

Collections Information Policy

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Amendment Suggestion

If you have suggested amendments please make them to
NRS Archive Strategy and Liaison team

1. Purpose

1.1 This policy has been approved by the Keeper of the Records of Scotland (the Keeper). It supports that part of the National Records of Scotland's (NRS) mission statement that, "We collect, preserve and produce information about Scotland's people and history, and make it available to inform present and future generations."

2. Scope

2.1 The policy sets out how NRS seeks to provide and maintain intellectual access to archive holdings for staff and users for the purposes of research and management.

2.2 This policy covers all of the records in whatever format under the authority of The Director of Information and Record Services. It encompasses the work of the staff of NRS as well as any volunteers under their direction. It does not cover records created by the statutory registration of births, marriages and deaths, nor the population censuses.

2.3 Although the great majority of NRS finding aids are available online, it is the central objective of this policy that, subject to reservations set out in section 8 below, all our finding aids should eventually be made available online. This is in line with NRS strategic priority to deliver services digitally by default.

3. Background

3.1 The Keeper of the Records of Scotland has responsibility for records that go back to the twelfth century. NRS and its predecessor bodies began actively taking records from other government bodies into General Register House in the mid-1780s. Inevitably, since then various different standards have been employed for listing and indexing the records in order to make them publicly accessible.

3.2 A comprehensive, modern catalogue standard was first set out in 1986. This was paralleled by a separate standard for computer listing, initially for government records on the STAIRS application (from 1985) and then for government and private records on STATUS (from 1991).

3.3 With the introduction of the CALM cataloguing system in 2002, NRS introduced a unified cataloguing standard, based on ISAD(G), for all analogues records. A retro conversion project ran until 2003 which saw the bulk of legacy manuscript and typed catalogues converted into digital form. The content of the CALM catalogue was then made available through the NAS Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC), in our search rooms and via the website.

3.4 There were a small number of older catalogues, with little conformity to ISAD(G), which proved difficult to convert. These remained paper based and their conversion and re-cataloguing is ongoing.

3.5 In pursuit of building a comprehensive online catalogue, we accepted some imperfections from the original paper finding aids, while fully committed to removing defects and mistakes later. Continuous improvement to the catalogue is ongoing.

4. Accessioning Information

4.1 All accessions, analogue and digital, are documented in the CALM Accessions module within one week of receipt. Any associated correspondence or supplementary information concerning ownership or access conditions is to be retained in the appropriate collections management file within the NRS Electronic Document Management system.

4.2 All born digital records deposited at NRS are managed at accession level. This simple arrangement allows for the delivery of digital archiving and management procedures.

4.2 Temporary Deposits (TDs) are records that do not belong to NRS but are brought here on a short-term basis. This is normally for public inspection, assessment before transfer to an archive, digitisation or exhibition. TDs are administered by the staff of the national Register of Archives for Scotland (NRAS), within NRS Records and Archives Engagement Branch. The NRAS maintains a permanent record of each TD, showing ownership, names of users consulting it, and the dates of arrival and return. All TDs are separately stored and bear special labelling to distinguish them immediately from the other NRS holdings. TD information is not recorded on CALM.

5. Cataloguing Information

5.1 In the work of cataloguing its archive holdings, NRS adhered to its in-house cataloguing standard which follows ISAD (G) and is implemented through the electronic cataloguing application, CALM.

5.2 On joining a cataloguing team, staff familiarise themselves with the manual and procedures. Cataloguing is subject to checking by line managers.

5.3 The CALM database is subject to quarterly quality checking on behalf of users to identify double numbering, blank fields and other errors that are not readily identifiable by individual cataloguers. This task is coordinated by staff in Archive Depositor Liaison Branch.

5.4 NRS aims to catalogue all the archive collections to either file or item level. In practice, this means that an individual record entry in our catalogue might be a volume, a bundle of papers, a file or a single sheet of paper.

5.5 The aim of cataloguing is to provide a researcher with the best reasonable means of locating the information they are seeking. It should also, by implication, suggest to researcher where not to look.

5.6 The catalogue further provides a level of security for the records as the catalogue provides intellectual control of the collection and will also, more often than not, record the presence of particularly noteworthy documents.

6. Preservation and Conservation

6.1 All new accessions are assessed for conservation issues on receipt or shortly after, and collection care programmes are in place to ensure continual monitoring of the condition of NRS holdings. Although the storage environment is known, stable and managed, conservation knowledge about collections that predate this period is not comprehensive.

6.2 Ongoing cataloguing, surveys and collection audits all identify conservation issues and inform programmes of work. Where records are found to be unsuitable for public inspection because of their physical conditions, this will be noted in the catalogue. Normally it will state that the records are 'closed', with a comment that this is due to conservation issues.

6.3 Every effort is made to keep the catalogues up- to date but it can happen at the point of production, or when surrogacy is requested, that records will be found to be unfit and so subject to restriction or temporary withdrawal from access. In these situations, staff will maintain dialogue with the reader and will try to facilitate access to such records where possible, whether by supervised access or by seeing whether suitable repairs may be expedited.

6.4 Conservation resources are costly and finite, however, and the long term preservation of the records must be paramount. Consequently there will be occasions when access is not possible and has to be refused.

6.5 Similar to our analogue collections, when born digital records are transferred to NRS and ingested into the NRS Digital Repository, records are analysed and collections information is recorded. This collections information is used to ensure the integrity of the digital records over time, to identify preservation risks and to plan for preservation actions.

6.6 Ahead of transfer, depositors are expected to submit accompanying content metadata in a 'manifest' file, to support preservation and access. Using this manifest, and archiving tools such as DROID, each digital transfer is taken through a set of standardised processes, which address security, format classification and completeness. Further information on these processes can be found in our [Depositor Guidance](#).

6.7 Content and technical metadata derived from these processes is essential to the collections' long-term management. This metadata is collated and stored within two logs:

- NRS Accessions Management Checklist- a digital accessioning process log
- Digital Repository Box List – a detailed object-by-object inventory of what is included in each digital accession. This includes file format description (with at

risk formats flagged), closure status and MD5 checksum (used for integrity checking).

6.8 This metadata is saved on our corporate eRDM and separate secure shared drive. In the absence of formal cataloguing of digital records at NRS, these documents enable better searching of content, and identification of preservation risk.

6.9 Another significant support to digital collections information is the [NRS Web Archive](#). As an open, online collection, the web archive provides a critical, time-specific contextual record on the evolution of modern Scotland. This will inform future collections information management, and act as a 'finding aid' for users. Information relating to websites in the web archive, provided by our depositors as part of our permissions process, will in time, be appropriately catalogued, to enable greater insight on this collection.

6.10 The forthcoming NRS Digital Archiving Initiative will further develop and improve these practices, as we aim for effective, scalable, and sustainable digital archiving capability in the years ahead.

7. Physical Security issues

7.1 Almost all archive records are unique. Some are also of outstanding cultural or financial value. NRS operate a programme to digitise the most popular records to provide surrogates and thereby aid their preservation. This extends to records identified as being of unusual value, where there is perceived to be a risk of theft or damage. The catalogue will show when researchers are expected to use surrogates. The underlying assumption is that, where a digital or other surrogate exists, access to the original records will be given only in exceptional circumstances.

8. Freedom of Information, Data Protection, Environmental Information and Public Access

8.1 In its cataloguing work, NRS complies with its obligations under information rights legislation, including the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), Data Protection Act 2018, Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 (FOISA), Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA), and Environmental Information (Scotland) Regulations 2004 (EIRs).

8.2 Data protection legislation applies to personal information of living individuals contained in all of the records transferred to NRS, including privately owned collections. Freedom of information legislation applies only to records transferred to NRS by public authorities and to records owned by the Keeper, which include archives gifted by or purchased from private owners. Freedom of information legislation does not, however, apply to records which remain in private ownership.

8.3 The depositing body usually remains the controller of any personal information contained in records transferred to NRS, although there may be some

exceptions. The Keeper may also assume the role of controller where the depositing body is defunct or an owner cannot be identified.

8.4 Archived public records at NRS are opened to public access as soon as possible, subject to any closures or exemptions applied by the depositing bodies (where they remain the data controllers) under appropriate regulations. Where records contain sensitive personal data, prohibitions on disclosure under the UK GDPR will override the right of access provided by FOISA.

8.5 NRS staff complete mandatory Scottish Government training in data protection. This informs their cataloguing work and they take care to ensure that sensitive personal data is not unfairly and unlawfully made available, whether in the catalogue itself or by a failure to identify records containing such information during the listing process. Where we anticipate that an accession of uncatalogued records is likely to contain significant quantities of sensitive data, this will be taken into account at the catalogue planning stage.

8.6 Privately owned records may also be subject to specific access conditions by agreement with the owners.

8.7 Where a public record in NRS is closed this will be clearly stated in the catalogue, usually along with the reason for the closure, details of any exemptions that apply, and the date at which the record will be opened. The reason for closure will be expressed without revealing personal or other information. The public can request access to closed public records, and all requests are dealt with under the appropriate information rights legislation.

9. Intellectual Property Rights (IPR)

9.1 NRS adheres to copyright legislation. Where necessary and appropriate, the NRS Online Public Access catalogues will identify IPR residing in a collection, with an indication of the rights owner.

10. Online Public Access Catalogues (OPAC)

10.1 There are two types of OPAC in NRS, the in-house versions for NRS and NRAS which can be viewed in the Historical and Legal Search rooms, and the online versions.

10.2 The in-house versions include some sensitive personal data about living individuals and may be viewed only after registered researchers have signed an undertaking recognising their obligations under Data protection legislation. The online versions do not contain sensitive personal data about living individuals.

10.3 The in-house version of the NRAS catalogue includes lists of papers that private owners do not wish to be made available online.

10.4 The data for both OPACs is drawn from the CALM application and is updated monthly.

10.5 The overwhelming majority of NRS catalogues are in electronic form but as noted above, a few still remain paper-based. Cataloguing teams maintain a list identifying paper catalogues not currently on OPAC, as well as record series where there is cataloguing work in progress. This is available on demand.

11. Cataloguing Information Plan

11.1 NRS maintains a cataloguing information plan that is revised annually by the cataloguing teams and the Deputy Keeper.

11.2 This plan sets out the cataloguing plans and priorities for the year ahead, normally dominated by incoming business. In addition to the year ahead priorities, the plan also sets out the medium and longer term cataloguing priorities which reflect the ongoing work of upgrading older catalogues and reducing the backlog of uncatalogued records.

11.3 Decisions on assigning priorities are currently taken by the team leads in cataloguing teams, the Head of Archive Depositor Liaison, the Head of Records and Archives Engagement in consultation with the Deputy Keeper, taking into consideration the significance of the material, perceived public or other demand, and availability of suitably qualified catalogues.

11.4 Future cataloguing prioritisation will be informed by the ongoing LOGJAM project which will identify, quantify and help prioritise NRS cataloguing backlog.

12. Cataloguing Upgrades

12.1 Demand on staff resources to deal with regular transfer of records from stakeholders means that upgrading or improving catalogues is only done where necessary. This includes:

- where existing catalogue description is misleading
- the discovery of significant material not properly identified when first catalogued
- where there is insufficient information to interpret correctly
- where revision of catalogue would benefit exhibition or other NRS publicity work
- where revision of catalogue would facilitate digitisation and access through scotlandspeople

13. Backlogs and cataloguing priorities

13.1 NRS catalogues 95% of new accessions within 12 months of transfer to the archive and endeavours to list the remainder as soon as possible thereafter.

13.2 There are however quantities of records within NRS' holdings which are either only partially catalogued or completely uncatalogued. In some instances this backlog of legacy collections is very long standing.

13.3 NRS is currently undertaking a review of our existing backlog using the LOGJAM methodology. This will provide a robust quantification and prioritisation of the cataloguing backlog and will be used to inform future collection information plans.

14. De-accessioning

14.1 De-accessioning of archive materials forms part of NRS collection management practice. Generally however NRS does not normally de-accession records which have been brought in from depositors, however there are exceptions to this position.

14.2 NRS would normally expect a depositor to have identified and removed any material not required for permanent preservation prior to transfer to NRS, and in line with that depositor's retention schedule. However de-accessioning will be utilised where permission has been given by depositors to destroy duplicate or other unimportant material that it was impracticable to sift out before receipt. In cases where such work is significant, NRS reserves the right to cover its costs by negotiating funding from the depositor.

14.3 NRS may de-accession where a review of the administrative or historical value of all or part of a record series indicates there is no longer a case for retaining or collecting it, or it is no longer compatible with NRS Collection Development Policy. Reviews of this type will involve the depositor of the record series and, where appropriate, experts and users in the field covered by the records.

14.4 De-accessioning will be appropriate where owners of privately deposited collections require the return or transfer of records to another body. It may be appropriate to continue to display the catalogue in the NRS system, with suitable alterations to represent the changed status and location.

14.5 De-accessioning supports the transfer of records, primarily of local interest, which were accessioned by NRS at a time when a suitable local archive didn't exist, but now does.

14.6 Deaccessioning can be used where the physical condition of the record makes it more appropriate to make and preserve a surrogate rather than continued preservation of the original. These are highly rare occurrences.

15. Charge and Superintendence

15.1 Where it is appropriate NRS can arrange for records of primarily local interest to be transferred to a local authority or other archive under the Charge and Superintendence of the Keeper.

15.2 This process is governed by the Policy on the Transfer of Records of Local Interest to Local Custody and formal agreement between the Keeper, any owner of the records, and the receiving archive.

15.3 The records remain the ultimate responsibility of the Keeper and the NRS catalogue will continue to display associated catalogue entries with suitable alterations to represent the changed status and location.

16. Temporary Deposit of records

16.1 As part of its services to researchers, the NRAS manages the administration of historical papers deposited temporarily by private owners for consultation in the Historical Search Room, GRH.

16.2 The service supports access to private collections for researchers of all types (academics, local historians, genealogists) which might otherwise be impossible as owners cannot provide secure access on their own premises.

16.3 The NRAS team record the temporary deposit of records in the NRAS Administration database. This details the references, description, quantity, depositor information, date of receipt and return. The team maintain a paper based log which also records this management information

16.4 Deposits are expected to be short term, that is usually a maximum of three months. Exceptionally, however, longer periods of temporary deposit are negotiated between NRS, researchers and the owner.

16.5 An annual audit of the temporary deposit data takes place during collection audit periods.

17. Temporary retransmission of records

17.1 NRS provides a service which arranges the temporary retransmission of file and item level records to depositing bodies, where the body has an administrative or other bona fide need to inspect the record in-house or over an ongoing period.

17.2 For public records this is done under s5(3) of the Public records (Scotland) Act, 1937

17.3 The Retransmissions Unit records the order for the record, oversees its outward journey, issues reminders to encourage returns and records the return.

17.4 Retransmissions are expected to be short-term, that is a maximum of six months. Exceptionally, however, longer periods of temporary retransmission are negotiated between NRS and the depositing authority.

17.5 An annual audit of retransmissions data is undertaken.

18. Collections Management Information

18.1 A number of systems and applications are employed by NRS to store collections management information. CALM is the primary source of information

pertaining to the intellectual management of the collections, including accessions, conservation, appraisal and cataloguing. The Records Location System is the source of information relating to the physical management of the collection. This supports the Electronic Ordering system which documents collection movement around the estate.

18.2 In addition to the information held in the accession and catalogue modules of CALM, a body of information is maintained in collection-specific management files. These normally include any formal agreements with depositors or donors, information about closures, access restrictions or conditions, details and explanations of record content or function, cataloguing work and any other significant information concerning the collection. Staff are expected to keep these files up to date.

19. Catalogues of Records held elsewhere.

19.1 The majority of entries in the NRS catalogues concern records held by NRS. A significant proportion of the catalogue however comprises records not held by NRS.

19.2 Records surveyed by the National Register of Archives for Scotland (NRAS) which are held privately, or private records held by local authority or other archives appear in NRS catalogues. This material is clearly identified as such. As noted above, there are separate NRAS in-house and online catalogues.

19.3 Sometimes records pass from NRS to other archives, either on Charge and superintendence terms, or as a transfer at the request of the original depositor or owner. In these cases, particularly where the records had been in NRS for many years, it may be appropriate to continue to keep the original catalogues in the public domain, while clearly showing that the actual locations and custody of the records have changed.

20. Collections Audit

20.1 NRS archive staff devote two weeks each year, currently one week in February and one in September, to conduct a collections audit, a programme of examining selected collections or collection services. This may be to check the collection integrity, preservation status or other condition.

20.2 A collection audit report will normally be drawn up recording the results of the exercise and lodged with other collection management information.

20.3 Where appropriate, findings will be reported to the NRS Audit and Risk committee.