

## **Deaccessioning policy**

The circumstances under which the British Library may dispose of certain types of material.

### **Part A: British Library Act, 1972**

The Act constrains the British Library Board's powers of disposal in respect of two categories of collection items.

First, with respect to those items transferred to the Library from the British Museum where the Board can exercise its powers of disposal only if: (a) it is a duplicate of another item in the collections or (b) it is printed after 1850 and a photographic ("or a process akin to photography") copy is held in the collection or (c) it "is unfit to be retained in their [i.e. the Board's] collections and can be disposed of without detriment to the interests of students". (Schedule, Section 11(4))

Second, with respect to those items subject to a trust or condition where the Board may not act in any manner inconsistent with the trust or condition. (Schedule, Section 11(5)).

Although not covered in the Act, it should be noted that material transferred to the British Library from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office with the India Office Library and Records is also subject to additional permission from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, which retains "beneficial ownership".

### **Part B: Supplementary policy as approved by the British Library Board, February 2003**

#### **UK Legal deposit material**

The retention of items received by legal deposit is a fundamental function of the Library. It has been accepted that the Library should preserve the original format of publications, even when for service purposes these are selectively made available in surrogate form. (This has been the practice with respect to the nineteenth-century collections, printed on acidic paper, and for newspapers. Much service in Reading Rooms is catered for by delivering microfilm but the originals exist for those who must see them and make a case to do so. The same is true of the great treasures of the Library that are generally made available in surrogate form, except where a scholarly case can be made for seeing the original.)

This policy recognises that some forms of scholarship require access to the original, paper-based artefact and it is a legitimate expectation of the national library that it should preserve its own national printed archive in original form.

Material that is currently being received under voluntary deposit (sound, microform and some electronic material) is treated as if received formally under legal deposit legislation.

#### **Colonial deposit material**

In the past both the British Museum Library and the India Office Library received items under colonial deposit arrangements. These arrangements covered former colonial territories in Africa as well as Asia and relate to various periods of time. As with UK legal deposit, the onus was on the privileged libraries to claim published material. Unlike the UK, this was operated on a very selective basis by both institutions. It has been accepted that the Library should preserve the original format of publication, even when it has made a copy for service purposes.

## **Duplicate material**

The Library purchases duplicate printed material for service reasons. The largest expenditure supports the provision of duplicates of legal deposit material for loan or document supply. The Library buys these duplicates in part because it is our policy that legal deposit copies may only be consulted on site. It is also custom and practice that the Library does not wish to be in commercial competition with the publishing industry by using legal deposit material for its business ends. Normally, therefore, the Library purchases duplicates of legal deposit material to put it on the same footing as any commercial operation. The Library also buys a limited amount of duplicates of reference material, for use in the Reading Rooms, which has the effect of preserving the legal deposit copy from excessive use in the early years of its publication. Very little printed purchased material is bought in more than one copy. The exceptions are those where a business case (based upon sufficient use through the Document Supply service to cover the purchase-price of the additional copy) can be made for multiple duplicates.

In the case of this printed material the Library disposes of the duplicates once the service requirement for them has passed.

## **Foreign material**

The primary responsibility of the Library is to the long-term preservation of the national published archive. At a time when the preservation budget is strained maintaining the British printed heritage for future generations, the Library cannot be expected to expend significant levels of Grant in Aid preserving the original formats of printed foreign material where this is adequately achieved in the country of origin. In cases where appropriate service surrogates exist and, at the time of disposal, the Library is satisfied in writing through direct contact with an appropriate organisation that the long-term preservation of the original documents in the country of origin is safeguarded, the Library may dispose of the originals. This decision is taken in the context of the full cost of retaining the item, including storage and preservation costs (life-cycle costing).

## **Unique material (archives, manuscripts, other formats)**

Following the normal practice of archivists, the Library may dispose of material deemed to be superfluous in the course of preparing an acquired collection of papers for incorporation into its collection. In the course of the same process, it may also elect to transfer material from such a collection to another institution that is considered better able to curate or house it. Unique material, once forming part of the collections, is retained in perpetuity.

## **Part C: Practical implementation**

The Treasury Solicitor has advised that the Board itself must decide upon recommendations for disposal for those items inherited from the British Museum, because of the provisions of Section 11(4) of the Schedule to the British Library Act. This power cannot be delegated to the Library's executive.

For all material acquired since the formation of the Library, the Board has resolved that it should approve all significant acts of deaccessioning. "Significant", in this context, covers significance in terms of the specific items under consideration (as defined, for instance, by their monetary value or their research importance) and in terms of the size of the disposal exercise, the latter category to include proposed disposal of original formats and reliance upon surrogates.

The Board will remain responsible for approving the disposal of all material held by the Library in single copies.

In the case of material where the approval of the Board is required before disposal, the executive will want to satisfy the Board that appropriate consultation with relevant interested parties has taken place before proposing disposal, and that the most appropriate route of disposal is pursued.

In the case of duplicate copies of material purchased for service reasons, the Board has delegated to the executive responsibility for determining the disposal of those duplicates once the service rationale for such duplication has ended.