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The public consultation process for Operational Selection Policies

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Selection of public records

Done under the authority of The Public Records Act 1958

Selection done by departments under the supervision of The National Archives.

Here's what the legislation has to say about what records are worthy of permanent preservation:

Selection of public records

- All records dated 1660 or earlier (s3(3) of the 1958 Act)

....errr....that's it.

History of non-consultation

No consultation about the 1660 rule

No consultation about subsequent Public Record Office guidance issued to departments

Essentially a closed government process to which the public – neither researchers nor taxpayers – had access

No consistency for departments, researchers or archivists

History of consultation

Reasons for gradual move towards consultation

- Public accountability
- Open government, Freedom of Information
- Increasingly vocal pressure groups
- Academic researcher interest

History of consultation

- Acquisition policy
- Disposition policy
- Appraisal policy
- Custodial policy

Etc.etc.

Process of consultation

- Cabinet Office guidance
(<http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/regulation/consultation/>)
- Identify interested users
 - Either regular researchers with an interest in your acquisition policy generally...
 - ...or researchers interested in that topic
- Other approaches possible

Result of consultation

- Unlikely alter main thrust of policy – but may tinker at edges
- Likely to be low-key, unless you propose the destruction of key researcher resources (as the researchers see it)
- May feel like a pointless exercise, but there are benefits nevertheless

Benefits of consultation

- Open government
- Accountability for decisions
- Involve users of the archive
- Win support of academic users
- Gives authority to decisions, which...

Benefits of consultation

- Gives archive managers more authority over record “owners”
- Allows better flow of material into the archive
- Encourages debate and promotes the archive
- Greater staff and public confidence in its decisions



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