



## **HEI Records Management**

### **Guidance on Archival Appraisal**

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## Introduction

Archives<sup>1</sup>, by definition, like all other records, are part of the natural outgrowth of the business functions and activities of the organisation or organisations which created or received them. It is important to understand and to maintain this context and relationship as the basis for any appraisal and selection process. Appraisal remains one of the core skills of the professional archivist. Consequently, those HEIs which do not at present employ one should approach these criteria with care and look for guidance, in the final analysis, from professionally qualified archivists.

## Aim and Objectives

The aim of archival appraisal should be to identify and select records which, collectively, build a comprehensive but compact picture of the institution over time as:

- a corporate entity;
- a teaching and learning organisation;
- a research and innovation organisation;
- a contributor to economic and cultural development;
- a member of local, national and international communities;
- a community in itself.

The records selected should provide information about, and evidence of, what the institution has done and why, what it and its staff and students have achieved, and of its impact locally and in the wider world. The selection process should also facilitate the survival of records which contain unique information incidental to their main purpose or function but which, nevertheless, might have research value. This approach is not unique to HEIs but is common to all organisations and similar records have the same value in all organisations, irrespective of what they were set up to do.

In simple terms, appraisal of HEI records for permanent preservation should focus on

- *substantive* functions (i.e. Teaching, Research, Academic Award Administration);
- *substantive* elements (e.g. Strategy Development, Policy Development) of *facilitative* functions (e.g. Governance, Estate Management, Public Relations).

It should aim to answer to questions such as:

- *what* did the institution do ?
- *why* did it do it in a particular way?
- *when* and *how* did it do it and *where*?
- *who* did it employ to do it and to *whom*?
- *what* were the results of what it did?

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<sup>1</sup> In this context 'archives' means official records of the institution which are thought worthy of continuing preservation because of the value of the information they contain or the evidence they provide about the business of the institution which created them.

- *how* successful was it and *what* impact did it have?
- *what* external relationships did it have and what was its impact on the various communities in which it worked?

## Guiding Principles

- Records should be identified as archives at the earliest possible stage in the record life cycle. In line of business electronic systems, this may need to be at system design stage.
- Archival retention decisions should be applied at the series<sup>2</sup> level. Unstructured series (e.g. correspondence) have traditionally been appraised piece by piece using the same criteria which are applied at the series level when dealing with more structured records. However, the sheer volume of records generated by modern organisations and the transient nature of digital records, combined with a shortage of suitably qualified professionals, has led prominent archivists to propose that records should first be selected, by applying a process of macro-appraisal, on the basis of the creating function's importance to the organisation (the more important the function, the more important the records created in carrying it out). This selection can then be refined over time, once the records have survived. The HEI Business Classification Scheme and the HEI Records Retention Schedule provide a framework for doing this because they identify the core business functions of an institution and its key governance and support functions and provide pointers to those activities which contribute to the effective development and management of the institution.
- Records of continuing value to the ongoing business of the institution will almost certainly have the greatest potential archival value.
- Research trends are a poor guide to the selection of records as archives because of the time lag between identifying a research need and identifying and accessioning records to meet that need. Archivists should encourage researchers to allow the available sources to drive their research. A single research interest often produces "single use" archives. Nevertheless, archivists should maintain close contact with the research community for advice on the likely research value of particular groups of records.
- Records from the upper part of the business value chain (substantive function and activity) are more likely to meet archival criteria than those (transaction records) from the bottom.
- Transaction records will only be of value if aggregated or analysed.
- Records which identify individual people will need to be anonymised (and probably aggregated) to make them usable in the short term without breaching Data Protection legislation.
- Realistic assessment of potential use should also influence selection and the potential benefit which will accrue should clearly justify the cost of preservation.
- Institutions should use these selection criteria to re-evaluate existing archive holdings. Past accession is no guide to continuing archival value.

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<sup>2</sup> A record series is the basic unit for organising and controlling records. It is a group of records kept together (either physically or intellectually) because they relate to a particular subject or function, result from the same activity, document a specific type of transaction, take a particular physical form or have some other relationship arising out of their creation, receipt, maintenance or use.

The following table applies these suggested criteria to some of the functions in the HEI Business Classification Scheme. It is intended to illustrate the approach rather than to provide a definitive or exhaustive list.

## FUNCTION

## QUESTION

### Teaching & Learning

**What** did the institution decide to teach and **why**?  
**What** were the results of what it did?  
**How** were teaching programmes designed and developed?  
**How** was teaching carried out?  
**How** was learning supported?  
**How** successful was the teaching?  
**How** were students selected (*the policy and the process*)?  
**How** were students assessed (*the policy and the process*) and **how** successful were they?  
**Where** was teaching done?

### Research

**What** areas of research did the institution support and sponsor and **why**?  
**What** were the results of that research?  
**How** was the research carried out?  
**How** was the research exploited?  
**Who** carried out the research?  
**Who** funded it and **how**?  
**When** was the research carried out?

### Academic Administration

**How** were students recruited, admitted and controlled?  
**How** was students' academic performance assessed?  
**What** awards were made, and to whom?  
**How** were awards conferred?  
**What** tuition fees were charged?

### Student Support Services

**What** facilities and resources were provided for students?  
**How** were students counselled, advised and accommodated?  
**How** did students formally (and informally) organise themselves?

## FUNCTION

## QUESTION

### Corporate Management

**Why** and **when** was the institution established?

**Why** was it located where it is?

**Who** were the main players in the life and development of the institution?

**What** were the institution's strategic goals?

**What** did it do to achieve those goals?

**What** policies did it put in place and **why**?

**How** was policy developed (the process) and **why**? **How** was it communicated and implemented?

**What** were the institution's management and organisational structures and **how** did they evolve?

**Who** was responsible for the governance of the institution and **how** was it carried out?

**What** part did academic staff and students play in the development and management of the institution?

### Corporate Resources

**What** premises did the institution own and/or use, and on what terms?

**What** equipment did the institution own and/or use and **why** was it purchased or otherwise acquired?

**What** facilities and resources were provided for staff?

**How** was the institution funded for both teaching and research?

**How**, in broad terms, was the money spent?

**How** were investment decisions made and by whom?

**How** were academic and other staff selected, managed and rewarded?

**Who** were its staff (in general and in particular where significant) and **what** impact did they have on the success of the institution?

## FUNCTION

## QUESTION

### Corporate Relations

**What** impact did the institution have in its local community?

**What** impact did the institution have in the national and international HE community?

**What** special events occurred? **What** was their impact?

**How** did the institution promote itself to prospective staff and students, and in general? **How** successful was this?

**How** important were successful academic staff in the public perception of the institution?

**What** formal relationships were established with the student body and **what** structures were in place for managing that relationship?

**What** part did students play in managing and developing the institution?

**What** formal relationships were established with alumni and **what** structures were in place for managing that relationship?

More information about appraisal and identification of records as archives and examples of HEI archival selection policies and arrangement can be found by following the links below (accessed on 31st January 2007).

- **The National Archives**  
[Appraisal Policy](#)
- **University of Edinburgh**  
Edinburgh University Archives [Archival Selection Criteria](#)
- **Oxford University**  
Oxford University Archives [Selection Policy](#) (November 2003)