

How to compile an appraisal report

Guidance on completing the Appraisal report template

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Part A Introduction

What is an appraisal report?

An appraisal report is a key summary of the records a government body believes worthy of historical preservation and intends to select for transfer to The National Archives or an approved Place of Deposit. It provides:

- Structured information about the organisation's responsibilities, work and records to help reviewers identify records of potential historical value
- A transparent record of decisions on the selection of paper and digital records for permanent preservation. This includes shared drives, databases and other digital formats, as well as, where relevant, records created in hybrid formats

It has been developed especially for appraising both managed and unmanaged records in UK government departments, executive agencies, and NDPBs. It can also be used to:

- collect background information to rationalise paper review
- collect background information for retention scheduling
- provide evidence of records management and retention scheduling for FOI s46 assessment purposes

The appraisal report is therefore an appraisal tool in the widest sense of the word, although it is designed specifically to aid historical selection. It springs from macro-appraisal principles, such as those outlined in our publication [Best practice guide for the appraisal and selection of records for The National Archives](#). Departments and agencies should use the report separately from Operational Selection Policies, which we will be gradually review and update or archive from July 2013.

While the appraisal report allows for the structured recording of information to assist decisions, selection continues to be based on two broad criteria: the documentation of what government did, why and how; and the value of the records for future historical research. Relevant criteria are outlined in The National Archives' [Records Collection Policy](#).

Stages in drafting an appraisal report

There are three stages:

Stage 1: Basic information about the organisation and the types of records it produces is entered. Preliminary proposals are made for the sort of material the department wishes to select.

Stage 2: Discussion between the organisation and The National Archives' Information Management Consultant (IMC), including (where possible) consideration of the file plan and any digital records, including records and datasets published on websites. Specific decisions for groups of records will be made.

Stage 3: The 'final' draft as agreed by the Information Management Consultant and the Departmental Records Officer. The draft is presented to The National Archives' Records Decision Panel for review.

Once approved by the Records Decision Panel, the appraisal report will be published on The National Archives' website for public consultation. Feedback from the public will be discussed with the organisation and any agreed changes made so that a final version can be published.

Part B Instructions for compiling an appraisal report

Executive summary

This section should be brief (max 500 words) giving an overview of the selection decisions made in the main body of the report. Information in this section may be entered (in an initial form) at any point in the report's development, but it must be completed.

The executive summary has two purposes:

- to assess the significance of the organisation's records against the collection themes listed in The National Archives' Records Collection Policy
- to summarise the records to be selected, with arguments presented where important types of records have not been selected

During initial evaluation and discussion, it may be determined that the department has few (if any) records for selection under The National Archives' Records Collection Policy. In this case it may only be necessary to complete the executive summary of the report. A simple recommendation in such a case might be: to select nothing; to ensure that the Annual Reports are preserved at the British Library; or, to only select high-level governance records (in accordance with [Operational Selection Policy 35: Board and Committee records](#)).

Organisations should include information on the following record types that they are selecting within the executive summary:

- high-level committees
- policy files
- case files
- datasets
- significant issues to be tracked either through keeping an eye on new databases created or through the electronic equivalent of registered policy files
- significant agency programmes as laid down by sponsoring department, with a link to the Records Collection Policy

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A summary of additional information can be included here, which could cover the following issues (more detail should be included in the organisation's technical report):

- To what extent is policy development or information about operational activities covered through committee papers?
- To what extent do publications provide information on the organisation and its impact on government and society?
- To what extent is information of historical value reflected in a database or a set of case files, and what selection recommendations are made for these?
- To what extent is it necessary or desirable to capture additional material (apart from committees, publications databases) to show policy developments in accordance with an existing Operational Selection Policy?
- To what extent the organisation has published records to their website, and to what extent the website's construction allows it to be captured in the UK Government Web Archive? ¹
- Are there recurrent 'issues' or 'crisis' events, for example, railway or aircraft accidents, outbreaks of disease, industrial disputes, where the agency's handling of the situation is likely to be of historical interest?
- Is there scientific or research data and what steps have been taken to ensure the preservation of the information, and what processes for its disposition are in place?

¹ See nationalarchives.gov.uk/information-management/policies/web-continuity.htm for The National Archives' guidance on the capture and publication of government records

1 Background information

1.1 Name of Agency/NDPB/Department/Division

Indicate here the accepted/statutory name of the organisation (including acronyms and common names, for example, OfWAT for Office for Water Services).

1.2 Type of Agency (do not use if Central Government Department)

Check relevant box in this section of the template with **X** or *****.

1.3 Annual budget (do not use if Central Government Department)

This and the next section can be useful for gauging the importance of the organisation.

1.4 Number of employees (do not use if Central Government Department)

Apart from indicating the approximate/known number of employees, it may be useful to indicate here where a very high proportion of the workforce is doing very routine work such as processing driving licences or applications for premium bonds.

1.5 History of organisation

This section should cover a brief administrative history of the organisation, and should mention any bodies from which the organisation succeeded or inherited functions.

1.6 Functions, activities and recordkeeping

Use this section for a brief summary of the public tasks and statutory duties of the organisation with reference to specific legal provisions.

Organisations should avoid referencing mission statements and business targets. These are likely to have an element of 'spin' of temporary interest, whereas The National Archives needs to assess an organisation's core purposes and therefore what is likely to be of longer-lasting interest.

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This section should also include a brief explanation of how the records were managed over time, including the introduction of new systems and file plans.

Large or complex organisations, such as central government departments and Executive Agencies, should provide detailed information in table (3.2) within the technical report. In these cases, the organisation may choose merely to refer to the table in this section.

1.7 Name of the parent or sponsoring department (do not use if Central Government Department)

If no parent or sponsoring department indicate the Minister who lays an annual report before Parliament on behalf of the organisation.

1.8 Relationship with parent department (do not use if Central Government Department)

This section is of relevance only in the case of an organisation which answers or is responsible to another department or agency:

- State if any framework document exists
- Indicate where the agency has a policy-making role and the nature of that role
- Indicate any areas of overlap with the work of the parent department

1.9 Relationship with other agencies/NDPBs

Indicate where there is overlap with the work of other organisations.

Indicate where statutory or independent committees scrutinise, oversee or monitor the work of the agency (for example, The Lord Chancellor's Advisory Council on National Records and Archives, PSD's Pesticides Advisory Committee).

Include any bodies the organisation manages records and information for, and the records that will be selected for permanent preservation.

2 Selection decisions

2.1 Areas of policy work undertaken in the organisation

This section gathers information to determine the extent and types of policy development which need to be considered. It should be linked to the history, functions, and activities outlined within 1.5 and 1.6. For organisations employing a function-based classification scheme or file plan it should be relatively easy to pinpoint specific elements of the file plan for selection. Organisations may choose to develop a 'review' sheet, outlining those prefixes or classifications that will be selected. This may be included as an attachment to the technical report.

The following categorisation of the types of policy work undertaken in government departments should be used to help this analysis:

- a) making or contributing to policy decisions of an immediate, broad impact on domestic or international events and conditions (for example, foreign policy, policing, asylum and other legal cases, deployment of troops, setting the budget, intervention on foreign exchanges)
- b) the development, advice on, communication of primary legislation whether decided at a national or European level, including work on White or Green Papers
- c) the development of secondary legislation - in the UK this is through statutory instruments which tend to regulate the way operations are carried out and have legal force (for example, the Civil Aviation Authority's work centres around regulating all aspects of aviation in the UK)
- d) advice on carrying out primary or secondary legislative provisions but without any legal force
- e) decisions affecting the way an organisation conducts its core operations

This may include decisions setting precedents, illustrating legislative intricacies, impinging on wider political developments. The decisions may show the development of 'visionary' or 'mission' statements, the response to technical change, or summarise the organisation's work.

Include further detail, if required, under section 3.2 and 3.6 of the technical report.

2.2 Areas of high-level operational work undertaken in the organisation

This section of the report should include a list of the organisation's core operations. Only list those operations which are core to the agency's statutory functions, for example governance covering the supply and delivery of equipment to service personnel by the Ministry of Defence. List them as bullet points against the functions identified under section 1.6.

You do not need to list activities relating to internal functions here, but you should note areas for potential selection.

Generic OSPs provide further guidance on the selection of different types of operational records.

In addition consult the guidance in other OSPs relating to specific departments, subjects or function when making appraisal decisions here and in other sections of the report.

Include further detail, if required, under section 3.7 of the technical report.

2.3 Hybrid or electronic datasets/Business systems

Indicate where these exist, and the classification schemes used to manage the information within the system. Indicate whether paper records should be selected or records from ERMS or other digital systems (entire ERMS systems are rarely selected - rather individual classifications or prefix series). It is important to establish at an early stage the comprehensiveness of the corporate record in the electronic file plan. It may be that this will indicate whether the records the organisation selects will be wholly in paper form.

Include further detail, if required, under section 3.3 of the technical report.

3 Instructions for completing the technical report

For most organisations, particularly small NDPBs and temporary bodies, the appraisal report will provide sufficient information about records reviewers need to select.

Larger organisations, or those with more complex information structures (for example, central government departments or large Executive Agencies), need to document their research and analysis in an 'annexed' technical report.

The purpose of the technical report is to document the detailed analysis undertaken in developing the Appraisal report and the determinations in evaluating the value of the records and activities - in particular, records and papers of:

- committees
- core and statutory functions
- special formats or collections, including any published data on public websites
- scientific research
- publications

In the initial phases of the draft, collect information so that judgements can be reached to complete the executive summary.

However, do not spend time on the technical report if it becomes apparent that the agency contributes little of historical value as judged against The National Archives' Records Collection Policy and relevant OSPs. In these cases the executive summary can be completed with a few key records identified where necessary.

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In order to complete the technical report, the department will need to understand:

- To what extent is policy development or information about operational activities covered through committee papers?
- To what extent do publications provide information on the agency and its impact?
- To what extent is the information of historical value reflected in an unpublished dataset or a set of case files, and do these sources contain anything of historical value that is not captured or published elsewhere?
- To what extent is it necessary or desirable to capture additional material (apart from committees, publications databases) to show policy developments in accordance with an existing OSP?
- To what extent the organisation has published records to their website, and to what extent the website's construction allows it to be captured in the [UK Government Web Archive](#)? For example, are the records published as open, or are they redacted in any way? Is there unpublished information that provides context to the published records that should be selected?
- Are there recurrent 'issues' or 'crisis' events, for example, railway or aircraft accidents, outbreaks of disease, industrial disputes, where the agency's handling of the situation is likely to be of historical interest?
- Is there scientific information and what steps have been taken to ensure the preservation of information and its disposition is in place?

From this, the organisation should have a better understanding of what records it needs to select and what records it does not need to.

3.1 Committees

It is only necessary to document committees related to core statutory duties. For some agencies significant decisions might be concentrated in one or two very high level committees; others might have a web of subsidiary technical committees. Organisations with complex committee structures should consider whether they need to select records of sub-committees or advisory bodies which report to higher governance structures.

Indicate also where the records of committees selected for permanent preservation are held in digital or paper systems. There is a tendency for organisations to duplicate copies of committee papers. The National Archives and the organisation need to understand their correct provenance and the official correct version needs to be selected.

In completing this section, organisations will also need to distinguish between key committees and project boards. For example, the Construction Industry Advisory Committee (CONIAC), a key advisory body on the construction industry, advises the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) on the protection of people at work (and others) from hazards to health and safety within the building, civil engineering and engineering construction industry, and the minutes and papers should be selected for these reasons.

Consider project boards on the basis of how they fit into other elements covered in the report. Such project boards are not part of a committee structure and therefore do not all need to be listed here, but you should refer to them as necessary under section 3.6.

To help assess the value of committee records, sample the minutes and papers; for example, they might be anodyne and simply a string of action points.

Further guidance is provided in [Operational Selection Policy 35: Board and Committee records](#).

3.2 Core statutory functions and activities

For large central government departments, Executive Agencies, and complex organisations, this will be the most important section of the report - it requires significant departmental input.

Organisations should link the information in this section to public task and statutory functions outlined in section 1.6 of the Appraisal report.

For column 3 within the table, identify the business unit that created the record, and the current owner (if different from the creator).

When completing column 5, you should identify how the records are managed. Examples of this include, but are not limited, to:

- paper record and paper index
- paper record and electronic registry
- hybrid file (both paper and digital) and electronic registry or case/content management system
- electronic file, electronic registry or case management
- public website or intranet
- database management or other data management systems such as a GIS (Geographical Information System)

If the record (or the management system) is managed in a special format, include further information under section 3.3. If the record is a publication, include further information under section 3.4.

Activities relating to internal functions do not need to be listed here, but areas for potential selection should be noted under section 3.7.

In addition the guidance in other OSPs relating to specific departments, subjects or function should also be consulted in making appraisal decisions here and in other sections of the report.

3.3 Information in special formats and systems/collections

This section should outline any series of records, central to the organisation's statutory role, whose format differs from the standard registered paper file used in most government departments. Examples of this include:

- physical maps/plans
- databases/EDRM systems
- audio visual (analog or digital film and sound, or other specialised visual material such as glass-plate negative)
- electronic servers
- web technologies
- datasets
- geographic information systems

This information is important to capture as the organisation and The National Archives need to assess where the information is in its most complete and/or most research-friendly form. They also need to ensure that, if selected, processes are in place to ensure its preservation and eventual transfer/disposition. Any special formats identified under section 3.2 should also be included in this section (link to website regarding acceptable formats).

Under column 3, when referring to electronic systems, refer to the version number of the system, and any special requirements or protocols required for ongoing preservation and access. If selected records are published to the organisation's website, provide detail here that provides assurance that the information contained in the records:

- genuinely comes from the stated source
- is reliable, accurate and authentic
- is re-useable, accessible, and copyright has been appropriately assigned
- the version stated to be original has not been altered or manipulated
- can be captured by the UK Government Web Archive ²

² See further guidance at nationalarchives.gov.uk/information-management/policies/web-continuity.htm and nationalarchives.gov.uk/information-management/our-services/dc-guidance.htm on what detail to provide

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Datasets published on the organisation's website will be captured into the UK Government Web Archive, provided the data is in a machine-readable format: not hidden behind a 'log-in', or a pick list or drop down menu. Document datasets that are published in a machine-readable format - and the rationale for selection - as well as any that have been published and selected but (for whatever reason) cannot be published in a machine-readable format.

Under column 4, include physical volume (metres/files) if known, and the amount of bytes the record encompasses.

3.4 Publications

In most cases, publications will be forwarded to the British Library and other appropriate collecting institutions or be captured within the UK Government Web Archive, if published on your website.

This section should provide information on any publications that should be selected. In most cases, the only publications that need to be selected are those that reduce the need for further selections from internal records. Any unpublished reports or internal publications, and the rationale for selection, should be documented here.

Preservation of publications and grey literature should be decided in accordance with [OSP36: Publications / grey literature](#).

Capture and preservation of public websites are covered under [OSP27: UK central government websites](#), and are captured within the UK Government Web Archive.

3.5 Scientific and research records

Most organisations will not have any series which contain records of scientific analysis and research. This includes research on social and societal issues. For those organisations that do, this section should provide information on:

- the nature of the records with scientific data which are produced by the organisation
- the value to the organisation
- the steps that are being taken to ensure the preservation of the information and its disposition, including the publication of the research and associated data

3.6 Significant issues and events

Many agencies create records of future interest around significant issues. These will either be headline events which occur infrequently (major railway crash, outbreak of disease, cross government review), long-simmering issues, or major pieces of legislation (and accompanying documentation - for example White Papers).

Where this will assist in the selection of records, insert a simple list (also known as a calendar of events) with links to the National Archives' Records Collection Policy.

Identifying the 'significant issues' handled by a division or directorate within the organisation will aid this process.

Examples of current lists are included in the following OSPs:

- [OSP5: The administration of social security, 1979-1997](#)
- [OSP24: Records relating to the machinery of government and the management of the civil service from March 1974 to 2000](#)

3.7 Internal Administration

Organisations should only complete this section if there are any internal administrative records which need to be selected. [OSP38: Records of internal administration](#) provides additional guidance on what administrative records organisations should select for preservation.

[OSP15: Control of central government expenditure, 1969-97](#) and [OSP17: Preservation of the built environment, 1970-99](#) provide guidance on which financial and estates records organisations should select for preservation.

4 Additional information and follow-up

4.1 Additional Checks

Some selection proposals need to be supported by scrutiny. For each of the areas listed below record a brief account of the checks made and conclusions drawn. This process should take place in Stage 2 of the process, when making selections.

- OSPs
- quality of committee minutes and papers
- nature of documents included in any case files selected and the sort of information provided
- location and provenance of records identified
- relationship with paper records and with records published on websites especially in any hybrid situation

4.2 Impact on records of other departments

For agencies with a parent department, decisions to select or not to select policy and other records will depend on assumptions made about (or knowledge of) the policy records created in the parent department.

Make a note here if certain policy records, related to the work of the parent department, must be kept for the records to be complete or of value to researchers.

4.3 Implications of the report for the review and selection of paper records relating to the functions covered here

This section should highlight how the decisions in this report will help in the review of the agency's paper records.

Summarise details on how digital records will be reviewed if applicable.

4.4 Follow-up

Indicate here:

- when the appraisal report will be reviewed and updated
- what procedures need to be established in the agency to ensure 'big issues', datasets and so on, are captured in the way indicated in the report, and monitored to ensure that the relevant information is preserved and eventually captured as part of the National Archive collection