

The National Gallery's Display Policy (Permanent Collection)

Date on which this policy was approved by the Board of Trustees: 17 July 2014

Date at which this policy is due for review: 17 July 2019

Policy Owner: Director of Collections

1. The display of the National Gallery's collection of paintings to the public is the principal mission of the organisation. The National Gallery's overall vision is to encourage members of the public to place the appreciation and enjoyment of Old Master paintings at the centre of their cultural lives. To facilitate access to a beautifully-presented display of the permanent collection is at the heart of this aim.

2. Although, by international standards, the collection is not particularly large (2349 paintings, at June 2014), its breadth and quality make it a collection of world-wide importance and reputation.

3. The permanent collection is supplemented by long-term loans of pictures of importance and quality where these enhance the permanent collection, usually to provide comparisons and juxtapositions that increase public understanding and enjoyment of the National Gallery's own paintings.

4. The National Gallery's aim is to show as large a proportion of its collection to the public as possible, consistent with the following constraints:

- Sufficient hanging space in areas of appropriate environmental control for preservation
- Availability of continuous security measures to prevent damage by visitors whether by accident or by deliberate acts
- Conservation factors; that is, works on display must have sufficient robustness for long-term exhibition

5. The National Gallery's main display is provided by the sweep of Galleries in the main (Wilkins) Building, the North Galleries and the Sainsbury Wing permanent Galleries. The main floor hang is presented chronologically, and sectors of the collection can be identified on a colour-coded floor plan. There is an overriding division by national school, but this is not so rigid as to prevent occasional interesting comparisons to be made across national boundaries. All the main Galleries just described are at 1st floor level and accessible to the public via four main entrances from street level.

6. Where technically feasible and affordable, all principal floor Galleries have controlled, UV-filtered, daylight, supplemented by dimmable LED lighting fixtures. The principles of lighting of the display rely on conservation requirements of pictures, aesthetic quality and low-energy consumption of lighting units. The installation of LED

lighting forms part of the Gallery's carbon management plan. Improvements to lighting and environmental management are made as resources become available.

7. The remainder of the pictures on permanent display reside in five lower floor contiguous (and physically linked) galleries (Rooms B-G), and a large recently-refurbished lower gallery (Room A) situated beneath the North Galleries. The reopening of lower gallery A in 2014 represents an important stage in Gallery plans to continue to improve the permanent collection display by making available to the public important groups of pictures that had not been available for some time, in a carefully selected hang devised by curators. For reasons of staffing resources, Rooms A-G have more limited opening times than the main floor galleries.

8. The lack of full environmental control in parts of the National Gallery, or standards in exhibition rooms that fall regularly outside the parameters specified as 'best practice' for the protection of Old Master paintings on panel and on canvas, limit the flexibility of curators in determining the hang. In cases of doubt, protection from damage to paintings is the primary consideration as determined by the Conservation and Scientific Departments.

9. For reasons of security or conservation, certain paintings on public display are glazed for their protection. The decision to glaze is guided by a 'glazing policy'.

10. Requests for temporary loans from the Collection are discussed by the Board of Trustees who balance their decisions taking account of the effects on the permanent display of paintings temporarily unavailable to visitors to Trafalgar Square. Background conservation and curatorial advice is available to the Board for these decisions.

11. Curators work on a regular basis to improve the display for the benefit of the public by rehanging individual works, groups of paintings and interlinked areas of the Gallery's display. These are planned both for aesthetic reasons or to improve comprehensibility of the hang.

12. The National Gallery recognises that it is not only the pictures on show that determine the quality of the overall display, but also the state (and aesthetics) of decoration and repair of the rooms, and the standards of lighting and lighting maintenance. The Gallery makes plans for major refurbishment and improvement of its rooms on a regular basis, with the curators as principal clients, according to available resources. Core building maintenance takes precedence over schemes for improved decoration.

13. The Gallery continues to improve its display by renewing, repairing, replacing and conserving picture frames, and by acquiring genuine period frames as resources and opportunities allow.

14. Where pictures are removed from display for building or maintenance works to rooms, alternative public display is often found, although certain pictures may require temporary storage for lack of alternative hanging space. These plans are determined by curators in conjunction with the Building Department and Art-Handling Teams (under Conservation Department management).

15. If temporary room closures are necessary, due to shortages of staff, curators have determined a rota of closures designed to inconvenience visitors to the least extent. This is designed so that it is not always the same rooms that are closed first. For emergency closures, for example where urgent maintenance, or safety or security measures are involved, the room will be closed irrespective of the pre-planned sequence. The Gallery seeks to avoid room closures during public hours whenever possible.

16. The Gallery maintains several environmentally-controlled storage facilities on-site. No paintings from the collection are stored off-site. From April 2014 a new large storage area has a rolling-racking arrangement to allow access for viewing, research, condition checks and so on. The paintings are available for public inspection by advance appointment, via direct application to the Information or Curatorial Departments. Information on pictures 'not on display' is available on the Gallery's Website, which provides a contact number and email address for information. Gallery visitors are encouraged to use these information sources to further their enquiries. The Gallery will facilitate a request to view a painting in storage, although specialist staff, for example, art-handlers, are not always available at short notice. Generally speaking, requests to see paintings by specialists and researchers would normally be given priority over casual enquiries, but the latter are also considered a service to the public.

17. Paintings in storage are relatively accessible for re-installation in public spaces as hangs change, for example to provide pictures for public display when other paintings are unavailable as a result of conservation work, or of temporary loan.

18. The quality and extent of information on pictures, such as labels and electronic resources, available to the public is dealt with elsewhere.