A Guide to Archival and Related Standards
Standards applicable to archives; for the digital delivery of repository guides, finding-aids, and images of material from collections.

Title
BSI PAS 197, Code of Practice for Cultural Collections Management

Name of Standards Developing Organisation
British Standards Institute, sponsored by the Collections Trust (formerly MDA).

Current version
BSI PAS 197:2009 Code of Practice for Cultural Collections Management

Abstract
A PAS is a ‘publicly available specification’, which documents best practice in a sector. PAS 197 documents consensus across the museum library and archive professions, to inform senior managers how cultural collections are best managed. It covers the provision, implementation and maintenance of a collections management framework including: policies, processes, procedures and supporting standards.

Description
Sponsored by the Collections Trust (formerly MDA), PAS 197 aims to codify a holistic approach to the management of cultural collections by setting out a series of recommendations relating to good practice in the field. It gives recommendations at a high level for the management of cultural collections by collecting organizations such as archives, libraries, museums and other public and private collecting organizations.

PAS 197 covers the provision, implementation and maintenance of a collections management framework, including policies, processes and procedures and standards for:

a) collections development
b) collections information
c) collections access
d) collections care and conservation.

It is applicable to all types and sizes of cultural collections.

There was a drafting and consultation process that began with an initial draft circulated in summer 2008. The draft focused on museum practice, using SPECTRUM (3rd edition) guidelines [see ARC No 235 March 2009 article on SPECTRUM]. However, through the consultation process a number of archivists (representing the Society of Archivists) and librarians (representing CILIP) contributed to the document and substantial changes were made. This has resulted in a document that stresses commonality of practice – using domain-neutral terminology where possible – but which also identifies
differences between domains. Despite the desire in some quarters to encourage convergence of practice and terminology in archives, libraries and museums, in fact PAS 197 suggests that this is currently impractical.

The document’s strength is that it very effectively defines the core areas of collections management. It is the first attempt to collate best practice across the sector and it will be an essential reference guide for practitioners.

However, PAS 197’s principal aim is to illustrate to senior managers what collections management means in terms of processes (and resources). As such it will support archivists who often have very little ammunition to hand when needed. It will also be of benefit to those working in a cross-domain environment to ensure different methodologies between archivists, curators and librarians are respected. The appendices that collate existing standards across the sector are particularly useful.

The 48 page document is available as a download for £58 from the BSI together with more details. BSI also has a process for commenting on the PAS for consideration for future editions.

**Next month**

Next month we will look at Search and Retrieve via URL (SRU) (a standard for distributed database searching). This article was delayed to enable us to bring you information on the newly released PAS 197.

Teresa Doherty (the Women’s Library)
Norman James (The National Archives)
Christopher Marsden (Victoria and Albert Museum)
Susan Snell (Library and Museum of Freemasonry)