Heritage Collections Conservation Management Course: Condition Surveys, Risk and Storage Control

26 – 30 October 2026
Geneva

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Programme Summary

Heritage collections conservation management, from condition surveys and risk ranking to storage control and treatment decisions, is the subject of this one-week training course for museum, archive and heritage authority leaders, ending in a conservation management plan for one collection. Collections lose value quietly through light, humidity, pests, poor storage and unplanned handling, and gaps often show only after damage. The programme moves from significance and risk to surveys, environment, storage, treatment and emergency planning, using a prepared collection case file. Mars Training Centre UK delivers this programme on heritage collections conservation management to mixed-organisation cohorts.

The Business Case

Museums, archives, libraries and heritage authorities hold collections that cannot be replaced and are rarely fully funded. Leaders who can rank collection risks, judge what a survey shows and decide which treatments justify limited budgets protect more of the collection and can explain their priorities to boards, funders and lenders.

- Collection Loss Risk: Falls when risks are ranked and the highest are controlled first.
- Conservation Spend Efficiency: Improves when treatments are chosen against significance and condition rather than request order.
- Emergency Exposure: Reduces when response plans, salvage priorities and storage layouts are agreed in advance.

Principles and Evidence Base

- ICCROM Preventive Conservation Approach: A risk-based approach to collections care, applied in Sessions 1 and 2 to rank risks and plan surveys.
- ICOM-CC Conservation Terminology: The agreed terms for preventive conservation, remedial conservation and restoration, applied in Session 4 to separate kinds of intervention.
- ISO 11799: The international standard on storage requirements for archive and library materials, applied in Session 3 to check storage conditions.
- ICCROM-UNESCO RE-ORG Method: A method for reorganising collection storage, applied in Session 3 to plan storage improvements.

Intended Participants

- Directors who are accountable for the condition and safety of a collection.
- Collections managers who plan surveys, storage and handling routines.
- Heritage estate and facilities leaders who control building environments for collections.
- Programme and budget holders who fund conservation and decide treatment priorities.

Typical settings include national and local museums, archives, libraries and heritage site authorities.

Learning Outcomes

1. Participants will be able to prioritise collection risks by likelihood, effect and significance.
2. Participants will be able to construct a condition survey method and interpret its results.
3. Participants will be able to evaluate environment and storage conditions against recognised requirements.
4. Participants will be able to justify treatment decisions and distinguish preventive from remedial work.
5. Participants will be able to design an emergency response and salvage plan for a collection.
6. Participants will be able to justify a conservation management plan to a board or funder.

Programme Structure

Day 1: Heritage Collections Conservation Management Foundations

What is held, why does it matter, and what threatens it?

- Collection Significance Statement
- Agent of Deterioration Map
- Collection Risk Register
- Risk Ranking Matrix
- Conservation Roles and Decision Rights Chart

Day 2: Condition Surveys

How is the state of a collection measured and recorded?

- Survey Sampling Plan
- Condition Grading Scale
- Survey Record Form
- Priority Scoring Sheet
- Survey Findings Summary

Day 3: Environment and Storage Control

Do the building and the storage protect what they hold?

- Light, Temperature and Humidity Monitoring Plan
- Pest Monitoring Log
- ISO 11799 Storage Check
- RE-ORG Storage Assessment
- Handling and Display Rules

Day 4: Treatment Decisions and Emergency Planning

Which work is done, who approves it, and what happens in an emergency?

- Intervention Level Chart
- Treatment Proposal Template
- Ethics and Reversibility Check
- Emergency Response Plan
- Salvage Priority List

Day 5: Conservation Management Plan for One Collection

Do the findings join into a plan that a board or funder can approve?

- Applying the Session 1 Risk Ranking Matrix
- Using the Session 2 Priority Scoring Sheet
- Fitting the Session 3 Storage Assessment
- Adding the Session 4 Intervention Level Chart
- Completing the Conservation Management Plan

Methodology

The programme is a case analysis built on a prepared collection case file, with survey records, monitoring data and storage plans for two collections, one in a museum and one in an archive. Participants rank risks, read survey results, assess storage, choose treatments and defend their plan to peers acting as a funding panel.

- Suggested activity: Ranking ten collection risks and agreeing which three to control first.
- Suggested activity: Reading a humidity log to find a storage fault.
- Suggested activity: Choosing between three treatment proposals within a fixed budget.

Capstone Output

Each participant completes a conservation management plan for one collection. It holds a significance statement, a risk register, a survey summary, a storage and environment assessment, a treatment priority list and an emergency plan. At work it goes to the board or funder and becomes the baseline for later reviews.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is heritage collections conservation management suitable for leaders who are not conservators?

Yes. Heritage collections conservation management is taught through a prepared case file and templates. You need responsibility for a collection, its budget or its building, but no training in conservation treatments.

Which standards and methods does heritage collections conservation management rest on in this training?

Heritage collections conservation management here rests on the ICCROM preventive conservation approach, ICOM-CC terminology, ISO 11799 and the ICCROM-UNESCO RE-ORG method.

How is the plan from heritage collections conservation management training used at work?

You present the conservation management plan to your board or funder, use its risk ranking to direct spending, and keep its survey and storage records as the baseline for later reviews.

How does heritage collections conservation management differ from a programme on conservator restorer practice?

Heritage collections conservation management concentrates on risk, surveys, storage and budgets across a collection, while a programme on conservator restorer practice concentrates on hands-on treatment skills for single objects.