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Human Remains and Burial Artefacts Policy (MPF1226)

1. Objective

The objective of this policy is to articulate how the University accepts, cares for and manages human remains and burial artefacts.

2. Scope

2.1. This policy applies to all teaching, research and collection areas in the University which hold human remains or manage burial artefacts. They include academic divisions, libraries, archives, and regional campuses.

2.2. This policy does not apply to:

(a) human remains or human tissue covered by government policies or existing laws, such as the *Human Tissue Act 1982* (Vic) (e.g. bodies that come to the University via the University's body donor program); and

(b) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ancestral Remains and burial artefacts (defined as secret or sacred objects under the *Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2006* (Vic)) that are the subject of the [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Heritage Policy](#).

3. Authority

This policy is made under the [University of Melbourne Act 2009 \(Vic\)](#) and [Council Regulation](#), and supports compliance with the:

(a) *Human Tissue Act 1982* (Vic); and

(b) International Council of Museums Code of Ethics (2004).

4. Policy

4.1 The University recognises that all human remains have social, cultural and spiritual significance attached to them, and therefore are handled sensitively and differently from other teaching and research items.

5. Procedural principles

5.1 The University may accept human remains and/or burial artefacts by donation, gift or bequest in accordance with this policy.

5.2 Teaching, research and collection areas in the University store human remains and burial artefacts with a high level of care and respect, taking into account the standards of best practice outlined in the [International Council of Museums Code of Ethics \(2004\)](#) .

5.3 Human remains meeting any of the following criteria may be considered for deaccessioning:

- (a) remains that are the subject of a request for repatriation to a descendant family, community or another country;
- (b) remains that have deteriorated from continued handling and use to such an extent that they are no longer recognisable or able to be used; or
- (c) remains that may endanger other items in a collection.

5.4 Staff manage deaccessioning of human remains in accordance with the roles and responsibilities set out in section 6 below.

5.5 A staff member with any real or perceived conflict of interest relating to the deaccessioning of a collection of human remains must not be involved in the deaccessioning process for that collection.

5.6 Any record created as a result of this policy will be managed in accordance with the University's [Records Management Policy](#) .

6. Roles and responsibilities

<i>Role/Decision/Action</i>	<i>Responsibility</i>	<i>Conditions and limitations</i>
Appoint a donations officer (cultural heritage)	Dean, head of department, university librarian or other relevant senior member of staff with responsibility for holding human remains or management burial artefacts ('responsible unit')	If appropriate, this role may be filled by the collection manager/curator
(a) Decide whether to accept any donations of human remains and/or burial artefacts coming into their responsible unit (b) Facilitate deaccessioning of human remains and/or burial artefacts from their responsible unit	Donations officer (cultural heritage)	(a) in accordance with this policy (b) as authorised by a dean, head of department, chief librarian or other relevant senior member of staff with responsibility for the collection to be deaccessioned, and in accordance with the policy

<p>When accepting a donation of human remains and/or burial artefacts, ensure that:</p> <p>(a) a Deed of Donation/Gift of Non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Human Remains and/or Burial Artefacts is completed</p> <p>(b) detailed information relating to the donation, including its provenance, is recorded in Schedule 1 to the deed</p> <p>(c) where human remains and/or burial artefacts are being considered for acquisition into one of the University's cultural collections, the acquisition policy and relevant processes of that collection are also followed.</p>	<p>Donations officer (cultural heritage)</p>	<p>(a) –</p> <p>(b) on advice from an anthropologist, unless the human remains and/or burial artefacts have been commercially sourced and have satisfactory documentation and authorisation</p> <p>(c) –</p>
<p>Complete a physical examination of the collection and prepare a Human Remains or Burial Artefacts Recommended for Deaccessioning/Interment form ensuring that:</p> <p>- the University's title to the collection is verified to the extent that it is reasonably possible</p> <p>- there are no restrictions or prohibitions for deaccessioning in the original bequest, gift or donation</p>	<p>Donations officer (cultural heritage)</p>	<p>-</p>
<p>Authorise the Human Remains or Burial Artefacts Recommended for Deaccessioning/Interment form</p>	<p>Dean, head of department, university librarian or other relevant senior member of staff with responsibility for the collection to be deaccessioned</p>	<p>-</p>
<p>Assist in making human remains available for repatriation</p>	<p>Donations officer (cultural heritage)</p>	<p>When a request is made for repatriation by a descendant or family, by an indigenous community outside Australia, or by a foreign government (claimant) and subject to the claimant providing evidence of entitlement to those human remains</p>

Ensure that remains are identified and stored respectfully for a maximum of twelve months, arrange a cremation or burial ceremony on behalf of the University so that the human remains are interred in a respectful manner	Donations officer (cultural heritage)	When the University makes a decision that human remains consisting of skeletons, or part thereof, will no longer be used
Implement post-deaccessioning activities and/or external relations activities where required	Donations officer (cultural heritage)	-
Develop a database and cataloguing system for all human remains and burial artefacts at the University to assist international indigenous communities or international governments that may be attempting to locate human remains or burial artefacts that they wish to legitimately claim	Associate Provost	-

7. Definitions

Burial artefacts or **artefacts** means objects from a burial site or associated with human remains or regarded as sacred by the communities from which they originated.

Human remains means the whole or any part of bodily remains, including any part of a skeleton, teeth, human tissue and hair, whether alone or entwined with artefacts.

Responsible unit means an area within the University that holds human remains or manages burial artefacts including academic divisions, libraries, archives, regional campuses and semi-autonomous bodies.

POLICY APPROVER

Council

POLICY STEWARD

Associate Provost

REVIEW

This policy is to be reviewed by 21 July 2021.

VERSION HISTORY

Version	Approved By	Approval Date	Effective Date	Sections Modified

1	Council	25 August 2014	25 August 2014	N/A
2	Governance and Nominations Committee authorised by Council	23 June 2016	21 July 2016	New version arising from the Policy Consolidation Project (consolidating the Human Remains and Burial Artefacts Policy MPF1226 and the Acceptance and Deaccessioning of Human Remains and Burial Artefacts Procedure MPF1290)
3	Vice-Principal, Engagement	29 August 2017	29 August 2017	Editorial amendment to reflect changes in the <i>Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006</i> (Vic)
4	-	-	-	<i>Created in error</i>
5	University Secretary	24 May 2019	3 June 2019	Changed Policy Steward to Associate Provost (previously Vice-Principal, Engagement). Editorial amendments to correct minor errors or align with the University's policy style guide.