

Policy on the display of closed digital record descriptions

This paper sets out the policy on the display of descriptions for closed digital records held at The National Archives. This policy has been published to ensure better understanding of our practice as the volume of digital records sent to us increases.

Scope of the policy

This policy applies to descriptions of all digital records available on our catalogue whether they are received from government departments and other public bodies or private organisations (under special arrangements). It does not cover the display of websites and records captured and displayed in the UK Government Web Archive. For policies relating to these records see our [takedown and reclosure policy](#).

General principles

Most records held by The National Archives are classed as 'open' and anyone can view them or obtain a copy of them. Records may be closed, i.e. not available to the public, under the exemptions in the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act 2000 or the exceptions in the Environmental Information Regulations (EIR). If a record is closed, this is clearly identified in our catalogue. Even when the record itself is closed, its description is usually displayed. In the case of digital records, the description is the original filename, for example "20130525 ExecTeam Minutes.doc".

It is understood however, that some descriptions may be sensitive in themselves. This is because they were created at the same time as the record rather than at the time of transfer to The National Archives (as is often the case with descriptions of paper records). This may mean that the transferring body will wish to 'close' the description under an exemption/exception along with the record until it is no longer sensitive.

Business rule

When closure of all or part of a description cannot be avoided, it will either be amended and include the additional phrase "Not full description", or it will be replaced with the phrase "Closed description".

An example on the catalogue is the file ASSI 84/86 which has the description:

Incest. Not full description, name withheld

The closure of the description as well as the closure of the record will be clearly indicated on the catalogue in the Access Conditions field with the text:

Closed Or Retained Document, Closed Description

Benefits

This policy provides clarity for transferring organisations on the publication of their record descriptions. They have the right to close descriptions to protect sensitive information and this policy ensures that the public can understand the reasons for the closure or amendment of record descriptions.

This policy does not affect the statutory rights of members of the public to request access to a closed record or its description by making a request under the FOI Act or the EIR.