

ACCESS POLICY

1. Context of the policy

West Glamorgan Archive Service (WGAS) is a joint service for the Councils of the City and County of Swansea and Neath Port Talbot County Borough, reporting to the West Glamorgan Archives Committee.

WGAS is based in Swansea Civic Centre and operates an additional service point at the Neath Mechanics Institute. WGAS provides a professional service to donors, depositors and users of archives in accordance with national standards of access to archives, in particular the Archives Accreditation Standard.

WGAS publishes information about its performance in the form of an annual report available through its web pages on the Swansea Council website. It also provides annual statistical returns to the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy and annual lists of its accessions to The National Archives.

This policy forms part of a suite of Archive Service policies as published on the Archive Service web pages on the Swansea Council website. Hard copies are also made available in the archive searchrooms.

2. Definition of terms used in the policy

Community: The community served by WGAS includes the residents of the City and County of Swansea, residents of Neath Port Talbot County Borough, and other UK and overseas residents. They may or may not make personal visits to WGAS premises. They may contact WGAS by post, email or telephone.

User: WGAS users include any person who uses any kind of service provided by it, and includes casual or marginal users of the service as well as established users.

Researcher: A researcher is someone using WGAS for research, including potential and future researchers.

Stakeholder: WGAS stakeholders include its parent authorities, donors and depositors of records, partner organisations, users of the service and potential users who form part of our target audiences.

3. Purpose of the policy

WGAS has prepared this Access Policy in line with the principles and provisions of the Archives Accreditation Standard. It is also to be read in conjunction with other WGAS policies, strategies and service plans.

This policy outlines the principles which will ensure all WGAS stakeholders are aware of their rights and responsibilities in relation to access to the services which WGAS provides.

4. General principles of the policy

- a. WGAS shall aim to serve its community as effectively and efficiently as possible within its allocated annual budget and any additional funding received for specific projects.
- b. WGAS shall aim to serve all of its community, devising a range of services appropriate to the community's stated or implied needs. It will not discriminate against any member of its community. WGAS welcomes donations and deposits of archival material from all of its community, in line with its Collection Policy.
- c. The constitutional framework, operation and leadership of WGAS is transparent and communicated through a variety of means. It is made clear therein who manages the Service, and how they can be contacted. All staff are clearly identifiable and are fully trained to undertake their jobs, or are supervised trainees.
- d. Historical records are collected and preserved by WGAS on the general understanding that they will be made accessible to all who wish to use them for study and research, subject to any relevant legal restrictions or preservation issues.
- e. WGAS aims to encourage as much access by researchers to primary source material as is compatible with the permanent preservation of unique and irreplaceable material. There should be a presumption of openness. Any restrictions on access, along with the reasons for these restrictions, are clearly communicated to users.
- f. Some of WGAS's services function through processes in which the user is an active participant and in which he or she has responsibilities as well as rights (such as when providing public access to original archival material). WGAS shall communicate clearly these responsibilities to users when and where appropriate.

5. Providing on-site access

WGAS provides an on-site public service for its community from its headquarters in Swansea Civic Centre and from its service point in Neath. Access to original documents held by WGAS is provided in the archive searchroom at Swansea Civic Centre. Access to original documents held by the Neath Antiquarian Society is provided in the archive searchroom in the Neath Mechanics Institute. This service is managed by WGAS with the assistance of the Neath Antiquarian Society.

Practical information on how to access WGAS facilities is made widely available to the public both in hard copy and online. Researchers are required to register for an archive reader's ticket prior to accessing original archival material in either of these two locations. Information on both the registration process and the documentation required to register is made available to the public online and in hard copy.

Archive Service staff are available at each service point to supervise and assist researchers in the use of original, facsimile and surrogate material. Finding aids are provided in the form of detailed handlists and indexes, which are also available in a searchable form online.

Rules and procedures for the use of the searchrooms in each service point are clearly displayed. By registering as a user of WGAS, researchers agree to abide by these rules and procedures. In these rules, the Archive Service makes clear to users their responsibility to assist in ensuring the long-term preservation of archival materials. The Archive Service also requires all service users to treat other users and Archive Service staff with consideration.

At both service points, individual users can obtain information on the use of archives for research, and view a range of resources relating to the area covered, in facsimile or surrogate form. The Archive Service also welcomes visits from external groups, including local societies, schools and universities.

When welcoming individual users or visiting groups, the Archive Service provides physical access, signage and on-site facilities which are compliant with the Equalities Act 2010 and with the current rules and guidelines of its parent authorities. WGAS has a feedback mechanism for receiving comments and complaints from users at both service points.

WGAS participates regularly in the Archives and Records Association's UK National Survey of Archive Users in order to gauge levels of user satisfaction with its service.

6. Outreach and engagement work and remote access to the service

The Archive Service aims to reach out to potential users of the service through special events in order to develop our user base, in line with targets outlined in the WGAS Audience Development Plan.

The Archive Service recognises that not all its users wish, or are able to visit one of the service points in person. Basic enquiries about Archive Service holdings are therefore welcomed by telephone, post and email. A research service is available where remote users have more in-depth queries, and a reasonable charge is made for this service. The Archive Service aims to respond to all written enquiries within 10 working days.

The Archive Service makes information on the service provided, including details of opening hours, locations and collections held, available on its web pages on the Swansea Council website. WGAS provides remote access to its catalogue on its website and also through partnership working with the Archives Hub.

7. Access restrictions

The Archive Service has a limited number of research spaces, and on busy days it may not be possible to accommodate everyone wishing to use the facilities within the

research area. Advance bookings can be made, and details of how to make a booking are made available to the public.

The Archive Service strives to provide copies of archive materials when requested. Where copies cannot be made, the reasons will be fully explained to the user.

Archives that contain personal information of living people (or those who are presumed may still be alive, judging from the date range of the records) will be dealt with according to the terms of the General Data Protection Regulation 2016 and the Data Protection Act 2018..

Records which fall within the scope of data protection legislation are usually identified as such in the archive catalogues, however the archivist on duty has discretion to withhold any record for this reason, or allow access on the basis of a data protection waiver signed by the researcher. Such a waiver commits the researcher not to record or reproduce any personal information as a result of their access to the document.

The Archive Service endeavours to provide access to new deposits as soon as possible after receipt. Collections are added to a cataloguing programme which is subject to change according to the demands of the service. Collections will not usually be made available to researchers until they are fully catalogued.

8. Fees and charges

On-site personal access to the collections is free of charge, although a fee is charged for photocopies and scans provided on request. A table of fees and charges is advertised in WGAS searchrooms and on the WGAS web pages on the Swansea Council website. The use of a camera for recording personal research is free of charge.

Current service charges are outlined in a Fees and Charges notice which is updated and re-issued annually at the start of the financial year. These charges are publicised to users through notices in all service points and through the Archive Service website.

Policy dated March 2020, for review by March 2025