



the national archives

# Standard for Record Repositories





The National Archives

# Standard for Record Repositories

First edition, 2004

All enquiries about the content or interpretation of this standard may be addressed in the first instance to

The Head of National Advisory Services  
The National Archives  
Ruskin Avenue  
Kew  
Richmond  
Surrey TW9 4DU

Telephone: +44 (0) 20 8392 5330 ex 2619  
Fax: +44 (0) 20 8487 1970  
E-Mail: [nas@nationalarchives.gov.uk](mailto:nas@nationalarchives.gov.uk)  
Website: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk>

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The National Register of Archives (Scotland) is maintained by the National Archives of Scotland, HM General Register House, Edinburgh EH1 3YY.

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# Preface

## The National Archives Standard for Record Repositories

In 1990 the Historical Manuscripts Commission (HMC) first published *A Standard for Record Repositories* on behalf of the wider archival community covering matters of constitution and finance, staff, acquisition, access, storage and preservation. This was intended to give public repositories a set of pointers to good practice which were broadly similar to those required from museums by the then Museums and Galleries Commission's museums registration scheme. It included, as an appendix, an earlier checklist of issues agreed in 1989 between HMC, the Public Record Office (PRO), and the Scottish Record Office and based on BS 5454 *Recommendations for the storage and exhibition of archival documents*, which they would take into account in carrying out their respective inspections of record repositories (incorporated in the body of the text in the 3rd edition). Governing bodies of repositories were accordingly invited, on a voluntary basis, to subscribe to the HMC Standard, and many have done so. The Public Record Office in 1994 separately issued further guidance in its publication *Beyond the PRO* on the standards that must be met by repositories seeking its approval as places of deposit for Public Records. This also drew on the recommendations contained in BS 5454, and included guidance specifically aimed at those archive services responsible for holding series of such records by agreement with the Lord Chancellor.

Since the merger of the HMC and PRO in April 2003 to form The National Archives (TNA) we have sought to eliminate any duplication and overlap between the inspection and advisory services operated by our predecessor organisations. We have also been aware that the HMC Standard and *Beyond the PRO* guidance do not offer comprehensive pointers to best practice in every field relevant to the operation of publicly and privately funded repositories. After a consultation exercise with interested parties in 2003-04, we have now determined, with the consent of the archival community, to issue a new *National Archives Standard for Record Repositories* as part of a framework of standards, which will provide such a comprehensive basis for all our inspection and advisory work.

The Standard's recommendations are addressed to archivists and governing bodies of record offices, libraries, museums and other institutions holding records which are available to the public for research. It incorporates, and is largely based on, the former HMC *Standard* but guidance has been added on the preservation of digital and other electronic records in the absence of definitive standards in this developing field. Repositories whose governing bodies have adopted *The National Archives Standard* and meet its requirements in all essential respects will be eligible for full TNA approval (previous approvals under the terms of the HMC *Standard* will be carried over). The *Standard* will be used to harmonise previous HMC and PRO systems of approval as far as existing legislation allows.

Those record-holding institutions which do not meet the Standard in significant respects may still be authorised to hold particular classes of records in accordance with specific statutory requirements, but will not normally be recommended as homes for archival or manuscript material accepted by the nation in lieu of tax or for manorial and tithe records.

Many specialist repositories and private owners (both individual and institutional) of course require no official approval or recognition to hold the archives in their care. We encourage them nonetheless to apply the recommendations of the *Standard*, in as far as they are relevant to their own needs. TNA's

National Advisory Services offer free advice to all custodians of archives, both public and private, who are seeking to improve conditions of storage and access and/or aspire to meet The National Archives Standard.

Complying with the recommendations of TNA's Standard does not diminish the need of repositories to meet all necessary legal requirements within the areas of governance and service provision encompassed by the document. Nor does the *Standard for Record Repositories* act as a substitute for meeting other relevant best practice guidance or standards which may apply to libraries and museums holding archives, including the requirements for accreditation set out in the Museum Library and Archive Council's *Accreditation Scheme for Museums in the United Kingdom: 2004* for museums and galleries.

The present *Standard* does not encompass records management issues but these are separately covered by BS ISO 15489-1:2001 *Information and documentation – records management* which forms part of The National Archives' framework of standards.

November 2004

# Interpretation

For the purposes of this document the following interpretations apply:

*Records* means all archives, records or documents, whether individual items, series or collections, and of whatever format or medium.

*Record repository* means a record office, library, museum or other institution holding records which are open to public inspection. (It should be noted that in British Standard 5454 'repository' means the storage accommodation only).

*Finding aids* means reference works such as general guides to, or lists, inventories or schedules of the records, describing them either collectively or as individual items.

*Preservation* means the protection of records against damage or deterioration.

*Conservation* means the application of technical treatment or repair to the physical form of damaged or deteriorated records.

*Professionally qualified archivists and conservators* means those having a professional qualification or specific training or equivalent experience recognised by the Society of Archivists (from which further details may be obtained on request).

## Constitution and finance

- 1.1 In creating or maintaining a record repository the aim is to achieve a permanent establishment for the care and public inspection of records, based on sound management and firm financial guarantees.
- 1.2 A record repository's source of authority should be found in one of the following documents:
  - (a) an Act of Parliament
  - (b) a Royal Charter
  - (c) a decision or resolution formally recorded in the minutes of the central council, board or committee of its overall governing body
  - (d) a charitable trust deed approved by the Charity Commissioners.
- 1.3 The archivist in charge<sup>1</sup> of the record repository should draw up, and the governing body or its appointed council, board or committee should approve, a statement of the objectives of the record repository and of the services which it aims to provide.
- 1.4 The governing body should delegate to the archivist in charge powers to manage the record repository, to negotiate independently with all owners and transferors of records, and respond to enquirers, and to develop and implement policies concerning the record repository, under the governing body's general direction.
- 1.5 The archivist in charge<sup>1</sup> should have an effective line of communication with the governing body and a position within the overall administrative structure which will enable the effective promotion of the record repository's declared objectives (see 1.3).
- 1.6 The archivist in charge should be responsible to the governing body for an identifiable budget.

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<sup>1</sup> The archivist in charge's function may, in some repositories, be carried out by a librarian or museum curator where archives form part of wider collections.

## Section 2

# Staff

- 2.1 In determining the staff complement of the record repository the governing body should take into account its declared objectives (see 1.3) and the following minimum requirements:<sup>2</sup>
- (a) to keep the records safe and to make them available for public inspection (see section 4)
  - (b) to advise the governing body and, where relevant, other owners of the records on their care, and to prepare adequate finding aids to the records (see 4.7)
  - (c) to take all necessary practical steps for the preservation and conservation of the records.<sup>3</sup>
- 2.2 Beyond the very smallest, record repositories accordingly require the services of
- (a) one or more professionally qualified archivists with training or experience relevant to the kind of records held
  - (b) one or more professionally qualified conservators
  - (c) one or more non-professional archivist or records assistants, and appropriate clerical staff
  - (d) support staff, who may include word processor/keyboard operator(s), porter(s) and cleaner(s).
- 2.3 In the case of a small repository where no appropriately qualified professional staff can be employed, the governing body should formally seek regular advice on such matters as acquisition, storage, conservation and cataloguing from a professionally qualified archivist in another repository or from The National Archives (which provides guidance on both public and private records) or, in Scotland, from the National Archives of Scotland and in Northern Ireland from the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland.
- 2.4 The number and categories of staff employed in any record repository should be commensurate with the extent and nature of the records held and with the intensity of their use.
- 2.5 Allowance should be made for the need to maintain a service, including proper invigilation (see 4.9), during staff leave and other unavoidable absences.

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<sup>2</sup> Some of the skills required to perform the tasks in (a) and (b) may, in smaller repositories, be combined in one person. The skills necessary for (c), however, are distinct and are acquired through different courses of training. Both are necessary for the proper care of archives.

<sup>3</sup> This may include contractual arrangements with another repository or with a private conservator.

## Acquisition

- 3.1 In acquiring records every effort should be made to avoid conflict and duplication with the collecting policies of other record repositories.
- 3.2 The archivist in charge should draw up, and the governing body should approve, a clearly defined statement of collecting policy<sup>4</sup> which indicates the subject areas within which records are sought and acquired, any geographical restrictions affecting the scope of material collected, and the various media for which appropriate storage and access facilities are provided (see 3.9).
- 3.3 The statement should be reviewed as necessary by the governing body to take account of any changed circumstances.
- 3.4 The statement should be made publicly available in the record repository, and a copy should be sent to The National Archives (National Advisory Services).
- 3.5 Acquisition should not be attempted outside the terms of the statement of collecting policy.
- 3.6 In seeking or acquiring records the archivist in charge should keep in mind the appropriateness of the record repository as a suitable place for their custody and consultation and respect the principles of archival integrity.<sup>5</sup>
- 3.7 No records may be acquired or disposed of in contravention of the terms of any current legislation and in particular the Public Records Acts, the Manorial and Tithe Documents Rules and the Parochial Registers and Records Measure.<sup>6</sup>
- 3.8 No attempt should be made to secure the acquisition or removal of any records held in another record repository, except with the consent of the owner of the records and in consultation with the archivist in charge and governing body of that repository.
- 3.9 Records in a format or medium requiring special equipment for their consultation (such as microfilm, microfiche, audio-visual, machine-readable and electronic records) should not be acquired unless the record repository has, or plans soon to obtain, the necessary equipment, or is able to arrange facilities for appropriate public access elsewhere under proper invigilation.
- 3.10 Before accepting records, the archivist in charge should be satisfied that the transferor has proper authority or title to transfer them.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For further guidance see Christopher Kitching and Ian Hart, 'Collection policy statements', in *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, 16 no.1 (1995), pp. 7-14. This guidance is also available on The National Archives Website

[http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archives/advice/pdf/archive\\_collection\\_policy.pdf](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archives/advice/pdf/archive_collection_policy.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Records held together by an original archival unity should normally not be divided nor any item selected or removed in detriment to that unity. Where, however, a large collection falls into clearly discrete parts there may be a case for the records to be divided. Advice may be sought from the Head of National Advisory Services at the National Archives or, in Scotland, from the National Register of Archives (Scotland).

<sup>6</sup> See A A H Knightbridge, *Archive legislation in the United Kingdom* (Society of Archivists Information Leaflet 3, 1985).

<sup>7</sup> In particular, due diligence must be exercised over any records which might have been imported illegally into the United Kingdom. For specific guidance on this issue see *Due diligence guidelines for museums, libraries and archives when acquiring cultural material* (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2004).

- 3.11 In the event of acquisition by gift or loan the governing body and the donor or owner of the records should fully apprise each other in writing of any terms or conditions attaching to the transfer.
- 3.12 An accessions register (whether in manual or computerised form) should be kept, in which essential information on the nature and circumstances of each acquisition should be recorded. At a minimum it should include the date and terms of transfer, the name and address of the transferor, brief details of the records and any reference number necessary to allow the records themselves and any related documentation to be traced.
- 3.13 Notice of every new acquisition and of any restrictions on access to it should be made public at the earliest opportunity.
- 3.14 If the archivist in charge intends to destroy or return to the owner or donor any duplicate or ephemeral material this should be made clear at the time of transfer.
- 3.15 In all other cases there is a strong presumption against the disposal, by any means, of records accepted into the record repository unless
- (a) it is found that they belong more properly with records in another repository, in which case they may be transferred there with the consent of the owner and the knowledge of both governing bodies, subject to any relevant statutory provisions being observed
  - (b) the repository becomes unable, either temporarily or permanently, to provide proper care from them, in which case they should be transferred, on such terms as may then be agreed in writing with the consent of the owner and of both governing bodies, to another appropriate repository with similar overall objectives
  - (c) the owner requests their return.

## Access

NOTE: The *Standard for Access to Archives*, drafted by the Public Services Quality Group and forming part of The National Archives' *Framework of Standards* may usefully inform access policies in all types of repositories and provides mandatory guidance defining best practice in the provision of access to public records. Its provisions are not repeated here.

- 4.1 The governing body should provide a designated study area sufficient to satisfy normal demand for public access to the records and suitable for their inspection under constant invigilation.
- 4.2 The health and safety of the public must be provided for.
- 4.3 Reasonable measures must be taken to meet the special needs of disabled readers and it is desirable to publicise these adequately.
- 4.4 The governing body should provide, and ensure the proper maintenance of any technical facilities necessary for consulting the records and appropriate to their types and quantity (see 3.9).
- 4.5 The governing body should make public the regulations for access to the records. These should conform to any statutory or official requirements concerning records for which the repository is officially approved.
  - 4.5.1 Details should be given of regular opening hours. In setting these, archive services should endeavour to take account of the needs of their users.
  - 4.5.2 Conditions for the issue of readers' tickets (if applicable) should be stated.
  - 4.5.3 It is highly desirable that readers be required to produce written evidence of identity before being given access to unique archival documents.
  - 4.5.4 General restrictions on access, such as any statutory or customary time-limited closure of the records, or any applicable derogations of closure (for example with regard to Freedom of Information or Data Protection), should also be explained in the regulations. Variations to the general rule in the case of certain categories of records or individual items may more conveniently be noted in the relevant finding aids.
  - 4.5.5 Readers should not take coats and bags to their study places.
  - 4.5.6 Readers should write with pencils only, and not write on or trace directly from any records.
  - 4.5.7 Provisions for the protection of the records from theft or damage during public inspection and for the prevention of unauthorised access to the records should be laid down.
- 4.6 The governing body should, through such visitor registration processes as are in operation, make users aware of rules, regulations and other codes of conduct which apply to the use of the archive service.

- 4.7 All records which are open to inspection by the public should be clearly described, in publicly-available finding aids. All newly created finding aids should be compatible with approved national and international standards. A copy should be sent to the National Advisory Services at The National Archives for incorporation in the National Register of Archives and, in Scotland, to the National Register of Archives (Scotland) at the National Archives of Scotland. Interim lists are welcome where more detailed finding aids are likely to be long deferred. Both the above institutions should be informed, as appropriate, where an electronic version of a finding aid is made publicly available to remote users over a computer network. It may also be helpful to provide further copies for other record repositories and libraries.
- 4.8 The governing body should provide efficient means of delivering records for public inspection in the designated study areas without undue delay and without damage to the records.
- 4.9 When in use the study area should be constantly supervised by sufficient staff to provide an effective level of invigilation of the whole area, under the direction of a professionally qualified archivist.<sup>8</sup>
- 4.10 It is desirable, and in the case of Public Records mandatory (see Appendix), that facilities be provided, either in the repository or by appropriate arrangement elsewhere, for making photographic or other copies of the records, with due regard to copyright. Copying should not, however, be carried out if in the opinion of the professional staff the records in question are too fragile to withstand copying. Suitable arrangements should also be made for the authentication of copies for legal and other purposes.

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<sup>8</sup> In institutions with mixed collections of archival and other material, such as library or museum, this direction may be discharged by a professionally qualified librarian or museum curator.

# Storage and preservation: Guidelines for repositories seeking accreditation

## 5.1 *General*

- 5.1.1 These guidelines set out the conditions which record repositories, ie the whole building or those parts of a shared building used for the storage, conservation, administration and consultation of the records, are expected to meet if they are to gain official accreditation. In respect of storage accommodation they must conform broadly with the current edition of British Standard 5454, *Recommendations for the storage and exhibition of archival documents*. Copies of the British Standard, and of a Guide to its interpretation, (PD 0024:2001) are obtainable from Customer Services, BSI, 389 Chiswick High Road, London W4 4AL (Telephone 020 8996 9001, Fax 020 8996 7001). Although most of the recommendations below are directly based on BS 5454, they should not be taken as a substitute for the fuller range of recommendations given in that Standard.
- 5.1.2 Preservation of digital or electronic records is an evolving discipline. The following standards or guidance may be used until more comprehensive standards are developed.
- 5.1.3 Transport and storage of digital storage media should be in accordance with BS 4783 *Storage, transportation and maintenance of media for use in data processing and information storage*.
- 5.1.4 The National Archives has published guidance, which should be referred to in the absence of a nationally agreed standard for digital preservation. This consists of four volumes published under a composite title: *The Generic Requirements for Sustaining Electronic Information over Time (2003)*.<sup>9</sup>

## 5.2 *Situation*

- 5.2.1 The repository must be free-standing or, if in a shared building, be capable of being completely isolated from other activities.
- 5.2.2 Potential hazards from external sources including neighbouring properties or other parts of a shared building must be carefully assessed and appropriate defensive measures taken. BS 5454 identifies particular hazards against which precautions must be taken.

## 5.3 *Construction*

- 5.3.1 The repository and most especially its storage accommodation must be of robust construction of brick, stone or concrete, with adequate protection for all roofs, walls, floors, ceilings and openings against unauthorised entry, fire, flood and damp. The building should also offer effective protection against dust, pollutants and pests.
- 5.3.2 Floors must be capable of bearing the weight of the records to be stored. This will vary according to the use of static or mobile racking.

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<sup>9</sup> Available on The National Archives Website <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/electronicrecords/generic.htm>

- 5.3.3 Plumbing, plant and drains in, above or adjacent to the strongrooms should be avoided, and services should not pass through a strongroom unless required within it.
- 5.3.4 There should be a minimum of flammable finishes and fixtures.
- 5.3.5 In the case of all but the newest buildings (which should provide for 15 to 20 years of accruals), a long-term storage strategy should be in place which makes provision for expansion, either on site or elsewhere, once the present storage accommodation is full.

#### 5.4 *Security*

- 5.4.1 The perimeter and all parts of the repository must be secure against unauthorised entry and vandalism.
- 5.4.2 External and strongroom doors must be of strong construction and fitted with mortice deadlocks or security locks.
- 5.4.3 Access to keys must be strictly controlled by archival staff.
- 5.4.4 If the strongrooms have any windows at ground floor level, or at any other level easily reached from the exterior, they should either be blocked or protected by bars or strong mesh and fitted with suitable intruder detectors and alarms.
- 5.4.5 When staff are not on duty the repository and more particularly the strongrooms should be protected by intruder alarms linked to a police station or security agency.
- 5.4.6 Access to the strongrooms should be restricted to archival staff and other authorised persons accompanied by them.
- 5.4.7 The search room must be constantly invigilated when the public are present.

#### 5.5 *Fire protection*

- 5.5.1 Strongrooms, including their doors, walls and ceilings, should offer 4-hour fire resistance. This requirement can only be abated if a full fire risk assessment has been conducted, in consultation with the appropriate fire safety officer or local fire service, and the overall strategy for fire protection offers a corresponding (or greater) degree of assurance.
- 5.5.2 Smoke detectors, preferably capable of detecting a fire in its incipient phase, with automatic fire alarms linked to the fire station or security agency should be fitted to strongrooms, plant rooms, and adjacent areas and preferably throughout the repository.
- 5.5.3 No matter on which level(s) of the building the records are stored, provision should be made for the drainage of any water generated during fire-fighting, and for the extraction of any smoke resulting from a fire.

- 5.5.4 Whether or not automatic fire extinction systems are fitted an adequate number of suitable aqueous and non-aqueous portable fire extinguishers must be provided in accordance with the advice of the fire prevention officer on their type and location.
- 5.5.5 Electrical plant and main switches should be located outside the storage accommodation. Electrical wiring should be of recent construction and run within metal conduits. Lighting should be by fluorescent tube fitted with diffusers. Power points for necessary equipment such as vacuum cleaners or dehumidifiers may be provided within the strongrooms.
- 5.5.6 *Lifts and bookhoists should have fire-resistant doors*
- 5.5.7 Flammable and hazardous chemicals must be stored in properly secure conditions according to the requirements of the Health and Safety Executive.
- 5.5.8 Smoking must be strictly prohibited in the strongrooms and elsewhere throughout the repository except in areas designed and equipped for the purpose.
- 5.6 *Environment and storage: parchment and paper*
- 5.6.1 For new buildings, or those with new environmental controls, the targets throughout the strongrooms should be a constant temperature (ie  $\pm 1^\circ\text{C}$ ) within the range  $16^\circ\text{C} - 19^\circ\text{C}$  for frequently used material, or [where such distinctions are possible]  $13^\circ\text{C} - 16^\circ\text{C}$  for infrequently used material (which, however, should then be allowed to acclimatise before and after use), and constant relative humidity (ie  $\pm 5\%$ ) within the range  $45\% - 60\%$ .
- 5.6.2 In the case of buildings fitted out prior to the publication of BS 5454:2000, if a stable environment can be maintained with constant temperature and relative humidity within the ranges  $13^\circ\text{C} - 18^\circ\text{C}$  and  $55\% - 65\%$ , this will continue to be acceptable provided that no adverse effects to the records themselves are observed.
- 5.6.3 Regular, and preferably continuous, recordings of temperature and relative humidity should be made in all storage areas, and closely monitored. Remedial action must be taken if the conditions fall outside the recommendations of BS 5454.
- 5.6.4 Sufficient air movement should be achieved to avoid pockets of stagnant air and to remove offgassing of organic materials.
- 5.6.5 Shelving should be strong and adequately braced. The records should be stored on the shelving in archive boxes made of undyed and acid-free materials. Separate protection should be given to volumes, outsize documents and maps.
- 5.6.6 BS 5454 provides specific guidance on packaging and storage.

5.7 *Environment and storage: photographs*

- 5.7.1 Photographs should be stored in accordance with the recommendations given in BS 5454 (Annex A and Section 11) which cover temperature and relative humidity, and protection against dust, dirt and pollutant gases.

5.8 *Environment and storage: film*

- 5.8.1 Films should not be stored in a general-purpose repository unless appropriate environmental conditions can be provided, if necessary in a separate room or compartment. Films should be stored in dust-free metal or inert plastic cans, placed horizontally on metal shelves. Annex A to BS 5454 gives guidance on the recommended temperature and relative humidity for storage of different types of film.
- 5.8.2 Films on a cellulose nitrate base, which are inherently unstable, must not be stored in the repository but deposited in a specialist store whose conditions satisfy the requirements of the Health and Safety Executive.

5.9 *Environment and storage: magnetic tape*

- 5.9.1 Magnetic tape should be stored in an environment as close as possible to that which it will be consulted. An annex to BS 5454 gives guidance on the recommended temperature and relative humidity for storage of gramophone discs, magnetic tapes, video tapes and electronic media of different file types.
- 5.9.2 No electric or electronic apparatus producing magnetic currents that could cause the erasure of recorded material should be permitted in the storage area, nor should tapes be brought within the vicinity of such apparatus or of lightning conductors.
- 5.9.3 Tapes should be stored in containers made from aluminium, acid-free board or inert plastic, placed vertically on metal shelving.

5.10 *Environment and storage: digital and electronic records*

- 5.10.1 Appropriate maintenance regimes should be established to ensure storage media are examined regularly, together with processes which conform to suppliers' recommendations. These will enable timely media refreshment and migration regimes to be established, to avoid data loss or corruption.
- 5.10.2 Appropriate robust back-up and concomitant storage regimes should be established to ensure multiple copies are created and managed so that all back-ups remain uncorrupted and readable. The backup regime should ensure that the backup data could be readily restored by authorised personnel to prevent loss or corruption and to allow continuity of service. The current recommendation is for a minimum of four copies of the data to be maintained – two of which should be stored on-line and off-line in secure off-site storage subject to appropriate environmental controls.

- 5.10.3 Proposals to migrate software file formats due to perceived obsolescence of the originating format should be subject to stringent controls to document the need for the migration, the reason for the choice of the preferred migration format, the agreed performance measures and the actual process in which the migration has been undertaken and tested.
- 5.10.4 Digital archives should be maintained to the overall security capability required by BS ISO 17799 Code of Practice and Specification for Information Security Management. All systems should be fully auditable and audit trails should be maintained for all actions carried out on all objects. Actions are to include but need not be limited to
- Import and export processes
  - Migrations
  - Replacement of corrupt copies
  - Changes to metadata including authorised changes or annotations made to records held in the archive.
- 5.11 *Disaster plan*
- 5.11.1 An up-to-date plan should be accessible to archival staff.
- 5.12 *Conservation*
- 5.12.1 Suitable provision must be made either within the repository or by appropriate arrangement elsewhere for such conservation as the records may require.
- 5.12.2 Conservation involving remedial treatment to stabilise or improve the physical or chemical condition of archives should only be carried out by suitably qualified and/or accredited conservators.

# Appendix: Public Records of the United Kingdom and Places of Deposit

Public records, as defined by the Public Records Act 1958 and subsequent amendments to the schedules of such records attached to it, are subject to statutory controls and are placed under supervision of the Keeper of Public Records (the Chief Executive of The National Archives), and the Lord Chancellor (the Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs). Many of these records are held in local places of deposit, which have to be approved by the Keeper. There are specific requirements for places of deposit, which however, are largely limited to providing for their management, safe keeping, and access, and do not constitute a standard. Organisations operating places of deposit are expected to care for public records in their custody and make them available in accordance with the Public Records Acts 1958 and 1967, the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Requirements for preserving and making available such public records are set out here for the convenience of repositories since those appointed as recognised places of deposit will need to meet them when inspected by TNA's National Advisory Services. Other related guidance concerning these records, previously set out in *Beyond the PRO: Public Records in Places of Deposit* and which is now superseded by TNA's *Standard for Record Repositories*, will be made available on our website ([www.nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk)).

## The Public Records Act 1958

*Note: References to the Public Record Office in the Public Records Act 1958 should be understood as referring to The National Archives since April 2003 and similarly, references to the Keeper of Public Records now apply to the Chief Executive of The National Archives.*

The appointment and operation of places of deposit is set out in section 4(1) of the Act, which states: 'If it appears to the Lord Chancellor that a place outside the Public Record Office affords suitable facilities for the safe-keeping and preservation of records and their inspection by the public he may, with the agreement of the authority who will be responsible for records deposited in that place, appoint it as a place of deposit as respects any class of public records selected for permanent preservation under this Act.'

Places of deposit are appointed to hold public records for one of four reasons:

- they were created locally and have a specific local interest;
- the information they contain is of a very specialised or technical nature which requires specialised skills for its interpretation;
- they are in a format, which requires very specialised skills for their preservation and/or use, not available at The National Archives;
- certain public records bodies (such as national museums and galleries) have an administrative need to keep their own archives.

Further sections of the 1958 Act have a bearing on the operation of places of deposit.

Section 3(4) states that 'Public records selected for permanent preservation under this section shall be transferred not later than thirty years after their creation either to the Public Record Office or to such other place of deposit appointed by the Lord Chancellor under this Act as the Lord Chancellor may direct'. These powers are currently delegated to the Chief Executive of The National Archives.

Section 5(5) states that 'The Lord Chancellor shall, as respects all public records in the Public Record Office or any place of deposit appointed under this Act outside the Public Record Office, require arrangements to be made for their inspection by the public comparable to those made for public records in the Public Record Office'.<sup>10</sup>

Section 6 of the Act provides for the potential destruction of deposited public records: 'If, as respects any public records in the Public Record Office or any place of deposit appointed under this Act, it appears to the Keeper of Public Records that they are duplicated by other public records which have been selected for permanent preservation or that there is some other special reason why they should not be permanently preserved, he may, with the approval of the Lord Chancellor and of the Minister or other person, if any, who appears to the Lord Chancellor to be primarily concerned with public records of the class in question, authorise the destruction of those records or, with that approval, their disposal in any other way'.

Further detailed guidance about the care and management of public records in places of deposit, and their loan, donation, destruction, transfer, or administrative retention can be found on our website which also lists all such approved places (<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archives/>).

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<sup>10</sup> The Public Records Act s.5(5) currently continues "and subject to restrictions corresponding with those contained in the foregoing provisions of this section". From 1 January 2005 these words will be deleted by the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (c36), Sch.5, paragraph 2



The National Archives  
Kew Surrey TW9 4DU  
Phone: 020 8876 3444  
Email: [nas@nationalarchives.gov.uk](mailto:nas@nationalarchives.gov.uk)  
[www.nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk)

