



What to Keep?

A UK Perspective on Appraisal

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Introduction

Our poster illustrates current appraisal practices in the UK. It focuses on three areas: law, policy and practice.

Legislation

These laws each affect the way that appraisal is carried out in the UK *Public Records Act 1958 (updated 1966), Local Government Act 1972*

The Public Records Act mandates the selection of central government records for permanent preservation. Other public bodies such as local record offices and university archives are subject to the Local Government Act. The guidance in this Act is less explicit and prescriptive regarding retention and appraisal.

Data Protection Act 1998, Freedom of Information Act 2000

These Acts affect appraisal in that they determine which records must be kept and which must be destroyed. For example, some records containing personal information must be destroyed after active use, whereas some records must be kept in perpetuity to ensure the accountability of the record-creating body.

Policy

The National Archives (TNA) defines appraisal as “the process of distinguishing records of continuing value from those of no further value so that the latter may be eliminated.” TNA’s appraisal strategy is shifting from The Grigg System, which determines the timescale and procedure for review, towards macro-appraisal, which better facilitates the appraisal of both paper *and* electronic records.

There is no basis in law for local archives to produce an appraisal policy, although TNA encourages all collecting repositories to publish one.² This has resulted in a widespread lack of codified guidelines, which hinders full accountability and consistency in practice.

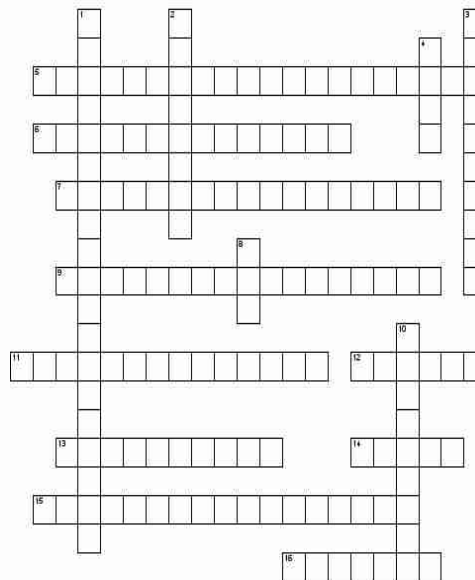
Private archival repositories are under no obligations regarding appraisal, save for the affects of the Data Protection Act. Practices are therefore often independently-created and not made public.

Practice

Outside TNA, practitioners vary their approach to appraisal depending on institutional objectives and resources, favouring a pragmatic rather than theoretical methodologies. There is a clear distinction between the practical aims of working appraisers and conceptual aims of contemporary theorists.

There have, however, been various attempts to explore the practical application of different theories. These include the Minnesota Method at University of Glasgow and the functional analysis approach which has been adopted at University of Oxford since 2003.³

1. TNA, *Appraisal Policy*, vers. 1, (Aug 2004), p.3.
2. Williams, Caroline, ‘Sudying Reality: the application of theory in an aspect of UK practice, *Archivaria*, 62, (2006), p.92.
3. *Ibid.*, p.94.



Across

- 5 Which law, passed in 2000, allows UK citizens to request information from public bodies?
- 6 Collections can be appraised at any time throughout their lifecycle. If you were to re-appraise a collection and decide not to keep it what would this be called?
- 7 What is the name of The National Archives' initiative to preserve digital records?
- 9 Which law, passed in 1998, protects the private details of living UK citizens?
- 11 Which appraisal strategy do the archives of the UK currently subscribe to?
- 12 The review period for government records was recently lowered from thirty years to how many years?
- 13 When reviewing records, The National Archives seeks to identify three main values. Two of these are legal and business values. What is the third?
- 14 Which system did The National Archives of the UK use from 1958 to 2004 for conducting appraisal?
- 15 What was the main problem which led to The National Archives reviewing their appraisal practices in 2004?
- 16 Which 19th century literary figure signed a petition in 1851 to enable public access to the Public Record Office (the former name of The National Archives)?

Down

- 1 What is the name of the UK government's official archive?
- 2 What is the name of the UK's oldest government record held at The National Archives, created in 1086?
- 3 What kind of analysis is carried out in macro-appraisal?
- 4 What percentage of government records are selected for preservation?
- 8 In which part of London is The National Archives located?
- 10 Who is the Godfather of UK archival theory?

Conclusion

It is difficult to formulate a all-encompassing UK perspective on appraisal. While TNA has specific appraisal tools, other repositories are more affected by local factors such as resources, institutional drivers and inherited in-house practices.

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