

A Collecting Policy Framework for Scotland's Archives



**SCOTTISH
COUNCIL ON
ARCHIVES**

A Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SC044553)

Contents

1. Introduction ([2](#))
2. Background ([3](#))
3. Purpose of Framework ([3](#))
4. Scope of Framework ([4](#))
5. Glossary of Terms ([4-5](#))
6. Collecting Policy Framework ([6-8](#))
7. Evaluation & Feedback ([8](#))

Appendix A: Collecting Policy Working Group: Representative Organisations ([9](#))

Appendix B: Collecting Across the Sector: Key Issues ([9-11](#))

Appendix C: Resources ([12](#))

1. Introduction

Clear and well-defined collecting policies and collections development plans are fundamental to supporting an archive's purpose and aims. A strategic approach to collecting offers many benefits – efficient use of resources, greater focus for collecting activities and opportunities for collaboration.

The issues and challenges arising around collecting are varied. Most services have collecting policies in place. However, there can be complicating factors:

- it is not always clear where a collection is best placed based on regional or national significance
- donors may prefer a place of deposit that does not align with existing collecting policies
- services can inadvertently find themselves bidding against other archive services, driving up the cost of acquisition
- archives can be pressured to collect based on the research interests of their parent institution, outside of a longer-term collecting strategy
- lack of information as to what is held where can lead to overlaps in collecting and confusion for archive users.
- lack of resource in terms of staffing, space and media expertise
- issues archives face if offered non archival material such as artefacts or books
- issues archives face collecting and curating digital surrogate or born-digital archive material

Many of these challenges can be addressed through improved communication and information sharing.

Scottish Council on Archives is committed to supporting the sector in furthering best practice in collecting. Ongoing and open communication across the sector will ensure that collecting issues continue to be addressed, to the benefit of both archive services and archive users.

2. Background

This draft framework has emerged from the deliberations of an SCA working group drawing together bodies representing national, local authority, university, business and private archive collections (a list of organisations represented on the working group can be found in Appendix A). The working group agreed that SCA, as a non-collecting body, would facilitate communication and information exchange, co-ordinate a wider consultation and develop a collecting policy framework.

The draft framework has been informed by feedback from collecting bodies who principally collect archive material and by input from a consultation workshop with representatives from 35 archive collecting institutions. A summary of the key issues identified during this consultation and participating organisations can be found in Appendix B. There is an acknowledgement that the collecting landscape includes organisations who do not exclusively collect archive material. It is intended that the further development of the framework will involve input from museums, libraries, galleries and community archives. SCA is now inviting all organisations throughout Scotland who collect archive material to provide input and comment on this draft framework.

3. Purpose of the Framework

The purpose of the framework is simple - to support and promote best practice in collecting among all organisations that currently hold and collect archive material in Scotland. Most archive services have collecting policies in place to define the scope of their collecting. Many also have a collections development policy, identifying community needs and gaps within collections. The purpose of this collecting policy framework is not to offer a prescription for collecting activities at individual service level or to duplicate existing guidance. Rather it is intended to:

- ensure dialogue around collecting policies and activities remains open across the sector
- establish high level outcomes and associated actions promoting resource and intelligence sharing
- reduce fragmentation of collections
- encourage best practice
- share knowledge and expertise

The framework will continue to evolve in response to wider developments and ongoing evaluation.

4. Scope of the Framework

The collecting policy framework is intended to be of practical use to all organisations who collect and hold archive material across Scotland. These include local authority archives, business archives, university archives, private archives, health archives, community archives and archive collections held in libraries, museums and galleries.

5. Glossary of Terms Used

Archives - “Materials (physical or digital) created or received by a person, family or organisation, public or private, in the conduct of their affairs and preserved because of the enduring value contained in them or as evidence of the functions and responsibilities of their creator, especially those materials maintained using the principles of provenance, original order and collective control; permanent records.” (ISO 16175-1:2010)

Archive Service - “An organisation, or part of an organisation, with a remit to manage and promote the preservation and use of archives in its custody”

Archive Services will normally have custody of the archives of their own parent organisation but may also have custody (but not necessarily ownership) of the archives of other organisations or persons. ([The National Archives, Scope of the Archive Accreditation Scheme](#))

‘Best-Practice’ – for the purposes of this framework, this refers to the principles of the [ARA-UK Code of Ethics](#), the [Archive Service Accreditation Standard, 2018](#) , with particular reference to [‘Section 2: Collections’ and Getting Started with Archive Service Accreditation, 2018](#).

Collecting body – for the purposes of this framework, this refers to an organisation with a remit to collect and make publicly accessible objects, books, paintings and other material, including archives.

Community Archives – “Many communities tend to have a local focus, even if they meet virtually but others have another shared focus altogether such as sexuality, occupation, ethnicity, faith, or an interest, or a combination of one or more of the above. Community histories or community archives are the grassroots activities of documenting, recording and exploring community heritage in which community participation, control and ownership of the project is essential.”¹

¹ Flinn, A. ‘Community Histories, Community Archives: Some Opportunities and Challenges’ Journal of the Society of Archivists Vol. 28, No. 2, October 2007

Collections Development - Collections development policies describe what an archive service collects and why, when and how archives are transferred, and where there are gaps in collections. There are different approaches to collections development, but all are designed to ensure that it is an active, open and ongoing process. ([The National Archives, Collections Development](#))

Collecting Policy - Describes the overall intention and direction of an organisation in relation to collecting and can include scope, statutory obligations, subject areas, priorities for collecting, geographical area, co-operation/demarcation of collecting overlaps with other collecting bodies, genres, formats, terms and conditions regarding acquisition and deaccessioning.

Deaccessioning - The process by which an archives, museum, or library permanently removes accessioned materials from its holdings.

6. Collecting Policy Framework

Based on consultation with the archive sector, there was a clear need expressed for facilitating improved communication and supporting best practice in collecting. The following draft framework sets out an aim, (the broad, longer-term desired change) outcomes (the change or difference that will be made) and activities (actions undertaken to effect change).

Aim

Scotland's collecting bodies are well informed, co-ordinated and demonstrate best practice in archive collecting

Outcomes

1. Outcome

Archive collecting bodies benefit from improved access to information on holdings, collecting policies and best-practice in collecting

2. Outcome

Archive collecting bodies and donors benefit from a co-operative and informed approach to managing deposits and acquisitions

3. Outcome

Archive collecting bodies have increased opportunities for communication and collaboration

4. Outcome

Archive collecting bodies benefit from access to impartial advice

Actions

Outcome 1	Archive collecting bodies benefit from improved access to information regarding holdings, collecting policies and best-practice in collecting
Action 1.1	Establish a central hub on the SCA website to share collecting policy and collections development guidance and examples of best practice (e.g. deaccessioning, strategic collections development, ARA-UK Code of Ethics)
Action 1.2	SCA will promote available fundraising e-resources and toolkits and co-ordinate 'meet the funder' workshops
Action 1.3	Commission the development of a toolkit for analysing collection gaps and devising a collections development strategy
Action 1.4	Continue to develop a new online portal and catalogue for Scotland's archive holdings
Action 1.5	SCA and NRS will continue to support services in working toward the Archive Accreditation standard through offering advice, training and access to tools (e.g. the Archives and Records Management Services Quality Improvement Framework)
Outcome 2	Archive collecting bodies and donors benefit from a co-operative and informed approach to managing deposits and acquisitions
Action 2.1	Develop general guidance for donors, including a 'decision tree', to help guide donors and collecting bodies in accessing appropriate information and impartial advice
Action 2.2	Work in partnership with organisations who collect information about archive holdings, (e.g. ARCHON Directory) and further develop the SCA Scottish Archives Map to include community archives.

Outcome 3	Archive collecting bodies have increased opportunities for communication and collaboration
Action 3.1	In response to sector needs, deliver networking events for a broad range of archive collecting bodies
Action 3.2	Continue to convene Collecting Policy Working Group meetings to share information about related developments and promote ongoing dialogue
Action 3.3	Explore the development and establishment of regional networks to share information about deposits and acquisitions
Action 3.4	Continue to build links between archives, community archives and other collecting bodies and to offer relevant training and networking opportunities

Outcome 4	Archive collecting bodies benefit from access to impartial advice
Action 4.1	Develop a neutral collections advisory service for collecting bodies, facilitated by non-collecting bodies

7. Evalutaion & Feedback

In order to ensure that this framework is reflective of the needs and interests of a wide range of collecting bodies, SCA welcomes ongoing feedback on the framework from collecting bodies across Scotland. If you have any comments or suggestions, please email them to contact@scottisharchives.org.uk

The SCA Collecting Policy Working Group will continue to review and update the framework, in response to developments and feedback from archive collecting organisations.

A. Collecting Policy Working Group: Representative Organisations

Archives & Records Association UK & Ireland (ARA)
 Archivist of Scottish Local Authorities Working Group (ASLAWG)
 Business Archives Council of Scotland (BACS)
 Historic Environment Scotland (HES)
 National Library of Scotland (NLS)
 National Register of Archives for Scotland (NRAS)
 National Records of Scotland (NRS)
 Scottish Council on Archives (SCA)
 Scottish Universities Special Collections and Archives Group (SUSCAG)

B. Collecting Across the Sector: Key Issues

In 2018, an SCA facilitated consultation event gathered input from representatives from across the archive sector. The exercise has informed the draft framework's overall aim, outcomes and associated actions.

Key issues were identified under four main headings:

1	Funding, Training and Collaboration
1.1	Ensuring the long-term sustainability of collections when external funding ends.
1.2	Lack of skills, time and resource required to develop successful funding bids.
1.3	Lack of alignment between requirements of funding bodies and priorities of organisations acquiring collections.
1.4	Finding time to collaborate with other organisations.
1.5	Comparatively low profile of archive sector.

2	Conflict Resolution
2.1	Institutions with similar collecting remits can find themselves bidding to acquire the same collection, thereby driving up the price of the item or collection with potentially unfavourable outcomes for the institutions. Engagement or resolution can be even more challenging if institutions bid for a collection alongside private collectors operating outside an established governance model.
2.2	Donors might have a fixed position in relation to where they want their collection deposited that does not align with the institution's collecting remit.
2.3	The research interests of academics within Higher Education institutions can place pressure on archive services to collect outside an established collecting policy or longer-term collections development strategy.
2.4	Lack of clarity, of awareness or of availability of appropriate advice and information about collecting activities within related sectors (e.g. community archives, museums and libraries) can result in collecting overlaps, the division of collections and legacy conflicts.
2.5	It is not always clear or straightforward to establish where a collection should be deposited, particularly if a collection covers more than one geographical area.
2.6	Although disputes are rare, there is not currently a neutral or agreed mediator to assist with the resolution of conflicts or issues arising around collecting.
3	Collecting Policies and Collections Development
3.1	Policies are a useful tool provided they are detailed enough (a broad mandate may not help inform immediate decisions).
3.2	Deaccessioning can be driven predominantly by space considerations, and there is a lack of accessible examples of best practice.
3.3	Challenges around deciding on how a collection should be developed, i.e. gathering appropriate information and using suitably robust methodology to identify gaps in collections and set priorities.
3.4	Lack of consistent terminology and guidance at different levels: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donor to archivist • Staff to staff • Organisation to organisation

4	Information Sharing and Communication
4.1	Disparate sources of information with no central hub providing relevant information to a diverse range of collecting bodies.
4.2	Lack of communication at different levels: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donor to archivist • Staff to staff • Organisation to organisation
4.3	Managing the expectations of donors.

Consultation Participants

Aberdeen City Archive

Archives and Records Association UK & Ireland (Scotland)

Ayrshire Archives

British Geological Survey

Culture Perth and Kinross Limited

Glasgow City Archives

Historic Environment Scotland

Inverclyde Council

KF Governance Solutions Ltd

Lloyds Banking Group Archives

Midlothian Council Archives

National Library of Scotland

National Records of Scotland

National Register of Archives for Scotland

Oban Communities Trust

Standard Life Aberdeen

Tasglann nan Eilean (Hebridean Archive)

The Glasgow School of Art

The National Archives (Kew)

University of Dundee

University of the Highlands and Islands

University of the West of Scotland

West Dunbartonshire Council

C. Resources

The Archive and Records Association UK & Ireland, [ARA Code of Ethics, May 2018](#)

[Business Archives Council of Scotland](#)

Community Archives and Heritage Group, [Supporting and Promoting Community Archives in the UK and Ireland](#)

The Collections Trust, [Revisiting Archive Collections Toolkit, 2009](#)

The Collections Trust, [Spectrum 5.0 Collections Standard](#)

The National Archives, [Archive Service Accreditation Standard UK, 2018](#)

The National Archives, [Archive Collection Policy Statements: Checklist of Suggested Contents, 2004](#)

The National Archives, [Deaccessioning and Disposal: Guidance for Archives, 2015](#)

The National Archives, [Fundraising for Archives, e-learning and resources for archives](#)

The National Archives, [Understanding Collections Development, March 2018](#)

The National Archives, [Writing a Collections Development Plan and Policy, March 2018](#)

The National Archives, [Collections Development Case Studies, March 2018](#)

[The National Register of Archives for Scotland](#)

The Scottish Council on Archives, [Archives and Records Management Services Quality Improvement Framework, 2018](#)

The Scottish Council on Archives, [Archive Service Accreditation, Guidance for Scottish Services](#)



CONTACT

Scottish Council on Archives
HM General Register House
2 Princes Street
Edinburgh
EH1 3YY

E: contact@scottisharchives.org.uk
T: +44 (0)131 535 1362



facebook.com/ScotsArchives



[@ScotsArchives](https://twitter.com/ScotsArchives)



www.scottisharchives.org.uk



**SCOTTISH
COUNCIL ON
ARCHIVES**

A Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SC044553)