

# Victoria and Albert Museum Conservation Department Ethics Checklist Background Document 2004

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The V&A Conservation Department has recently revised its 'Ethics Checklist' of 1994. The purpose of this background document is to explain the thinking behind the revisions of 2004. For further information about the Checklist of 1994 please also refer to the Background Document of 1994 archived in the Conservation Department of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

## 2. Ethics Checklist 1994

### 2.1 Historical Context – Reasons for developing Ethics Checklist

Ten years ago, the Conservation Department of the Victoria and Albert Museum drafted a document initially for its own use which was published and has been informally circulating around the world of conservation ever since. It was called the "Ethics Checklist" because it grew out of discussions about the principles upon which the staff were basing conservation practice at that time and an expressed desire on the part of Department staff for guidelines on decision-making. After wide consultation a working group produced a tool that aimed to provide a common set of criteria for decisions and to help conservators feel more confident about their decisions. It was based on the assumption that good decision-making is fundamental to an ethical approach.

### 2.2 Dissemination of Checklist

After completing the drafting phases efforts focussed on disseminating the Checklist and the work surrounding it in articles and conference papers. The Checklist was first introduced at a conference held at The British Museum in 1994 called 'Restoration: Is It Acceptable?'.<sup>i</sup> It has since been the subject of a number of articles<sup>ii iii</sup> and appeared alongside other decision-making tools in a book<sup>iv</sup>. In addition, the Checklist has been recommended to colleagues both within the profession and beyond.

### 2.3 Developments since 1994

Developments included an attempt to group the questions<sup>v</sup>, and incorporating it into the conservation part of the computerised museum-wide documentation system by including the question: "Have you consulted the Ethics Checklist?" with a check box on the "Proposal" screen.

## 3. Ethics Checklist Research Project 2004

### 3.1 Survey and reasons for current research

By 2000, the Checklist was in wide circulation, had been in use for a number of years, and had not been reviewed since 1994. These in themselves seemed good reasons to undertake some research. The current project was begun by sending out a questionnaire to the Department to find out if other staff agreed. There was an overwhelmingly positive response generally indicating that the checklist, although it had limitations, had generally satisfied its aims. It was still considered to be useful but could also be usefully updated.

There was also evidence that the checklist was not used regularly and that newer members of the Department were not aware of its existence. In addition, staff had some concerns about current practice that suggested a need for more guidance. Most important of all was the identified need to raise awareness of how the changes in museums were affecting conservation decisions and actions.

Some of the general comments made by staff follow:

- The Checklist did not prevent unethical decisions or actions from happening. Indeed, this was one of the acknowledged limitations of the checklist<sup>vi</sup>; it only asks you to consider the question, it does not ask you to do anything about it. The use of the Checklist was restricted to the interaction of conservator with the object. While not intended to be restricted to treatment decisions, it was reported as having been most often used for this purpose.
- The Museum's project culture was felt by some to be testing the limits of ethical practice. Resource constraints were having an impact on working practices. One conservator reported that 'while no object had been compromised by its conservation, certain display methods were not considered ethical but these had been out of the conservator's control.' Some had concerns about the increased use of outside contractors, and loss of control over the final "product". Others felt that curators responsible for contractors sometimes based their decisions on too little or misunderstood information.
- Within the Department there was a recognised need to improve the way conservators communicate about and justify their decisions to other stakeholders.
- The use of private contractors to conserve museum objects might increase and the Checklist could be very usefully incorporated as part of a contract.
- Although the Checklist was to be reviewed regularly, this had not taken place. It needed to address new developments and changing emphases in the field of conservation: changing values, shifting role of the conservator, new emphasis on cultural significance and the recognition of less tangible aspects<sup>vii</sup>, access to collections, sustainability, diversity, involving stakeholders in decision-making, recognition of the subjectivity of conservation and the development of risk management as a tool in collections care.
- When the first checklist was created it was acknowledged that there were some areas of practice, such as documentation, which required the development of standards and mechanisms. Some progress had been made on these and this needed to be taken account of in the wording of the Checklist.
- The Checklist was intended to be widely and regularly used, easy and accessible<sup>viii</sup>. But was this actually the case, and was this a reasonable expectation? The Checklist was not, in fact, being used very much and the research group felt that this was because time was now a resource that was in critically short supply. There was greater pressure to prepare objects for display and little time to reflect. The causes possibly lay in a more market-driven museum culture. Our aim was to encourage people working within this culture to see the benefits of using the Checklist.

- It had long been recognised that the structure of the checklist could be improved upon and the whole made more easily accessible by creating an on-line version. Layout and formatting could be rationalised into categories.

### 3.2 Aims of research

If the Department felt that the Checklist was worth reviewing and conservators had concerns about their working practices, could we develop a decision-making tool that improved on the current one by addressing some of these issues and could it help conservators in the new situations in which they found themselves? To address these questions a research project was begun in 2004 with the following remit:

- to review the Checklist in the light of changes in the working context of the V&A and developments in the conservation profession's ethical and professional framework;
- to produce a revised Checklist or new tool altogether;
- to pilot the new Checklist in the Department in order to evaluate its effectiveness;
- to launch a updated Checklist on the Museum's intranet and the internet.

A research group was set up comprising Sandra Smith, Head of Department; Pauline Webber, Head of Paper, Paintings and Books; Graham Martin, Head of Science; Sophy Wills, Senior Conservator Ceramics, Glass, Sculpture and Metalwork; and Titika Malkogeorgou, researcher in history and philosophy of conservation. The project was co-ordinated by Alison Richmond, Deputy Head RCA/V&A Conservation Postgraduate Programme. Dr. Jonathan Ashley-Smith acted as advisor to the project.

### 3.3 Mode of research

Three modes of research were planned:

1. Review of conservation literature of last ten years – in particular looking at developments in ethical codes; new emphasis on values and risk assessment; evolution of the project culture in museums, with new pressures on collections - access, open storage, changing roles of conservators. This research would feed into the review process
2. A working group made up of representatives from the Department with a range of different roles would review and develop the tool.
3. Once a new tool was developed it would be tested in the Conservation Department before publishing on the Museum's intranet and on the Internet.
4. The rationale for the final form of the new tool would appear in a background document.

### 3.4 Results of research

#### 3.4.1 The revised Checklist

After considering the development of a new tool we decided to update and revise the existing checklist. The Checklist appeared to have stood the test of time and we introduced only a small number of changes to the Checklist. This part of the Background Document

describes the changes in general terms, while the reasoning behind each change is covered in the Commentary under individual questions.

- The wording of the questions has been altered, in most cases only very slightly, to reflect changes and to clarify intention.
- The order in which the questions appear has also been changed slightly following suggestions from many respondents and to reflect the fact that some questions naturally precede or follow others. However, the underlying principle that the questions can be approached in any order remains.
- A commentary on each question has been incorporated into the Checklist itself rather than appearing in the Background Document as previously, to aid understanding and to make the Checklist stand-alone. It highlights recent developments in the field.
- A glossary has been provided to define essential words, such as “stakeholder”, as used in the checklist.
- The Checklist is supported by a “raft” of other relevant documents for ease of reference. Together these documents provide an ethical and legal framework for the V&A conservator.

#### 3.4.2 On-line version

Research and development began on an interactive on-line version. Since the first Ethics Checklist great progress has been made in online publishing and interactive websites. One of the drawbacks of the original Word version was that while we envisaged the questions could be asked in any order and at any point in the process of considering what to do, anything other than linear progression through the questions was discouraged by the list format. By creating a non-linear, image-based diagram, we thought we could encourage a different kind of interaction with the questions. In addition, a web-based version would be an ideal training tool. Due to technical difficulties there are no plans for developing a web-based version in the V&A and for now, a Word version of the document with links is available on the museum’s intranet and Internet.

#### Other outcomes

The purpose of the Checklist has been clarified: Originally intended to be applicable to all conservation professions and activities, the working group acknowledged that in practice the Checklist deals with the relationship between the conservator and the object or objects and is most often used for treatment decisions. The object is the focus of the Checklist and this is appropriate for conservators. Rather than attempt to make one checklist fit all purposes or situations - assessment of object condition for display/loan, curator/conservator decision-making, prioritising work, moving collections – different means need to be developed to address these. Nor does it deal with behaviours – you can do anything. It just asks you to consider the questions.

The Checklist has also been defined more clearly. The working group had some difficulty defining what the checklist is: is it a policy or a code of practice? It was agreed that although it is not a policy it should act as a filter, filtering out the conservator’s previous

conservation culture and invoking the V&A Conservation Department's own culture. In effect the Checklist is the philosophy of how to go about conserving objects in the V&A's Conservation Department. At the same time it should encourage recognition of diversity. The name "checklist" was useful because it was non-specific and perhaps less intimidating than "policy" or "procedures".

We have identified who the Checklist is for. The original checklist aimed to be inclusive of all "conservation professionals". One common misperception is that the checklist is aimed exclusively at students and interns. The working group recommended that its use should not be restricted to training. In fact, practice should compare favourably with what we teach (and preach!). The research group agreed that in practice the users are conservators, both professionals and students, interns and recent graduates. Therefore the term 'conservator-restorer' has been substituted, in line with nomenclature current in the UK conservation profession. Curators, conservation scientists, technical services, exhibitions team, some external contractors require other tools, specifically designed for their requirements. Further research is recommended to address these needs.

The new Checklist will be more accessible: The Checklist will be available on the Internet and the Museum intranet. It will be available to the public and will be used to describe how conservators in the Department approach their work. It will be situated within a V&A procedures manual, supported by a raft of other documents, codes and guidelines. Conservators will be able to access these through Internet links. Department standards, Museum standards, and professional standards (e.g. for accreditation,) and legislation (e.g. health and safety, laws governing the movement of cultural property, copyright law and artist's moral rights) will also be linked to the checklist.

### 3.5 Pilot Study

In order to obtain initial reactions to the proposed changes to the checklist, a pilot study was designed. All conservators, students and interns present in the Department in the month of October 2004 were sent the new version of the checklist along with a copy of the questionnaire. Staff were requested to use the checklist for a project or projects some time between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> of October 2004. Managers were asked to encourage their staff to use it, and supervisors were asked to do the same for their students and interns.

17 questionnaires were received out of approximately 37 sent out (approximately 46% response rate). Although respondents were not specifically requested to identify themselves, 7 respondents could be identified as staff, 4 as postgraduate students, and 2 as interns. The remaining 4 could not be identified.

### 3.6 Conclusions/recommendations of pilot study

- Although many considered to be "common sense", the Checklist was acknowledged as having aided the decision-making process and was considered to be most useful for projects presenting complex problems or requiring a lot of intervention. Its value as a training tool was emphasised. Some re-wording and re-

ordering of the questions was recommended. Generally people found the checklist to be clear and easy to use.

- Current levels of access to and configuration of computers (few laptops) within Department puts the wisdom of developing an online interactive version into question. Instead a Word version will be made available on the Museum's website and intranet. From this paper copies can be printed off. The location of the checklist and associated documents should be publicised regularly both within and outside the Museum. While the research group was enthusiastic about the extra documents and commentary of the new checklist, the single sheet of A4 of the old checklist was preferred by some respondents. For this reason a single-sheet checklist will be appended as a front page.
- Concerns were voiced by conservators in the current study about under resourcing of projects which results in few interventive treatments being carried out in the Department which in turn has longer term ramifications both for care of the collections and for the maintenance of staff skill levels. Others drew attention to conservators' lack of influence in "the continuum of decision-making" – decisions being taken before the conservator encounters the object and after it leaves his or her care. In general, the research group acknowledged the need for raising awareness of the impact of a continually shifting context on conservators' decisions and actions, and that consideration of these issues should be given by senior management

### 3.7 Future research

During the process of this research, a number of suggestions were made for possible future projects: developing a training version of the current checklist which would be visually interesting and interactive; taking one step back in the decision-making process to develop a similar tool for assessment of objects for loans or exhibitions that would be used by the curator and the conservator together; developing a similar decision-making tool for use by object handlers, object packers and other technical staff. In future years the Museum may have to hand a suite of tools for use in making decisions about museum objects.

## Victoria & Albert Museum Conservation Department Ethics Checklist

2<sup>nd</sup> Edition December 2004

- A. Why is **action** needed?
- B. Have I consulted records?
- C. Have I consulted **stakeholders**, peers, other specialists?
- D. Have I considered and weighted the factors contributing to the identity and significance of the object(s)?
- E. What are my options for **action** which will produce an appropriate result with minimum intervention?
- F. What effect will my **action(s)** have on the evidence of the factors contributing to the identity and significance of the object(s)?
- G. Do I have sufficient information and skill to assess and implement **action(s)**?
- H. What are the benefits/risks of each course of **action** and how will I continue to assess these throughout the course of **action**?
- I. Can the use or environment be adapted instead of intervening on the **object(s)**?
- J. Is my intended **action(s)** the best use of resources and is it sustainable?
- K. Do established courses of **action** need to be adapted or new ones developed?
- L. How will my **action(s)** affect subsequent **action(s)**?
- M. Have I taken into account the future use and location of the object(s), and have I made recommendations accordingly?
- N. Will my **actions** be fully documented to a known and accepted standard?
- O. Will the information resulting from my **actions** be accessible?
- P. How will I assess the success of the **action(s)**, and how will I get feedback from **stakeholders** and peers?

## Background Commentary – Rationale for changes to Ethics Checklist

### Using the Ethics Checklist

#### Text of 2004

This checklist of ethical considerations is intended to act as the “conscience” of the **conservator-restorer**.

It raises questions, but will not necessarily provide straightforward answers. Thinking about ethics is not a separate activity and throughout any conservation **action** the list should prompt the basic question, **“Am I doing the right thing?”**.

The checklist does not tell you what to do; nor does it ensure that you do it: it only asks you to go through a process of asking yourself certain questions. It is based on the premise that going through the process of good decision-making is fundamental to an ethical approach.

The **conservator-restorer** is expected to exercise the judgement gained through education, training and experience in deciding what is reasonable and acceptable to the profession.

Thereafter the aim is to reach consensus and arrive at an outcome that will be acceptable to **stakeholders**.

The Checklist is applicable to a broad range of

#### Notes on changes to 1994 text

Changed from “conservation professional” in recognition of conservators as main users of Checklist. Term “conservator-restorer” comes from NCCR PACR Accreditation standards<sup>ix</sup>. EWG (Ethics Working Group) thought that it could apply to others in CSD (Collections Services Division) and consideration should be given to this in future.

This is problematic because in conservation there is rarely a clear definition of what is right and what is wrong. EWG thought that this was succinct and would be understood as not meaning *The Right Thing*.

The working group thought it was important to make explicit the way the Checklist works and its limitations.

We felt it was important to define to whom it should be acceptable. This is complicated by the requirement to include stakeholders in decisions. EWG felt the professional must follow professional ethics in the first instance, but that the stakeholders had an important role in the decision. Stakeholders were identified as including the conservator.

Reaching consensus was considered to be a valid aim, although not necessary or achievable in every case. Reaching consensus was important, especially in the project-team culture of the Museum.

The term “remedial” was considered to refer to

conservation activities, not just interventive treatment of individual objects.

first aid or patching up. “Interventive” was preferred. The Checklist had been used for interventive more often than any thing else.

The list can be used before, during and after any action(s).

The research group felt it was important to emphasize the continuing use of the checklist throughout the activity. Equally, the Checklist can be used to: check the decision against the consequences afterwards, and to give insight into the justification at a later date.<sup>x</sup>

Apart from question A, which is the single most important question, each question is equally valid.

The order and formatting of the checklist was discussed. Attempts at imposing an order on the Checklist failed. More research is recommended to develop an interactive version which could have a more dynamic structure suitable for a training tool.

The final wording of each question was chosen to leave the possible factors for consideration very open. The checklist questions are supported by a commentary. In addition a Background Document records the process by which the checklist was arrived at. The checklist is supported by a raft of other relevant documents available through links on the Internet.

We thought that a commentary which was integrated into the checklist would help to elucidate the rationale behind the checklist as a whole and each question. The raft of documents was proposed to underpin the checklist and to provide support to the conservator – a ‘one-stop shop’ for professional guidance.

## Glossary

### Action

An action is any process which the **conservator-restorer** may employ and which affects the objects under consideration. These include interventive treatment, preventive conservation measures, examination and study, sampling, analysis, and **doing nothing**.

The term 'conservator-restorer' replaces 'conservation professional'. (See below)

### Communities

**Communities** can be religious, indigenous, collectors, donors and other groups.

'Communities' was added to reflect the new concern with decision-making that should be as inclusive as possible.<sup>xi</sup>

### Conservator-restorer

**Conservator-restorer** is the term currently used by the UK conservation profession, in line with European usage.<sup>xii</sup>

The term 'conservator-restorer' is more specific than 'conservation professional'. The research group felt that the checklist is designed for conservators' interactions with objects. Other decision-making tools need to be developed for other personnel and situations.

### Peers

**Peers** are other conservation professionals (**conservator-restorers**, conservation scientists, conservation managers and trainers), other museum and academic professionals (e.g. curators, art historians, scientists) both internal and external to the V&A.

### Stakeholders

A **stakeholder** is anyone who has a valid interest in the outcome of the decision. Stakeholders can include the **conservator-restorer**, clients (curators, other museum departments including Conservation, the public, students, private owners), peers, artists/makers and artists/makers' estates, other specialists, and representatives of communities.

'Stakeholders' was added. While 'stakeholders' is considered by some to be jargon, the group felt that it was indispensable as a descriptor in this case.

### Other relevant documents

It is understood that the minimum requirement

Legal sources are not cited separately and all

of a conservator-restorer is to obey international and national law. In addition, the **conservator-restorer**, as an employee of the V&A, is guided by codes of ethics for museums (international and national) as well as codes of ethics for the conservation-restoration profession (international and national). Unless otherwise specified the relevant document can be found on the linked website.

legal sources are not included. Instead some are contained within professional documents for the reason that professional bodies are more likely than we are to keep them up to date. PACR accredited conservators are expected to observe legal requirements and obligations, including those relating to health and safety, employment and contract law, and international agreements.<sup>xiii</sup>

ICOM International Council of Museums Code of Ethics for Museums (2002) <http://icom.museum> (also available in V&A Staff Handbook)

MA Museums Association Code of Ethics for Museums (2002) [www.museumsassociation.org](http://www.museumsassociation.org)

ECCO European Confederation of **Conservator-Restorers'** Organisations Professional Guidelines (1993) <http://www.ecco-eu.info/>

IoC Institute of Conservation [www.instituteofconservation.org.uk](http://www.instituteofconservation.org.uk)

NCCR National Council for Conservation-Restoration. [www.nccr.org.uk](http://www.nccr.org.uk)

DACS Design and Artists Copyright Society [www.dacs.org.uk](http://www.dacs.org.uk)

V&A Victoria and Albert Museum Staff Handbook <http://intranet.int.vam.ac.uk/>

V&A Victoria and Albert Museum Collections Management Policy (procedures) <http://intranet.int.vam.ac.uk/>

V&A Victoria and Albert Museum Emergency Response Procedures <http://intranet.int.vam.ac.uk/>

V&A Victoria and Albert Museum Conservation Department Background to the Ethics Checklist (2004) <http://intranet.int.vam.ac.uk/>

## Question

## Commentary

A. Why is **action** needed?

This question appears first because this is the single most important question. If a user gets no further than this, the Checklist will still have been useful. The final wording was chosen to leave the possible reasons for action open.

*Rationale*

*The Research Group decided to keep this very open ended. We agreed that it was still the single most important question and that the format of the Checklist might ultimately reflect this. Action is not necessarily use-driven and can be required, for example, as part of general care. The changing context in the Museum, however, means that most of the time action is needed because the object is going on loan or exhibition. This question provoked discussion about curatorial decisions regarding object selection: Conservators do not choose objects for conservation. Survey information is either out of date or not used. This is a very different context from 1994. The decisions made by the curator means time constraints on the conservator, but at least if selected, the object gets treatment. Conservators can be put into the position of not being able to say “no”. The way in which access policies affect our decisions and actions needs to be brought to the attention of decision and policy makers.*

B. Have I consulted records?

The **conservator-restorer** should be able to judge what is necessary/relevant, but only after thinking about everything that might be available. Records can include written, image-based, on object, derived from maker, owner, collector/collection, conservator.

*Rationale*

*We removed the word “available”, as it is impossible to consult records that are not available. Nevertheless, consulting available records is often considered impractical and unhelpful.*

C. Have I consulted **stakeholders**, peers, other specialists?

Recent codes put focus on public service and social inclusion, on the museum’s obligation to promote access and in so doing consult and involve communities, users and supporters, among others.

*Rationale*

*Involving stakeholders makes the decision-making process more complicated but is in line with the move of the Museum towards greater access – not just to objects, but to the processes of understanding and caring for them. The Burra Charter (1999) recognises the need to involve people in decision making particularly those that have strong associations with (a*

*place) and to respect cultural diversity and the needs of minority stakeholders.<sup>xiv</sup> . EWG thought it was important, in this process of consultation, to draw out expectations, especially about appearance.*

D. Have I considered and weighted the factors contributing to the identity and significance of the object(s)?

The conservator-restorer has a significant and distinctive role in interpreting the past. It is important to keep in mind that decision making occurs within a cultural context and the conservator-restorer should acknowledge the subjectivity inherent in conservation. Values shift over time and there are a range of values for different individuals and groups. Factors – tangible and intangible - include historical, aesthetic, technical, associations, sacred, and maker's intentions.

*Rationale*

*Muñoz Viñas (2002) reminds us that it is important to keep in mind that decision making occurs within a cultural construction and our cultural background is an important factor influencing choice.<sup>xv</sup> The Burra Charter (1999) incorporates recognition of less tangible aspects of cultural significance including those embodied in use, associations, and the meanings that (places) have for people. That there is a range of values for different individuals/groups and that cultural values co-exist should be recognised, respected and encouraged especially in cases where they conflict.<sup>xvi</sup> The continuously shifting status/value of material heritage affects our decisions and actions.<sup>xvii xviii</sup> EWG thought it was important to consult with stakeholders on this question and that effort to identify values should be collaborative. . It is desirable to assign a value to each factor in order to decide priorities, as it is rarely possible to give equal weight to each factor within a conservation activity.*

E. What are my options for **action** which will produce an appropriate result with minimum intervention?

The **conservator-restorer** is expected to exercise the judgement gained through education and experience in deciding what is reasonable and acceptable to the profession. Thereafter the aim is to reach consensus with stakeholders. Reaching consensus is a valid aim, although not necessary or achievable in every case. Alternatively, it is up to the conservator to have the judgement to know what would be acceptable to others. If there are conflicting views it is up to the conservator to use their judgement. Minimum intervention is assumed to be a guiding principle. Preventive conservation measures should be considered first. In the case of modern or contemporary works conservation treatment may have ramifications in terms of copyright and for the artist's moral rights.

*Rationale*

*We felt it was important to define to whom the decision should be acceptable. We thought that it should be to the profession as it is the conservator's professional judgement that is being exercised. There is also a need to include stakeholders in decisions. Reaching consensus seemed to be a valid aim, although not necessary or achievable in every case.<sup>xix</sup> Retaining a reference to minimum intervention in the Checklist was questioned, but many conservators referred to it as a principle underlying their work. EWG thought that a specific reference should be made to contemporary objects which fall under copyright/artist's moral rights legislation.*

F. What effect will my **action(s)** have on the evidence of the factors contributing to the identity and significance of the object(s)?

It is important to identify the implications of any potential conservation-restoration measures. Risk assessment methodologies can be used to assess the impact on factors.

G. Do I have sufficient information and skill to assess and implement **action(s)**?

This question can help to identify development needs of the individual or lead to a transfer of responsibility to another with the required skills, knowledge and understanding to do the job.

H. What are the benefits/risks of each course of **action** and how will I continue to assess these throughout each course of **action**?

Risk assessment aids decision-making and prioritisation of conservation-restoration measures. Continuous assessment of actions helps the conservator keep options open for changing approach or abandoning action altogether. Equally, the Checklist can be used to: check the decision against the consequences afterwards, and to give insight into the justification at a later date.<sup>xx</sup>

*Rationale*

*'Advantages/disadvantages' was removed in favour of the more professional 'benefits/risks'. Risk is now accepted as part of common practice. EWG thought that continuous assessment of actions needed to be emphasised.*

I. Can the use or environment be adapted instead of intervening on the **object(s)**?

*Rationale*

Alternatives to intervention should be considered as early on in the process as possible, and should be selected in favour of intervention, if this will produce an acceptable result. *It was agreed that more emphasis on preventive conservation was needed. EWG wondered whether it could appear earlier.*

J. Is my intended **action(s)** the best use of resources and is it sustainable?

Resources are only among ethical considerations in so far as they affect the object; but they are a realistic constraint on the amount of work that can be done. In the ethical context a

balance between the actions which *should* be done and actions which *can* be done within the available resources is sought. In general, optimum use of resources results in economically and environmentally sustainable action. Resources include time, people, money, equipment and materials.

*Rationale*

*Sustainability is a concept that has been developed since 1994 in relation to conservation.* <sup>xxi</sup>

K. Do established courses of **action** need to be adapted or new ones developed?

The profession can only advance through experimentation and innovation, and every practitioner has some responsibility to contribute towards this. In addition, the conservator should be asking whether he/she needs to develop skills, knowledge or understanding.

*Rationale*

L. How will my **action(s)** affect subsequent **action(s)**?

It is important to identify the implications of any potential conservation-restoration measures. Risk assessment methodologies can be used to assess the impact on potential future actions.

*Rationale*

*See under H.*

M. Have I taken into account the future use and location of the object(s), and have I made recommendations accordingly?

Risk assessment methodologies can be used to assess the impact of the environment on the object or collection. Objects may require different action if being sent on a lengthy touring exhibition than if being returned to store; both courses of action may be equally ethical.

*Rationale*

*The research group thought that it was important to emphasise the conservator-restorer's responsibility to make recommendations regarding preventive care.*

N. Will all my actions be fully documented to a known and accepted standard?

Standards have not yet been developed for all documentation. Standards are both national and international, and include those of the profession, institution, department, section, studio.

*Rationale*

*The future tense has been used to encourage the conservator-restorer to decide on the type and standard of documentation before action is taken. What to do in cases where standards are not known needs to be addressed.*

O. Will the information resulting from my actions be accessible?

Legislation regarding freedom of information (2000) and issues of confidentiality need to be taken into consideration. Conservator-restorers also have an obligation to disseminate their knowledge.

P. How will I assess the success of the action(s), and how will I get feedback from stakeholders and peers?

It is always advisable to review performance in order to innovate and improve, and conservator-restorers should be pro-active in seeking feedback that will influence future developments. Feedback may be elicited through discussion, publication or presentation.

This version of the Background Document is recognised by the Victoria and Albert Museum as the current version. It is the outcome of a review process involving the Conservation Department. The Ethics Checklist and Background Document of 1994 are archived in the Conservation Department of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

For more information please contact:

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<sup>i</sup> Ashley-Smith, J. (1994) A consistent approach to a mixed collection. In Oddy, A., (ed.) *Restoration: Is It Acceptable?*, British Museum Occasional Paper No.99, 89-94.

<sup>ii</sup> Richmond, A. (1995). Re-conservation of works on paper at the Victoria and Albert Museum: a cause for concern? In *Restoration, De-Restoration, Re-Restoration* 4<sup>th</sup> conference of the ARAAFU. In Preprints, 267-278.

<sup>iii</sup> Wills, S. and Metcalf, S. (1999). Should a conservation treatment reveal the secret of Damascus steel? In *V&A Conservation Journal*, April 1999 No.31, 10-13.

<sup>iv</sup> Caple, C. (2000). *Conservation Skills: Judgement, Method and Decision Making*. Routledge. 2005

<sup>v</sup> Wills, S. and Metcalf, S. (1999). Should a conservation treatment reveal the secret of Damascus steel? In *V&A Conservation Journal*, April 1999 No.31, 10-13.

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