Title
SPECTRUM: The UK Museum Documentation Standard

Name of Standards Developing Organisation
mda

Current version
SPECTRUM Version 3.1

Replaces
SPECTRUM Version 2

Abstract
SPECTRUM: The UK Museum Documentation Standard is the UK and international standard for Collections Management. It contains procedures for documenting objects and the processes they undergo, as well as identifying and describing the information which needs to be recorded to support the procedures.

Description
SPECTRUM is the UK and international standard for Collections Management. It was developed by the mda (formerly Museum Documentation Association) in partnership with over 100 museum professionals. SPECTRUM is an open standard held in trust on behalf of UK museums by the Collections Trust.1 SPECTRUM is available free of charge for non-commercial purposes after registering your details at http://www.mda.org.uk/

SPECTRUM comprises two main sections: ‘procedures’ and ‘information requirements’.

The ‘procedures’ section outlines a number of steps to be carried out in sequence when completing the 21 different activities identified in the standard. The activities cover all aspects of collections management, so has a much broader remit than any existing archival standards, and includes the acquisition of the object, cataloguing, loan in and out, loss and damage; deaccession and disposal, together with location movement control, valuation control and rights management.

The ‘information requirements’ section details parts of a procedure where information needs to be recorded and ensures that the institution collects and records information in a standard way. The information requirements comprise ‘units of information’, which are the lowest level of information recording and may be just one field in a documentation system. These are

grouped together in ‘information groups’ which relate to particular area, such as the physical description of the object, events relating to the history of the object and institutional events such as audits.

Although SPECTRUM has identified 21 activities, a museum does not have to carry out all activities if they do not apply to their institution, and it is designed to fit around existing in-house practices, or be used as a basis on which to write an in-house procedures manual. Of the 21 activities identified in the standard, only eight are considered ‘primary’ procedures i.e. the minimum documentation required in order that the museum has a basic, accountable, documentation system. These are:

- object entry
- loans in
- acquisition
- location and movement
- cataloguing
- object exit
- loans out
- retrospective documentation

In order to become an accredited museum under the Museum Accreditation Scheme, an institution must comply with the ‘primary’ procedures, and, where appropriate two others, conservation and collections care, and deaccessioning and disposal.

As mentioned SPECTRUM has a much wider scope than any of the archival standards, but there have been projects to map some of SPECTRUM’s procedures to archival standards, for example Elizabeth Shephard and Rachael Pringle’s paper in Journal of the Society of Archivists, Volume 23, Number 1, 1 April 2002, pp. 17-34(18) which maps SPECTRUM’s cataloguing procedure to ISAD(G), and the mda publication Standards in Action, book 4, Managing archive collections in museums compiled and edited by Peter Elliott, which contains SPECTRUM mappings to ISAD(G), MAD3, EAD, ISAAR(CFP) and NCA Rules.

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