

# ***Records at Risk***

A Report on the BRA Survey of Risks  
to Historical Records in the East of  
England and London Regions,  
Autumn 2010

The British Records Association

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## Contents

Executive Summary.....	p 3
Introduction .....	p 6
Overview .....	p 8
Survey Findings .....	p12
Your Repository.....	p12
Risks to Archives in your Custody.....	p14
Risks to Digital Archives.....	p17
Risks to Archives not (yet) in your Custody.....	p19
Preservation Solutions.....	p27
Preservation Status.....	p34
Disaster Planning.....	p37
The British Records Association .....	p39
Recommendations.....	p42
Annexes	
A. Approach and Fieldwork.....	p45
B. Copy of Questionnaire .....	p46
C. Identified Responding Archives, in Alphabetical Order .....	p55
D. Identified Responding Archives, by Category of Repository	
East of England .....	p58
London .....	p58
E. Targeted Interviews .....	p59

## Executive Summary

*Readers familiar with HM Government's Archives for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (CM 7744, 2009), and the subsequent Archives for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in action (The National Archives/Museums Libraries and Archives Council, 2010; refreshed and reissued, August 2012) will find much to recognise in this report. In particular, we agree on the need for bigger, better, more sustainable archive services, perhaps through collaboration and networking, and on the risks to digital archives.*

Since 1932 one of the principal objectives of the British Records Association (BRA) has been to encourage the preservation of records of historical importance and to help to reduce the threats to their survival. By 2010 it was apparent that a worsening financial climate and the proliferation of new forms of record keeping were having a dramatic effect on archives in Great Britain. The Association therefore commissioned research in that year by The Archive Skills Consultancy (TASC) on risks to archives in two regions, London and the East of England. This summary presents the principal findings of that work. It also makes proposals for future initiatives to address the issues identified by the research, and makes suggestions as to who might be well placed to take those initiatives forward, should they be accepted as useful. It is far beyond the resources of the Association to do this by itself.

The archival landscape has of course changed and developed since the research by TASC in 2010. In particular, the abolition of the Museums Libraries and Archives Council (MLA), the assumption of its strategic archival functions by The National Archives (TNA), and the development of an Archive Accreditation scheme across the UK, are highly relevant to our report. The latest draft (as at September 2012) of the Archive Accreditation scheme addresses many of the issues we have raised. We hope that our independent findings will both inform and encourage further work.

The archives profession exists to care for records of the past, and to make them available to users. It must also take notice of the records of the present, so that those of value are preserved for the future. But despite a multitude of record repositories, large and small, and many local examples of excellent practice, there remain major risks to the records both of the present and of the past.

These risks are structural, part of the way in which the profession is organised and trained. They apply irrespective of budget cuts, though these will almost certainly make things worse. They apply whether or not records are held in an archive repository. They place records at risk despite the vocation of every archivist to preserve records for the future.

The chief risks may be summarised as follows:

- there is currently an unwillingness or incapacity to take in archives in non-traditional formats, especially digital, but also film and sound
- most repositories lack the skills to look after such formats properly, even if they take them in
- there is no national oversight of the collecting practices of individual repositories, to ensure comprehensive and consistent provision. Records can fall through the gaps
- there is no accessible central register of repositories' collecting policies, to advise both public and professionals when records need a good home
- almost 40% of repositories appear not to have a written collecting policy at all
- only 25% of repositories are aware of records at risk within their territorial or subject area
- 75% of repositories, including several London borough repositories, are unable actively to survey undeposited records within their collecting area

- many archivists work in isolation in small repositories, without professional peers. Not all are professionally qualified. They would welcome – and need - the opportunity of shared resources and collaborative projects
- most record repositories will run out of space for new accessions within ten years. Commercial storage is not currently popular as a solution
- despite lack of space, there is often embarrassment and inertia about rationalising holdings which are unwanted
- only 50% of repositories appear to have a disaster plan
- very few repositories have any regional disaster provision, for access to local assistance in a crisis
- very few repositories are planning an exit strategy in case cuts in funding are so severe that total or partial closure is unavoidable.

Our report contains over 30 recommendations to tackle this, which are summarised in the points listed below. Where appropriate, we have made suggestions as to who might lead on particular activities:

- the current emphasis on preserving digital archives should be continued and reinforced, as the message is not “getting through”. Additional support in this area is needed, including active encouragement of the formation of partnerships to share good practice. TNA would be ideally placed to provide leadership here, and ensure that digital preservation is built into the final Archive Accreditation scheme
- the expertise and assistance of TNA in helping to develop digital capacity should be available beyond the public sector. TNA should examine ways in which this can be achieved, in the longer term through the Archive Accreditation scheme and in the short term through continued training and support
- the feasibility of regional provision both for the maintenance of digital archives over time, and for film and sound archives, should be thoroughly assessed, perhaps through research by the Archives & Records Association (ARA). There is also a need for a brokering role to support partnerships along the lines of the Digital Preservation Consortium of the Archives and Records Council Wales; TNA could play a key role in developing partnerships of this kind in England
- a co-ordinated approach is needed, nationally or regionally, so that all information about archives at risk and potential repositories feeds into a central resource. Ideally this should be managed by TNA
- a “collecting policy initiative” is needed, to encourage all repositories to develop and maintain a collecting policy. TNA has already done work on this, and would be a natural candidate to lead this initiative

- collecting policies should be used as a basis for proactive work in surveying and collecting undeposited archives. With the limitations of smaller repositories in mind, TNA should seek to ensure that there is capacity for surveying in each region, and that there are no significant subject gaps at a national level, so that collections are not at risk through gaps in the archival collecting map
- national, sectoral and regional surveys of undeposited archives are also to be encouraged where possible. TNA has undertaken admirable initiatives of this nature on business and religious archives, and is well placed to give a lead on this, but should seek partners amongst interested bodies, including specialist archival institutions, the BRA, the Business Archives Council (BAC) and also regional archival bodies, where they survive
- more collaboration is needed between repositories, especially London borough repositories, to reduce costs and professional isolation, and raise standards. Closer working between archive services is one of the goals of *Archives for the 21st Century*, and there is a role for the ARA, TNA and regional archive bodies to encourage the formation of partnerships and shared working arrangements. The Religious Archives Support Plan offers a sector-based model for how this might be tackled. We also believe that the establishment of the Business Archives Crisis Management Team, co-ordinated by TNA, has been a welcome and useful development
- continued investment is required in new storage facilities, together with low-cost space-saving solutions such as reshelving and reboxing by shape and size rather than by collection
- every repository should have a disaster plan, to include an exit strategy. TNA should ensure that this forms part of the final Archive Accreditation scheme
- regional – or at least collaborative – disaster provision would be helpful, especially for small repositories with limited capacity. Some provision for ensuring suitable measures are in place should form part of the final Archive Accreditation scheme
- the importance of identifying and rescuing undeposited archives should be reaffirmed as a core part of the training of every archivist
- archivists should also be trained to be more confident about disposing responsibly of low-grade or inappropriate material already held, after proper evaluation. The ARA could liaise with the providers of archival diploma courses to develop suitable training content
- sharing of staff (and volunteers) within organisations should be encouraged, wherever this is appropriate. The ARA could undertake further research on flexible deployment of staff and volunteers in the archive sector
- digitisation of records with high public interest through commercial digitisation services (e.g. Ancestry) can help generate income for archives services, and archivists need more advice and support for such projects. TNA and the ARA, building on their experience of developing model contracts and project programmes, will be well placed to offer wider support and advice through their websites and training courses.

## Introduction

This is a report about records at risk in two English regions: East of England, and London. We hope that its findings will be relevant to other regions of the UK as well. It was commissioned by the British Records Association (BRA) with sponsorship from the UK Data Archive (UKDA), University of Essex; the East of England Regional Archives Council (EERAC); Archives for London (AfL); the Charlotte Bonham-Carter Trust; the Mercers' Company; and the estate of the late Nancy Briggs, formerly of Essex Record Office. The project was conducted between July and October 2010, using the approach and fieldwork outlined in Annexe A.

The London Region, containing the national capital, a metropolis of several million people, has over 300 archive offices, with a considerable density in central London. These are run by a mixture of mostly national and local government, national museums and charities, international businesses, universities, academic institutes, professional bodies and old-established libraries. Some are very small.

The East of England Region contains over 90 repositories, a mix of mostly county record offices, local museums, stately homes, schools, universities and colleges, with the greatest density in Cambridge. Again, some are very small.

The project objectives were:

- to review current capacity within the two regions, in order to identify risks to historical records
  - within repositories
  - not deposited in repositories
- to make practical recommendations to reduce those risks
- to understand the capacity of repositories to respond to emerging threats and urgent needs for rescue or deposit, including by collaborative working.

Data was collected primarily by means of a questionnaire. This was sent to all the East of England repositories we could identify, 91 in total. We also contacted 100 London repositories, including all London local authority repositories. For details see Annexe A. The questionnaire is reproduced as Annexe B.

136 repositories responded. Of these, 85 identified themselves, 37 from the East of England and 47 from London, plus the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies, which is in neither target region.<sup>1</sup> These 85 repositories are listed in Annexe C. Most categories of repository appear to be represented. For details, see Annexe D.

Interestingly, only 21 of the 85 are administered by local government, and include twelve London borough repositories, five of which have no qualified archivist. These five in particular are to be commended for completing the questionnaire in such an open and honest manner. We hope that our recommendations have done justice to their concerns.

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<sup>1</sup> We have included this return in our report because the staff there clearly feel very strongly about the issues raised.

Follow-up telephone interviews were then carried out with 50 repositories of the 85. The results supplemented and reinforced the findings of the questionnaire, and have been incorporated into this report. In addition, contact was made with three targeted individuals to discuss specific issues. See Annexe E.

The survey and follow-up interviews were carried out on our behalf by The Archive Skills Consultancy (TASC), which also wrote the first draft of this report. The BRA extends its grateful thanks to TASC for its help. The report was then edited for publication by members of the BRA Council, in particular Stephen Freeth, to whom the Association is very grateful.

The BRA would like to thank all 136 repositories that responded to the survey, together with those who contributed to the follow-up and targeted interviews. It acknowledges the guidance and advice of the project's Steering Committee, under the chairmanship of Dr Anthony Smith, Chairman of the Records Preservation Section of the BRA. It is also extremely grateful to Norman James and his colleagues in the Archive Sector Development (ASD) team at TNA, who read a draft of this report and made many helpful comments

The significant level of response to the questionnaire shows that records at risk are a serious professional concern. Our report recommends various actions, based on analysis of the survey data.

## Overview

The first objective of the survey was *to review current capacity within the two regions to identify risks to historical records within repositories*. In general repository managers seem well aware of the risks to their collections in traditional formats – parchment and paper. However audio-visual and especially digital archives are either not being collected, or are at risk even after they have been taken in by a repository. The survey also aimed to assess contingency plans in the event of archive repositories closing, or suffering crippling reductions in resources. In the main we conclude that exit strategies are not yet an accepted part of disaster planning.

The second objective was *to review current capacity within the two regions to identify risks to historical records not deposited in repositories*. We conclude that it is difficult to know when such archives are at risk, but that much good work is being done. Local and national networks, including the various listserves, identify and discuss archives at risk on an *ad hoc* basis. The National Archives co-ordinates a crisis response team for business archives at risk, and also monitors sales catalogues to alert repositories to relevant material. Although many repositories (unsurprisingly) have difficulty in accepting archives at risk that fall outside their collecting policies, there is substantial evidence of good will towards finding solutions.

At the same time some repositories appear introverted, with no knowledge of records at risk in their collecting areas, nor any method in place to become aware of them. This is not limited to small privately-funded repositories, but extends to some of the twelve London borough archives that replied to our questionnaire. Lack of funding is surely the reason.

Objective number three was *to make practical recommendations to reduce those risks*. In the course of the project we were provided with many concrete suggestions, as well as developing our own ideas. These appear under “Recommendations” at the end of this report.

The last objective was *to understand the capacity of repositories to respond to emerging threats and to urgent needs for rescue or deposit, including by collaborative working*. We write this report at a time of austerity and reductions in public sector funding. It is clear that there is a need for training; best practice guidelines; facilitated collaboration; and more centralised co-ordination of effort, knowledge and resources. It is also clear that many repositories are open to innovation and collaborative working, and would welcome such developments.

We were unable to discover any significant differences between the two regions. The risks to records are essentially the same in both: the weaker the funding, the weaker the provision. Fortunately in both regions, small, privately-funded repositories with limited responsibilities can give a good service with resources which a local authority repository would find completely inadequate. Unfortunately the funding of some borough repositories in London is more or less at this low level.

The responses to the various sections of the questionnaire may be summarised as follows:

## Repository Staff & Management

The majority of repositories have at least one qualified archivist. However five of the twelve London borough repositories which responded to our questionnaire do not. This seriously weakens the provision for archives in these important metropolitan areas.



## Risks to Archives in Custody

There is a keen awareness of the preservation needs of collections in the traditional formats of paper and parchment, to the exclusion of other formats.

Loss of staff is a significant concern, but partial or total dismantling of the service is not. In general, public repositories feel more vulnerable than private archives to budget cuts.

Strategies are needed for income generation. Collaboration with on-line providers of paid-for access to digitised material is one possibility; model contracts are needed to assist local negotiations.

There is little apparent risk of depositors removing collections.

## Risks to Digital Archives

Digital archives are at great risk. There is no general understanding of the requirements for their acquisition or care. There is a lack of specialist staff and technical resources to manage and preserve them in the longer term. Many archivists are reluctant to collect them. The majority of repositories, while not specifically excluding digital archives, do not actively solicit them.

An internet portal for easier access to best practice and standards would be helpful. So too would a national advisory service on digital archive management. The good work of The National Archives (TNA) and the Digital Preservation Coalition should be continued and expanded.

Public archives are significantly better able to provide for digital archives than private repositories. The support given by TNA to local authority repositories should be extended beyond the public sector.

Successful digital preservation strategies should be promoted to the rest of the archives profession. Basic training in digital curation, and co-ordination of data recovery services from obsolete media, will also be welcome.

## Risks to Archives not (yet) in Custody

The specialised storage and access requirements of film and sound archives discourage their collection. Regional provision may be a solution.

Collecting policies are a powerful tool. A significant number of repositories use collecting policies for proactive collecting, and for surveying undeposited archives that fall within their collecting remit. Collecting policies also encourage collaboration and co-ordination between repositories.

However almost 40% of respondents when asked (Question 5.1) do not have a formal collecting policy; and existing policies do not add up to a comprehensive safety net. A "collecting policy initiative" is therefore suggested, to encourage all repositories to develop and implement a collecting policy using The National Archives's checklist. This should be monitored centrally, to ensure comprehensive, co-ordinated and efficient coverage.

A significant number of repositories lack the storage space and staffing actively to collect undeposited archives.

Most repositories are unable to take in archives at risk that fall outside their collecting policy. At the same time, there is a high level of commitment to advising owners of archives about how to preserve their collections, and to suggesting alternative repositories when a collection is declined.

Monitoring undeposited archives is currently done on an *ad hoc* basis according to local resources, supported by specific national initiatives, such as the recent survey of Religious Archives. Unfortunately a large proportion of respondents, including several London local authority repositories, do not do this, nor do they know of any archives at risk.

A co-ordinated approach is needed. Undeposited archives should be surveyed nationally, sectorally, regionally and by individual repositories, as resources allow. There should be more collaboration between neighbouring repositories, the richer helping the poorer. Information about archives at risk and about potential repositories should also feed into a central managed resource, nationally or regionally. And the importance of local networking, and of personal responsibility, initiative and quick reflexes, on the part of every archivist, to rescue archives at risk should be a core aspect of professional training and recruitment.

## Preservation

Many archivists in small repositories feel extremely isolated. They would welcome greater access to shared resources and collaborative projects. However the practical implications of collaborative working, especially finance, can be difficult. Successful collaborations should be used as models.

There is some support for specialist regional repositories for audio-visual and digital archives. We also need to increase understanding of digital archives, especially the difference between “born digital” and “digitised”, which makes a difference to preservation priorities.

Lack of storage space will become critical within the next ten years, without further investment. Commercial storage is currently not a popular option. In addition archivists need to overcome their embarrassment about de-accessioning unwanted material, though this should always be done in a professional manner, with destruction as the last resort. The Records Preservation Section of the BRA may be able to help.

There may also be scope for inexpensive interim measures, such as reshelving and reboxing archives by shape and size rather than by collections. Space savings of over 20% can often be achieved very quickly. This approach is often overlooked, and should be promoted more widely.

Many repositories would welcome more support from national and regional bodies in rescuing archives at risk.

Only a minority of repositories are able to make preservation resources, including packaging and decontamination, available at short notice for archives at risk. This is not through unwillingness, but lack of resources. Local links with better-funded repositories would seem to be the answer, perhaps on a rechargeable basis.

Over 60% of archives held by repositories are now in archival quality containers. This is to be applauded. In addition, around 5% have been digitised, and almost 10% microfilmed. This too is good news, and should save wear and tear on the most heavily-used material.

## Disaster Planning

Disaster plans are an accepted part of repository management, but only around half of the respondents had one. Even where they exist, such plans tend to concentrate on physical threats. There is little evidence that partial or complete closure of repositories, i.e. the need for exit strategies, is being addressed. This is a new area for archivists, where guidance and best practice in related heritage sectors will be useful.

## Survey Findings

We set out our detailed findings below. This section is arranged in the same order as the questionnaire.

Only the initial question was answered by all 136 respondents. At least 87 respondents answered the questions that required only a Yes/No answer. The response rate dropped for the core questions within Question 6.1, about preservation strategies, which respondents may have found more difficult or less relevant. Full statistics of responses can be found under each question in the analysis below.

### 2. Your Repository<sup>2</sup>

#### **2.1 Are you/do you have a qualified archivist? (Yes/No)**

*Answered question: 136*

*Skipped question: 0*

96 respondents (70.6%) were, or had, qualified professional staff. Given the number of small and specialist repositories in the two regions, this is a good sign. However, five of the twelve London borough repositories that responded to our questionnaire had no qualified professional staff.

#### **2.2 Are you able to influence senior management decisions with respect to archives policy, strategy and management? (Yes/No)**

*Answered question: 135*

*Skipped question: 1*

114 respondents (84.4%) replied Yes. To test this, we included in the telephone follow-up phase the question, "If you wanted to embark on a major renovation of the storage area which would cost money and involve complex logistics moving the archives, would this be easy to push through?"

Of the 50 repositories contacted, 27 made comments relevant to this issue of which only eight could be construed as negative. Table 1 illustrates the range of replies:

<b>Table 1: Support to archives from senior management</b>	
<b>Positive</b>	<b>Negative</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The will is there but not the money</li> <li>▪ Good support ... from the family; consider the archives to be one of the treasures</li> <li>▪ Currently have adequate storage and very good support for archives</li> <li>▪ A lot of support from the Trustees, who realise the value of the archives</li>   <li>▪ Generally good support. Plans are in place for a new museum building that would benefit archives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Immensely difficult to get support; limited capacity and resources.</li> <li>▪ Archives regarded as "Cinderella" activity</li> <li>▪ Archive support hangs by a slender thread</li>   <li>▪ No support; have had to fight hard. Without support it</li> </ul>

<sup>2</sup> Section 1 of the survey questionnaire comprised the Introduction.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Refurbished very recently and good support</li> <li>▪ Expansion is not appropriate as the new Record Office was built 10 years ago</li> <li>▪ Already have new storage to a good standard; good support within the institution</li> <li>▪ No space available; archives are supported, and projects would be regarded well if the reasoning was sound</li> <li>▪ Arguments for an upgrade would be strong, but resources are limited</li> <li>▪ Already completed big development project – external drivers plus council support were the keys</li> </ul>	<p>is impossible to get funding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Archives are a bit of an after-thought</li> <li>• Any storage improvements would require complex negotiations</li> </ul>
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From this we conclude that:

1. there is indeed good senior management support for many archive repositories
2. this support can lead to refurbished or new facilities.

**2.3 How many reporting levels are there between you and your organisation’s governing body?**

*Answered question: 135*

*Skipped question: 1*

0	1	2	3	4	4+
7 (5.2%)	36 (26.7%)	30 (22.2%)	24 (17.8%)	18 (13.3%)	20 (14.8%)

The majority of replies fell between 1 and 3, with the immediate reporting level being a very encouraging 26.7%.

### 3. Risks to Archives in your Custody

This section tested the general appreciation and extent of risks to collected archives.

#### **3.1 Which of the following pose risks to your holdings? (Please tick all that apply) (14 options)**

*Answered question: 129 (overall total)*

*Skipped question: 7*

The response rate indicates a high degree of engagement with risk factors. Table 2 shows the results:

<b>Table 2: Perceived risks to holdings</b>	<b>Response count</b>
The age of the building	49 (38%)
Sharing accommodation with other services or organisations	58 (45%)
A lack of environmental control	80 (62%)
Pressure to provide access to users	35 (27.1%)
Budget cuts/ fewer resources forcing de-accessioning of all collections	4 (3.1%)
Budget cuts/ fewer resources forcing de-accessioning of a portion of collections	8 (6.2%)
Loss of staff	49 (38%)
Digitisation programmes leading to increased vulnerability of originals of copied archives to enforced de-accessioning	4 (3.1%)
Lack of resources to maintain digital preservation strategy	76 (58.9%)
Vulnerability of film collections to inappropriate storage conditions and the complexities of access	38 (29.5%)
Vulnerability of sound collections to inappropriate storage conditions and the complexities of access	31 (24%)
Vulnerability of photographic format collections to inappropriate storage conditions	49 (38%)
Owners of deposited archives removing them	13 (10.1%)
Deteriorating, mouldy or otherwise compromised collections	22 (17.1%)

Lack of environmental control (80 ticks) (62% of 129) was the highest identified risk, with other building-related risks scoring highly: shared accommodation (58) (45%), and age of building (49) (38%).

Lack of resources to collect digital material (76) (58.9%) was the second highest identified risk. Digital material is therefore poorly supported and highly at risk, indicating the need for national and regional strategies to address this issue. The responses to questions 4.1 and 4.2 below confirm that just over three-quarters of respondents do not actively solicit digital collections, and lack specialist staff to deal with them.

There was some concern about storage and access arrangements for audio-visual material: photographs (49) (38%); film (38) (29.5%) and sound (31) (24%). Photographs form a significant part of the holdings of most repositories, and are often integral to individual archives, so they should not be removed; but film and sound material may be better cared for in specialist repositories on a regional basis. The lower response rates for film and sound collections may simply indicate that there are fewer such collections.

More than one third of respondents (49) (38%) were concerned about possible loss of staff. The effects of staff reductions will clearly vary from repository to repository, and may be unavoidable. Substantial income generation through collaboration with on-line providers such as Ancestry.com was suggested as one way of compensating for budget reductions. However it seems unlikely that individual repositories could complete the necessary complex negotiations within a limited time frame. Model contracts, perhaps using TNA experience, may help.

Risks to collections through pressure to provide access (35) (27.1%) suggested that in some instances repositories are forced to make uncatalogued and/or fragile material available. "Compromised" condition was a concern for almost one fifth of respondents (22) (17.1%), which probably indicates a lack of conservation facilities or access to relevant expertise. Regional conservation provision on a rechargeable basis, or a budget with which to hire craftsmen from the private sector as contractors, may be a way forward.

A lower risk than might have been anticipated was from removal of deposited archives by owners (13) (10.1%). Perhaps repositories now ensure that material is donated rather than deposited. However the 85 repositories who identified themselves in their responses to the questionnaire included many small, specialist, in-house units (school archives, college archives etc), for whom this is a relatively minor problem. The real risk is to local government record offices, and to some university collections. (For example, London Metropolitan University has recently decided (March 2012) to seek a new home for the Women's Library and the TUC Library.)

The lowest risks were perceived to be from enforced de-accessioning. Budget or resource reductions were thought to be a risk to the *entire* holdings of the repository by only 3.1% (4) of respondents, and to *some* of its collections by only 6.2% (8), whilst only 3.1% (4) thought de-accessioning of originals that have been digitised was a risk. The same explanation probably applies.

**3.2 Have you grounds to suppose your service is facing severe reductions in resources such as budget, staff, space etc? (Yes/No)**

*Answered question: 131*

*Skipped question: 5*

<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
46 (35.1%)	85 (64.9%)

Most respondents were confident that resources would not be severely reduced. Perhaps they do not fully appreciate the current economic climate. On the other hand, small specialist repositories may be relatively unaffected.



## 4. Risks to Digital Archives

### **4.1 Do you actively solicit archive collections in digital formats? (Yes/No)**

Answered question: 129

Skipped question: 7

Yes	No
30 (23.3%)	99 (76.7%)

Digital material is highly at risk because it is not being actively sought. Digital preservation has been widely promoted for several years as a vital part of ensuring that the records of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries are as complete as possible; but progress is slow.

The responses to Question 4.2 below suggest that this approach may be caused by lack of specialist staff. Nevertheless repositories must be discouraged from ignoring archives in digital formats. The National Archives has been effective in supporting local authority repositories to develop digital capacity. This support needs to be made available more widely, perhaps through a national advisory service, analogous to the Digital Curation Centre, which could provide advice on best practice and standards.

Those repositories with successful digital preservation strategies need to promote them, e.g. via professional seminars. Basic training in digital curation, and co-ordination of data recovery services from obsolete media, will also be useful.

The profession needs to identify the reasons for poor provision overall.

### **4.2 Do you have appropriate specialist staff to manage digital archives? (Yes/No)**

Answered question: 129

Skipped question: 7

Yes	No
28 (21.7%)	101 (78.3%)

More than three quarters of respondents did not have specialist staff.

Many respondents to the follow-up phase felt that it was not necessary to have specially trained “digital archivists”, but that archivists managing archives in digital formats would need a high level of IT literacy, “to outline the issues and define the needs”, as one put it. There are a lot of resources available to help, both within and beyond the archive sector. An internet portal giving access to all the available links would be a good starting point.

### **4.3 Do you have the technology to manage digital archives through time? (Yes/No)**

Answered question: 129

Skipped question: 7

Yes	No
40 (31%)	89 (69%)

A high proportion of respondents lacked the necessary technology. As stated before, repositories should be prepared to accept archives in digital formats. However it is perhaps unnecessary for *all* repositories to be able to maintain digital archives over time. This could be achieved through collaboration on a regional basis. Again, there are examples of good practice in establishing and maintaining digital repositories, from which archivists could learn.<sup>3</sup>

#### **4.4 Are you able to make digital records available for study or use? (Yes/No)**

Answered question: 128

Skipped question: 8

Yes	No
60 (46.9%)	68 (53.1%)

The surprisingly large number of respondents who said Yes to this question were probably referring to their ability to provide access to *digitised images*, either in-house or remotely, rather than to “born digital” archives. An overall impression from the telephone follow-up interviews was of confusion between “born digital” records, those created within a computer, and “digitised” records, those created from a hard copy original. There should be less concern about risks to the latter because, in general, the hard copy original will continue to exist. “Born digital” records are the real problem, and even more so if many archivists’ knowledge about them is stuck at an elementary level.

Further analysis of the Yes responses to questions 4.1 to 4.4 was then carried out to establish possible differences between public and private repositories and between the two regions. Nothing worthwhile could be deduced from the comparison between the two regions, but the comparison of public and private repositories produced results as follows, based on the responses which identified themselves:

- active collection of digital archives is almost equal between public (10) and private (8) repositories
- specialist staff are much more frequent in public repositories (7) than private (2)
- the ability to manage digital records over time is more frequent in public repositories (10) than private (6)
- making digital records available is possible in more public repositories (11) than private (7).

This supports the need for information and training in managing digital archives to spread beyond the public sector. Even there, it could probably be repeated and reinforced.

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<sup>3</sup> For example, case studies can be found at: <http://www.dpconline.org/advice/case-notes>.

## 5. Risks to Archives not (yet) in your Custody

This section investigated repositories' collecting activities; their awareness of archives potentially at risk; and their willingness/capacity to provide for archives at risk.

### **5.1 Do you have a collecting policy? (Yes/No)**

**If so, please send an electronic copy to [margaret@archive-skills.co.uk](mailto:margaret@archive-skills.co.uk) as well as answering the questions. If you don't have one, please respond to the questions in this section according to your collecting practice.**

*Answered question: 113*

*Skipped question: 23*

Yes	No
69 (61.1%)	44 (38.9%)

Although a sizeable majority of the 113 respondents had a collecting policy, almost 40% did not. We were also concerned that 23 respondents did not answer this question, raising doubts as to whether they had a collecting policy either.

The 100 replies to Question 5.3 below, about how respondents use their collecting policy *or practice*, nevertheless suggest that more than 69 repositories do in fact have an established collecting remit, albeit not yet written down or formally approved. This is encouraging.

We are grateful to the 19 repositories that supplied a copy of their collecting policy, 11 of them from the East of England region, and 8 from London.

A collecting policy is a fundamental document for archive management. (See Question 5.3 below.) Every repository should have one. The National Archives website has a checklist<sup>4</sup> to guide people in the creation of a collecting policy. This checklist clearly needs to be advertised more widely. We also need examples of collecting policies available on-line.

Those repositories which have yet to codify their established practice into a formal written policy should do so without delay. It should not be a difficult task.

### **5.2 Are any of the following formats excluded: Digital – Audio – Film and video – Paper/parchment?**

*Answered question: 18 (overall total)*

*Skipped question: 118*

**Digital – 7 (38.9%)**

**Audio – 10 (55.6%)**

**Film and video – 14 (77.8%)**

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/archive\\_collection\\_policy.pdf](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/archive_collection_policy.pdf)

### **Paper/parchment - 1 (a special format repository)**

There were only 18 responses to this question. On the face of it, most repositories do not explicitly exclude any format. Of those that do, most decline film and video. However the response about digital records must be viewed in conjunction with the negative response to Question 4.1 above, which asked whether repositories actively collected digital records. (99 respondents said that they did not.) The true situation is therefore much worse than the replies to this present question suggest. The same probably applies to audio, film and video.

### **5.3 How do you use your policy/practice? (Please tick all that apply)**

*Answered question: 100*

*Skipped question: 36*

- **to de-accession material that does not fit your remit - 28 (28%)**
- **to decline to accept records into your repository that do not fit your remit - 87 (87%)**
- **for proactive collecting - 49 (49%)**
- **to survey undeposited records - 27 (27%)**
- **cooperation with other repositories in collecting policy and decision making - 45 (45%).**

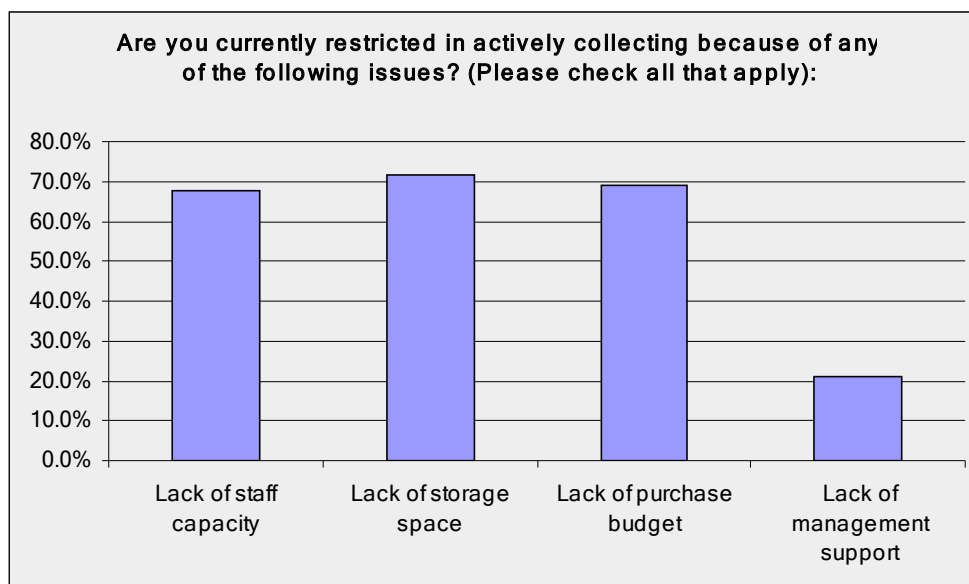
There were 100 replies to this question, even though only 69 repositories have a collecting policy (Question 5.1). We therefore assume that the remainder have an established collecting *practice*, if not yet a formal *policy*.

Of the 100 respondents, a significant proportion (87%) used their policies to decline material. This shows how a collecting policy can help maintain the focus of an archive, preserve storage space and protect staff time. Almost one half (49%) used their policies for proactive collecting, and more than a quarter (27%) for surveying undeposited collections. This demonstrates that a collecting policy can be a powerful tool for rescuing and/or documenting archives at risk. Cooperation with other repositories (45%) should also strengthen the safety net for undeposited archives.

### **5.4 Are you currently restricted in actively collecting because of any of the following issues? (Please tick all that apply)**

*Answered question: 81*

*Skipped question: 55*



Most (58) (71.6%) of the 81 respondents cited lack of storage space, closely followed by lack of purchase budget (56) (69.1%), and lack of staff capacity (55) (67.9%). Lack of management support was cited by only one fifth of respondents (17) (21%). The graph shows the results.

**5.5 If a potential deposit was fragile, mouldy or otherwise compromised, would you decline to accept it into your custody? (Yes/No/Depends) (Please give details below)**

*Answered question: 109*

*Skipped question: 27*

Yes	No	Depends
16 (14.7%)	46 (42.2%)	47 (43.1%)

These figures are encouraging. Those answering “Depends” were asked to give details and, in general, compromised state would never be the sole reason for refusing a collection, but would be balanced against significance. The size of the collection and the cost of treatment were also considerations, with some repositories indicating that they would try to negotiate with owners for a contribution to those costs.

One specialist digital archive added, “Our concern is to ensure that the archives we accept do not require excessive pre-ingest enhancement, have metadata compliant with internationally recognised standards, and are licensed in such a way as to make them accessible to researchers.”

**5.6 If you decline an archival collection that is offered to you, do you provide advice to mitigate risk? (Yes/No)**

*Answered question: 103*

*Skipped question: 33*

Yes	No
70 (68%)	33 (32%)

**5.7 If you decline an archival collection that is offered to you, do you suggest an alternative repository? (Yes/No)**

*Answered question: 104*

*Skipped question: 32*

Yes	No
95 (91.3%)	9 (8.7%)

**If so, how do you know about alternative repositories?**

Of the 95 who had said Yes, 82 replied. All relied on experience and professional knowledge. Typical answers were as follows:

- years in the job
- NRA, ARCHON, word of mouth, general professional knowledge
- Museums and Galleries Year Book; County has an archive
- we are in regular communication with the majority of repositories whose collecting policies are similar to ours
- we have an alternative repository list
- networking with other archivists in the health sector and my local area. I also check the NRA register of archives and HOSPREC database
- local knowledge, advice from colleagues, web-based research
- liaise with county record office
- this is easier with a small dedicated collection like ours, where offers will be somewhere in the same subject area, and I would almost certainly know who to turn to.
- the subject at issue (Fine Art) is well defined, and relevant repositories/collecting policies well mapped.

**5.8 Do you give advice or support to holders of undeposited records which fall outside your collecting remit for any reason? (Yes/No)**

*Answered question: 109*

*Skipped question: 27*

Yes	No
67 (61.5%)	42 (38.5%)

Questions 5.6 to 5.8 are considered together. They aimed to find out how much advice and support repositories give to owners of undeposited collections. The answers indicate a high level of

commitment to protecting undeposited archives, although less so if the records are outside the collecting remit.

### **5.9 Do you maintain up-to-date depositor information? (Yes/No)**

*Answered question: 110*

*Skipped question: 26*

Yes	No
66 (60%)	44 (40%)

It is worrying that 40% of the 110 respondents did not have this basic information, which would show them who their archives belonged to; allow them to keep in touch with owners or custodians; help them to advise users wishing to publish material; and make it possible to secure accruals to continuing series, as well as other records which might have been retained.

### **5.10 Do you survey undeposited records within your collecting remit? (Yes/No)**

*Answered question: 109*

*Skipped question: 27*

Yes	No
29 (26.6%)	80 (73.4%)

### **5.11 Do you hold lists of undeposited archives within your collecting remit? (Yes/No)**

*Answered question: 110*

*Skipped question: 26*

Yes	No
28 (25.5%)	82 (74.5%)

These two questions are considered together. The responses indicate that knowledge of undeposited archives within a repository's collecting remit is rare. Around 75% of those answering, equivalent to over half of the 136 respondents to the questionnaire as a whole, and including several London borough repositories, claimed neither to survey undeposited archives nor to hold lists of them. This must inevitably place such collections at greater risk of damage or loss.

This is disappointing. Repositories need to be more outward-looking than this. Change is clearly needed. Outside help, perhaps linked to TNA's National Collections Strategy (May 2009) and to the National Register of Archives, could make a significant difference.

Targeted surveys can also be nationally led, as in TNA's work on Religious Archives; sectorally led, as in the Freemasons' recent survey of Lodge records; or organised by regions. Few repositories will have the resources to cover their own collecting areas comprehensively. Large-scale surveys will also minimise waste and duplication of effort.

**5.12 Do you know of any archive currently at risk? (Yes/No)****If so, please give brief details (in general terms if you wish, eg “a large solicitor’s collection”)***Answered question: 108**Skipped question: 28*

Yes	No
28 (25.9%)	80 (74.1%)

This question was answered by 108 respondents and the Yes/No ratio was roughly one quarter/three quarters. Eight of the twelve London borough repositories which responded to the questionnaire were among those who replied “No”. We interpret the negative replies as reflecting those to questions 5.10 and 5.11, i.e. as displaying blissful ignorance, rather than a satisfactory state of affairs.

Almost all of those answering Yes gave further details, mostly in general terms. A few points can be made:

- two respondents (one a school archivist, the other a hospital archivist) identified their own organisation’s archives as being at risk, the first because of a lack of qualified staff, suitable accommodation and budget; and the second because the building was under threat
- there is increased risk to archival collections in small museums, due to the loss of Museum Development Officers in the current economic climate
- corporate engineering records are at risk in a time of mergers, restructuring and bankruptcy
- “the records from the chambers of barristers. In future years they will serve as a fascinating insight into the fast-changing legal world. We have no other evidence.”

**5.13 How do you become aware of archives at risk? (Please tick all that apply) (8 options)***Answered question: 104 (overall total)**Skipped question: 32*

<b>Table 3: Sources of information about archives at risk</b>	
Staff members of own organisation	50 (48.1%)
No method in place	46 (44.2%)
Approach from institutions with records at risk	40 (38.5%)
Information from public/Friends group	37 (35.6%)
Vendors such as book dealers or auction houses	31 (29.8%)
Information from The National Archives	22 (21.2%)
Other (please give details)	17 (16.3%)
Information from BRA	15 (14.4%)



Table 3 gives the responses, in order of significance.

Those who answered “Other” gave details as below:

- customer/user (5)
- local media (2)
- people involved/ individuals with records at risk (2)
- college’s own networks; interested parties
- volunteers
- BAC; TNA Business Archives support officer; ARA Business Records Group
- members of the Company and others within the trade
- professional colleagues/organisations
- archive supporters, clients and advertising industry contacts.

We were at first extremely disappointed that 46 respondents had replied “No method in place”. However closer examination made it clear that over half of these had ticked other options (often several others) as well. We therefore interpreted “No method in place” in these replies as indicating much the same as “Other”, i.e. that sometimes information had reached those repositories in a manner not covered by the other options.

This still left over 20 respondents who had ticked this option *alone*. The other options had been designed to cover a very wide range of scenarios. A solitary tick of “No method in place” could therefore indicate that these respondents had neither heard of nor rescued *any* archives at risk, at any time. Fortunately, most of them were in-house specialist repositories, and their response is understandable. Less fortunately, three were London borough repositories, two of which had answered “No” to questions 5.10 to 5.12. while the third replied “Yes” to 5.10 and 5.11, and “No” to 5.12 alone. This is worrying. Local authority repositories are the country-wide safety net for local records. They cannot fulfil this role if they are too inward-looking.

One anonymous reply to the follow-up stage may be relevant here:

*“No resources due to Local Government cuts. Would not consider anything outside the existing service. Would suggest an alternative location.”*

**5.14 Do you have examples of archives at risk which you were not able to save? Please give details.**

*Answered question: 23*

*Skipped question: 113*

There were only 23 respondents, again disappointing. Of these, one answered simply “Yes”, and five “No” or “None”, without further details. It is hard to believe that all those who failed to reply, or who answered “No”, were always successful in rescuing archives at risk; or that records relevant to their areas were never at risk, because they could somehow save themselves.

Of the remaining 17, 14 gave the following details:

- archive of a local printing business that ceased operation.
- unreadable digital media
- records found in empty properties unrelated to Estate, if no issuing organisation can be traced
- local historian's papers thrown away at her desk
- 80,000 glass plate negatives 1870-1970 destroyed by school because not their provenance
- own building records, because lack of space
- branch records not transferred to archive and now lost
- sound archive in own damp storage affected beyond conservation
- local solicitor's collection broken up and sold on market stalls; items at auction are often beyond the financial resources of the repository
- hospital patient records: too bulky; personal papers destroyed because "not important"; company records lost after being surveyed
- memoirs and memorabilia of alumni which are outside collecting remit
- business records and photographs thrown away in Sheffield
- video tapes affected by mould whilst in commercial storage before deposit
- deceased person's archive split between friends.

#### **5.15 Any other comments on collecting policies and exclusions with respect to archives at risk.**

*Answered question: 19*

*Skipped question: 117*

There were only 19 responses. Resources were the main difficulty.

One comment pointed out the gaps in the collecting policies of the relevant repositories:

*"There are gaps between collecting policies relating to religious archives, which make it difficult to find a repository for ecumenical organisations' archives, especially when they are small. I suspect there are similar 'gaps' between collecting policies in other areas as well."*

Another comment encapsulated what this project is trying to achieve:

*"We should have a global policy towards all archives falling within our collecting policy, whether collected or not; we should actively survey undeposited material, keep records of it and actively encourage its deposit."*

## 6. Preservation Solutions

This section aimed to find out how much collaboration is already happening between repositories in the areas of storage, disaster planning, staffing and the purchase of supplies. It also asked how much more collaboration respondents would like to see in future, and whether they would appreciate more support from national and regional bodies. Collaboration is likely to become increasingly important in the current economic climate.

### **6.1 Which of the following potential strategies for mitigating risk to archives do you have, or would like to have, in place? (8 options)**

*Answered question: 94 (overall total)*

*Skipped question: 42*

<b>Potential Strategy</b>	<b>Have</b>	<b>Would like</b>	<b>Total</b>
Shared storage facility with other repositories or heritage organisations in region	14	29	43
Commercial storage	10	12	22
Specialised storage facility for audio-visual materials in the region	18	37	55
Specialised storage facility for digital materials in the region	11	50	61
Regional disaster planning strategy	7	43	50
Partnerships with other institutions to support de-accessioning programmes in finding alternative custody	4	29	33
Partnerships with other institutions, or branches of the service, to share staff	4	36	40
Purchasing consortium for packaging and disaster supplies	3	45	48

Table 4 gives the responses. For analysis of the individual options, see below. As a general point, the follow-up telephone interviews made it clear that many archivists in small repositories feel extremely isolated. They would appreciate greater access to shared resources and collaborative projects.

#### **Shared storage facility with other repositories or heritage organisations (may be libraries and museums or archaeological finds with accompanying documentation) in region**

<b>Have</b>	<b>Would like</b>
14	29

Shared storage is often suggested as a solution to space shortages and future expansion, for example within a county authority with a variety of different stores (libraries, archives, current records, archaeology). However the results show that this option, while superficially attractive, has not taken

hold very widely. This may be due to cost, political will, local financial procedures, or poor relationships between services.

A number of respondents to the follow-up interviews expressed concern at the practical complications of sharing. Certainly joint arrangements can require much effort from all concerned. There may also be differences of status between the various parties. Nevertheless, such sharing may become unavoidable, and a positive attitude based upon training and current best practice is surely the way forward.

### Commercial storage

Have	Would like
10	12

Ten repositories have already established the principle of extending storage capacity by purchasing it commercially. However only 12 others appear to wish for it. This may be because of the potential dangers, such as

- unreliable quality
- inconvenience
- cost.

These weaknesses were a concern to respondents in the follow-up, and some were adamant that they would never consider this option. There was a danger of loss of control over standards of storage and care. The commercial option, with its necessary compromises over storage below the standard of BS 5454: 2000, *Recommendations for the Storage and Exhibition of Archival Documents*, might also undermine the organisation's commitment to existing storage facilities. However it could form part of an exit strategy.

In a new and most interesting initiative (April 2012), the National Conservation Service, a membership subscription service, has leased a huge amount of archival-quality storage at a redundant Cold War airfield in Oxfordshire from a commercial supplier. By doing so it has been able to reduce the cost per linear metre to much more affordable levels. The NCS will now carry the financial risk, and sub-let space to individual repositories on demand. This initiative appears to offer both unlimited storage through a consortium, and emergency storage for rescued documents. We shall be following developments with interest.

### Specialised storage facility for audio-visual materials in the region

Have	Would like
18	37

Many respondents were probably thinking of a regional film archive store, with repositories passing over obsolete formats and receiving digital copies in return (e.g. film to DVD).

The follow-up data suggest, nevertheless, that this is not seen as a pressing need. Many respondents felt that there were many other more urgent needs within their collections. At the same time a number of them were not confident that they could look after these formats properly themselves.

### Specialised storage facility for digital materials in the region

Have	Would like
11	50

These figures are hard to interpret. They do not fit well with the answers to questions 4.1 to 4.4, especially 4.1, to which 30 respondents replied that they actively solicited archives in digital formats, as against 99 who did not.

Some replies may have been thinking of in-house, rather than *regional* (shared) storage. Worryingly, a significant number of respondents in the follow-up assumed that “digital materials” referred to scanned images. It seems unlikely that 50 respondents felt a need for a regional facility for scanned images.

Many respondents in the follow-up were also very unsure of the management of digital materials, and few had even rudimentary views on digital preservation. The prevalent view was that there was no immediate pressure to deal with digital material because other, more traditional formats would take precedence.

All of this reflects the need for more support and professional advisory services; and the need to remove the block in attitudes and abilities within the profession. The creation (since our survey) by the Archives and Records Council Wales (ARCW) of a Digital Preservation Consortium is a new example of good practice that might be imitated in English regions.

### Regional disaster planning strategy

Have	Would Like
7	43

The replies to this option were at odds with the replies to Question 8.1, “Do you have a disaster plan?” This may illustrate the weakness of the regional model, i.e. repositories have specific local arrangements, but have found a regional programme more complex to achieve:

#### 8.1 Do you have a disaster plan?

Answered question: 102

Skipped question: 34

Yes	No
69 (67.6%)	33 (32.4%)

Political and financial barriers may be the problem here. Important concerns for anyone entering into cooperative arrangements include:

- Security
- Health & Safety
- different emphases
- joint funding
- joint purchasing
- storage of materials.

Yet all of these issues are surmountable, given commitment both in budgets and staff time. The benefit also is obvious: in a major disaster to a repository, especially one without in-house conservation expertise, the active assistance and prior knowledge of neighbouring repositories will be invaluable. Some regions (for example East Midlands,<sup>5</sup> West Yorkshire and Scotland) have been successful in establishing a regional approach. Their experience should be brought to a wider audience.

The respondents in the follow-up were often supportive of the regional model, whilst expressing the concerns above. The archives profession needs to promote and enable regional models, stress the importance of regional partnerships within professional benchmarking exercises, and provide practical training.

**Partnerships with other institutions to support de-accessioning programmes in finding alternative custody**

Have	Would like
4	29

We were surprised by the small number of replies to this option. Cooperation between repositories can make de-accessioning a constructive process by which unwanted collections are transferred to another institution. This is also relevant to exit strategies.

However the follow-up respondents were uncomfortable with the implications of de-accessioning when viewed from within the organisation. It generally carried a stigma of mismanagement. Respondents were also concerned that senior managers or politicians might misinterpret de-accessioning as an indicator that the collections overall were of limited worth.

We disagree. Storage space is never infinite. The transfer or disposal of inappropriate material needs to be presented as an aspect of efficient management, akin to keeping premises tidy. Senior managers and politicians will then lose interest. The Records Preservation Section of the BRA has for many years been providing small-scale assistance to repositories to de-accession and relocate unwanted material. It may be able to help.

All transfers and disposals should of course be carried out responsibly, after careful evaluation. We are not advocating hasty destruction. Decisions should not be based upon present as opposed to potential use. There may be a place for national standards.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.emms.org.uk/reds/team>

**Partnerships with other institutions, or branches of the service, to share staff**

Have	Would like
4	36

For those archive services which have always worked closely with museum and library colleagues, sharing staff has proved to be extremely effective. There may be scope to extend existing arrangements, and for successfully integrated services to present themselves as exemplars. The number of respondents who “would like” this option is encouraging.

The follow-up respondents confirmed that where joint or partnership arrangements exist, they are a normal part of service provision. However, they had very real concerns about sharing staff across counties or regions: local knowledge and a clear understanding of the collections were essential for the public service. Such sharing could only be a last resort.

**Purchasing consortium for packaging and disaster supplies**

Have	Would like
3	45

Such consortia have always seemed an obvious way to make the most of existing budgets. However, they hardly ever succeed.

Such consortia could cover, as well as packaging and disaster supplies:

- conservation supplies
- conservation services (on a rechargeable basis).

Many of the follow-up respondents acknowledged the potential of this kind of arrangement, but were sceptical of its success. Concerns over potential conflicts and accounting were at the heart of this view. Nevertheless the value-for-money arguments are strong, and may become crucial. Examples of successful joint ventures, such as the purchasing consortia for preservation materials amongst the college archivists at Oxford and Cambridge, should be written up in the professional literature and used as models.

**6.2 Do you think there should be more support to you and your region in rescuing archives at risk from the national and regional bodies, for example the British Records Association, The National Archives, the Museums Libraries and Archives Council, the Archives and Records Association? If so, please give details.**

*Answered question: 86*

*Skipped question: 50*

Yes	No
54 (62.8%)	32 (37.2%)

A majority of the 86 respondents to this question favoured the involvement of national and regional bodies in rescuing archives at risk. 50 of the 54 who said Yes also gave further details. A selection of their comments appears below.

This was confirmed by the follow-up respondents, who felt that this project was timely, and who eagerly awaited its results.

**Table 5: Support needed**

1. Greater funding opportunities.
2. Useful as an information conduit.
3. A centralised registry of businesses -- perhaps culled from Companies House -- would be useful, as would guidance on how to take a more proactive approach to approaching donors/depositors.
4. We are concerned chiefly with the risks to born-digital and digitised copies of original materials in the Eastern region (we have published on this subject, the OARP Report). We would welcome moves by regional and national archival bodies to pioneer the development of regional digital archives, to alleviate the risk.
5. [Organisations] such as these with standing and influence should do more to make archive holders such as solicitors, businesses etc aware of the potential value of any deeds, ledgers etc that they hold. Encourage them to deposit them with a suitable museum or archive, and if there are problems of confidentiality make it clear that they can set the conditions of use, eg "this document cannot be shown to the public for 30 years" etc.
6. Experts could visit those who are embarking on their role as school archivist, and advise the direction it should take which matches the size and type of school.
7. If there is no support from the parent organisation, it is important that outside bodies offer support.
8. We need support for digital preservation. If an organisation wants its records kept for posterity, it needs to create those records in a format with proven longevity, preferably non-proprietary and open source. Yet instead they create records in formats which have the exact opposite attributes, and then wonder why there's a problem. There has to be a cultural shift towards creating digital records in better, simpler formats.
9. Somewhere to go to for advice.
10. Ideally I would like some kind of regional support, or even shared regional services, but I realise that none of the bodies mentioned will have sufficient resources to fund it.
11. BRA's work over many decades is appreciated, as is TNA's support and especially their sales advisory service. The impending demise of MLA is to be regretted, especially since <i>Archives for the 21st Century</i> had so much to offer. One hopes that its implementation will not be adversely affected. With the Coalition Government talking about 25%-40% cuts in government spending, the archives at greatest risk will be those presently held by local authority archive services. Should such circumstances materialize, any positive support from TNA, BRA, ARA would be welcome.
12. There is always a case for more support to be available, although in practice there is a limit. However, it would be good if some of the bodies noted could give more <u>active</u> assistance to organisations/individuals, rather than just pointing them in the direction of repositories with a collecting policy that <u>might</u> cover the archives in question and leaving them to get in contact. This can lead to archives being left in abeyance because of the effort needed to locate a repository that <u>can</u> actually accept the archives.
13. More guidance to hospitals and magistrates' courts re responsibility for their Public Records.
14. Central place/website where general information and advice could be accessed.
15. Money, storage facilities and awareness of archives at risk or offered for sale [are the] main problems.



<p>16. For the immediate problems here, it's not clear what would help. The college fully recognises the need to improve the provision for its archives, and that this will require either a very major conversion project or (preferably) a purpose-built new building. If any of the above bodies (if not abolished) would like to give us several million pounds towards that project, that would be very welcome. But proposals involving sharing facilities with other bodies, or using outside storage of any sort, are not likely to go down well. The college archives currently play an active role in supporting other college departments and promoting the sense of a unique college identity. Some of the items you list in (1) above - such as shared purchasing - already operate in an informal way locally through Cambridge Archivists Group.</p>
<p>17. It would be helpful. In particular, a register of local and approved conservation workshops willing and able to undertake specialist work would be useful.</p>
<p>18. Is it still the case that HMC-type agents survey and catalogue archives at risk for the NRA? Archivists are necessarily bound to their institution, and opportunities to look around and help are limited. A non-affiliated archivist with a roving brief for protection of archives at risk would be a powerful force for good.</p>
<p>19. The BRA has always been a great support, and has recently helped with the re-distribution of a large solicitor's collection. Standards in all repositories can always be driven up - perhaps an accreditation scheme for archives linked to cash rewards would be beneficial, as it is with museums - but any solution must be sustainable in the long term. With regard to the sale room, it always comes down to cash - even the grant-awarding bodies cannot provide all the funds needed.</p>
<p>20. Since the demise of the old HMC I get the impression that TNA is much less actively involved in identifying and surveying collections at risk.</p>
<p>21. This should be delegated to just one body to make sure no-one slips through the net, and there should be one place/person to whom all such information is directed, so efforts can be concentrated and data collected to build up a better picture of the issues being faced.</p>
<p>22. Perhaps a listserve or email message giving details of archives at risk.</p>

## 7. Preservation Status

### **7.1 What percentage of your collections is packaged in archival quality containers?**

*Answered question: 98*

*Skipped question: 38*

The responses ranged from 0 – 100%, but the average was 62.5%. This proves the effectiveness of packaging programmes over the last 10-15 years.

### **7.2 What percentage of your collections has been digitised/ microfilmed?**

*Answered question: 91*

*Skipped question: 45*

	Response average	Response total	Response count
Digitised	5.79%	515%	89
Microfilmed	8.36%	736%	88

The presentation of original material in surrogate form is an established tactic to prevent damage to archives through excessive use. The percentage results here, which are mean averages of the total responses, are low, as was to be expected: in many repositories, 10% of the holdings get 90% of the use.

The follow-up respondents favoured scanning over microfilm, despite the acknowledged problems with digital preservation.

### **7.3 Do you have unused storage space? (Yes/No)**

*Answered question: 101*

*Skipped question: 35*

### **7.4 If you have unused storage space, please give an indication of the amount (in terms of normal annual accrual rates) – Less than one year – 1-3 years – 3-5 years – 5-10 years – More than 10 years**

*Answered question: 57*

These two questions are considered together. 56 respondents (55.4%) to Question 7.3 had unused storage space. Of the 57 (sic) who then replied to Question 7.4, most (18) (31.6%) said "1-3 years". 10 (17.5%) said "Less than one year". 11 (19.3%) said "3-5 years". 15 (26.3%) said "5-10 years". 3 (5.3%) said "More than 10 years".

Lack of storage space will therefore become critical almost everywhere within the next ten years, without further investment. 25 years' expansion space, as required by BS5454:2000, *Recommendations for the Storage and Exhibition of Archival Documents*, would seem to be limited to new builds.

It is nevertheless worth pointing out that these two questions did not take account of the substantial space savings that can be achieved by reshelving and reboxing archives by shape and size, as opposed to by collections. This low-tech option, much cheaper than converting static shelving to mobile, involves fixing shelf heights at the optimum levels, and finding items through a location list. Space savings of over 20% are not uncommon. Such projects can be carried out under supervision by manual staff, temporary staff or volunteers. This approach is often overlooked, and should be promoted more widely.

**7.5 If preservation measures are needed at short notice to “rescue” and take into custody archives at risk, do you have the capacity in the following areas [eight listed areas]**

*Answered question: 98 (overall total)*

*Skipped question: 38*

<b>Table 6: Capacity areas</b>			
<b>Capacity area</b>	<b>Response total</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Packaging in archival standard materials	96	50 (52.1%)	46 (47.9%)
Storage	98	39 (39.8%)	59 (60.2%)
Staffing	95	33 (34.7%)	62 (65.3%)
Conservation	95	21 (22.1%)	74 (77.9%)
Isolation and decontamination	96	17 (17.7%)	79 (82.3%)
Safety copies (digital)	93	15 (16.1%)	78 (83.9%)
Safety copies (microfilm)	94	11 (11.7%)	83 (88.3%)

This question asked what resources respondents could instantly commit to the needs of archives at risk. The table sets out the responses, in order of preference.

The results are depressing. Only half the respondents could even supply packaging – or less than half, once we remember that only 96 repositories answered the question. Far fewer could supply anything else.

Links with better-funded repositories nearby would seem to be the answer, perhaps on a rechargeable basis.

**7.6 If in general you have the resources to take custody of archives at risk, are you prepared/able to do this even if they do not fall within your collecting policy?**

*Answered question: 89*

*Skipped question: 47*

-

<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
9 (10.1%)	80 (89.9%)

The results are understandable: there is little point in a collecting policy if it is then to be ignored. The replies may also reflect respondents' level of authority, and power to act.

Most follow-up respondents had neither the storage nor the staffing to offer any real solutions. A number of them also made the point that their organisations would look unfavourably on solving the problems of others when resources were scarce enough for existing (core) collections. All the more need, therefore, for some sort of national co-ordination.

**8. Disaster Planning**

**8.1 Do you have a disaster plan?***Answered question: 102**Skipped question: 34*

Yes	No
69 (67.6%)	33 (32.4%)

In February 2006, the Preservation Advisory Centre (formerly the National Preservation Office) produced a report called *Knowing the Need*, on “preservation need in libraries and archives in the UK”.<sup>6</sup> This asked about the availability of an up-to-date written disaster control plan, and whether it was “adequate” or “inadequate”. 54% were adequate, against 46% inadequate.

This present survey appears to show no improvement since 2006. Only 69 (50.7%) of the **total of 136 respondents** answered Yes. The 34 who failed to reply at all can surely be added to the 33 who replied No.

The continued promotion of disaster planning as good practice, and the availability of both practical training and reliable disaster plan templates,<sup>7</sup> appear therefore to have had little impact. These results present a dismal picture, even before we start to consider more detailed questions, such as:

- Is the plan regularly reviewed and updated?
- Is it available to all who need it?
- Is it supported by annual training?
- Are new members of staff introduced to the plan via the induction programme?

**8.2 If so, does the plan include contingencies for the risks posed by reduction of the archives budget, or enforced closure of the service? (Yes/No)***Answered question: 78 (sic)**Skipped question: 58***8.3 Do you have an exit strategy (for example copying the records prior to de-accessioning) to secure the holdings in the event of closure of the service? (Yes/No)***Answered question: 96**Skipped question: 40*

	Yes	No	Response count
8.2 Does the plan include contingencies for the risks posed by reduction of the archives budget or enforced closure of the service?	6 (7.7%)	72 (92.3%)	78
8.3 Do you have an exit strategy (for example copying the records prior to de-accessioning) to	11 (11.5%)	85 (88.5%)	96

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.bl.uk/blpac/pdf/knowing.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.m25lib.ac.uk/m25dcp/>

secure the holdings in the event of closure of the service?			
---	--	--	--

These two questions purposely focussed on the current economic climate, and the very real possibility of significant cuts to the funding on which many archive services rely.

The questions were clear and unambiguous, and the results are striking. Very few repositories had made any provision for closure of the service.

The most dramatic cut to a local government archive repository so far has probably been that at the London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham, in early 2010. The staff were made redundant, and the collections would simply have been locked away indefinitely had there not been a public outcry. Limited access was then provided through volunteers, supervised by a professional archivist seconded by another London local authority.

In this particular case, the archive collections were not at risk of immediate disbandment. However these events show the importance of planning for the worst.

**If not, what would you do in the event of a requirement to reduce outgoings which would seriously impact your ability to care for and/or retain your holdings?**

There were 61 responses to this supplementary question. The main responses (from approximately 50% of the 61) are summarised below:

- “mothball” the collections until the economic situation improves
- deposit with another appropriate organisation (locally, regionally or nationally)
- discuss options with other local repositories
- reduce the number of access services/staff/activities
- extend surrogacy programmes, especially digitisation
- start working on an exit strategy.

The option to store the collections with another repository was a popular response, and this survey has shown that capacity does exist. However it seems unlikely that capacity would meet demand. One respondent pointed out that an alternative repository would be difficult to identify, as the collection did not fit any particular geographical location.

A number of respondents did not think that this was a likely scenario. Indeed some in private archive collections did not think that it would ever happen. This was borne out by the follow-up interviews. But many agreed that a strategy was necessary, if unpalatable.

## 9. The British Records Association

**9.1 Please rank the following BRA services from 1 to 6 (where 1 is of little value and 6 is invaluable) according to the value they have for you:**

36. Please rank the following BRA services from 1 to 6 (where 1 is of little value and 6 is invaluable) according to the value they have for you:							Rating Average	Response Count
rescue and transfer of records to archive repositories	18.0% (16)	6.7% (6)	9.0% (8)	11.2% (10)	16.9% (15)	<b>38.2%</b> <b>(34)</b>	4.17	89
training days	11.1% (10)	17.8% (16)	21.1% (19)	<b>24.4%</b> <b>(22)</b>	13.3% (12)	12.2% (11)	3.48	90
publications in the Archives and the User Series (eg Manorial Records by Harvey)	16.3% (14)	20.9% (18)	16.3% (14)	<b>22.1%</b> <b>(19)</b>	11.6% (10)	12.8% (11)	3.30	86
guidance leaflets (eg Guideline on the Preservation of Pre-registration Deeds)	8.9% (8)	12.2% (11)	<b>26.7%</b> <b>(24)</b>	14.4% (13)	23.3% (21)	14.4% (13)	3.74	90
its journal, Archives	13.3% (12)	20.0% (18)	<b>23.3%</b> <b>(21)</b>	18.9% (17)	13.3% (12)	11.1% (10)	3.32	90
annual conference	<b>24.4%</b> <b>(21)</b>	23.3% (20)	22.1% (19)	12.8% (11)	11.6% (10)	5.8% (5)	2.81	86
<b>answered question</b>								<b>91</b>
<b>skipped question</b>								<b>45</b>

This question, "Question 36" in the on-line version of the questionnaire, did not form part of the core project objectives. The columns should be read from left (1) to right (6).

No analysis of the responses will be offered here, but the table above gives the details.

**9.2 Are there any other activities you would like to see the BRA undertake, if resources can be found? If so, please specify.**

*Answered question: 73*

*Skipped question: 63*

Of the 73 respondents, 14 (19.2%) answered Yes, and the rest answered No. In fact 19 respondents made relevant suggestions in the comments box, as shown in Table 7 below. It is clear that there are areas in which the BRA can improve. We have also incorporated the more general suggestions into the rest of our report:

**Table 7: Activities the BRA might undertake if resources can be found**

1. Advice to Museums and other non-archive-office holders of archives. We are not members of BRA and receive no information about it.
2. Arguing the importance of archives, archives professionals and archives services when (as in the present economic times) [these are] under threat.
3. BRA does a good job with limited resources.
4. Clearing house for potential volunteers or work experience interns seeking archive placements as part of their career plan.
5. Don't know - the above list looks useful, however I have not benefited from them myself.
6. Effective collaboration with ARA. I did not understand the "no" votes.
7. I liked the idea of "archivist for hire". Many organisations have no professional archivist or records manager, but may be willing to hire someone short-term to organise collections and establish guidelines. I think the current emphasis on information governance in the public sector has increased the demand for this service. If the BRA offered short-term archivists/records managers for hire, it would help to reduce the number of records that are lost. It would help to promote the idea that records and archives management is a professional skill, and may encourage more organisations to employ someone permanently.
8. If resources were available perhaps BRA could administer a small grants programme, say for the purchase of conservation/preservation materials. This was invaluable when MLA East offered such a service. Also grants could be used for conservation surveys, or smaller repositories may like to have a report similar to the TNA Inspection which would help them to unlock other grant funds.
9. In general, the BRA is of little value to me as I am already a member of the ARA and they provide a number of the services listed above.
10. Money is the biggest problem for charities such as ours with archive collections - and lack of staff time to go out and find it. Catch 22 situation. Current awareness from organisation such as BRA on likely funding bodies, what they will and will not fund, [and] support [for] funding applications from charities that don't have an archivist and are therefore at a disadvantage. We are trying to get funding to employ an archivist to catalogue our Topographical Document Collection to ISAD(G) standard. An application recently failed, because it is not "in need of sustained intellectual and professional attention to understand provenance, original order, structure and context. The topographical collection instead appears to consist of single items or small groups of material. While there are clearly items of real interest and significance, it is not a complex, structured archive. It would be possible to list the collection incrementally over time, perhaps with support from the Society's members. This grants scheme exists primarily to ensure highly complex archives can be made accessible." But we don't have the cataloguing expertise amongst our staff or membership to do as they suggest!
11. More advice for non-archivists on where to find services such as document scanning, digitising photos and indexing them etc with no staff, no time, tiny budget.
12. On-line publications promoting archives and archivists and their work - may already be happening, but I am not aware of it. Look at archives with much smaller staff, sometimes unqualified.



**Table 7: Activities the BRA might undertake if resources can be found**

<p>13. [Organisations] such as these with standing and influence should do more to make archive holders such as solicitors, businesses etc aware of the potential value of any deeds, ledgers etc that they hold. Encourage them to deposit them with a suitable museum or archive, and if there are problems of confidentiality make it clear that they can set the conditions of use, eg "this document cannot be shown to the public for 30 years" etc.</p> <p><i>[This respondent wished to repeat this reply to Question 6.2]</i></p>
<p>14. Small scale training days for those who are completely new to this area of school life.</p>
<p>15. The BRA journal (Archives) played an enormous part in my preparation for an archive career. BRA has also helped me in other posts, and through me other people, to deal with stray records, which has been a valuable service.</p>
<p>16. The most important activity the BRA performs for the wider archival community (outside its own membership) is the rescue/transfer one. Any resources that become available would be best spent on securing/extending this service.</p>
<p>17. This is a school archive, and we are members of the School Archivists Group. I dare say that BRA already offers support and advice to SAG, which in turn filters though to us. Long may that continue. We would welcome advice on DATA PROTECTION as it relates to schools, colleges and universities, with particular reference to the disclosure of information about past pupils.</p>
<p>18. Undertake a survey of the archive collection [here] and prepare a strategy to prioritise action for grant applications to external bodies, particularly the National Cataloguing Grants Programme for Archives.</p>
<p>19. We have not been aware of any BRA training days, but would be interested in hearing more.</p>

## Recommendations

## A. Digital Archives, and Film and Sound Archives

1. The current emphasis on preserving digital archives should be continued and reinforced, as the message is not “getting through”
2. We need more training in the management of digital archives, both “born digital” and “digitised”, together with an internet portal for easy access to best practice
3. The expertise and assistance of TNA in helping local authority repositories to develop digital capacity should be available beyond the public sector
4. The expertise of the UK Data Archive, the Digital Preservation Coalition and the Digital Curation Centre should be utilised and made more widely available
5. There should be co-ordinated provision of data recovery services from obsolete media
6. There should be collaboration on a regional basis to maintain digital archives over time. It is unreasonable to expect small and poorly resourced repositories to do this for themselves; economies of scale should be achievable with regional provision
7. Research should be carried out into the reasons for the present poor provision for digital archives
8. Consideration should be given to the usefulness and efficiency of regional provision for film and sound archives.

## B. A Coherent National Safety Net for Records not yet in Custody

1. A co-ordinated approach is needed, so that all sources of information about archives at risk and potential repositories feed into a central managed resource, regional or national
2. This will rescue archives more effectively; unlock resources; and provide support to small poorly-funded repositories
3. There should be a “collecting policy initiative”, to encourage all repositories to develop and maintain a collecting policy
4. The guidance available from TNA about drafting a collecting policy should be publicised more widely, with examples available on-line
5. Collecting policies should be assembled, publicised and co-ordinated centrally, to ensure seamless and efficient provision. This could be done by TNA, building upon its current work in providing a central point for the voluntary deposit of collecting policies, and upon current inspection arrangements
6. Collecting policies should be a basis for encouraging archivists to become more aware of archives within their collecting area but not yet deposited; for surveying and collecting undeposited archives; and for collaboration and co-ordination between repositories

7. They should also be a basis for responsible accessioning; and for the responsible clearance from repositories of low-grade or inappropriate material already held
8. The Records Preservation Section of the BRA can offer experience and some practical help
9. National, sectoral and regional surveys of undeposited archives are also to be encouraged where funds allow. Individual repositories cannot be expected to survey everything, and larger surveys will offer economies of scale. Collaborative arrangements between adjacent repositories, especially London borough repositories, should also be encouraged, the richer helping the poorer.
10. Consideration should be given to setting up a small grants programme, to be administered nationally or regionally, to assist with the costs of listing undeposited archives.

### C. Preservation

1. Collaboration between repositories can reduce costs. Successful collaborative projects, such as the purchasing consortia for preservation materials amongst the college archivists at Oxford and Cambridge, should be used as models
2. There should be continued investment in new storage facilities. Most repositories will run out of space within ten years
3. Low-cost space-saving solutions, such as reshelving and reboxing by shape and size rather than by collection, should also be promoted through training courses and the availability of specialist advice
4. Shared storage should be promoted through professional training courses, and by the dissemination of current best practice
5. Small repositories which lack in-house conservation expertise should be offered low-cost assistance, such as access to conservation work by larger repositories on a rechargeable basis, or advice and training in how to commission work from craftsmen in the private sector
6. Consideration should be given to setting up a small grants programme, to be administered nationally or regionally, to assist with the costs of preservation materials; conservation of specific items; temporary staff, etc.

### D. Disaster Planning

1. Disaster plans, to include an exit strategy, should be encouraged for every repository through professional literature and the archive training courses, and enforced through inspection
2. Guidance and best practice about exit strategies should be sought from related heritage sectors

3. Regional – or at least collaborative – disaster provision, especially for small repositories with limited capacity, should be encouraged, and backed up by practical training and professional benchmarking
4. Successful regional approaches to disaster planning, such as those in the East Midlands, West Yorkshire and Scotland, should be brought to a wider audience.

## E. Personnel and training

1. The importance of rescuing undeposited archives should be a core part of the training of every archivist
2. Archivists should be encouraged to network within their customer base or collecting area, the better to know of undeposited archives at risk
3. Archivists should be encouraged to show energy and initiative in rescuing such archives
4. Archivists should be trained to be more confident in disposing of/ transferring low-grade or inappropriate material already held, responsibly, after proper evaluation
5. Opportunities should be taken to promote sharing of staff (and volunteers) within organisations, wherever this is appropriate
6. Examples of successfully integrated services (libraries, museums, archives) should be promoted through professional literature, conferences and other meetings
7. There should be more collaboration between repositories, especially London borough repositories, to reduce professional isolation and raise standards.

## F. Funding

1. All these initiatives should be small-scale and low-cost, an extension of existing practice, including the small grants programmes suggested under B and C above
2. Model contracts are needed, perhaps using TNA experience, to facilitate fundraising by repositories through commercial digitisation services (e.g. Ancestry)
3. Lack of resources, and the absence of professional peers, will very likely prevent archivists working in isolation in small repositories from taking up training opportunities or professional advice that involve more than simply reading emails or clicking on a website. Efforts should be made to take such training and advice to them, perhaps through an expansion of the current system of inspection.

## Approach and Fieldwork

The survey, by means of a questionnaire, and follow-up interviews took place between July and October 2010. They were carried out on behalf of the BRA by a team from The Archives Skills Consultancy (TASC), consisting of:

- Margaret Crockett, archives and records management consultant
- Janet Foster, archives and records management consultant
- Jonathan Rhys-Lewis, preservation management specialist.

TASC worked to the direction of a Steering Committee, headed by Anthony Smith, Chairman of the Records Preservation Section of the BRA.

The survey questionnaire is reproduced as Annexe B. We are grateful to Christopher Hunwick, Archivist to the Duke of Northumberland, for testing it and recording his response time.

We compiled a list of repositories in the two regions using our knowledge of the sector, ARCHON and *British Archives*. It seemed sensible to send the questionnaire to all the East of England repositories we could identify, a total of 91. The London region has many more repositories, and our approach here was different. We sent the questionnaire to 100 London repositories, chosen as follows:

- all London local authority repositories
- 25% of all other repositories, excluding HEIs, after sorting them into categories and then alphabetically. This selection, more or less random, attempted to ensure a good “spread”.

We also sent general invitations, and the on-line version of the questionnaire, to the following archival listserves:

- AIM25, for London HEIs
- Archives-nra
- Business archives
- Cambridge University college archivists
- East of England Region.

We received 136 replies, 51 of them anonymous. The 85 respondents who identified themselves are listed alphabetically in Annexe C. Of these, 37 were in the East of England, and 47 in London, plus one reply from the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies. Most categories of repository seem to be represented: see Annexe D. The last reply was dated 26<sup>th</sup> September 2010.

We were then able to contact 50 respondents, of the 85 who had given contact details, for follow-up telephone interviews. Information gathered during this follow-up stage has been incorporated into our report.

We also contacted three targeted individuals to discuss specific issues: business archives at risk; managing budget cuts; and digital archive curation. Details can be found in Annexe E.

Finally, we analysed our findings, discussed possible recommendations and compiled this report.

## British Records Association Archives at Risk Project Questionnaire for Repositories in the London & East of England Regions

### Introduction

The BRA is conducting an investigation into archives at risk in two English regions. The project aims to:

- Identify the risks to historical records both within established repositories and those not (yet) in archival custody
- Make practical recommendations to reduce those risks
- Investigate the capacity of repositories, and the archives network, to respond to threats to archives
- Consider general themes and issues, not to make comparisons or judgements

For more information about the project, please go to:

[http://www.britishrecordsassociation.org.uk/pages/RPS\\_Project.html](http://www.britishrecordsassociation.org.uk/pages/RPS_Project.html)

Research is being conducted based on recent reports and surveys as well as through this questionnaire with selected follow-up interviews. The immediate benefit to the archival community will be:

- a greater understanding of existing and potential threats and risks to archives
- strategies for maximising capacity to deal with them within existing – and possibly shrinking – resources.

A longer term benefit, arising from the project's identification of existing successful strategies and methods, will be to provide the basis of a best practice framework for managing archives at risk and reducing levels of threat.

We really need to know your views, so please do take the time to respond (it should take no longer than 20 minutes to complete). No repository will be identified in the final report but all questionnaire respondents will be entered into a prize draw. The prizes on offer are FOUR packages each containing free admission to the BRA's annual conference in 2010 plus two free books from the prestigious series *Archives and the User*.

- The conference will take place at Freemasons Hall in central London on 7 December 2010 and is titled *The Philanthropy Files* focussing on the theme of the records of charitable and philanthropic activity.
- The two books on offer are Nat Alcock's [Documenting the History of Houses](#) (2003) and, hot off the presses, Elizabeth New's [Seals and Sealing Practices](#) (2010), both normally available at £9.50 each.

If you wish to fill out the questionnaire on-line, please go to:

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/WLZ56WZ>

Please send your completed questionnaire (by the 6<sup>th</sup> August) to: **Margaret Crockett, 38 Lyttelton Court, Lyttelton Road, London N2 0EB**. If you have any questions, please contact her at [margaret@archive-skills.com](mailto:margaret@archive-skills.com).

 Your Repository

1. Are you/do you have a qualified archivist? YES  NO
2. Are you able to influence senior management decisions with respect to archives policy, strategy and management? YES  NO
3. How many reporting levels are there between you and your organisation's governing body? 0  1  2  3  4  4+

 Risks to Archives in your Custody

1. Which of the following pose risks to your holdings? (Please tick all that apply)

- The age of the building
- Sharing accommodation with other services or organisations
- A lack of environmental control
- Pressure to provide access to users
- Budget cuts/fewer resources forcing de-accessioning of all collections
- Budget cuts/fewer resources forcing de-accessioning of a portion of collections
- Loss of staff
- Digitisation programmes leading to increased vulnerability of originals of copied archives to enforced de-accessioning
- Lack of resources to maintain digital preservation strategy
- Vulnerability of film collections to inappropriate storage conditions and the complexities of access
- Vulnerability of sound collections to inappropriate storage conditions and the complexities of access
- Vulnerability of photographic format collections to inappropriate storage conditions
- Owners of deposited archives removing them
- Deteriorating, mouldy or otherwise compromised collections

2. Have you grounds to suppose your service is facing severe reductions in resources such as budget, staff, space etc? YES  NO



## Risks to Digital Archives

1. Do you actively solicit archive collections in digital formats? YES  NO
2. Do you have appropriate specialist staff to manage digital archives? YES  NO
3. Do you have the technology to manage digital archives through time? YES  NO
4. Are you able to make digital records available for study or use? YES  NO



## Risks to Archives not (yet) in your Custody

1. Do you have a collecting policy? YES  NO

If so, please send an electronic copy to [margaret@archive-skills.co.uk](mailto:margaret@archive-skills.co.uk) as well as answering the questions. If you don't have one, please respond to the questions in this section according to your collecting practice.

2. Are any of the following formats excluded:

- Digital
- Audio
- Film and video
- Paper/parchment

3. How do you use your policy/practice? (Please tick all that apply)

- To de-accession material that does not fit your remit
- To decline to accept records into your repository that do not fit your remit
- For proactive collecting
- To survey undeposited records
- Cooperation with other repositories in collecting policy and decision-making

4. Are you currently restricted in actively collecting because of any of the following issues? (Please tick all that apply)

- Lack of staff capacity
- Lack of storage space



Lack of purchase budget

Lack of management support

5. If a potential deposit was fragile, mouldy or otherwise compromised, would you decline to accept it into your custody?

YES    NO    Depends (please give details below)

6. If you decline an archival collection that is offered to you, do you:

Provide advice to mitigate risk?                      YES       NO

7. Suggest an alternative repository?                      YES       NO

If so, how do you know about alternative repositories?

8. Do you give advice or support to holders of undeposited records which fall outside your collecting remit for any reason?                      YES       NO

9. Do you maintain up to date depositor information?                      YES       NO

10. Do you survey undeposited records within your collecting remit? YES  NO

11. Do you hold lists of undeposited archives within your collecting remit? YES  NO

12. Do you know of any archive currently at risk? YES  NO

If so, please give brief details (in general terms if you wish, eg "a large solicitor's collection"):

13. How do you become aware of archives at risk? (Please tick all that apply)

- No method in place
- Staff members of own organisation
- Approach from institutions with records at risk
- Information from public/Friends group
- Information from British Records Association
- Information from the National Archives
- Vendors such as bookdealers or auction houses
- Other (please give details)

14. Do you have examples of archives at risk which you were not able to save? Please give details:

15. Any other comments on collecting policies and exclusions with respect to archives at risk:

 **Preservation: Solutions**

1. Which of the following potential strategies for mitigating risk to archives do you have, or would like to have, in place:

- |  |                               |                                     |
|--|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Shared storage facility with other repositories or heritage organisations (may be libraries and museums or archaeological finds with accompanying documentation) in region | Have <input type="checkbox"/> | would like <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Commercial storage solution  | Have <input type="checkbox"/> | would like <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Specialised storage facility for audio-visual materials in the region  | Have <input type="checkbox"/> | would like <input type="checkbox"/> |

Specialised storage facility for digital materials in the region Have  would like

Regional disaster planning strategy Have  would like

Partnerships with other institutions to support de-accessioning programmes in finding alternative custody Have  would like



Partnerships with other institutions, or branches of the service, to share staff Have  would like

Purchasing consortium for packaging and disaster supplies Have  would like



2. Do you think there should be more support to you and your region in rescuing archives at risk from the national and regional bodies, for example the British Records Association, the National Archives, the Museums Libraries and Archives Council, the Archives and Records Association? YES  NO

If so, please give details:

  **Preservation Status**

  What percentage of your collections are packaged in archival quality containers?

%

  What percentage of your collections has been:


Digitised  %                      Microfilmed  %


  Do you have unused storage space? YES  NO

  If you have unused storage space, please give an indication of the

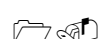


amount (in terms of normal annual accrual rates):

- Less than one year
- 1-3 years
- 3-5 years
- 5-10 years
- More than 10 years

 If preservation measures are needed at short notice to “rescue” and take into custody archives at risk do you have the capacity in the following areas:

- |  |     |                          |    |                          |
|--|-----|--------------------------|----|--------------------------|
| Staffing   | YES | <input type="checkbox"/> | NO | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Storage  | YES | <input type="checkbox"/> | NO | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Packaging in archival standard materials   | YES | <input type="checkbox"/> | NO | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Isolation and decontamination  | YES | <input type="checkbox"/> | NO | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Conservation   | YES | <input type="checkbox"/> | NO | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Safety copies (digital)  | YES | <input type="checkbox"/> | NO | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Safety copies (microfilm)  | YES | <input type="checkbox"/> | NO | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|  If in general you have the resources to take custody of archives at risk, are you prepared/able to do this even if they do not fall within your collecting policy? | YES | <input type="checkbox"/> | NO | <input type="checkbox"/> |

### Disaster Planning

- |   |     |                          |    |                          |
|---|-----|--------------------------|----|--------------------------|
|  Do you have a disaster plan?   | YES | <input type="checkbox"/> | NO | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|  If so, does the plan include contingencies for the risks posed by reduction of the archives budget or enforced closure of the service?                 | YES | <input type="checkbox"/> | NO | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|  Do you have an exit strategy (for example copying the records prior to de-accessioning) to secure the holdings in the event of closure of the service? | YES | <input type="checkbox"/> | NO | <input type="checkbox"/> |

If not, what would you do in the event of a requirement to reduce outgoings which would seriously impact your ability to care for and/or retain your holdings?

 The British Records Association

1. Please rank the following BRA services from 1 to 6 (where 1 is of little value and 6 is invaluable) according to the value they have for you:

- rescue and transfer of records to archive repositories
- training days
- publications in the Archives and the User Series (egg *Manorial Records* by Harvey)
- guidance leaflets (egg *Guideline on the Preservation of Pre-registration Deeds*)
- its journal, **Archives**
- annual conference

2. Are there any other activities you would like to see BRA undertake, if resources can be found? If yes, please specify:

 Contact Details

1. Please give us your contact details so we can get in touch if we need to:

Name:

Repository:

Address:

Email:

Telephone:

Identified Responding Archives, in Alphabetical Order

*This list comprises 85 repositories. 136 replied to the questionnaire. 51 preferred to remain anonymous.*

Alleyn's School  
Aviva Group Archives  
Aylsham Town Council Archives  
Baldock Museum  
Barking & Dagenham Local Studies & Archives  
Barnet Local Studies  
Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Records Service  
Berkhamsted School  
Bishop's Stortford College  
Brent Archives  
British Medical Association  
British Museum Central Archive  
British Red Cross Museum & Archives  
Bromley Local Studies and Archives  
Cambridge Assessment Archives Service  
Cambridgeshire Archives  
Camden Local Studies & Archives Centre  
Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies  
Churchill Archives Centre  
Cranfield University - Lord Kings Norton Archive  
Egypt Exploration Society  
Enfield Local Studies Library and Archives  
Essex Record Office  
Girlguiding UK  
Goldsmiths' Company  
Harrow Libraries Local History Services  
Harrow School  
Hatfield House  
Hertfordshire Archives  
Hillingdon Local Studies, Archives & Museums Service

History of Advertising Trust  
Holkham Hall  
Hounslow and Chiswick Libraries Local Studies and Archives  
HSBC Archives  
Imperial College London  
Imperial War Museum Department of Documents  
Inner Temple  
Institution of Engineering and Technology  
Jesus College, Cambridge  
John Lewis  
King's College, Cambridge  
Kingston University Archives and Special Collections  
Knebworth House Archive  
Lambeth Palace Library  
London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine  
London South Bank University Archives Centre  
Merton Local Studies Centre  
Middle Temple  
Middlesex University (Barnet, Herts)  
Museum of London Archaeological Archive  
Museum of London Docklands Port and River Archives  
National Army Museum  
National Jazz Archive  
Norfolk Record Office  
Peterborough Local Studies and Archives Service  
Portman Estate  
Queen Mary University of London  
Queens' College, Cambridge  
Rothamsted Research  
Royal Academy of Arts  
Royal Air Force Museum  
Royal College of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists  
Royal Free Hospital Archive Centre  
Royal Society



Scout Association  
Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham (Anglican)  
Sir John Soane's Museum  
Society of Genealogists  
St Albans Cathedral  
St. Catharine's College, Cambridge  
Stowe School (Photographic) Archives  
Suffolk Record Office  
Thomas Cook Archives  
Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives  
UK Data Archive, Essex University **(two replies, one from the History Data Service)**  
United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel  
University of East Anglia Archives and Special Collections  
Wandsworth Heritage Service  
Warburg Institute  
Wardown Park Museum (Luton Culture)  
Watford Museum  
Wellcome Library  
Wiener Library  
Wisbech & Fenland Museum

<b>East of England identified responses, by category</b>		
<b>Category</b>	<b>Mailed</b>	<b>Identified responses</b>
A-V & digital	4	2 (both from same repository)
Business	5	3
Charities	2	0
Estates	5	3
Higher Education	11	9
Libraries	8	0
Local authority	9	8
Medical	2	0
Museums	19	4
National	7	1
Performance	1	0
Religious	5	2
Schools	6	3
Specialist	7	2
<b>Totals:</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>37</b>

<b>London identified responses, by category</b>			
<b>Category</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Mailed</b>	<b>Identified responses</b>
A-V & digital	5	2	0
Business	27	6	1
Charities	16	3	3
Estates	4	3	1
Higher Education	29	Mailing list	6
Local authority	33	32 (Could not find any contact at Havering)	12
Medical	12	3	3
Museums & Galleries	40	10	7
National	67	17	5
Performance	6	1	0
Religious	20	6	2
Schools	8	2	2
Specialist	43	15	5
<b>Totals:</b>	<b>310</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>47</b>

## Targeted Interviews

### Alex Ritchie, Business Archives Co-ordinator, The National Archives

He is organiser of a volunteer crisis team of five archivists concerned with business archives, to identify archives at risk in that sector across the UK. Information is gathered on an *ad hoc* basis mainly through monitoring national and local media as well as contacts from archivists. The team mainly communicate through email. They then decide who will take the lead to negotiate either directly with the business or with whoever has already made contact with the business, to ascertain willingness to deposit the archives and identify a suitable repository.

The team has been in existence for one year during which time 15-20 closing businesses have been identified. However some were false alarms or not rescue situations. At least three deposits have been negotiated and another is pending. Suitable repositories are usually identified on the basis of location, either current or at the time of establishment. Approximately 75% of business records in archive repositories are deposited in local authority record offices, and rescued business archives follow this trend although specialist repositories will be considered.

He is open to closer liaison with the BRA's Records Preservation Section.

### Caroline Sampson, Heritage Services Manager (formerly County Archivist), Warwickshire County Council

She is considering how to manage draconian budget cuts. Staff costs are the largest budget item and posts at all levels are vulnerable. She is also looking at ways of raising significant revenue to save posts. She is negotiating with on-line content providers, e.g. Ancestry, to achieve this, but national negotiations would be helpful because the process is so time-consuming.

Consequences of staffing cuts:

- senior staff no longer available to mentor and train junior staff, leading to de-skilling
- short-term contracts, even for Heads of Service
- loss of pre-course internships, which will impact on the profession at a national level
- a rise in volunteering by qualified professionals, especially conservators.

Any "Records at Risk" campaign should be national, but saving local archive services can best be achieved through local campaigns which engage local communities.

## Matthew Woollard, Director, UK Data Archive, University of Essex

It is necessary to distinguish between “born digital” and “digitised” records. The latter are of less concern in terms of preservation over time, because the analogue record still exists.

All repositories should be prepared to deal with/take in digital records (indeed local authority repositories are obliged to do so in relation to Public Records), but not necessarily to maintain them over time, although there must be provision for this which may be cheaper collaboratively.

Lack of familiarity is a barrier to making provision for (or even thinking about) digital archives. But this is generational, and will change. Younger members of the profession will be more used to dealing with computers and digital objects.

Preservation of digital records via a migration strategy will become more of a software-driven process, requiring less intervention. Archivists will know what software to procure in the same way as they know what archival packaging to procure for the preservation of traditional format archives. Until this happens, specialist digital archivists will be needed who are more than usually IT-literate.

He advocates a centralised national service to advise on digital archive preservation and provide a second line of defence – at present the Digital Curation Centre does this for the HE/FE sector, but UK Data Archive will do this if the digital archive is relevant to its collecting policy.

Archivists need to understand more about the physical media that digital records are created on, e.g. dates of viability of different sizes of floppy disk, to inform decisions about their accessioning and maintenance over time.

There is a lot of guidance and examples of best practice available on the web, e.g. Gloucestershire Archives has a policy on managing digital archives. A web page with links to encourage access to these resources would be useful.

Selection criteria are very important, but we also need to pay attention to the pre-ingest process, e.g. rights clearance for digital records, which may be time- and resource-intensive, to enable contents of digital media to be accessed.