



Appraisal Policy

February 2017

Our Mission

The West Yorkshire Archive Service exists to preserve the past, serve the present and protect the future. We do this by collecting and looking after the unique documentary heritage of the region and by helping members of the public use and enjoy these records.

Preserving the past, serving the present, protecting the future

Our Vision

To provide a welcoming and engaging service that will inspire people to use the archives of West Yorkshire, enabling them to celebrate their identity and understand their past, present and future.

Introduction

Archival appraisal is the process of evaluating which records which have a long-term continuing value to the creating organisation and to the wider community (i.e. deciding which records should be retained as archives). Those records of no further value can be destroyed or returned to the depositor if requested.

The purpose of this policy is to facilitate informed, consistent, and transparent appraisal decisions in situations where some element of subjective judgement is inevitable. The policy sets out the professional rationale upon which appraisal decisions at WYAS are based, and provides a positive basis upon which retention decisions can be justified.

Audience

- WYAS staff responsible for collections development and collections management
- Record creators and curators within the five Metropolitan Councils of Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds and Wakefield
- Other organisations and individuals depositing archives with WYAS for preservation
- Users of WYAS collections
- Communities and individuals from the five Metropolitan Councils of Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds and Wakefield

Relationship with other Policies and Guidelines

This Archival Appraisal Policy should be read in conjunction with the WYAS Collections Policy, Cataloguing Policy and Digital Archives Policy.

Appraisal is undertaken in conjunction with available national best practice guidelines for particular record series (e.g. parish church archives). WYAS 'Category Lists' ensure consistency across the service in both appraisal and cataloguing practice.

With regard to the records of the five Metropolitan Councils of Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds and Wakefield, the service maintains a close working relationship with records and information management professionals within each Council, to ensure that corporate record-keeping systems (including electronic records management systems [EDRMS]) retention and disposal policies also support long-term requirements for archival preservation.

Archival Roles and Responsibilities

Archival appraisal is inherently value-laden and biased, since it involves making a judgement or estimation about the worthiness of certain records to be preserved as archives. This Policy seeks to minimise this inherent bias by placing the community at the centre of all archival appraisal actions carried out by WYAS.

This community effort can be summarised as:

- The responsibilities of record creators to ensure that records are created in suitable formats and with sufficient contextual metadata and documentation to ensure that authentic records can be maintained for use for as long as required.
- The responsibilities of record curators (records and information managers) to design record-keeping systems, and retention and disposal policies, which support the long-term preservation of an archival subset of records created. Record curators also liaise with record creators to ensure that records are in the best condition and format to enable long-term preservation when they reach WYAS.
- The interests of depositors and donors, who place records into the care of WYAS.
- The interests of WYAS users, who collaboratively define the current research potential of WYAS collections.
- Communities and individuals living within the five Metropolitan Districts of Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds and Wakefield, who collaboratively define both the picture of present-day West Yorkshire which we would wish WYAS collections to reflect, and the future research potential of those collections.
- The statutory and governance framework under which the service operates, which defines the purpose and objectives of WYAS.
- The responsibilities of WYAS staff in ensuring that appraisal criteria are clearly defined and understood, and effectively implemented.

Scope

The Policy covers records from all sources covered by the WYAS Collections Policy, and in all formats, including those which may be developed and used in the future. Early appraisal decisions are required with modern 'born-digital' records which might otherwise become inaccessible.

The focus of archival appraisal at WYAS is on justifying retention, not destruction. This perspective provides the basis for coping with an ever-increasing quantity of records created: a framework which accommodates digital records, streamlines techniques for

the selection of bulky paper records, and ensures consistent appraisal decisions can be made across different formats and disparate creating organisations and individuals.

Archival appraisal is not an 'evil necessity'. It is a quality control mechanism resulting in the long-term preservation of only the highest quality archives in the most cost-effective manner. The costs of the appraisal process itself can be justified through the re-use of contextual information derived from appraisal in ongoing preservation management and access provision (e.g. cataloguing).

Appraisal Strategies

As an established local authority record office in the UK, archival appraisal at WYAS has by convention taken a pragmatic line somewhere between the Jenkinsonian tradition (which contends that appraisal decisions should be taken only by record creators and be based purely on administrative need) and the appraisal arguments put forward by the American, Theodore Schellenberg, who differentiated between the primary (to the creator) and secondary (to the wider community) value of records. Secondary value may be further divided into:

- Evidential value – of how the record creating body conducted its business (context).
- Informational value – judged not on the importance of *context* but on the informational *content* and uniqueness of the records.

The current Policy, with its focus on a collaborative community effort across the records lifecycle, brings these traditions together with a more recent professional trend towards top-down, macro-appraisal techniques. Macro-appraisal encourages an organisation-wide understanding of *functions* as a guide to identifying records of value for business or archival purposes. It provides a means to make archival appraisal decisions without the need for the physical examination of each record or the 'historical perspective' provided by the passage of time.

Principles of Archival Appraisal

All archival appraisal is undertaken within the overall framework of the WYAS Collections Policy.

WYAS archival appraisal practice will now include some analysis of the functions which produced records as a pro-active first step in identifying organisational records of enduring value. This approach is particularly suited to the records of local government, Public Records creating bodies and other business organisations, such as the Church of England. It is not necessarily applicable to the personal papers of individuals and the records of family estates.

Macro-analysis will be used as an aid to:

- Identifying record series within formal record-keeping systems and organisational structures (Information Asset Registers, file plans and EDRMS) of potential archival value. Such series may include (but are not limited to) legal, fiscal, administrative and operational records.
- Developing generic 'category lists' for particular types of records (e.g. hospital records, school records, trade union records, etc.).
- Identifying areas of overlap between departments and organisations.
- Avoiding duplication in material selected for long-term preservation.
- Identifying especially vulnerable records early in the records lifecycle.

Archival appraisal of organisational records is ideally undertaken at the series level (i.e. without physically examining individual records).

Series should be weeded for duplicate material and blank documents, and for documents relating to areas of overlap with other collections and repositories as identified by the macro-analysis.

Micro-appraisal techniques which involve a physical examination of the record are usually used only in regard to 'particular instance papers' and case files, or in respect of the personal papers of families and individuals. Where micro-appraisal techniques are used, records are assessed in respect of both their evidential and informational value, and quality in terms of completeness and density of information.

Archival appraisal includes the identification of documentation or other metadata required to ensure archives remain understandable and useable in the future e.g. indexes, user manuals, technical metadata about digital records.

Appraisal may include some assessment of the physical condition and/or technical properties of the records, in order to ascertain whether it is both technically and economically viable to preserve the records as archives. If records have serious technical defects, such as being unreliable, incomplete or inaccessible, the decision may be taken to destroy them.

Where the same information is represented in different formats, consideration will be made (a) of the robustness and sustainability of each format and (b) of the accessibility of each format to WYAS users.

Wherever possible, staff undertaking archival appraisal will seek out and take into account the views of stakeholders (including record creators and curators, depositors, WYAS users, and local communities and individuals), who may have a vested interest in the appraisal decisions made.

All appraisal decisions will be documented, including an account of the basis upon which appraisal decisions were made (including disposal decisions).

Intellectual Property Rights

Records will only be selected for retention where acceptable legal and intellectual property rights, to keep and to re-use the data, can be negotiated with record creators, custodians, or depositors and donors.

Sampling

There are significant cost implications involved in keeping very large collections of case files and electronic datasets. Whilst their quantity may provide an opportunity for WYAS users to extrapolate data for statistical analysis, this does not necessarily justify the costs of retaining such records as archives.

In this situation, sampling may be considered as an appraisal option. However, appraisal decisions that call for sampling of records will only be made after careful analysis of all other options, including the costs and benefits of implementing a sampling decision. Sampling decisions will not be used where this option merely defers problems, and should be avoided where item by item decisions would be required to be made.

Sampling may be:

- Purposive – a qualitative, subjective approach which retains records relating to prominent subjects or individuals
- Random
- Systematic – selection according to a stated pattern
- Keep typical examples – to illustrate the typical type and content of the record series

Re-appraisal

WYAS will re-appraise records when there is compelling evidence that earlier appraisal decisions require review. Re-appraisal may be required:

- To ensure that collections meet current collecting and appraisal policies.
- When the technical capacity to preserve digital records is more advanced.

Disposal

Responsible disposal is an important part of ensuring that collections are well managed and sustainable. WYAS may dispose of records by:

- Returning records to the owner or depositor.
- Transferring records to a more appropriate repository – another Archive Service, Library or Museum.
- Physical destruction, including destruction as ‘confidential waste’.
- Internal disposal and re-use in a handling or education demonstration collection.

Review

This policy is issued in February 2017 and will be reviewed and updated as necessary every three years.