

Purchasing archives and manuscripts: a checklist for archivists

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The following points need to be considered before making a purchase. Please also keep the [sales monitoring team](#) at The National Archives informed, in confidence, of any significant prospective purchases. Further contact details are given at the end.

- Does the material fall within your **collecting policy** or **collection development policy**? If so, is another repository also likely to be interested, in which case you need to check that you will not be in competition.
- What **priority** would you give to its acquisition, as fund-raising can be a time-consuming process?
- What arrangements will be made to **catalogue and conserve** the material? Both cataloguing and conservation need to be fitted into your planning and financial resources from the outset unless you are purchasing a collection already deposited with you that is already fully listed and conserved.
- Can you establish the **provenance** of the material? Funding bodies will normally expect that you have established that proper title is being transferred and that due diligence procedures have been followed.
- Is the purchase of the material subject to **restrictions or legal controls** such as records falling within the scope of the Public Records Act 1958, the Manorial Documents and Tithe Documents Rules, the Parochial Records and Registers Measure, on which The National Archives' sales monitoring service can advise, or other records of a public or official nature, subject to Scottish public records legislation which is also extra commercium, where the National Records of Scotland can advise.
- Is the material affected by **export regulations**? All archival and manuscript material over 50 years old, except for the personal papers of living individuals, is subject to export licensing regulations.

If material is being imported from elsewhere in the EU there are also further EU licensing requirements.

Where material falling within the Waverley criteria is export-stopped or is effectively prevented from export by the Manorial Documents Rules this has implications for both price and saleability of records as it restricts the market.

- Is it worth the **asking price**? Grant-awarding bodies and public institutions need to be sure that money is being wisely spent and that meeting the asking price does not unnecessarily inflate the market.

Major purchases need to be backed by independent valuations.

For smaller purchases, The National Archives' sales monitoring team can help by checking for comparable material on our sales database.

Archivists also need to act ethically towards vendors and should on no account seek to open negotiations by offering a price to a vendor, which may prejudice the chances of grant aid later.

- Can you reduce the **asking price set by the vendor**? At auction, prices are set by competitive bidding, but in private treaty sales there is often room for flexibility and negotiation, particularly if the material appears, on professional advice, to be overvalued or is offered without a full valuation. Some dealers will also offer a discount to public institutions (often known as a museum discount, but also available to archives).

Private treaty sales may also offer financial advantages to both sides if the vendor will incur tax liabilities in the course of selling. Further information is available from Arts Council England.

If a record office has been caring for a collection for a number of years before being invited to purchase it, some reduction in price is regularly sought to reflect the expenditure on storage and packaging, cataloguing, provision of access, conservation, or any other tangible benefits which the owner may have derived from deposit.

- **Sources of grant-aid:** guidance on funding bodies is available from our advice and guidance page (<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archives/advice>).

If the collection is a pre-eminent one and subject to Inheritance Tax then it may be possible for the material to be accepted in lieu of tax. Advice on AIL requirements is available from Arts Council England.

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- How will the acquisition support **your organisation's wider goals and strategies**? This may be a question asked by your parent authority or governing body and by some funding bodies such as the Heritage Lottery Fund, with its emphasis on access, learning and social inclusion.

You will need to consider the impact of any significant acquisition on education, learning and publicity programmes, or may need to undertake further such initiatives. You should also consider the impact on your collecting in the future.

For further advice contact Archives Sector Development at:

sales@nationalarchives.gov.uk

or on

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