# Archiving oral history in local authority archives

Survey conducted by the Archives and Oral History Special Interest Group of the Oral History Society, 2025

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ORAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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# Executive summary

Based on survey results from 48 local authority archives, oral histories are widely accepted and increasingly valued – a marked change from the 1990s and 2000s, when archivists were still averse to accepting oral history collections. At the same time, they are seen as underused and challenging or time-consuming to manage. Cataloguing and providing access, not accessioning, are regarded as the main issues facing archivists.

Local authority archives remain an integral part of oral history work and the oral history movement in the UK, not just preserving and making accessible oral histories, but also providing template documentation, training, equipment and advice to oral history projects. However, the picture is not all positive. Archives are operating in increasingly difficult conditions of budgetary and staff cuts. Preservation of oral histories remains uneven - while the Unlocking Our Sound Heritage (UOSH) project made significant steps in digitising at-risk formats and sharing knowledge within the sector, there are still analogue formats at risk, and digital preservation measures vary.

Most significantly, cataloguing oral histories and providing access to them remains a major challenge, with severe backlogs across local authority archives. Archives also face new data protection backlogs. When local authority archives can meet cataloguing and data protection requirements, they do not always have the staff resources, institutional support or technical infrastructure to make the oral histories available to the public. This is most notable when it comes to online access, but in some cases also applies to onsite access. Despite growing interest in and enthusiasm for oral history collections, many archived oral history collections remain effectively inaccessible and chronically underused.

There is demand for guidance, for example on how to catalogue oral histories within ISAD(G), as well as training, although many archivists do not have the resources or time to attend training. To support local authority archivists in working with oral histories, we believe that more 'archive work' could be built into funded oral history project budgets and schedules, and existing guidance and template processes better signposted. The survey results also indicate a need for continued support for the digitisation of at-risk formats and the long-term preservation of digitised and born-digital recordings, and for advocating for the value of oral histories in local authority archives.

# Recommendations

The survey responses highlight a wide range of challenges in preserving and providing access to oral histories. While capacity across the sector remains stretched, we believe that several measures would help overcome these barriers:

## 1. Build 'archive work' into oral history projects

It would reduce the burden on archivists - and subsequent backlogs - if funded oral history projects provided permission forms, sensitivity reviews, and technical and content metadata (including interview summaries or transcripts) to archives as standard. Ideally, these would be agreed on with an archive before any funding application is made, so that they are compatible with existing workflows, catalogues, and digital preservation measures.

In turn, archives could require permission forms and some interview-level metadata as a condition of deposit, providing projects with a template to standardise and speed up the accessioning process.

Where projects are unable to provide enough metadata for archivists to catalogue and make the oral histories accessible, and archives have capacity to do so themselves, they should look to include costs and timescales for this in funding applications. It may be useful to share existing rates between archivists, oral historians, and funders, as well as raise awareness of what this work involves more generally.

## 2. Share guidance around cataloguing and providing access to oral histories for non-specialists

The survey responses point to a clear demand for guidance on cataloguing oral histories in line with ISAD(G). Existing guidance could be signposted in places that non-specialist archivists are likely to find and use - for example, the websites of the Archives and Records Association or The National Archives, as well as the OHS. It would be helpful to share case studies alongside this guidance, including practical examples of how archivists are currently using AI tools to catalogue oral histories.

Similarly, it would be useful to collate and share workflows to help archivists provide access to oral histories, covering redaction and anonymisation, data protection, copyright, and licensing. This would help to reduce backlogs, encourage the re-use of collections, and generate income where appropriate.

To give archivists the confidence to work with oral histories and audio-visual archives, we also recommend building more training into core modules of post-graduate courses and apprenticeships (optional modules are currently offered through some MA Archives and Records Management courses).

## 3. Continue to invest in digitising at-risk formats

Local authority archives still have – and continue to collect – oral histories on at-risk formats. As demonstrated by the UOSH project and others, it is vital to digitise these formats to ensure their long-term preservation, and the urgency of this should be re-iterated at every opportunity.

In the context of limited core funding, archives should make use of regional and national expertise for advice about the different options available. Continued sharing of best practice around in-house and external digitisation would also benefit the sector.

## 4. Address the long-term preservation of digital recordings

Digital preservation is clearly a huge challenge facing the sector, with many archives contending with storage limitations as well as environmental and privacy concerns. As more archives adopt digital preservation systems, it would be useful to explore the impact of this move on how digitised and born-digital oral histories are preserved and made accessible.

There also appears to be a need to address variations in the digital formats accepted by local authority archives. It would be valuable to re-state the long-term preservation value of uncompressed audio formats to both oral historians and archivists, and we would recommend further discussion between local authority archives and film archives around approaches to collecting and preserving video.

## 5. Advocate for the value of oral histories in local authority archives

For many archivists responsible for oral history collections, the main challenge is a lack of resources. This appears to disproportionately affect oral histories and audio-visual collections compared to more traditional archive material. Archivists working with oral histories know that the true value of these collections can only be realised if they are properly accessioned, catalogued and made available. However, securing resources for this essential work can only be done if this value is itself recognised by internal and external stakeholders.

We encourage local authority archivists to be enthusiastic advocates for the importance of oral histories, but recognise this advocacy can only take place with the support of other colleagues or professional bodies. Organisations like the OHS and British and Irish Sound Archives (BISA) can play an important role in supporting archivists, leading to greater visibility and potentially further funding.

It may also be helpful to share case studies (again, where non-specialists will find them) demonstrating the value of oral histories in providing opportunities for meaningful partnership work with local communities and heritage projects, raising awareness of archives amongst under-served audiences, and ensuring that collections are more representative of the people local authority archives are funded by and serve.

This survey indicates how meaningful working with oral history collections in a local authority context can be and we hope this report can go some way to making this more widely known. In turn we hope this encourages other local authority archivists who are not currently working with oral histories to consider them as part of their own collection policies.

# Responses to the survey

For the purposes of reporting, all the respondents have been randomised and assigned identifying numbers. Quotes are attached to these numbers and, as much as possible, identifiable features have been removed from said quotes. The anonymised results are available as a csv file from the OHS website.

## With thanks to:

Angus Archives
Bedfordshire Archives
Cambridgeshire Archives
Cheshire Archives and Local Studies
Coventry Archives
Cumbria Archives
East Midlands Oral History Archive (EMOHA)
East Sussex and Brighton and Hove Record Office
Edinburgh City Archives
Essex Record Office
Explore York Archives
Gloucestershire Archives
Gwent Archives
Herefordshire Archive Service
Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies
Highland Archive Centre
Kent Archive and Local History Service
Kresen Kernow
Lancashire Archives and Local History
Library of Birmingham, Archives & Collections
Liverpool Record Office
Living Archive Milton Keynes
London Borough of Sutton Archives
Manchester Central Library
Medway Archives Centre
National Museums NI
Norfolk Record Office
Nottingham Local Studies Library
Orkney Library & Archive
Peterborough Archives Service
Royal Berkshire Archives
Richmond-upon-Thames Local Studies Library and Archive
Scottish Borders Archives
Sheffield City Archives
Shropshire Archives
Southampton Archives
Stoke-on-Trent City Archives
Surrey History Centre
Teesside Archives
The London Archives
The Story, Durham
Warwickshire County Record Office
Wessex Film and Sound Archive
West Sussex Record Office
West Yorkshire Archive Service
Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre
Wolverhampton City Archives
Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service

# Introduction

This survey came out of monthly meetings of the Archives and Oral History Special Interest Group (SIG) of the Oral History Society (OHS), where anecdotal evidence had suggested that local authority archives were increasingly reluctant to accession oral history collections.

The OHS has long encouraged archiving recorded interviews and, given the strong traditions of social and local history within UK oral history theory and practice, local authority archives have always been an essential part of this archival landscape. Funding bodies such as the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) now recognise the importance of identifying an archive before starting an oral history project, and attendance on the OHS/British Library (BL) course 'Archival Management of Oral History Collections' shows interest amongst archivists for working with oral histories.

At the same time, local authorities have suffered immensely from near to fifteen years of economic austerity in the UK. Many local authority archives now operate on shoestring budgets with one member of staff taking on roles previously spread amongst many others. In this context, it would be unsurprising if such archivists had concerns about taking in less familiar and potentially complicated collections. However, as archivists working with oral history collections, we see this as a grave loss to the archival ecosystem we operate within. For many oral history projects, it could represent something close to an existential threat.

In response, members of the SIG decided to conduct a survey of local authority archives to ascertain whether such archives were still collecting oral histories and what support we as a professional society might be able to offer.

## Previous surveys

The survey consciously built upon previous survey work, such as the 1998 Society of Archivists. Film and Sound Group 'Archives and Oral History Questionnaire' and the 2015 'Directory of UK Sound Collections', itself a precursor to the UOSH digitisation project. Post-UOSH survey work on physical collections requiring transfer has been carried out in the East Midlands and the South West of England. Crucially, our survey was not intended as a refresh of the 'Directory', nor a look at preservation post-UOSH. We instead focused on collection policies and attitudes towards new collections.

## The survey

The survey was written on Microsoft Forms in late 2024 by members of the SIG and with the support of British and Irish Sound Archives (BISA). Responses were collected between January and May 2025 and interim reports on the survey were presented at the 2025 BISA conference (15-16 May, Manchester) and the 2025 OHS conference (6-7 June, Glasgow).

103 archives were identified in England, Scotland and Wales and emails were either sent to named members of staff where information was available or generic emails where it was not. We also used contacts to send messages to the Chief Archivists in Local Government Group (CALGG) and the Archivists of Scottish Local Authorities Working Group (ASLAWG) mailing lists. The Archives and Records Council Wales (ARCW) group helpfully translated a covering email into Welsh and sent it to local authority archivists in Wales. Through contact with National Museums Northern Ireland we concluded that the local authority landscape was sufficiently different in Northern Ireland to the rest of the UK, and oral history archiving so dominated by National Museums NI, that they would be the only Northern Irish respondent.

In total we received 48 replies, a response rate of 47% from the 103 archives we had identified. Two respondents were not strictly local authority archives but take on that role in their respective regions.

## National and regional differences

We received 41 responses from English archives with good geographic distribution (67% of the 61 identified) and five responses from Scottish archives (19% of the 27 identified). We received only one response from a Northern Irish archive (as explained above) and only one response from a Welsh archive (out of 14 identified). The lack of responses from Welsh archives is partly explained by Samuel Sorahan conducting a similar survey in 2024 as part of his dissertation at Aberystwyth University called 'The Challenges of Accessing and Using Oral History at Welsh Public Archives'.

While these factors go some way to explaining the limited responses from Welsh and Northern Irish archives, it is still true that the Scottish response rate was far below that of the English response rate and that the survey results are skewed towards English archives. This is a gap in this report, and we would welcome future research into archival collection policies in the devolved nations of the UK.

## Pro-oral history respondents?

Our hypothesis going into this survey was that local authority archivists were reluctant to accession new oral history collections. On this point, we were delighted to have been proven wrong by the results. Of the 48 respondents, all 48 said they currently accepted oral history collections and 93% said they had accepted an oral history collection in the past three years. By contrast, cataloguing and access were the main challenges faced by local authority archives. These points are explored further in the relevant results and analysis sections,

A caveat to the results is that we may only have heard from archivists who were 'pro-oral history' and there is a possibility that amongst the 53% of archives we did not hear from, there remains reluctance towards working with oral history collections. We were aware of this risk at the start of the survey and specifically made the effort to contact named individuals and go through organisational mailing lists to try and expand the results beyond our existing networks. Our cover email also began with "Whether you have one collection or one hundred, if you have accepted an oral history collection last week, last year or even if you don't accept them at all, we'd love to hear from you". Regardless, it is true that archivists who were supportive of oral history collections were more likely to answer the survey. The survey results still indicate significant challenges for these same archivists and the picture was not all rosy.

We would also be very supportive of any follow up work with any of the archives we did not receive results from. Still, if the main legacy of this survey is a list of 48 archives across four nations who are all willing, and often enthusiastic, to accept oral histories, then we see that in itself as a success.

## Artificial intelligence (AI) and oral history

Anecdotally, very few local authority archives were using AI to process oral histories when we wrote the survey questions in late 2024, so we did not ask respondents to address this subject directly - although some did reference experimenting with AI, or the potential of AI, in their responses to other questions. The past year and a half has seen a significant shift in this, with many archivists using AI to transcribe, summarise, and process oral history metadata. While there is no simple technological fix to wider questions of resources and staffing, and the relative value placed on oral histories within institutions, it is also true that careful use of AI might offer a way to deal with the cataloguing and other backlogs identified in this survey.

# Accessioning

This survey came out of anecdotal evidence that local authority archives were increasingly reluctant to accession oral history collections. It is for that reason that we began the survey with questions around accessioning.

Based on the survey results we were delighted to have our hypothesis proved wrong. All 48 archives who answered the survey said they were accepting oral history collections. This was very promising and shows there is still enthusiasm amongst local authority archivists to work with oral history collections.

However, there are two caveats to these results. The first is that we may have only had responses from those archivists who were 'pro-oral history' and there is a possibility that amongst the 53% of archives we did not hear from, there remains reluctance towards working with oral history collections. The second caveat is that we know of past examples of respondent archives deciding against accessioning oral history collections. Here, we can only assume that there were other factors at play, or the archive has now changed its policy on oral history collections.

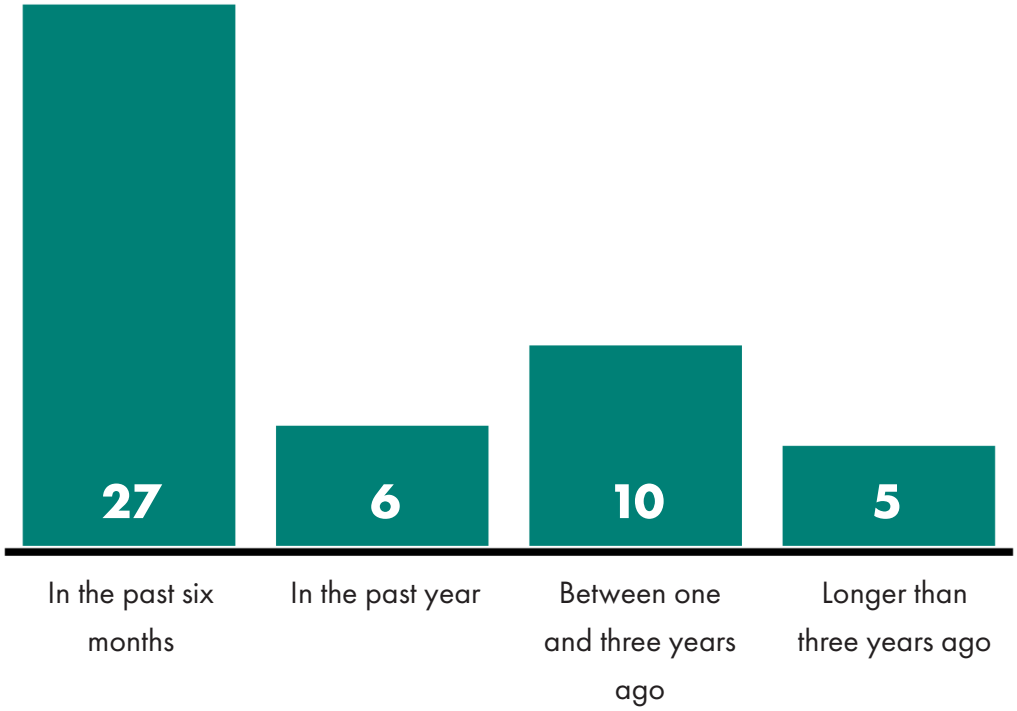
## Q6: Does your collection policy mention audio-visual or oral history collections?

The results were positive as 35 archives (73%) said yes. When looked at in the context of the following question, this indicates that even those archives without a specific mention of audio-visual material in the collection policies are still accessioning oral history collections.

## Q7: Do you currently accept oral history collections?

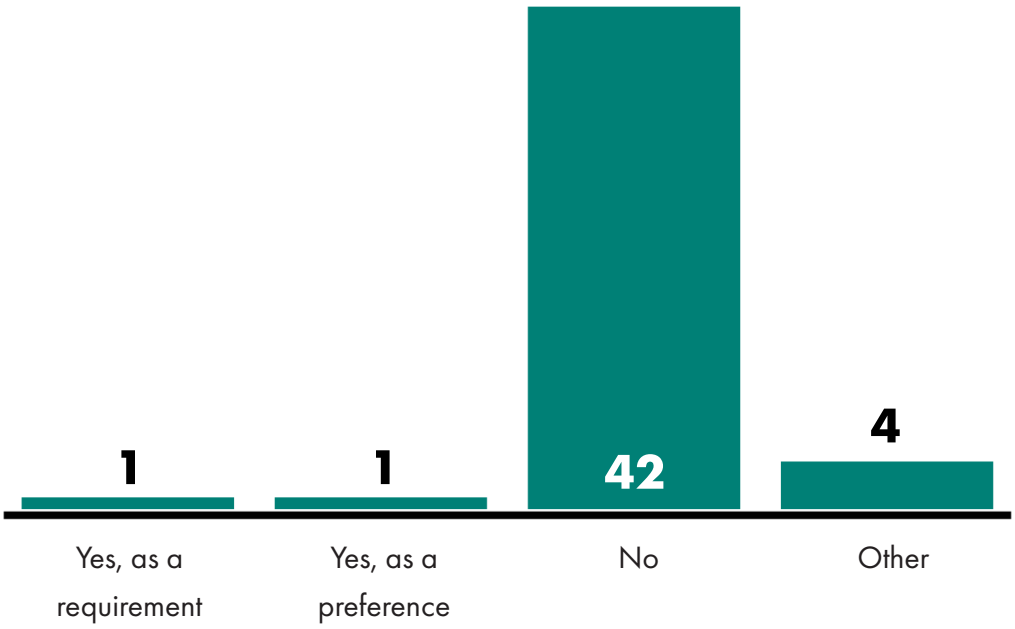
All 48 archives who responded to the survey answered yes.

## Q8: When was the last time you accepted an oral history collection?




27 archives (56%) said they had accepted an oral history collection in the past six months, rising to 43 (93%) who said they had accepted an oral history collection in the past three years. We were pleased to see that archives are not just theoretically willing to accept oral history collections but have been actively and recently accessioning new collections.

## Q9: Do you charge for oral history deposits?




The vast majority of respondents, 42 out of 48 (88%), said no. Six archives replied that they would charge or wrote comments such as:

> *If the recordings were created as part of a funded project, we encourage there to be a budget for accessioning the recordings and if mentioned in the application, for cataloguing, and for undertaking copyright and sensitivity checks if a project aim is to publish recordings online.*[12]

> *Depends on the reason for deposit and whether it's part of a funded project* [15]

Of these six archives, all but one have a direct connection to the UOSH project, either through working as a project 'hub' or through personnel. This suggests that involvement in a national funded project led to both greater awareness of the need for archival funding and the confidence to ask for archival costs.

We would encourage more archives who are working with funded projects, for example through the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF), to include archival costs in the bid. In our experience, funders are increasingly aware of the need for support towards cataloguing and preservation, and funded projects can be a good way for archives to cover these often hidden costs.

## Q17: Are there any other factors that would determine whether or not to take in oral histories?

A common answer was along the lines of:

*Oral history would need to be relevant to our geographical collecting area.*[39]

It is unsurprising that local authority archives would be primarily interested in collections related to the local area they serve. A number of responses mentioned problems with formats, either physical or born digital, and this is explored further in the 'formats' section of this report. However, other answers included:

*If there was another repository more suitable to hold the content we would recommend its deposit there. If it was a format that we would not be able to migrate or make accessible in any way then we may consider not accepting it, but our preference would normally be to preserve the item in the hopes of being able to make it accessible.* [7]

*It is our preference that the recordings have either been part of a project or have a clear methodology behind them.* [45]

*The quality of the recording, i.e. that we are physically able to hear it and make out what is being said. The content of a recording, e.g. that the information is useful and informative and not in bad taste or insensitive.* [47]

*If the depositor wanted them to be permanently closed.* [8]

*Volume of data could be a factor.* [8]

These are common factors for all archivists working with oral history collections.

# Formats

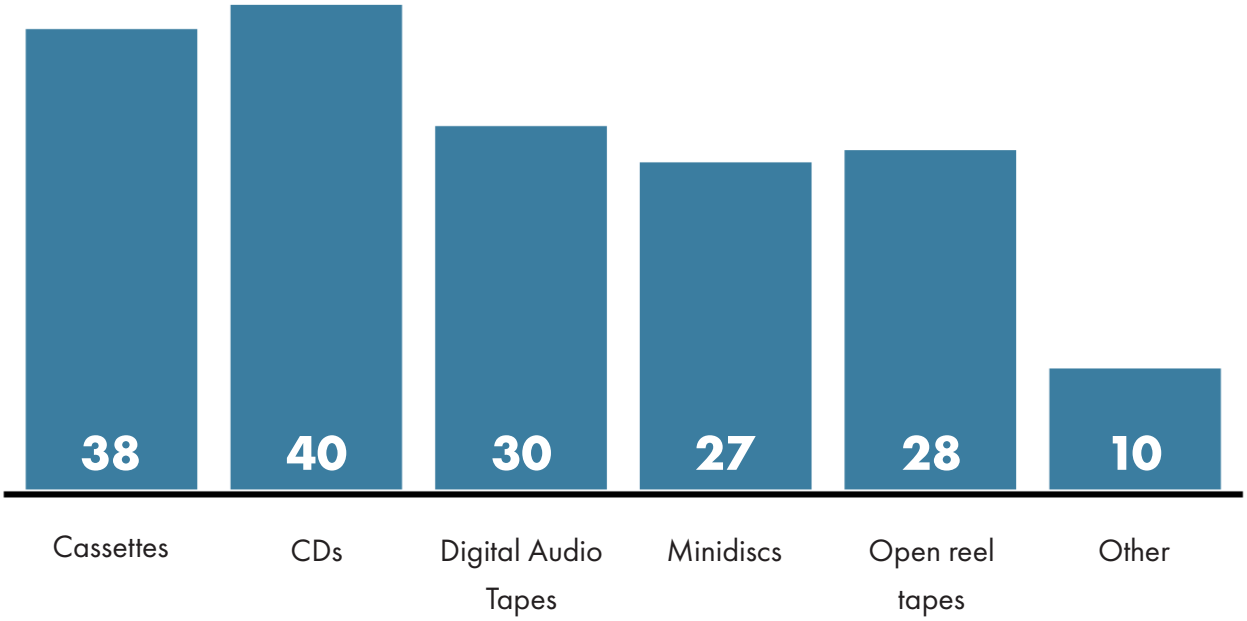
In this section we asked whether archives were accepting various physical formats and born-digital formats, and if they had a preference for uncompressed or compressed digital formats.

The results paint a positive picture of archives still accepting physical formats, particularly cassettes and CDs. However, they show that some formats - particularly open reel tape and Minidisc - remain at risk of being rejected. Moreover, as some of the comments in this section suggest, the fact that these formats are accepted by an archive does not guarantee that the recordings held on them are then digitised or transferred (see 'Preservation').

We initially thought that a lack of digital storage space might limit the number of born-digital recordings (or uncompressed digital recordings) archives would take. This does not seem to be the case, with the majority of archives requiring depositors to provide uncompressed formats, or only accepting compressed formats if they are the only format available. However, there are still a number of archives that only accept compressed files, or have no preference over the quality of the files. This indicates that the value of preserving uncompressed files needs to be re-iterated, both at the recording stage and within the archives sector.

The fact that some archives do not accept any video formats, or only compressed video formats, is also a cause for concern. There is clearly a need for further discussion within the archives sector over the role of local authority archives in archiving video, and more guidance around best practice in this area. It also indicates the potential long-term vulnerability of video oral histories in comparison to audio oral histories, and for this to be considered by those carrying them out.

## Q10: Do you accept oral history collections on any of the following formats?




44 archives (92%) said that they would accept oral history collections on at least one type of physical format. Of these, three archives said that they would not accept any of the given formats, but said 'Yes' for 'Other'. One of these said that oral history collections had only been created in digital format.

Of the four that did not accept any physical formats, comments included:

*We don't have a defined list of physical formats at present* [27]

*[...] ideally we would not accept these formats, but if the records are significant enough and there is no alternative we may* [24]

*Digital transfer only, not on storage media* [3]

Of the archives that said they would accept physical formats, 22 said that they would accept all the physical formats we offered. One of these commented that all analogue formats were then transferred to a more specialist local archive. Of the other 19, most would take either cassettes or CDs, with fewer taking DATs, open reels and Minidiscs. Answering in the 'Other' field, the archives commented:

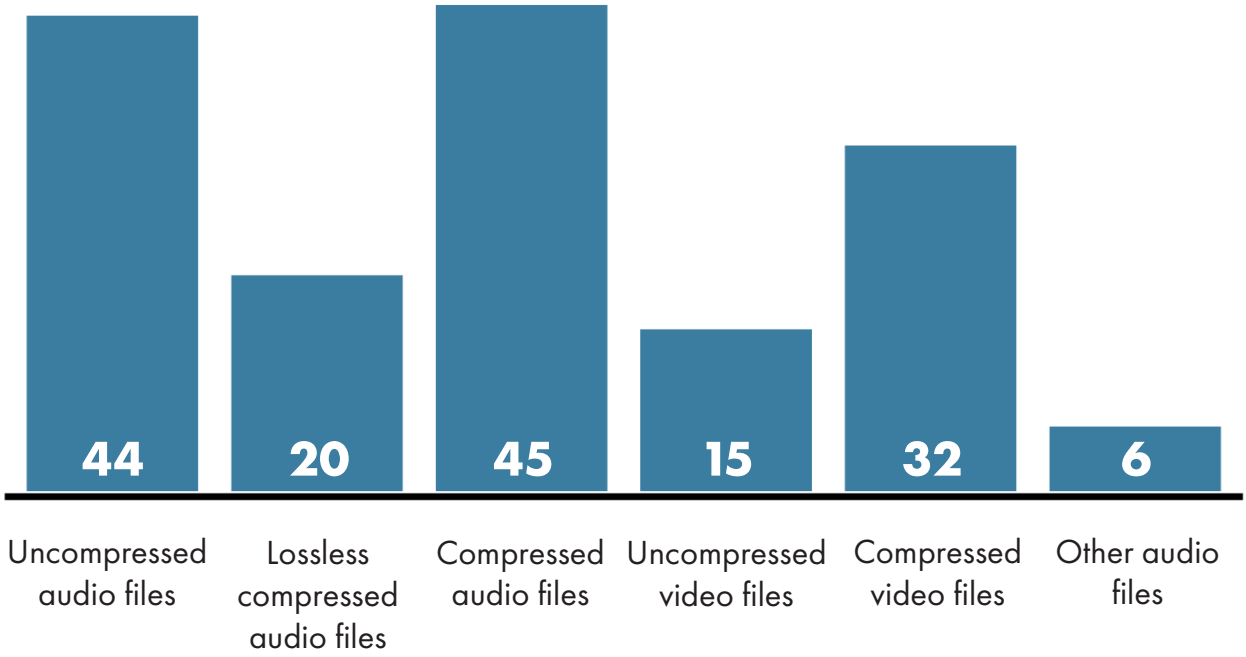
*Would consider other formats depending on content... but nothing to access them on* [28]

*We accept formats that we can migrate to digital files and are sufficient quality to be usable* [34]

## Q11: Do you accept oral history recordings on the following born-digital formats?

## Q12: If you accept born-digital formats, do you require depositors to provide uncompressed file types?

*Yes; Yes, but we will accept compressed formats (e.g. mp3s, mp4s) if that is the only format available; No, we only accept compressed formats; No preference*




Looking at the results for born-digital audio formats, most archives (over 90%) said that they accept uncompressed WAV files. Of these, all also accepted compressed MP3 files, and 20 accepted lossless compressed FLAC files. Four archives that said they only accept compressed MP3 files.

Fewer archives said that they accepted born-digital video formats, with most accepting compressed video files. Of these, an even smaller number, 15 archives (31%), accept uncompressed video files.

When asked whether they had a preference for uncompressed or compressed formats, 29 (60%) said that they preferred uncompressed formats, but would accept compressed formats if that was the only format available. Concerningly, 16 (33%) said that they had no preference. Just one archive indicated that they only accepted compressed formats.

The difference in accepting audio and video formats is not clear, but may be attributed to several factors. In some cases, local authority archives do not see video as part of their remit:

*Primarily audio; video is not central to our collections remit* [36]

*We only accept audio currently* [34]

*We... don't collect moving image collections as this falls within another local repository's remit* [27]

For others, the size of video files (particularly uncompressed formats) or difficulty accessing video formats may be the issue:

*May accept compressed video files but this would depend on the size and quantity of the recordings* [6]

*Recordings are generally just in wav or mp3/4 format but we would accept other formats providing we have a means of accessing them* [18]

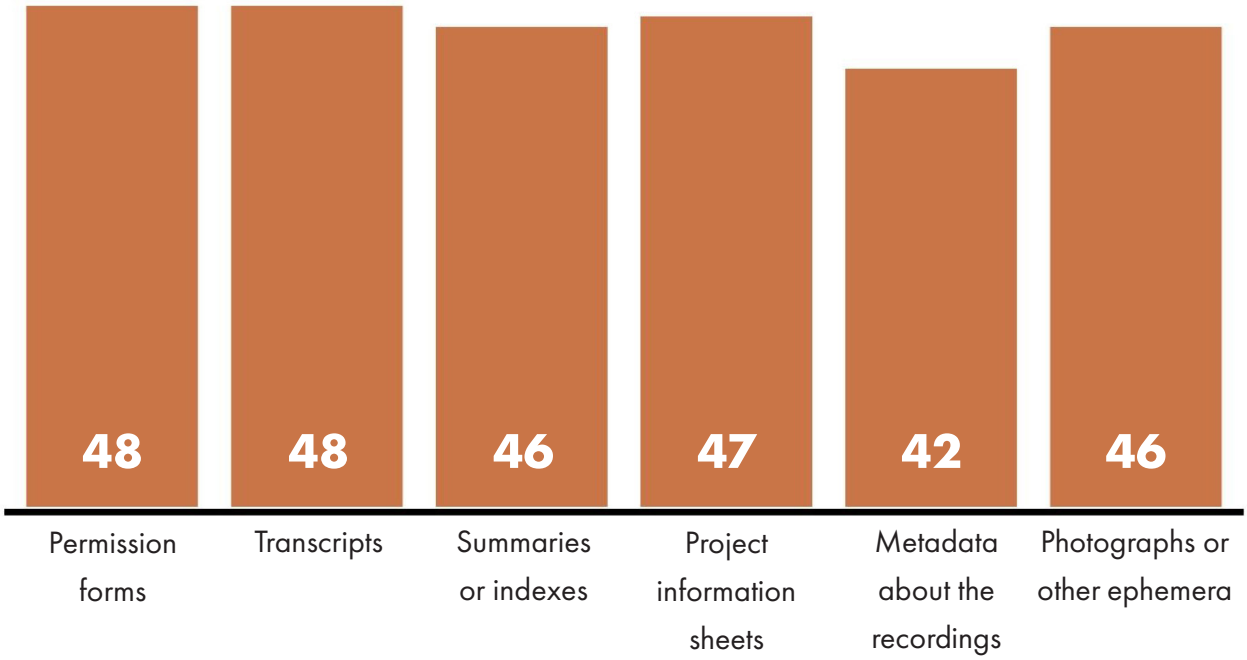
# Documentation

In this section we asked about what additional documentation archives take in alongside oral history collections.

The results indicated a willingness of local authority archives to take in permissions and descriptive documentation, but a reluctance to be more assertive in requiring said documentation. When asked about deposit agreements, answers often highlighted the need to work with established agreements and processes.

We would argue for local authority archivists to be more forthright in requiring documentation, including metadata, as part of deposits and to bring this into existing workflows. This is often easier said than done, especially with older or completed projects, and perhaps requires the creation of more template forms and workflows to be shared amongst archivists working with oral histories.

## Q13: Do you accept any of the following documentation as part of an oral history deposit?




All the respondents said they would accept permissions forms and transcripts, all but one said they would accept project information sheets and all but two said they would accept summaries or indexes or photographs and other ephemera. Perhaps surprisingly, a lower amount of 42 (88%) said they would accept metadata about the recordings. Given that this can be one of the best ways for archives to speed up the process of cataloguing and to ensure project and interviewee involvement in metadata creation, we would encourage more archivists to create template metadata sheets to be shared with oral history projects and used for the creation of catalogue records.

## Q14: Do you require any of the documentation listed above as part of a deposit?

The answers were mixed. In this free text field 43 respondents (90%) mentioned permissions forms. Many highlighted problems with securing them:

*We prefer to accept oral histories with permissions forms, but wouldn't necessarily turn away deposits without them.* [13]

*For new deposits we require permission forms. Some older collections do not contain forms.* [18]

However, only 17 (35%) mentioned other documentation, mostly transcripts. Comments included:

> *Consent/permission forms are a given, and we often ask for the recordings to be catalogued/listed prior to deposit, the other documentation is desirable but would not prevent us accepting a collection* [15]

> *Permissions forms Summaries or Index spreadsheet (but of course we don't always get them!)"* [22]

> *Yes. We require permission forms, transcripts as standard - without these we will not accept an OH collection. The depositor is responsible for creating and providing redacted copies and transcripts if those are necessary. We do not have the resources to redact recordings or create transcripts or summaries/ indexes.* [33]

Others highlighted the differences between working with completed or older projects, and with ongoing projects:

> *We try to ensure that we the permissions forms are included in the accession. Unfortunately this isn't always possible; sometimes we're offered recordings from projects that took place several years ago, for which the permissions don't survive or were never sought at the time. Any other paperwork that comes with the accession is a bonus.* [35]

And those who had worked with oral histories in the past showed a greater awareness of the difficulties of cataloguing undocumented material:

> *Now we require permission forms and a detailed list. We have learnt this from working through our historic oral history backlog.* [23]

## Q15: Does your agreement with a depositor cover copyright in the oral history recordings?

## Q16: If yes, what options do you offer?

43 archives (90%) said that their depositor agreement covered copyright. Answers to the follow-up question were more varied.

The ability to adapt agreements varied:

*We are flexible, depending on the original agreements with interviewees and the needs of the oral history project.* [2]

*Standard depositor agreement form includes the following section on copyright (there's no specific agreement around oral histories)* [18]

*Our deposit agreement is a bit of a blunt instrument.* [12]

29 respondents (60%) specifically referred to transfer of copyright to the archive, and seven (15%) described this as a preference. Only two (4%) specifically referred to joint copyright and only one archive mentioned Creative Commons – the preferred licensing format of the NLHF. Other archives referred to options of licensing the material to the archive.

Respondents referred to the need to ensure deposited oral histories could be both made available and used by the archive:

*We ask for copyright to be assigned to us but don't require it. Permission for use by the archive service for outreach/exhibition etc is a requirement in our deposit agreement, as is a process for researchers to request permission to publish extracts from the recordings.* [34]

*The depositor can either transfer their copyright to us or retain it, with the option to give permission for them to be used for research (strongly preferred), education, performance, publication, and broadcast.* [42]

Fewer archives mentioned licensing the third parties for, for example broadcast. One exception being the following:

*The depositor and interviewee grants us permission to allow the general public to listen to the recordings and to copy the recordings for research or private study or educational purposes. We would agree to go back to the depositor and interviewee for permission, if any commercial company wished to broadcast the recording or publish it on the internet in order to make money.* [47]

In practical terms this may well be because local authority archives have not been approached often for third party licensing of oral histories.

# Preservation

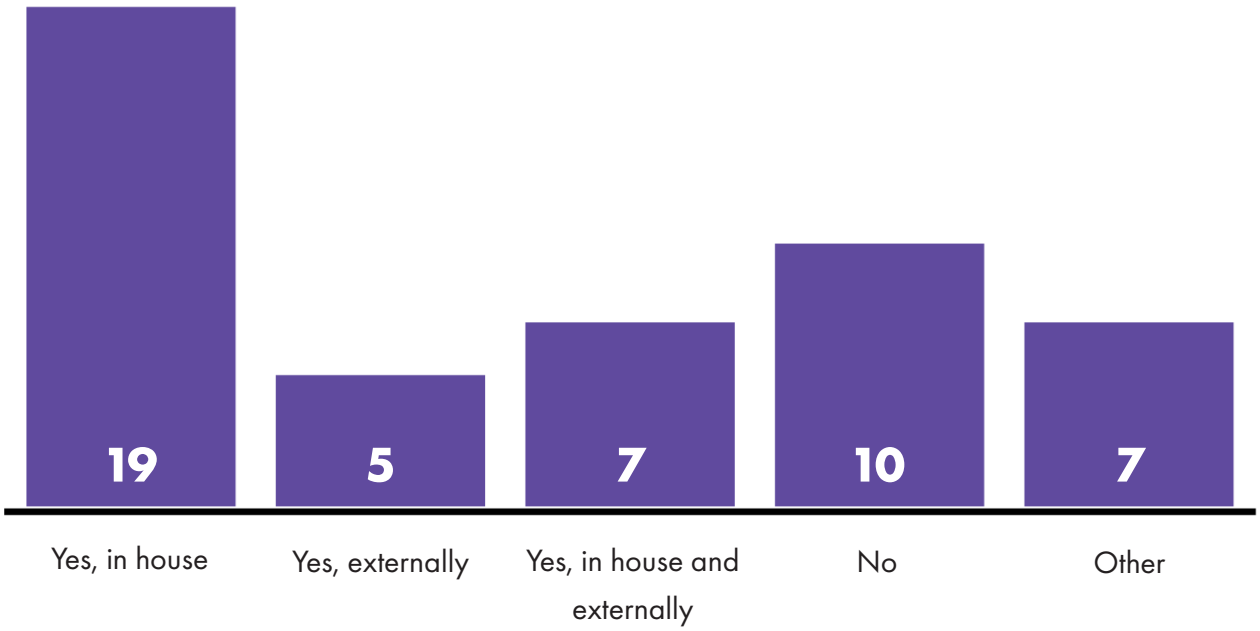
In this section we asked whether archives were able to digitise* physical audio formats, whether that was part of core work or funded projects, and how archives were preserving digitised or born-digital recordings.

Most archives (79%) said that they were able to digitise physical audio formats, whether in house or externally, although most had some in house capacity. As with the number of archives accepting physical audio formats, this seemed surprisingly high, potentially showing the legacy of the UOSH project. The comments given in response to this question, however, suggest that even if archives can digitise as part of their core work, their capacity to do so is significantly limited in terms of available equipment or staff resources. As we know from the 'Formats' section that archives are still accepting physical audio formats, we would recommend continued support for digitisation to ensure that they are preserved.

Around half of the archives said that they use a digital preservation system (predominantly Preservica) to preserve digital recordings. The other half use local council-based storage , with some other processes in place. The trajectory appears to be towards digital preservation systems, although many of the responses suggest that council-based storage and local storage can still play a significant role alongside these. The responses also raised the question of whether digitised recordings are treated with the same care as born-digital recordings. With the move towards digital preservation systems, it may be worth exploring how these can support the preservation of both digitised and born-digital oral history recordings.

**We asked about 'digitising or transferring' physical audio formats, as we would 'digitise' analogue formats and 'transfer' digital formats; in the report we use 'digitise' to cover both.*

## Q18: Are you able to digitise physical audio formats?




31 archives (65%) said that they could digitise physical audio formats in house, with nine of these archives also able to digitise formats externally.

## Q19: If you are able to digitise or transfer collections, is that part of your core work or only during funded projects?

*As part of core work; During funded projects*

26 of these archives said that they did this as part of their core work. The results cannot tell us, however, what 'core work' looks like in practice. To some it could mean employing a full- or part-time digitiser, while to others it could mean digitising material on an ad-hoc basis, on request. They also do not tell us about the number of formats that archives can digitise, or the quality of the digitisation.

The comments in response to this question give some idea of this:

> *We have a cassette to mp3 converter (not high quality) in house, and have had other collections digitised externally* [18]

> *Only a very small number of formats (analogue audio cassette, common digital formats)* [24]

> *We have capacity to digitise some physical formats in-house (audio cassettes and CDs currently) but recordings on other media carriers externally* [27]

*We digitise reel-to-reel tapes on request but we have limited capacity and do not have the capacity to digitise our entire collection* [34]

*Some formats i.e. CD, DVD, and floppy discs* [37]

*We have the facilities to digitise physical audio formats but do not have the staff resource to do this on a regular basis or as part of our core work* [6]

*Although.... we are able to digitise and transfer physical audio formats in-house this is limited for media such as cassettes and CDs, and there is limited time to undertake the work (digitisation as part of core work may include new deposits which would ideally be digitised and added to our digital management system, and we may digitise items specifically requested through our paid research service)* [7]

Funded projects did play a role in digitising collections. Five of the archives who could digitise in house said that they could only do so as part of funded projects, and another three said that they could have formats digitised externally through funded projects. The two archives who did not tick any of the boxes both said that they were able to digitise through funded projects, with one specifying the Sounds of the South West project.

Interestingly, in comparing these results to those in the 'Formats' section, of the 10 archives who said that they were not able to digitise physical audio formats, only three did not accept any of these formats; five accepted nearly all those we offered, and two accepted CDs or DATs.

## Q20: How are you preserving digitised or born-digital recordings, and backing them up?

21 archives said that they were using digital preservation systems to preserve recordings. Of these, 18 were using Preservica, two Arkivum, and one Titan (by Minisis). Of these, 13 said that they used the systems alongside council-based storage, and seven said that they still used hard drives at some point in the process. Several archives mentioned that they had only recently started using these systems, and were still in the process of uploading recordings or creating workflows. Others noted that they carried out other preservation processes in advance of uploading the recordings, including manual appraisal and the creation of master and access copies.

22 archives were using a council-based storage system. Some responses suggested this was a fairly passive way of preserving the recordings:

> *Files are currently sitting on shared network drives or in hard media* [4]

> *Files are stored and backed up on the organisation's SharePoint site. We do not currently undertake any preservation activities* [2]

Others, however, noted that they carried out additional digital preservation processes, including the creation and storage of checksums, the use of DROID to gather metadata, and the creation of preservation and access copies. Some also made a point of saying that the shared networks were secure and backed up on a regular basis. As with the archives using digital preservation systems, at least six archives using council-based systems said that they were also using hard drives, with some in different locations.

Some of the responses also suggested that this was a temporary solution, with several noting that the files were only 'currently' being stored on council servers. Some explicitly noted the intention of procuring a digital preservation software in the future; one archive suggested that they had the funding to do so, but were currently limited by council IT services. Another three archives said that they had recently acquired Preservica, although again one said that they did not have the capacity to start using it.

Interestingly, while some responses noted that they treated born-digital and digitised recordings in the same way, a few responses noted a difference between the two. Two archives noted different preservation workflows, with one archive (notably a film and sound archive) using Preservica for born-digital material and Sharepoint and local storage for digitised material, "due to the size of the files"[25]. Another explicitly noted that while born-digital recordings are treated "like all other born-digital accessions", digitised material is "treated with far less care"[22].

Only two archives indicated that they aren't actively preserving digital recordings, one due to the fact they did not have a digital archivist in post, and the other due to a lack of knowledge of correct procedures and formats as well as a lack of staff capacity. A few responses noted methods of accessing recordings (see Access).

# Cataloguing

In this section we asked whether archives were following any guidelines around cataloguing oral histories, whether they made summaries or indexes available on their catalogues, and whether they had any other general comments on cataloguing.

Around half of the responses suggested that archives were not following any specific cataloguing guidelines for oral histories. Most of these archives used general in-house cataloguing guidelines and followed ISAD(G) to catalogue oral history recordings, as they would paper and digital material. The other half referenced a range of more specific guidance, including in-house guidelines tailored to oral histories as well as guidance from the OHS, BL, International Association of Sound and Audiovisual Archives (IASA), and UOSH. Several responses indicated an appetite for more guidance.

While many of the archives said that summaries or indexes were made available on their catalogues, they caveated this by suggesting that not all oral histories had summaries or indexes, or had very brief entries. They also suggested that the depth of summaries varied between collections. Many responses highlighted the time-consuming nature of cataloguing oral histories and lack of staff capacity to carry this out.

Having said this, some responses suggested that cataloguing was still taking place, whether that was in the context of new volunteer projects or experimentation with AI. Several responses also highlighted the role of depositors in providing sufficient information for the catalogue, making the cataloguing process more efficient.

## Q21: Do you follow any guidelines around cataloguing oral histories?

Nine archives responded 'No' to this question; a few added that they didn't follow any guidelines specifically relating to oral history.

Eight archives said that they would catalogue oral histories to ISAD(G), with two of those noting that they did not follow specific oral history guidelines. One mentioned that they would add a "description/basic summary"[47] for oral history recordings. Another six archives suggested that they followed in-house cataloguing guidelines, also used for other paper and digital archive material. One noted that they would additionally follow best practice for data protection.

The other half of the respondents used their own specific guidelines or use other oral history or sound-specific guidelines, with at least four using their own guidelines, six using OHS guidance, three using BL guidance, and three using IASA guidance.

Other responses also mention drawing from experience or guidelines created during the UOSH project, or credit previous projects or organisations in cataloguing collections, including UOSH, the North West Sound Archive, and the Southampton Oral History Unit.

Several archives responded that while they have not used oral history guidelines, they would look to follow them in future, with at least one pro-actively developing internal guidelines and others requesting more guidance around best practice.

## Q22: Do your catalogue records for oral histories include an index or summary?

## Q23: If your catalogue records for oral histories include an index or summary, who writes them?

*Interviewer or depositor; Archive staff; Volunteers; Other*

35 respondents (73%) said that their catalogue records for oral histories did include an index or summary. Of these 35 archives, 18 said that the summaries and indexes were completed by interviewers or depositors, archive staff, and volunteers. Another seven said that summaries and indexes were only completed by interviewers or depositors.

Several archives clarified that only some oral histories have summaries or indexes or that these "are not extensive". In response to this question and others in the survey, archives indicated they rely on creators or depositors to supply summaries and indexes.

## Q24: Is there anything else you would like to add about cataloguing oral histories?

Some responses highlighted the lack of information about oral histories available on their catalogues, or the varying depth of information between collections:

*Not all collections have a summary, and at present no plans to make changes to existing collections that are on the catalogue* [21]

*Not all of our catalogue records for oral histories include an index or summary* [38]

*Having an index or summary is the ideal, but collections vary as to the depth of summary. In general the minimum level of indexing would include notable topics* [7]

*[Description] varies depending on when the recordings were done. Older ones can have very sparse info. Ones done as part of projects tend to have more info which can be used to form a catalogue entry.* [16]

*The level of catalogue metadata varies greatly between oral history collections, some collections come with very detailed indexes, transcripts and summaries* [24]

Many responses commented that cataloguing oral histories can be time-consuming, and challenging with limited staff capacity:

*Still in early days of cataloguing and finding it very time consuming* [14]

*Our service does not currently have the resources to create detailed catalogues, indexes or transcripts if the collection does not come with them.* [24]

*We don't have the resource to do it at the moment* [37]

*We have very little staff time available for cataloguing collections* [2]

*We don't have a dedicated cataloguing post for audio material unless we have project funding, so there is always a backlog of uncatalogued collections* [32]

*Many of our existing collections simply have subject key words, although we have offered limited volunteer opportunities to improve this information. Unfortunately staff rarely have the time to listen to recordings in detail as part of the accessioning process.* [9]

*The one funded OH project that we have done did not factor in adequate time to properly catalogue, transcribe/index recordings and as the project post was fixed term, when it ended the work was left unfinished. There is not capacity within the regular service to complete this and so it seems likely that some recordings will need to stay closed until they can be re-visited.* [5]

In addition, one archive commented that some "within large organisations don't fully appreciate the value in having oral histories catalogued and searchable for researchers" – contributing to the lack of capacity.

Despite these challenges, some responses captured current activity to improve catalogues, from making sure that all oral histories were captured on the catalogue to updating cataloguing guidance for oral histories. Two archives mentioned the role of AI in transcribing and summarising oral histories, although both suggested it was still early days.

Volunteers were mentioned several times, in reference to creating summaries for legacy collections. However, one archive commented that this itself created a backlog of summaries to check and make available. Another suggested that while they had some success in university students cataloguing remotely, their volunteers did not like creating indexes and summaries, as the task was "very detail oriented"[5] and took a lot of time.

Another potential solution offered was asking depositors for more information to help the cataloguing process:

*Working on guidance for new depositors to make sure we take in all relevant information and to speed processes up.* [14]

*We are moving towards asking depositors for more specific details to help us with the cataloguing and we can use this/import this as our metadata for Preservica.* [38]

Several responses commented on a lack of staff experience or asked for more guidance, particularly around specific standards for oral histories.

# Access

In this section we asked about how local authority archives are providing access to oral histories, including approaches to redaction. This was one of the largest sections of the survey and highlighted the major challenges local authority archives have in providing onsite and online access to oral history interviews.

While most archives could provide onsite access to oral histories, this was not the case for all, and even those who could sometimes rely on outdated technology. Fewer archives could provide online access to oral histories, and this was predominantly for practical and technical reasons.

Archives were also aware of the need for data protection checks to identify sensitive personal data in line with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and were performing these at various points in the collection management process. However, many noted how time intensive this work can be and how it could slow down access to interviews. Alongside accessioning, digitisation and cataloguing backlogs, we argue that archivists now also face significant data protection backlogs.

Archives were keen to reuse their oral history collections and encourage reuse by others but identified access as one of the areas that was most time and resource intensive. Alongside cataloguing, access is a major challenge for archives working with oral histories and is a marked change from previous decades where the challenge was around accessioning.

## Q25: Do you provide access to any oral history recordings on site? If so, how?

41 archives (85%) said they could provide access to oral histories onsite. Five archives said they could not provide access to oral histories onsite at all, and two others gave ambivalent answers:

> *Not a great deal. Tends to be via transcripts, but working towards being able to provide access via Preservica.* [16]

> *In theory we would provide access if requested but a process hasn't been fully worked out at present.* [20]

32 archives (67%) mentioned onsite computers, but often with complications:

> *In theory, although a recent test of this sent us round an elaborate system of getting ICT to [write] a CD of the file in the hope that we could play it on a public access computer.* [3]

Nine (19%) mentioned access through cassettes, seven (15%) mentioned CDs, four (8%) mentioned minidiscs and one mentioned a reel-to-reel player.

## Q26: Do you provide access to any oral history recordings online? If so, how?

The numbers were lower here than question 25. 15 archives (31%) said they provided online access to oral histories. A further nine (19%) referred to extracts and eight (17%) expressed that their archive was either moving towards online access or that they were hopeful of it. Of the 15 who answered yes, five mentioned Preservica and of the eight who expressed interest in future access, four mentioned Preservica. Three archives mentioned Soundcloud. Five respondents (10%) mentioned the BL Sounds website and oral histories that had been made available as part of UOSH.

Some respondents mentioned social media:

> *On occasion we have put some on social media, but generally we don't make them accessible* [40]

> *We make compilation videos of audio and photographs and upload them on YouTube and then share the link to these on our social media platforms.* [47]

And others, external websites:

> *No. But many of the oral history projects we have accessioned have external websites containing the recordings.* [2]

However, when compared to onsite access, most archives were not providing online access to interviews.

### Q27: Do you provide access to oral history transcripts, if available?

*Onsite only / Onsite and online / No*

33 respondents (69%) said they would provide onsite access to transcripts and 12 (25%) said they also provided online access. The two archives who answered no also said they could not provide onsite or online access to oral histories at all. Both had accepted oral history collections in the past three years and one in the past six months. This suggests a wider problem of archives who are enthusiastic about accessioning oral history collections, but do not have the staff resources, institutional support or technical infrastructure to make them available to the public.

### Q28: Do you check oral histories for data sensitivities before making them available? If so, what procedures do you follow?

Answers to this question showed an acute awareness of data sensitivity issues but also highlighted the resources required to properly assess oral history collections.

A number of archivists said they relied on the depositors for this work, but others highlighted the difference between this work and working with older collections:

> *We expect the depositor to do that and to alert us to any sensitivities at time of deposit.* [3]

> *Not for old recordings, no. For new recordings captured as part of our NLHF project we are flagging up any sensitive content.* [18]

Four respondents mentioned using BL or OHS templates, and others described their own processes:

> *Assess collection provenance, text-search summaries, check documentation and record decisions at an item level. Then keep a record of this process in collection file.* [22]

Others relied on listening to the interviews:

> *We do check them if we don't have sufficient information about the collection when it comes in. We would generally just listen to the recordings and check for any sensitive information that would require us to put a closure period on them. However, due to a lack of staff capacity, we are more likely to label a collection 'closed until assessed' and assessed as and when access is requested.* [38]

Some archivists described adding notes on data sensitivities, as well as content warnings, to the catalogue:

> *Yes, on our catalogue we will have warnings in our access conditions field if there are data protection issues.* [39]

> *Yes. Content warnings. Option to restrict access etc.* [19]

Those who answered yes to the question noted that they approached sensitivities at different stages in the archiving process; this included deposit, cataloguing, digitisation and access. Archivists are clearly aware of data sensitivities and the importance of assessing interviews for it, however many highlighted the resources required:

> *We would not make them available without doing so, but we don't have the resources to do this routinely[...]access can be delayed as a result.* [25]

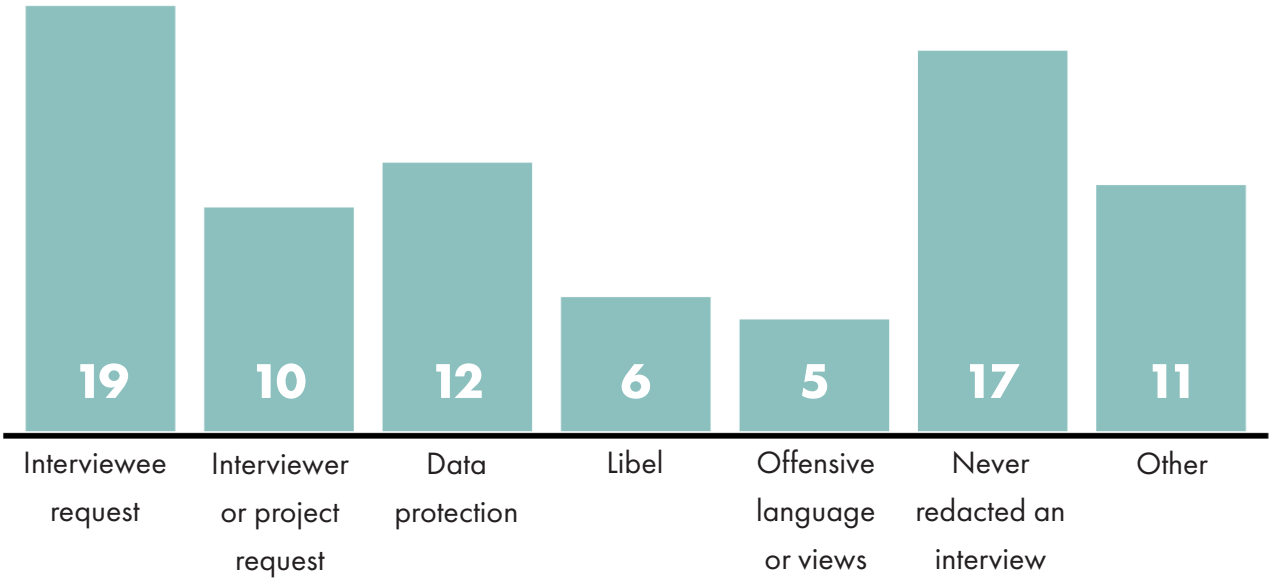
> *No. We could not listen to everything before giving it out - some older tapes run for over an hour and we don't have capacity to listen to them or read through detailed transcripts if they are available* [40]

> *We do try to do this but we do not have the capacity to screen every second of every recording. We try to discuss these issues with depositors as much as possible prior to deposit to identify any potential sensitivity issues and target these recordings specifically.* [24]

## Q29: Have you ever redacted part, or all, of an oral history interview for any of the following reasons?

*Interviewee request; Interviewer or project request; Data protection; Libel; Offensive language or views; Never; Other*

29 respondents (60%) had redacted oral histories based on interviewee, interviewer or project requests. By contrast 23 (48%) had redacted oral histories for legal or ethical reasons (data protection, libel or offensive language or views). In addition, 17 (35%) had never redacted oral histories at all.




Oral history practice has long emphasised the rights of interview participants to request redactions or closures in their own interviews, but the implementation of GDPR in 2018, alongside existing libel law, means oral historians and archivists must now be more aware of third party mentions. The responses to the survey indicate that archivists are more familiar with the former type of redaction. This may be a result of the content of interviews archived at local authority archives, but may also reflect resource issues. One 'other' comment included:

> *it is the depositors responsibility to do this. We do not have the resources for this amount of work* [33]

Some archivists mentioned writing catalogue warnings or notes for researchers:

> *One collection catalogue description carries a warning about offensive language, but it is not redacted* [8]

> *In providing access to oral history recordings, we may make a decision not to provide an individual recording on the basis of a sensitivity; or, at least, in such circumstances, we may flag sensitivities to a researcher in respect of referencing names or personal details in academic publications* [36]

However, another mentioned avoiding censorship:

> *We are careful to avoid accusations of censorship. If we can provide access in our public searchroom whereby we obtain undertakings from the researcher, we will do.* [12]

## Q30: Have you ever anonymised oral history recordings? If so, for what reasons?

28 respondents (58%) said they had either anonymised an oral history, catalogued an oral history interview under a pseudonym or had received oral histories that had already been anonymised. 12 (25%) explicitly said they had not.

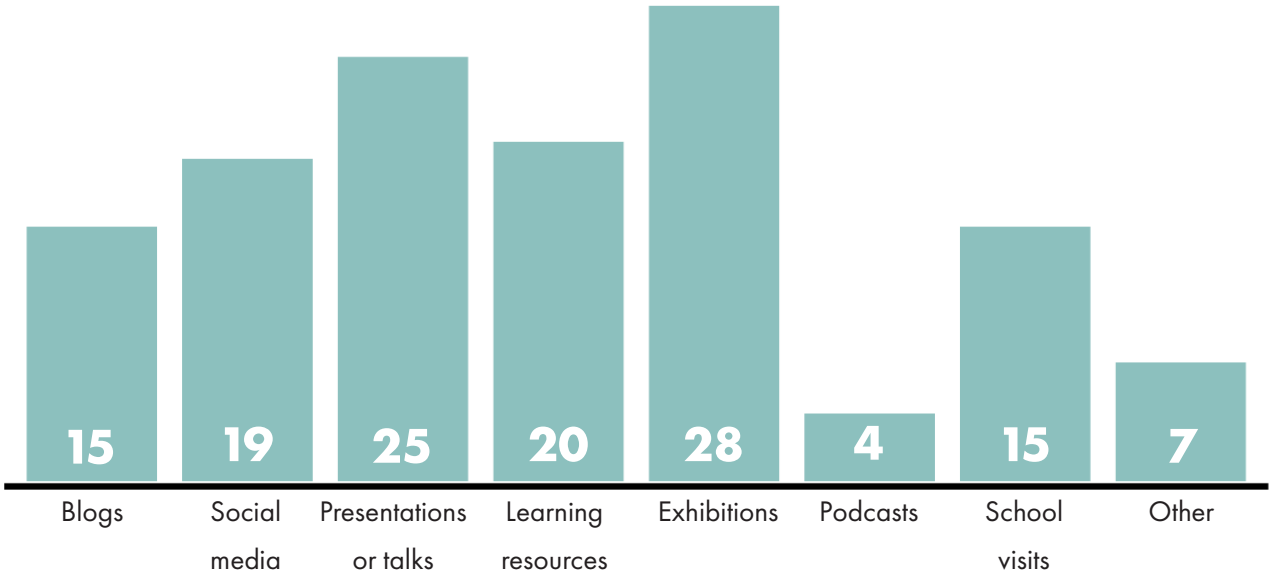
Amongst those who said yes, reasons were varied, including LGBT people who were not 'out', interviewees who were not aware their interviews were in a public collection, interviews with asylum seekers, and interviewees who were from the same home area as the interviewer. Others mentioned specific requests from interviewees.

For some archivists, older anonymised collections cause problems today:

> *Our largest collection is anonymised because the county archivist at the time was worried about data protection. However as the recordings were made available elsewhere without being anonymised and the interviewees didn't expect to be anonymised this was a bit nonsensical and has caused us problems. We are gradually trying to remove the anonymisation.* [3]

Future research on this topic could include the degrees of anonymisation used by archivists with oral histories, and the difference between anonymisation and use of pseudonyms. Given the extent of personal information held in oral history interviews, we are sceptical that they can ever be truly 'anonymous'.

## Q31: As an archive, have you ever made use of archived oral histories for any of the following resources?



The answers to this question show a general enthusiasm at using oral histories for archival resources. Only two archives explicitly referred to not using oral histories in any of these categories, one stating that it was due to a lack of resources. Amongst those who answered yes, exhibitions and presentations or talks were the most well used categories, followed by learning resources and social media. Very few archives had made use of oral histories in podcasts, possibly reflecting the time and resources that must go into podcast production, as well as the rights and data protection issues of using archived oral histories.

### Q32: Do you provide copies of recordings or transcripts for commercial or non-commercial reuse?

*Commercial only; Non-commercial only; Commercial and non-commercial; Neither*

### Q33: Do you charge for licensing oral histories for non-commercial or commercial reuse?

*Charge for commercial use only; Charge for commercial/non-commercial use; Do not charge*

30 archives (63%) provided copies of oral histories or transcripts for reuse, with most providing them for both commercial and non-commercial reuse. 13 (27%) did not provide copies for reuse at all.

When it came to charging for reuse, 18 (38%) charged only for commercial reuse and 12 (25%) charged for both commercial and non-commercial reuse.

While local authority archives do appear to be in the position to license material, fewer are charging for this and may want to consider doing so, especially for commercial reuse. This, however, may require working within existing council licensing structures. It is also the case that a clear distinction between commercial and non-commercial can be difficult to define.

### Q34: Is there anything else you would like to add about providing access to oral histories?

Some answers to this question expanded on the answers to questions 32 and 33, some noting that it depended on the permissions in the original agreements, NLHF Creative Commons conditions or Public Sector Information guidelines.

Some added that they had not had many, or any requests to reuse oral histories:

> *To date we have not received a request to use oral histories, but as our collections and use of them in volunteer transcription projects continues to grow, we expect to firm up our policies in this area much more.* [30]

*We are still in the early stages of working with oral histories so haven't had experience of providing them for reuse but could potentially do this in the future* [14]

*We don't have a way to provide access at the moment.* [37]

*Due to their uncatalogued nature, our oral history collections are a very underused resource.* [2]

Those who did provide access highlighted the work involved:

*It is very time consuming and can be difficult, but overall is probably worth the effort so long as the depositor works with us from the beginning of their project rather than coming to us at the end.* [3]

*It's very difficult and complicated for us due the resources required so we generally only offer access on a case by case basis* [33]

*We would like to do more recordings (we treasure the ones that we do have) but lack the resources to do so.* [45]

Finally, some answers referred to the ethical issues surrounding online access:

*We take educated risks when providing content onsite. We are much more risk-averse for online content.* [22]

*To us it seems that users increasingly expect to be able to access oral histories online (or remotely, via ordering copies). At the same time, we have to think about the ethical issues of sharing full oral history interviews online, which still appears to be the expectation from funders and/or project staff. It seems that the way forward is putting more resources into sharing clips (and doing so more creatively, by inviting different audiences to engage with the collections) and making it clear how people can access the full interviews if they wish to do so.* [42]

# Recording oral histories and partnerships

In this section we asked whether archives had recorded oral histories themselves, received oral history training, owned any recording equipment, or worked in partnership with oral history projects.

The responses demonstrate that the vast majority of archives are actively involved in supporting oral history projects, with around half offering support beyond preserving and providing access to the recordings, and around a quarter offering a more substantial amount of support, from providing template documentation, training, and equipment to enabling online access. Many archives were also involved in recording oral histories themselves. This is a significant contribution to oral history across the UK.

Positively, archives did report that they became involved in oral history projects before funding applications were made, suggesting that archiving costs could be built into the application. There were still a number of archives, however, who had been approached after the oral histories had been recorded, or at the end of the project. We would recommend to funders and oral historians that they begin discussions with archives as soon as possible in the process of putting together a project, so that the cost of preserving the recordings and making them accessible – as well as any other support offered – can be built into the application.

## Q35: As an archive, have you recorded oral histories?

*Yes, with individuals on a case-by-case basis; Yes, through a funded oral history project; Yes, through a funded project with an oral history element; No; Other*

27 archives (56%) had recorded oral histories through a funded project, whether that was a funded oral history project or a funded project with an oral history element.

18 archives (38%) had recorded oral histories with individuals on a case-by-case basis. Two responses to the following question about oral history training (36) suggested that this was in the past, though one noted that they now generally work in partnership with a local organisation that runs teams of volunteer interviewers.

16 archives (33%) had not recorded oral histories at all.

## Q36: Has anyone at the archive received training in oral history? If so, from whom?

30 archives (63%) had received training in oral history. A sizeable number of these – 12 – had received this training from the OHS. Several responses mentioned a specific context; that the training was funded through a project grant, for example, or was done as part of a group of archive staff and volunteers, or a combined archive and museum team. One archive mentioned that they had done this in preparation for recording depositors. Another five archives noted that they had attended training provided by the OHS and the BL, one specifically mentioning the management of oral history collections course.

Other responses suggested regional training; two had received training through the Scottish Council on Archives, and another from the Scottish Oral History Society. Others had received training from local organisations or projects, including Staffordshire Museum Service, the East Midlands Oral History Archive, and the Sounds of the South West project. Several individual trainers were mentioned, including Roger Kitchen and Padmini Broomfield, who both have close links with local projects. Two respondents provide training in their regions.

16 archives had not received any training in oral history, although some did say that former members of staff had been trained, or that interviewing practice was based on experience with previous projects or guidance provided by the OHS and BL.

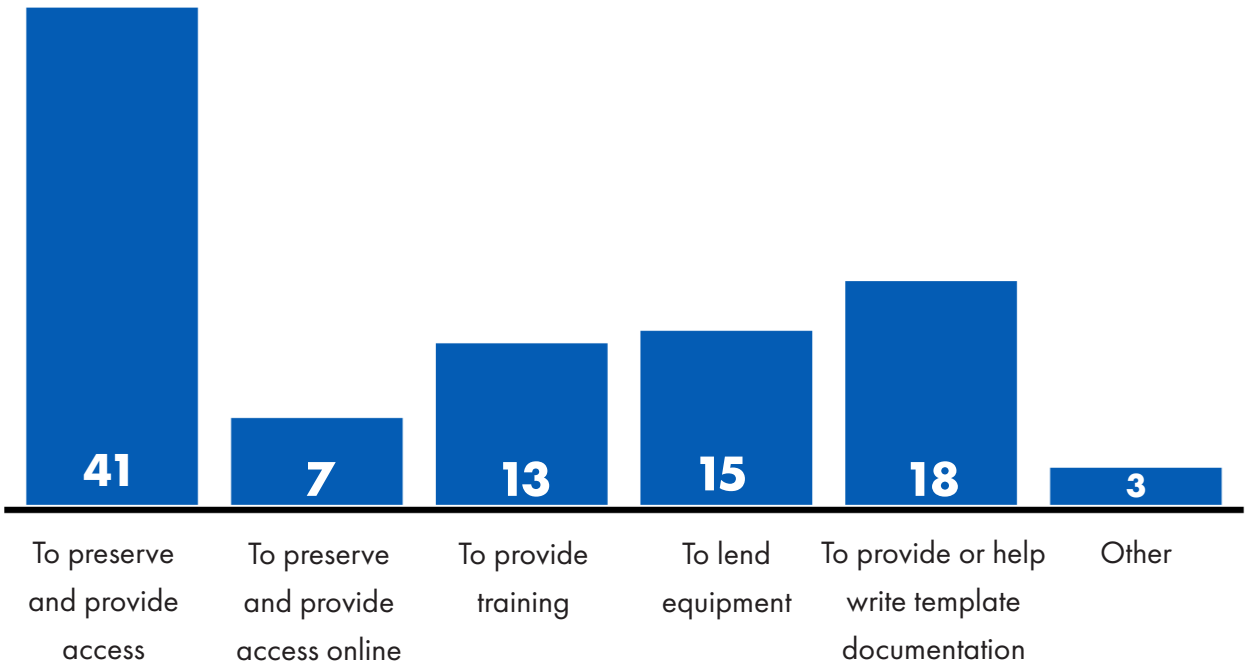
## Q37: Do you own any oral history recording equipment? If so, do you lend it out?

28 archives (58%) said they owned oral history recording equipment. The comments demonstrate the range of equipment, including podcasting equipment and microphones that could be repurposed for oral history, older inherited equipment, more up-to-date recorders, and a selection of loanable recorders and even video kit.

Of those who answered, 18 archives said that they did lend the equipment out, while eight said that they wouldn't. Several of those who wouldn't clarified that it was older equipment or usually used for another purpose.

## Q38: Have you worked in partnership with funded oral history projects?

## Q39: If yes, what was your role?



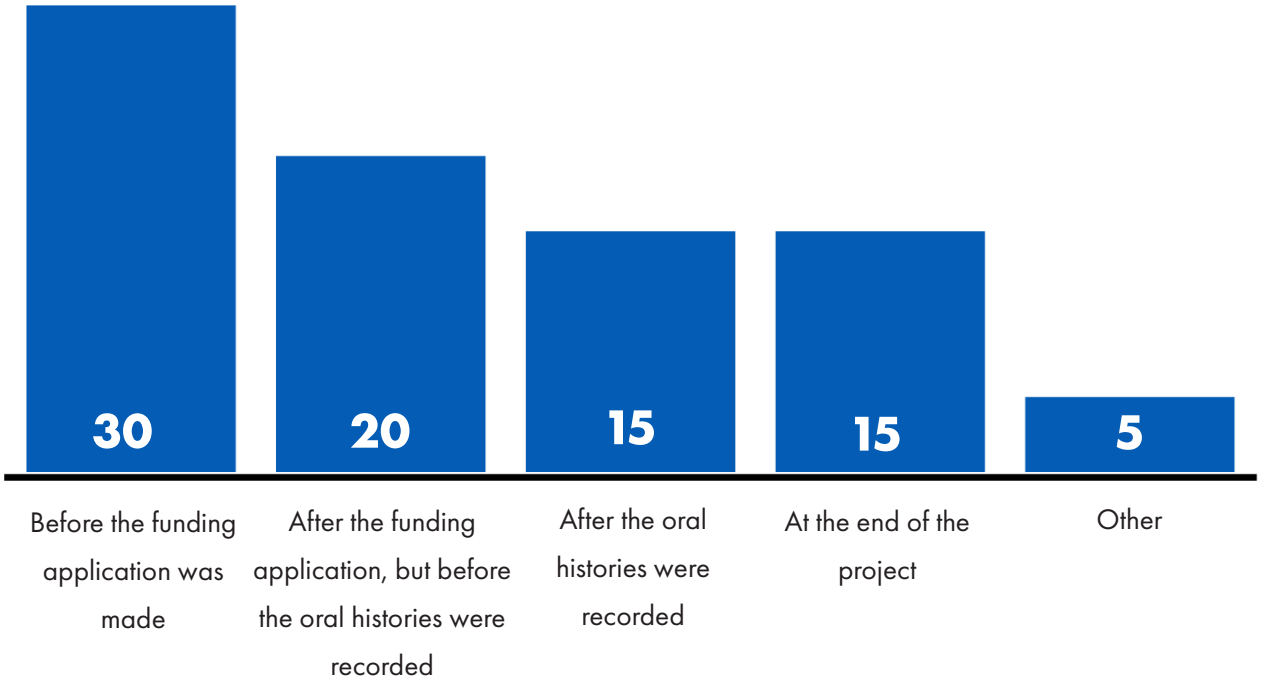

Of the archives who responded to this question, 41 (85%) said that they had worked in partnership with oral history projects. All who did so preserved and provided access to the interviews, as a minimum. 26 of these provided additional support: in providing or helping write template documentation; lending equipment; providing training; and providing online access to interviews. Half of these archives provided at least three of these different types of support, implying a substantial role in supporting oral history projects.

Others suggested even further involvement:

*To shape bids and advise on everything* [22]

*Facilitating the creation of the recordings and preserving them* [27]

## Q40: At what stage have you begun partnerships?




30 archives said that they had begun working in partnership before a funding application was made to carry out an oral history project. 20 of these archives said that they were approached after the application was made, but before the oral histories had been recorded.

15 archives said that they had been approached after the oral histories had been recorded, or at the end of a project. This is perhaps inevitable, given legacy collections, but does make it more challenging to cover the costs of archiving oral histories. Three archives elaborated on their response, with two focusing on costs:

*We get approached at all stages by projects but before funding app[lication] is made is ideal so we can ensure our costs are covered* [33]

*Obviously, what we can offer if unfunded is very limited* [12]

12 archives did not answer this question.

# Resources

In the final section of the survey we asked respondents about resources for working with oral histories, as well as anything else they wanted to add on working with oral histories. As these were both open questions, we received a range of results that makes easy analysis difficult. However, certain themes did emerge. Respondents expressed enthusiasm for oral histories and for the potential uses of them by both archives and researchers. At the same time, they highlighted how time-consuming this work can be.

Respondents highlighted the need for support around digital preservation and guidance around working with oral histories, specifically around cataloguing. As local authority archives increasingly move to Preservica, support on the former might become easier and the latter might require specific guidance around ISAD(G). The results also suggest a need for guidance as opposed to training as some respondents noted that funding and time for training might be hard to resource.

We are aware that lots of guidance already exists. However, it is often on sites known to oral historians and oral history archivists, but not archivists who are themselves non-specialists in oral history. There is a need to group this guidance with any new material that is produced and make it available in places known to archival professionals.

Ultimately, the respondents to this section of the survey support our finding that there is general enthusiasm for taking in oral history collections, but difficulties in cataloguing and making the collections available.

## Q41: Are there any resources you need to help you in your work with oral histories?

Many answers here were common to the wider archival and heritage sector, including storage, staff and equipment. Respondents referred to the human labour required in working with oral histories:

*Staff and time! They are only a tiny part of our overall collections.* [9]

*Erm yes please could we have a whole team of staff to deal with our backlogs?!* [22]

*More staff to enable oral history projects to be developed and executed. Current staff capacity is limited.* [30]

*Staff don't have the experience so training, and capacity would be needed to process the digital outputs. Staffing levels essentially are the issue with being able to process new, and tackle older collections that have not been processed.* [38]

*Staffing, it's a time-consuming process.* [45]

Others focused on the issues of digital storage and preservation:

*Yes - digital storage would be good, plus time to sort and catalogue* [11]

*Support with digital preservation would be welcome.* [31]

*Greatly increased digital storage capacity for video interviews.* [41]

*Resources aren't generally the issue the block is our council's ICT.* [3]

This was also reflected in difficulties around digitising material:

*Staff resources and training for digitising analogue oral histories and oral history techniques - data protection, redaction etc. Means of making oral histories available online.* [6]

*Equipment to migrate over to digital- past legacy oral history projects.* [29]

*Funding for staff time to digitise and fully catalogue collections deposited many years ago.* [34]

*We need better equipment to make the older material accessible as it is on cassette tape. We simply don't have the capacity to do much with them, despite the fact we know they are popular and there is a demand.* [40]

While a broader community of sound archivists and engineers might not be able to help with staffing or digital preservation, the legacy of UOSH and digitisation 'hubs' will hopefully go some way towards helping with transfer of older formats. One respondent also noted that:

> *It might be useful to have a maturity model for management OH like the DPC Rapid Asset Model for digital preservation to benchmark progress in building capacity for managing OH.* [27]

We would echo the need for increased advocacy for digital preservation measures amongst oral historians and oral history archivists.

Respondents were clear in their need for additional guidance and training. This included requests for assistance with access, copyright, data protection, editing, redacting, making oral histories available online and transcription. However, a common theme was for guidance around cataloguing oral histories:

> *Training on cataloguing, access, copyright and data protection and risk would be very useful. Help with advocacy for digital preservation would also be very useful.* [2]

> *Guidance sources are always helpful - relating to all stages of the oral history process, including best practice for cataloguing. Free training sessions are useful for archives with limited resources or for voluntary groups.* [7]

> *Guidance on cataloguing oral histories; preservation of analogue audio material; resources for making more widely accessible.* [17]

> *Also, would be good to have some guidance on cataloguing OH recordings in ISAD(G) and metadata schema for digital recordings.* [27]

There is definitely a need for existing guidance to be collated into locations that archivists who are not specialists in oral history are likely to consult. There may also be a requirement for new guidance - for example, tailored to ISAD(G).

> *Better training on accessioning and cataloguing oral histories. We often feel like we're trying to figure things out as we go along and we're not sure how other archives approach some of these issues. We're aware that training through the OHS is available but sadly we don't have the funds to send any of our staff.* [35]

*Yes, but as a local authority archive our governing bodies will not be able to provide these - time and fund for archivists to attend training, equipment and staff time to use equipment (digitising, access etc), an outreach officer who can create and offer meaningful engagement with this material. Clear written guidance around cataloguing, preserving, accepting and managing OH recordings that doesn't require in person attendance. More hours in the day, more staff, to manage these collections alongside our regular workload.* [33]

## Q42: Is there anything else you would like to say about working with oral histories?

Answers to this question highlighted both the value and potential of oral histories to local authority archives, but also the resources required. Many respondents highlighted the staff time required:

*It's a very demanding area in terms of resources and time. Whilst we would like to do more with our oral history collections and recognise the value they can bring, we just don't have the capacity.* [6]

*It's very time-consuming to do it properly, and the returns on investment and impact are slim. In practice we are making progress - processing new accessions and legacy stuff - behind the scenes. It seems easier to get money to create new stuff, or to digitise stuff that's 'at-risk' than to deal properly with making what we already have properly accessible. We get far more impact and use from online clips than onsite full interview access. Much of our backlog comes from 30 years of badly documented HLF oral histories, and it would be good if the NLHF could weigh legacy more heavily in their evaluation.* [22]

*It is not as straight forward as it initially seems.* [42]

For one respondent this was a reason to avoid working with oral histories:

*Due to the amount of work involved in making these accessible we generally avoid taking them. Data Protection issues alone can be a nightmare with OH recordings and we simply don't have the resources to properly check and manage them and make them accessible.* [33]

Another highlighted the relative importance placed on oral histories in the sector:

*Still don't feel that it is seen as a core part of archiving material and that more emphasis should be placed on it in collection policies and in training for archivists.* [14]

However, many other archivists expressed their enthusiasm for oral histories and working with them:

> *Hugely rewarding and valuable for making direct connections with stakeholders, but problematic to manage without adequate capacity, software and skills.* [5]

> *We feel oral histories are a neglected source of historical information and we would be glad to receive more recordings. Although we have a range of ideas for oral history projects, specifically with communities currently under-represented in our collections, we are glad to receive the output of any local projects which fit our collection policy.* [30]

Two respondents noted that oral histories are becoming increasingly popular:

> *As we put more onto our online catalogue more of the collections are being used. The more the collections are digitised the easier it will be to share them.* [34]

> *They are suddenly one of the most popular resources with a noticeable uptick in demand for access. They provide us with challenges as it is hard to make them accessible and we lack the technical knowledge/expertise within our core staff.* [40]

And one noted the possible future uses of Artificial Intelligence (AI):

> *We can see exciting potential in AI for the transcription of oral history recordings in future but we're nowhere near that yet.* [45]

Of note is that this was one of only four mentions of AI in the survey results, although we did not explicitly ask about it in any of the questions.

Ultimately, the tension between resources required and possible reward was perhaps best summed up by this respondent:

> *We feel like they have huge potential, but are vastly underused. We do hope that making recordings available through our online catalogue will help to change this perception, and will give us a reason to focus our energies more heavily on our sound collections.* [9]

Finally, one respondent noted that the oral history community has always been a supportive one:

> *There is a lot of co-operation and support out there in the oral history community which is great. Have found the guidance produced by the Oral History Society and University of Leicester very helpful. British Library Sound Archive were very helpful and supportive when we started out dealing with oral histories and sound recordings generally.* [16]

It is in this spirit that we produced this report and we hope it can add to this history and practice of co-operation and support.