



OPERATIONAL SELECTION POLICY OSP20

RECORDS OF THE
CENTRAL OFFICE OF INFORMATION/
COI COMMUNICATIONS (COI)

February 2003, Revised December 2005

1 Authority

- 1.1 The National Archives' Acquisition and Disposition policy statements announced The Archive's intention to develop Operational Selection Policies across government in consultation with departments, record users and other archives. These policies would apply the collection themes described in the policy to the records of individual organisations, indicating which records would be selected for preservation at The National Archives and how non-selected records would be disposed of. The options for disposition are described at Annex A.
- 1.2 Operational Selection Policies are intended to be working tools for those involved in the selection of public records for permanent preservation. They may therefore be reviewed and revised at any time in the light of comments from users of the records or archive professionals, the department's experience of using the policy, or as a result of newly discovered information. There is no formal cycle of review and comments are welcome at any time. The extent of any revision exercise will depend on the nature of the comments received.
- 1.3 If you have any comments upon this policy, please e-mail records-management@nationalarchives.gov.uk or write to:
- Acquisition and Disposition Policy Project Manager
Records Management Department
The National Archives
Kew
Richmond
Surrey
TW9 4DU
- 1.4 Operational Selection Policies do not provide guidance on public access to selected records.

2 Scope

- 2.1 This policy concerns all records created and held by the Central Office of Information (COI) in whatever medium.
- 2.2 It represents the first step towards a comprehensive Operational Selection Policy for records relating to information policy, press and publicity. It is being issued in advance of the wider policy in view of COI's pressing need to develop disposal schedules in line with current business requirements and new ways of working, particularly the implementation of full electronic records management from 2003.
- 2.3 The policy takes account of the changing status of COI from mandatory supplier and common service to optional supplier and commercial trading fund. For publicity records created in the 1960s and 1970s, it

was possible to use COI's own collection as a back-up source for material overlooked in the sponsoring department, but this ceases to be the case from the 1980s. Not only has COI disposed of material not required for its own business needs, but departments have been free to use alternative suppliers. It will therefore be necessary when sponsoring departments are selecting files to document the implementation of policy for them to include related publicity material where this forms a significant aspect of implementation.

3 History of COI

- 3.1 COI was established in 1946 when the Ministry of Information's war-time control of information policy was resumed by departmental ministers. Following the pattern of other common service agencies (e.g. Property Services Agency, Crown Suppliers) it concentrated expertise and was able to take advantage of centralised purchasing for government departments, who were obliged to use its services but did so without charge.
- 3.2 COI produced information and publicity services for other government departments, including exhibition design and construction, tours for official visitors from overseas and survey data.
- 3.3 There were nine regional offices in England and Wales and a London headquarters. The regional offices provided the local press with a service equivalent to that provided to the national media by departmental press offices. Regional staff also provided media advice and assistance to the Royal Household outside London. The Scottish Information Office (responsible to the Secretary of State for Scotland) and the Northern Ireland Government Information Service acted as COI's agents. In 1965 the Cardiff regional office became the information division of the newly created Welsh Office, responsible to the Secretary of State for Wales.
- 3.4 In 1967 on the recommendation of the Heyworth Committee on Social Research, COI lost its responsibility for the Government Social Survey, which became a separate department responsible to Treasury Ministers.
- 3.5 In 1971 COI lost certain trade fairs and export promotion work and in 1972, following the Melville Report on COI and departmental information services, provision was made for greater devolution of information services to departments, subject to consultation with COI.
- 3.6 In the 1980s all government common service agencies moved towards a more commercial relationship with clients. The Prime Minister approved COI's move to repayment services in 1981 and from 1984 COI began charging all its customers the full cost of the services it provided.
- 3.7 One of the major steps to prepare for repayment was to restructure the organisation. The new structure grouped together specialist divisions

with common interests and created a top management team comprising the Director General, Deputy Director General, Principal Establishment Officer, Principal Finance Officer, and the Directors of the four specialist groups - Client Services, Visual Media and Radio, Home Publicity and Overseas Publicity. The Management Group took all corporate decisions, set targets, and monitored trading results and group performance.

- 3.8 In April 1990 COI became a vote-funded executive agency and in April 1991 a trading fund under the Central Office of Information Trading Fund Order 1991. As a department, COI receives a small provision in respect of central advisory services but is expected to cover all other costs through receipts for services.
- 3.9 In June 1992 ministerial responsibility for COI was transferred from the Chancellor of the Exchequer to the Minister for the Cabinet Office who determines the overall policy and financial framework within which COI operates but does not normally become involved in day-to-day management. The Chief Executive of COI is also the Accounting Officer and is formally responsible to the Minister for the operations of the agency within the framework set out by COI's Framework Document.
- 3.10 In 2002 the Quinquennial Review of agency status chaired by the Cabinet Office concluded that COI should continue to operate for a further five years as a department (i.e. funded by parliamentary vote), an agency of the Cabinet office and a trading fund. The Review also recommended that the Regional News Network (regional offices) and News Distribution Service should be transferred to the Government Information and Communications Service (GICS) in the Cabinet Office.
- 3.11 Until 2001 when the secretariat transferred to the Cabinet Office, COI sponsored the Advisory Committee on Advertising. The Committee was established in 1940 to advise on the nomination of suitable advertising agencies for Government work and on cost-effective working methods, including ways of selecting and buying. It met regularly to agree the list of approved agencies.

4 Functions of COI

- 4.1 COI has no policy-making function; overall policy on government press and publicity issues rests with the Cabinet Office. COI also has no control over the content of government information and publicity. Although COI advises on how the government message can be most effectively conveyed, it has no role in determining what that message should be; this is the responsibility of the sponsoring department.
- 4.2 COI's function is to support central government policy objectives by advising departments on communications and producing the best, most cost-effective media solutions, either by direct provision or, increasingly, through sub-contracting to specialist advertising agencies and film

producers.

4.3 Its biggest single client has been the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for whom it provided a wide range of publicity and information services for embassies and missions overseas, and also arranged programmes and facilities in the UK for overseas visitors, television teams and press correspondents. Much of COI's overseas exhibition and display work has been undertaken on behalf of the Board of Trade/ Department of Trade and Industry. Other clients have ranged from major departments of state employing their own publicity staff and sometimes in-house production capacity to small departments, agencies and non-departmental bodies relying heavily or completely on COI for specialist publicity services. It has occasionally carried out work for public bodies outside central government.

4.4 COI's client services include:

- Regional press services (until 2001)
- Advertising campaigns, including research into campaign effectiveness
- Cinema, television and radio advertising
- Press advertising and information services
- Publications (home and overseas)
- Exhibitions (home and overseas)
- Direct marketing and promotions
- Translations
- Film and video production (e.g. for conferences and training)
- Photographs/pictures
- Information and reference services

5 Organisation and appraisal of records in COI

5.1 *Registered files*

Most COI records created before 2002 are held in paper format on registered files organised into alpha-numeric series. Under pressure to reduce record storage in the 1980s, COI took the step of microfilming files of continuing administrative value and disposing of the rest. Although there is a complete list of the files filmed, there is no record of what was destroyed but, in view of the ephemeral nature of much that was filmed, it is reasonable to assume that little, if anything, of historical value was destroyed.

5.2 Over the last five years, COI has largely succeeded in bringing up to date the regular review of files for preservation or destruction. Most files held by the central registry have been subject to a first review (i.e. appraisal for continuing administrative value five years after closure) but many files remain with business groups and have not been reviewed. Second review (i.e. appraisal for permanent preservation) has been carried out for all series up to 1985, other than those on microfilm, and

has been taken up to 1995 in the case of the DG (Director General) series.

5.3 The review of microfilmed files has proved to be too time-consuming for either COI or The National Archives to carry out on a file-by-file basis. An initial sift based on file title alone is being followed by a review of files identified as of possible historical interest from cross-links with earlier and later paper files already selected for The National Archives.

5.4 From April 2003 COI aimed to have moved entirely from paper to an electronic records management system, into which incoming mail will be scanned. In order to increase the effectiveness of the system, COI is looking to simplify its filing structure radically and to aim to dispose of all records according to schedule, without individual file review. Types of information identified by The National Archives as required for permanent preservation will be filed so as to facilitate automatic transfer; all other records will be scheduled for automatic destruction according to business needs. In general this will result in the destruction of administrative records of client projects at the same time as the corresponding financial records.

5.5 ***Other records***

In addition to papers held on registered files, COI also produces publications, moving image productions on film and video, sound recordings and still photographs.

5.6 Government publications are deposited at the copyright libraries and it is not The National Archives' policy to take them. An exception is made for annual reports because of their value in establishing context for records held by The National Archives. COI also maintained its own collection of publications. In 2000, this was given to the British Library as a collection which, because fully indexed, was more accessible to researchers than the copies already held un-indexed by the Library.

5.7 Production materials created in the course of developing publications, posters, fliers etc had accumulated from the 1970s although the corresponding files had been destroyed after two years. A one-off review of the material in 2000 found nothing worthy of preservation and the whole collection was destroyed. Materials are now scheduled for destruction at the same time as the files.

5.8 COI's collection of films has been placed with an agency for storage, for indexing and for commercial exploitation. The National Archives, the *bfi* National Film and Television Archive and the Imperial War Museum have appraised film and video productions on a regular basis for many years and have jointly selected those worthy of permanent preservation. The selected productions are held by the *bfi* National Film and Television Archive or the Imperial War Museum Film and Video Archive. The three organisations have a formal agreement with COI which

regulates the appraisal and transfer process. The agreement includes the provision that The National Archives will be informed if the agency ever wishes to destroy any of the films and will be able to reconsider them for preservation or arrange for them to be offered to another archive.

- 5.9 COI also produces sound recordings, mainly radio advertising and public information fillers. These are maintained by COI and periodically appraised for preservation at the British Library Sound Archive.
- 5.10 Following the closure of COI's in-house photographic library in 1989, and the disposal of its collection, COI contracted out its picture library. Photographs are stored by an agency which meets part of the costs by commercial exploitation of the material. No review of the collection has been carried out.

6 Application of the Acquisition Policy to COI records

- 6.1 The Acquisition Policy Statement outlines certain themes which form the basis of The National Archives' appraisal and selection decisions. These themes relate to the major policy areas of government concern (e.g. defence, health, education, control of public expenditure). The policy states The National Archives' intention to document those government functions which are of historical significance in relation to these themes. This excludes those functions which government has in common with all organisations such as staff management, training, accommodation and public relations. Records for these functions are required only in so far as they show the context in which policy work was carried out or become in themselves matters of government policy (e.g. dispersal of departmental staff to the provinces, privatisation of in-house support services).
- 6.2 Since COI does not hold responsibility for policy but exists to provide support services which are also provided by the private sector, The National Archives takes the view that
- COI's records fall largely outside the remit of the acquisition policy and do not merit permanent preservation at The National Archives
 - it is the responsibility of the sponsoring department to select publicity records relating to implementation of significant policies, whether the publicity agency employed was COI or a private company
- 6.3 The National Archives will therefore take only sufficient records to document the functions of COI and the relationship between COI and other government departments in so far as they differ from those of private sector suppliers of communications and publicity services.
- 6.4 The Acquisition Policy also states that the cost of selection and storage must be an explicit element in appraisal decisions. When COI was the mandatory supplier of publicity services and all significant publicity material could be found among COI records, review of COI files

appeared to be justified even though corresponding files might be held in departments. However since use of COI services ceased to be mandatory, the only way to ensure that all significant publicity campaigns are identified and preserved is to capture them among departmental records. As it is the responsibility of sponsoring departments to document the communications aspects of policy implementation, appraisal of COI records to provide a safety net for what departments may miss is a duplication of effort which can no longer be justified.

- 6.5 The one area of COI's work where it remains cost-effective to carry out review at COI as well as in departments is moving image production. Until departments have arrangements for the identification and appraisal of such productions which are as reliable as those for registered files, it remains advisable for The National Archives to appraise films produced for departments at COI. This does not exempt departments from seeking to bring all media within the scope of their standard review procedures but will act as a safety net for ensuring the preservation of significant film materials.
- 6.6 The National Archives also recognises, following the controversy arising from the disposal of COI's photographic library, that it should be involved in any future disposal of moving image, photographic and sound records which are not required by The National Archives but which may be of continuing interest to specialist archives.
- 6.7 The following sections indicate which records The National Archives intends to preserve in relation to:
- Management of COI
 - Client services

7 Selection of COI records

7.1 *Management*

This theme covers records created by the offices of the chief executive and deputy chief executive, and records relating to the marketing of COI's services, the overall management of client services, and to the provision of internal administrative and support services (finance, personnel, accommodation, ICT and office services).

- 7.2 The changing status of COI - from common service agency to executive agency and trading fund - reflects the overall trend within government to privatise support functions or, where they cannot be contracted out entirely, to put them on a more commercial footing. This changing approach to service delivery is documented by annual reports which provide information about how COI is organised and funded, its business performance, its staffing and financial arrangements. For the period before and beyond 2003, The National Archives will preserve a full set of published annual reports.

7.3 However COI differs from other common service agencies and from private sector companies in that its work touches on controversial areas such as the relationship between political campaigning and departmental advertising and the accuracy and timeliness of news briefings. In order to capture internal discussions on issues which may not be adequately documented by annual reports, The National Archives will preserve a full set of minutes and papers of the Chief Executive's Management Board for the period before and beyond 2003.

7.4 For the period before 2003 The National Archives will also preserve files from the office of the Director General/ Chief Executive (DG series) relating to:

- The move to trading fund status and agency status including the associated reviews of COI's organisation, staffing and role
- Relations with the Cabinet Office on issues relating to probity and to the Government Information Services

8 Client services

8.1 Files

For the period 1980-2003, The National Archives will preserve files (paper and microfilm), primarily in the DG series, relating to:

- The work of the Advisory Committee on Advertising
- COI's relationship with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office as its major client
- COI's role in publicity and communications relating to privatisation of utilities, major state occasions, and war

8.2 From 2003, The National Archives will not preserve any client service files. Records relating to specific projects will be appraised in sponsoring departments. Broader issues relating to client services will be adequately documented by annual reports and the minutes of senior management meetings.

8.3 Files which are not selected for preservation at The National Archives will be destroyed as soon as no longer required for administrative use.

8.4 Moving image production

Films and videos created prior to 2001 have already been selected. The National Archives will continue to collaborate with the *bfi* National Film and Television Archive and the Imperial War Museum in the selection of moving image productions for permanent preservation in line with The National Archives guidance *Management of Audio-visual Records*. In particular The National Archives will select for preservation:

- Public information films which relate to major campaigns of particular historical significance (e.g. AIDS awareness, energy conservation, pensions provision)

- Public information films which proved particularly effective or ineffective, as measured by COI's own research
- Departmental training films where the training is unique to the public service, has features peculiar to the public service, or gives insight into the actual conditions and views of officials formulating policy or delivering public services (e.g. training of police or immigration officers, videos of ministerial meetings)
- Films which document events, places or people not likely to have been covered by the news media
- Productions with significant technical and artistic value

8.5 Transfer of viewing copies and masters of selected productions will continue in line with the existing agreement between the COI, PRO, *bfi* National Film and Television Archive and Imperial War Museum.

8.6 COI may retain non-selected productions, subject to the Lord Chancellor's approval, until they are no longer required by the COI or its agent. When they are no longer required, COI will offer the production to The National Archives for reappraisal. Should The National Archives still not require the production for preservation at the *bfi* National Film and Television Archive or the Imperial War Museum, it will seek to find an alternative archive for rejected productions but in the event that no archive is willing to take them, the material will be destroyed.

8.7 ***Sound recordings***

COI's sound recordings are primarily public information fillers produced for radio broadcast. As it is difficult to ensure that these are identified and appraised in sponsoring departments, The National Archives and COI will continue to appraise them at COI for preservation at the National Sound Archive. Those not selected for preservation will be destroyed.

8.8 ***Photographs***

COI picture library is maintained as a resource for use by COI and other government departments. The National Archives does not preserve photographs unless they have been incorporated into departmental records or form a discrete, fully documented series. It expects that photographs which have value specifically in relation to the history of government departments, their policies and activities will be selected for preservation in the sponsoring department; the copies held by COI are regarded as duplicate and may be disposed of by presentation to a suitable archive, by sale, or by destruction. The National Archives will advise on suitable archives.

8.9 ***Publications***

The National Archives will not preserve any COI publications other than a set of annual reports. COI will continue to deposit a full set of its

publications at the copyright libraries. It is also usual for sponsoring departments to keep major publications in their own libraries and/or attach them to related registered publicity files. Copies of publications no longer required by COI will be destroyed.

9 Implementation of the policy

9.1 Implementation of the policy falls primarily on COI and The National Archives. In 2003/4 they:

- Drew up comprehensive COI disposal schedules based on the policy
- Completed review of registered files created before 2003
- Completed review and transfer of microfilmed files
- Established procedures for the transfer of electronic files scheduled for permanent preservation

9.2 The policy also has implications for other government departments. All departmental record officers will need to

- Ensure that disposal schedules do not presuppose the preservation of COI's files to document significant public information and advertising campaigns
- Check there are procedures in place to ensure press, public information and advertising records are considered alongside related policy files.

Annex A

Disposition of public records

The Acquisition Policy identifies the type of record which will be preserved at The National Archives itself. The National Archives at Kew is the primary repository for records on paper and for electronic records other than datasets. Provision of preservation and public access services for datasets is contracted out to the University of London Computer Centre (National Digital Archive of Datasets) and for moving image productions to the British Film Institute.

The Disposition Policy identifies the type of records which, although judged worthy of permanent preservation, would be more appropriately preserved by a local authority record office or specialist archive. The Public Records Act 1958 distinguishes between records which may be “deposited” (s. 4.1) and records which may be “presented” (s. 3.6) to an archive other than The National Archives.

“Deposited” records are those which are worthy of preservation at The National Archives as being of national significance but which are more appropriately held locally in one of the approved places of deposit. If no place of deposit were able or willing to preserve records of this type, The National Archives would preserve them.

“Presented” records are those which The National Archives does not regard as of national significance and would not be prepared to take into its own custody. They may be transferred to any suitable archive. They cease to be subject to the Public Records Acts as soon as they have been presented. If the receiving institution is subsequently unable to preserve them, The National Archives will assist in locating another suitable institution but, failing this, the records will be destroyed.