



The National Archives

# **Collections and Collecting:**

## **A Survey of University Archives**

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# Introduction

The National Archives conducted the survey *Collections and Collecting* in May-July 2009. This mapping survey was undertaken to obtain an impression of the current situation of university archives in England and Wales. Within the last decade, university archives and special collections have undergone considerable growth and in some cases dramatic change, with many institutions developing an archive service for the first time. Others have moved from maintenance of an institutional archive to become active collectors of externally-produced archive material.

The survey requested information from participating institutions to map the overall picture of these developments within the university archive sector as well as providing detailed information about aspects of developing individual university archives that have previously had little or no contact with The National Archives. The survey results demonstrate the breadth and variety of the university archives sector, and also highlight areas of common good practice and common problems. The mapping survey shows overall an active sector which is aware of the potential its archives hold and is making positive moves towards improving standards in storage and access to those collections.

The National Archives is grateful to all those institutions who responded to the questionnaire. We hope that this survey will be the basis for developing our relationship with the university archives sector in the future.

Archives Sector Development  
The National Archives  
October 2009

# Survey Methods

The survey was conducted by the distribution of a questionnaire (a copy is at Appendix 2) covering four principal areas of archive work. All English universities received an identical questionnaire; the Welsh university version had a single additional question relating to provision of a Welsh-language service.

All institutions funded by HEFCE and HEFCW were included in scope. 134 surveys were distributed to institutions, insofar as possible directly to the archive service. 79 completed surveys were returned whilst three further responses were received indicating no archives were held or managed by the institution. Of the full returns, four institutions provided two separate returns for archive operations run independently of one another, so responses from a total of 75 university or higher education institutions were received. Questions were not mandatory, and not all respondents answered all questions, though a significant majority did respond in full. This does however explain why response numbers to relatively few questions total 79.

Qualitative responses were requested and were broken down by the project officer into broad categories allowing some basic quantitative analysis of the results in the presentation of this report. We do not claim robust statistical significance for the quantitative data, but the value of this approach lies in effectively demonstrating the trends affecting the sector.

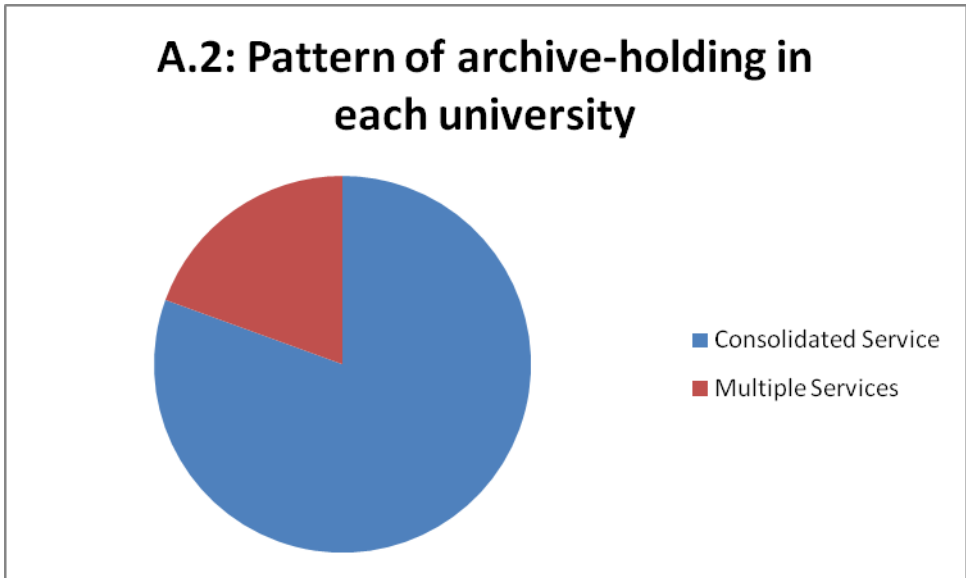
# The Findings

## Section A: Scope of Operations

The questions within this part of the survey aimed to discover broad trends in record keeping.

Returns from participating universities showed that of the 79 completed questionnaires, only one institution stated they held no archives. Three separate non-questionnaire responses were made: one stated their archive was held elsewhere due to the nature of its foundation; the second that there was no archivist currently employed (suggesting the existence of archives not being professionally managed); the third stated that its archives were being transferred to another university archive for long term preservation.

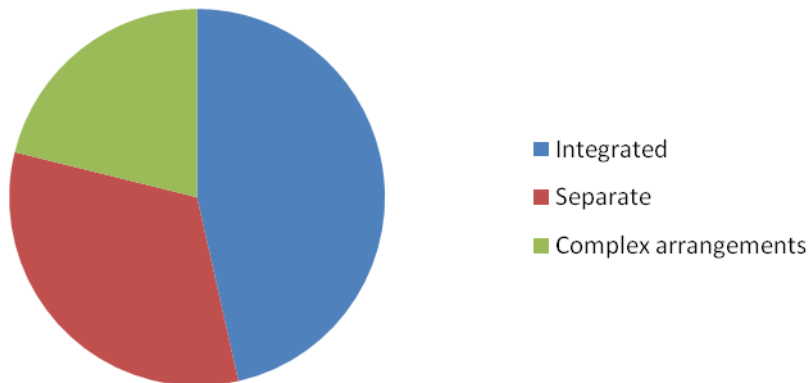
The remaining 78 completed questionnaires stated the services held archival material: either solely relating to the university itself and its predecessors or encompassing both institutional archives and special collections.



**Question A.2: Are archive collections held within a single consolidated service (e.g. Special Collections as part of the Library), or are sections retained in separate departments or centres?  
58 Single Services, 14 Multiple Services**

In responses to this question, we can see that the majority of university archive services are administered as a single service (usually as part of the university library), though a significant proportion of participating institutions hold their archives in dispersed patterns including departments, central administration offices and libraries.

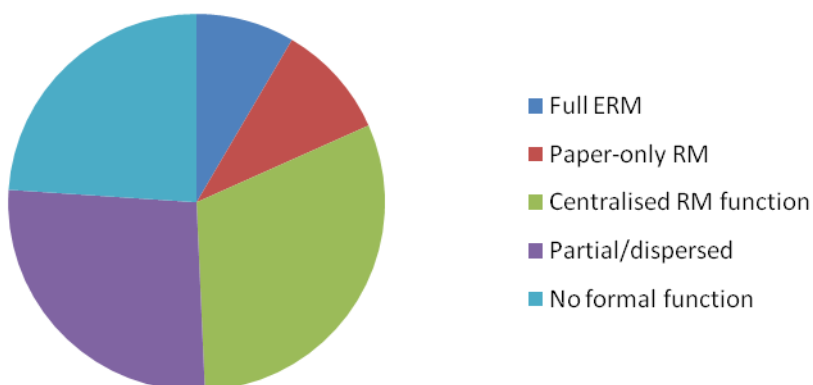
### A.3: Relationship of university archives and Special Collections



**Question A.3: Are the University's historic records managed together with acquired archival material or through a separate service?**  
**33 reported fully integrated operation; 23 wholly separate operations; 15 combined and complex arrangements**

This question was designed to identify whether there is usually separation between archives and Special Collections, or a more integrated model. As the results show, there is no simple pattern to be found. Just under half of responding institutions have fully joint operations; and a further third have wholly separate operations. The remaining third have a variety of more or less complex combinations of the two arrangements.

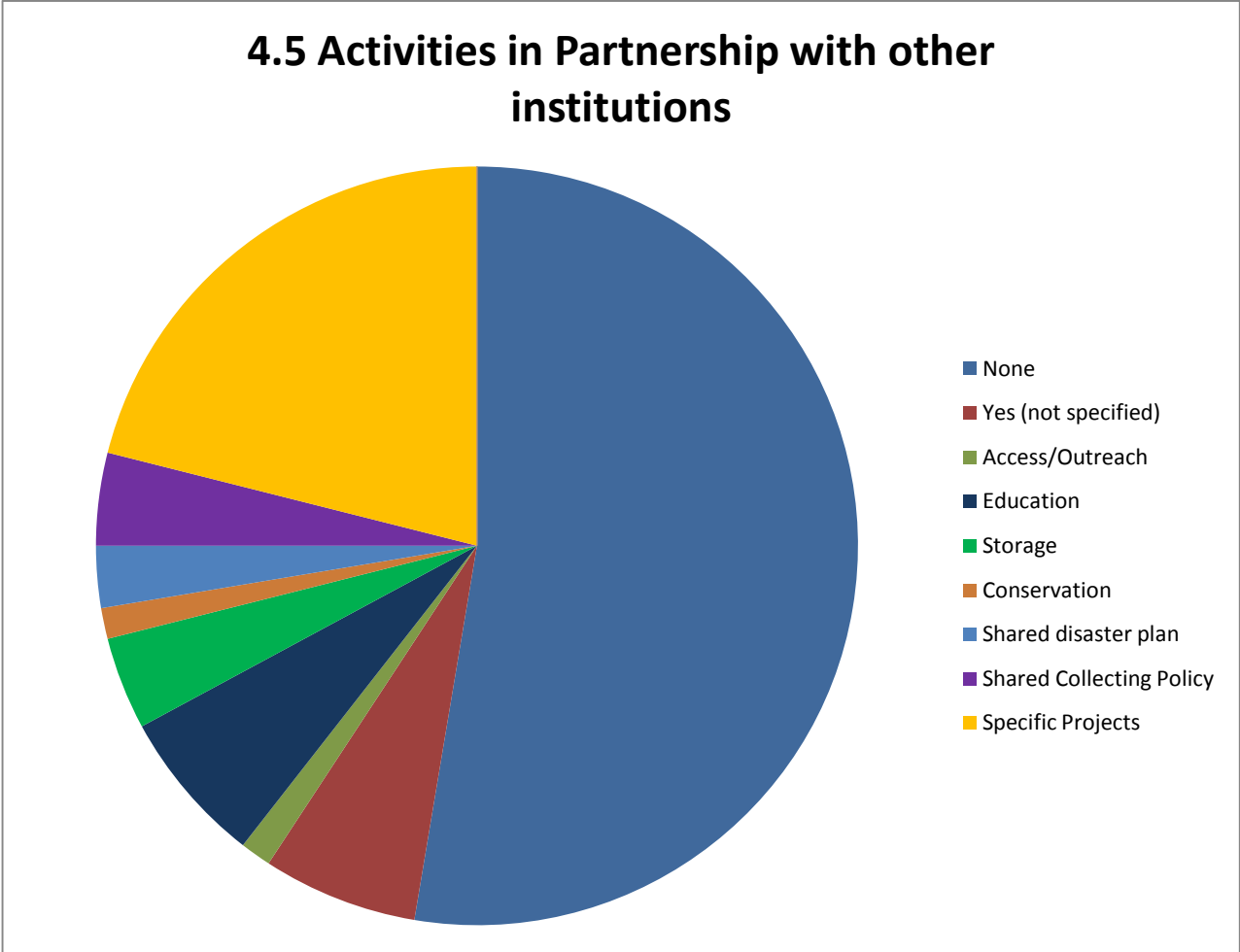
### A.4: University Records Management Function



**Question A.4: What arrangements are in place for management of current records?**  
**6 respondents reported centralized records management including full EDRMS; 7 reported centralized management of paper records; 22 reported centralized records management without specifying record type; 19 partial or highly dispersed records management coverage; 17 reported no formalized records management function**

This question sought to establish briefly the pattern of keeping modern records in universities. Where possible, we have demonstrated whether a centralised records management function covers both paper and electronic records management, or only paper records. However, many responses did not offer this level of detail.

The pattern of records management shown is very variable, although a worryingly high proportion of responding institutions reported no formal or no centralised records management. One respondent commented, “This concerns me deeply as I am sure that material is being destroyed which would otherwise come to the University Archives.” On the positive side, although only a minority currently actively manage electronic records, a significant number of respondents reported initiatives in place to develop effective management of electronic information.



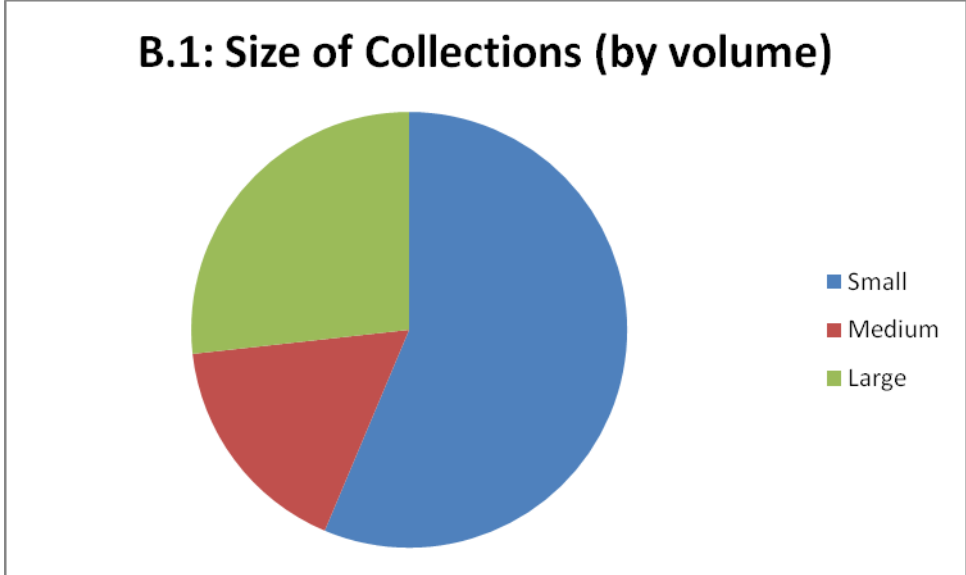
**Question A.5: Do you work in partnership with any other archive holding body?**  
**40 No; 5 Yes (not specified); 16 specific projects only; 1 joint access/outreach work; 5 joint education work; 3 shared storage; 1 shared conservation; 2 shared disaster plans; 3 shared collecting policy**

Respondents were asked to outline areas of common work with other archive holding bodies, such as local authorities, other Higher Education institutions or museums. The majority reported no collaborative work, but the remainder identified a wide variety of examples of partnership working. The most common partnership is a limited one, around specific projects, but there was also significant shared work on education, collecting and conservation, and examples of shared storage.

An area of partnership which is explored later in the questionnaire but which was frequently raised at this point is the hugely successful networking initiatives, the Archives Hub and AIM25. These wider partnerships for bringing archive collections to the attention of researchers are clearly among the most important relationships in the sector, and the majority of respondents participate in one or both networks.

## Section B: Scale of Operations

This section of the questionnaire was designed to draw out the general position of university archives with regard to scale and resources. The variety of scope seen in section A is directly reflected in the size and staffing seen in section B, and also in the varying delivery of public access.

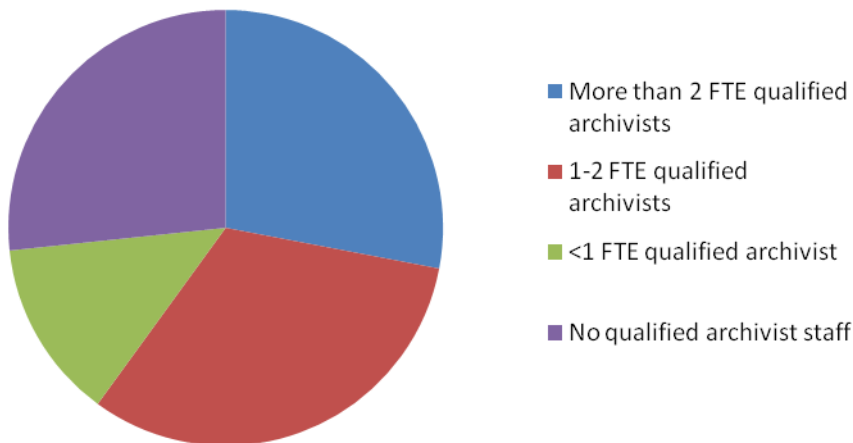


**Question B.1: What is the size of your archival holdings?**  
40 respondents with collections under <50 m<sup>3</sup>; 12 with 50-100 m<sup>3</sup>; 19 with >100m<sup>3</sup>

A significant range in the size of archive collections held by each institution was reported, ranging from a few cubic metres to a maximum of 1083.3m<sup>3</sup>. With caveats relating to uneven use of measurement units in the reporting of figures, which means some collection sizes had to be estimated, there is still a fairly clear picture of the sector, which is almost polarised between small and large collections. Of the 'small' collections, many are substantially under 50 m<sup>3</sup>, and of the large, many have hundreds of cubic metres of holdings. This confirms that generalisations about the size and role of university archives need to be treated with caution.



## B.2: No. of professional archive staff



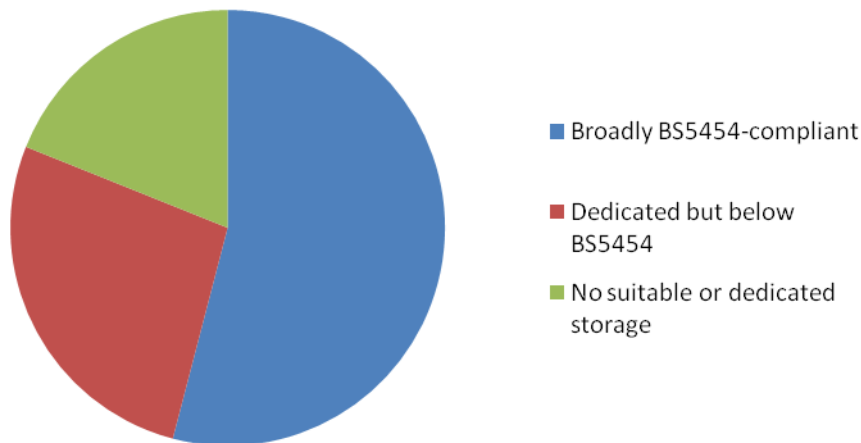
**Question B.2: How many staff are engaged in supporting archive work?**

**21 respondents reported over 2 FTE qualified archivists on staff; 24 have between 1 and 2 FTE qualified archivist staff; 10 had less than 1FTE archivist and 20 no qualified archivist staff.**

As anticipated, the size of collections is directly proportional in most cases to the number of dedicated archive staff or the time that is allocated to managing archives. Staff numbers and responsibilities of those staff vary greatly: ranging from employment of six full time qualified archivists and five full time support staff to institutions that do not employ anyone dedicated to the care or management of archival material, qualified or otherwise. The type of archive support staff also varies greatly, depending on the situation in which the archive is found. Joint arrangements for support staff shared across university museums or libraries are reasonably common, primarily when archives are part of a larger service. The complexity is such that it is difficult to draw a straightforward conclusion about average overall staffing numbers.

Numbers of qualified archivists per archive service, however, correlate reasonably closely to collection size and are indicative of the level of expert stewardship available to the collections. These raw numbers are mitigated in some cases by archivists being on short term contracts (though a surprisingly small proportion of respondents mentioned this). Most archive services without qualified archivists on staff have either records managers or librarians instead, or else support staff undertaking a professional archives qualification; only a few respondents, invariably in charge of small quantities of archives, indicated that the collections were in the hands of staff without any professional qualifications.

### B.3: Archive Storage

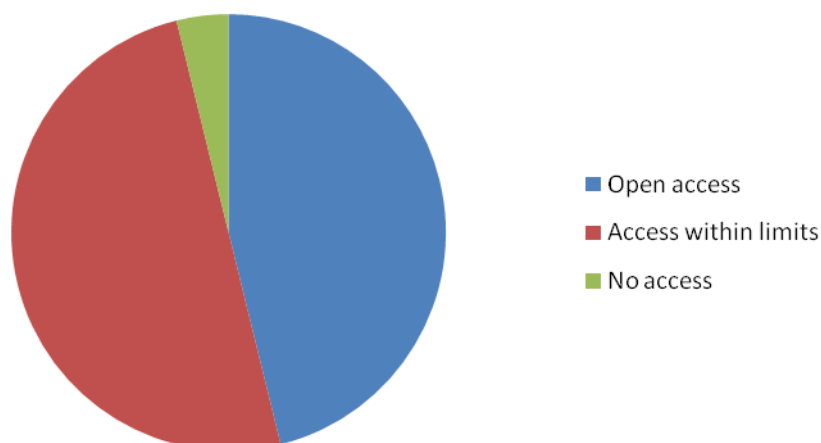


**Question B.3: Are your archive collections held in storage which is broadly in line with the provisions of BS5454:2000 *Recommendations for the Storage and Exhibition of Archival Documents*?**

**40 reported broadly BS5454-compliant storage; 20 dedicated storage but not approaching national standards; 14 no dedicated storage**

This question was deliberately broadly phrased, but it is positive and surprising nonetheless that more than half of participating universities indicated their storage was close to meeting national standards in full. Of the remaining universities, over half have dedicated space for storing the archives even if not BS5454:2000-compliant, and a relatively small proportion responded that their storage was wholly unsuitable. Responses to this question also indicated that many of those in less satisfactory accommodation have active plans for improvement or total replacement of storage facilities.

### B.4: Level of Research Access

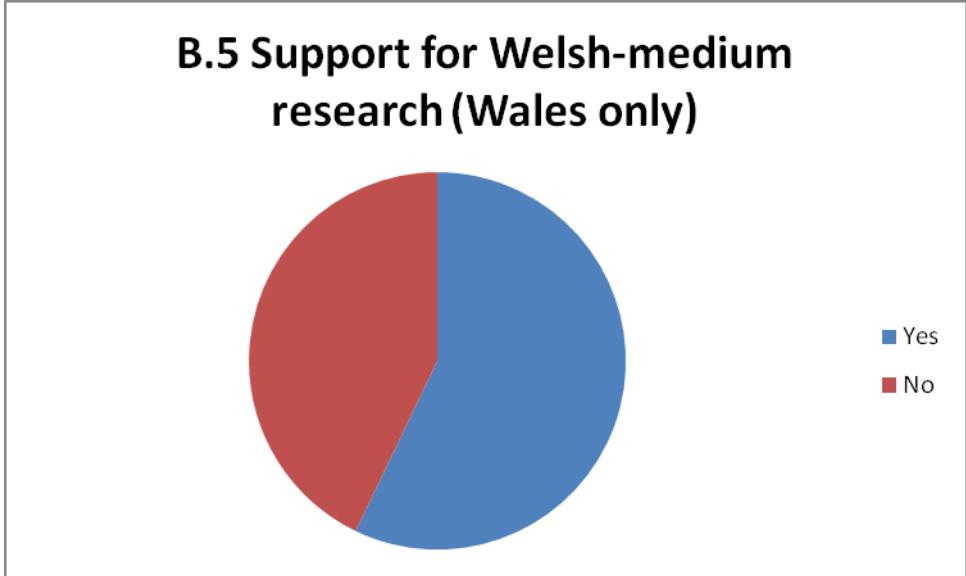


**Question B.4: What arrangements (if any) are made for external users to access the collection(s)?**  
**36 No restrictions on access apart from opening hours; 39 access may be limited by advance booking or other requirements; 3 no external research access is provided.**

This question was designed to draw out how readily collections can be accessed, and in general the response demonstrates that university archives are positive in their approaches to access. The category 'within limits' was used to indicate when potential

barriers to access are in force, such as very limited opening hours or no published opening times, providing ad hoc research space only with advance notice. The majority of institutions are fully open for researchers within published times, and can accommodate researchers as part of their day to day operations.

In response to a supplementary question, only four institutions indicated that they charge for access under some circumstances.

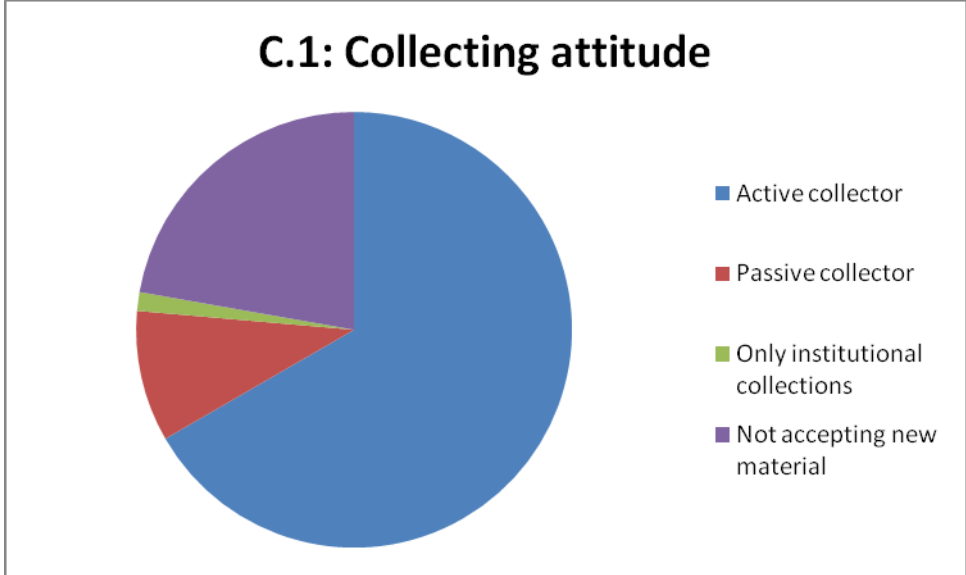


**Question B.5: Are you able to support access to holdings in the Welsh language? (Wales only)**

Of the seven Welsh respondents, four offer supported access to Welsh medium holdings. In the majority of cases, this is not a fully bilingual service, but support can be accessed at need from the wider parent organization.

## Section C: Collecting

Section C of the survey aimed to draw broad conclusions about the current position of the university archives sector with regard to acquisition of new material. This was the core area of interest for the survey, with the aim of developing a full picture of the appetite for archive collecting, and the barriers which might frustrate services seeking to develop their collections.



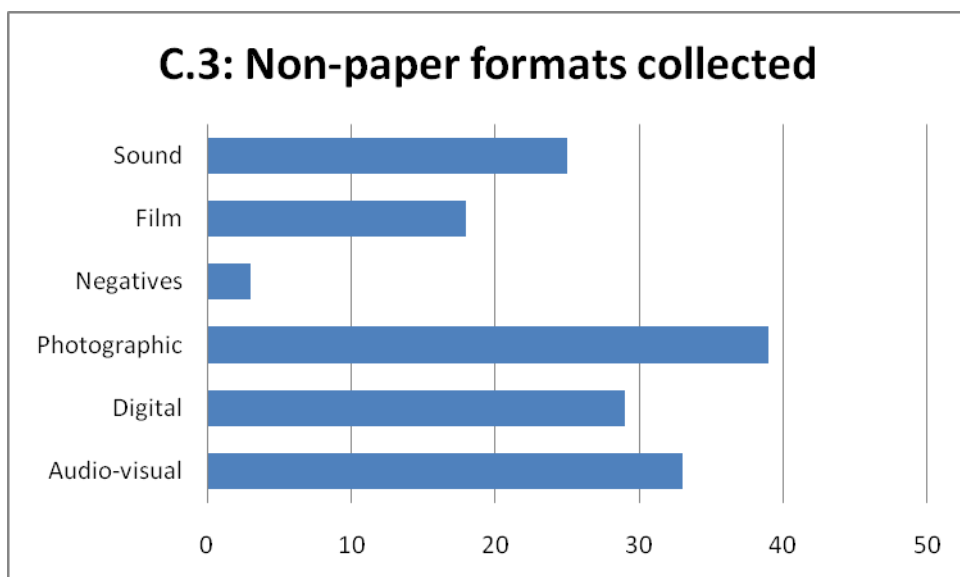
**C.1: Does your institution actively seek to expand its holdings of archive and manuscript material?**

**48 identified themselves as active collectors; 7 as passive collectors; 1 acquires only material from their parent institutions; 16 do not acquire additional material.**

The responses to this question demonstrate that the university archives sector is generally positive about collecting opportunities and the majority of services are in a position to take advantage of them when they arise. All but seventeen responding universities actively accept new material from external sources. Where archive services do not collect actively, it is primarily due to issues with storage or lack of staff to manage the records.

### **C.2: Have you taken in any substantial archive collections in the past three years?**

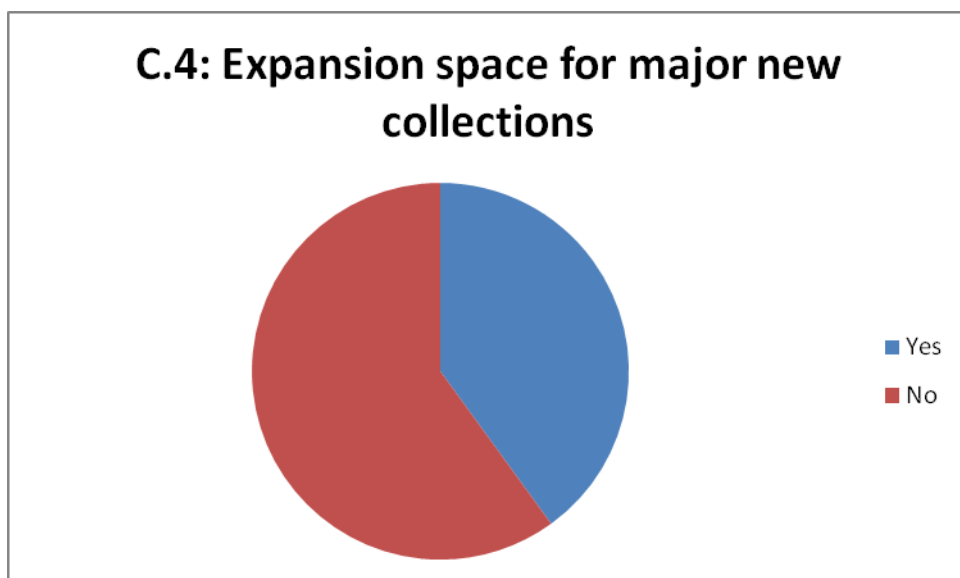
This question was asked primarily to improve coverage of individual university holdings on the National Register of Archives, and responses are therefore not reported in full. However, a clear pattern emerged of collecting activity. Of the responding universities that identified themselves as active collectors, all but two said they had accepted significant collections within the last three years. This ranged from some institutions taking in one significant collection in three years, to one institution which had received eight significant new collections in that period. This confirms that the 'active collector' attitude translates into action in the majority of cases.



**C.3: Which non-paper formats are you able to collect?**  
**39 collect photographs (and a further 3 specified photographic negatives); 25 collect sound archives; 33 collect audiovisual material; 34 collect digital formats; 18 accept film archives; finally, 1 repository reported an unconventional collection of walking sticks.**

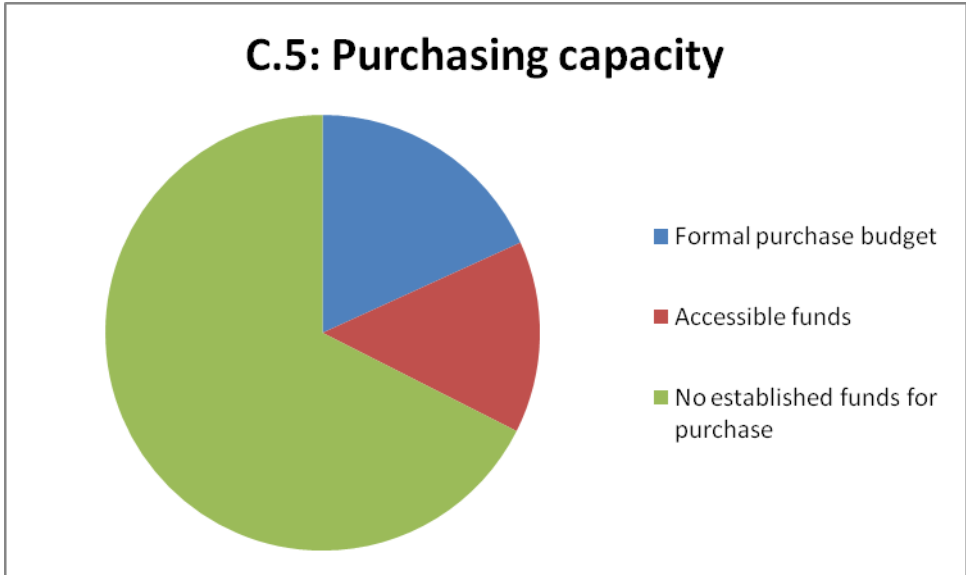
All responding universities collect paper records, with most collecting at least one other format. The principal formats of record collected tend to be audiovisual and photographic, though there is a positive indication that almost half of respondents are seeking to collect and preserve digital records. Some responding universities collect as many as five different formats. Some common formats (photographs in particular) may be under-reported in responses, judging by comments made on this question.

However, several respondents also commented that they do not actively collect non-paper formats, and/or have inadequate facilities for storage or access to some types of media. In these cases, such collections have largely been acquired as a minor part of larger paper-based collections.



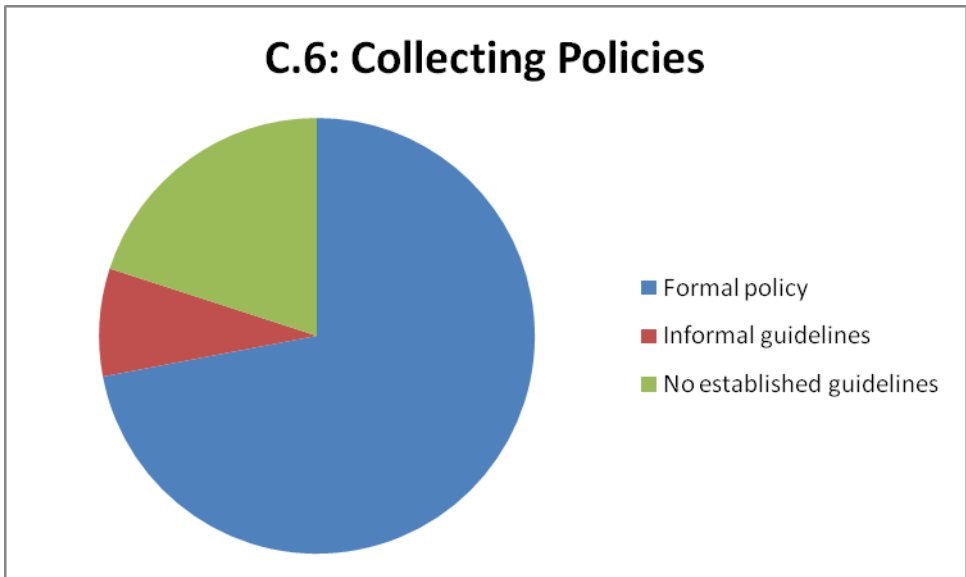
**C.4: Do you have sufficient storage space of suitable quality to accept further substantial archive collections?**  
**30 respondents indicated they could accommodate further substantial collections; 45 could not.**

Storage space appears somewhat problematic: over half of responding universities indicate that they do not have enough spare storage space to accept further substantial collections. Responses on both sides tended to be with caveats: those lacking space would make serious efforts to accommodate exceptional collections or are negotiating actively for more space; those with space do not have infinite capacity. The overall picture, though, is of a sector with significant practical restrictions on collecting larger archives.



**C.5: Do you have an acquisition budget which covers archive and manuscript material? 14 indicated an established purchase budget is available; 11 have no set budget but can access funds for purchase; 52 have no established means of funding any purchases.**

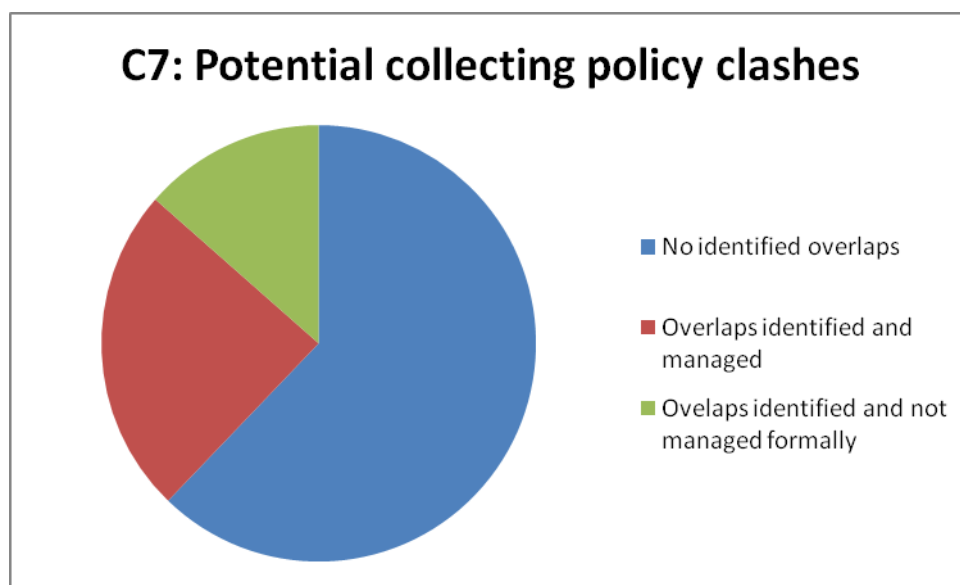
Lack of readily-available purchasing funds can leave archives unable to acquire important material for sale under pressure of time, if an appeal or grant application cannot be made within deadline. It is therefore of concern to note that well over half of respondents have no access to funds to support purchase, whether an established budget or flexible funds which may be made available at need.



**C.6: Do you have a formal collecting policy which covers archive and manuscript material? 54 have a formally-recognised collecting policy; 6 an informal agreement. 15 reported no established collecting guidelines**

This question received a very positive response. Two-thirds of responding universities have formal collecting policies in place, in line with professional best practice. Several respondents without policies in place are actively developing such formal agreements.

The collecting remits within the formal collecting policies showed five major collecting areas: subject-specific collecting; institutional records; records of individuals with a connection to the institution (staff and alumni); records directly supporting research and teaching; and records which complement current holdings.



**C.7: Are you aware of any potential or actual overlaps or conflicts between your collecting policy and those of other institutions?**

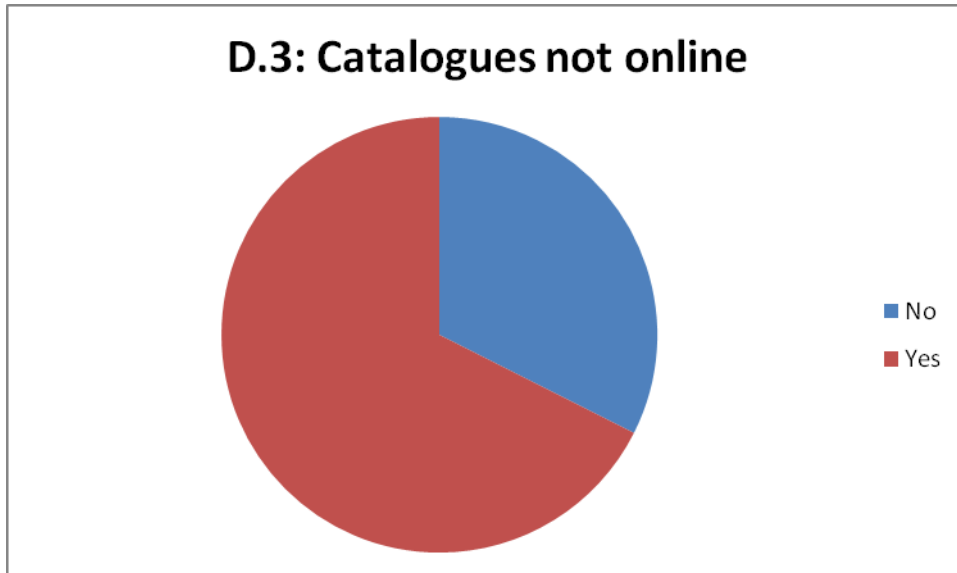
**46 respondents indicated that they were not aware of any collecting policy overlaps; 18 actively manage identified overlaps. 10 respondents indicated that they were aware of overlaps with identified repositories but that there was no formal management process to avoid conflict in acquisition.**

The majority of respondents either reported no conflicts of collecting remit, or else conflicts managed either through a direct relationship with the service(s) concerned; through a subject specialist body such as the Theatre Information Group; or through a negotiated compromise at the time when the collecting policy was drawn up. There are clearly some remaining cases where collecting boundaries are not clearly delineated, but in general respondents emphasised the need for active co-operation on individual cases where this may arise. Very few respondents have no routine plan to consult other relevant repositories in case of clashing collecting priorities.

An analysis of the collecting policies submitted to the survey suggests that this consultative approach will continue to be vital. Although some returns indicate collecting in areas which are unlikely to produce conflicts, or else with clearly defined boundaries to avoid competitive collecting, there were a significant number of policies with open clauses such as “records that support research and teaching” or “records of national significance”, which suggest the potential for overlap in some cases. Certain subjects (such as literature, drama, the history of medicine, and political history) are also very widely collected without set boundaries in collecting policies. The need for groups which seek to encourage discussion and a collegial approach in these areas (such as the Political Parties and Parliamentary Archives Group, the Theatre Information Group and the Group for Literary Archives and Manuscripts) is reinforced.

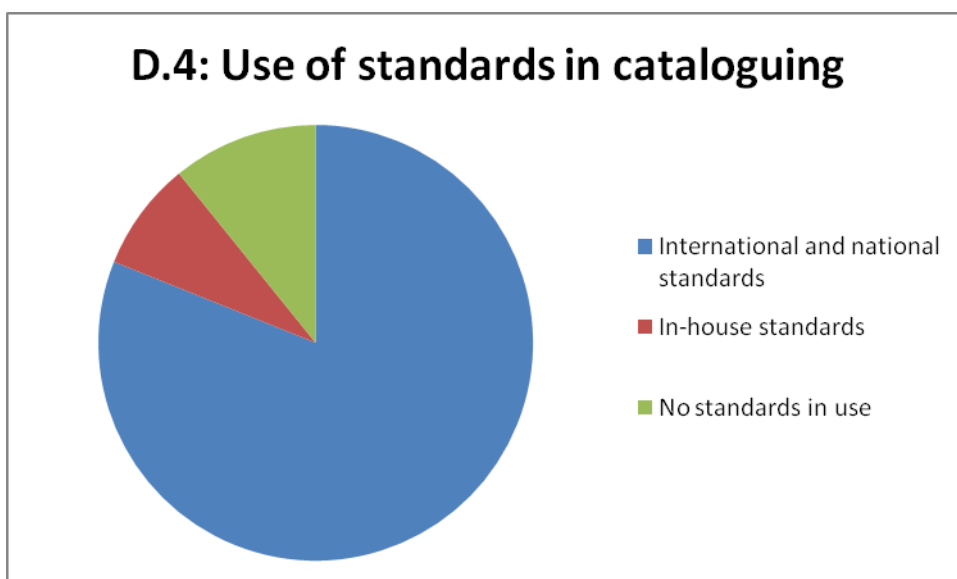
## Section D: Collection Description and Cataloguing

Section D began with questions relating to updating and expanding The National Archives' information resources (ARCHON and the National Register of Archives). Action was taken on an individual repository basis and is not summarised here. The remainder of this section was concerned with the state of cataloguing across the university archives sector.



**Question D.3: Do you have catalogues which are not available online?**  
50 Yes, 24 No

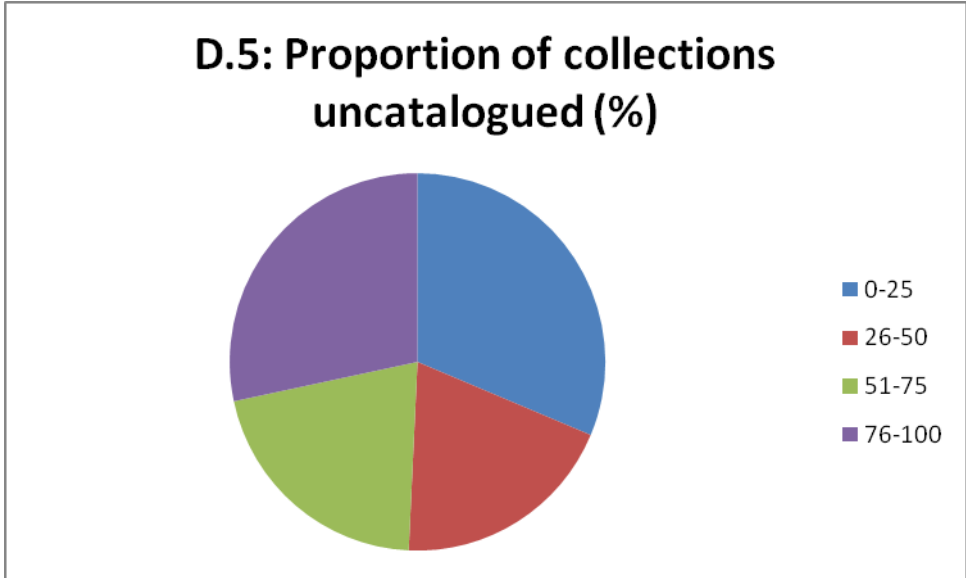
Responses to this question confirm that there remains a very substantial retro-conversion task for paper catalogues in university archives. Well over half of respondents have a proportion of finding aids which are not available online, though the survey did not seek detailed data on the percentages (this was the subject of a survey by The National Archives in 2005). In most cases, such catalogues remain in hard-copy only, limiting awareness of and intellectual access to collections.



**Question D.4: What standards are used in cataloguing archival material in your institution?**  
60 respondents use national and international standards as the basis for their cataloguing; 6 use alternative in-house standards; 8 respondents indicate cataloguing is not standards-based.



Response to this question was very positive, and only a small proportion of respondents indicated that cataloguing was not standards-based. The main standard mentioned was ISAD(G), together with UKAT, EAD, ISAAR(cpf) and the National Council on Archives, *Rules for the Formation of Personal, Corporate and Place Names*. Some responses reflected use of relevant standards from other domains (AACR, Spectrum, MARC and Library of Congress Subject Headings were among those mentioned). Those archive services which do not catalogue to standards are almost exclusively those which are in the process of being set up or which are without professional support.



**Question D.5: What proportion of your collections are uncatalogued or not catalogued to an acceptable standard?**

**21 respondents indicated >75% collections catalogued; 13 have 50-75% collections catalogued; 14 have 26-50% catalogued; and 19 have <25% collections catalogued.**

The national archive cataloguing backlog remains a significant barrier to access, and responses to this question demonstrate that the university archives sector is broadly in line with the national picture. The proportion of uncatalogued collections is surprisingly evenly spread: almost the same number of institutions have 75-100% cataloguing backlogs as have over 75% of collections catalogued.

## Conclusion

The vast majority of responding universities have archives, whether institutional, special collections or a combination. The survey results demonstrate the breadth and variety of the university archives sector, and also highlight areas of common good practice and common problems. The diversity of the sector and of the purpose of university archive services makes generalisation somewhat difficult: there is clearly a very different role for an institutional archive compared with a thematic Special Collection supporting a particular area of research strength.

Nonetheless, some useful conclusions can be drawn, particularly around attitudes to collecting and description, which were the particular focus of this survey. The university archive sector is relatively well-placed to collect actively and most respondents see that as an important part of their work (albeit with caveats around storage space and purchasing capacity). Collecting is in general undertaken through formal agreements and in a co-operative spirit, to avoid clashes with other institutional collectors, and there is a network of subject-specialist groups aimed at supporting this approach. Given the potential breadth of many of the collecting policies submitted, this collaborative approach is critical.

Respondent university archives have collected many dozens of significant collections in the past three years. There is capacity to collect a wide variety of formats, though public access to some formats remains problematic in many services. The challenge of digital archives is being addressed by a significant minority of respondents. The university archives sector as a whole has the potential to play a valuable role in national collection strategies. Information from respondents has been and will continue to be used to enrich the information resources of The National Archives and to inform our work on archive collecting and collection development.

In the context of *Archives for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, with its call for greater collaboration and partnership within the sector, it is good to see that many respondents already undertake a variety of partnership working. This survey suggests that there are particular opportunities for shared facilities in storage and access of non-paper formats, which are actively collected across the sector. This applies especially to the work on digital access, where some university archives are substantially ahead of the majority of the archives sector.

The survey shows an active sector which is aware of the potential its archives hold and is making positive moves towards improving standards in storage and access to those collections. This represents a significant proportion of the public archives sector and a critical element in the national network of archive collectors.

## **Appendix 1 – List of Respondents**

Aberystwyth University: Centre for Performance Research  
Arts University College Bournemouth  
Bangor University  
Birkbeck College: University of London  
Birmingham City University: Birmingham Institute of Art and Design  
Bishop Grosseteste University College, Lincoln  
Bournemouth University  
Brunel University  
Canterbury Christ Church University  
Cardiff University  
City University, London  
Coventry University  
De Montfort University  
Guildhall School of Music and Drama  
Heythrop College: University of London  
Imperial College, London  
Institute of Education: University of London  
Keele University  
Kingston University  
Leeds Metropolitan University  
Liverpool Hope University  
Liverpool John Moores University  
London Metropolitan University: The Women's Library  
London Metropolitan University: Trade Union Congress Library Collections  
London Metropolitan University: Other Collections  
London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine: University of London  
London South Bank University  
Loughborough University  
The London School of Economics and Political Science  
Manchester Metropolitan University  
Middlesex University  
Newcastle University  
Nottingham Trent University  
Oxford Brookes University  
Queen Mary: University of London  
Royal Academy of Music  
Royal College of Art  
Royal Northern College of Music  
St George's: University of London  
Senate House Library: University of London  
School of Oriental and African Studies: University of London  
Swansea Metropolitan University  
Swansea University  
Teeside University  
Trinity Laban  
University of Bath  
University of Bradford  
University of Bristol

University of Bristol: Theatre Collection  
University of Cambridge  
University of Chichester  
University College Falmouth  
University of Cumbria  
University of East Anglia  
University of East London  
University of Exeter  
University of Glamorgan  
University of Huddersfield  
University of Hull  
University of Leicester  
University of Liverpool  
University of Manchester  
University of Northampton  
University of Nottingham  
University of Oxford: Bodleian Library  
University of Plymouth  
University of Reading (including the Museum of Rural English Life)  
University of Salford  
University of Sheffield: Special Collections and Archive  
University of Sheffield: University Archives  
University of Southampton  
University of Sunderland  
University of Surrey  
University of Surrey: E. H. Shepard Archive  
University of Surrey: National Resource Centre for Dance Archive  
University of Sussex  
University of Wales, Lampeter  
University of Warwick  
University of Westminster  
University of York  
University College London  
York St John University

## Appendix 2 – Survey Questionnaire



The National Archives

### Mapping University Archives: Collections and Collecting

Name and job role of person completing survey:

Institution:

*A) Scope of operations*

**A.1) Does your institution hold archive material?**

**A.2) Are archive collections held within a single consolidated service (e.g. Special Collections as part of the Library), or are sections retained in separate departments or centres?**

Please give details.

**A.3) Are the University's historic records managed together with acquired archival material or through a separate service?**

Please give details.

**A.4) What arrangements are in place for management of current records?**

**A.5) Do you work in partnership with any other archive holding body? Please give details if so.**

*B) Scale of operations*

**B.1) What is the size of your archival holdings?**

**B.2) How many staff are engaged in supporting archive work?**

Please give details of professional and support posts, and explain when job roles also share responsibility for non-archive work.

**B.3) Are your archive collections held in storage which is broadly in line with the provisions of BS5454:2000 *Recommendations for the Storage and Exhibition of Archival Documents*?**

**B.4) What arrangements (if any) are made for external users to access the collection(s)?**

*C) Collecting*

**C.1) Does your institution actively seek to expand its holdings of archive and manuscript material?**

**C.2) Have you taken in any substantial archive collections in the past three years?**

Please give brief details or link to online resources where available.

**C.3) Which non-paper formats are you able to collect?**

**C.4) Do you have sufficient storage space of suitable quality to accept further substantial archive collections?**

**C.5) Do you have an acquisition budget which covers archive and manuscript material?**

Please indicate size of budget, unless this information is confidential.

**C.6) Do you have a formal collecting policy which covers archive and manuscript material?**

Please attach a copy or link to online version if you have not formally submitted such a policy to The National Archives in the past. If you do not have such a policy, please give details of areas of collecting interest.

**C.7) Are you aware of any potential or actual overlaps or conflicts between your collecting policy and those of other institutions? Please give details.**

*D) Collection description and cataloguing*

**D.1) Please check your entry on the ARCHON Directory**

**(<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archon/>), the UK's central contact directory of institutions holding archival material. Are there corrections to be made to your entry?**

If you do not have an ARCHON entry please indicate whether we should create one.

**D.2) Do you have an online catalogue or online presence in a networking project like the Archives Hub or AIM25 which is NOT included in your ARCHON entry?**

**D.3) Do you have archive catalogues which are not available online? If you do, and if you are interested, you can submit a copy of those catalogues to the NRA.**

**D.4) What standards are used in cataloguing archival material in your institution?**

**D.5) What proportion of your collections are uncatalogued or not catalogued to an acceptable standard?**