

Privacy & Records Management

Appraisal policy and methodology

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The British Council's status

The British Council became a public records body on the 1 April 2003 (SI 2003/438).

Before then, the British Council had transferred, on a voluntary basis, a significant number of files to The National Archives, currently covering the period 1933-2001.

About the British Council

Founded in 1934, the British Council is an executive non-departmental public body sponsored by the Foreign & Commonwealth Development Office (FCDO); and a UK charity governed by Royal Charter.

The British Council supports peace and prosperity by building connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and countries worldwide.

The British Council combines the UK's expertise in arts and culture, education and the English language, their global presence, and relationships in over 100 countries. In 2021-22 the British Council reached 650 million people.

The British Council creates mutually beneficial relationships between the UK and other countries. This is done by:

- Working directly with individuals to help them gain the skills to transform their lives. The British Council supports them to build networks, to learn English and to gain internationally recognised qualifications.
- Working with governments and partners in the Education, English language, and cultural sectors, in the UK and globally. The British Council takes a long-term approach to building trust and remain at arm's length from government.

The majority of the British Council's income comes from partnership agreements, contracts, philanthropy, and teaching and exams. The British Council also receives grant-in-aid funding from the UK government.

Objects and powers

The terms of the Royal Charter and bylaws, reissued in 1993, underpin all British Council activity. The objects of the British Council are:

'To advance, for the public benefit, any purpose which is exclusively charitable and which shall:

- a) promote cultural relationships and the understanding of different cultures between people and peoples of the United Kingdom and other countries;
- b) promote a wider knowledge of the United Kingdom;
- c) develop a wider knowledge of the English Language;
- d) encourage cultural, scientific, technological, and other educational cooperation between the United Kingdom and other countries; or
- e) otherwise promote the advancement of education.'

Selection decisions

The table below sets out the types of documents that are suitable for selection for permanent preservation and transfer, in line with The National Archives' Records Collection Policy.

It is important to note that the British Council only transfers records originating from the British Council. Third party material is only transferred if it gives context to British Council archives.

Minutes and papers of meetings

- Key Committees
- High level and strategic working parties/groups
- Minutes and correspondence of the Senior Leadership Team
- Board of Trustees
- Mixed Commission Meetings
- General Meetings of overseas subsidiaries

Reports

- Unpublished Country Annual Reports
- Regular returns summarising key activities and relationships
- End of major projects, events, programme, reports

Relationships with Government departments and external stakeholders

- Overseas Development Ministry
- FCDO and its predecessors
- Cabinet Office
- Governments of other countries

Policy files

- Correspondence detailing high-level decision making
- Design and implementation papers for major projects, programmes, services
- Regional and Country Plans and key strategy documents
- Key records of the regularisation of the British Council's tax and status position in a particular country

Response to external incidents where British Council operations are affected

- Natural disasters
- External emergencies (coups, bomb threats, political instability, war, fragile environments)
- Security incidents

Records with these functions will not usually be considered for permanent preservation. If not selected these records will be securely destroyed in line with the British Council's retention schedule. See the British Council's [Records Retention Schedule](#).

Internal administration

- Practical arrangements for meetings/conferences
- Details of artists touring schedules
- Low level costings
- Agreements with artists/musicians
- Routine paperwork
- HR records dealing with staff issues, pensions, recruitment etc.
- Records of individual students

External documents

- Files that contain a significant amount of non-British Council material and where any British Council paperwork included is of a low level [e.g., Transactional] nature.

Places of deposit

The bulk of selected British Council records are transferred to The National Archives.

Tate Archive holds records of the Visual Arts team (formerly Fine Arts, now part of the Cultural Engagement Directorate) including exhibition files, reviews, and newspaper clippings. The majority of the files concern the exhibitions created by the department and the touring of the exhibitions outside Britain and provide illustrations of the art works included. (1936-1982). All records created after 2003 will be transferred to The National Archives. N.B. All records suitable for retention concerning the Venice Biennale are deposited at The National Archives.

The British Library Sound Archive holds the work of the Recordings Unit. This consists of taped interviews with authors, poetry readings and recordings of lectures and plays. Most of this material was produced in the late 1950's to the end of the 1960's/. A staff Oral History project from 2006-2007 is also housed here.

The British Film Institute (BFI) holds a collection of films produced and sponsored by the British Council in the 1930s and 1940s. This is a static collection.

The Modern Records Centre at the University of Warwick holds the records of the Staff Association and Whitley Council Staff Side/Trade Union Side (1968-1994) This is a static collection.

The Special Collections of the University of Reading holds a collection of correspondence between 183 British and Irish writers and the British Council's Literature department, together with reports of visits and other papers (1960-2001) This is a static collection.

The UK Government Web Archive has captured British Council websites and social media since 2004.