



the national archives

# Preparation for undertaking review of paper records

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## 1. Purpose

To provide a set of procedures and guidelines to enable departments to assess their current review methods and employ appropriate alternative methods.

## 2. Authority

**2.1** The National Archives' (TNA) Appraisal Policy sets out "an agenda for change in methods used to select records for permanent preservation" see [http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/recordsmanagement/selection/pdf/appraisal\\_policy.pdf](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/recordsmanagement/selection/pdf/appraisal_policy.pdf). Four strands are outlined:

**2.1.1** "a shift to a system of appraisal that will be applicable to the new environment created by digital records".

**2.1.2** Provision of "appraisal methods which will integrate the appraisal of digital and paper records".

**2.1.3** Provision of guidelines for 2nd review specifically:

- retaining "the Grigg system as the means to safeguard the continuing transfer of records in all other media (other than digital) to TNA as long as departments need it";
- "reasserting the importance of clear selection criteria and TNA monitoring at 2nd review, while ensuring that 2nd review is targeted on records with high potential archival value"
- providing methods and procedures..."to allow the controlled transition to modified systems of review".

**2.1.4** Provision of clear guidelines for the appraisal of case files;

**2.2** This paper provides methods and guidelines to enable departments to move towards modified systems of review and especially to implement the pledges outlined in 1.1 above.

## 3. Preliminary considerations

Before deciding on appropriate methods of review for its prefixes, departmental records staff should be aware of the following principles of appraisal and selection.

### 3.1 Macro-appraisal in the context of paper review

Macro-appraisal in the context of 2nd review should be a unified, top-down analysis of the departments' records or of specific prefixes, to supplement and precede review at the level of the record. The aim of analysis is to identify specific types of records in order to target resources (storage costs, review time) on records with the highest potential archival value.

In general the following principles apply:

- Review and appraisal must be preceded by a period for reflection and research to understand the position of the prefix, unit or department in its governmental context.
- Some records are more 'valuable' than others. This principle applies at every level of consideration - across government, within a department and within a prefix – and this can help to determine methods of review.
- Different types of records can be identified with different values, e.g. committees, policy-making, operational records.

## 3.2 Case files

3.2.1 Before any review is undertaken review teams should ensure that runs of case files have been identified and they they are considered separately from the review process. Where case files and policy development occur in the same prefix they should be handled using one of the methods outlined in section 4 'DART'.

3.2.2 A definition of case files and guidelines for their appraisal is provided in Appendix 4.

## 3.3 Merging 1st and 2nd Review

3.3.1 Before review is undertaken departments could consider merging 1st and 2nd review. Under such a system a review takes place five to ten years after a file has passed out of active use, when it is judged simultaneously both for continuing business need and archival value.

3.3.2 Departments may save storage and retrieval costs by establishing the historical value of files at the same time as the continuing business need is decided. This method is likely to become attractive as departments seek to integrate paper and electronic appraisal. (Electronic records must be appraised for historical value no later than 10 years after creation or departments risk loss and corruption of the records.)

3.3.3 The approach represents a departure from Grigg guidelines. However, TNA has always recommended that future historical value be borne in mind at 1st review, and reviewers have always considered not only current but also possible future business need at 1st review. Thus the merging of the two reviews is, to an extent, a refinement of existing practice.

3.3.4 Over the last 10 years many departments have stopped doing 1st review and are therefore faced with de facto merging of the two reviews in the near future.

3.3.5 Departmental records staff will require on-going discussions with TNA to accomplish such a move. Alternatively departments might use the process for some series only, where the historical criterion is more readily applied.

3.3.6 Adopting this method will require reorganization of a department's review teams and retraining.

3.3.7 After the decision to move to a merged review there is still the choice of method of review for each prefix (see DART below).

3.3.8 Merging 1st and 2nd reviews promises to streamline and integrate the appraisal and review process. However, it cannot apply to departments where business units carry out 1st review.

### 3.4 Selection criteria

3.4.1 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.

Records teams should also consult TNA's *General guidelines for the selection of records*.

### 4. Differentiated and targeted review (DART)

4.1 TNA developed the concept of DART because file by file review is resource-intensive and, while it may enable some historical nuggets to be spotted, can also be ad hoc.

4.2 The key principle behind DART is that preliminary research about and reflection on an organisation's records allows file series to be reviewed in ways suited to the type of material in the files. This may result in the decision to continue with file by file review (for instance where sensitivity checks are extensive and intensive). None of the proposed DART methods is mandatory: they are all suggestions and their use should be the subject of discussion with client managers.

4.3 Reflection and analysis of the way paper review is conducted should ideally be applied across all of an organisation's prefixes. However for many departments this is a substantial project which may not be feasible or practical. Therefore it is suggested that as each prefix comes up for review, this analysis and determination of the best method of review centres on the prefix. Eventually, sufficient information might be collected from this process to enable decisions to be made about all the prefixes across the organisation. It may be possible for departments which opened their prefixes in cycles to analyse the best method of review for all the prefixes in one cycle of paper records.

4.4 Where the department decides to analyse each prefix as it arises analysis and determination of the best method of review involves the following work:

- understanding the functions which the records in the prefix were created to carry out;
- understanding how this work relates to other prefixes as far as that is possible, for example where the records involve operational work with policy made in another division or on another prefix;
- looking at the records (using lists produced from the file management database where these exist) to identify the types of records created in the prefix and therefore the best method of review (Appendix 1).
- Documenting the findings by completing a series level appraisal questionnaire (Appendix 3).

4.5 To research the functions which the records in the prefix were created to carry out the following sources are suggested:

- Information held in the records management files – the 'zero file', central file registry, the 'prefix bible';
- Internal business directories where these have survived for the period in question;

- The National Archives' Catalogue for information about the division or branch or about the prefix itself if files from the prefix have already been transferred;
- Civil Service Yearbook for the period in question. If records teams do not have copies of this, it is suggested that the relevant pages be photocopied as a reference source;
- Establishment files which explain any reorganisations, raising of new prefixes etc;
- The business unit currently carrying out the same or similar functions can explain how the work on the prefix relates to work carried out elsewhere.

**4.6** To determine the most appropriate method of review for the prefix reviewers should:

- consult the possible methods of review listed in Appendices 1 and 2 ;
- complete the series level questionnaire at Appendix 3.

**4.7** This process may take up to a day but the understanding of the prefix which is gained should simplify review. To the extent that file by file scrutiny is avoided, there is less listing and description of individual records at the review stage – often of records which will then be destroyed.

**4.8** Appendix 2 documents decisions as to the *method* of review. Departments must continue to ensure adequate documentation of selection decisions.

# Appendix 1 DART methods

## 1. File by file review

This is the traditional method of 2nd review in which files within a prefix are considered individually and assessments of the historical value of each file entered on a review sheet. Client managers check the review sheet conducting spot checks as necessary.

## 2. Series Level Review

### 2.1 Brief description

Over a few years of 2nd review a series is identified where file-by-file review rarely results in any files being destroyed or in any files being selected. The whole series is therefore selected for permanent preservation, or destroyed, obviating the need for full file-by-file review. The method requires monitoring by The National Archives because of the dangers noted below to check for changes in the sort of records filed into the prefix.

### 2.2 Benefits:

Reviewers may simply list a file series without any review. This benefit is mitigated by the need to ensure that the title still correctly describes the content of the file. Some form of check of the file is therefore needed at listing stage. While this may make listing a longer process it is also a safeguard against files being sent to The National Archives which are of no archival value.

### 2.3 Drawbacks:

The nature of a file series may change over time, and the value of the records it contains may therefore not be constant. This risk may be mitigated by regular monitoring by The National Archives.

## 3. 'Mixed' Series

**3.1** A 'mixed' series is one containing case files and files recording related policy developments. The policy files are likely to be of an operational nature, that is 'policy' consists of developing advice on how primary or secondary legislative provisions are to be carried out. However, the policy might be of a 'higher' order and concern or encompass the development of secondary legislation. It may be that some policy files draw conclusions from case files in such a way that new policy develops at either a legislative or operational level.

### 3.2 Procedures for review

- Decide if the series is 'mixed';
- Using the definitions of case and policy files and some common sense separate out the policy and case files;
- Review the policy files as normal;
- Make an initial assessment of the historical value of the case files by random samples of the case files bearing in mind the following questions:
  - Is the function undertaken core to the statutory duties of the departments or is the department commenting on decisions made elsewhere, in which case the department asking for comments can be expected to maintain the main run of case files
  - Are the files homogeneous, that is, is the function the same in every case. (The more homogeneous the work the more possible it is to draw some general conclusions from decisions being made.)
  - Are the case files interpreting law – i.e. are they setting precedents? If so, are there summaries of this process in the policy files, or reports on them in publications? If not, are precedents being set of business value or of longer – term historical value?

- What aggregate data could the historian collect from the files? That is, could s/he collect figures from the files of interest?
- If figures can be aggregated are these published somewhere?
- Rather than review all case files, this summary should be sent to the client manager together with a review of the policy files;
- It may also be possible to put together selection criteria for the policy files;
- The client manager would need to see the series and decide whether for the case files to:
  - Take all
  - Take none
  - Take samples
  - Devise selection criteria
- The decisions are recorded and all future reviews of the same series (assuming its basic nature is unchanged) handle the case and policy files in the same way.

#### 4. Selection Criteria + File Title

##### 4.1 Brief description

The functions of the business unit(s) which use the file series are analysed, together with consideration of material which may have been selected in the past. The types of records, and the types of subjects likely to be of historical value are identified and agreed between The National Archives and the Department. The reviewer may then take the file title as the key guide to the value of the records, supplementing this with a further study of the contents of the file where the file title is ambiguous or appears to be misleading.

##### 4.2 Benefits:

Reduces the time spent on file by file review

##### 4.3 Drawbacks:

- File titles may be unreliable guides to the contents of files
- Reviewers may attempt to 'fit' all files to the criteria

##### 4.4 Suitable for:

- Registered file series other than case files or committee papers
- Files where decisions on specific issues may have differentiated and national repercussions. For example Civil Service Department files on manpower complements will be of more interest where they cover police recruitment than where they cover The National Archives
- Series which were not first reviewed
- Generic records such as Establishment files, where The National Archives can provide detailed guidance on material of likely archival value

#### 5 Summary sheets and sift and file review

##### 5.1 Brief description

Summary sheets capture information about the series and give broad selection criteria, e.g. the name of a committee whose files are to be selected or destroyed. This enables a sift and reduction of files before file-by-file review.

##### 5.2 Benefits:

- The extent of full file by file review is reduced
- There is a good knowledge of the records before any quick method is applied
- Experience is added to the summary sheets each time review takes place
- Changes in the use made of the prefix will become apparent through the summary sheet
- Decisions are documented on summary sheets

### 5.3 Drawbacks:

- File titles may be unreliable guides to the contents of files. It may be preferable to consider one of the other methods listed in this Appendix such as 'mixed series review'.

## Appendix 2 Decision table

Question	Comment	Review method	Relevant OSP or other guidance
1. Is the series about the internal administration of the department alone? (If no proceed to the rest of the questions)	OSP 38 states that TNA will not take internal administration policy files and lists exceptions.	a) Attempt series level review with a select none outcome, unless topics covered are relevant to OSPs listed right, in which case try... b) Selection criteria + file title c) Rack review	OSP38 - Internal administration, OSP 15 – Central government expenditure, OSP 17 – Estates Retention schedules – various
2. Is the series predominantly about policy?	Macro-appraisal indicates this might be of high value and splits policy into five types see below.	It is likely that all types of policy obtain within a series. In these cases full review might be necessary but bearing in mind the distinctions below.	
2a) Making or contributing to policy decisions of an immediate, broad impact on domestic or international events and conditions e.g. foreign policy, policing, asylum and other legal cases, deployment of troops, setting the budget, intervention on foreign exchanges.	The highest value possible with likely sensitivities and FOI exemptions	a) File by file review or series level review b) Series level review with a view to a 'select all' outcome	Subject OSPs as relevant. The important files are usually easily identified in the course of review.
2b) Development, advice on, communication of primary legislation whether that be decided at a national or European level, including work on White or Green Papers (TNA's work on a new archives legislation fits here);	This will be of a potentially high value	a) File by file review b) Series level review with a view to a 'select all' outcome c) Mixed series review	Generic OSP 35 - Committees, future OSPs e.g. European negotiations, Subject OSPs as relevant

Question	Comment	Review method	Relevant OSP or other guidance
2c) 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 (the Civil Aviation Authority’s work centres around the production of SI’s);	This is work often done in agencies, but still quite high value. Whether full review is attempted will depend on the nature of the subject matter, the extent of publications.	a) Mixed series review (this type of policy is often developed on the same series as case work). b) file by file review c) Selection criteria + file title	Appraisal Report for the organisation may be available.
2d) 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);	This is tending towards low value because guidance is often published. However, changes to the how of operations often embody significant changes in the effect and intention of legislation. Assessment of the nature of the subject matter needs to be made.	a) Avoid file by file but any of the other methods may be considered	Generic OSP 36 - Publications, standards and guidance; Subject OSPs as relevant
2e) Decisions affecting the way an organisation conducts its core operations.	Such files may cover decisions which set precedents, illustrate legislative intricacies, summarise the organisation’s work, impinge on wider political developments, cover the development of ‘visionary’ or ‘mission’ statements, show the impact of technical change.	a) Series level review possible; b) File by file review guided by some selection criteria.	OSP or Appraisal Report for the organisation.
3. Does the prefix contain case files alone?	The research value of case files should be assessed taking them in aggregate and over the appropriate period.	a) No file by file review b) See Appendix 3 of this paper c) consultation could be by means of a researchers’ advisory group, through a paper to Records Review Panel or client manager / DRO discussion.	Retention schedules Subject OSPs as relevant; Generic OSP - Inspections, others as relevant
4. Is there a mixture of policy (see types above) and case work?	DEFRA, DTI, ODPM/DFT seem to create this type of prefix. Many agencies create this type also.	Mixed series review	Generic OSPs as available, e.g. Committees, Inspections, Subject OSPs as relevant e.g. Retention schedules

# Appendix 3 Series Level Appraisal Questionnaire

*This form is also available as a word template*

<b>1. Series and Title</b>
<b>2. TNA Class and Title where applicable</b>
<b>3. Metre run of series/ number of files</b> a) for this year's review b) total held for this series
<b>4. Date range</b>
<b>5. Describe the functions carried out on this series.</b>
<b>6. Describe the contents of the series that is whether it covers policy formation, operational work and note runs of case files if a mixed series. If the series consists entirely of case files go to 10.</b>
<b>7. Are related files available in other series or held in other formats? If so, briefly describe material held elsewhere.</b>
<b>8. By what method should the series be reviewed?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● File by file</li><li>● Series-level review</li><li>● Mixed series review</li><li>● Selection criteria + file title</li><li>● Sift + review</li></ul>
<b>9. Give reasons for your proposal</b>
<b>10. Case files. Describe the type of information recorded in the files. Indicate how routine or complex the information is. Indicate whether the information is available elsewhere. Assess the archival value of the files.</b>
<b>Agreement of Department</b>
<b>Comments by TNA (client manager and/or Appraisal Project team)</b>
<b>Date agreed</b>

# Appendix 4 Case files

## 1. Definition

**1.1** Case files, sometime referred to as 'Particular Instance Papers' are described in the Grigg report as "often very large groups of papers, the subject matter of which is the same, though each relating to a different person, body or place. The Grigg report continued: *"While each individual document may be of little importance by itself; taken together or by way of sample these papers enable broad conclusions as to historical, economic or social trends to be drawn"* (Grigg Report para 62).

**1.2** Case files are records series whose component files contain similar information, generated in response to the same piece of legislation or regulation, about a specific group of persons, organisations, places or transactions. That specific group could be very large e.g. the whole population of England and Wales, or relatively small and discrete, e.g. applications to exceed foreign exchange restrictions.

**1.3** Case files probably account for over 70% of the total of government holdings, and for some agencies and NDPBs this will be much larger. They present special and significant appraisal and storage problems both for the creating department and for TNA and therefore must be considered separately from review.

## 2. Types of case files

There are three broad types of case files:

**2.1** Simple case files are generally returns on a printed form or to a standard questionnaire. Here inputs and outputs are standard and the case files essentially record processing operations such as applications for driving licences. It is the type of information now commonly entered into a dataset.

**2.2** Complex case files. Here although all files in the series are generated by the same piece of legislation or by the same procedure, they are characterised by a low degree of document similarity and a high degree of variation between files. In complex case files civil servants are applying a high level of consideration to the information for each case, as occurs, for example, with legal files. Such case files, although relating solely to one entity, start to take on the characteristics of a policy file: the outcome may involve re-interpretations of policy and/or prompt re-consideration of policy.

**2.3** Scientific and technical records of Research and Development establishments may be viewed as another type of case file. Here work is project based and each project could be viewed as a case file, while each one will contain simple standardised data.

## 3. The historical value of case files

**3.1** In considering the historical value of case files the following general principles apply:

**3.1.1** Case files relating to the internal administration of the department are not generally selected for TNA. However, TNA's existing retention schedules and OSPs should be checked and all such records may be accorded periods for future destruction.

3.1.2 Case files generated to implement a department's core, unique functions may have historical value:

a) Simple case files. Here the historical value of the record series or digital dataset resides in the aggregated use of the individual entries or returns: more or less sophisticated statistical methods may reveal social, economic or environmental trends. The information in just one return may have value to a specific individual or organisation. However, selection must primarily be conducted on the basis of the statistical use that may be made of the aggregated data. Some very significant simple case files are selected for permanent preservation, such as the decennial census and personnel files of the armed services.

b) Complex case files. These yield data of a qualitative nature: the whole set of entries will not be susceptible to standard statistical tests, except by first reducing the information to a standard format. In these cases specific case files, although relating to one person, organisation or event, may yield information of broader historical value, such as standard investigations where data on significant disasters or test cases may be found, such as air accident investigations. They require special consideration where they have a strong link with policy development.

c) Scientific projects. TNA will develop guidelines for appraisal and disposition of scientific and technical casework.

3.1.3 Selection should continue to be based upon the determination of "*what papers, if retained, would give the greatest amount of information in the smallest amount of space*"(Grigg report, para 109)

#### 4. Procedures for appraising case files

4.1 Details of the case files may be entered on the series level questionnaire (Appendix 3). If the run of case files presents difficult issues, or may involve TNA in accessioning a very large run of files, that is over 20 metres, the matter must be referred to Records Management and Cataloguing Department's Records Review Panel. It may additionally be referred to a group of informed historians.

Where the decision is referred elsewhere the client manager, in liaison with the reviewer or DRO should explain in writing:

- the function or legislation which gave rise to the run of case files;
- the subject matter;
- the type of documents on each file;
- the type of information which can be gathered – in aggregate for simple case files and in aggregate or singly for complex case files – and its likely research value;
- the volume of records involved.

4.2 If the decision is not difficult the series level questionnaire can be completed and disposal agreed with the TNA client manager.

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