

# THE SELECTION TOOLKIT

A Toolkit to aid in the Selection  
of the Working Project Archive

**CiFA**

Chartered  
Institute for  
Archaeologists



Historic England

**CiFA**

Archaeological  
Archives  
Group

Samantha Paul  
MCiFA

Dr Katie Green  
CAiFA

Duncan Brown  
MCiFA



The creation of a stable, ordered, and accessible archive should be the goal of any archaeological project.

The records, materials and results of post-excavation analysis should be available for re-examination and re-interpretation; a tangible legacy of our archaeological endeavours that we pass on to museums and other repositories to care for in perpetuity.

Archives are what we leave behind after the report is written, the planning requirement is fulfilled and the project is finished.

Archaeological archives should be available and accessible support research, teaching, outreach, engagement and display activities



However, the current reported archaeological legacy as represented by archaeological archive isn't great.

The lack of storage space in Museums, and the reduction of museum expertise has been widely reported over the last few years:

- 2011 Southport group reported that archaeology stores were full to capacity  
<https://www.archaeologists.net/sites/default/files/SouthportreportA4.pdf>
- FAME in 2012 estimated that there were 9,000 archaeological archives in England unable to be deposited with a repository  
<https://famearchaeology.co.uk/fame-position-statement-on-archaeological-archives/>
- The 2013 Museum Archaeology report estimated that museum expertise in archaeology had reduced by 1/3.  
<http://socmusarch.org.uk/socmusarch/gailmark/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Archaeological-archives-and-museums-2012.pdf>

Since these reports came out the problem has not lessened, if anything the figures are probably worse. While many archives have been deposited, many, many more have been created.

The 'crisis' is regularly discussed and debated throughout the sector, often from the perspective that archives problematic, time-consuming, expensive and difficult to

manage.

Anecdotal stories describe abandoned archives, inaccessible and unused, with museums struggling to justify the continued storage and curation of boxes of material that they cannot immediately perceive as having any future potential.

One published opinion is that archaeological archives are not worth the space and time they take up within museum stores.

But is the term 'crisis justified?'



The 3 year SMA Museums collecting archaeology survey has unfortunately, but not surprisingly demonstrated that many of the anecdotal stories around the storage crisis are **based on real, on-the- ground reductions in resource and capacity.**

- The SMA 2016 report concluded that 23% of museums have stopped collecting archaeology archives.

- Of those that still collect, 63 % will run out of space in 5 years.  
<http://socmusarch.org.uk/socmusarch/gailmark/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/HE-SURVEY-2016-FINAL.pdf>

- The 2<sup>nd</sup> year of the project demonstrated the pressure that museums with archaeology collections continue to face in terms of diminishing storage space, staff reductions and loss of expertise.
- Lack of space was once again the most cited reason for ceasing to collect followed by shortage of staff resources and expertise.

<http://socmusarch.org.uk/socmusarch/gailmark/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/HE-SURVEY-2017-FINAL.pdf>

- The 3<sup>rd</sup> year of the report came out this April and reported more of the same.

<http://socmusarch.org.uk/socmusarch/gailmark/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/HE-SURVEY-2018-TEMPLATE-FINAL.pdf>

**These reports have therefore clarified the need to ensure that Archaeological Archives contain only those elements useful for future research, display, engagement outreach**

**and teaching activities.**

It is not just about space, it is about the legacy of our archaeological projects:

- What are we leaving with others to store, manage and curate in perpetuity.
- How are we presenting them for curation and
- How are we making this very important resource accessible and sustainable for current and future generations?

**There has therefore been an increased focus on being more selective when it comes to what we choose to retain in the archives we are creating.**

Selection of the working project archive is beginning to take place across the sector, however the process is by no means universal, and the recording and documentation of such a process is patchy at best.

## CALLS FOR NATIONAL GUIDANCE ON SELECTION

*“unified core guidance, endorsed by ClfA, SMA, HE, ALGAO, FAME etc. on archive selection and deposition”*

21<sup>st</sup> Century Challenges in Archaeology (2017)

*“improve the long-term sustainability of the archaeological archives generated by developer-funded excavations”*

Mendoza review (2017)

There have been several calls for national guidance on selecting archaeological archival material;

At Archive Groups annual day conference in March 2016 on Selection, Retention and Rationalisations, delegates called for:

- National level guidance on selection
- Endorsement at a national level
- Selection to be included in project specifications

One of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Challenges in Archaeology (2017) proposed actions was:

*“unified core guidance, endorsed by ClfA, SMA, HE, ALGAO, FAME etc, on archive selection and deposition”*

<https://www.archaeologists.net/sites/default/files/21st-century%20Challenges%20for%20Archaeology%20project%20report%20October%202018.pdf>

The 2017 Mendoza review into museums in England contained a commitment to:

*“improve the long-term sustainability of the archaeological archives generated by developer-funded excavations”*

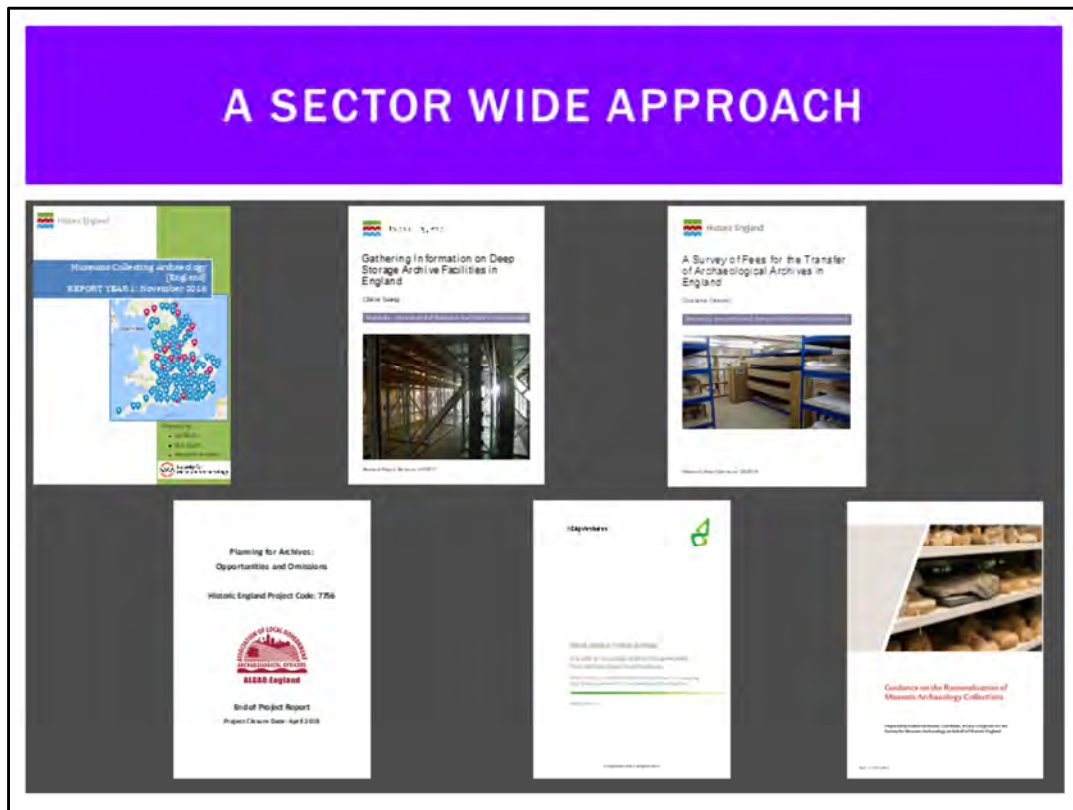
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/673935/The\\_Mendoza\\_Review\\_an\\_independent\\_review\\_of\\_museums\\_in\\_England.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/673935/The_Mendoza_Review_an_independent_review_of_museums_in_England.pdf)

As far back as 2011, the Southport report stipulated the need for a selection strategy.

<https://www.archaeologists.net/sites/default/files/SouthportreportA4.pdf>

**The ClfA selection toolkit project funded by Historic England was a direct response to those calls for national guidance.**





**Before we discuss the toolkit it is important to note:** The Selection Toolkit project does not stand alone

The development of the toolkit is one of several inter-related projects currently being undertaken across the sector looking at the issues raised in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century challenges report and the Mendoza review.

- 2016-2018 SMA Museums collecting archaeology project  
<http://socmusarch.org.uk/projects/hesma-annual-survey-of-museums-collecting-archaeology-reports/>
- 2017 HE project- gathering information of Deep Storage Facilities in England  
<https://research.historicengland.org.uk/Report.aspx?i=15626&ru=%2FResults.aspx%3Fp%3D1%26n%3D10%26a%3D4873%26ns%3D1>
- Historic England funded survey into museum deposition charges published this year  
<https://museumdevelopmentnorthwest.wordpress.com/2018/06/07/survey-of-museum-charges-for-archaeological-archive-deposition/>
- The ALGAO project looking at the relationship between national planning policy and the creation and management of archaeological archives.  
<https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/planning-for-archives/>
- DIG VENTURES project- Work digital / think archive - A guide to managing digital data

generated from archaeological investigations - out later this year.  
<https://digventures.com/projects/digital-archives/>

- AND the SMA Guidance on the Rationalisation of Museum Archaeology Collections  
<http://socmusarch.org.uk/projects/guidance-on-the-rationalisation-of-museum-archaeology-collections/>

**Rationalisation** of existing museum collections, and specifically the rationalisation of stored archaeological archives has long been bandied about as a possible 'solution to the storage crisis': The SMA project assessed precisely this concept through five scoping studies

IN BRIEF- the report concluded that while the audits requires by a rationalisation process are seen as very useful because they increase collections knowledge, one of the main conclusions of the project was that the **cost of rationalisation of existing collections far outweighed the benefit of the resultant space created within store.**

One museum identified 568 boxes during the scoping process- They established that the cost of rationalisation of these boxes would be £259,008 and that this process would only free up 10.125m<sup>3</sup> of space. Not only is no-one is going to fund a project like that, but you could build a whole new store for that kind of money!

**So this is all Proof** that in order to support sustainable archaeological collecting, selection of archaeological archives accompanied by comprehensive documentation **prior** to museum deposition is essential.

**We are back to the question of how do we do this? Hence the Selection Toolkit project came about**



The Selection Toolkit was created by a cross-sector working party funded by Historic England.

Membership of the working party represented

- Chartered Institute for Archaeologists
- CifA Finds Group
- CifA Archives Group
- Society for museum Archaeology
- Archaeology Data Service
- Historic England
- Archaeological Archives Forum
- The Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers
- Federation of Archaeological Managers and Employers (through membership of the other committees)

The Selection Toolkit DRAFT was sent out for consultation to the membership of

- CifA AAG
- CifA FG
- CifA IMSIG
- SMA
- FAME
- ALGAO
- AAF

The draft toolkit was work-shopped as part of a **Continuing Professional Development session** at the 2018 ClfA conference in **Brighton**.

The final version of the Selection Toolkit was agreed by the working party based on the consultation feedback and workshop recommendations.

**Result is a toolkit for aiding the creation of a project specific selection strategy**

## WHAT IS A SELECTION STRATEGY?

A Selection Strategy details the **project-specific** selection process, agreed by all stakeholders, which will be applied to the Working Project Archive prior to transfer into curatorial care.

What is a selection strategy?

*A Selection Strategy details the project-specific selection process, agreed by all stakeholders, which will be applied to the Working Project Archive prior to transfer into curatorial care.*

Benefits of a project-specific Selection Strategy will:

- Promote better collaboration between contracting units, *Collecting Institutions, specialists*, researchers, planning archaeologists and other Stakeholders.
- Improve the active management of the Working Project Archive, including onsite collection, preparation and preservation requirements, and the *dispersal of de-selected material* prior to the transfer of the Archaeological Archive to a repository.
- Ensure that the Archaeological Archive is fit for purpose and that the importance and potential of all materials has been considered.
- Facilitate better knowledge of the Archaeological Archive's contents and relevance , and therefore increase the opportunities for promotion of, and engagement with, the Archaeological Archive.
- Support the adequate allocation of funds and staffing from the outset of a project.
- Improve the efficient use of available storage space and resources.

## THE SELECTION TOOLKIT = BEST PRACTICE

All archaeological projects that include the recovery or generation of data and/archaeological materials (finds) will result in a stable, ordered, accessible archive. All archaeologists are responsible for ensuring that the archive is created and compiled to **recognised standards**, using consistent methods, and is not subject to unnecessary risk of damage or loss. It is the responsibility of all curators of archaeological archives to ensure that archives are stored to recognised standards for long-term preservation and made **accessible** for consultation.



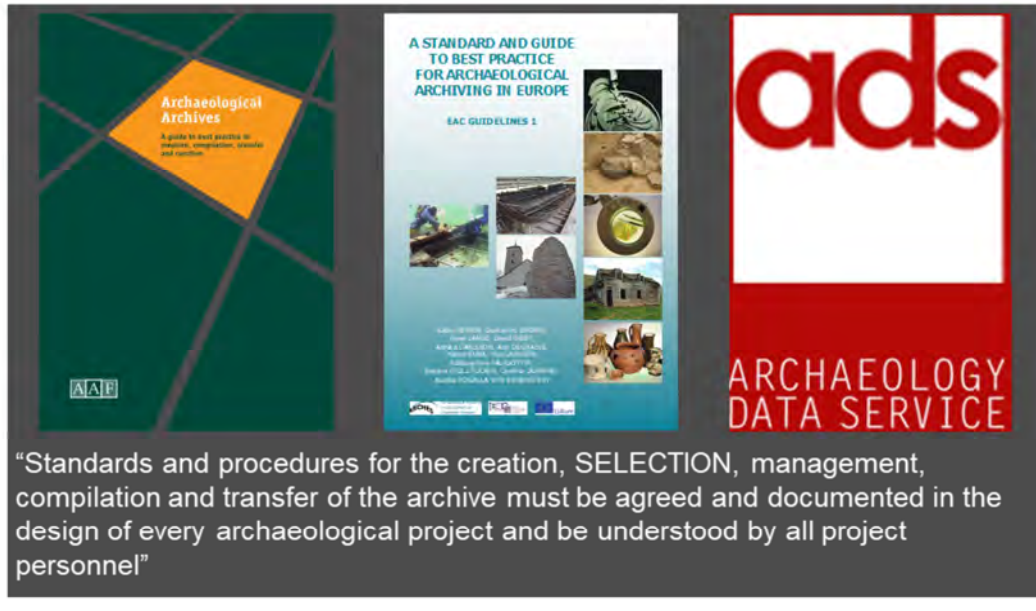
The toolkit is built on existing guidance and best practice, therefore the information and requirements for section are NOT NEW, its just that no-one has really known how to create, or at least record a selection strategy before this.

The CIfA standard for archaeological archiving states:

“All archaeological projects that include the recovery or generation of data and/archaeological materials (finds) will result in a stable, ordered, accessible archive. All archaeologists are responsible for ensuring that the archive is created and compiled to **recognised standards**, using consistent methods, and is not subject to unnecessary risk of damage or loss. It is the responsibility of all curators of archaeological archives to ensure that archives are stored to recognised standards for long-term preservation and made **accessible** for consultation”.

[https://www.archaeologists.net/sites/default/files/CIFAS&GArchives\\_2.pdf](https://www.archaeologists.net/sites/default/files/CIFAS&GArchives_2.pdf)

## THE SELECTION TOOLKIT = BEST PRACTICE



And here are the recognised standards that ClfA is referring to:

**THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL ARCHIVES FORUM guide to best practice in the creation, compilation and transfer and curation of archaeological archives states:**

“The entire project archive should be subject to a selection procedure to determine which elements are to be retained from the documentary (including digital) and material archive.”

[http://archives.archaeologyuk.org/aaf\\_archaeological\\_archives\\_2011.pdf](http://archives.archaeologyuk.org/aaf_archaeological_archives_2011.pdf)

This document has been superseded (BUT NOT REPLACED) with:

**ARCHES Standard and guide to best practice in Archaeological Archiving in Europe by the E.A.C.**

### **ARCHES- Principles:**

“Standards and procedures for the creation, SELECTION, management, compilation and transfer of the archive must be agreed and documented in the design of every archaeological project and be understood by all project personnel”

### **ARCHES- General Standard**

*“selection criteria and procedures must be fully documented and included in the project archive”*

<https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/arches/attach/The%20Standard%20and%20Guide>

%20to%20Best%20Practice%20in%20Archaeological%20Archiving%20in%20Europe/ARCS  
HES\_V1\_GB.pdf

Of course there are the **ADS standards** on digital archive selection and compilation  
<https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/advice/guidelinesForDepositors.xhtml>



## WHO IS THE TOOLKIT FOR?

Staff within commercial units

Specialists, both finds and environmental.

Collections personnel, such as curators, administrative staff, and archivists.

Laboratory staff.

Local authority archaeologists, county or city archaeologists, planning archaeologists.

Researchers (academic researchers, students, independent researchers).

Community groups.

Everyone who works with or has a stake in the creation of archaeological archives!

A SELECTION STRATEGY Intended to be supported by other documentation, it is not a stand alone document but should be created during project planning alongside and informed by the Brief, WSI, relevant research Frameworks, Data management plan and other relevant documents.

The toolkit is GENERIC

The Selection Toolkit provides a set of useful and flexible resources to assist archaeological practitioners during the creation of project-specific Selection Strategies for the Working Project Archive.

**This Toolkit is not:**

Intended to be used in the creation of a Selection Policy (a selection policy, as apposed to a selection stagey is where general non project specific decisions are made about specific materials of objects with no reference to the aims and objectives of the project or the potential future re-use of the material).

Therefore, the Selection Toolkit **does not** give advice on what Selection decisions should be made.

The toolkit instead provides advice, guidance and resources to aid the management of the Selection process, and tools to help archaeological practitioners record their project-

specific Selections decisions.

It is NOT Intended to be used in the rationalisation of museum collections. See SMA Guidance on Rationalisation of Museum Archaeology Collections  
<http://socmusarch.org.uk/projects/guidance-on-the-rationalisation-of-museum-archaeology-collections/>

It is NOT Intended to be used for the selection of Human Remains, Historic England have produced lots of advice on the treatment of human remains.  
[http://www.archaeologyuk.org/apabe/pdf/Large\\_Burial\\_Grounds.pdf](http://www.archaeologyuk.org/apabe/pdf/Large_Burial_Grounds.pdf)

## HOW TO CREATE A SELECTION STRATEGY

### Project Planning

- ◇ Selection Strategy outlined using the Selection Strategy Template.
- ◇ The outline Selection strategy should accompany the project design and be agreed by all relevant stakeholders.
- ◇ Detail the strategic approach to the selection of the different archive components.
- ◇ Methodology for recording uncollected material agreed with relevant specialists.
- ◇ Manner of dispersal for material not selected for inclusion in the archive agreed with relevant stakeholders.
- ◇ The selection strategy should be provided to all stakeholders.

#### **How do you create a selection strategy: PROJECT PLANNING**

- A selection strategy should be outlined during Project planning and included within the project design.
- The outline Selection strategy should accompany the project design and be agreed by all **relevant stakeholders.- LPA, Museums, specialists etc.**
- It should Detail the strategic approach to the selection of the different archive components.
- Detail the Methodology for recording uncollected material agreed with relevant specialists.
- Manner of dispersal for material not selected for inclusion in the archive agreed with relevant stakeholders (landowner, museum, specialists etc.)
- The selection strategy should be provided to all stakeholders (local authority archaeologist, filed staff, museum, specialist, landowners etc.).

BUT- A Selection Strategy should always be applied on a project-by-project basis and must take into account:

- The aims and objectives of the project.
- Local Authority guidance (including the brief and/or Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI)).
- collection policy of the museum and/or deposition guidelines.
- Local and regional research frameworks.
- Relevant thematic or period specific research frameworks and Material-specific guidance documents.
- The project's *Data Management Plan* (DMP).

- Internal recording and reporting policies.

At the end of each stage of the project the Selection Strategy should be reviewed, and amended if required.

The image displays four overlapping pages of a Selection Strategy template. The top-left page is the main 'Project Information' page, which includes fields for Project Name, Date and Version, Project Management (Project Manager, Archaeologist or Archive Manager, Organisation), Selections (Collecting Institution(s), Project Lead / Project Assessment, Lead(s) / Consultant, Other), Resources (Researcher(s) required, Specialist(s) required, Specialist(s) of archival resources required), and Context (Description, Aims, Objectives, etc.).

The other three pages are numbered sections:
 

- 1 - Digital Data:** Includes sections for Stakeholders, Selection (with sub-sections 1.1-1.4), De-selected Digital Data, and Amendments.
- 2 - Documents:** Includes sections for Stakeholders, Selection (with sub-sections 2.1-2.4), De-selected Documents, and Amendments.
- 3 - Materials:** Includes sections for Stakeholders, Selection (with sub-sections 3.1-3.4), Uncollected Material, De-selected Material, and Amendments.

The template can be used to help with the creation of the selection strategy, however the Selection strategy template is not the only way to record your selection strategy: it should match the project.

A very small watching brief on a couple of utility trench's will probably only require a few sentences in the WSI, outlining the plan to bring everything back to the unit and agree what should be included in the archive during post excavation.- as long as you have said what you plan to do, and then say if that changed at all then you have written your selection strategy.

For many project a bit more information will be required:

The different digital techniques you will be applying the the project, the different approaches to various material types. I would suggest that the selection strategy you propose to apply to Neolithic pottery should not match the selection strategy proposed for Roman tile!

If your DMP covers selection of digital material- that page will become redundant and you will simply need to refer to your DMP and agree its implementation with the ADS.

Documents:

- While digital recording is increasing, there is still a lot of physical documents that are produced through an archaeological projects lifecycle- what are you going to do with them and why?
- It may be that the tiny WB you undertook was archaeologically sterile, the topsoil and subsoil are adequately recorded in the report and an OASIS record is all that is required to adequately archive the project. But the decision should not be made

unless all the relevant parties are in agreement and the process should still be recorded- and I suggest added to the OASIS submission, possibly just as a note at the end of the report.

- It might be that you have databased your entire context record, and added scans of the sketches to each digital record, and therefore you agree that can go to the ADS and the original cards can be recycled.
- It might be that the museum no longer takes documents and requires everything to be digitised and stored with the ADS. In this case make sure that you speak with the ADS and get everything digitised in the right format and appropriate metadata is created to ensure future access.

#### Materials:

- This page can be repeated as many times as necessary
- One page may be enough to cover your small evaluation where all material will be brought back to the office for cleaning and assessment for selection purposes, at which point further data can be added.
- However for large scale urban excavation I would suggest that selection of different materials should be considered in more detail from the outset.
- List all stakeholders (specialists etc.)n and make sure the museum is happy with the plan that has been made!

This is already happening on many projects, on site, and during post-excavation assessment; we are just asking that it is recorded so that the archive that ends up in the museum is an accurate representation of the project and that it can be fully accessed and understood in the future.

Detail the Methodology for recording uncollected material agreed with relevant specialists.

The manner of dispersal for material not selected for inclusion in the archive should be agreed with relevant stakeholders (landowner, museum, specialists etc.)

This process should as a minimum be overseen by the project manager.

## HOW TO CREATE A SELECTION STRATEGY

### Data Gathering

- ✧ The Selection Strategy should be made available to all project personnel.
- ✧ The Selection Strategy should be implemented, monitored and revised as necessary.
- ✧ Any changes agreed with relevant stakeholders.
- ✧ Uncollected material recorded and dispersed as agreed.

#### **How do you create a selection strategy: DATA GATHERING**

- The Selection Strategy should be made available to all project personnel.
- The Selection Strategy should be implemented, monitored and revised as necessary (if find something unexpected like a pottery kiln, etc.)
- Any changes should be agreed with relevant stakeholders (museum and specialist).
- Uncollected material recorded and dispersed as agreed.

## HOW TO CREATE A SELECTION STRATEGY

### Analysis and Report Writing

- ✧ All materials recovered during the project, and documentation created, including digital data, should be assessed specifically for Selection.
- ✧ Take specialist advice into account.
- ✧ The LPA and collecting institution should be consulted as to any changes to the agreed Selection Strategy.

### **How do you create a selection strategy: ANALYSIS AND REPORT WRITING**

- All materials recovered during the project, and documentation created, including digital data, should be assessed specifically for Selection. This would be probably routine for some of you as part of a PX assessment, the only difference being that we want you to record the decisions!
- Obviously, take specialist advice into account when making these decisions. But at the same time make your specialists aware that you expect them to consider selection during their assessment of the material and make suggestions for retention and dispersal. 100% retention is a justifiable selection strategy, as long as you have the record as to why that has been proposed, agreed.
- The LPA and collecting institution should be consulted as to any changes to the agreed Selection Strategy.
- All changes should be recorded



## HOW TO CREATE A SELECTION STRATEGY

### Archive Compilation

- ✧ Apply the final selection strategy top the Working project archive.
- ✧ Disperse the de-selected material as agreed.
- ✧ A copy of the final Selection Strategy should be included in the project report and accompany the Archaeological Archive to the collecting institution/ museum.

### **How do you create a selection strategy: ARCHIVE COMPILATION**

- Apply the final selection strategy top the Working project archive.
- Disperse the de-selected material as agreed.
- A copy of the final Selection Strategy should be included in the project report and accompany the Archaeological Archive to the collecting institution/ museum.

## THE AIM OF THE SELECTION PROCESS

The aim of a selection process is to ensure that all the elements retained from the Working Project Archive for inclusion in the Archaeological Archive (documentary, digital and material) are appropriate to establish the significance of the project and support future research, outreach, engagement, display and teaching activities.

So what are we hoping to achieve through the implantation of a selection process?

“To ensure that all the elements retained from the Working Project Archive for inclusion in the Archaeological Archive (documentary, digital and material) are appropriate to establish the significance of the project and support future research, outreach, engagement, display and teaching activities. “

**If museums and repositories are aware of the archives coming their way and what they contain, if they can understand and access the archaeological archives that are taking in for curation in perpetuity- that means we are creating a positive legacy with archaeological archives**

## ENCOURAGING UPTAKE

Selection will be part of the ClfA standards and guidance on Archaeological Archiving.

Implementation of project specific selection strategies will be expected as **best practice** by Registered Organisations.

Implementation of project specific selection strategies will be **assessed** during RO applications and inspections



ClfA are ensuring that Selection is seen as best practice and therefore expected of all Registered Organisations.

Selection will be part of the ClfA standards and guidance on Archaeological archiving and the implementation of project specific selection strategies will be assessed during RO applications and inspections.

Implementation of these amendments will be gradual, and individuals and organisations are not expected to demonstrate full adherence to the changes straight away, however we are hoping that use of the Toolkit will become general working practice by the end of 2020.

The implementation of selection throughout the archiving process is not solely down to contractors and ClfA. The monitoring of the selection through the planning process is down to local government archaeological officers.

<https://www.archaeologists.net/selection-toolkit>

Samantha Paul MCifA  
Sampaulheritage@gmail.com

Dr Katie Green, ADS  
Katie.green@york.ac.uk



Historic  
England



ALGAO



Chartered  
Institute for  
Archaeologists



Archaeological  
Archives  
Group



Finds  
Group



Society for  
Museum Archaeology



Information  
Management  
Group