

## Study Unit 2: Archives: Types, Characteristics & Purpose

### Introduction

In this study unit, you will familiarize yourself with what archives are, the types and forms of archives; the attributes/ characteristics of archives and the importance of keeping archives. You will be able to appreciate the unique characteristics of archives and their role in organisations. You will also be introduced to what an archival institution is, so that you are able to differentiate between a National Archive, National Museum and National Library.

### Learning Outcomes of Study Unit 2

**Upon completion of this study unit, you should be able to:**

- 2.1. Explain the concept of archives.
- 2.2. Describe the unique characteristics of archives.
- 2.3.** Describe the role of an Archival Institution
- 2.4. Explain why it is important to keep archives.
- 2.5. Enumerate and explain the types of archives.
- 2.6. Explain the common formats for archival records.

### 2.1. The Concept of Archives

The word "archives" has three meanings. Archives are:

- The non-current records of an organisation or an individual, which are selected for preservation because of their continuing value.
- The repository or building (or part thereof) where archival material is stored.
- The agency responsible for the selection, preservation, documentation and making available of archival material.

### ITQ

What is the difference between an Archive, Registry and Records Centre?

### 2.1.2. Facts about Archives

- Few records are recognized as having archival value at the point of their creation.
- The perceived value and use of records changes over time. A file created this week may have great archival value in twenty-five years, but it can be difficult to discern that value at this early stage in the record's life.
- The value of records differs between the different communities of users. For example Managers and auditors use records to assess performance and accountability. To them, the administrative value of records ends when regulatory requirements have been met. The majority of records will be destroyed once their business function has ended and there is no further need to retain the evidence they contain.

### 2.2. Unique Characteristics/Attributes of Archives

Just like records, archives have attributes too, which determine their nature:

- Such records must document the creation, functions, and subsidiaries of an organization or company.
- These records must document or provide evidence of the company's activities and probably the consequences of these activities.
- These records must be inactive or non-current.
- Such records should provide information relevant to significant technical questions regarding the company's operations or functions.
- Archives provide a reliable and authentic knowledge base, enabling the past to be reconstructed and understood. Without archives, the past would remain largely unknown. By documenting the significant decisions, transactions and events of political, social and economic life, archives serve as the essential link in the chain of human history.
- The value of archives as authoritative evidence depends upon the quality of their custody and care from the time they were first created and used.
- At any point in their life, whether in the custody of their creators or an archival institution, records are unusable or valueless if their context and authenticity has not been safeguarded. Without context and authenticity, the evidence contained in archives cannot be relied upon or fully understood.

- These records should probably meet or fulfill scholarly or research needs that is contained in them.
- They contain continuing legal or operational value.
- Such records could be containing written notes or papers of significance by personalities or organizational officials. For example of such records are seminar papers endorsed by the director.

## 2.3 The Archival Institution

- The traditional role of the archival institution is to be the custodian of those records set aside for permanent preservation. The archival institution is the base for the last phase in the life of records that have enduring value.
- Archival repositories are major cultural institutions within society. They serve as centres of research, repositories of evidence, places where users can have access to records in pursuit of their interests and guardians of the documentary memory.

### 2.3.1 The National Archives

At a national level, the National Archives, together with the National Library, the National Museum and any other national cultural institutions, is one of a country's core research resources.

- Users come to it from all sectors of society, including professional and academic researchers, researchers from government departments, members of the public, people wishing to have some contact with the primary sources of the national culture and tradition and citizens with a problem that can only be solved by reference to the evidence preserved in archival institutions.
- The National Archives also have a role as the repository of valuable records that originated outside government service but are of interest to the nation. It is also often necessary for a records and archives institution or an archival institution to establish and run regional or branch facilities.
- Under the general supervision of the central management of the records and archives institution or archival institution, these branch establishments perform the same function

in relation to regional or local government agencies as the National Archives does to central government.

### 2.3.2 Uganda National Archives

- The first attempt made to organise the archives of Uganda was made in May, 1950, when the Colonial Office appointed Mr P.T. English, a former Clerk and Customs Officer, Grade I, of the Treasury, Gilbert and Ellice Island, as Government Archivist of Uganda.
- The National Records & Archives Centre was commissioned in September 2016 and is located on plot 8-9 Lourdel road.
- The Uganda National Records & Archives Centre stores and manages appraised semi-current and archival records from ministries, departments, agencies and local governments. The facility also offers reference, retrieval and search room services.

#### ITQ

What is the difference between the National Archives, National Museum and National Library?

## 2.4 Importance of Keeping Archives

- **Administrative Value**

In the conduct of their business, organisations and individuals often need to refer back to records of former activities and decisions; for example, to provide background information, or to substantiate or refute a claim or allegation.

- **Financial Value**

An organisation needs long-term documentary evidence of the way in which monies were obtained, allocated, controlled and expended. This includes budget records which provide evidence of how income and expenditure were planned, and various accounting records which record and document financial transactions.

- **Legal Value**

Legal records provide evidence of contractual obligations, duties and privileges agreed upon by governments, organisations or individuals. They provide a record of such matters as charters, property titles and other legal and civil rights. They may be preserved as evidence of the

decisions of governments, courts and other bodies, or as the source of the authority for actions taken by organisations or individuals.

- **Information Value**

Archives are generally recognized as the primary source materials for information and research in to the history of society. They form a unique and indispensable record for researchers such as historians, scientists, geographers, sociologists, statisticians, architects, writers, genealogists, local historians, broadcasters and journalists.

Archives are valued so highly because they have formed an intrinsic part of the activity which brought them into existence; unlike, for example newspapers which place particular interpretations upon events, or articles which seek to put forward a particular viewpoint on an occurrence or activity.

### **Other functions of Archives**

- Archives enable informed planning, decision making and they support continuity. They are a base for future planning and any management information system that may be implemented.
- To enable research, for instance if one wants to know about earth quakes.
- They are a way of preserving history which is profound in identifying and understanding ourselves, organizations or society.
- They are vehicles for communication through which we access the experiences of others.
- They act as long-term memory through which history, knowledge or expertise is preserved.

#### **2.4.1. Why it is important to transfer Archives**

- The Archives can provide reference service and access to the records. Most permanent records are open to public inspection.
- If these materials are maintained in your office, you are required to make them available to those who request to see them. If they are transferred to the Archives, the Archives staff can provide reference service and access to the materials.
- Inactive permanent records can be moved from expensive office space to semi-active storage to less expensive storage provided by the Archives.

- The Archives provides environmentally stable and secure storage and reference areas, uses archival supplies to house materials, and monitors reference use of materials in order that they may be preserved for use by future generations.

### **ITQ**

Read about the history of Archives.

## **2.5. Types of Archives**

Archives are divided into three categories:

### **(a) Public or government Archives**

These contain records that are created by government or state in the transaction of their business, such records are to be safeguarded and preserved due to the legislative requirement in place. These records will document a history of the government, its agencies and the citizens it serves. These records should be retained for administrative, legal as well as historical purposes.

### **(b) Private Archives**

These are established to preserve the history of an institution, a cooperation or family. Many churches, businesses and associations maintain these private archives to provide evidence and information relating to the organizations' functions, policies, procedures and operations.

E.g. Rubaga Cathedral Archives, Namirembe Cathedral Archives

### **(c) Collecting Archives / Manuscript Repositories**

These are archival institutions primarily responsible for personal papers, artificial collections, and records of other organizations. These often contain collection of unpublished works from a number of sources relating to a specific region, subject, personality, etc.

- Items collected in such archives are dependent on the acquisition policy of that archives' administration. These collections are assessed on informational value that they contain.

## **2.6. Archival Record Formats**

### **(a) Traditional record types**

- Audio recordings -cassettes, vinyl records, gramophone discs
- Typed and handwritten letters and documents
- Photographs, negatives and transparencies
- Maps and architectural plans

## ITQ

Can you identify these?



- Prints and posters
- Certificates and awards
- Motion picture film and video



Figure 1: Traditional Archives

## Modern Archives

- Digital images and video
- Spreadsheets and databases

- Electronic word documents and presentations

**Other archival materials** include Common seals, plaques, regalia, flags etc

**Note:**

It is important however to identify archival records early in their life cycle, while they are still active, so that care can be taken to ensure they are preserved during their active life and safely transferred to the Archives once they are no longer needed.

In the case of electronic documents they may need to be migrated to different formats over time to ensure that they are still able to be read or viewed after the software is no longer available.

**Case studies**

Research & make a presentation on the what comprises the following types of Archives in Uganda:

- Hospital Archives
- University Archives
- Church Archives
- Bank Archives
- Supermarket Archives

**Self-Review Questions (SRQ) For Study Session 2**

Now that you have completed this study unit, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning Outcomes by answering these questions. Write your answers in your Study Diary and discuss them with your Tutor at the next Study Support Meeting or Online interactive sessions.

1. Describe the role of the following in Archives Management:
  - a) Archivist
  - b) Uganda National Records & Archives Centre
2. Explain the major types of Archives.
3. Describe the purpose of keeping archives in organizations.
4. Differentiate between a Records Centre and an Archive.