



the national archives

# How to compile an appraisal report

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# Part A Introduction

## 1. What is an Appraisal Report?

The Appraisal Report serves three purposes:

- It provides structured information about the responsibilities, work and records of organisations so that appraisers can identify records of potential historical value;
- It is a transparent record of decisions on the selection of digital records for permanent preservation;
- It is the guide to subsequent selection of specific records from an organisation's Electronic Document and Records Management System (EDRMS), shared drives, databases and other digital formats, as well as, where relevant, from records created in hybrid formats.

It has been developed especially for appraising managed and unmanaged digital records in UK government agencies, NDPBs etc but can be used for a variety of other purposes:

- To make archival appraisal decisions for digital records produced within a division or directorate of a central government department;
- To make archival appraisal decisions for hybrid records (e.g. shared drives plus paper files);
- To collect background information to rationalise paper review;
- To collect background information for retention scheduling;
- To provide evidence of records management and retention scheduling for FOI s.46 assessment purposes

The Appraisal Report is therefore an appraisal tool in the widest sense of the word, although originally developed to aid historical selection.

## 2. Macro-appraisal principles at TNA

The Appraisal Report springs from certain macro-appraisal principles. These are stated in broad terms in TNA's Appraisal Policy, and other documents available on the Appraisal pages of The National Archives' website:  
<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/recordsmanagement/selection/appraisal.htm>

More detailed interpretations of 'macro-appraisal' have been developed in the client manager unit. The following broad principles apply:

**2.1** Before selection there must be a phase of reflection and research so that the organisation and its role in government is understood. The phase includes understanding an organisation's functions and also identifying the key operational and policy records it produces. The view of the work of the organisation as a whole allows for broad assessments of the historical value of the records to be made.

**2.2** Some organisations have more 'valuable' records than others. When making appraisal decisions, TNA distinguishes between the records of central government departments and their agencies / Non-Departmental Public Bodies etc. Among agencies the work of the Pesticides Safety Directorate, for instance, is more complex and of greater potential impact on society as a whole than that of the National Weights and Measures Laboratory, or TNA or the Fire Service College. Measuring the 'importance' of each agency is not an exact science and should be explained in the 'Executive summary' of the report so that the appraiser's assumptions are evident. The volume and detail of the records selected from an agency depends on this assessment of its role in government and its impact on society, the economy and the environment.

### 3. Stages in drafting an Appraisal Report

2.3 Macro-appraisal involves a co-ordinated approach across government to certain types of records. Some existing Operational Selection Policies (OSPs) either dictate selection (Internal administration, publications) or provide selection criteria to steer selection decisions (Internal administration, publications, committees, inspection reports). The number of 'generic' OSPs will gradually increase and will need to be considered as part of this appraisal process, in addition to any subject/theme/organisation-based OSPs relevant to the organisation. Existing OSPs are on TNA's website. See: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/recordsmanagement/selection/ospintro.htm>

2.4 While the Appraisal Report allows for the structured recording of information to assist decisions, selection continues to be based on two broad criteria – the documentation of what government did, why and how, and the value of the records for future historical research. Both criteria are effectively summarised in the high-level collection themes in the Acquisition Policy and the criteria in the Disposition Policy. See: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/recordsmanagement/selection/acquisition.htm#9>  
<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/recordsmanagement/disposition/policy.htm>

The Appraisal Report will be a dynamic document until all selection decisions are completed.

The very last stage in the appraisal process is the selection of records. For digital records this is to be done through a 'transfer schedule' listing file paths. Hence the production of the transfer schedule is the last stage of the appraisal process and the trigger for the transfer process.

To complete a transfer schedule the broad decisions in the Appraisal Report must be translated into the selection of specific file paths. As specific records are studied in the course of this process some appraisal decisions in the report may have to be modified. Given these complexities, there are three stages corresponding to three drafts of the report:

**Stage 1:** The basic information about the department and the types of records it produces is entered. Preliminary proposals are made for the sort of material TNA wishes to select.

**Stage 2:** This is how the Appraisal Report looks after a client manager/departmental discussion of the 1st draft, including where possible consideration of the file plan and other digital records that are revealed in that process. Specific decisions for groups of records have been made.

**Stage 3:** This is the 'final' draft when the client manager and DRO have converted the broad decisions in the Report into specific selections of digital records (e.g. specific file paths for records in file plans) and these have been entered onto a transfer schedule. The process of turning the broad decisions in the Report into specific selections involves a look at the actual content of the records and this might necessitate changes to the appraisal decisions. For example, committee papers might prove to be anodyne and the material better collected elsewhere; or case files prove to be more routine and less informative than anticipated and the decision is made to select a database instead.

#### 4. Roles and responsibilities

Table 1 provides an overview of the appraisal and selection process, demonstrating roles and responsibilities, sources of information and expected outcomes for each stage of the process.

**Table 1: Roles, responsibilities and timetables**

Activity	Responsible person	Sources of information	Outcome
Stage 1: Gather background information and fill in sections 1, 2 and as much of section 3 as possible	Client manager	Websites, civil service yearbooks, annual and departmental reports, TNA Catalogue, departmental intranet	
Stage 1: Meet with DRO and complete section 3	Client manager and DRO	As above; DRO / business unit knowledge / The Catalogue	
Stage 1: Revise sections 1 – 3 in the light of discussion make draft Executive summary and send completed 1st draft to the DRO.	Client manager	As above;	Appraisal Report 1st draft
Stage 2: Hold discussion in department or at TNA, with DRO present and using the department's file plan if possible. (It may be necessary to undertake folder review for some areas of policy. A 'review sheet' is available from ICMU for this.)	Client manager + DRO + Inspection and Client Manager Unit (ICMU)		
Stage 2: Revise Executive Summary and sections 1 – 3 of the Appraisal Report in the light of discussion and send to DRO	Client manager		Appraisal Report 2nd draft
Stage 3: Meet DRO in department, with access to the file plan to go through 2nd draft and identify the specific file paths which should be selected. Make the checks listed in section 5 of the report as necessary.	DRO and Client manager		Transfer schedule 1st draft
Stage 3: Revise Appraisal Report in the light of selection decisions and through discussion with DRO. Complete sections 4 and 5.	Client manager and DRO		Appraisal Report 3rd draft
Stage 3: Complete transfer schedule. This stage will include time to consider FOI and Data Protection issues. <i>Guidance on this is in development.</i>	DRO		Transfer schedule signed

# Part B Instructions for compiling an Appraisal Report

*In compiling the report it is important that client managers and reviewers adopt an integrated approach. The report is broken into sections but each is related to the others. Describing functions should not be an academic exercise but conducted with thoughts about the potential records involved and potential appraisal values. While assessments made in the Executive summary will inform appraisal, it will also be the case that knowledge of the records recorded in section 3 will influence such assessments. Other scenarios may be that Section 1 needs to be revised in the light of information discovered while researching section 3; or that the client manager's view of the value of the department's records changes at the stage of filling in the transfer schedule.*

*While much of the commentary addresses the records of an agency, the same principles can apply to records of central departments.*

## Executive summary

This section should be brief (500 words), giving an overview of the information and appraisal decisions made in the report. It may be filled in at any point in the development of the report, but should be completed, even in an initial form for each draft of the report.

This executive summary has two purposes:

- To assess the significance of the organisation's records against the collection themes listed in the TNA's Acquisition and Disposition Policies
- To summarise the records to be selected with arguments presented where important types of records have not been selected.

It will essentially be left to the client manager to highlight those aspects which s/he thinks will best allow others to assess the historical value of the organisation's records. The essential elements to address are:

- How relevant is the Agency's work, either for present or future purposes, to a majority of the population whether that population be human, businesses, organisations, animals, minerals, flora, or other aspects of the physical environment?
- How relevant are the records to the collection themes of the Acquisition and Disposition Policies?
- General historical value of the records

Answering these questions as early as possible may lead swiftly to the conclusion that there is little of archival value. In this case it may only be necessary to fill in section 1 and the executive summary of the report and not go deeply into the other areas. A simple recommendation in such a case might be to take nothing or just to ensure that the Annual Reports are preserved.

Additional information could cover the following issues:

- To what extent is policy development or information about operational activities covered through committee papers?
- To what extent do publications provide information on the agency and its impact?
- To what extent is the information of historical value reflected in a database or a set of case files, and what selection recommendations are made of these?

- To what extent is it necessary or desirable to capture additional material (apart from committees, publications databases) to show policy developments in accordance with an existing OSP?
- Are there recurrent 'issues' or 'crisis' events, for example, railway or aircraft accidents, outbreaks of disease, industrial disputes, where the agency's handling of the situation is likely to be of historical interest?
- Is there scientific information and what steps have been taken to ensure the preservation of information and its disposition is in place?

# Section 1 Background information

*Numbers in this part refer to the numbered sections of the Appraisal Report*

## **1.3 Annual budget**

This and the next question may give some indication of the 'importance' of the work of agency

## **1.4 Number of employees**

It may be useful to indicate where a very high proportion of the workforce are doing very routine work such as processing driving licences or applications for premium bonds etc.

## **1.5 Hybrid records**

Indicate where these exist, the classification schemes used to track them. Indicate whether paper records should be selected or EDRMS or other digital system. It is important to establish at an early stage the comprehensiveness of the corporate record in the electronic file plan. It may be that this will indicate that the records TNA selects are wholly in paper form.

## **1.6 Background, functions and activities**

This is a very important section and needs to cover:

- A brief administrative history
- A summary of the statutory duties of the organisation with reference to specific legal provisions.

This section should summarise the organisation's statutory duties, rather than using its mission statements and business targets. The latter are likely to have an element of 'spin' of temporary interest, whereas TNA needs to assess an organisation's core purposes and therefore what is likely to be of longer-lasting interest.

## **1.8 Relationship with parent department**

This section is of relevance only in the case of an agency.

- State if any framework document exists;
- Indicate where the agency has a policy-making role and the nature of that role;
- Indicate any areas of overlap with the work of the parent department

## **1.9 Relationship with other agencies / NDPBs**

- Indicate where there is overlap with the work of other agencies;
- Indicate where statutory / independent committees scrutinise, oversee or monitor the work of the agency (e.g. TNA's Advisory Council, PSD's Pesticides Advisory Committee)

## **Section 2** Material transferred to TNA in the past

Enter the series numbers and titles of accessioned material. Where the content of the series is not clear from the title provide some extra information, e.g. to show the case files that have been taken or the nature of the policy work on registered files.

*Entering details here is not intended to indicate that TNA should select the same material now as it did in the past, but it provides a steer and might highlight where TNA is radically departing from former practice. In such cases it may be necessary to refer to the Records Review Panel for approval.*

## Section 3 Analysis of types of records

*Numbers in this part refer to the numbered sections of the Appraisal Report*

This part of the report analyses types of records – committees, policy development, operational records, publications, databases, and internal administration. In the initial phases information needs to be collected so that judgements can be reached to complete the executive summary. However, time should not be spent on section 3 if it is apparent already, or swiftly becomes apparent, that the agency contributes little of historical value, judged against TNA's Acquisition Policy criteria and relevant OSPs. In these cases a swift review of the records created through a discussion with the DRO may be all that is necessary to confirm an initial impression and the executive summary can be completed with a few key records identified where necessary. On the other hand, some agencies and all central departments will be considered of such importance that the digital equivalent of registered files will need to be considered. In such cases TNA can supply the DRO or client manager with a review sheet. This would be used, however, in conjunction with the Appraisal Report to direct and focus any folder 'review'.

### **3.1 Committee structure within the agency or parent department, relevant committees directing the work of the organisation but independent of the agency and its parent department**

For historical appraisal purposes it is only necessary to list committees related to core statutory duties. It is especially important to note the work of statutory committees.

For some agencies all significant decisions might be concentrated in one or two very high level committees. Other agencies might have a web of technical committees below that, although these might again report to higher committees. An agency with such a web of technical committees will therefore have a recognisable committee structure and this should be noted with decisions put forward on the extent to which the lower committees should be selected.

Distinguish between committees making decisions which affect the tenor of a core element of the agency's work and those which are project boards. For example, the decisions of TNA's Records Review Panel influence the very nature of the archive, set precedents, and may be used as a source of accountability, and the minutes and papers should be selected for these reasons. Project boards need to be selected, if at all, on the basis of how they fit into other elements covered in this report. For instance, TNA committees on the 1901 census should be selected because the introduction of the digitised census is an important event in the history of the archive and other policy papers on this might also be selected. Such project boards are not part of a committee structure and therefore do not all need to be listed here, but should be referred to as necessary under section 3.7.

To assess the value of the different committee records check the value of the minutes and papers; for example, they might be anodyne and simply a string of action points. Indicate also where the records of committees selected for permanent preservation are held in digital or paper systems (there is a tendency for organisations to duplicate copies of committee papers and TNA needs to understand their correct provenance). Further guidance is provided in OSP 35 – Board and committee papers.

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/recordsmanagement/selection/pdf/osp35.pdf>

### 3.2 Areas of policy work undertaken

This section is gathering information in order to determine the extent and types of policy development which needs to be considered. As a result of the analysis in this section it should be possible to decide whether the policy elements of the file plan require 'review'. A 'review' sheet should then be completed and attached to the Report.

The following categorisation of the types of policy work undertaken in government departments should be used to help this analysis

- a) Making or contributing to policy decisions of an immediate, broad impact on domestic or international events and conditions, for example, foreign policy, policing, asylum and other legal cases, deployment of troops, setting the budget, intervention on foreign exchanges;
- b) The development, advice on, communication of primary legislation whether that be decided at a national or European level, including work on White or Green Papers (The National Archives' work on a new archives legislation fits here);
- c) The development of secondary legislation – in the UK this is through statutory instruments which tend to regulate the way operations are carried out and have legal force (for example, the Civil Aviation Authority's work centres around the production of statutory instruments);
- d) Advice on carrying out primary or secondary legislative provisions but without any legal force (all TNA's standards and operational policies including e.g. the Acquisition Policy would fit here);
- e) Decisions affecting the way an organisation conducts its core operations. This may include decisions setting precedents, illustrating legislative intricacies, impinging on wider political developments. The decisions may show the development of 'visionary' or 'mission' statements, the response to technical change, or summarise the organisation's work.

### 3.3 Operational work

For agencies this will be the most important and most complicated section of the Report and will require significant departmental input. However, client managers can make an initial attempt using information gleaned while completing sections 1 and 2. The list of types of operations has been compiled from appraisals carried out to date and it may be necessary to add a new operational activity as a result of completing an Appraisal Report. It is important that operations are listed which are core to the agency's statutory functions. Activities relating to internal functions do not need to be listed here, but areas for potential selection should be noted at 3.8

Generic OSPs provide further guidance on the selection of different types of operational records. These are published on TNA's website: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/recordsmanagement/selection/ospintro.htm> In addition the guidance in other OSPs relating to specific departments, subjects or function should also be consulted in making appraisal decisions here and in other sections of the report.

### 3.4 Other Electronic formats

#### *Datasets*

Datasets consist of records created in the course of carrying out operations and represent a digital form of case files. Any dataset identified as central to the agency's statutory operational work in section 3.3 should be listed here. Datasets are listed separately because, although each dataset may be a record of one operational activity, the organisation may have used it for other purposes also and TNA needs to assess where the information is in its most complete and/or most research-friendly form.

The same process should obtain for the other electronic formats:

- *Image Library*
- *Geographic Information Systems (GIS)*
- *Websites*

### 3.5 Publications produced by the organisation

This information is needed because official publications produced by the department – either with or without an ISBN or ISSN number – may capture sufficiently an area of work of the department, whether that be policy development work or, for instance, statistics on a department's operational side summarising information in a database. The appraisal notes should therefore indicate whether the preservation of the Agency's publications reduces the need for further selections from the internal records. Preservation of publications and grey literature is decided in accordance with OSP36.

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/recordsmanagement/selection/pdf/osp36.pdf>

### 3.6 Scientific records

Comment here on the nature of the records with scientific data which are produced by the organisation where these have not been picked up in section 3.3 and 3.4.

### 3.7 Significant Issues

For agencies TNA will seek to minimise 'review' of folders through selection of key committee papers, core operational records and databases. However, many agencies create records of future interest around significant issues. These will either be headline events which occur infrequently (major railway crash, outbreak of disease), or long-simmering issues. A simple list should be inserted here with some appraisal comments. These may be further identified if a mini-review is considered necessary. The need for folder review should be explained in this section.

For central government departments, TNA will similarly seek to minimise 'review' of folders through identification of key functions, committees, publications and databases, and through identifying where policy development is concentrated. Identifying the 'significant issues' handled by a division or directorate will aid this process.

### 3.8 Internal Administration

OSP 38 indicates what is to be selected and gives guidance on OSP15 and OSP17 which identify financial and estates records to be preserved.

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/recordsmanagement/selection/ospintro.htm>

## **Section 4** Proposals for TNA selection

This section will be the basis of the transfer schedule. It should list the records which TNA intends to select for permanent preservation (assuming the checks detailed below support such a conclusion). They should be listed under the following headings:

- Committees
- Databases
- Case files
- Significant issues to be tracked either through keeping an eye on new databases created or through the electronic equivalent of registered policy files.
- Agency programme as laid down by sponsoring department
- A summary of records selected through folder review.

## **Section 5** Additional information and follow-up

*Numbers in this part refer to the numbered sections of the Appraisal Report*

### **5.1 Additional Checks**

The following issues indicate where proposals made in the Appraisal report need to be supported by scrutiny of the contents of files and folders held in digital form. For each of the areas listed below a brief account of the check made and conclusions drawn from this should be recorded. This process should take place in Stage 3 of the process, when selections are being made from the digital collection.

- OSPs
- Quality of committee minutes and papers
- Nature of documents included in any case files selected and the sort of information provided.
- Location and provenance of records identified
- Relationship with paper records especially in any hybrid situation.

### **5.2 Impact on records of other departments**

Decisions to select or not to select policy and other records will depend on assumptions made about or knowledge of the policy records created in the parent department. If it is felt that some policy records related to the work of the department must be kept for the records to be complete or of value to researchers a note should be made here.

### **5.3 Implications of the report for the appraisal of an agency's paper records**

It may be possible to use the decisions in this report to help paper review.

### **5.4 Follow-up**

Indicate here:

- When the Appraisal Report will be reviewed
- What procedures need to be established in the agency to ensure 'big issues', datasets etc are captured in the way indicated in the report.

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