

Executive Summary

This options paper examines the part that The National Archives might play in the development of a national strategy for the archives of science and technology, principally those outside the scope of the Public Records Act 1958. It arises from concerns expressed that modern science and technology was not being adequately represented in the archival record. From autumn 2014 to spring 2016 discussions and investigations were held with a wide range of interested parties and this paper considers the various issues at stake, gives the historical context within which these issues have come to a head, sets out the findings of our investigations, analyses the particular challenges identified, and makes initial recommendations.

In the course of our investigations, it became evident that the findings could be seen to have three dimensions, relating to the needs to:

1. Improve access to and exploitation of existing sources.
2. Improve archival capture of contemporary scientific records.
3. Ensure long-term constituency infrastructure to ensure sustainability.

This three-fold schema was adopted to structure the discussion of the Findings in section 4 of the report and the recommendations arising (sections 5 and 6). It should be noted that much stress is placed on the need for collaboration and partnerships, within and outside TNA, both in the consideration and in any implementation of the recommendations.

Summary of recommendations

Improving access to and exploitation of existing sources

- 1) It is recommended that TNA consider appointing a Records Specialist in the Advice and Records Knowledge department in the area of science and technology.
- 2) It is recommended that TNA hosts a workshop or seminar based on the resources in science and technology it holds, highlighting research potential within them.
- 3) It is recommended that TNA publishes a guide or guides to the scientific and technological archives it holds, possibly later extended to PODs.
- 4) It is recommended that TNA investigate hosting a partnership with AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Award studentship to exploit our resources.
- 5) It is recommended that existing entries for scientists and scientific bodies in Discovery be checked and where necessary amended.
- 6) It is recommended that a package of measures is developed to help meet the general challenge of capacity building in cataloguing of, fund-raising for and promoting the use of scientific and technological archives collections.

7) It is recommended that the Centre for Scientific Archives@the Science Museum be a partner in developing a science and technology archives strategy, particularly in relation to cataloguing.

Improving archival capture of contemporary records

8) It is recommended that research and mapping be undertaken to clarify collecting policies in the area of science and technology in Britain.

9) It is recommended that a survey be undertaken of records of Britain's aerospace industry, to gather information, build relationships and offer guidance.

10) It is recommended that a supportive relationship be built with the Archives of IT project.

11) It is recommended that investigations similar to those reported here for science and technology be initiated for engineering.

12) It is recommended that work begin on preparing simple, practical guidance for scientists on identification and long-term preservation of archival material based on UK and international guidance, with a focus on born-digital personal papers.

13) It is recommended that advocacy material be compiled for scientists which explains the importance and ranges of use of historical archives of science.

14) It is recommended that discussions be initiated with the science Research Councils and other parties to promote recommendations 12 and 13 and investigate developing a documentation strategy approach to particular lines of research.

Ensuring long-term sector infrastructure to ensure sustainability

15) It is recommended that an advocacy or specialist interest group be established for science and technology archives.

16) It is recommended that work be undertaken to (re)establish a network of European science archivists and that if necessary some funding be provided to support this.

Next steps

17) It is recommended that the development of a science and technology archives strategy for TNA is taken forward, with a commitment to active participation in any interest group or support network.

18) It is recommended that this paper, or a version thereof, be circulated widely among interested parties soliciting feed-back and comment.

19) It is recommended that TNA prepares an initial outline timetable for the discussion and implementation (where applicable) of recommendations presented here, beginning with hosting an initial round table meeting of interested parties.