

Edinburgh University Archives

Archival Selection Criteria

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General Background

This document provides some basic guidance on how to identify records holding potential archival value. By applying some basic archival selection criteria, you should be able to define the archive still more clearly, either by reducing or adding to your list of what may need to be preserved permanently as the unique archives of the University.

This is an augmented version of the original Archival Selection Criteria document, with specific additional guidance for the record creator who is working in a web-based environment.

Aims

Probably less than five per cent of records generated by the University need to be preserved permanently as archives. The archival process therefore aims to preserve only a small selection of records (regardless of format/medium). These will reflect and provide the essential evidence of the University's most significant functions and activities, and will also serve legitimate research needs either on the part of the University itself or the wider academic and public user community. The surviving archives should show what the University has done and why, how it was organised and operated, and its effect on the wider community.

Underlying Themes

The main themes to bear in mind when determining archival value are underlined in bold text below. The themes are closely related to the University's main functions, but when making recommendations for archival selection try to think beyond your own functional area. It could be for example that an academic unit will retain the original layout drawings for building alterations that will explain a new development more clearly than the set held by the University's drawing office. It is better therefore to have some awareness of all the main themes, and not just those that relate most closely to your own area of work.

Remember also that archives created as part of routine administration can contain information that can be used profitably by researchers for a wide range of purposes. For example, matriculation records created as part of normal business practice could be used by a social scientist to analyse students' social backgrounds, so it is always important to consider the potential informational value of the records for research purposes.

Origins Growth and Organisation

This relates not only to the University as a whole but also to its constituent parts, so is not merely concerned with older official documentation such as ancient charters. Records showing how an amalgamation with another institution came about or how a new school, centre, institute or student service arose can be especially valuable. Records describing or depicting how the university or parts thereof were organised and operated within overall structures are also useful, as well as any changes over time. Record types can include administrative files, working group minutes, organisation charts and formal documents under seal such as signed agreements.

Policies Planning and Decisions

Records that demonstrate how major policies and strategic plans for the University's teaching, research and supporting services were formulated and developed, the debate and decision making processes, and the communications amongst the governing elements in the university often form the essential framework of a university archive. Researchers frequently begin their research by consulting main records series such as minutes, meeting papers and annual reports of main governing bodies and committees such as those generated by the University Court, Senate, Colleges and Schools and their main sub-groups, but often need to pursue more detailed information held amongst the key administrative files, minutes and other documentation generated by senior management teams.

Retention schedules for committees will determine the archival status of the records generated. If they are earmarked for permanent retention, then all agenda, minutes and relevant papers, along with documentation about the context and remit of the committee must be retained.

Teaching

Records that provide a summarised view of what subjects were taught, how they were taught and assessed, together with records that show how the curriculum developed are all valuable. Record types might include course handbooks, lists of courses offered and syllabi, examination and other regulations, departmental minutes and minutes of boards of studies.

Research

The published results of research normally reveal little about the research processes involved in conceptualising and following particular research lines. At the very least there needs to be a minimum record of what research is being carried out so records that reveal project proposals, grants awarded, annual progress and final reports should be retained. Any regular summary descriptions of current research in progress are also useful, especially if the research does not have designated financial support. Information relating to patents registration and commercial exploitation of research should be kept, and records summarising the research assessment exercise, including the monitoring and review processes also have archival importance.

Beyond this, research data itself may also need to be retained or referred to specialist data archives, especially data created by projects of major national or international significance and in those instances where the data is crucial to substantiating research results. The extent of public interest and controversy in particular areas of research, such as genetics, is also a good indicator of likely archival value as is the professional standing of the principal researcher and research teams. The terms and conditions of external sponsors and the extent to which external interests own and preserve the resultant data will also influence archival selection decisions. Research record types can be very wide ranging. Administrative material will normally be held in file formats, but many other types of recording media may be held, including photographs, samples and objects, some of which may need to be referred to preservation specialists.

Students and Staff

The main undergraduate student record, registers and statistical information required for archives are generated centrally. Other information that may be held at more local levels mainly by academic units includes; prizes and awards, outstanding performances, class photographs and lists, biographical summaries of graduates and postgraduates, staff/student liaison groups, departmental student statistics, and social/clubs/societies material. All such material helps build a comprehensive but compact picture of student life. Record types

include prize lists, year books, class registers and lists, student handbooks, event programmes and alumni newsletters.

Material that reflects how the university manages the relationships with its staff may have archival importance. Staff handbooks and manuals, codes of conduct and practice, collated employee statistics and staff survey results, staff directories and industrial relations information can all help towards understanding how staff policies evolved and were implemented. Matters relating to significant/new appointments or establishment of Chairs should also be retained. Record types can include printed diaries, directories and instructions, annual reports, and administrative files of senior officers.

Finance and Physical Resources

The management and deployment of the University's finances generate very large amounts of data, but relatively few records need to be retained permanently, especially at departmental level. The controversial nature of Higher Education funding does however guarantee a ready research interest. Apart from the annual financial report, records summarising acquisition of funds (including external fund-raising activities), investment management, the authorised annual budget and year end accounts have archival value. Endowment information/conditions are also useful. Additionally, lists/indexes of accounts and the general ledger should be retained as should main audit reports. Record types can include reports, accounts ledgers (usually held as computer generated microfiche), and key correspondence files of senior officers.

The physical environments in which the University operates reflects the educational mission of the University, and can offer great insight into how it perceived itself at different times as well as how it expanded to cope with growing demand. Campus plans, property registers of buildings owned, rented or acquired, space planning information in summary, and consolidated buildings insurance information can all help paint an overall picture of the University's physical presence over time. Photographs of buildings during both construction and working life are valuable and the main floor plans, (especially if layout/equipment information is given) and elevations also need to be retained. Record types can include ground plans, building plans, models, photographs and correspondence files of senior officers.

The University and the Wider Community

The University has a very wide range of contacts in the local, national and international arenas, including government departments, other universities, local councils and schools and its own alumni. Unpublished information showing how the university relates to other HEI's, how it markets itself, how it manages its public relations and its role in the local community can all be of value, as can summaries of fundraising and alumni initiatives. Record types might include market research reports and analyses, promotional designs and materials, official press releases and clippings, minutes of joint ventures with other bodies, alumni statistics, events and newsletters, and special events photographs.

Specific Guidance

Assessing archival value is rarely straightforward but the following guidance may help the process. For further help and advice please contact us at is-crc@ed.ac.uk to be put in contact with someone to assist you.

By their nature archives are a unique record of past activity. Unless otherwise advised only the final/principal/main copy of an archival document is required. The records custodian or designated responsible officer for each major committee/working group likely to have archival

value must take responsibility for ensuring the completeness and security of the archival record, and ensuring its eventual transfer to archival storage. Circulation copies of, for example, agendas and supporting papers are not required.

- The records of minor committees or working groups whose main findings/reports are relayed to and engrossed in the records of policy making committees or officers at a higher point in the administrative hierarchy are not required.
- Check with relevant support group offices as to those records they intend to transfer to archives. For example, Edinburgh Research Innovation and Enterprise may retain and transfer copies of project proposals and other documentation, thus reducing or even eliminating the need to transfer such material to archives from academic units.
- Avoid the 'cherry-picking' approach to archival selection. To aid their understanding of archival material researchers need to know the context in which it was created, so even if an unstructured administrative file of correspondence contains only a few archivally important documents, retaining the entire file may be the best course of action.
- In most cases archival retention decisions should be made at series level, for example, a series of departmental management team minutes, and not individual minutes of particular meetings.
- Records of the most substantive functions and activities dealing with information on for example, - organisational structure, management of business, operational policy and precedent, are usually more valuable than those that deal with the implementation of established policy and practice, (transactional material) such as paid invoices.
- Records that have long-term value to the University as part of its ongoing business administration often have high potential as archives.
- Try to apply retention decisions as soon as possible after records are created or received, - this is especially important for electronic recording media which require special measures to be in place for long term preservation.
- Any 'historical' signed/designated final minutes of significant major committees or working groups that may still be held by records creators or administrators must be referred to the University Archivist, as should any other significant 'principal/final copy' item.
- Please take particular care regarding material generated by teaching units as this is one of the weakest areas of coverage in the existing archive.
- Retention decisions for the majority of records will be governed by the University's retention schedules but in those instances where older (fifty plus years) records are uncovered, please contact the University Archivist even if the schedule indicates destruction. Older records whose modern equivalent is not required for archives may nevertheless retain some archival value, particularly if they constitute the only surviving contemporary evidence of a significant function or activity.

Guidance for creators of web content

The retention period for web content should be determined at the time of creation. In the following list of record types, specific comments, relating to identifying web content with archival value, are given and denoted by the graphic on the right.



Alphabetical Listing of Main Records Groups with Potential Archival Value

The following list provides a note of records groups, series and types which are likely to hold archival value. The list is not comprehensive and is unavoidably general in nature. It should be used alongside and not instead of the guidance in the preceding sections and covers records in all types of recording media. For further advice and guidance, please contact us at is-crc@ed.ac.uk

Accounting and Financial Records

- Annual financial report
- Audit reports and summary actions
- Capital ledgers
- Endowments: reports, summaries, conditions
- General ledger
- Investments and disposal of assets
- Pension funds ledgers
- Year end accounts



If you are putting on the web anything that can be considered a successor to any of the above, it will likely have archival value.

Committees, Meetings, Groups etc.

(includes General Council, Court, Senatus, Central Management Group, Principal Committees, Colleges, Schools, Boards of Studies, Sub-units Centres and Institutes, Support Groups and Planning Units)

- Agendas and supporting papers including draft minutes
- Minutes/minute books signed and unsigned
- Any other directly related records series e.g. annual reports, terms of reference, standing orders



As the main University committees increasingly make their minutes, agenda and papers available online, it is crucial that status of the web version is identified.

Correspondence Files

- Central filing (University Secretary's office)
- Key senior officers' and management teams' files, (policies, planning, developments)



Unlikely to appear on the web but proper procedures for the management of email should be followed.

Legal/Regulatory

- Codes of Practice
- Charter, Ordinances, Trust Foundations etc.
- External review reports
- Formal legal opinion/advice
- Formal agreements, contracts and documents under seal
- Insurance, Health and Safety, Environmental audits/reviews and actions
- Legally based directives/orders
- Legal precedents
- The University's role in HE sector legislation development



While formal signed agreements and similar high-level legal documents will (at least in the short to medium term) have a non-digital golden copy, everything else needs to be considered.

Maps Plans and Properties

- Buildings plans - architectural including site plans floor layouts, elevations
- Campus/space maps and plans, models
- Major projects policy planning and management files
- Photographs (*see under Photographs below*)
- Property registers and property acquired and Title Deeds



The 'public face' of most major projects is frequently now online as are campus guides.

Personal Papers

- Papers and files owned by University staff and alumni



Personal webpages created by (in particular) academic and research staff may be worthy of permanent retention as they may reflect wider collaborative and research interests.

Personal/Staffing Records

- Appointments to Chairs and senior positions (matters relating to)
- Codes of Conduct and Practice
- Employee Relations – industrial, collated statistics and survey results
- Honours lists
- Organisation charts
- Pay reviews/reward schemes
- Staff handbooks and manuals
- Staffing structures and reviews etc.



Local intranet sites in particular may be the main means of communicating with staff, and may contain the main procedural, guidance and similar documents.

Photographs

- University staff
- Students (groups) /
- Buildings
- Celebrations, events etc.



Special attention should be paid to photographs used to illustrate web pages. Digital images have specific preservation needs. It may be preferable to archive the images separately and cross-reference.

Printed Matter & Publications

- Departmental publications (2 copies)
- General publicity/promotional materials including designs, newsletters, posters, events programmes, menus etc
- Newspaper cuttings
- Occasional papers – research in progress
- Official press releases
- Prospecti and Calendar
- Student recruitment campaigns/materials



Any publications which no longer have a paper version circulated are potentially archival. Check with University Archives if in any doubt.

Registers/Directories

- Awards, endowments, research staff, property students, alumni, honorary graduates
- Visitors books



Any registers/directories which no longer have a paper version circulated are potentially archival. Check with University Archives if in any doubt.

Research and Research Support

- Final reports
- Grant proposals and awards
- Patents applications and information
- Related companies annual reports
- Research Assessment reports
- Research data
- Sealed and official documents, agreements



Research data which is delivered all (or in part) over the web may have complex underlying data structures and require specialist intervention. Creators of web pages which provide a context or gateway to such data should be assessed in conjunction with the dataset itself.

Schools and Academic sub-units (General)

- Chairs – files relating to
- Course handbooks/lists/syllabuses
- Entry qualifications and guidelines
- Open Days, major conferences, special events
- Research projects
- Taught course assessments – final reviews
- Teaching quality review/reports



Departmental and similar web pages will often provide more specific detail on academic work within the University. Try and think about the relationship between this and what is given at College level, to avoid unnecessary duplication in what is designated as archival.

Special Events, Lectures, Occasions, Memorials

- Ceremonies including installations, openings, graduations (including videos and photographs) (groups) and programmes
- Honorary Degrees citations and correspondence
- Inaugural Lectures



Records of such events are nearly always archival. See guidance on photographs (above). Moving media also has specific preservation needs.

Students' Records

- Biographical summaries
- Class lists and registers including postgraduates
- Photographs (student groups)
- Prizes and degree awards lists (recipients)
- Registry records (including printed degree examination papers)
- Student publications including handbooks
- Staff/student committees and groups
- Statistics
- Student associations, clubs and societies
- Student/alumni newsletters and events
- Year books



The retention requirements for centrally-held student records are being considered as part of the EUCLID project. Anything further needs to be considered on its own merits.

Surveys

- Market research analyses
- Quality audit reports
- University policies and initiatives, - collated results

