

Revised July 2011

Records Decision Panel (RDP): Terms of Reference

Under section 3 of the Public Records Act, it is the responsibility of public records bodies to appraise their records and to select those worthy of permanent preservation. The National Archives is responsible for coordinating and supervising this work and provides advice, guidance and training to departments on how to carry out appraisal and selection and what to select.

The purpose of the RDP, is to support Information Management Consultants in refining selection judgements, and ensure that particular preservation, handling and wider issues which may arise from a recommended selection, or non-selection, are considered and managed effectively by interested parties across The National Archives.

1. What should be taken to the RDP for decision?

- Revisions and updates to the Acquisition and Disposition Strategy, Appraisal Policy
- Operational Selection Policies (OSPs) (new and substantially revised)
- Appraisal Reports (new and substantially revised)
- Selection decisions which deviate from current policy
- Collections where Information Management Consultants (IMCs) need advice on whether to select
- Termination of records series accrual and destruction of records under s.6
- Deposit of records series to places of deposit under s.4(1) which raise policy issues
- Transfers of records from The National Archives to places of deposit under s.4(3)
- Offers of non-public records of historical significance
- Records in unusual formats that are likely to cause preservation issues, be difficult to give access to or store, including all electronic records

The decision tree attached explains this further.

2. Membership of the Records Decision Panel

The Records Decision Panel consists of the Heads of Department of all departments affected by the decisions to select records to accession. This includes: IMP, ASD, DSD, ARK, Licensing, Digital Preservation and Collection Care.

The Head of Department may nominate a representative to attend in his or her place, but, such a substitute needs to represent the views of the department as a whole, and to ensure that the Head of Department not attending is informed of discussions and decisions which may have an impact on the department.

3. Preparing and circulating recommendations for the RDP

All Selections, including those for the RDP, must be mindful of preservation, handling or wider issues. Selections approved by the RDP shall be added to the Information Management and Practice transfer plan, where meeting the criteria, to provide a clear view of material destined for The National Archives.

Papers should be prepared using the standard template, and set out the key evidence for selection in addition to any outstanding risks in preservation, handling or reputation, or confirming their resolution with appropriate National Archives' colleagues and/or departments.

Papers are to be circulated to the members of the Panel by the Secretary 10 working days before the planned meeting.

If external experts are involved then papers should be circulated three weeks before the meeting to give them enough time to read the papers.

Comments on submissions will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting and stored in Objective. The author of the paper shall provide a summary of comments for discussion at the meeting, and for inclusion on the web-site.

Operational Selection Policies (OSPs) should be submitted to the Panel in draft form prior to public consultation. If substantial comments are received during the consultation period then these should be discussed at the Panel. The final version of the OSP should be signed off by the RDP before being published on the website.

4. Organisation of meetings

The panel usually be scheduled for the third Monday of each month, by the Secretary. Meeting dates will be set at the beginning of the calendar year and calendar invitations sent to the members of the Panel by the Secretary.

Meetings should not be cancelled or moved without good reason, for example, if the meeting clashes with another important National Archives' event that all/most members are required to attend or there are no issues for discussion.

- If the Chair is unable to attend then the Secretary should consult with the other members to see if they would be able/willing to chair the meeting.
- If a meeting does need to be moved or cancelled then the Secretary should consult with members and anyone due to give a paper on the most suitable course of action.

- If a meeting is to be cancelled or moved then all attendees should be informed at the earliest point possible.
- If there are urgent matters for discussion (for example situations that might endanger the survival of records such as an office closing) then attempts should be made to organise a special meeting. If this is not possible then discussions could take place virtually by email.

5. Preparation of minutes of meeting and summary

Secretary to prepare minutes and summary of minutes not more than 3 days after the meeting and circulate to the core and wider distribution lists.

The minutes and summaries should be agreed at the following meeting, and the summaries should be published on The National Archives' website as soon as it has been agreed by the Panel. If a meeting is cancelled then the minutes and summary should be agreed via email.

The Secretary is to update panel decisions in the RDP decisions log on Objective, within a week of the meeting.

6. Escalation

Proposals regarding large collections and unusual formats should be referred to Executive Team for approval who will also consider the accessioning of digital surrogates on a case by case basis.

The Head of Information Management & Practice, as chair of the Records Decision Panel, will take the recommendations concerning these exceptional cases to Executive Team, as soon as possible, who will make the final decision. This ensures high level buy-in and clear-sighted commitment of resources towards business-driven outcomes.

Julia Stocken
Head of IMP

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