed location, theft is deemed quite likely (7 out of 10) but its disappearance would be a significant loss to your collection (9 out of 10). This gives a risk assessment product for potential theft of $7 \times 9 = 63$.

Risk from theft	1	2	3	4	5	6	<u>7</u>	8	9	10
Potential loss										
1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2	2	4	6	8	10	12	14	16	18	20
3	3	6	9	12	15	18	21	24	27	30
4	4	8	12	16	20	24	28	32	36	40
5	5	10	15	20	25	30	35	40	45	50
6	6	12	18	24	30	36	42	48	54	60
7	7	14	21	28	35	42	49	56	63	70
8	8	16	24	32	40	48	56	64	72	80
9	9	18	27	36	45	54	<u>63</u>	72	81	90
10	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100

This is a high risk, but you could reduce it by choosing a different painting or improving security measures at the new venue. If the painting were unglazed you might decide the major risk was touching or vandalism and so a different calculation would be needed.

Or:

You are putting together a new display that will include opportunities to touch and explore a selection of duplicated objects from your reserve collection. The risk of touching will be high because invited (10 out of 10) but any resulting damage may have little significance to your collection as a whole (2 out of 10). This gives a risk assessment of $10 \times 2 = 20$.

This is a low risk, and might encourage you to expand the range of objects to be used. If the objects were not duplicates, or if they were made of particularly sensitive materials, the risk calculation would obviously increase. You could also calculate the risk of theft and loss.

By repeating this for any objects being used in any new scenarios, and by comparing risk values, you can rationalise your thoughts and aid the decision making process. This type of assessment will also give you a heightened awareness of how your physical, electronic and human security elements interact and help you prioritise how they might be used to mitigate potential risks.

Conclusion

This document isn't designed to answer every museum security problem ever encountered. Risk will never be entirely eliminated but, by adopting a rational process of decision making, informed by thought and discussion, ideas for increasing access can become more of a reality. We hope the examples and tools provided in this document will give you the confidence to make such decisions when trying to balance the sometimes seemingly contradictory policies of increasing access and maintaining security in a museum context.

We hope you will also use the following scenarios as a starting point for what you can achieve for yourselves. They show a range of simple ways that museums can open up physical and intellectual access to their collections and reach new audiences whilst still preserving a secure environment. The level of preparation and thought processes can be applied equally to access increasing situations of your own. For more information about security issues generally, consult the references list at the end.

Scenario 1 - The Stores Visit

You have decided to extend access to your collections by advertising public tours of basement store areas within your building.

In advance

Walk your proposed route and look out for any potential problems.

Security:

One of the main concerns with giving a behind the scenes tour is the potential for criminals to probe possible weaknesses in your security in that part of your facility.

- Main alarm control boxes are usually found behind the scenes and are often marked with both your system provider's name and the alarm contract number. Make sure they are covered over if they are on your tour route. Locations of individual detectors will also be of interest. Don't give anything away about how your stores are protected, unless you are supremely confident that doing so would be an additional deterrent.
- Temporarily cover over any signage or labelling which might assist potential thieves, for example Silver Cabinet.
- If you are showing items of a particularly collectable type, such as birds' eggs, watches, coins, or silver, display them away from their normal storage locations rather than in situ.
- Set aside a cupboard or similar area for your visitors to use as a cloakroom. Coats and bags are ideal places for hiding stolen exhibits so don't let them be taken on the tour.

General:

Ideally, at least two staff members should accompany each tour group.

- In the event of a genuine medical emergency, one member will be able to stay with the group while the other goes for assistance.
- A potential thief could distract a single member of staff, acting as a decoy to cover the actions of an accomplice.
- One member should lead the group from the front (opening doors), the
 other following up behind (closing doors). This way door security is
 maintained, the group is kept together, and in the event of evacuation the
 group can be led quickly in whichever direction is most appropriate.
- Having two staff members present will also facilitate corroboration in the event of any incident.

On the Day

- Ensure visitors sign in and out. You could use your tour booking list to double as an in-out sheet, tallying the numbers who start the tour with those who come out at the end. A home phone number for each visitor can come in handy in case of emergency.
- Ideally, unlock and re-lock doors as you proceed, unless this conflicts with your evacuation procedures, and try to be discreet with your keys - every bit of information can be useful to a potential thief.

- In your tour script don't mention the value of any collections or individual objects.
- Going into the non-public areas of a building can be disorientating for visitors. A bit of reassurance is fine, but be careful to avoid revealing statements like 'just so you know where we are, this fire exit leads onto the quiet alleyway behind Burger King'.

Scenario 2 - Open Displays

You have decided to extend access to your collections by displaying a small collection of objects from your stores on open display in a public gallery.

In advance

Consider whether you want visitors to touch and interact with the objects.

Security:

- Items that attract the attention of thieves are small in size and high in value. Examples include coins, watches, silverware, and birds' eggs. Curators will know within their collections which items will be most at risk, and may influence your decisions about what to display.
- If you don't intend visitors to handle or get too close to the objects, a simple physical barrier will keep them at a distance and, if staff are constantly invigilating, this precaution should prove sufficient. Alternatively, invisible barrier systems can be used to create a harmless beam or electromagnetic field around a table or display area. An alarm will sound to alert staff if anything comes too close.
- If physical interaction with the objects is intended, invigilation will be a greater priority. Tying items together or to a table using thin wire or fishing line can provide additional security, and putting a bell on the line will help to indicate anything amiss. Alternatively, higher value objects could be enclosed within small wire cages with hand holes through which visitors can still touch.
- Create a checklist and take individual and group photographs of the items on display.
- An evenly spaced, uncluttered and regular distribution of exhibits on the table will make any missing items noticeable more quickly. Using a uniform (white) tablecloth as a background will help this. Placing something bright and contrasting (red?) under each item will also assist.
- Additional electronic security can be provided by anti-snatch or cord alarms, like those used by high street electrical stores.

General:

If you do intend to allow public handling of the exhibits, a whole range of conservation issues come into play. This may influence your choice of items or necessitate seeking expert conservation advice.

On the Day

- Based on your decisions about proximity of viewing and/or handling, visual security checks of the exhibits on display should be undertaken on a regular basis. It will be helpful to use your checklist and photographs for reference.
- If you are allowing handling of exhibits, be aware that clever thieves have been known to prepare copies of specimens in advance to swap with the genuine ones on display (e.g. painting a common type of bird's egg to imitate a rare one, then swapping them with the real thing when an opportunity presents itself).
- If handling is allowed, check the condition of items regularly to detect any changes, such as damage due to handling or signs of physical deterioration which might be due to environmental conditions.

Scenario 3 - Touring Exhibitions

You have decided to provide access to collections to a new range of audiences by touring a selection of exhibits to community venues.

In Advance

Every exhibition has a theme, which will inform the choice of what exhibits to tour. Whilst security considerations should be included at the earliest design stage, they should always seek to complement an exhibition, enabling items to be included rather than ruling them out. However, just as conservation concerns would preclude an exhibit from touring, concern for their security might also lead to a decision that an item's value or rarity cannot be put at risk. Also remember, if you are exhibiting outwith the normal museum environment, your insurers will want to know.

Security - Venues:

- Physical Security
 - Venues should be inspected in advance to ascertain their suitability and to inform the choice of location for the exhibition within the venue. If possible, locate the exhibition away from any dark corners or exits.
 - Most community venues will not have the same physical security standards as a museum, but some minor improvements might be made. Physical security aids, such as cases and barriers, can travel with the exhibition, and you might need to augment after hours arrangements.
- Electronic Security
 - ➤ A community venue is unlikely to have any electronic security beyond an after-hours intruder alarm. Inspecting this in advance may influence the internal location of the exhibition and could allow for some improvements. If there is additional protection, such as day-time CCTV, this will also influence the exhibition's location.

Consideration could be given to the purchase or adaptation of an existing stand-alone alarm system to tour with an exhibition. This could be an off-the-shelf system or self-assembled from components readily available from electronic wholesalers (eg. pressure pads, micro switches, transformers). A simple audible alarm would indicate any activation.

Invigilation

- ➤ Ideally, museum staff or volunteers would travel with the exhibition and be responsible for invigilation at the temporary venue. Cover will need to take into account any lunch or tea breaks.
- If the venue's own staff are to be relied upon for invigilation, the venue management will need to be briefed as to security implications. Invigilation may not be a priority where existing duties have still to be undertaken, so it might be important to locate an exhibition in clear view of a permanently staffed area of the venue, such as a reception point. All procedures should be agreed in advance, for example for visual monitoring and what actions to take in the event of theft or damage.

General -Travel and Installation:

Security is invariably at its weakest when exhibits are outwith the normal, safe, planned museum or gallery environment. The points above are intended to assist in making a temporary venue similarly secure. The greatest risk will therefore occur between these two places, when collections are in transit. Doors are propped open, staff are preoccupied carrying items to and from a van, objects are stacked by the door or even at the van while being tied in. Not everyone has a secure loading bay, and it is unlikely that community venues will have either, and so, at each stage of the move, security must be at a premium.

Loading/Unloading

- If it opens onto a public area, always guard the internal door where you are taking items from (store, gallery). Ideally, you should lock the door behind you as you take each item out. This is even more important for the venue you are taking items into, because it is less familiar.
- ➤ If the van is parked out on the street during loading or unloading, keep two people there. If someone swipes something from the van and does a runner, at least one person will be able to give chase or go for help without leaving everything else unattended.
- Carry one item at a time. You will be able to keep a better grip but also, if you are carrying two things and someone grabs the item from one hand, what do you do with the other item? Give chase with it or put it down and leave it?
- ➤ Once loaded, the vehicle should never be left unattended. In effect, that means allocating two staff to the vehicle during the journey.
- Remember, the exhibits you are carrying have probably never been in a less secure environment since they came into your collection, and your publicity material will have advertised the fact that they're going to be there.

Transport

- ➤ If your organisation has its own vehicle for transporting exhibits, security should have been considered as part of the specification. If you are hiring a vehicle, make sure you have your own good quality padlocks for the door/shutter hasps.
- ➢ If you are using a commercial removal company, consider that, once the lorry has left your museum, the next stop might be a house removal, where the lorry will be parked at the roadside with the doors open while house contents are loaded. Your collections may be at risk of both theft and damage, unless you specify that they are to be collected last and delivered first.
- ➤ Ideally, if using an external mover, use an accredited fine art removal firm, or take recommendations from other museums.

Installation

Security is a great concern when installing your exhibition, particularly where installation takes place in a public area. You will either need a secure room in which to store your collections until they are individually needed or direct invigilation, or both. The same considerations will apply when taking down.

On the day

The level of monitoring necessary during an exhibition will depend on the security solutions chosen. Where invigilation is necessary, but museum staff or volunteers are not allocated, a heavy reliance may be placed on the venue staff. They can be encouraged to monitor the exhibition regularly and effectively, and to report any problems or observations, by working to a checklist drawn up by the museum.

References

Security in museums, archives and libraries: a practical guide Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) 2003

Improving museum security: MGC guidelines for good practice
Museums and Galleries Commission (MGC) 1997 (available through MLA)

Security manual 1st edition Museums and Galleries Security Group, PMH Ltd, Chichester

Security for museums
Nell Hoare, 1990
Committee of Area Museums Councils in association with the Museums
Association, Rhinegold Publishing, London

The Accreditation Scheme for Museums in the United Kingdom Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) 2004

Sources of Advice

Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) www.mla.gov.uk

International Committee for Museums Security http://user.chollian.net

Museum Security Network www.museum-security.org

Scottish Museums Council www.scottishmuseums.org.uk

Security Industry Standards and Tools

British Security Industry Association www.BSIA.co.uk

Risk assessment tools and electronic security equipment are available from commercial security companies. Listings of companies can be found in the Museums Yearbook, or on the Museums Association website, www.museumsassociation.org

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