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National Museum of Ireland
Ard-Mhúsaem na hÉireann

Archives Policy

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National Museum of Ireland – Archives Policy

The Archives of the National Museum of Ireland (NMI) comprise the ‘Departmental Records’ held by NMI. These are defined in legislation National Archives Act, 1986.

NMI Archives may be used for research, management, and interpretation of the museum collections. They are also used by staff in the general management of NMI. Researchers may access the Archives for their own research projects.

This policy covers acquisition, disposal, management, care, and access for all archive holdings of NMI.

1 Legislative Basis

NMI has a role under the National Cultural Institutions Act, 1997, to interpret the museum collections and make them accessible to the public. The Archive is a key resource in supporting these requirements and is staffed by a qualified Archivist.

NMI is also a ‘Scheduled Body’ under the National Archives Act, 1986. This has the effect of delegation of responsibility to NMI in order to retain ‘Departmental Records’ on NMI premises as long as they are preserved there in accordance with such conditions as may be specified in writing by the Director of the National Archives.

‘Departmental Records’ are defined in the National Archives Act, 1986 (Section 2-2) as:

“For the purposes of this Act, “Departmental Records” means any of the following: books, maps, plans, drawings, papers, files, photographs, films, microfilms and other micrographic records, sound recordings, pictorial records, magnetic tapes, magnetic discs, optical or video discs, other machine-readable records, other documentary or processed material, made or received, and held in the course of its business”

The definition specifically excludes (Section 2-2-ii):

“any part of the permanent collection of a library, museum or gallery”

The permanent collections of NMI are covered under a separate suite of collections policies for ‘museum heritage objects’ as defined in the National Cultural Institutions Act, 1997.

The National Archives Act, 1986 only applies to ‘Departmental Records’ over 30 years old.

The Director of NMI acts as ‘Certifying Officer’ under the terms of the National Archives Act, 1986.

2 Role

The role of the NMI Archive is to support the National Museum of Ireland to:

1. Collect, preserve, promote and exhibit Ireland’s portable material heritage and natural history;
2. Interpret and promote the collections and make them accessible to audiences at home and abroad;
3. Be an authoritative voice on relevant aspects of Irish heritage, culture and natural history;
4. Maintain the lead role in education, research and scholarship pertaining to the collections;
5. Fulfil the obligations of NMI under the National Archives Act, 1986.

3 Departmental Records

The National Museum of Ireland will:

1. Preserve the 'Departmental Records' of NMI in accordance with legislation and under the guidelines and policy of the National Archives to ensure the permanent protection and preservation of archives in our care and to facilitate access through the provision of a high quality public service.
2. Prepare a retention and disposals schedule for 'Departmental Records' less than 30 years old to include the terms of the national retention schedule prepared by the National Archives.
3. Develop a Records Management Policy for new records, which will clarify and simplify retention of Departmental Records in due course.

3.1 Transfer of Departmental Records

The National Museum of Ireland will:

1. Formally record 'Departmental Records' of NMI when entering the NMI Archive, following the Guidelines for Transfer process for Transferring Bodies that would normally apply when passing such records to the National Archives.
2. Label all 'Departmental Records' in order to identify them clearly.
3. Develop a Transfer Schedule to be approved by the Director NMI that will identify Departmental Records across NMI less than 30 years old and determine the point at which they enter the archive in advance of that timeframe.

3.2 Management of Departmental Records

1. NMI will follow the Guidelines for Places of Deposit of the National Archives of Ireland.
2. The NMI Archivist will formally process and list 'Departmental Records' in line with ISAD (G) – the General International Standard for Archival Description, of the International Council on Archives.
3. NMI will carry out listing to ensure recording of information and metadata regarding archives, to comply with NMI's obligations for public inspection of historical Departmental Files under the National Archives Act, 1986.
4. NMI will maintain a catalogue of the 'Departmental Records' of NMI and manage their physical access, loans, copyright, and reproduction in accordance with the standards agreed with the National Archives.
5. NMI will carry out regular inventories of 'Departmental Records' and audit the results to ensure security, physical condition and organisation are maintained.
6. NMI will record details of sensitive data and to assign closure periods to 'Departmental Records', where appropriate.
7. NMI will record access by researchers to the Archive.
8. Any proposed refusal or limitation on access will be submitted in writing through the Archivist and be assessed by an internal panel, then referred to the Director for consideration before being submitted to the Director of the National Archives for a decision.
9. NMI may lend 'Departmental Records' from its Archive for the purposes of exhibition or display subject to standards on transport and display conditions being agreed with the Director of the National Archives.
10. Displays of archive holdings on NMI premises or on loan out to other exhibitors will ensure security, safety, and preservation of the archives while off-site. These will be subject to written applications through the Archivist and be assessed by an internal panel, then referred to the

Director for consideration before being submitted to the Director of the National Archives for a decision.

3.3 Storage of Departmental Records

1. Storage areas for all Departmental Records will be based on BS EN 16893:2018 'Conservation of Cultural Heritage. Specifications for location, construction and modification of buildings or rooms intended for the storage or use of heritage collections'.
2. Storage of digital files will take due regard of current best practice in a rapidly evolving field, and follow any standards set by the National Archives.
3. The current storage location and the full location history of 'Departmental Records' will be recorded in the ISAD (G) record on the NMI archives database.

3.4 Disposal of Departmental Records

Destruction of 'Departmental Records' is prohibited under Section 7 of the National Archives Act, 1986 unless permission is first granted by the Director of the National Archives, and a Certificate for the Disposal of Departmental Records issued.

1. The Archivist will prepare applications for disposal to be submitted to the Director NMI as Certifying Officer, who will seek guidance from the NAAC (National Archives Advisory Council). The application will then go to the Director NA for decision.
2. Reasons for disposal of 'Departmental Records' may include, but are not limited to:
 - 2.1. Legal: Lack of title or other legal reasons where the holding of an item in the Archive is brought into question.
 - 2.2. Condition: damaged or deteriorated beyond use or representing a health and safety hazard.
 - 2.3. Value: Non-paper material held in formats that are no longer readable through obsolescence of the equipment required for their use.
 - 2.4. Duplication: retention of a single copy of any record may be deemed sufficient.
3. All actions pertaining to the de-accession of 'Departmental Records' will be documented in full.
4. Catalogue entries for 'Departmental Records' that have been disposed of will be maintained.