

All libraries except the State libraries of Tasmania and Queensland, and the National Library of New Zealand (for obvious reasons) use Libraries Australia name authorities. The National Library of Australia, and the state libraries of Queensland, New South Wales, Western Australia and Victoria also use Library of Congress Subject Headings.

5.12 Encoding standards

As would be expected from the different approaches to description, encoding standards vary across the NSLA libraries. 8 of the libraries use MARC21 for collection level records (or can output to MARC for this purpose); 1 uses Dublin Core. Five libraries use or can output to EAD if required. However, even those libraries who have authored finding aids in EAD have encoded only a minority of finding aids using the standard (there have been no major retrospective conversion projects). The three libraries who have been authoring new finding aids in EAD since the standard's introduction to Australian in 2002 are all now investigating or implementing Archivists Toolkit, which can output finding aids in EAD if required.

5.13 Collection management systems

NSLA libraries use a range of collection management systems to manage archival lifecycles. Most struggle with inadequate systems, or inadequate connections between corporate systems, requiring time-consuming workarounds.

6 libraries use a database to manage and track collection opportunities. Of these, 3 libraries use a system which interfaces with or is a part of their collection management system. Of these, the National Library of New Zealand's Tapuhi system appears to be the only one providing satisfactory support. 2 libraries use Reftracker to track and manage enquiries; Reftracker does not currently interface with their collection management systems. 2 libraries use Excel spreadsheets to record offers; 1 uses a handwritten offers book.

5 libraries use archival management systems to describe and manage accessions. 4 libraries use library management systems for this purpose. 1 uses standard Office software, and 2 create accession records in hard copy. Given that 9 libraries responded to this survey, this means that at 3 libraries are using more than one system to describe and manage accessions.

6 libraries use library management systems to create collection level records. 4 libraries use archival management systems to create collection level records. Again, this suggests that 1 library is using more than one system to describe and manage collection level records.

Of the 8 libraries creating finding aids or component level metadata, 5 use archival management systems to do so; 1 uses its library management system, and 4 libraries (including the library using its library management system) create finding aids in Word or Excel. Production of finding aids is clearly not consistently supported across the libraries.

Four archival management systems are currently in use among NSLA libraries. Two libraries use Archivists Toolkit (and another is investigating it); one uses a 5 level 'boutique' content management system; two use their own customised collection management systems. These last (National Library of New Zealand and State Library of Tasmania) report the highest levels

of satisfaction with their current workflow support, although the National Library of New Zealand reports that its Tapuhi has not been redeveloped for many years and is not user friendly.

Several libraries use a combination of their library management systems and archival management systems for different collection management purposes. Interfaces between these systems are few and 'clunky'.

2 libraries are very satisfied with their current collection management systems, 4 are somewhat satisfied; 1 is neutral; 1 is somewhat dissatisfied; and 1 is very dissatisfied. Several libraries reported that they had been very dissatisfied but are feeling more satisfied with recent implementations of Archivists Toolkit. The following dissatisfactions were recorded:

- Lack of integration between systems
- Patched together methods of managing the full collection lifecycle
- Need to update description in 3 different systems
- Flat database structure precluding all collection management activities from being properly linked
- Lack of technical support for customised system
- Teething issues with Archivists Toolkit
- Lack of user friendly interface for staff or patrons
- Inability to produce finding aids as anything but text
- Lack of effective publication pathway for finding aids.

5.14 Digitising archival material

All NSLA libraries have digitised at least some of their archival collections. Of these, 6 report that they have completed one or more projects and 1 reports that it has an active and ongoing digitisation program. 5 report that they only digitise when specific purposes funding is available.

Archival management staff are involved in a range of digitisation activities.

All libraries report that staff are involved in selection of material (including preservation and rights assessments); 8 report that staff create catalogue or component level metadata to support digitisation; 5 undertake quality control; 4 project manage digitisation projects; and 2 manage interfaces between collection management systems and digital asset management systems. Only 1 library reports that archival management staff actually produce digital images (through scanning or photography).

While the survey did not ask respondents to quantify their archival digitisation programs, it is clear from qualitative answers that digitisation of archival material (as distinct from pictorial, film or oral history material) is a very selective and small scale affair across the NSLA libraries.

5.15 Born-digital archives

As expected, this is an area where there is great need, but little capability. All 9 libraries reported that they hold born-digital material, on a range of physical format carriers. However, only 4 of the 9 libraries have a program to manage and preserve born-digital material.

Of those 4 libraries, 2 reported that management of these collections is principally undertaken by archival staff, with assistance from digital preservation staff if required; the other 2 report that management is principally undertaken by digital preservation staff with assistance from archival staff.

Of the 4 libraries, all are able to migrate material from physical format carriers to a mass storage system; 3 are able to arrange and describe material; 3 are able to provide access to material; 2 are able to integrate description of born-digital with description of physical materials; and 2 are able to convert proprietary file formats to non-proprietary formats.

No libraries are able to preserve databases.

5.16 Online access to collections

The survey asked respondents to provide information on the degree of online discoverability of their archival collections, and the extent to which this has changed over the last decade.

5.16.1 Catalogue records

Libraries were asked to answer a range of questions – from slightly different stances – on the cataloguing status of their collections. Close attention to the detailed responses reveals that there are some logical inconsistencies in these answers, indicating the difficulties which some libraries had in answering these questions. However, taken together, the answers provide a fairly solid picture of the online discoverability of archival collections in NSLA custody.

Libraries were asked to provide information on what percentage of their archival collections were described with an online record 10 years ago, and to compare this with the current situation. 7 libraries were able to provide answers on their situation 10 years ago; all 9 were able to respond for the current situation.

Most libraries were moderately or very confident, or certain about their answers to these questions.

In 2000, 1 library had online catalogue records for 98% of its collection; 1 had records for 95%; 1 had records for 60%; 1 had records for 40%; 1 had records for 32% and 1 had online records for just 5% of their collections.

In 2010, 5 libraries have online catalogue records for 100% of their collections; 1 has online records for 99% of its collection; 1 has records for 90%; 1 has records for 80%; and 1 has online records for 30% of its collection.

This increase in online catalogue records for archival collections is a very pleasing result. Researchers are much, much more able to discover collections in the online environment than was the case 10 years ago.

Libraries were also asked to provide information on what percentage of their archival collections is described with various kinds of records. 8 libraries answered this question.

1 library reported that 20% of its collection has no record of any kind; 2 libraries reported that 1% and 70% respectively of their collections have only card catalogue records; and 2 libraries reported that 49% and 10% respectively of their collections are described only on their local catalogues.

6 libraries reported that they have records on Libraries Australia. Of these:

1 library reported that 80% of its collections have a Level 1 record; 1 reported 50% with a Level 1 record; 1 reported 19%; 2 reported 15% and 1 reported 5%.

1 library reported that 75% of its collections have a Level 2 record; 1 reported 25; and 2 reported 10%.

1 library reported that 95% of its collections have a Level 3 record; 1 reported 90%, 1 reported 81%; 1 reported 75% and 1 reported 5%.

Across the NSLA libraries, 3% have no catalogue record of any kind; 12% have a card catalogue entry only; 12% have a local system record only; 22% are described in a Level 1 record on Libraries Australia; 20% are described in a Level 2 record on Libraries Australia; and 57% are described in a Level 3 record on Libraries Australia. Because of the variability of answers, these statistics actually add up to more than 100%.

Nevertheless, when the National Library of New Zealand is removed from this equation, it is still clear that a very high percentage of all archival collections are represented – with at least a Level 1 record – on Libraries Australia.

5.16.2 Records on Libraries Australia/Trove

However, these figures belie the variation between libraries. When libraries were asked whether and to what extent they currently contribute their records to Libraries Australia, it became clear that coverage is very uneven.

3 libraries contribute all their archival records to Libraries Australia; 1 contributes most; 1 contributes some records; and 4 contribute no records to Libraries Australia.

The National Library of New Zealand, of course, has no need to contribute to Libraries Australia. Of the 3 other NSLA libraries which do not currently contribute to Libraries Australia, 2 describe their archives in multi-component metadata, rather than with summary catalogue records and separate finding aids.

Libraries that contributed to Libraries Australia were also asked whether their records included the correct leader codes to ensure that their records form part of the archives 'island'

in Trove. Of the 5 libraries contributing to Libraries Australia, 4 include the correct leader code. 1 does not but is considering a batch change to its records to include this data.

As is already known to the archival community, a very significant proportion of archival collections held in Australian NSLA libraries are not discoverable through Trove. This is a major concern, especially as contributing to Trove also means contributing (painlessly) to OCLC, and is the easiest way to maximise Google indexing of records.

5.16.3 Finding aids

The last decade has seen a significant increase in the percentage of finding aids (or component level metadata) available online.

In 2000, only the two national libraries had any finding aids available online; the National Library had 50% of its finding aids online; the National Library of New Zealand had 60% of finding aids available online.

By 2010, an average of 56% of NSLA finding aids are available online – ranging from 5% at some libraries to 90% in others. However, for some institutions, all or most finding aids available online are not searchable, i.e. they are images of hard copy finding aids, or their format makes searching difficult.

Libraries were also asked whether the percentage of large collections described in an online finding aid had increased or decreased in the same period. For those libraries who had no finding aids available online 10 years ago, increases were obviously very substantial.

For the 2 libraries (NLA and NLNZ) who had 50% and 60% of finding aids available online 10 years ago, there were not necessarily big increases in the percentage of large collections described in an online finding aid. The National Library of Australia reported that its percentage had fallen by 25% or less (the result of an increasing backlog of collections with no finding aid). By contrast, the National Library of New Zealand – which has a minimal processing backlog – reported that the number of large collections described with online component level metadata has increased by 25% or less in the last 10 years.

For those libraries which have searchable online finding aids and who answered a question on format, 2 libraries have 100% of their online finding aids/component level description available as multi-level non-MARC records; 2 have 100% finding aids in HTML; 1 has 90% in Word/PDF, 5% HTML, and 5% EAD, and 1 has 70% HTML and 30% EAD.

This confirms that online finding aids/deeper description are not standardised across the NSLA libraries; it would be impossible to offer 'federated' indexed searching across the NSLA archival collection.

5.17 Physical infrastructure

Physical infrastructure (sorting shelves, large worktables etc.) available for archival processing work varies considerably between the respondents. Some libraries – the National Library of Australia, the National Library of New Zealand, and the State Library of Victoria – report that

their physical infrastructure is very satisfactory. These institutions also placed a high value on the importance of good physical infrastructure to achieving efficiency.

Other libraries have extremely limited space and/or equipment available for processing activities, with staff effectively forced to try to deal with very large collections at their desks.

5.18 Discoverability of new collections and additions to collections

The time at which a summary record is created and viewable on the online catalogue for new collections or accessions varies between libraries. 5 libraries create a visible summary record on receipt; 2 create a record when accessioning is complete; 1 creates a record only when the collection or accession is regarded as 'fully processed'.

This is an area which could be standardised, with all NSLA libraries aiming to include at least a very brief summary record in their online catalogues, pending completion of accessioning and further arrangement and description.

5.19 Ways of handling additions to collections

Library management systems are not particularly good at handling continuing resources such as archives received as multiple accessions. Given that most NSLA libraries work within LMS environments, a range of 'workarounds' are in place.

1 library creates a note in the bibliographic record; adds a holdings statement; adds the accession information to existing finding aids where these exist; and adds receipt information to Archivists Toolkit.

1 library creates detailed descriptions of the addition in Archivists Toolkit, then adds this information as detailed notes to the bibliographic record, and individual holdings for each processed and unprocessed accession. Finding aids are only amended if and when accessions are fully processed.

1 library creates a note in the bibliographic record; adds new items to the holdings statement; updates existing finding aids where these exist; and manages parent-child relationships in the local catalogue.

1 library uses the MARC 541 field to capture coded data on each new accession: donor, date of receipt, description of the records, file numbers and additional remarks. These 541 fields are suppressed from view.

1 library acknowledges that its processes are in flux, following a change of collection management system. Small additions are simply added as a note; where the collection has been itemised an item record is added.

1 library adds child records for each addition to the collection and links these as time allows.

1 library (with an integrated archival system) either records additions as separate 'further records' or fully integrates the collection level description on completion of A&D work.

Standardisation of practice in this area – especially from Australian libraries working in a Trove environment – would be of significant benefit to researchers. Further discussion is required to discuss the aims of describing additions in systems (discoverability by researchers, collection management purposes for libraries), and how these are best met. Improved understanding of Trove limits (e.g. lack of support for navigation between parent-child records, no inclusion of Institution Specific Data) would help Australian libraries to make the best decisions in an imperfect world.

5.20 Processing policies

Given the significant processing backlogs in NSLA libraries, the survey asked respondents to say whether their library has a policy on processing large collections, and what this is. It also asked whether there were local definitions of ‘fully processed’.

5 libraries reported that their library’s policy is to fully process all large archival collections

3 libraries reported that their library’s policy is to fully process only high priority large archival collections.

However, for many respondents this ‘split’ did not adequately describe their position. The policies of a number of libraries are clearly out of step with actual practice; outdated policies that see all material as in scope for full processing have resulted in growing backlogs and unattainable goals. With no firm definitions of ‘fully processed’, it is difficult to see how backlogs can be adequately quantified.

Similarly, definitions of ‘fully processed’ varied considerably and are not always in step with stated library policy; in many cases there is no firm definition. At the highest end, one library deems collections to be fully processed only if a full level record group description plus description of every item (box, folder, volume) has been entered into the catalogue; one considers collections fully processed only if (at least) series headings and subject access points for the series are assigned; some libraries deem collections fully processed if there is a good collection level description plus box listing; one library regards high priority collections as fully processed only after full arrangement and description, but medium and low priority collections as fully processed on production of a good collection level catalogue record; one library regards all but the very highest priority collections as fully processed when initial accessioning is complete.

Without common definitions of ‘large’ collections and common processing policies, it is impossible to accurately compare the quantity of material that might require further processing in NSLA libraries.

5.21 Access to unprocessed collections

Although libraries had varying definitions of ‘unprocessed’, most respondents understood what this means in practice and were therefore able to answer a question about their library’s policy on allowing researchers to access unprocessed collections.

No libraries always allow access to unprocessed collections; 3 usually do; 4 sometimes do; 1 never does.

For those who never or only sometimes allow readers to access these collections, the most common concerns are privacy and confidentiality, security and preservation. The least likely concerns are inadequate description.

In one case a respondent said that readers would not be aware of unprocessed collections as they are not described at all on the library's catalogue until accessioning is complete.

Standardised practice across the NSLA libraries – to allow researchers to discover and access unprocessed collections unless there are pressing reasons to deny access – would significantly increase researcher access to our collections.

6 Findings on archival practice and performance

The next part of this report documents findings on archival practice and performance from the 8 NSLA libraries who responded. As most questions asked libraries to report on the frequency of actions on archival collections, and on available performance data, this section of the report is very detailed. A number of these questions asked libraries to report on whether they always, usually, sometimes, seldom or never undertook certain actions. In the sections that follow, **bold** indicates the highest number of respondents for each question.

6.1 Supplier requirements

In recent years, some NSLA libraries have redirected resources to try to improve the condition and description of collections before they reach the library, or before they are permanently accepted into the collection. The survey asked a series of questions about pre-acquisition activities. While all libraries indicated that they are actively investigating the possibility of moving towards more 'offsite preparation and donor engagement', the extent to which this has actually occurred varies considerably.

1 library always physically appraises prior to transfer; 1 usually does; **6** sometimes do.

2 always appraise by email or phone prior to transfer; 2 usually do; **4** sometimes do.

2 libraries usually require suppliers to pack collections into the library's archives boxes prior to transfer; **4** sometimes do; 2 never do.

2 usually require suppliers to provide a box list of contents prior to or at the time of transfer; **4** sometimes do; 1 seldom does; 1 never does.

1 library usually requires suppliers to use a library supplied template to create the box list; **3** sometimes do; 2 seldom do; 2 never do.

2 libraries usually use their own staff to pack collections onsite; 2 sometimes do; **4** seldom do.

2 libraries use their own staff to list collections onsite; 2 sometimes do; 2 seldom do; 2 never do.

1 library usually requires valuers to provide a detailed contents list, using a template; 2 sometimes do; 1 seldom does; 4 never do.

The survey results indicate that a number of libraries have considerable room to move if they wish to move towards receiving 'shelf-ready archives'. This may include incremental change, e.g. if the library requires a box list, it is a small extra step to ask the supplier to use an approved template; if library staff pack collections onsite, it is a small extra step to simultaneously list the collection.

The survey recognised that such intensive pre-acquisition work is not always warranted for smaller collections. The results suggested that most libraries do not have a 'benchmark' for when this work is warranted. If more NSLA libraries move towards the 'shelf-ready archives' paradigm, setting a benchmark (even a flexible one) may be useful. Those libraries who did indicate a notional benchmark suggested that collections larger than 3-5 boxes benefit from pre-acquisition activity.

Only one library estimated a percentage of collections where the requirement to box and list was waived (<10%). However, 4 libraries indicated the conditions that would lead them to waive the requirement. All agreed that old age, illness, stature of the donor and political/strategic considerations were important; 3 libraries indicated that sometimes the requirement is waived because it is 'just too hard'. The exception argued that good communication skills, persistence, and a willingness to compromise mean that enforcing the requirement is never just 'too hard'. This library indicated that suppliers respond well to the 'value proposition' that they are adding detail which archival staff would never be able to know.

The number of collections received boxed and listed by suppliers varied greatly between libraries, as would be expected by the different approaches taken. One library received more than 100 collections boxed and listed by suppliers in the previous year; 1 received 50-100 collections; 1 received 20-50; 4 received less than 10; 1 received none. The benefits to researchers of having instantly (if briefly) listed collections is obvious. However, it should be noted that the benefits are much greater in libraries which lack sufficient resources to undertake arrangement and description on a regular basis.

Similarly, the number of collections boxed and listed onsite by library staff varied considerably. Two libraries reported more than 50 collections handled in this way; 1 indicated 20-50 collections; 1 indicated 10-20 collections; two reported less than 10 collections; 2 reported that no collections were boxed and listed onsite by library staff.

Onsite packing and listing (where undertaken) has mostly been done by higher level professional staff. However, some libraries indicated that they have had considerable success with using lower level staff for this task.

The survey results suggested that few libraries have policies or guidelines in this area. For those libraries that do not or only rarely require suppliers to supply collections boxed and listed, the factors governing this choice were (in descending order of importance): fear of losing individual collections; fear of a generalised backlash against the library or archival unit; fear that such a policy requires too much liaison work; or that the policy is not supported at the library. Only one library indicated that they felt that this work is the province of the archivist, not the supplier. Similarly, only one library indicated that such a policy had not been considered.

Two libraries responded to a question about the number of collections they felt they had 'lost' because of the requirement for suppliers to supply boxed and listed. One library indicated none; one library indicated that it knew of two low value collections actually 'lost', but also noted that there may be others where the library did not hear back from the donor after outlining its requirements.

Standardisation in this area may be of considerable benefit to NSLA libraries.

Standardisation of policies – if not of actual practice – may be of considerable benefit to NSLA libraries. If all libraries require most suppliers to supply material boxed and listed, this will gradually become a 'norm' that suppliers expect and comply with.

6.2 Accessioning practice

The survey recognised that the definition of 'completed' accessioning may vary greatly between institutions, and have varied considerably over time with changes in processing and access policies. For example, the tasks required in an environment where a large proportion of all new receipts will be considered not just fully accessioned, but fully 'processed' on production of a good catalogue record will be much more extensive than an environment in which all receipts are considered in scope for full arrangement and description (and where resources to do so may reasonably be expected to be available).

The survey results confirmed that the tasks that must be undertaken before accessioning is considered 'complete' vary considerably between the libraries. In fact, the only tasks that all libraries always do is to label and shelve accessions!

6 libraries always assign a unique accession number; 1 usually assigns; 1 never assigns.

2 libraries always register receipts in a manual, Word or Excel register; 1 seldom does; 5 never do.

6 libraries always register receipts in a library or archival management system; 1 usually does; 1 never does (NB Anecdotal evidence suggests that at least one library retains a manual register even though receipts are registered in a system).

7 always record the size of the accession; 1 usually does.

5 always describe the contents of the accession (although description levels presumably vary); 2 usually do; 1 sometimes does.

Only 1 library always creates a box level list at point of receipt if one is not supplied; 2 usually do, 1 sometimes; 1 seldom; and 3 never.

4 always assign a processing priority at point of receipt; 3 sometimes do; 1 seldom does.

3 always assign a broad subject heading on receipt; 2 usually do; 1 seldom does; 2 never do.

2 always record the presence of born-digital material in a separate register or database; 4 usually do; 1 seldom does; 1 never does.

2 always record the presence of audio-visual material in a separate register or database; 5 usually do; 1 never does.

1 always records the physical condition of the accession; 2 usually do; 3 sometimes do; 2 seldom do.

4 always rebox or rehouse material if required; 2 usually do; 2 sometimes do.

All libraries always label accessions.

All libraries shelve accessions in permanent or semi-permanent locations.

6 libraries always acknowledge receipt; 2 usually do.

6 regard accessioning as complete only if any required valuation processes are complete; 1 sometimes does; 1 seldom does.

2 always finalise access conditions with suppliers; 6 usually do (see note below on when rights agreements are made with suppliers).

7 create a brief record in their online catalogue at point of receipt; 1 usually does. NB. There is a slight discrepancy between answers reported for this question, and for those asking when an online record is first created. Nevertheless, this is a pleasing result, and should mean that almost all new receipts should be quickly discoverable – even at the most basic level – at all NSLA libraries. This was not always the case.

3 create a full record in their online catalogue as soon as possible after receipt; 2 usually do; 1 seldom does; 2 never do. Again, this is a pleasing result; 5 of the 8 respondents create rich records for their new accessions soon after receipt. This was not always the case.

4 always register access conditions in their online catalogue; 1 usually does; 1 sometimes does; 1 seldom does; 1 never does.

2 always register access conditions and rights holders in a rights management system; 1 sometimes does; 1 seldom does; 4 never do (because they do not have rights management systems).

5 always file documentation relating to the accession on paper or electronic files; 2 usually does; 1 sometimes does.

The survey did not ask whether libraries have an accessioning worksheet listing tasks that must be completed, when they are done and 'signing off' on completed accessioning. Nor did it ask who – if anybody – undertakes quality control of the accessioning process. Similarly, it did not ask whether the systems used to manage archival collections provide support for workflow tracking and reporting. For example, the National Library of Australia's implementation of Archivists Toolkit delineates a number of stages in the workflow – from registration to completion – and reports can be run to determine where each accession is in the workflow chain.

These workflow management issues would be a fruitful source of discussion for the NSLA libraries.

6.2.1 Note on access conditions

Finalising access conditions with suppliers can be a time-consuming task, and greatly affect the actual and elapsed time taken to complete an accessioning process. The survey found that the point at which access agreements are completed varies considerably between and within institutions. This seems to 'fit' with the complex nature of the relationships that exist between suppliers and archival management staff, and to indicate that individual judgements are made as to when is the best time to finalise these agreements.

As in previous comparative sections, **bold** indicates the highest number of respondents for each question.

6 sometimes complete agreements during accessioning; 1 seldom does; 1 never does.

4 sometimes complete after accessioning is complete; 1 seldom does; 1 never does.

4 sometimes complete agreements after a summary catalogue record is complete; 3 seldom do; 1 never does.

Only 1 library always completes agreements after full arrangement and description; 1 usually does; 3 sometimes do; 3 seldom do.

1 usually completes agreements at the point of need (when requested by researchers); **4** sometimes do; 1 seldom does; 2 never do.

6.2.2 Assigning processing priorities

Whether and how processing priorities are assigned to new receipts varies considerably across the NSLA libraries.

6 libraries assign processing priorities at point of or soon after receipt; 2 do not (but 1 is in the process of developing guidelines for doing so).

Those that assign priorities generally use a 1-3 model (High, Medium, Low); 1 library has a 1-5 model (that for practical purposes collapses into 3).

At least 2 libraries record these priorities within bibliographic records, allowing accurate reporting on the collections (and quantities) in each processing priority. The addition of broad

subject headings by the National Library of Australia supports accurate reports on the quantity of material that requires processing across the spectrum of subject areas.

One common issue for priority models is the nexus between research value and the actual need for deeper description. For example, some very high research value collections can be adequately described with a collection level record and a supplier list. It may be difficult for staff assigning priorities to know whether to assign based on value or on the need for further description.

1 library noted that any priorities set are very 'fluid', and that assigned priorities are not always used when deciding what to work on next.

Given that most libraries are – or are about to – assigning processing priorities, and that the models are very similar, there may be some value in standardising further in this area; standardising inclusion of processing priorities in similar fields in bibliographic records, and considering how to provide advice to staff assigning processing priorities.

6.3 Arrangement and description practice

This part of the survey closely followed the survey conducted by Greene and Meissner^{vii} in 2006. This survey divided A&D practice questions – for material being fully arranged and described – into 3 sub-categories: arrangement; preservation oriented action on the collection; description. Note that this section of the survey only applies to collections being fully arranged and described (not to the kinds of quick packing and listing described in the section on accessioning above).

6.3.1 Arrangement

As with other parts of this survey, archival arrangement practice varies considerably across the libraries. The most 'common' arrangement practices are that all libraries always or usually arrange material at the series level, and that 6 of the 8 libraries always or usually arrange at the folder level.

3 libraries always arrange material at the series level; 5 usually do.

1 library always arranges material at the sub-series level; 2 usually do; 3 sometimes do; 1 seldom does; 1 never does.

2 libraries always arrange material at the folder level; 4 usually do; 1 sometimes does; 1 never does.

No libraries always arrange material within folders; 1 usually does; 3 sometimes do; 2 seldom do; 2 never do.

2 always weed duplicates; 3 usually do; 2 sometimes do; 1 never does;

2 always weed material of little or no historical value at the item level; 3 usually do; 1 sometimes does; 1 seldom does; 1 never does.

These findings suggest that NSLA archivists are less likely than Greene and Meissner respondents to: always or usually arrange material at the sub-series level; arrange material within folders; weed duplicates; and weed material of little or no historical value. There are no actions which NSLA libraries are more likely to always or usually undertake. There is already less 'process' in this area than in the Greene and Meissner sample.

6.3.2 Description

1 library always requires processing staff to produce a project plan, including estimates for the time required to complete discrete tasks; 1 usually does; 1 sometimes does; 1 seldom does; 4 never do.

Similarly, 1 library always requires processing staff to produce an end of project report, including lessons learned, and discrepancies between the anticipated and actual time required; 1 sometimes does; 6 never do.

This suggests that most libraries do not control the time required for processing archival collections, nor hold staff accountable for their performance.

The level of description for collections being fully arranged and described varies considerably between institutions.

4 libraries always create a biographical or administrative history note; 3 usually do; 1 sometimes does.

6 libraries always include a provenance note; 1 usually does; 1 sometimes does.

4 libraries always include an arrangement note; 2 usually do; 1 sometimes does; 1 seldom does.

5 libraries always create a collection level scope and content note; 3 usually do.

1 library usually creates series level scope and contents notes; 3 usually do; 1 sometimes does; 2 seldom do; 1 never does.

1 library usually creates sub-series scope and content notes; 2 sometimes do; 3 seldom do; 2 never do.

2 libraries usually create folder level scope and content notes; 2 sometimes do; 2 seldom do; 2 never do.

1 library usually describes at box level; 5 sometimes do; 1 seldom does; 1 never does.

1 library always creates item level lists or descriptions; 2 usually do; 2 sometimes do; 3 seldom do.

NB. The question above lacked clarity. For most archivists, 'item' equals folder or file, rather than an individual document within that file.

1 library usually creates correspondence indexes; 4 seldom do; 3 never do.

1 library seldom creates subjects indexes; 7 never do.

5 libraries always include subject headings in their finding aids; 1 usually does; 2 never do.

4 libraries always include name authority headings in their finding aids; 2 usually do; 2 never do.

These findings suggest that NSLA archivists are as likely as the Greene and Meissner sample to create collection level, series level and folder level descriptions. Most of the actions in the NSLA survey (e.g. correspondence indexes) were not included in the Greene and Meissner survey.

6.3.3 Preservation actions

6 always rebox into archival boxes; 1 usually does (1 library did not answer this question)

2 always refolder into archival folders; 3 usually do; 1 sometimes does; 1 seldom does; 1 never does.

2 always remove metal paper clips; 3 usually do; 2 sometimes do; 1 seldom does.

1 always removes staples; 1 usually does; 1 sometimes does; 4 seldom do; 1 never does.

No libraries always enclose newspaper clippings in inert enclosures; 2 usually do; 3 sometimes do; 3 seldom do.

No libraries always photocopy newspaper clippings; 1 sometimes does; 7 seldom do.

No libraries always photocopy carbons and thermal faxes; 3 usually do; 2 sometimes do; 3 seldom do.

1 library always places torn documents in inert enclosures; 4 usually do; 2 sometimes do; 1 seldom does.

2 libraries always encapsulate brittle, torn or valuable documents; 1 usually does; 3 sometimes do; 2 never do.

No libraries always mend torn documents; 1 usually does; 4 sometimes do; 2 seldom do; 1 never does.

No libraries always deacidify brittle paper; 2 sometimes do; 2 seldom do; 1 never does.

1 library usually replaces intrinsically valuable documents with photocopies; 2 sometimes do; 1 seldom does; 4 never do.

No libraries always store photographs separately from the rest of the collection; 4 usually do; 3 sometimes do; 1 never does.

3 libraries always store photographs in inert enclosures; 1 usually does; 3 sometimes do; 1 seldom does.

No libraries always interleave scrapbooks or albums with pH neutral paper; 3 sometimes do; 4 seldom do; 1 never does.

No libraries always microfilm physical format material; 4 sometimes do; 1 seldom does; 3 never do.

No libraries always migrate analogue AV material to preservation digital formats; 2 usually do; 2 sometimes do; 1 seldom does; 3 never do.

No libraries always make use copies of all AV material; 2 usually do; 1 sometimes does; 2 seldom do; 3 never do.

1 library always makes a use copy of AV material on demand; 1 usually does; 3 sometimes do; 2 seldom do; 1 never does.

2 always migrate born-digital material to preservation formats (see note below); 2 sometimes do; 2 seldom do; 2 never do.

NB Given that migration to preservation formats is in its infancy, even in the largest archival institutions, it should be assumed that those who responded positively to this question actually meant the born-digital material is migrated from physical carriers to safer storage, rather than to preservation formats.

No libraries make use copies of all born-digital material; 4 sometimes do; 2 seldom do; 2 never do.

1 library always makes use copies of born-digital material on demand; 2 sometimes do; 3 seldom do; 2 never do.

These findings suggest that NSLA archivists are less likely than the Greene and Meissner respondents to always or usually: remove metal paper clips and staples; separate newspaper cuttings; photocopy newspaper clippings; photocopy carbons or thermal faxes; mend torn documents; replace intrinsically valuable documents with photocopies; interleave scrapbooks with pH neutral papers; make use copies of AV material on demand. There are no actions which NSLA libraries are more likely to always or usually undertake. There is already less 'process' in this area than in the Greene and Meissner sample.

Overall, the findings on which tasks are actually undertaken during arrangement and description suggest considerable variety of practice within the NSLA libraries, but also suggest that NSLA archivists are already engaged in less 'process' of the kinds that Greene and Meissner suggested were significantly slowing archival processing.

6.4 Processing performance

This survey essentially replicated the findings of Greene and Meissner who found that archivists and archival managers were unable to answer fundamental questions about what they thought performance should be, and what it actually is.

Most of the NSLA respondents could give no clear answer as to how long it should take to complete initial accessioning of collections; none could give a clear answer on how long it actually does take. Most could give no clear answer as to how long it should take to fully arrange and describe collections; only one could give a clear answer on how long it actually does take.

Part of this uncertainty can be attributed to some of the definitional issues described above. What does accessioning mean? What activities does it include?

However, even allowing for these varying definitions and nomenclatures, it is clear that managers of archival collections do not have the information required to set and measure against internal or external performance benchmarks for these crucial – and time-consuming – aspects of archival collection management.

6.5 Accessioning performance

Estimates for the minimum time required to accession a straightforward receipt such as a single letter or volume ranged from 30 minutes to 3 hours. Estimates for the average time accessioning receipts (large and small, simple and complex) should take ranged from 30 minutes to 10 hours. Estimates for the average time institutions think is actually taken to accession receipts (large and small, simple and complex) ranged from 30 minutes to 15 hours.

However, it should be noted that the enormous differences reported here are in line with the wide variation in local processing policies, definitions, accessioning practices, and the size of average receipts; there is no sense in which apples are being compared with apples in this part of the survey.

Any meaningful study of accessioning performance within an individual library would require clear definition of what is and is not in scope, and what aspects of local processing policy affect the scope of the task. Any attempt to compare accessioning performance across the NSLA libraries would be significantly hampered by widely divergent policy and practice.

On the other hand, most NSLA libraries are only ‘somewhat confident’ about the time this activity actually takes, and most reported ‘mixed’ satisfaction with efficiency of accessioning workflows. Given that accessioning is a time-consuming activity repeated – in some cases – hundreds of times per annum and using a significant proportion of all archival collection management resources, further costing of this activity (at least at the institutional level) may be warranted.

The survey did not ask any questions about quality control of accessioning work, so it is not known whether QA is done by the accessioner, other staff at the same level, or staff at a higher level.

6.6 Factors affecting accessioning performance

The survey asked respondents to 'weight' a number of factors that may affect accessioning productivity. Again, there was variation among the responses. The highest weighting was given to pre-acquisition work undertaken by the library.

5 libraries regarded pre-acquisition work undertaken by the library (e.g. appraisal, staff boxing and listing) as essential; 3 as very important.

2 libraries regarded pre-acquisition work by donors (e.g. boxing and listing) as essential; 1 as very important; 4 as important; 1 as not very important.

2 libraries regarded suitable physical infrastructure as essential; 2 as very important; 4 as important.

3 libraries regarded suitable systems infrastructure as essential; 4 as very important; 1 as important.

3 libraries regarded workflows that minimise repetition (e.g. data rekeying) as essential; 4 as very important; 1 as important.

3 libraries regarded staff competency, aptitude and experience as essential; 4 as very important; 1 as important.

6.7 Arrangement and description performance

Most libraries found it almost impossible to say how many hours a linear metre of material should take to arrange and describe, or to say how many metres a full-time processing archivist (with few or no other responsibilities, working on large 20th century collections) should be able to arrange and describe. This is partly because there are very few full-time processing archivists working in NSLA libraries. Most fit some arrangement and description work among other collection management or reader services activities. This in itself means that – for most NSLA libraries – arrangement and description is an inherently inefficient stop-start affair.

The survey respondents' suggestions for performance per linear metre varied from 5-36 hours; the proposed metres per annum varied from 30-80. This variation is in itself demonstrates how poorly performance is understood or managed.

It should be noted that only one library was able to accurately identify hours per metre and metres per year. Ironically, the National Library of Australia's current resourcing situation – in which full arrangement and description is only possible by utilising trust and other off-budget funds – means that it has very accurate figures for full-time processing archivist performance over the last 4 financial years. Proposing a project for trust funding – including giving a firm estimate of how much work will be achieved in a given period, and knowing that the outcome must be reported on – is a wonderful way of concentrating the mind on this issue!

An average of 80 metres per year has been achieved in each of the last 4 years by dedicated processing archivists. It should be noted that all collections thus processed are 'highest' priority; they include personal papers of Prime Ministers; leading writers; artists; composers; a single very large (and very complex) aviation collection; and a single very large records of a literary agency. Performance varied from 60 metres per year (for primarily literary collections where significant work was required to integrate accessions into previous A&D work, and where very messy previous access conditions had to be corrected) through to 115 metres in a year in which the records of the literary agency comprised nearly half.

Using NLA salaries and oncosts, this means the cost per metre processed is just under \$900 per linear metre. NLA archivists also report on the actual hours spent processing (i.e. excluding tea breaks, recreation leave, sick leave, team meeting attendance, corporate meeting attendance, training, occasional Reading Room duties, A&D extras such as converting old finding aids, and preparing material for digitisation, and other 'extras' such as being required to assist at a display or write an article on the collections processed etc). They reported an average of 12 hours expended per metre processed. At an average salary per hour of \$50, or \$600 per metre of *actual* processing time, this suggests full-time processors spend around 2/3 of their time actually processing collections.

Of the nine responding libraries, only one library requires processing archivists to produce a processing plan for each collection being arranged and described.

Greene and Meissner concluded that 'a competent processing archivist ought to be able to arrange and describe large twentieth century archival materials at an average rate of four hours per cubic foot' and the 'processing 400 feet per [full-time] processor per year is not a theoretical goal; it is achievable'.

Linear metres can be converted to the US centric cubic foot:

Libraries using NAA type 1 boxes: 1 linear metre = 3.2 cubic feet

Libraries using type A boxes (14 cm): 1 linear metre = 3.8 cubic feet.

The National Library of Australia uses type A boxes. This means that full-time processing archivists at the NLA have processed an average of just over 300 cubic feet per annum. Inclusion of more straightforward organisational records took this to 437 cubic feet in a single year. These figures were achieved with a high degree of processing relative to the Greene and Meissner suggestions; collections were arranged in series, within series, refoldered, described at the folder level, paperclips were removed; many photographs were separately housed; and finding aids included almost all possible elements. This suggests that 400 cubic feet per annum or just over 100 linear metres per annum would indeed be possible if all Green and Meissner 'more product, less process' suggestions were followed for all collections.

6.8 Factors affecting arrangement and description productivity

The survey asked respondents to 'weight' a number of factors that may affect arrangement and description productivity. Again, there was variation among the responses. However, all libraries agreed that staff competence, attitude and experience are essential to productivity.

The next most highly weighted factors were the ability to undertake processing as full time occupation, and the availability of suitable systems infrastructure.

1 library regarded pre-acquisition activity undertaken by the library (e.g. appraisal, staff boxing and listing) as essential; 4 regarded this as very important; 1 as important.

1 library regarded pre-acquisition activity by the donor as essential; 2 as very important; 5 as important.

3 libraries regarded the standard of initial accessioning as essential; 1 as very important; 4 as important.

4 regarded suitable physical infrastructure as essential; 2 as very important; 2 as important.

4 regarded suitable systems infrastructure as essential; 4 as very important.

2 regarded project planning as essential; 2 as very important; 3 as important; 1 as not very important.

All libraries regarded staff competence, attitude and experience as essential.

1 regarded the ability to undertake processing activity as a full-time occupation as essential; 6 as very important; 1 as important.

Quality control of finding aids is undertaken at different levels. 3 libraries reported that QA is undertaken by staff at the same level as the processor; 5 libraries reported that QA is undertaken by more senior staff.

6.9 Recent changes to processing archival collections

The survey also asked respondents to outline any recent (last 3 years) changes in their processing policies and practices. Although archival areas are often characterised as resistant to change, it is clear that considerable change has occurred within the NSLA archival community. On the positive side, examples range across technical, professional, resource allocation and organisational structure areas:

- Implementation of Archivists' Toolkit to manage accessioning and finding aid production (2 libraries).
- Merging of legacy databases with mainstream LMS (2 libraries).
- More resources devoted to appraisal and other pre-acquisition activities (several libraries).
- Requirement for donor lists (1 library with others considering).
- Assignment of processing priorities at point of receipt (two libraries).
- Move to varying levels of processing, rather than a 'one size fits all' approach (several libraries).

- Project planning for A&D projects (1 library).
- Merger of 'library' archives with State Records Office, resulting in more dedicated time for processing.
- Review of policies and procedures (most libraries).
- Increased emphasis on standards (several libraries)
- Successful use of lower level staff for accessioning (1 library)

On the negative side, staffing and organisational issues were mentioned:

- Loss of experienced staff through retirement
- Reduction of FTE available for work.
- Effects of organisational restructure; more work required on securing effective policies, practice and performance.

One library also noted (and no doubt others might have if pressed), that there is a much greater intake of electronic records in recent years.

6.10 Blue sky

After being asked to reflect on recent changes, respondents were also asked to 'blue sky' about what they would do to improve archival collection management workflows in the 'ideal' world of being able to close the archival doors to address these issues.

While the inevitable 'clear the backlog' responses were present, they did not dominate. Blue sky desires included: total re-engineering of workflows; projects to scope descriptive work required; projects to use available information to improve access to collections; improving control of collections through use of locations and barcoding; improving physical preservation of collections; scoping and developing workflows to convert non paper based material to safe digital formats.

- Develop minimum standards of description on a national basis
- Scope and develop programs for tackling existing backlog (several libraries)
- Clear backlogs (several libraries)
- Complete stocktake to find collections that have never been accessioned
- Improve training, especially in standards and guidelines, appraisal and valuations
- More time to select items for digitisation
- More arrangement and description (which allows staff to engage deeply with content)`
- Require box lists for incoming material to enable the quick creation of catalogue records

- Implement 856 links to series and special lists, transcripts and translations
- Streamline workflows that involve other areas of the library (e.g. in digitisation)
- Improve processes for scoping, managing and preserving non paper based formats: tapes, film, digital (several libraries)
- Create an electronic record for every collection.
- Improve physical infrastructure for accessioning and A&D
- Process collections that have some sort of list on file
- Decide what can be de-accessioned
- Physically rehouse entire collection (long term project)
- Improve description of collections with only basic description
- Improve description of high value collections with poor description
- Master our backlogs while keeping on top of incoming material
- Review all processes, targeting backlogs
- Re-engineer workflows to deliver collections to readers much more quickly
- Utilise expert content knowledge (not necessarily librarians)
- Get the front end right and capitalise on donor contribution and engagement
- Import legacy data into At and other archival management systems
- Physical survey of collection to record and add location information for every collection
- Fast track new guidelines for A&D and rehousing
- Convert pre-accession records (very brief legacy data) to collection level catalogue records
- Barcode all collection material
- Identify collections which do not have finding aids and should have; scope project to create finding aids
- Develop workflows for born-digital material

6.11 The real world

The survey finished by asking all respondents to return to the real world and list their top three 'worries', and the three things they thought would help most. Respondents were asked to assume that there was no magic wand to improve staffing, so 'not enough staff' was not regarded as a valid answer (See 5.7.1 above about required staffing levels)

6.11.1 Worries

- Lack of proactive collection development
- How to manage born digital records
- How to manage other electronic format material
- Too many transfers awaiting processing
- Lack of resources to undertake arrangement and description work
- Inadequate physical infrastructure
- Expectations from other areas of the library
- Inadequate storage space (temporary problem for some; permanent for others)
- Competing demands for time of collection management staff; collection management always loses out
- How to develop a pragmatic approach to the backlog
- How to manage the cultural change needed to support new processes
- Low level of detail in finding aids
- Inability to undertake retrospective description improvement
- 'Institutionalised' backlogs: a mindset that says backlogs are a way of life and why fight it
- Mismatch between increasing volume of material received, but static throughput using old processes
- Delays inflicted on clients who want to access collections quickly
- Our processes are too often focused on what we want and can do, not what our clients want
- Lack of trust in systems, resulting in time-wasting manual duplication and checking

6.11.2 Things that would help

- Full integration of archival management systems with other library systems
- A system that allows production of finding aids with just one tool (not several unrelated ones)
- Increased interoperability between systems
- Project time to fully scope backlog and develop streamlined processes that utilise scarce staff time effectively

- Upgraded collection management system
- Focus on improving systems rather than retaining manual processes
- ‘Ring fencing’ of A&D from demand driven acquisition and reference work
- Investigating opportunities for resource sharing with other parts of the library (without endless restructures)
- Barcoding the collection to improve collection control
- Improved training for staff
- More (and better) volunteers
- Ability to publish all finding aids – in many formats – online and in ways that allow a range of Web 2.0 navigation and interaction
- Adequate physical infrastructure and work areas
- Good box lists with incoming material
- Library endorsement of archival processing as a vital part of the library’s work
- Institutional understanding of the core activities of archival collection management areas
- Manual of policies and standards
- Putting our energies where they belong
- Eliminate ad hoc decision making – develop processes that work even in exceptional circumstances

Endnotes

- ⁱ OCLC 2009, ‘Mobilising unique resources’, accessed online 24 August 2010, at: <http://www.oclc.org/research/activities/mum.htm>

- ii OCLC is also conducting a study on the contents of more than 1 million MARC records describing archival collections. The project brief notes that MARC records for archives are less consistent than those for other kinds of materials, and aims to recommend practices that would enhance discovery of archival collections. OCLC 2009, 'Analyze archival description practice', accessed online 25 August 2010 at:
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- vii Greene, Mark A and Meissner, Dennis, 2005, 'More product, less process: pragmatically revamping traditional processing approaches to deal with late 20th century collections', *American Archivist* 68:208-263