



# Durham County Record Office

## Deaccessioning Policy

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# Durham County Record Office

## Deaccessioning Policy

### 1 Purpose

- 1.1 Our deaccessioning policy exists to ensure that we preserve permanently as archives only those records of evidential and historical value to County Durham and Darlington. It should be read alongside our other policies, in particular our Collecting Policy and our Appraisal Policy.

### 2 Context

- 2.1 Durham County Record Office is the statutory local authority archive service for County Durham. We also act under agreement as the archive authority for Darlington Borough Council and as the Durham Diocesan Record Office for Parish Records. DCRO is an Accredited Archive Service and appointed as a place of deposit for public records by The National Archives.

- 2.2 Our mission statement:

Durham County Record Office collects, conserves, secures and makes accessible historical records relating to County Durham and Darlington to enable learning and education, business operations, local accountability, and personal enrichment.

### 3 Scope

- 3.1 This policy applies to all records managed by our service both analogue and digital: Durham County Council and Darlington Borough Council corporate records, and records offered to us as potential archives by other organisations or individuals.

### 4 Policy Principles

- 4.1 We preserve archives because of the enduring value of the information they contain or as evidence of the functions and responsibilities of their creator. This important evidential role of archives supports research and the operational efficiency of organisations. What we preserve is unique and therefore irreplaceable.
- 4.2 We undertake the collection, preservation and provision of access to archives following professional principles and ethical guidance.
- 4.3 We accept collections for permanent preservation following our Collecting Policy. We appraise the content of collections, assessing the cultural and informational value of the material, deciding what is archival material and worthy of retention in the archive. Following this appraisal, we formally accession archives into the collection.

4.4 Deaccessioning is and should be a rare occurrence because of the enduring value of archival records. We have a continuing responsibility for the records we hold, and take disposal decisions with great care, following The National Archives Deaccessioning and Disposal Guide 2015.

4.5 We consult with the record owner about how we will dispose of any unwanted records. We keep a record of the deaccessioning work we carry out.

## **5 Policy requirements**

5.1 We may retrospectively appraise existing catalogued collections if we are aware that a full appraisal has not been undertaken.

5.2 We will consider the following factors before making any decision to deaccession:

- The conditions and intentions of the depositor at the time the records were first acquired.
- Are the archives controlled by legislation or regulation?
- Does the collection/item fit better in the collections of another archive service or museum in terms of subject or format?
- Is the collection split between repositories?
- Is the collection/item badly damaged and considered irretrievable?
- Can we provide public access to the collection/item?
- Has the depositor requested withdrawal of the collection/item?
- Has the collection been digitised?
- Is the collection rarely used? Why?
- Is the collection/item of low informational/evidential value?
- Are the items duplicates or non-archival?

## **5.3 Disposal**

5.3.1 We will dispose of items in accordance with legislation and in agreement with the donor/depositor.

5.3.2 Disposal will follow our Collecting Policy and will be by return, transfer to another repository, use for training or teaching purposes, or by confidential destruction.

## **6 Standards**

6.1 See Appendix 2 for statutory position.

6.2 When considering deaccessioning, we assess the overall evidential and historical value of the records using:

- Guidelines published by The National Archives to appraise public records as defined by the Public Records Act 1958. These include records of magistrates and coroners courts and the National Health

Service. DCRO is the recognised Place of Deposit for public records relating to County Durham and Darlington.

- Guidelines published by lead professionals (the Information and Records Management Society and the Archives and Records Association) to appraise records created by local government, schools and businesses.
- Other nationally recognised best practice guidelines, such as The Church of England's records management guides for parish and diocesan records.
- Guidelines developed in-house for appraising records created by private individuals, families, societies and businesses.

## **7 Roles and responsibilities**

7.1 DCC Corporate Management Team is responsible for approving the corporate framework for the preservation of semi-current and archival records as set out in this policy.

7.2 DCC Corporate Directors are responsible for developing service guidance for the preservation of semi-current and archival records.

7.3 DCC Heads of Services are responsible for ensuring that appropriate resources are in place to enable compliance with the Deaccessioning Policy.

7.4 Individual Employees are responsible for the records they create and will follow service guidance for the preservation of semi-current and archival records. DCC owns the information that individual employees create.

7.5 The County Archivist is responsible for DCRO's Deaccessioning Policy, and will provide guidance and support to services and elected members in order to support its aims.

7.6 The Deaccessioning Policy will apply to records created by Elected Members as part of their Council work.

## **8 Communication**

8.1 The Deaccessioning Policy will be published on the DCRO website.

## **9 Audit**

9.1 DCRO will develop procedures to enable the effective monitoring of the Deaccessioning Policy.

## **10 Risk Management**

10.1 Without a policy and procedures to manage deaccessioning, there are a series of risks:

- Disposing of significant archives, irretrievable loss of historically important records.
- Accusations of poor management and/or bias in decision-making. Archive services should record all their decisions and provide an approved audit trail for these decisions so they can show they followed agreed policy, and demonstrate professional judgement and accountability in managing archival collections.
- Attracting bad public relations and damage to reputation. Archive services should consider the impact of their disposal decisions on their reputation. In particular, depositors and donors may make different donation decisions if they think there is a risk of items being disposed of later.
- Trust. Archive services that do not manage the appraisal and disposal process efficiently and ethically, risk losing the support of their community. This community includes a range of stakeholders including users, depositors and funders. Improper disposal can damage the relationship between a funder and an archive service, risking future funding.
- The role of individual archive staff and managers. Without agreed policy and procedures, approved by top management external to the archive service, individuals risk accusations of poor decision-making and even illegal activity or fraud.

## **11 Review**

We will review this policy every three years.

## **12 Contacts**

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## Appendix 1

### Glossary

**Archive:** a group of records created by an organisation or individual in the course of daily activities but no longer needed by them for regular reference. The individual records in an archive can vary in format but each is a combination of a medium and the information recorded on or in it; for example single sheets of paper with typed or handwritten text, maps, bound volumes, photographic negatives and prints, audio-visual recordings and digital documents/files.

**Accessioning:** the process of bringing archives under the intellectual and custodial control of a preservation environment.

**Deaccessioning:** the formal, documented removal of a collection or item from the accession register or custody of the archive service.

**Appraisal:** the process of deciding whether an item or group of items has continuing value in accordance with the collecting organisation's mission statement.

**Retrospective appraisal:** appraisal of collections or items where evidence of previous appraisal to an approved standard is not apparent.

**Disposal:** the physical act of transferring the collection or item from the archive service to another destination. This covers transfer to another repository, return to depositor or donor and, as a last resort, destruction.

## **Appendix 2**

### **Statutory Position and Standards**

Durham County Council has a statutory duty to provide an archives service, to preserve and make accessible archives in whatever format they may be created.

Relevant legislation:

- Public Records Act 1958
- Local Government (Records) Act 1962
- Local Government Act 1972
- Data Protection Act 1998
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Environmental Information Regulations Act 2004
- Parochial Registers and Records Measure 1978
- The Law of Property (Amendment) Act 1924
- The Manorial Documents Rules 1926
- The Tithe (Copies of Instruments of Appropriation) Rules 1960

Standards play an important role in appraisal and deaccessioning. Standards that are relevant to the management of all archives:

- Archive Service Accreditation Standard 2013
- British Standard for archive storage BS 4971:2017
- The National Archives Deaccessioning and Disposal Guide 2015
- Information and Records Management Society Retention guidelines for Local Authorities 2003