

Criteria for the transfer of records to the Modern Records Centre

General principles

We are grateful to all organisations and individuals who donate or deposit records with us because the growth of our archival holdings, and hence our development as a centre for research, is largely dependent on their willingness to do so. But there are certain constraints on our collecting activity. These derive from two main factors:

- The need to avoid, as far as possible, duplicating the holdings of other archive repositories or libraries, or taking in material that should be housed elsewhere.

This is largely addressed by the application of our collecting policy. Ideally the policy is applied before we take in any records, but it may sometimes have to be done afterwards.

- The need to make best use of our resources in the provision of our services.

The accessioning, appraising, cataloguing and storage of our collections are fundamental to everything else we do. They also require a lot of staff time and expensive specialised storage space. So, whilst we want our collections to keep growing, we need to be quite selective in what we take in and what we keep.

What we will take in and keep: general

The records must meet the following three criteria.

- They must, in our judgement, contain information likely to be of long-term research value. We accept that such judgement is a subjective process, but it is unavoidable. The records must be essential to the understanding of the overall development and core activities of the organisation or person concerned, or they must contain other types of valuable information. Even then their bulk may limit how many of them we retain.
- They must not contain information that it is already available in the same form, or substantially the same form, either in our holdings or elsewhere. This precludes the deposit of multiple exact copies of the same item.
- They must be non-current, i.e. not required by their owners for current or future activities and unlikely to become so.

In most cases it is a condition of our receiving records that we are able to dispose of unwanted items without further reference to you.

What we will take in and keep: specifics

Records of organisations

Most of the organisations whose records we are currently receiving are trade unions, employers' and trade bodies and campaigning organisations. The following list is therefore based on what is typically found among the records of such organisations. But not all organisational archives contain all of these record types.

- The definitive series (i.e. those retained by the body's secretariat rather than circulated copies) of minutes, agenda, reports and papers of major policy-forming and executive bodies of the organisation.
- Records arranged by subject which meet the general criteria on page 1. Such records are sometimes the bulkiest in the archive and therefore have to be rigorously appraised.
- Periodicals and other publications of the organisation depositing or donating the records or of its predecessors, unless we already hold such publications in another collection.
- Summary accounting records such as annual financial statements. More detailed financial records will only be retained if they meet the general criteria on page 1.
- The main series of membership records.

What we will not keep

- Minutes, agenda and papers of other organisations unless: they are the definitive series; they are unlikely to be publicly available elsewhere.
- Publications by other organisations or individuals, unless: they are unlikely to be publicly available elsewhere (e.g. ephemera produced by small or short-lived organisations); they contain substantial information about the body or person of whose archive they are part, either in their own content, in significant annotations or insertions, or in the nature of their compilation (e.g. press cutting books). This criterion will preclude the retention of large organisational or private libraries.
- Large series of records relating to particular cases (e.g. accident compensation claims) in their entirety. The retention of a sample of these may meet the general criteria on page 1.
- Artefacts such as banners and badges. These should be housed in an appropriate museum.

In the main it is too time-consuming for us to 'weed' the contents of files or other physically distinct archival items, so records in the above categories may be retained if they are integral parts of such an item whose other content justifies its retention.

Records of individuals

It is more difficult to be specific about these records because they tend to vary more in their content and structure than those of organisations. Except in the case of people of exceptional prominence (e.g. actual or potential subjects of substantial biographies), the general rule is that we only wish to retain those records which relate to the person's activity in one or more of the general fields, such as industrial politics or education, covered by our holdings. This would, for instance, exclude personal financial records.

How you can help us

- Provide us with any information you have (and which we could not easily find out elsewhere) about the organisation or individual who created, received and used the records.
- In the case of large collections, provide us with an outline list of the records which will enable us to identify those which we wish to receive. The list could also be used to make us aware of any records with sensitive personal data which might be subject to current data protection legislation.
- In the case of large collections whose original arrangement has clearly been disrupted, do some preliminary physical sorting (e.g. bringing together a series of meeting minutes and papers in chronological order). As no two archive collections are exactly the same, we can give specific advice on this.
- If your collection is likely to grow, wait until you have a substantial amount or everything you are likely to have in the near future. Then transfer it in one go, rather than in small batches.

None of these actions is necessarily a condition of the transfer of records to us, but they will help us make them available to researchers more quickly.

Transfer of records

In most cases we will ask you to arrange and meet the costs of transferring your records to us although we might consider other arrangements if the donation or deposit would otherwise be impossible.

Digital records

Specific guidance on these is on our website at <https://warwick.ac.uk/services/library/mrc/digital-preservation>.