POLICY POSITION: NATIONAL GOVERNMENT PUBLIC RECORDS AND PROVINCIAL ARCHIVES SERVICES

1. Introduction

The post-1910 records of national government bodies are the responsibility of the National Archives and Records Service of South Africa (NARSSA). Many of these records are in the custody of repositories which are now part of provincial archives services. National government bodies (e.g. magistrates’ offices) situated in the provinces will continue producing records for which the NARSSA is responsible. There are sound reasons for arguing that the archival custody of such records should be the responsibility of provincial archives services, they include:

- It brings them into the contextual milieu in which they were created and used functionally.
- It makes them more accessible: to the communities on which they have a direct bearing; and to records creators who might occasionally require them for functional purposes.
- It contributes to the devolution of the nation’s cultural heritage and thus the enriching of relatively marginal areas.¹

The same reasons can be used to substantiate the movement of national government records in the custody of the NARSSA in Pretoria, which originate from provinces, into the custody of those provinces’ archives services.

2. National government public records already in the custody of provincial archives repositories

Where a provincial repository can demonstrate its capacity to manage and care for the records adequately ², and the creating office is satisfied with the arrangement, the NARSSA will consider relinquishing its responsibility for such records (in terms of section 13(2)(a) of the National Archives and Records Service of South Africa Act, Act No 43 of 1996, as amended).

3. National government public records still in the custody of creating offices situated in the provinces

The NARSSA will retain full records management responsibility (e.g. approval of classification systems, appraisal, inspections) for such records. If there is a need NARSSA will request the appropriate provincial archives repository to assist with these tasks. NARSSA will approve the transfer of such records with enduring value into the custody of provincial archives repositories if:

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¹ Par. 1 of POLICY POSITION: INTER-REPOSITORY MOVEMENT OF RECORDS.
² ANNEXURE A: STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL MANAGEMENT AND PHYSICAL CARE OF ARCHIVES
3.1 A provincial repository can demonstrate its capacity to manage and care for the records adequately (see ANNEXURE A: STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL MANAGEMENT AND PHYSICAL CARE OF ARCHIVES);

3.2 The creating office is satisfied with the arrangement; and

3.3 The provincial archives service concerned is prepared to meet terms and conditions laid down by the NARSSA for the records which post-date 10 May 1994 (see ANNEXURE B: PROTOTYPE TERMS AND CONDITIONS FOR DEVOLVED CUSTODY). In other words, the NARSSA will consider relinquishing further responsibility for pre-10 May 1994 records, but will in all cases retain over-arching professional control over post-10 May 1994 records.

4. National government public records in the custody of the NARSSA in Pretoria to which provinces may lay claim

The guidelines contained in POLICY POSITION: INTER-REPOSITORY MOVEMENT AND REPATRIATION OF RECORDS will be applied. In addition:

4.1 The creating office (where applicable) must be satisfied with the agreement reached between the NARSSA and the provincial archives service concerned; and

4.2 The provincial archives service concerned must be prepared to meet terms and conditions laid down by the NARSSA for the records which post-date 10 May 1994 (see ANNEXURE B: PROTOTYPE TERMS AND CONDITIONS FOR DEVOLVED CUSTODY). The NARSSA may consider relinquishing further responsibility for pre-10 May 1994 records, but will in all cases retain over-arching professional control over post-10 May 1994 records.
ANNEXURE A

STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL MANAGEMENT AND PHYSICAL CARE OF ARCHIVES

1. **Storage facilities**

   1.1 The building must be secure against unauthorised entry and vandalism

   1.2 Access to storage areas/strongrooms must be strictly controlled by staff.

   1.3 Protection against fire must be adequate – the minimum requirement is 24 hour smoke detectors throughout the building with automatic fire alarms linked to a fire station. A High Sensitivity Smoke Detection system (VESDA) and a gas fire suppression system using gas products such as Novec or FM 200 is preferable. If water is going to be used for fire suppression it needs to be a very specialised system, for instance such as the one in use in the United States National Archives. The doors to the strongrooms must also be fireproof.

   1.4 All areas where archival material will be kept on a temporary basis, for instance in the conservation laboratory, must meet the same fire detection and suppression standards as the strongrooms.

   1.5 Protection against water or damp must be adequate. Plumbing or drains in or above strongrooms is unacceptable.

   1.6 Temperature and relative humidity in strongrooms for paper-based archival records must be controlled at stable levels between 18°C - 22°C and 50 – 60% RH. Other appropriate environmental standards should be laid down for electronic records, microfilm and various audio-visual materials.

   1.7 Direct sunlight must be excluded from storage areas.

   1.8 There must be adequate shelving and appropriate use of archival boxes.

   1.9 An archives building is intended to preserve public records with enduring value for the future. It is therefore, necessary to build it with the best material possible.
2. Public use facilities

2.1 A reading room in which records can be consulted under constant supervision must be provided.

2.2 The reading room must be properly serviced and be open at reasonable office hours.

2.3 Finding aids to all archival records must be provided.

2.4 There must be a set of reading room instructions which include provision for the safety of records while being consulted.

3. Human Resources

3.1 The staff establishment must be adequate for the performance of core functions – those functions which an archival institution must perform to fulfil statutory or other requirements and to ensure that is viable and effective.

3.2 The presence of properly qualified archivists – the number appropriate to the extent of the institution’s holdings – is a prerequisite.

4. Institutional infrastructure

4.1 The repository must have approved institutional policies detailing a minimum set of standards to which it will adhere (and budget for-) in order to ensure that line functions such as preservation and access are integrated functions within the broader functioning of the repository.

4.2. Condition of records

4.2.1 The need for the devolution / repatriation of archival records needs to be balanced by the legislated imperative to preserve archival records. Archival records should not be imperilled through their repatriation, either in the initial move or at their new residence.

4.2.2 The physical condition of the archival records must not be put in danger (e.g. fragile records, already treated records).

The repository from which records are repatriated from will have the obligation to evaluate the condition of the records identified for repatriation. The evaluation of the records identified will include not only the history of their origins, but also the condition of the records in order to establish whether they are in sufficient-enough condition to be repatriated.
A further portion of the evaluation is to establish whether the repository requesting records for repatriation has preservation appropriate facilities for the storage and usage of archival records.
ANNEXURE B

PROTOTYPE TERMS AND CONDITIONS FOR DEVOLVED CUSTODY

1. The NARSSA approves the continued archival custody of the following public records by the (name of provincial archives repository):

   and/or

The NARSSA approves the transfer into the custody of (name of provincial archives repository) of the following public records:

2. This approval is subject to the (name of provincial archives services) meeting the following terms and conditions:

2.1 The NARSSA retains overarching professional control over such public records.

2.2 The NARSSA retains full responsibility for such records in terms of the National Archives and Records Service of South Africa Act, Act 43 of 1996, as amended, while such records are still in the custody of the creating office.

2.3 The (name of the provincial archives repository) will manage such records in its custody strictly according to the relevant provincial archives act. If no such act exists such records will be managed in terms of the National Archives and Records Service of South Africa Act.

2.4 The (name of the provincial archives repository) will bear all the costs related to the management of such records.

2.5 The (name of the provincial archives repository) undertakes to:

   • meet and maintain standards set by the NARSSA for the professional management and physical care of the archives (see ANNEXURE A: STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL MANAGEMENT AND PHYSICAL CARE OF ARCHIVES);

   • consult with the NARSSA before: access to any such records is denied; the copying of any such records is prohibited; any such records are restored;

   • secure NARSSA approval for: the permanent transfer of any such records to another archival repository; the temporary alienation of any such records (except to the creating office for the purposes of consultation);

   • report to the NARSSA: any damage to or loss of such records; major structural changes or additions to the building;
• ensure that any computerised finding aid prepared for such records is compatible with and linked into the NARSSA computerised retrieval system; and

• allow the NARSSA to inspect its facilities at least annually.

3. The NARSSA reserves the right to withdraw the approval described in paragraph 1 above if the (name of the provincial archives service) fails to comply fully with any one of the terms and conditions set out in paragraph 2 above.
SUGGESTED READING


Helen Forde: The education of staff and users for the proper handling and care of archival materials: a RAMP study with guidelines (PGI-91/WS/17)

Ted Ling: Solid, Safe, Secure. Building Archives Repositories in Australia (National Archives of Australia, no date), Chapter 6


National Archives of South Africa: Directive G1: Perils to which archives are subject (Pretoria, 1994).

National Archives of South Africa: Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository, Specific Task Manual STN16: Reading Room Management.

National Archives of South Africa: Reading Room: National Archives Repository, General Information for Researchers.

National Archives of South Africa: National Archives Repository, Reading Room Rules (Pretoria, 1995).

http://www.wbdg.org/design/archives_records.php

http://www.bl.uk/blpac/pdf/environment.pdf

http://www.parbica.org/content/BuildingLowCostArchivesBuildingsReport_tcm50-74758.pdf
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