



The National Archives

# Preservation policy

## Document Control

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to state the principles that guide the care and preservation of The National Archives' collections. It concerns all materials in all formats including digital records and surrogates.

This policy provides a comprehensive framework for decision making at The National Archives and for the development of procedures. It is not intended to be a handbook or operating manual.

## 1.2. Context

The National Archives has a fundamental responsibility to ensure the continuing availability and authenticity of the accessioned records that it holds in trust for present and future generations.

Given the unique and irreplaceable nature of the collection, The National Archives' executive team has identified loss of assets as a strategic risk to the organisation. The owner of this risk is the director of operations and services who has overall responsibility for ensuring that this risk is managed in accordance with The National Archives' risk management policy.

The National Archives' Collection Care Department is responsible for the preservation of traditional, physical records, whereas preservation of digital records is overseen by the Digital Preservation Department. The preservation policy is issued jointly by these parties.

In addition to ensuring the preservation of existing holdings, The National Archives has a responsibility to provide advice and guidance to central government departments on information management for both physical and electronic records. This is particularly significant where digital information is concerned, and The National Archives is proactively involved with the development of systems and standards for digital preservation.

The preservation policy has been developed in accordance with existing preservation policies from the archival and preservation sectors ([Appendix A: Policies and guidelines consulted](#)).

## 1.3. Use

The chief executive approves the preservation policy on the advice of the Management Board of The National Archives. All staff and managers of The National Archives assist in implementing the preservation policy as appropriate to their roles and responsibilities.

The preservation policy should be read alongside other policies of The National Archives as cited in the policy statements. The policy is complimented by guidance on the care of documents which details the day-to-day activities of specific departments addressing any preservation issues.

## **1.4. Definitions**

The terms used in this document are specific to this policy and are defined in [Appendix B: Definitions](#).

## **2. POLICY PRINCIPLES**

### **2.1. The National Archives' vision**

The National Archives recognises that preservation is integral to all aspects of The National Archives' vision. The National Archives ensures that preservation is embedded in all activities, from acquisition through to access, and also in The National Archives' wider influencing role in UK government, and within the archive and conservation sectors.

### **2.2. Access and authenticity**

The preservation of The National Archives' collection is vital in order to ensure all current and future access to the records. Preservation is also concerned with ensuring the authenticity of records.

### **2.3. The value of records**

The National Archives recognises that records are valued for a combination of qualities that relate to their importance, usefulness or quality. These values can be summarised as follows:

- informational value – all information presented, whether written, pictorial or audio
- material value – intrinsic information about the records that can be retrieved from the material itself, such as age, provenance, history, software
- cultural value – encompasses a range of values such as political, religious, historical, ethical, aesthetic, and many other similar values.

It is the policy of The National Archives to preserve all qualities of all records as far as possible.

### **2.4. Risk-based approach**

In striving to preserve its collection The National Archives adopts a risk-based approach. For physical records this consists of conducting a preservation risk assessment for the whole collection which is subsequently reviewed periodically. The results of this risk assessment inform the Collection Care Department business plan. Electronic records are individually assessed on a regular basis and the outcomes inform the digital preservation planning process.

### **2.5. Conservation**

Conservation at The National Archives aims to have a minimal impact on the authenticity of the record while preserving its informational, material and cultural values. The National Archives adopts a combined approach of preventive measures and conservation treatments.

## **2.6. External roles**

The National Archives aims to take a leading role for archival preservation nationally and internationally. Its role includes the development of expertise; the development, implementation and dissemination of national and international standards and best practice; and the promotion of the value of archival preservation in the UK and globally.

## **2.7. Digital preservation**

Different preservation paradigms apply to digital records, where a distinction must be made between the intellectual content of the record and its technical manifestation. Long-term access to a particular technical manifestation cannot be guaranteed due to its unavoidable dependence on specific technologies which will become obsolete over time. The National Archives' policy on preserving digital records is therefore predicated on preserving the means of access to the underlying intellectual content and its associated evidential value.

The National Archives preservation policy encompasses two levels of preservation: passive preservation, which provides for the secure storage and integrity of each record manifestation, and active preservation, which may require the migration of records to new technical manifestations over time. The National Archives will always maintain the original manifestation of the record and all subsequently generated manifestations.

# **3. POLICY STATEMENTS**

## **3.1. Planning and strategy**

The National Archives recognises the expertise of the Collection Care Department and the Digital Preservation Department in archival preservation. The Collection Care Department and the Digital Preservation Department advise on preservation issues at all levels of The National Archives operations. They also monitor The National Archives activities to ensure that the preservation policy is being adhered to.

The Collection Care Department and the Digital Preservation Department are responsible for identifying key areas for development and implementation. The Collection Care Department and the Digital Preservation Department incorporate these into their business plans, outlining actions and identifying the required resources. All planning and activities are done together with relevant departments of The National Archives.

All The National Archives departments should be aware of the possible impact of their activities on the preservation of records, and should work closely with the Collection Care Department and the Digital Preservation Department as necessary. This might be during the planning of projects or development of procedures, or it might be in the form of on-going advice and guidance.

Preservation activities are documented as appropriate, for example, data on environmental monitoring, copying, treatments, surveys, loans and service requests, and this documentation is managed as a corporate asset.

### **3.2. Standards**

The National Archives follows current best practice as recognised nationally and internationally. In doing so, the Collection Care Department and the Digital Preservation Department refer to the following standards. These Standards are interpreted as appropriate in the light of collective experience.

- BS 5454:2000 Recommendations for storage and exhibition of archival documents
- BS 4971:2002 Repair and allied processes for the conservation of documents. Recommendations
- BS 1153:1992 Recommendations for processing and storage of silver-gelatine-type microfilm
- BS 4783 Storage, transportation and maintenance of media for use in data processing and information storage
- BS 7083:1996 Guide to the accommodation and operating environment for information technology (IT) equipment
- BS ISO/IEC 27001: 2005 Information technology. Security techniques. Information security management systems. Requirements
- BS ISO/IEC 27002: 2005 Information technology. Security techniques. Information security management systems. Code of Practice
- BS 6266:2002 Code of practice for fire protection for electronic data process installations
- ISO 14721:2003 Space data and information transfer systems. Open archival information systems. Reference model

### **3.3. Internal communications**

The Collection Care Department and the Digital Preservation Department proactively engage with staff via the internal communications team (for example Narnia, TALK magazine) in order to raise awareness of preservation issues at The National Archives.

All new staff are introduced to preservation issues and their collective responsibilities as part of the The National Archives corporate induction programme. In addition, the Collection Care Department provides training in document handling for all staff who work with physical documents, or in a public-facing role.

It is the responsibility of all staff at The National Archives to contact the Collection Care Department or the Digital Preservation Department when they require advice, guidance or assistance with a preservation issue.

### **3.4. Storage, transport and security**

The National Archives recognises that of all potential risks to the long-term preservation of The National Archives' physical records, inappropriate storage is the most significant.

The National Archives seeks to ensure appropriate and secure accommodation for all its holdings, wherever they are stored, processed, transported or used. This includes providing suitable environmental conditions and providing appropriate housing. It also includes monitoring via an

integrated pest management programme, and an environmental monitoring system.

When managing the storage environment, The National Archives takes into account the limits of the current buildings, and its commitment to green issues as stated in its green policy and green strategy.

### **3.5. Access**

Documents are consulted by readers or staff under controlled conditions in accordance with nationally recognised and agreed standards.

Readers use the Document Reading Room and the Map and Large Document Reading Room to consult original documents. Staff consult documents in the Staff Reading Room. All readers are expected to comply with the [reading room rules](#), and staff are expected to comply with the staff reading room policy.

In some cases valuable or fragile material may only be consulted under supervision either within the conservation studio or in the invigilation room. In some cases digital records which are unsuitable for online presentation may only be consulted within the Digital Preservation Department.

### **3.6. Disaster preparedness**

The National Archives maintains a [business continuity plan](#) designed to ensure the safety of staff as well as members of the general public, safeguard The National Archives' collection of documents and records, and to enable a return to normal operating with minimal disruption. Detailed procedures for responding to an incident are described in The National Archives' incident management plan.

In the event of a major incident, the first priority is the safety of people, followed by immediate action to rescue or prevent further damage to the records. Depending on the immediate threat, emergency response and recovery actions will take precedence over all other National Archives activities. The departments of Collection Care and Document Services will lead any document salvage operation, assisted by a team of volunteers.

The National Archives makes appropriate provision for the backup of its digital collections, including the provision of offsite security copies. The backup copies are actively maintained to ensure their continued viability. The National Archives updates and maintains its business continuity plan for its digital collections, to ensure that both the collections and the technical infrastructure required to manage and access them can be restored in the event of an emergency.

### **3.7. Surrogates and copying**

The primary reason for the production of surrogates at The National Archives is to improve access to the records. However, surrogates can be produced for

a number of other reasons both directly and as a by-product of The National Archives' activities.

Surrogates come in different formats (microform, digital and physical) and differ in retention, use and reuse. They are actively managed, taking into consideration their intended use and business value.

All surrogates that are retained by The National Archives have preservation value for the following reasons.

- They reduce the movement and handling of records.
- They may be designated as the accessioned record if the original is lost or damaged.
- They may constitute proof of condition and legal ownership.

When a surrogate is generated from an original physical record the production of the surrogate must not endanger the original record and should be designed with the long-term preservation of the original document in mind. Processes must aim to capture the maximum amount of information and should, as far as possible, offer customers their desired copy format. Where a surrogate is retained, future copies should be made from the surrogate rather than the original document.

The criteria for selecting digital surrogates for retention are outlined in The National Archives' digital surrogates policy. The retention of digital surrogates must be prioritised because of the high cost of digital storage. A record of digital surrogates which are retained will be kept on a digital surrogates database as described in the digital surrogates policy.

The digital surrogates policy also outlines standards for images and metadata, and the process for storage and maintenance of digital surrogates that are selected for retention.

For born-digital records, a distinction must be made between copying, which generates a new identical instance of the record, and transformations, such as migration, which create a new technical manifestation of the record. Transformation of digital records is described in section 3.8 below.

Digital records are not limited to a single physical instance and may be copied in a manner which is indistinguishable, and fundamentally identical to, the original at bit level. Furthermore, copying does not present any risk of damage or deterioration to the original (unless the storage medium itself is fragile). Copying of digital records may be carried out to meet requirements for media refreshment, security, disaster recovery and access. The integrity of all copies of electronic records will be verified as part of the copying process.

When producing a surrogate the copyright must be observed as outlined: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/legal/copyright.htm>

### **3.8. Treatment of physical and electronic records**

Within the Collection Care Department, conservation treatment of physical records is in keeping with the Icon (Institute of Conservation) [professional guidelines](#). Treatments for electronic records may encompass both the physical medium (for example, rewinding, cleaning) and the intellectual content (for example, migration).

Migration of born-digital records may be required to improve the usability of the record or in response to technological changes which threaten its continued accessibility through obsolescence. This is likely to be an ongoing periodic requirement throughout the life cycle of digital records and will always be undertaken in a controlled manner as a result of detailed preservation planning and testing. The potential risk of information loss will be mitigated through testing of migration pathways and validation of migrated records. Migration must also be fully documented in the form of a detailed migration history as part of the metadata associated with the record.

### **3.9. Exhibitions**

Under section 2(4)(g) of the Public Records Act 1958, the chief executive of The National Archives (in their capacity as Keeper of Public Records) is empowered to lend documents 'for display at commemorative exhibitions and for other special purposes' subject to the approval of the Lord Chancellor. All loans are conducted in accordance with The National Archives' exhibitions policy and applicants must agree to The National Archives policy by signing the loan conditions form.

### **3.10. Research**

The National Archives proactively engages in research as a means to underpin decision making and as part of The National Archives' on-going contribution to the national and international archival and preservation sectors. The National Archives' approach to research is stated explicitly in its research strategy.

### **3.11. Advice and guidance**

#### *Government departments*

The National Archives places considerable importance on the integrity of those records selected for permanent preservation so that it is able to ensure access both in the present and the long term. It provides advice and guidance to government departments and agencies on the preparation and packing of physical records for transfer.

With electronic records it is particularly important that they are well managed at source. Government departments are responsible for managing their electronic records via EDRMs (electronic document and records management systems) and other information management systems.

Since July 2007, The National Archives has been developing a shared service for central government departments to help them manage the risks to their business-critical electronic records more effectively. This is managed by the Digital Continuity project, and funded by sixteen central government

departments. The shared service will include guidance, tools and services, and standards to ensure electronic records of value remain complete, available and usable over time. This is essential for effective government and to ensure a flow of records into The National Archives in the future.

The National Archives sets standards for governmental records creators to incorporate preservation measures within their workplaces, particularly for technology-dependent records. The National Archives is responsible for the preservation elements of the government's [e-Government Metadata Standard](#) (e-GMS).

It is desirable for digital records to be transferred to The National Archives substantially in advance of the 30 year statutory default under the Public Records Act 1958. Following full government and public consultation, The National Archives has introduced a [Custodial Policy for Digital Records](#) and a regime of transfer agreements to govern the timing of transfer in a way suited to digital records. The policy clarifies the duty to care for records in these circumstances and will be supported by appropriate guidance on their active preservation.

#### *Other institutions*

The National Archives provides advice and guidance on best practice to other public and private archives via the department of Archive Sector Development. In addition, The National Archives provides administrative support and expert advice to the National Manuscripts Conservation Trust which provides financial support for the conservation of private records.

## **4. COMMUNICATION, MONITORING AND REVIEW OF THE POLICY**

The preservation policy is available to all National Archives staff via the intranet, and is available to the public on The National Archives' website.

The Collection Care Department and the Digital Preservation Department will review the preservation policy on an annual basis. The director of operations and services, as strategic risk owner, and the risk improvement manager will provide regular assurance to The National Archives' audit committee on the effectiveness of controls to mitigate the risk of loss, damage or compromised integrity of The National Archives' archival record holdings.

## **5. APPENDIX A: POLICIES AND GUIDELINES CONSULTED**

**British Standards Institution:** BS 4783:1988-94 Storage, transportation and maintenance of media for use in data processing and information storage

**British Standards Institution:** BS 1153:1992 Recommendations for processing and storage of silver-gelatine-type microfilm

**British Standards Institution:** BS 5454:2000 Recommendations for the storage and exhibition of archival documents

**British Standards Institution:** BS 4971:2002 Repair and allied processes for the conservation of documents. Recommendations

**British Standards Institution:** BS ISO/IEC 27001:2005 Information technology. Security techniques. Information security management systems. Requirements

**British Standards Institution:** BS ISO/IEC 27002:2005 Information technology. Security techniques. Information security management systems. Code of Practice

**British Standards Institution:** BS 6266:2002 Code of practice for fire protection for electronic equipment installations

**British Standards Institutions:** BS 7083:1996 Guide to the accommodation and operating environment for information technology (IT) equipment

**Brown, A:** Centre for Archaeology digital archiving strategy, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (2002). English Heritage

**European Confederation of Conservators-Restorer's Organizations:** E.C.C.O. Professional Guidelines (II), Code of Ethics (2002);  
<http://www.ecco-eu.org/about-e.c.c.o./professional-guidelines.html>  
(last accessed 4 June 2009)

**Institute of Conservation (Icon):** Professional Guidelines (2002);  
[http://www.icon.org.uk/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=121&Itemid=](http://www.icon.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=121&Itemid=)  
(last accessed 4 June 2009)

**International Organization for Standardization (ISO):** ISO 14721:2003 Space data and information transfer systems. Open archival information systems. Reference model

**London Metropolitan Archives:** Archive Preservation and Conservation Policy (April 2006);  
<http://217.154.230.218/NR/rdonlyres/D649ECFC-582A-47BC-AB3E-C6014DE07963/0/ArchivePreservationandConservationPolicy.pdf>  
(last accessed 4 June 2009)

**National Archives of Canada:** Preservation Policy (December 2001);  
[http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/preservation/1304\\_e.html](http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/preservation/1304_e.html)  
(last accessed 4 June 2009)

**National Preservation Office:** Building Blocks for a Preservation Policy (January 2001). NPO Preservation Guidance, Preservation Series  
<http://www.bl.uk/npo/pdf/blocks.pdf>  
(last accessed 4 June 2009)

**UK Data Archive:** Preservation Policy (September 2003). University of Essex, Colchester, UK

<http://www.data-archive.ac.uk/news/publications/UKDAPreservationPolicy0308.pdf>

(last accessed 4 June 2009)

**Wellcome Library:** Preservation Policy for materials held in collections (2007)

<http://library.wellcome.ac.uk/assets/wtx038065.pdf>

(last accessed 4 June 2009)

## 6. APPENDIX B: DEFINITIONS

**Archival master:** Usually a first-generation negative microfilm which is used to generate a working master copy. Archival masters are surrogates which are generated from an original archival record. However, some accessioned records are in microfilm format in which case the accessioned films are regarded as archival masters as a preservation measure.

**Accessioned record:** a record selected for permanent retention by The National Archives according with the 1958 Public Records Act

**Born-digital record:** a record that has been created and accessioned electronically, as opposed to having been digitised from a paper record

**Conservation:** a set of activities that aims to stabilise the physical or chemical condition of a record, to prolong the life of a record and relevant metadata, or enhance its value, or improve access to it through interventive treatment

**Conservation treatment:** an interventive action intended to improve or maintain a record's physical and/or chemical stability, its appearance or accessibility. For electronic records this may entail physical or chemical intervention; however, it may also entail the manufacture of an archival master or, for electronic records, migration or other forms of transformation which result in a new manifestation of the record. It usually takes place once damage has occurred, or in anticipation of damage or obsolescence (hence inaccessibility) because of the passage of time.

**Copy or surrogate:** a duplicate of an original document in whole or in part to preserve it and provide access to it

**Digital preservation:** a set of technical processes to ensure that digital documents and records remain accessible over the long term

**Electronic record:** a record produced, housed or transmitted by electronic means rather than physical means and satisfies the definition of a record

**Manifestation:** an instance of an electronic record which requires a specific technological environment for access. New manifestations may be created through the process of migration.

**Metadata:** a set of data which conveys information about other data. For example, the information in the catalogue can be considered to be metadata. Metadata is used for records management, retrieval and use.

**Migration:** the process of transforming an electronic record from one encoding format to another. This may be undertaken either to translate the record into a format which is more accessible to users, or in advance of technological obsolescence of the original format. Migration techniques are active preservation methods, which constitute a change to the nature of the record, and entail a risk of information loss which must be clearly identified and managed.

**Original record:** the accessioned record, which can be in a physical or electronic format, from which a copy or surrogate can be made. In some instances the accessioned record is itself a surrogate, for example, if microfilm is accessioned. In this case the accessioned record is still considered to be the original.

**Physical record:** a record that exists in its original physical format

**Preservation:** a set of activities that aims to prolong the life of a record and relevant metadata, or enhance its value, or improve access to it through non-interventive means. This includes actions taken to influence records creators prior to selection and acquisition.

**Records:** defined in the 1958 Public Records Act as including not only written records, but records conveying information by any means whatsoever. The information conveyed in records was created, received and maintained as documentation in pursuance of legal obligations or in the transaction of business.

**Refreshment:** the process of exactly copying the content of an electronic storage media instance to another medium of the same or different type. This may be undertaken as a result of physical damage to the medium, or in advance of technological obsolescence. It does not constitute a change to the electronic record itself.

**Surrogate or copy:** a duplicate of an original document in whole or in part to preserve it and provide access to it

**Transformation:** any form of active preservation of electronic records which results in a change to the means by which the information content is represented as a bitstream. Format migration is the most common type of transformation.

**Working master:** a duplicate of an archival master from which subsequent copies can be made, for example, service copies for use in the reading rooms. A working master exists for each archival master held by The National Archives and these are always stored separately from the archival masters.