

## APPRAISAL

The PRO, unlike some other national archival institutions, has no declared mission governing its responsibilities in the field of the appraisal and selection of records. We are charged simply with guiding, co-ordinating and supervising the action taken by departments and other bodies to perform their duty to make arrangements for the selection of those records which ought to be permanently preserved. The Act gives no guidance as to which those records are, or why they should be preserved. The Grigg Report refers only to, 'the possible historical, economic, sociological and other non-administrative needs of the future', which for convenience the Report refers to as the 'historical criterion' (para 31).

However we do have a defined role, in that the records for which we are responsible are, generally speaking, limited to those of central government and the English and Welsh courts.

The PRO, as the archive of central government, like any other archive needs to be selective in its acquisition of material, in order to establish and to maintain a corpus of records which is cohesive, compact and worthy of the resources required to support it. Our co-ordinating role across government should ensure that the contents of the PRO are national in scope and not a series of ad hoc collections from different departments.

We might adduce the following reasons for the preservation of departmental and court records.

- because they are part of the national heritage;
- because they have a legal value;
- because they have value as a source for administrative history;
- because they have value for current research, perhaps not directly related to their original purposes;
- because they have value as primary sources of information about past ages;
- because they are of use for reference by their originating departments and their successors, and to inform decision making and policy formation.

Appraisal is the determination of the different values that records may have for the originating department and for others, in order that the selection process may be correctly carried through. Records have a primary value, that is that they are of use to the department for its current or future work, and they may have a secondary value, that is that they may be of interest or use to others, even though their value to the department may have lapsed. The process of appraisal involves the acquisition of information about the department, its functions and its records, and the examination of particular records to assess their primary

and secondary value in the light of that acquired information. The work of deciding on the value of records is not susceptible to being reduced by any devised techniques to a mechanical operation, since it is dependent on analysis and judgment.

Under the Grigg system very generally speaking decisions on primary value are taken at First Review (or in the scheduling of records for destruction after a stated period), while decisions on secondary value are taken at Second Review (or when records are prescheduled for automatic preservation).

Primary values include administrative value, that is value for the transaction of business; legal value, that is value for the protection of legal rights or interests; fiscal value, that is value for financial administration; and scientific and technological value, if records contain data acquired as a result of research and not published.

Secondary value may be evidential, documenting the setting up, organisation, operations and activities of the institution that created the records, and the formulation, execution and effects of its policies; or it may be informational, relating to information that the records contain on persons, bodies, things, problems, places and phenomena, or any subject other than the creating institution itself.

Assessing secondary value is one of the most difficult tasks for archivists or record officers, but one of the most crucial. It is not possible to predict future research trends and patterns, since historical research is susceptible to changes in shifts in interpretation and method, and selection influenced by a particular interpretation or method is unlikely to be of enduring value. As far as possible selections should be objective, permitting and not restricting the use of records by different persons in different ages in different ways. It is better to rely on the administrative purposes and an assessment of the inherent quality of the information in records than on current research interests or speculative future uses. And the assessment will be better made in the light of the perspective brought about by time.

		EVIDENTIAL	INFORMATIONAL
First Review & Disposal Schedules	PRIMARY	administrative legal fiscal scientific & ) if unpublished technological )	
	SECONDARY	About the creating body	About anything else
Second Review		setting up organisation operations activities formulation of policy execution of policy effects of policy	people institutions subjects problems places phenomena



In assessing evidential value, the level of activity at which the records were created is likely to be a strong pointer to their significance and long term value. The importance of the functions of the creating body must affect the evidential value of its records. However it may well be that it will be necessary for some lower level records to be selected in order to provide insight into routine operations and to avoid distortion. It is also necessary to consider the significance of the function itself which created the records, since this will have bearing on the value of the records created.

In assessing informational value relating to subjects other than the creating organisation, it is not only the significance of the persons, bodies, things, problems, places or phenomena to which the records relate that must be assessed (or in some cases the degree to which the records contain all-inclusive information about a whole population of individually insignificant cases). The information should be unique, and not readily accessible elsewhere in as complete or usable form and the information should be in a form in which it is usable.

The relationship that records have with other records needs to be kept in consideration when assessing their value, since it is from the organic relationship that records have with one another and their administrative context that much of their significance is derived.

For registered files and papers, the unit of selection in the PRO is the file or piece, rather than the series, and in this we differ from nearly all other national archives. We tend to use the two words, 'appraisal' and 'selection', somewhat loosely and interchangeably, and we might usefully confine the use of the term 'appraisal' to the process of determining the value of series or blocks of records, and using 'selection' to refer to the process of deciding whether particular files or items from or within series should be kept or not.

We might discuss whether we ought to document more formally the results of an appraisal of a series of records, before the process of selection takes place, in order that the process of selection can take place in the light of an assessment of the value of the series in its place in the administrative process, and in order to make clear that the selection is being carried out on this basis. The appraisal report would form the basis for the information that is now collected by us on Form AAL. Much of the information that would form the basis for appraisal would, in time, be available through the processes that are being recommended by our Working Party on Documentation.

We might also discuss whether our role in future ought not to be more obviously slanted towards appraisal of series of records, whether registered files or case papers/PIPs, rather than our being so concerned with the selection process within series.

We might further consider the extent to which we ought to be using the processes recommended by the working party to obtain information about file series being brought into existence, or already in existence, at a much earlier stage, in order that the division should be able to get a widespread picture across government of the paper work on which the processes which it is our job to guide, supervise and co-ordinate will be operating.

Schema PRO

		EVIDENTIAL	INFORMATIONAL
First review & disposal schedules	Primary	administrative legal fiscal scientific & technological (if unpublished)	
Second review	Secondary	about the creating body  settingup organisation operations activities formulation of policy execution of policy effects of policy	about anything else  people instiutions subjects problems places phenomena