

The Glasgow School of Art Archives and Collections

Appraisal Guidelines

These guidelines are for use by The Glasgow School of Art's Archives and Collections staff.

The Glasgow School of Art's Archives and Collections service (the A&C) exists to collect records and objects relating to the School's rich and vibrant history. These appraisal guidelines explain how we work with archival records. However, the principals outlined below may also be used when dealing with large collections of objects such as sets of drawings, textile samples, ceramics etc.

The A&C select records of the highest archival value for permanent preservation. Appraisal is an essential archival activity which informs our selection procedure.

Background

1. Appraisal and removal of duplicate, ephemeral and low information value records allows the A&C to maximise storage space for archive collections of permanent historical value.
2. Modern archives are particularly voluminous. Appraisal is necessary to maintain control of this material and to ensure that only the items most useful and relevant to research are retained.

Scope

1. These guidelines apply to all collections stored and maintained by the A&C. It includes both collections created by GSA as well as collections deposited by external donors.
2. The A&C's right to appraise is recorded in our Transfer of Title form.
3. This document should be viewed in conjunction with GSA's [Collection Development Policy](#) and GSA's [Archival Selection Guidelines](#)
4. These guidelines cover the appraisal of newly deposited/given records, and also considers the re-appraisal of existing collections.

Definition of archival appraisal

Appraisal is the process of selecting records of long-term archival value for permanent preservation and identifying records of low or no further value so that they can be destroyed. Appraisal is a quality control mechanism. It is a positive and essential archival activity.

Aims

1. To ensure that appraisal strategy for archival purposes selects records of the highest archival value, avoiding duplication. The A&C preserves and conserves records permanently and must therefore limit its holdings to records of the highest archival value.
2. To assess the historical significance of individual items, series and collections across the A&C's holdings and in particular to develop a rational, consistent and cost-effective appraisal methodology.

3. To provide rational and consistent appraisal decisions, valid over time, for all records of potential archival value produced by the organisations and individuals whose collections are held within the A&C and to document those decisions.
4. To destroy duplicate material and all other unwanted material confidentially, if not wanted by the depositor. Material will occasionally be offered to other archive services.
5. To be aware of potential research, and to assess this alongside the A&C's overall acquisition strategy as set out in our Collection Development Policy and Archival Selection Guidelines.
6. To assess risk in all circumstances and make decisions based on full analysis of available information.

Procedures for appraisal

1. Appraisal will be carried out by qualified archival professionals, or by para-professionals under the supervision of a qualified archivist.
2. Appraisal of new deposits and gifts will be carried out in two stages: Before receipt into the A&C and also after receipt during the cataloguing process.
3. Where possible, staff will appraise the collection on-site before deposit/gift takes place. This pre-acquisition 'initial' appraisal helps avoid the unnecessary expense of taking this material into the A&C and removing it at a later stage. It is of course possible that a collection will be rejected in its entirety.
4. For newly-deposited collections, a more detailed appraisal will generally be carried out during the cataloguing process on a file by file basis.
5. We will ensure the right to appraisal is embedded in each Transfer of Title agreement. After appraisal, owners of collections will be offered a choice between taking back appraised items not deemed suitable for long term preservation, or allowing the items to be confidentially destroyed. On rare occasions material may be offered to other archive services or museums (if owned by GSA). Deposited material will be offered back to the depositor unless the depositor cannot be traced (using the last available contact details the depositor has supplied). The A&C will not undertake appraisal decisions motivated principally by financial reasons. However, if any monies are received by GSA from the disposal of items, these will be applied for the benefit of the A&C's holdings.
6. Re-appraisal will often be necessary for larger collections if no or little appraisal was carried out at the time of acquisition.
7. Smaller collections may be appraised on a file by file or even item by item basis (e.g. checking the collection folder by folder or document by document). Appraisal for larger scale collections may use a combination of file by file appraisal and macro-appraisal which looks more broadly at the areas a collection covers.
8. Macro-appraisal will be applied to very large collections, where the value of the records can be assessed at departmental or unit level rather than at an individual file level. This type of appraisal encourages organisation-wide analysis of functions or activities as a guide to identifying records of

value for archival purposes. It can identify areas of overlap and so avoid duplication of information selected for the archive.

Specific principles and methodology

1. Appraisal will be carried out within the following legal framework:

- Freedom of Information Act 2002 <http://www.itspublicknowledge.info/Law/FOISA.aspx>
- Public Records Act 1958 and 1967
- Contract law
- Financial regulations
- Data Protection Act 1998

2. Appraisal for archival purposes concentrates largely on the historical value of a record, any value for current business purposes having been superseded when the collection was deposited in the archive. Historical value can be broken down into two areas: 'evidential value', the way the record documents the history, structure and functions of an organisation; and 'informational value', or value in providing research material on persons, places and subjects.

3. Appraisers should use the following criteria when appraising collections, selecting items which provide information regarding:

- The history of The Glasgow School of Art or individuals or organisations associated with it, including, for institutions, their organisation and procedures
- The formulation of any policies or legislation and, more selectively, its implementation and interpretation
- Notable events or persons
- Major events, developments or trends

4. Appraisers should consider keeping material which may not exactly conform to any established criteria, but which does have information which is of interest, or which may be presented in a lively and engaging way.

5. Duplicated material should be systematically removed from the collection. Where possible and practical, all types of records produced by an organisation (and also related organisations if applicable) should be surveyed during appraisal, in order to track or identify sources of information. This will enable items which duplicate information to be selected for disposal.

6. When appraising ephemeral material, in some circumstances material may be suitable for long-term preservation by virtue of its suitability for user engagement and appraisers should also bear this in mind.

7. Sampling: random or other sampling methods should be used pragmatically, with appropriate methodologies implemented which are applicable to the collection under review.

8. All sampling and disposal decisions made after deposit/gift of a collection should be recorded in the catalogue for the collection at the appropriate level for the material destroyed, including reasons for disposal (direct duplicate, duplicates information held elsewhere, not considered worthy of permanent preservation), the individuals involved in these decisions, and the date the appraisal was undertaken.

9 Appraisers should additionally be aware of potential levels of interest from GSA's main user-groups, and where possible retain material which will add significantly to main topics of research, such as genealogy, local history or pedagogy.

Guidelines created: May 2017

These guidelines are based on those used by The London Metropolitan Archives:
<https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/london-metropolitan-archives/about/Documents/appraisal-policy.pdf>