

4th LIBER Collection Security Conference 2012
The Hague, National Library of The Netherlands, 23 November 2012

Concluding remarks – Together we are stronger
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Reflecting on today's presentations and discussions, we may conclude that we learned many lessons. Also, we learned that the security of collections has diverse dimensions. Various features passed today. But I am sure we did not see all dimensions.

Share knowledge and information

I think today's key lesson is that we all benefit, if we share our knowledge and information – inside our own institutions, with colleagues in peer institutions, with colleagues in the book and art trade, with police and prosecutors, and with the general public. We need to overcome our shame and the unjustified fear of risking our reputation.

Inside your institution, learning to share knowledge and information can be part of an integrity training. Make your staff members aware of the major risks. It will help them to understand why it is necessary to openly discuss deviant behaviour of colleagues, managers and visitors. Awareness of risks will create the right mindset to appreciate security measures, such as searching the staff's belongings or limiting access to the stacks. Sharing information and experiences is also vital to create a balance between the different departments, such as security and services.

It is important to share information and knowledge with colleagues in peer institutions, not only libraries and archives, but also museums and other memory institutions. It will prevent us from re-inventing the wheel.

Also, we need to share information with colleagues in the trade: antiquarian booksellers and art dealers. We should realize that they have a big interest in a fair trade. It is crucial to them that they are able to stand for what they trade. The book trade can help you to detect theft and to recover or trace stolen goods. So make sure that your missing items are included in the list of the International League of Antiquarian Booksellers (ILAB) and Interpol, and in the (Dutch) database of incidents.

Sharing information with the general public too can help to detect, trace and recover lost items. See it as a form of crowd sourcing. It has the additional benefit of raising awareness of the intrinsic value of cultural goods. Hearing the many references to collection security receiving a low priority or no priority at all and to the lack of understanding of major risks, we must conclude that awareness raising is a key issue. Here, openness will help as well.

Finally, in sharing information and knowledge, not all groups need to be informed at the same level. Some details can and sometimes must be exchanged confidentially. The key message is: together we are stronger.

An urgent lesson of today is that we need to educate police and prosecutors, so that they start to understand the way libraries and archives operate. We must help them to gain understanding of the singular value of cultural goods, so that they collaborate and at least do not block the crucial exchange of information among institutions and with the trade. Good practices in the United Kingdom told us that training an art and book expert to become a police officer is a very effective way to educate the police. The Dutch Cultural Heritage Agency showed us how organizing combined exercises can help the police, fire brigade and other authorities to understand the way our institutions operate. The security network could share crucial information via a dedicated website.

Today's presentations also contained various particular measures to improve the security of your collection. Tagging your collection is a valuable and effective instrument. You may simply stamp the vulnerable documents with an identification mark. Alternatively, you apply more recent methods like DNA or Radio Frequency Identification (RFID). The main objective is to prevent theft, but RFID has additional benefits in the field of collection management as well. Tagging your collection also helps to identify documents once they are no longer in your stacks. The British Library had to prove in court its ownership of loose book pages by showing the identical track of wormholes and stains in the stolen leaf and the adjacent pages of the book concerned.

Other suggested security measures include limiting the number of entrances to the depositories. Also, limit the number of staff members who have permanent access to the stacks and issue day passes to others who must have access only occasionally. Personal belongings of staff may be checked, at random, when leaving the building. Vulnerable books can be weighed before they are handed over to readers in the reading room. Take a photo of any researcher consulting your special collections.

Finally, we learned about observing deviant behaviour as a security measure. We gained insight in how security staff can be selected and trained to identify the true intentions of visitors and to respond to deviant behaviour effectively. The presentations encourage us to learn more about this approach. It seems a new area where several elements still need to be explored. So, we can be happy that there is still something left to do after today. Our exchange of knowledge and information does not end here. Together we are stronger.