

Understanding how UK museums manage collections in storage

25/06/2026

[See all updates](#)

We commissioned research to better understand the pressures facing collections storage across the UK and what the sector needs to address them.

Attachment	Size
PDF	1.39 MB
View Museums collection and resilience research as PDF(1.39 MB)	

As the largest funder for the UK's heritage, we support museums to tell the stories of our past and look after the collections in their care.

This research examines how museums manage stored collections and the challenges they face in keeping them safe, well documented and accessible to the public.

Heather Lomas Consulting and Emma Chaplin Heritage and Museum Services led the research. They gathered evidence through a UK-wide survey, with 218 responses from museums of different sizes and governance types, and in-depth interviews with 15 stakeholders.

What we learned

Museums face a range of pressures that affect how they care for and provide access to stored collections:

- **storage capacity is at its limit:** 60% of museums report their stores are already full
- **most collections are in storage:** 71% of museums keep more than half of their items in storage
- **conditions often fall below sector standards:** only 15% meet best-practice care and conservation standards
- **documentation backlogs limit resilience and access:** gaps in inventory and cataloguing limit risk management, space planning, rationalisation and access
- **collections continue to grow while rationalisation falls behind:** 83% are actively collecting, 65% plan to rationalise but 47% disposed of nothing in the past year
- **public access to stored collections is limited:** only 2% offer open access and most access is by appointment

This research highlights a need for coordinated leadership, targeted investment and strong focus on collections planning, rationalisation and skills. Building storage alone is unlikely to deliver lasting change.

Next steps

We will work in collaboration with organisations across the sector to further understand where targeted, strategic action could support museums.

Find out more

Read the report in the PDF attached to this page to explore the full findings.

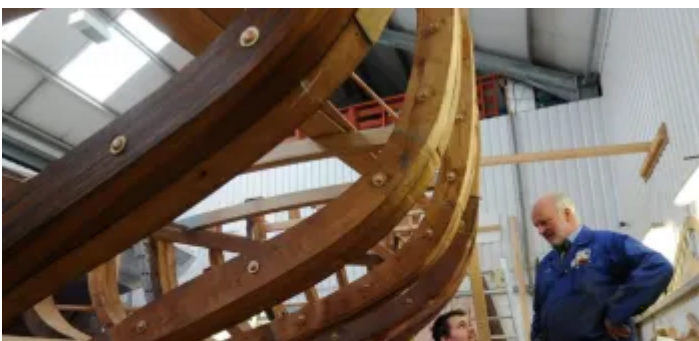
Learn about our support for [museum, library and archive projects](#) across the UK, including our recent [Dynamic Collections](#) campaign.

Our research and evaluation

We regularly conduct research to discover what is happening in the heritage sector, and we evaluate our work to better understand the change we are making. [Read more of our insight.](#)



[Children enjoying an exhibition at Seven Stories, Newcastle upon Tyne](#)





[Good practice guidance](#)

[Heritage 2033: our impact in year one, 2024–2025](#)