

Recognition Review Summary Report

November 2023



INTRODUCTION TO THE REVIEW

In spring 2022 it was agreed by the Recognition Committee and Museums Galleries Scotland that a review of the Recognition Scheme should be undertaken. The scheme was paused whilst this review took place, meaning that it was closed to new applications, collection holders' meetings were temporarily suspended, and status reviews paused.

A consultation exercise was undertaken with Recognised Collection holders, Committee members and other stakeholders. This consultation took place via Survey Monkey during 2022/23.

33 Recognised Collection holders responded, 9 members of the Committee, and 4 museums that do not hold Recognised Collections.

The consultation asked for views on the following:

- Whether the scheme was meeting its objectives and whether these were still the correct objectives for the scheme
- Whether the number of Recognised Collections has an impact on the effectiveness of the scheme, including whether the number of Recognised Collections should be capped
- Whether the status review process is effective in ensuring that collections continue to meet the scheme objectives and how it could be made more effective
- What role Recognised Collections should play in the wider museum sector

This report outlines a summary of findings from the consultation. It also sets out recommendations and possible actions that could be taken to address issues highlighted by the consultation.



CONSULTATION FINDINGS

Is the scheme meeting its objectives and are these still the correct objectives for the scheme?

Across all groups of consultees there was general agreement that the current objectives of the scheme are being met to a degree. It was clear, however, that lack of funding is felt by many to be limiting the extent to which the objectives are being achieved, and that there could be stronger advocacy around the scheme.

All groups consulted indicated that overall, the current objectives are still right for the scheme. There were a few respondents indicating that some outcomes were a higher priority than others – those around collections care and management, advocacy and resourcing and that others, such as those around leadership and engagement, might be secondary. Coming from just a few respondents, these comments should perhaps be taken to confirm the general concerns raised across the surveys regarding funding and advocacy, rather than a strong call to review the objectives. Only the committee was asked specifically if the objectives should be reviewed – amongst them 77% respondents said yes.

Concerns around funding

Although limited funding is a concern for delivery of all the objectives, there is particular concern around lack of funding for collections specific work. Some respondents expressed frustration that there is no funding that focuses specifically on the basics of collections care, with the emphasis now being on engagement and public benefit and funded projects being expected to do more.

The removal of ringfenced funding for Recognition was referred to by several respondents as a negative step.

Lack of advocacy for the scheme

Many respondents observed that there is very little awareness of the scheme beyond the sector. It is felt that more needs to be done to raise the profile of the scheme among those with influence: council leaders, Local Authorities in general, politicians, funders, etc. Several respondents reported that where this awareness does exist internally, it is making a positive difference.

It is recognised that advocacy is something that the Recognised Collection holders



themselves need to work on as well as, and with, MGS. Support (including resources), from MGS to do this on a local level would be welcomed and a combined effort to look at doing this on a national level should be taken.

There was divided opinion on whether there should be an effort to raise awareness of the scheme amongst the public, although there were more in favour of exploring this than not. Awareness campaigns using the media were suggested, with acknowledgement of the pressed resourcing within the sector for such initiatives.

Does the number of Recognised Collections have an impact on the effectiveness of the scheme, and should the number of collections be capped?

Overall, opinion is that the number of Recognised Collections should **not** be capped, but many acknowledged that recognising more collections does have an impact, spreading resources thinner and “diluting” the scheme.

There is support to keep the scheme open but to take a rigorous approach to assessing any new additions. From the suggestions made it may be prudent to review the full portfolio of collections that now exists after 16 years since the first collections were recognised. Consideration should be given to whether a more targeted approach to adding new collections - perhaps by subject area - should be taken. However, it is felt that it is important to keep the scheme open to new applicants since there is always the possibility that new, important collections will emerge.

It is also important to acknowledge that since the scheme was first conceived twenty years ago, there has been considerable change – change in perceptions about museums and changes in how the sector views its priorities, the stories it tells and the different types of expertise that it draws on. For Recognition to remain relevant in the future, it will be important to reflect on what these changes mean for Recognition and how the scheme should develop – particularly in relation to how it adds new collections.

Is the status review process effective in ensuring that collections continue to meet the scheme objectives and how could it be made more effective?

Most respondents found the status review useful and believe it to be an important part of the scheme, but several responses indicated that the process was overly resource heavy. Suggestions as to how it could be improved were made, including reminders from



MGS as to when an individual collections review would be due and better templates. There was conflicting opinion on whether it should be made more, or less frequent.

What role should the Recognised Collections play in the wider museum sector?

Across the board, the role of “sharing best practice” was felt to be a key role for the Recognised Collections to play in the sector. For the collection holders themselves, “specialist curatorial knowledge” was on an equal footing with that, but for the Committee, “specialist skills development” was given as high a rating as “specialist curatorial knowledge”. Amongst the collection holders themselves, “specialist skills development” came in behind “curatorial knowledge” and was on a par with “sector support”.

There is acceptance that the Recognised Collection holders should be playing some sort of leadership role within the sector and a willingness to do so, but the lack of resource and capacity was cited as a barrier here.

Entire holdings

Those who hold entire holdings that are Recognised were asked how open they would be to conducting a self-led review. The majority of respondents were open to doing this, with some indicating that they were very happy to do so and that they considered it a useful step in the dynamic Recognition process. Clear guidance would be needed.



RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

There is clear support for the continuation of the Recognition Scheme. It is also clear that there are challenges to the Recognition Scheme achieving its full potential, not all of which are easily resolved. However, there are several actions that could be taken emerging from this review, some in the immediate term and some in the longer term. These include actions for the Committee, MGS and the collection holders themselves. They are set out below.

Reopening the scheme to new applications

- The scheme should be reopened, and remain open, to new applicants.
- The scheme should be opened to new applicants on a **3-yearly cycle**.
- With MGS's support, the Committee should take stock of the full portfolio of Recognised Collections and assess whether a strategic approach to adding new applications in future should be taken. This could include looking to develop collection types, implementing a stronger process around setting precedents and/or address gaps in the portfolio. It should also consider how inclusive and representative the portfolio is and whether there should be any changes to the assessment process to address this. This is a medium-term action.

Funding

- MGS should provide clarity for Recognised Collection holders as to how they can access existing funds to support their delivery of the Recognition objectives and recommendations from the Recognition Committee.
- All stakeholders continue to advocate for the need for more funding to support Recognised Collection holders to achieve all of the objectives of the Recognition Scheme. The importance of investment in collections focused work needs to be emphasised. Should more funding be achieved, a ring-fenced fund for this work could be established. However, there needs to be recognition that whilst targeted investment in core collections management, care and research is needed, the public benefit of such funding needs to be clear and applications would need to make that case.

Advocacy

- MGS should revise the Recognition pages on its website. An overview page about the Recognition Scheme could be added and, crucially, information about why the scheme is important and Recognition is such a meaningful accolade. MGS can also explore other ways it could raise the profile of the scheme amongst sector stakeholders within its available capacity.



- MGS could work with Recognised Collection holders to develop internal advocacy tools and training so that collection holders are able to communicate the importance of the scheme to their own stakeholders.
- In the medium to longer term, all stakeholders should work together to explore whether investment of resource and capacity in raising public awareness of the scheme is feasible and worthwhile and what the most effective mechanisms for this might be.

Status Review

- MGS should publish a schedule of five yearly status reviews and send a reminder to collection holders 1 year and 6 months before theirs is due.
- MGS could develop more thorough guidance regarding what should be submitted for a collection review, ensuring that the process remains rigorous but as light touch as possible.
- In the medium term, MGS and the Committee should develop clearer guidance on what the criteria and process for leaving the Recognition scheme would look like.

Entire holdings

- Recognised Collection styled as 'Entire Holdings' or equivalent should be asked to consider the parameters of their collections when next invited to submit a Status Review report. MGS will develop guidance for this process with support from the Committee.
- MGS and the Committee should consider whether any process for redefining the status of these collections should be developed and how this might work.
- Recognition status should not be awarded to 'Entire Holdings' in future unless there is a cohesion of subject to the collections.
- Existing subject specific entire holdings should be renamed (e.g. 'Scottish Fisheries Collection', 'National Mining Collection').

Recognition meetings

- MGS should reinstate twice yearly Recognised collection holders' meetings and explore other platforms and mechanisms that will support collection holders to share learning and collaborate.
- MGS and Recognised collection holders should work together to find ways for the Recognised collection holders to share best practice, specialist skills and curatorial knowledge with the wider sector within the limitations of existing capacity.

