**Contagious Description: Factors influencing the adoption of the
Australian Series System in New Zealand Archives**

by

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Abstract

The Australian series system has been identified as useful in describing the multiple relationships increasingly identified in archival collections due to complex administrative history, the need to describe electronic records or a wish to describe multiple views of a single group of archives. However, throughout New Zealand it has been fully adopted by relatively few Archives. A mixed-methods survey was carried out to investigate motivators and barriers to the adoption of the Australian series system, using quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis of responses to a questionnaire. Using Rogers' diffusion of innovations theory and the records continuum model to suggest factors and map the results, it was found that the main motivator to use the AuSS was an archivist convinced of its value, through training or previous use, and with an awareness of archival conventions and standards. Other motivators included a large collection with a complex administrative history, the availability of compatible software, institutional support, and expert advice recommending its use. Barriers included lack of awareness or training, lack of autonomy for the archivist, and lack of resources. Changes to description occurred when particular moments of opportunity coincided with perceived needs. These factors worked together at all levels of the records continuum to affect decisions made by archivists on the type of description to use in their finding aids. Wider use of the AuSS to enable better information sharing and more fully-developed contextual description could be achieved through the provision of better publicised information; expert advice on implementation and on migration of existing data; and practical, readymade, simple and adaptable templates for finding aids

Keywords: Australian Series System; archival description; records continuum model; Rogers' diffusion of innovations theory; mixed-methods methodology; questionnaire; finding aids; New Zealand

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1 Introduction

Archives New Zealand has been using customised versions of Scott's (1966) Australian Series System (AuSS) as a basis for its finding aids since 1986, finding the ability it provides to separately describe context and content of archives, and the relationships between them, a valuable model for effectively reflecting the provenance of archives from complex administrative backgrounds. Adrian Cunningham (2010, p.4) noted that Scott's system is being used around the world to some degree, influencing international descriptive standards, even if largely unrealised by many practitioners.

A recent survey into archival description throughout New Zealand (Delaney, 2008-2009) found a wide range of descriptive practices, with relatively few Archives stating that they used the AuSS. It found descriptive programmes were mostly developed in a local context, often apparently not based on external standards, and echoing divergent views on the purpose of description. Electronic systems were often implemented with little regard for their suitability for supporting best practice in description. It also found little professional debate on archival description outside the major institutions, and a wide range of levels of understanding of descriptive principles. Delaney suggested this lack of agreed descriptive standards formed a barrier to effective sharing of online archival information in New Zealand. The findings did not reveal the factors behind the decisions made by individual Archives on which method to adopt in describing their archives.

The lack of standardisation of description in New Zealand is increasingly an issue, forming a barrier to meeting the increasing expectations of users that they will have online access to the resources of multiple institutions. Increasingly, the lack of ability to reflect the complex provenance of archives is also seen as an issue. A better understanding of the factors behind the choice of specific descriptive models by different Archives in New Zealand would help to show where initiatives to improve standardisation would be most effective. Gaps in knowledge of description in the archival community would be highlighted, as would the influence of organisational culture, available resources and the decisions of non-archivist managers on descriptive practice. The results could support better-targeted educational initiatives, improved collaboration between institutions and improved practice.

This study used a survey based on a mixed-methods methodology, with a questionnaire combining closed questions and open-ended questions to attempt to discover factors influencing the decision by Archives in New Zealand to implement, or not to implement, concepts of the Australian “series” system model in their description. The results were analysed using a mix of quantitative statistical analysis and qualitative coding analysis, combined and compared, and then mapped against attributes of Rogers’ diffusion of innovations theory and against Records Continuum theory. Conclusions were drawn from the results regarding significant factors in decisions on description, and possible implications for Archives in New Zealand.

2 Definitions

Australian “series” system: A method of archival description first developed by Peter Scott for the Commonwealth Archives Office in Australia (Scott, 1966), and adapted over time by individual Archives. It views provenance and original order as intellectual rather than physical constructs, describing agencies, series and sometimes also items, functions and organizations as separate entities. Relationships between these entities are described, allowing for intellectual links to be created between multiple creators or custodians of archives, and between records that might, for example, index or otherwise relate to each other.

Archives: For the purposes of this study, Archives in New Zealand are defined as any institution included in the Directory of Archives in New Zealand (Archives New Zealand, 2009) and The Community Archive (2010), formerly the National Register of Archives and Manuscripts.

Implementation (partial / full): For the purposes of this study, full implementation of the AuSS will be defined as the separate description of agencies and series, and optionally items, functions or other entities as well as description of the relationships between those entities, for all or part of an Archive’s holdings. Relationships could include but are not limited to controlling, controlled, predecessor or successor, and relationship dates or further description of the relationship can also be included. The agency documentation should give a brief overview of the agency’s recordkeeping systems. Partial implementation would involve the use of context entities as authority files, allowing linking from one series to more than one agency, and vice

versa, but without explicitly describing relationships, and without explicitly describing relationships between agencies, or between series.

Description: Archival description is often referred to as part of the phrase “arrangement and description”, the process of putting archives in order, intellectually or physically, in accordance with archival principles such as provenance and original order, and recording information about their nature and provenance, so that the archives will be managed and accessible.

Provenance: The provenance of an archive relates to the agency which created it, or was otherwise responsible for its existence – for example, the photographer, the organisation that commissioned the photograph, and/or the collector who put it in the photograph album in which it was transferred to the Archive. For some cultures, the provenance will include the subject of the photograph, or the Iwi or Marae to which they belonged

Original order: The concept of original order relates to the importance of retaining archives within the context or records structure in which they were created, which provides much of their meaning. For records existing within multiple structures, such as many electronic records, or records used for multiple purposes, retaining original order requires the description of relationships between records rather than physically keeping related records together.

3 Literature review and theoretical framework

A literature review was carried out, looking at the background to the development of the AuSS, later developments in archival theory and technology which might have a bearing on the perceived value or ease of implementation of the AuSS, and differing attitudes to the purposes of archival description. As the initial stages of the review showed the AuSS represented a significant innovation in archival theory, research relating to barriers or facilitators to the spread of innovation was also reviewed.

As the AuSS was developed in Australia and has been implemented internationally, the literature search included international perspectives, also necessary due to the small quantity of published research on New Zealand implementations. Much of the research in this field has been of the theory-building type, but some relevant empirical research was located.

From this review, research questions were formulated relating to possible factors in the decision of an individual Archive to include the principles of the AuSS in its descriptive practice.

3.1 Background to archival description in New Zealand

Archival description in New Zealand has a relatively brief history (Retter, 1996), with close ties between libraries and archival collections giving a bibliographic influence to much archival description. There were few opportunities for archival training in New Zealand until the 1990s, so professional qualifications were gained either at library school or overseas (Chawner and Oliver, 2011). Some working in government archives trained in Australia, giving exposure to the AuSS (Simes, 1992). The first Archives Act in New Zealand, covering government archives, was passed in 1957, the first New Zealand publication relating to archives and manuscripts, *Archifacts*, began in 1974, and the Archives and Records Association of New Zealand in 1976. The first National Register of Archives and Manuscripts was published in 1979, recently replaced by an online version (The Community Archive, 2010), with a descriptive structure based on the record group concept (Delaney, 2008-2009). Since the 1980s, government and local government has undergone frequent re-structuring, while recently, post-modern and bicultural concepts of multiple provenance and parallel provenance have been growing areas of discussion (Cullen, 1996; Jacobs and Falconer, 2004; Hurley, 2005), as has records continuum theory (Upward, 2005; Gow, 2008) and the worldwide issue of description of electronic records.

3.2 Development of the AUSS

The AuSS was developed at the Australian Commonwealth Records Office to meet the needs of describing records at a time of rapid administrative change (Scott, 1966). Following the principals of provenance and original order, as developed by Muller, Feith and Fruin (1898), Scott stated Jenkinson's (1922) recommendation of splitting series between two creators destroyed the original order and the series' "organic unity," that agencies and series did not always have the same lifespan, the creating record group was not always easily identified, and it was difficult to insert new series logically into existing record groups because of shelving issues. Scott described Schellenberg's (1956) record group as arbitrary, an "unnecessary complication ...

Instead of enabling one to adhere to basic principles, it may distort the application of those principles” (1966, p.87). Instead, the series would be the primary unit of description. Context could be captured intellectually through the description of all relationships between items, series and creating agencies, with the series as an independent element. Context and content were thus described separately, but combined intellectually. The record group then became an intellectual construct of all of the series attributed to a particular agency or person.

3.3 Why implement the AuSS?

Benefits of the AuSS view of provenance as an intellectual rather than a physical construct (Cook, 1993) were said to include allowing description to reflect multiple creators of records as functions pass between agencies or people (Cook, 1997), to better reveal the complex relationships of creation and use of electronic records in an online environment (Horsman, 2002), and to describe complex, interwoven series (Hurley, 1994). The need to reflect differing cultural attitudes towards the provenance of archives through alternative descriptions allowing multiple interpretations, as highlighted by Shilton & Srinivasan (2007), could also be successfully met by implementation of the AuSS.

Many factors could be involved in decisions on whether to implement an AuSS-based or other descriptive model. Barriers could include lack of: awareness, a trained archivist, autonomy for the archivist, or institutional support (Duff, 1999; McCausland, 1994; Yaco, 2008). They could also include resource barriers, such as lack of appropriate technology or staff (Yaco, 2008; Yakei & Kim, 2005). Finally, a significant barrier could be organisational culture or individual attitude of the archivist, such as preference for a bibliographic style of description including classification by subject-headings; private versus government/corporate archives and heritage versus accountability value; adherence to standards that do not accommodate AuSS-type description; or a continuing belief in record-group style one-to-one creator relationships (Cunningham, 1996; Southcott, Andre and Thomas, 1996; Fisher, 2009).

Possible motivators to implementing the model could include champions of the system with experience, a collection with a complex administrative background, the desire to reflect several different arrangements for unstructured personal papers, the

need to describe electronic records with complex relationships, organisational culture or individual attitude of the archivist supporting records continuum concepts, or the desire to allow the users or co-creators of the records to describe their own views of the provenance of the records (McCausland, 1994; Smith, 1995; Meehan, 2010; Hurley, 2005; Billinton, 2008).

3.4 Current knowledge of descriptive practice in New Zealand

The recent survey of archival description in New Zealand undertaken by Delaney (2008-2009) found a wide range of descriptive practice, many apparently not based on external standards. It suggested that descriptive programmes were mostly developed in a local context, reflecting divergent views about the purpose of description, and that there was an absence of professional debate, outside the major institutions, on descriptive issues. Often electronic systems for managing collections were implemented without considering their suitability for describing archives. A lack of coordinated leadership on description was identified as a possible barrier to effective use of descriptive standards in New Zealand, and comments received suggested that the experience and training brought to the institution by often sole-charge archivists was a key factor in deciding on descriptive systems. Delaney suggested that the lack of descriptive standards was a barrier to the effective sharing of online archival information in New Zealand. The lack of clarity on how decisions on description were reached suggests another survey directed more specifically at this question would be useful. Millar (2010) comments that archivists and institutions can become entrenched in habits of description for no other reason than “we’ve always done it that way” (p.xvii), so studying what archivists are doing, and why, could provide some impetus for a closer examination of whether descriptive methods used are upholding archival principles and standards effectively in the individual circumstances of each archive.

3.5 Theoretical framework

This study used as a framework two theoretical models. The Diffusion of Innovations model was used to examine attributes influencing adoption of the AuSS, while the Records Continuum model was used to look at the contexts of creation, management and use of descriptive records.

3.5.1 Diffusion of Innovations

The AuSS represented a significant innovation in archival theory, replacing the record-group concept of a one-to-one relationship between creators and records with the concept of many-to-many relationships between records creators and record series and items, where the relationships should also be described. In order to discover the factors involved in the adoption, or otherwise, of this innovation, a useful model could be Everett Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations model (Rogers, 2003).

Rogers defined diffusion as "the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system" (p.5) and innovation as "an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption" (p.12). He described five stages of the adoption process: knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation and confirmation. He also described five attributes which could influence an individual's decision to implement an innovation: relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability and observability. He noted the need for champions and agents of change in order for innovations to be adopted, and also divided adopters into categories including innovators, early adopters and late adopters. These attributes and the concept of the need for champions and agents of change suggested potential factors which could relate to the diffusion of the AuSS, and it was thought they could provide a framework for categorising and analysing the factors influencing implementation decisions. Using the five stages of the adoption process, once the data was been collected an attempt was made to determine where in the stages of adoption most institutions, and factors, lie.

Yakel and Kim (2005) used Rogers' five attributes as well as the five stages of innovation as a framework in their survey of 399 archives and manuscript repositories to investigate the implementation of Encoded Archival Description, and found the model revealed critical factors inhibiting its adoption, including small staff size, lack of standardisation in descriptive practices, lack of institutional infrastructure, and difficulty in maintaining expertise.

Further research into innovations in archival description practices used a survey approach without a stated theoretical framework. Duff (1999) described a survey to investigate the acceptance and implementation of the Canadian Rules for Archival

Description (RAD), distributing a questionnaire to all 742 members of the Canadian Council of Archives. The survey revealed a strong relationship between the use of RAD, description undertaken at a higher contextual level, and the involvement of professionals in descriptive work. She suggested that extensive national training initiatives and compliance requirements had encouraged its use.

Another survey into EAD implementation was reported on by Yaco (2008), following up on Yakel and Kim's 2005 survey. Yaco selected 16 archivists at institutions that wanted to implement EAD but were experiencing problems. The final question in the survey was an open-ended one requesting comments on barriers to EAD implementation. Like Yakel and Kim, Yaco found institutions with more archivists were more likely to implement EAD. Technology issues were cited as a barrier, as was attempting to work alone without the assistance of IT staff. Other key barriers included a lack of institutional support, and a desire to rewrite the legacy finding aids.

3.5.2 Records Continuum Model

Upward and McKemmish's Records Continuum model (Upward, 1996) is a way of looking at the relationship between recordkeeping and accountability, analysing the many different levels of influence on the creation of a record, and the different dimensions in which a record simultaneously exists and can have an effect. Records are seen as having "complex and dynamic social, functional, provenancial and documentary contexts of creation, management and use through space-time" (McKemmish, 2005, p.14). There are four dimensions in the records continuum model:

- *Create*: the actors carrying out the act, the act itself, documents recording it, and the trace or representation of the act.
- *Capture*: personal and corporate records systems capturing documents in context
- *Organise*: the organisation of recordkeeping processes – the manner in which a corporate body defines its recordkeeping regime
- *Pluralise*: the way the records are brought into a framework to provide a collective social, historical and cultural memory of institutionalised purposes of people and corporate bodies

The records continuum model also describes four axes representing accountability for records: *transactionality*: records as products of activities; *identity*: who made and kept the records; *evidentiality*: records as evidence, with integrity and continuity; and *recordkeeping containers*: the objects created in order to store records. (Upward, 2005, p.202). Records potentially exist in multiple dimensions (Loo, Eberhard & Bettington, 2008, p.22).

The centrality of the records continuum model to recordkeeping theory is seen in its use as the framework for ISO 15489.1 - 2002, the international recordkeeping standard.

Finding aids are themselves records created by Archives as part of their function of preserving, describing and providing access to archives. At the same time they capture the archives they describe, allowing for them to be organised within the organisation's recordkeeping regime, however it is defined, and bringing them into a framework to be pluralised. Viewing finding aids through a records continuum lens allows them to be examined within their context of creation and use, considering all of the different dimensions and axes of the continuum when looking at factors influencing decisions on descriptive systems. This requires questions not only about the people creating the finding aids and the systems in which they are maintained, but also about the wider organisational systems, the organisational culture, and the relative place in the wider cultural heritage framework which the respondents view as the position of their own Archives.

4 Problem statement and research objectives

Based on the potential factors suggested by the literature review, and on Rogers' diffusion of innovations model, as well as the records continuum model, the research questions were:

- What are the barriers to implementation of the Australian Series System in New Zealand archives?
- What are the motivators for implementation of the Australian Series System in New Zealand archives?
- Does the presence of these barriers and motivators consistently predict implementation?

Archival description needs to meet the challenges and opportunities of the complex context, content and structures of archives in an increasingly electronically-connected and culturally diverse society.

4.1 Research objectives

The main objective of this study was to investigate the current state of description in New Zealand Archives, and which factors have an impact on descriptive decisions. The results should help to illustrate the effect of context on descriptive practice, and whether decisions are made after careful consideration of the relative benefits of different options, or more often by default. The answers to these research questions could provide a background for better-targeted educational initiatives, improved collaboration between archival institutions and improved practice by highlighting gaps in knowledge regarding description within the New Zealand archival community, the extent to which variations in descriptive practice reflect differences in organisational culture, and the extent to which descriptive decisions come down to resources or the decisions of managers without archival knowledge.

5 Paradigm

The positivist paradigm, developed in the natural sciences, asserts that knowledge should be based on what can be objectively observed and measured (Williamson, 2002), and assumes that observer objectivity is possible. From the findings, generalisations are made.

In contrast to positivism, interpretivism is based on the belief that “the social world is interpreted or constructed by people and is therefore different from the world of nature” (Williamson, 2002, p.30).

Gilliland and McKemmish (2004, p.167) note the value of interpretivist approaches in “developing in-depth understandings of particular instances that assist in understanding other instances, taking into account their particular contexts.” They also note the close ties between the interpretive paradigm and structuration and post-modernism. Using the records continuum model as a basis for research emphasises the contingent nature of records, with diverse and changing contexts of creation. Thus it has relevance researching the formative role played by archivists in creating description about the records they hold. They also point out the post-modern view of

records as being both fixed as to content and structure as well as mutable as to context as they move through space and time.

Williamson describes post-positivism as the belief that although reality exists, it is not easy to discover, and to improve understanding insider views should also be sought. She suggests combining positivist and interpretivist approaches can provide a fuller understanding of topics, but suggests care should be taken due to their differing purposes, methods and outcomes. Gilliland and McKemmish also argue for the combination of the two paradigms in archival research, as different phenomena are better understood from different viewpoints. Cresswell and Plano Clark (2007) support this view, saying that sometimes there is benefit in combining concepts of both paradigms in separate but complementary sections of a research project.

This study combines elements which are observable in a “real-world”, positivist sense, such as size of institution, physical resources available, and whether concepts of the AuSS have been used in description, as well as elements better understood through an interpretivist approach, relating to the way individual archivists and institutions construct their view of their collection, its context, and the most appropriate methods of description for that collection. Together, they form a post-positivist approach, where factors affecting decisions are contingent on individual circumstances, but discoverable.

6 Research design and methodology

6.1 Research methodology

Quantitative methodologies – used mainly in the positivist paradigm – are used to answer questions of fact such as “who”, “when” or “how much”. In contrast, questions such as “why” and “how” are better answered using qualitative approaches (Williamson, 2002). Combining these methodologies is a research design known as “mixed methods”. Cresswell and Plano Clark (2007, p.9) argue that qualitative research adds context to quantitative research, while quantitative research adds generalisability, and arguably less observer bias, to qualitative research.

This current study combined two methods of collecting data within a survey framework and then correlated the results, in order to achieve the aim of gaining a broad view of the current level of use of concepts of the AuSS in Archives in New

Zealand, as well as some understanding of the context within which decisions as to descriptive systems were made.

The quantitative data, collected using closed questions in the questionnaire provided empirical evidence such as whether concepts of the AuSS have been used, resources of the Archives, presence of a trained archivist and type of training, presence of other types of collections and the systems used to describe them, whether the archivist has experience with the AuSS, type of institution, physical type of records held, source of records, type of existing systems and technology and how long the system has been in use. Some attitudes data was collected using quantitative methodology, and further explained and contextualised with the qualitative data.

Qualitative data, collected using open-ended questions, covered areas such as attitudes and beliefs of the archivists as to whether their records have simple or complex provenance, their understandings of appropriate description, their understandings of the requirements placed on them due to their institution's culture, whether they differentiate or place different importance on archives as evidence for accountability and archives as cultural heritage items, and their beliefs as to the benefits or difficulties of implementing the AuSS, as well as their stated reasons for whether its concepts have been included in their finding aids. The use of open-ended questions to a degree reduces potential bias in the closed questions, which were developed based on existing theories as set out above, on the researcher's interpretation of the literature surveyed and the researcher's world view relating to archival description. They could reveal factors not considered or tested by the closed questions. The data was analysed separately and then the findings compared and used to verify, to illustrate and to complement each other.

Although the qualitative data collected in this way is limited, compared with the richer data which could be gathered from a case-study methodology or semi-structured interviews, for example, this was selected due to the desire to include as many different contexts as possible, to find the most comprehensive possible range of potential factors, to cover as much of New Zealand as possible to gain a broad view of the situation throughout the country, and due to time and resource constraints on data collection. From this wide-ranging survey, the data collected was examined for broad

themes, the quantitative data tested to see how it fitted with suggested themes, and the qualitative data used to search for themes emerging from the answers.

6.2 Specific procedures

Gilliland and McKemmish (2004) recommend the use of surveys, interviews or focus groups to “produce systematic, representative, qualitative and quantifiable data” on predetermined questions from individuals in a targeted population for the surveying of current archival practices (p.186).

A combination of an online survey and a postal self-completion questionnaire, with identical questions, was selected. Some institutions have very few resources, with limited or no access to the internet, and excluding these institutions would bias the results. Those institutions with email contacts were sent the online survey, and all others the postal survey. There was a concern that this would introduce a bias to the results in the amount of data returned via the different formats, but the results showed no difference in quantity of written response between online and postal participants.

The questionnaire included closed and open questions, including a “please explain” or “further comments” after each closed question, to allow for answers to be qualified where desired. Further open questions provided larger amounts of space for participants’ free expression of their interpretation of the purposes of description, the most appropriate method of description for their collection, their attitudes to the concepts of single, parallel or multiple provenance and context / content relationships as they relate to their collection, and their interpretation of the most significant factors determining the choice of descriptive system for their archives. These questions were very open so as to bias the responses as little as possible in the direction of prior expectations of the questioner. The space provided for answers was a visual cue that detailed replies were sought, and the questions were worded to encourage answers as long and “data-rich” as possible. Respondents were encouraged to write “stories” (Bryman, 2008, p.560) about their attitudes to description and their description system decisions, or that of their institution. However, as many archivists were likely to lack the time or interest to provide long answers, it was emphasised that any response, however brief, would be appreciated.

The closed questions were written to establish concrete facts such as collection size. Some of the closed questions, such as those relating to type of collection and organisation, one relating to type of system, and several relating to the way provenance was documented, were taken from Delaney's survey as the same information was sought, and the intention was to build on this earlier survey.

The questionnaire attempted to clearly describe any potentially misinterpreted archival concepts, as Delaney found that there was some lack of understanding or differing interpretation of archival terms amongst some participants in her survey.

The questionnaire was accompanied by a covering letter setting out the aims of the survey, emphasising its confidentiality and that reported results would not identify individual institutions, asking for participation and explaining the value of the survey to the participants and to the wider archival and archives-using community. It asked that the questionnaire be completed by the most senior person in the organisation responsible for archival description. Postal surveys included a stamped addressed envelope for the return of the questionnaire and both surveys provided the option to request summarised results as further measures intended to increase participation. See Appendices I and II for copies of the questionnaire, covering letter and consent form.

The greatest risk to the validity of this survey was a low response rate, so to increase responses follow-up emails were sent after the due date, with thanks to the many who had responded, a re-emphasis of the value of the survey, and requests for response from those who had not yet done so. These reminder emails resulted in a significant increase in the response rate. To encourage the busier archivists to respond, the value of the survey to them was emphasised. The risk of non-professional or volunteer archivists not feeling qualified to answer the questionnaire was met by the covering letter which spelled out the value of their contributions. Fears that they would be judged and found wanting were allayed by stating explicitly that the survey was intended to gain as clear a picture as possible of description as it actually is, rather than a test of whether it is meeting any particular standards. Attending to these risks resulted in responses from a wide range of archivists from all levels of experience and knowledge.

Survey participants were not told that the objectives of the study related to the use of the AuSS, as it was considered that this could have deterred those archivists who had not heard of it, or were not using it.

6.3 Research population

The targeted population in this survey was all of the archival institutions in New Zealand, and the respondents were located using similar but updated sources to those used by Delaney, as the most comprehensive available lists – the Directory of Archives in New Zealand (Archives New Zealand, 2009) and The Community Archive (2010), formerly the National Register of Archives and Manuscripts (NRAM). There are 214 institutions listed in the Directory, while the Community Archive currently has 357 contributors listed, so it was necessary to compare and combine the lists for comprehensive coverage. All of the institutions in the population were included in the survey, though there were many non-respondents despite efforts to minimise this potential limitation.

All entries in The Community Archive were checked, and some were found to be repeated, while many others had been included as part of a Theatre Archive project which identified individuals who may or may not have held theatre-related archives. Many of these individuals were excluded from the survey unless they specifically stated that they held archives. Despite this, several who were included emailed to say that they held no archives, and were deleted from the total. Some had been seriously affected by the Christchurch earthquakes of September 2010 and February 2011, but some of these did send responses relating to the former arrangement of their collections, and future plans. Their willingness to participate despite their very difficult circumstances was greatly appreciated.

The total number of questionnaires sent out was 245. Of these, 35 were sent by post and 210 by email. One emailed respondent subsequently requested a copy on paper, and answered by post.

6.4 Pilot study

The questionnaire was tested on a small group of archivists, both from institutions which use the AuSS in description and those which do not, including Archives of large organisations and small collecting Archives, who were not included in the main

study, in order to test for issues such as poorly-worded questions and perceived bias. A few minor changes were made to the wording of two questions, and the option to comment was added to questions on whether the archive was open to the public, and on the main type of description used. This question was also altered to allow more than one type to be ticked, as some said they used two or more equally.

6.5 Delimitations and limitations

Delimitations

The research is confined to Archives in New Zealand listed in either or both of the *Directory of Archives in New Zealand* (2009) and *The Community Archive*. This may exclude some New Zealand Archives not listed perhaps due to lack of awareness or a desire for privacy.

Limitations

The greatest risk to the validity of this study was too few respondents, so much effort went into mitigating this risk, resulting in a response rate of approximately 35 percent.

The results can be generalised only to those institutions participating in the study, but could be used as a basis for comparison with other archival institutions, for example in other parts of the world.

Differing understandings of archival principles and terms may lead respondents to represent their descriptive practices differently from how they might be understood by others. To increase consistency of results terms were clearly defined, and quantitative and qualitative data was correlated.

7 Data analysis

7.1 Initial analysis – determining degree of implementation of the AuSS

First, the qualitative and quantitative data were used in combination to determine the degree to which each organisation had implemented the Australian series system, according to their replies to specific questions. This part of the analysis was carried out before any further qualitative or quantitative analysis was begun, by comparing their responses with the criteria as set out in the definition above, to determine whether they fell into one of three predetermined categories: “Yes” – full

implementation; “Some elements” – partial implementation; “No” – AuSS not implemented.

This categorisation was used in comparing aspects of the remainder of the quantitative and qualitative data, as described below, in order to find possible correlations between suggested factors and the implementation of the AuSS.

7.2 Analysis, quantitative data

The answers to closed questions were coded into an Excel spreadsheet using a coding schedule derived from the questions. As the entire population rather than a random sample was surveyed, and the response rate was only 35 percent, the results are not generalisable beyond those institutions participating (Williamson, 2002, p.97) and thus descriptive statistics were the most appropriate form of analysis, describing the characteristics of the institutions and the types of descriptive practice pertaining to each variable. The variables were mainly nominal, with a few ordinal or interval/ratio. First, totals were calculated for each variable, and where there were a large number of possible options, for example for Question 7 (“What training in archival description do you have?”) bar charts were drawn to allow visual analysis.

Bivariate analysis was carried out between assessed use of AuSS and other variables for an explanatory survey, by combining results for individual Archives for two variables and then assessing the correlation both visually, using column charts, and mathematically, using an online contingency table generator (Kirkman, 1996). Any apparent correlations were tested for statistical significance and strength of relationship using chi-square and Cramér’s V, and it was possible to arrive at conclusions -generalisable only to the institutions which responded to the survey – as to which factors may be significant. The results showed relationships between some variables, described below, though they cannot show causation (Williamson, p.97), and it is possible that apparent relationships may be due to other variables which have not been measured.

The contingency table generated a Chi-square and p-value, together with an indication of degrees of freedom. The Chi-square test measures the probability of independence between values. It should be noted that the Chi-square test is intended for use with random samples, and this sample is not random, but is instead self-selected by the

entire population of Archives in New Zealand. Similarly, where expected cell counts are less than five, Chi-square results are not seen to be accurate. Thus, the results should be seen to be indicative of the sample only, and cannot be confidently extrapolated to the entire population. Another limitation of Chi-square tests is that values must be mutually exclusive, so where multiple options have been selected by individuals the test cannot be used. Where this was the case, the questions were broken up into “yes or no” options: eg “Do you have a formal qualification – yes or no” was separated from the “Training” question which asked for all types of training, and the Chi-square test done across this data instead. It should be noted that the respondents did not actively choose a “yes or no” option but that this was assumed from their choosing whether or not to tick the option. Thus, errors could result from their choosing not to look at all of the options. For a view across all of the options for these questions, the column charts were used instead.

The p-value is calculated using the Chi-square value and the degrees of freedom. The resulting p-value for each analysis showed the probability that the apparent correlation shown by the table was due to chance. A p-value of less than 0.05 is generally considered statistically significant – this would mean that there is a less than 5 % probability that the correlation observed is due to chance (University of Pennsylvania, 2008), and therefore the null hypothesis that there is no correlation could be rejected. However, it does not explain the meaning of the relationship, and does not imply causation.

Next, the results of the Chi-square test were used to calculate Cramer’s V for each correlation. This is a measure of the strength of an assessed correlation, and can vary from 0 to 1, with 1 being the strongest correlation. Cramer’s V is equal to $\sqrt{(\chi^2/N(k-1))}$, where χ^2 is the Chi-square value, N is the grand total of observations, and k is the number of rows or columns, whichever is less. The p-value for this is the same as for the Chi-square test.

7.3 Analysis, qualitative data

As many of the respondents commented extensively, it was possible to carry out content analysis of the answers, first reading through them as they arrived to get a general impression of concepts. Next, the responses were read line by line, and remarks pertinent to choice of description were coded. After all responses had been

coded, the codes were reviewed and analysed for emerging themes, and possible connections or causation suggested by the respondents. The research questions were kept in mind, but at the same time new ideas emerging from the data were noted (Bryman, 2008, Charmaz, 2006). Emerging themes were analysed to see whether they appeared more often in specific contexts.

The codes were then ranked according to how many respondents had made comments relating to them, and it was assumed that those most frequently commented upon were likely to be significant factors to more respondents than those with fewer comments.

It is important to note that a respondent may not have commented in a particular category despite this being a factor in their descriptive decisions, but it has been assumed that respondents are more likely to have commented on factors that are of most significance to them.

7.4 Combined analysis

Results from the quantitative and qualitative analyses were compared and contrasted in several ways, for consistency and to gain a more comprehensive picture of factors involved – a design described by Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) as a convergence model, designed to improve validity and well-substantiated conclusions, and to better describe complex situations (Jenkins, 2001 and Yaco, 2008).

The factors found to be significant in the quantitative data were matched against the codes arising from the qualitative data, and it was noted where these results reinforced each other, and where new factors were suggested by the different data.

Next, Rogers' diffusion of innovations model was used for further analysis of the factors drawn out from the combined data. The five stages of innovation were used to attempt to group institutions according to where they stand in relation to the use of the AuSS, and the factors suggested by the analyses were grouped according to Rogers' five attributes, and his concept of agents of change, to discover whether this could add to the understanding of the effect of the factors on decisions on descriptive practice.

Finally, the records continuum model was used to map the factors across the four dimensions of the model and its four axes of accountability, in order to find where in the continuum major influences on descriptive practices lie.

8 Results

From 245 questionnaires sent, there were 86 usable responses, broken down into 76 out of 210 online questionnaires and 10 out of 35 postal questionnaires. In addition, four replied to refuse due to lack of time, one said they had lost their Archive in the Christchurch earthquake, one no longer had an archivist, one had no collection, and seven had a problem with the online questionnaire which could not be resolved despite repeated attempts. For others who replied to say they had technical problems, solutions were found. Another reason for lack of response was that contact details were not all up to date – some contacted me or forwarded the questionnaires to others, while others did not respond. Finally, the amalgamation of organisations such as Councils further reduced the total number of Archives in NZ from those listed.

The responses provided a very large quantity of data. Many took the opportunity to comment on their answers or on description in general, and this was useful for clarification and also suggested additional factors. The results for quantitative and qualitative data are described separately below, and then combined.

8.1 Results of quantitative analysis

For seventeen factors the p-value was less than 0.05, suggesting that the null hypothesis could be rejected and that there was a possible correlation between the choice to use the AuSS and the factor. Other factors showed some apparent correlation but it could not be proved that this was not due to chance.

The strongest correlation was found with the statement (Q23, option 19) “The collection has a complex administrative background ...” (see Table 1). The p-value for this was 0.000 and the Cramer’s V was 0.565, indicating a relatively strong correlation and a very low probability that this was due to chance.

	Complex admin background				
	Yes		No		Totals
Use AuSS?	Number	%	Number	%	
Yes	8	53	3	4	11
Some elements	4	27	23	33	27
No	3	20	43	62	46
TOTAL	15		69		84

Table 1. Contingency table showing the relationship between a collection with a complex administrative background and use of the AuSS

A weaker, but still statistically significant correlation was found with the statement (Q23, option 20) “The collection has a very simple administrative background, with one-to-one relationships between creators and series” ($p=0.034$, Cramer’s $V=0.284$). No people agreeing with this statement had fully implemented the AuSS, though four were using some elements.

The next-strongest correlation, perhaps not surprisingly, was with Q28 “Have you heard of the AuSS?” ($p=0.000$, Cramer’s $V = 0.53$). However, possibly more surprising was that finding that not all those using elements of the AuSS said that they had heard of it: see Figure 1.

Figure 1- Correlation: Heard of AuSS? / Using AuSS

Correlations were also found with others in the organisation having used the AuSS in the past ($p=0.029$, Cramer’s $V=0.701$). Although this appears to be a very strong correlation, it is a little less clear due to the small number of respondents to this question ($n=29$), as it was only asked of those who said they had heard of the AuSS. It is stronger than the correlation with those who have used it in the past in a different institution ($p=0.165$, Cramer’s $V=0.36$), perhaps because many respondents had been in the same institution for most of their career.

Significant correlations were found relating to the size of collections ($p=0.000$, Cramer’s $V=0.408$). In fact, none of the institutions with the smallest collections had fully implemented the AuSS. Large collections were those with at least 500 linear metres of textual material, while small collections had less than 50. Seventeen institutions did not state the collection size (one person stated “I have no idea”) - where possible, these were estimated given other evidence in the individual responses. This correlation could relate to other factors, such as resources available to larger institutions, or perceived relative advantage. Multivariate analysis was not possible due to the time available for this research, but this type of further analysis could be useful.

The availability of resources was found to be significant in some cases. For example, “number of staff” was a factor which correlated with use ($p=0.001$, Cramer’s $V=0.4$). Most institutions with few staff were not using the AuSS. However, as can be seen from Figure 2 (below), some institutions with only one staff member were using the AuSS, so low staff numbers do not completely rule out its use. Therefore other factors are clearly at play.

Figure 2 – Correlation: Number of staff / Using AuSS

Hours spent doing description per week showed only a weak correlation, and chance could not be ruled out for the correlation that did appear ($p=0.088$, Cramer’s $V=0.29$).

Graphing the use of the AuSS against type of institution did appear to show some relationship (Figure 3), though the significance could not be measured due to the large number of options and small number of respondents for each variable. This relationship may relate in some way to the relative size of collections as well as other factors such as institutional culture, and this multivariate analysis could be done in the future. No public libraries fall into the “yes” category, but half have implemented some elements. Note that museums are often using some elements – it could be possible to speculate that this may be due to their institutional culture of belief in significance of provenance, which could be worth further investigation in a separate study.

Figure3 – Correlation: Type of institution / Using AuSS

The type of descriptive system the respondents said they were using did appear to correlate to the use of the AuSS (Figure 4), but not as strongly as some other correlations, and there was a more than 5% probability that the correlation could be due to chance ($p=0.055$, Cramer's $V=0.44$).

Figure 4 – Correlation: Main descriptive system / Using AuSS

Some respondents said they were using a series system, but were not using the AuSS, while others said they were using other systems and were using some or most elements of the AuSS – often because they had not heard of it (see Figure 5). Some were using different systems for different groups of archives.

Figure 5 – Correlation: Type of institution / Heard of AuSS

When it came to training in archival description, it was difficult to find any strong correlations for most types. Again, many respondents had many different types of training, and all three choices regarding use of the AuSS were reflected in recipients of most types of training (see Figure 6).

Figure 6 – Correlation: Training / Using AuSS

It can be seen from this graph that none of those using the AuSS have had no training, and the majority of those with a formal archives qualification are using it to some degree. As the total number using the AuSS is only 11 out of the 75 respondents to this question, the amount of training they have done relative to others in the graph is

higher than it appears, and overall, relative to number of respondents, those using the AuSS to any degree have more training by than those not using it at all.

Breaking this down further into individual types of training (eg “Formal qualification: yes / no”) no correlations could be found that were statistically significant.

However, when the methods used by respondents to keep up to date (Q10; n=75) was analysed, some statistically significant correlations were found. The strongest of these were “Belong to online discussion group” – (p=0.000, Cramer’s V=0.408), and some association was also found with “Attend conferences” – (p=0.007, Cramer’s V=0.364). Figure 7 below shows also that no-one who had fully implemented the AuSS believed keeping up to date was not needed, and also those using the AuSS to some degree were relatively more likely to be using methods of keeping up to date.

Figure 7 – Correlation: How keep up to date / Using AuSS

When the respondents were specifically asked why they chose their particular method of description (Q23; n=84), few of the options revealed statistically significant correlations with use of AuSS. Two of these have already been described: a belief that the collection has a relatively complex, or a relatively simple administrative background. Another was “I/we studied all available systems and decided that this was the best for us” (p=0.002, Cramer’s V=0.38), with those agreeing with the statement more likely to be using the AuSS. Another was “It meets external descriptive standards” (p=0.005, Cramer’s V=0.36), again with those using AuSS more likely to agree. It was also more likely that those using the AuSS would select

the statement “I /We have used it elsewhere and found it effective” ($p=0.047$, Cramer’s $V=0.3$). However, there was no statistically significant correlation with other statements, including those relating to resources, ease of use, time, or view of archives as part of a continuum. See Figure 8 for an overview of the relative responses.

Figure 8 – Correlation: Why do you use descriptive system you have / Using AuSS

It can be seen from Figure 8 that there are a few options that have been chosen by none of the respondents who have fully implemented the AuSS: These are “The choice is restricted by funding”, “I/we do not know any other way of describing archives”, “The archives are only used in-house and do not need to be searched by anyone else”, and “The collection has a very simple administrative background.”

The option chosen most often by those not using any elements of the AuSS was “It’s easy to use”, followed by “It describes the collection very effectively.” The option chosen most often by those fully implementing the AuSS was “It describes the collection very effectively”, followed by “The collection has a complex administrative background and I need to reflect this in the description.” More than half of these also chose “I/we studied all available systems and decided this was the best for us” and “My predecessor chose it.” For those using some elements, the options chosen most often were “My predecessor chose it” and “It fits in with the

software available in our organisation.” More than half of these also chose “It’s easy to use” and “It describes the collection very effectively.”

Questions relating to attitudes of respondents to statements about archives and archivists were also asked (Q27), but only one of these showed a statistically significant correlation. This was “Archivists are neutral custodians of their collections” (n=76, p=0.007, Cramer’s V=3.62), with those using the AuSS less likely to agree with the statement, suggesting they adhere more to a post-modern view that it is impossible for an archivist to be completely objective.

The format of finding aids (Q34) showed some statistically significant correlation with the use of the AuSS, with those not using the AuSS less likely to be using fully electronic finding aids, no-one fully implementing the AuSS using only paper finding aids – and only one using some elements in this category (n=82, p=0.038, Cramer’s V=0.249).

Figure 9 – Correlation: Format of finding aids / Using AuSS

Whether the Archive was open to the public was found to be correlated with the use of the AuSS (n=79, p=0.018, Cramer’s V=0.318). All institutions fully implementing the AuSS were open to the public.

When looking at the archives themselves, there was only a relatively weak correlation with whether the respondent believed any of their archives had more than one creator, and the null hypothesis could not be rejected (n=81, p=0.070, Cramer’s V=0.231). However, a stronger relationship was found when asked if any of their archives had more than one original order: those saying “yes” were more likely to be using the

AuSS (n=81, p=0.040, Cramer's V=0.248). This is not a strong correlation, but it is statistically significant.

8.2 Results of qualitative analysis

(See Appendix III for complete list of coded factors and number of respondents whose comments fell into those categories)

Coding the comments revealed 28 categories, or factors, cited as being related to decisions on descriptive systems, as well as 4 other types of comment on description. Some of the factors were equally common across those using or not using the AuSS, while others were more common in one group than another.

8.2.1 Factors affecting description and descriptive system choice

Resources

The most-commonly mentioned factor, cited by 40 respondents out of the total 86, was lack of resources, including funding, time or staff – e.g. (E66N)¹ “Development of better finding aids is often restricted by time pressures”; (E36N) “Part time means no time to investigate...and familiarise myself with a new system”, and (E42Y) “...number of staff and lack of resources...” This, although slightly less common in those in the category “yes” (36%) rather than category “some elements” (54%) or “no” (47%), was relatively consistent across all groups, and often related to their reluctance to change the system they were using. However, for some it was stated as a limit on their description, or the adoption of the AuSS – eg [we do not use different descriptive fields for archival and non-archival items because of] “Lack of time, facilities, training” (E20S), “I would very much like to fully adopt the series system but it is very difficult with the resources I have at hand” (E10S).

Related also to resources, size of collection was mentioned by 12 respondents across all groups, usually for large archives as a limiting factor on the ability to change or the ability to provide detailed description, or for smaller archives, as a reason for not needing detailed description or the AuSS.

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¹ Respondents are identified by a three-part code: E or P signifying online or postal response; a running number; and Y, S or N signifying full, partial or no use of the AuSS

For 23 respondents, choice of description was limited or enabled by their level of autonomy, the amount of support from management, or the relative significance of the archives in a larger collection. Those not using the AuSS were more likely to say that their choice was limited by these factors.

Technology, or the type of software chosen for the descriptive system, was cited as a factor by 30 respondents. Usually, rather than stating that the technology had been chosen in order to allow a particular type of description, it was described as a factor in enabling or limiting types of description – more often as a limit, usually by those not using the AuSS. Those using the AuSS were more likely to cite features of their software positively. For example, E16Y “As part of our database the archives can be searched by using the programme and there is no need to index,” and (E74S) “Our software can be modified, and we are still working on refining description.” In contrast, (E66N) “our CMS isn’t especially well built to accommodate the Australian series system,” and (E40N) “Our current system is adequate but not ideal, which is why we are changing to [a different type of software]”

Access, use and users

The next most-commonly mentioned factor related to the desire to provide better or easier access to archives (33 respondents) – eg (E41N) “To enable quick reference”; (E56Y) “...enables users to more effectively drill down to different levels of the fond.” Again, all groups were represented relatively equally, though for those in category “yes” it was most common (55%), followed by “no” (38%) and “some elements” (36%).

Twenty-one comments related to the types of use or user of their collections. Once more there was no significant difference in the proportions across the groups. For example, (E22N) “It is sufficient for the research I am called upon to do,” (E46N) “Our system also suits our customers and the type of enquiries we receive.” (E16Y) “[We describe relationships between agencies for] research purposes”; (E18Y) “Researchers find subject indexes easy to use in sourcing information;” (E28S) “Very effective for finding specific projects which is the way the collection is generally used,” (E18Y) “[Describing relationships between agencies] is particularly useful for identifying both family and organisational relationships.”

Perceived relative advantage

Twenty-nine respondents made comments regarding the effectiveness or perceived relative advantage of their descriptive system – again, the percentages across groups were relatively evenly spread. However, the idea of what made a system effective differed according to the environment and knowledge of the respondent. For example, a comment from someone with a Post-Graduate Certificate in Archives and Records, in a large collecting archive, who had heard of the AuSS: (E56Y) “[Using the AuSS] makes sense in terms of preserving the context of creation, even with person and family papers. It also enables users to more effectively drill down to different levels of the "fond" by grouping records with similar context together.” In contrast, a respondent with no awareness of the AuSS described subject indexing as (E31N) “the most logical and easy to follow description.” A third respondent with no formal training, in a relatively small regional archive for a national organisation, when asked whether different rules or fields were used in describing archives in contrast with non-archival items, stated (P49N) “Don’t see the need,” and when asked whether they describe relationships between series or items stated “Probably haven’t considered it necessary.” Another respondent, also working in a collecting archive, and with awareness of but no previous experience with the AuSS stated (E66N) “Ours is a Museum collection and is often comprised of ephemeral items rather than sets / series of records.” However, the same respondent noted their finding aids could be improved with “Better depth and context”, but was limited by time pressures.

A belief in the need to reflect the context of archives was mentioned by 17 respondents. Seven of the 11 respondents whose archives had implemented the AuSS explicitly mentioned this, whereas only 3 of the 45 without the AuSS did so, and one of these (E66N) stated that their finding aids would be improved with “better depth and context.”

A desire to describe archives as fully as possible, or to improve users’ understanding of them, was mentioned by 13 respondents, spread evenly across all levels of adoption.

Knowledge, background and views of the archivist

The level of knowledge or skills of the respondent or others in the organisation was cited by 20 respondents as a limiting factor. Only one of these had fully adopted the AuSS, and in this case it had been introduced by somebody else. Three had implemented “some elements.” One of these commented on their lack of archives-related knowledge: (E64S) “The search does not always work the way I expect (I have a library background) and I can have difficulty relating complex collections.” The other two, discussing why they had not yet fully implemented the AuSS, referred to a need for more information and expert assistance: (E74S) “It requires more investigation and discussion with other authorities ie Archives New Zealand”; and (E34S) “we are working on a project to employ a qualified archivist short term to establish a robust procedure for us.”

Familiarity with a particular system was mentioned by two respondents as a factor – one had used the AuSS in a previous job, and one Record Groups (E6Y, E45N).

Other comments relating to the personal qualities of those doing descriptions included one from someone about to completely re-describe their collection to correct inconsistencies: (P8N) “Most volunteers have their own field of expertise. No one person is in charge of how the collection is arranged and described. Since the collection began about 50 years ago, different persons have recorded the acquisitions, and all have used a different system.” One described the strong influence of the original describer: (E61S) “The archive is the result of one person's work over many years, and her interest lay mainly in the prominent families and settlers of the [x] district, so that is how the archives are described.” Another (P11N) stated that they would need to wait to change their system until their current volunteers, mostly computer-illiterate, had left. Finally, one stated (E4N) “I have no interest in keeping up to date. This is an informal role.”

A strong belief in the significance of context was reflected for two respondents who had implemented by the AuSS, whose postmodern world view was reflected in their comments that the context of archivists and their collections would determine their answers to the (Q27) “attitudes” questions - eg (E67Y) “In different contexts it would be possible to make a strong argument for either of the options in most cases.” Thus, for them context was significant both for archives and for archivists.

Nature of the archives and the collection

The intrinsic nature of the archives themselves was a factor mentioned by many of the respondents. Those using the AuSS were more likely to refer to the nature and content of the archives as a factor – e.g. (P10Y) “We have used some of the features of the series system ... to deal with the complexities of series of church records that may be created by more than one Parish or Minister” whereas those not using the AuSS were more likely to refer to the physical format – eg (E54N) “We have a uniform collection, a Library, Photographic Images, Films, Video Tapes, DVDs and music which require differing descriptions.” One physical format that was mentioned by those implementing the AuSS was electronic records – two commented on its value for describing them.

Eight respondents commented that their system helped them deal with complex relationships in their collections. All of these had partially or fully adopted the AuSS. Five commented that their collections had simple relationships – one of these had adopted some features of the AuSS, while the other four had not adopted it.

Seventeen referred to the nature of the collection as a whole: e.g. (P10Y) “The nature of our archives (being in collections) means it is more effective to use archival methods of description”; (E62Y) “Best system for our holdings”; (E63N) “archives are coincidental to our main collection”; (E59S) “As a community archive we have many links between personal and community generated records, with personalities appearing in many roles.” Discussing interaction between the nature of the collection and the view of the archivist, one noted that archivists could aspire to neutrality but find it difficult (E32S) “Especially when they work in a museum where their own history and friends / family history is related.”

Inherited systems

Many respondents were using systems originally implemented by others, and 16 commented on this as a factor in their description, either as a limit on their ability to describe as well as they would like – e.g. (E17N) “An earlier volunteer set up material under subject matter (as a librarian would) and I have spent 3 years undoing that!!”, or as a reason for their choice – e.g. (E11S) “It was the way the archives were set up before I came and I have found it very convenient.”

Input from others: networking, and advice from external experts

Fourteen respondents mentioned networking as a method used in keeping up to date with descriptive practices: (E6Y) “Networking with other archivists from city,” (E55N) “Informal networking.” Two in larger organisations indicated that they networked with peers within their organisation to make decisions. A greater proportion of those who had adopted the AuSS mentioned networking (4 out of 11) than those who had not (4 out of 45). Some respondents noted that they had adopted similar systems to those they networked with.

The advice of external experts was mentioned as a factor by 10 respondents. Often these experts recommended the adoption of systems similar to their own. Thus, experts from museums would recommend the implementation of a museum collection management system (E49N). At times a lack of access to expert opinion was a limiting factor: (E21N) [regarding need for advice on using a particular system] “I cannot seem to find anyone to answer queries or offer support for problems.”

Input from others was also mentioned in discussion of information added to finding aids relating to specific archives. In all cases this was mediated by the archivist, though a few Archives provided a separate area, such as a wiki, or tagging was allowed, which allowed alternative views of the holdings. The 8 respondents using or stating that they would consider allowing tagging were all either using the AuSS or some elements.

Archival conventions and external standards

Twelve respondents referred to archival conventions such as provenance and original order, with a far larger proportion of those with the AuSS doing so (6 out of 11, compared with 4 of the 45 with no implementation). Some using only some elements noted the limitations of their system in reflecting archival conventions: e.g. (E28S) “Less effective at giving users an understanding of provenance / original order.” However, others using older archival systems such as Record Groups with no adoption of the AuSS commented that their system supported archival conventions: (E45N) “Collections are retained in their presented form as much as possible for the provenance and respect of the donor.”

External standards were also mentioned by 10 respondents - often these were archival standards such as ISAD(G), though one referred to Subjects of New Zealand descriptors, and two in library contexts to Library of Congress descriptors. Two in museum contexts referred to Chenhall's Nomenclature for Museum Cataloguing. Standards mentioned varied according to the stated knowledge and type of organisation of the archivist.

Nature of the organisation

As well as the collection itself and the background of the archivist, seven respondents explicitly mentioned the nature of the organisation as a factor – eg (E6Y) “As a local authority we have been through many amalgamations...”; (E47N) “Collection level records are based on a bibliographic approach as we are in a public library and this is what has been done historically” and (E45N) “[we describe relationships between agencies in the description field because] as a community archive we want to build the connections between the community and the archives we hold.” This respondent had not heard of the AuSS.

Information sharing or consistency of description

A wish to unite several collections within an organisation was commented on by eight respondents as a factor in their system of description. All but one of these used some degree of the AuSS. E.g. (E42Y) “The CMS is designed to allow as many forms of description...so [it] is a one stop shop for the collections”; (E25S) “We are trying to bring the archives in line with the rest of the collection”; (P3N) “since our archives link with (those of our organisation overseas), I would prefer to keep our present system - unless the others change!!”

Similarly, four expressed a wish to make their description consistent across their single collection: e.g. (E52Y) “[We are amalgamating three collections and] are in the process of coming up with a standardised way of describing records based on the [AuSS] which we use [here]”; (E24N) “[The system we are developing] will bring our resources together”; while one stated that to change their system would (E35N) “Break consistency of present archive.”

One respondent using some elements of the AuSS stated (E12S) "...it seems to be the way many archives are heading so if there was another countrywide index a common method would be useful."

Information available about archives

Finally, nine respondents commented that the information available about the archives had an effect on their descriptive choices. None of these had fully implemented the AuSS, and only one had not implemented any elements. For example, (P5S) relationships between agencies are described "Where known," and (E20S) "in many cases we do not have information". Both of these respondents stated that their description was limited by lack of time and resources.

8.2.2 Other comments regarding description

Developing systems

24 out of 86 respondents commented that they were currently developing their descriptive systems, a finding reflected in the comment of one respondent (P10Y) "Any system could always do with improvement." (The enthusiasm for the effort required for this constant improvement could be explained by the comment (E25S) "Archivists are usually passionate about their collections.")

Moments of transition / opportunity

Changes to systems were occurring for several reasons. Some were continuously developing their systems over time, while 19 referred to a time of transition or opportunity. Some had decided that their software was outdated and were looking for a replacement. Sometimes staff had changed, and the new staff members had new ideas about description. In some cases, several different collections were being amalgamated. Some believed that a growing and increasingly complex collection would need a new system, while others were finding their present system ineffective and were searching for, or had just located, a replacement. Several mentioned a new need to cater for describing electronic records. And for a very unfortunate few, a natural disaster had led to the destruction of their existing system, and an opportunity to create a new and better one.

Working around limitations

For seven respondents, using their descriptive systems was a matter of working within or around the limitations that the systems imposed on them, while eight stated that they had adjusted a system designed for other purposes – e.g. (E18Y) “I have inherited a system that applies a museum collection management system of description, but am changing this to a series system,” compared with (E23N) “As our archives are recorded in a museum application it does not provide for series.” This demonstrates the significance of the view, knowledge and level of autonomy of the archivist in choice of descriptive system.

9 Discussion

Combining the quantitative and qualitative results showed many consistencies across the data, providing a fuller picture of factors going into decision-making, and also revealing a few additional factors.

The desire to reflect complex relationships in a collection, or the belief that a collection has only simple relationships, was strongly indicated as a factor in both sets of results. Similarly, the personal views of the archivist could be seen to have an effect on whether the AuSS had been implemented. Those respondents with a belief in the significance of archival context and expressing postmodern views relating to subjectivity of archivists were more likely to be using the AuSS to some degree. Often those expressing a strong belief in the significance of context would work around the limitations of their systems to allow them to reflect context as well as they could. A few with a strong belief in the significance of provenance and original order were using record groups rather than the AuSS to reflect these, usually in collections where they believed the relationships were one-to-one. In contrast, those with less archival training were more likely to view subject as the most effective way to describe collections. Thus, many respondents had a strong belief in the effectiveness of their type of description, irrespective of the type of description they were using, but dependent on their views on what was effective.

The knowledge of the archivist was another strongly-indicated factor in decision-making, with those who had heard of the AuSS, especially those having used it in the past, very likely to be using it to some degree, and those without much training and

not keeping up to date far less likely to have heard of it. Those using the AuSS tended to have a higher level of training than others, and were more likely to have studied all available systems before deciding on the one they were using. The sources of advice used by the archivist could also be seen to have an effect, with external experts tending to recommend systems with which they were familiar.

The nature of the archives themselves and the collection as a whole was commented on as a significant factor by many – as well as the complexity of relationships, the needs of particular formats such as electronic records, audiovisual archives or archives collected for a very specific purpose and now used in a variety of different ways all threw up challenges to traditional methods of description to which respondents were still seeking solutions, and this interacted within the comments with the knowledge of the archivist, the type of institution and the resources available to them.

Types of use, users and the community in which the collection was operating also had an impact on descriptive decisions. According to the perceived needs of the users, the respondents reported the need for more or less detail in description, and particular types of description, indexing, arrangement and access.

The type of institution appeared to be a factor in the implementation of the AuSS in several interrelated ways. There was some correlation with whether the respondent had heard of the AuSS, and the level and type of training, as well as with the type of people they were networking with, the experts they consulted, and in many cases the software available to them for describing their collections. Different types of organisation also often had different types of collection, use and users, and sometimes differing user needs. Type of institution also related to size of collection.

The size of collection had several conflicting effects on the uptake of the AuSS. Larger Archives were more likely to be using it, often due to stated complexity of the collection. They were slightly more likely to say that they would find changing their existing system difficult, although several very large Archives were involved in either incremental change to their whole systems or radical change to several large collections within their organisation, despite the limits on resources in which they were working. They stated enhancing their implementation of the AuSS, either with

more contextual relationships or by bringing all collections in line with it, was necessary to improve their description. Some smaller archives stated change would be difficult due to lack of support or resources as their collection was not seen as significant by their organisation. Lack of support and resources were also seen as limits on describing collections as well as some would like. Resources, time available and staff were commonly cited as factors in description by many respondents, but as they were cited only slightly less often by those having fully implemented the AuSS than those not using it at all, other factors seemed to have a far greater influence on whether the AuSS was used.

Related to level of support and resourcing was the significance of autonomy – several noted that their level of autonomy enabled or limited their ability to implement aspects of the AuSS, though again some managed to work around the limits to implement some aspects when they stated that this was important to them.

The technical limitations and benefits of the software (or paper) used for finding aids was cited by many as an enabler or barrier to allowing the type of description they wanted to use, including aspects of the AuSS. This system may have been inherited from a previous archivist, or determined from above by the institution to which they belonged, and depended on the knowledge and view of the implementer. However, some were determined to introduce description of relationships and worked around the limitations that others saw as complete barriers. Others had replaced systems that were preventing the types of description they wished to use, and some had found benefits in the ability to describe relationships in systems they may have chosen for different reasons. As noted above, for many who were part of larger, non-archival institutions the choice of software was not theirs, and they were forced to make do with, and customise as much as possible, systems designed for describing different types of collection.

The need or desire to share information within or between institutions was another factor relating to software chosen as well as descriptive standards used. The impact of this on implementation of the AuSS depended on the type of institution with which respondents wished to share information, with those intending to information-share between Archives more likely to be using the AuSS, except where the related archives were not within Australasia.

9.1 Comparing anomalies in the results

Most institutions with large collections were using the AuSS partially or fully. The five which were not had some similarities. Although three had heard of the AuSS, none had used the system in the past, and nor did they have people in their organisation they were aware had used it. Most also stated that most or all of their archives had only one creator and saw no relative advantage in using the AuSS. One also stated that it was not compatible with their system and they had no resources to change as so many items were already described, while another said they had very little time for description. One of the five was currently changing their system but whether the new system had any elements of the AuSS was not assessed. Another said they may change in the future if they saw the need.

Most respondents who had heard of the AuSS were using it to some degree. For the six who were not, none had used it in the past, and none knew of any others in their institution who had previously used it. Four stated that it was not compatible with their existing system. Four stated that they could see no need with their collections, either due to size or a belief that their archives only have single creators and original order. However, one of these said their description needs more context. Two, including one of those who currently saw no need due to the small size of the collection, said they may use it in the future if they saw the need, and another, who said it would take too many resources to change, was already changing their system and may be introducing some elements. One stated that they did describe relationships between agencies but series were described together with collections.

The two respondents who said they had not heard of the AuSS but whose institutions had fully implemented it also had several things in common. Both agreed that their collection had a complex administrative background and they wished to reflect this in their description, and both said their archives could have more than one creator and more than one original order. Both stated their resources were limited, so this was not a barrier to implementing the system. However, both also stated they would be reluctant to change their system due to limited resources. One respondent said their predecessor had chosen the system, while the other respondent said they had used a similar system elsewhere and found it effective. This respondent, who was museum-

based, also said it fitted in with the way non-archival items in the institution were described.

9.2 Moments of transition / opportunity

The survey indicated that changes to descriptive systems could be incremental and gradual, but they could also be dramatic if an opportunity or necessity arose, particularly if the impetus came from a combination of major perceived problems with the existing system and the need to replace existing software, to amalgamate large collections with differing systems or to recreate description after a disaster or a major move. A significant factor in this was the presence of a person with the knowledge of a system they believed was better, a strong desire to implement that system, and the autonomy and resources to do so successfully – though the resources needed could vary according to the ability of the organisation to adapt and modify existing resources.

Although the survey was not developed to test the relevance of this theory to the adoption of the AuSS, these dramatic changes to systems commented on in the qualitative data appear to relate to Thomas Kuhn's (1962) concept of a paradigm shift, originally described for revolutions in scientific models but since used to describe changes in many other areas.

Working in a post-structuralist paradigm, Kuhn saw scientific knowledge as dependent on the culture and historical circumstances of a group of scientists, and said that paradigm shifts depended on the build-up of anomalies to the existing paradigm together with the development of a credible alternative, developed by "bolder individuals", which can resolve an outstanding and generally recognised problem that cannot be met in any other way, while still solving the problems its predecessors solved. Until a credible alternative is developed, practitioners continue to work within the old paradigm, working around the anomalies and seeing them as exceptions. This survey has shown archivists aware of the AuSS have often adopted it to solve problems relating to complex relationships in their collections that cannot be solved by more traditional methods of description, while those not aware of it but still needing to deal with anomalies have instead adopted sometimes less successful ways of working around their problems.

Kuhn stated that a new paradigm changed the way terminology was defined, just as provenance, original order and context under the AuSS are slightly different concepts, allowing for parallel and multiple provenance, and multiple orders and contexts, rather than those provided under the Record Group system, or used in a bibliographic or a museum context.

9.3 Mapping to Roger's diffusion of innovations theory

Although Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations theory was useful in the initial stages of this study in suggesting possible factors to test, once the survey was completed many of the results did not map usefully to his suggested attributes, as many fitted under several headings, and some did not fit easily into any of his categories. Perceived relative advantage was a category into which many of the factors did fit, and the wish to reflect a complex administrative background was one, as was the type of access, use and user. Trialability was also a useful concept, as the AuSS was very popular with those who had used it before, and unpopular with those who believed it was difficult to implement. Compatibility was another attribute in which many of the factors could fit, especially relating to technology available, beliefs about ideal description, type of use and user, and the wish to describe complex relationships. However, separating the factors into categories in this way disguised the strong interrelationships between them.

Attempting to map the level of implementation was not very successful, as a majority had not reached the first, or "knowledge" stage, while some had adopted many aspects of the innovation without any stated knowledge at all, and very few were in the intermediate stages, instead implementing some aspects fully and others not at all. Those who had fully implemented the AuSS had not necessarily done so over all of their collections.

However, Rogers' concept of an "agent of change" to introduce an innovation was well supported by the results.

9.4 Mapping to the records continuum model

Using the records continuum to map the results provides a way to describe the interrelationships of influences between the factors affecting the adoption of the AuSS.

At the centre of the continuum, in the “Create” dimension, are the archivists, the archives being described, and the individual finding aids created. The views and knowledge of the archivist, including training, previous experience of the AuSS, ideas on the best methods of description, archival conventions and standards, the needs of their users, their choice of descriptive technology, the ways they can use the systems available to them and the nature and relative complexity of their archival collection all have an impact on the way their finding aids are captured, organised and pluralised. The archives themselves, their format and content also sit in this dimension, influencing decisions on their description. At the same time, influences come in from all parts of the continuum on the archivist.

From the “pluralise” dimension the archivist can be affected by types of training received, reading archival literature, networks in the wider community, and sources of expert advice. The types of use and users, with perceived and stated needs affecting choices come from this dimension, as do societal expectations on the type of description found in particular institutions, archival concepts, conventions and standards, initiatives to share information between institutions, and ideas such as post-modernism.

In the “organise” dimension lies the institution within which the collection is held, and here the description and the archivist is affected by the level of support or autonomy provided to them, the type of organisation and its policies, resources available, and the technology and other systems within which they may have been told they must operate.. The archivist may also influence the organisation and its system, according to their views and knowledge, and the level of influence they hold.

In the “Capture” dimension, closest to the archivist, the archives and the elements of the finding aids, lies the finding aid system itself, and the totality of the archival collection it describes, with its relative size and complexity of relationships. The level

of complexity is open to interpretation by the archivist sitting in the “Create” dimension.

Moments of opportunity or transition can come from any of the dimensions, from natural disasters from the outermost dimension, to the arrival of a new archivist with new ideas, from ideas received in training in the “pluralise” dimension and acted upon by the archivist, to organisational decisions to change descriptive systems.

Terry Cook (2000) noted five factors on which the critical importance of the continuum rests. These were the interaction of the dimensions and axes, its insight that these complex relationships are fluid, multiple and simultaneous in time and space, its reconciliation of evidence and memory, its potential for incorporating private sector manuscripts with institutional archives, and its assertion that through pluralisation that societal values will influence all aspects of recordkeeping. Using the recordkeeping continuum model to map the factors affecting decisions on adoption of the AuSS demonstrates that descriptive decisions and finding aids are influenced by the interactions of factors at all levels of the continuum, and that the views and knowledge of the archivists at the centre of the continuum are key, while working within the values and expectations placed on them, and resources provided from all other dimensions, and reflecting the archives with which they are working.

9.5 The AuSS as a “contagious idea”

This study has shown the frequency with which those who have heard of the AuSS are using at least some elements of it in their description, suggesting that once the idea has been “caught” by an archivist it is likely to be adopted to some degree. One respondent noted that they used the AuSS because “former archivists in the organisation were indoctrinated into the system while studying in Australia in the 1980s” (E47Y). At the same time, the influence external experts can have on making decisions to implement particular systems has been noted. This suggests that the choice of descriptive systems can be passed on as a kind of “contagious idea”, with the AuSS as a “virus”, a convinced archivist as a “vector” and the organisation as the “host”. Those who do not associate with others using the AuSS are therefore unlikely to be “infected”.

In this model, the host organisation is more likely to “catch” the AuSS if other conditions are met, such as a collection with complex relationships, adaptable software, compatible standards and conventions, available resources or being in a time of transition. Systemic obstacles may limit the extent to which the AuSS is expressed within the organisation’s finding aids, but in some cases if the archivist has sufficient autonomy and determination the AuSS will be “caught” despite obstacles which may have prevented it in other organisations.

10 Conclusion

10.1 Implications for theory

Decisions on description in New Zealand Archives are influenced by many factors. Mapping these factors using the records continuum model reveals the way they interact with one another across all dimensions of the continuum. These factors include the resources available, the types of access, use and users of the collection, the nature of the archives themselves, the type of collection, the complexity of relationships within the collection, inherited or imposed systems of description including the software used, the knowledge and background of those with whom archivists network and from whom they ask advice, archival conventions, the nature of the organisation itself, and a desire to share information and search across collections within or between institutions. Finally, perhaps the strongest influence, interacting with all of the others, is the knowledge, experience and views of the archivist responsible for decision-making.

Restating the first two research questions, what are the barriers and motivators for the implementation of the AuSS in New Zealand? Several have been identified for the Archives surveyed. The AuSS can be seen to be more likely to be adopted in larger collections with complex administrative histories, where the archivist is aware of the AuSS, and often has some previous experience in its use. The AuSS is more often implemented where software used for description readily allows the making of relationships between entities, whether or not it was initially chosen with the deliberate intent of using the AuSS. It is used more often by archivists aware of archival conventions and standards, and those using it are also more likely to have more archival training and believe that context is important in describing archives.

The type of organisation did have some impact on the use of the AuSS, with no public libraries having fully implemented it, and no historical societies having implemented it at all. However, other factors came into play for these cases: in the case of public libraries, half had implemented it to some degree, but restricting factors included their wish to allow searching across their entire collections, a lack of awareness of the AuSS, their belief in subject description over contextual description or restrictions placed on them by their institutions. The sample size of historical societies was very small, but for one at least their descriptive system was about to change, with the introduction of some elements of the AuSS. The frequent use of some elements in museums was notable, which could be related to the traditional interest in provenance for museum objects, so that shared descriptive systems allow for the description of archival provenance. However, the degree of adoption for individual museums still varied according to the knowledge and views of the archivists, and other factors. Thus, as to the final research question - does the presence or absence of any one of these barriers or motivators consistently predict the implementation of the AuSS? The answer is no. None of the identified factors individually predicts implementation of the AuSS. Instead, they work together to make implementation more or less probable.

10.2 Implications for practice

The adoption of new descriptive systems usually occurs at particular moments of opportunity or transition, which may be caused by an external agent such as a natural disaster, the merging of collections, or the appointment of a new archivist. Internal agents can also lead to change, such as the realisation that existing systems can no longer cope with increasingly complex collections, or the introduction of new ideas of description through networking, reading archival literature, expert advice or formal study.

The perception of inertia in descriptive systems was notable: although 46 stated that they would be willing to change their systems if necessary, many said that it would require a great many resources, and that they would need a very good argument to do so. However, 25 had recently changed, were currently changing or planning to, either in part or in whole.

It was also notable that relatively few respondents had heard of the AuSS: only 28 out of the total 86 respondents. More awareness is needed in the archival community, in order that potential users can judge whether it would be useful for their collections and circumstances. The enthusiasm of those who had heard of the system to introduce it to their descriptive systems, in many different types of Archives, suggests that it could be of value to many more institutions.

If consensus in the archival community could be reached that the AuSS was the way forward to enable better description and information-sharing within and between archival institutions in New Zealand, this study suggests that several initiatives would need to be put in place, made readily available and widely advertised throughout all parts of the archival community. If so, when Archives reached a moment of transition, whether due to external forces or a belief that their own system could no longer adequately describe their collections, they would be aware of the AuSS and its value and easily able to access information and advice. Expert advice would need to be provided on the benefits of the system, together with practical advice on how to implement it, and some kind of customisable software for creating AuSS-compatible finding aids. An essential component of this would be a mechanism and advice for migrating data from existing systems. Possibly the most significant factor in success would be convincing archivists of the benefits of the system for their own collection and their users, making them more susceptible to “catching” the view that the AuSS has value as a descriptive system, and passing it on to their finding aids.

11 Suggestions for further research

The original intention of this study was to also collect examples of finding aids from each Archive, either through links to online finding aids or photocopies of parts of finding aids, to provide more information on how concepts of the AuSS were used. Time constraints meant that this was not possible in this survey, but this could be carried out in a separate study to discover the degree of accuracy with which archivists assessed their own finding aids.

Other related studies could also follow on from this research. For example:

- Comparison of museum and archival description of provenance to discover parallels and differences for improved understanding between institutions and for better collaboration
- Apply the same survey instrument in other countries for comparison and to test conclusions
- In-depth interviews with individual archives using or not using the AuSS to gain more understanding of their specific contexts and reasons stated
- Development of a template finding aid system for implementing the AuSS, and testing of the template in several different types of Archive to assess its usefulness

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Appendix I: Copy of invitation to take part in survey

Survey of archival description in New Zealand

I am Masters student in Information Studies at Victoria University. As part of this degree, I am carrying out a research project looking at factors influencing the way different Archives describe their collections, using a questionnaire which is being sent to every Archive in New Zealand. In 2008 Janine Delaney carried out a related survey² to look at **how** description is done in New Zealand. My survey is intended to look more at **why** particular styles of description are chosen. It is important that it covers all Archives, from the smallest family or community collection to the largest company or professional institution, so I would be very grateful if you would respond.

By looking at the way the context of the Archives and the archivists affects description, it may be possible to find the barriers and enablers archivists find in creating the best description they can for their records. A better understanding of this could help with better-targeted education, improved collaboration between institutions, and more information on the extent to which decisions on description come down to resources or the decisions of managers without archival knowledge.

The survey needs to be completed by the person who decides how the collection is arranged and described. No questions are compulsory, but the more information that you can give, the clearer will be the picture of the current state of description in New Zealand. If you are a local branch of a larger institution, please answer for your branch only. Please note there are no right or wrong answers. The survey should take approximately 25 minutes. I have enclosed a stamped, addressed envelope for you to return the completed questionnaire to me.

The collected survey responses will be analysed together, and the results will be written up in a research report on an anonymous basis. It will not be possible for your Archive to be individually identified in this report, and all questionnaires collected will be kept confidential. No-one other than me and my supervisor, Dr Gillian Oliver, will see the completed questionnaires. The research report will be submitted to the School of Information Management for marking, and deposited in the University Library. It is intended that one or more articles will be submitted for publication in scholarly journals. The questionnaires will be destroyed two years after the end of the project.

If you have any questions, you can contact me at PO Box 60533, Titirangi, Auckland 0642, or my supervisor at the School of Information Management, Victoria University, PO Box 600, Wellington, or by email: Belinda Battley: battlebeli@myvuw.ac.nz or my supervisor: Gillian.Oliver@vuw.ac.nz

If you would like to receive a summary of the results after this study is completed, please enter your contact details at the end of the questionnaire.

Thank you very much for your time.

Yours sincerely,

Belinda Battley

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² Delaney, Janine (2008-2009). Archival description in New Zealand: Should we be taking a stand on standards? *Archifacts* (October – April), 22-53

Appendix II – Copy of survey (postal version)

(note that formatting has been changed slightly due to space restrictions)

Survey on Description in New Zealand Archives

Consent to participation in the survey

I have been given and understood an explanation of this research project. I have been given an opportunity to ask further questions, and if I have done so they have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I may withdraw from this study at any time before data collection and analysis is complete without providing reasons, and if I choose to do so any data I have provided will be destroyed.

I understand that any information or opinions I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and her supervisor, the published results will not use my name or that of my institution, and no data will be attributable to me or my institution in any way that will be identifiable. I understand that the information I have provided will be used only for this research project and subsequent published paper, and that any further use will require my written consent. I understand that when this research is completed the information obtained will be destroyed after 2 years.

Please tick one of the boxes below, and then sign.

☐ I consent

☐ I do not consent

Signed: .....

Survey on Description in New Zealand Archives

Thank you for taking part in this survey. Your responses will not be identified by individual Archives. There are no right or wrong answers. No questions are compulsory, but the more complete surveys received, the more accurate will be the results.

---

1. How many staff (paid and volunteer) work in your Archives? (Full-time equivalent)

-----

2. How many hours per week in total (approximately) is spent in your Archives on describing archives (including listing)?

-----

3. What is the approximate size of your collection? (Use appropriate measurement depending on format: eg Linear metres for textual archives, MB for digital, number of films, etc)

-----

4. Do you have a backlog of material waiting to be described?

☐ Yes

☐ No

5. What is your role in your organisation?

☐ Archivist

☐ Library cataloguer

☐ Library manager

☐ Records staff / records manager

☐ Museum registrar

☐ Volunteer

☐ Other (please state) -----

6. Who in your organisation, apart from you, is responsible for describing and / or listing archives? (Please select all that apply)

- ☐ Archivist
- ☐ Library cataloguer
- ☐ Library manager
- ☐ Records staff / records manager
- ☐ Museum registrar
- ☐ Volunteer
- ☐ Other (please state) -----

7. What training in archival description do you have? (Please select all that apply)

- ☐ Self-taught
- ☐ On the job training
- ☐ Workshops / courses
- ☐ Practicum
- ☐ Formal archives qualification (please state) -----
- ☐ None
- ☐ Learnt from textbook, websites or other written guides (please name if possible) -----

-----

- ☐ Other (please describe) -----

-----

8. How many years have you worked / volunteered for this organisation?

-----

9. How many years have you worked with archives?

-----

10. How do you keep up to date with archival theory and practice? *(Please select all that apply)*

- ☐ Read archival literature (journals, books, online articles etc)
- ☐ Attend workshops
- ☐ Belong to online discussion groups
- ☐ Belong to Archives association or group *(please state which, eg ARANZ)*

☐ Attend archives and / or information management conferences

☐ Other *(please describe)*

☐ Not applicable *(please comment if you wish)*

11. How would you describe your Archives?

- ☐ Local authority
- ☐ Church / religious
- ☐ Collecting
- ☐ Local history
- ☐ Business
- ☐ School
- ☐ Iwi / hapu
- ☐ Government
- ☐ University / other tertiary institution
- ☐ Other *(please describe)*

12. Is your Archives part of a larger organisation / company?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

(If "No", then please go to question 14)

13. What type of parent organisation do you belong to?

- ☐ Public library
  - ☐ University
  - ☐ Museum / Gallery
  - ☐ Local authority
  - ☐ Large archival organisation
  - ☐ Government agency (excluding Archives NZ)
  - ☐ Business / company
  - ☐ School
  - ☐ Religious organisation
  - ☐ Historical society
  - ☐ Non-government organisation
  - ☐ Other (*please describe*)
-

14. Are your archives described within the same catalogue or finding aids as your other, non-archival collections?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

(If "No", please go to question 17)

15. Do you describe archives with rules that differ from non-archival items?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Please briefly explain why / why not

---

16. Do you describe archives with descriptive fields that differ from non-archival items?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Please briefly explain why / why not

---

17. Do you index your archives by subject?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Please briefly explain why / why not

---

18. How many of your archives are listed by item? (Please tick only one box. Do not include backlog of undescribed archives in this estimate)

☐ None

☐ Some

☐ Half

☐ Most

☐ All

☐ Other (please explain)

---

19. Would you describe your main descriptive system as based on:

☐ Record groups

☐ Series system

☐ Library catalogue (bibliographic)

☐ Museum collection management

☐ EDRMS

☐ Other (please state)

☐ Don't know

Please comment if you wish

---

20. When you receive new archives that relate to archives you have already, do you physically locate them together?

☐ Yes

☐ No

21. Do you have any digital archives? (eg email correspondence, databases, web pages)

☐ Yes

☐ No

(If "No", please go to question 23)

22. Do you store your digital archives electronically?

☐ Yes

☐ No

(Please go to next page)

23. Why do you use the descriptive system you have? (Please select as many as required – your answers to this question are particularly important so if any that apply to you are not shown, please add them at the end under “Other”)

- ☐ My predecessor chose it
- ☐ It's easy to use
- ☐ It describes the collection very effectively
- ☐ It fits in with the software available in our organisation
- ☐ It fits in with the way other items in our organisation are described
- ☐ The choice is restricted by funding
- ☐ The size of the collection affects the way our archives are described
- ☐ I / We do not have the resources to try any other system
- ☐ I / We do not have enough staff to try any other system
- ☐ I / We do not have enough time to try any other system
- ☐ I / We do not have enough time to describe our archives in the detail I would wish
- ☐ I / We have used it elsewhere and found it effective
- ☐ I / We have seen or read about it used elsewhere and decided it looked effective
- ☐ I / We studied all available systems and decided this was the best for us
- ☐ I / We do not know of any other way of describing archives
- ☐ It meets external descriptive standards (*please note standards used*)-----
- ☐ The archives are only used in-house and do not need to be searched by anyone else
- ☐ I / We have been told by my manager(s), administrator(s) or other staff member who is not an archivist that this is the system we must use
- ☐ The collection has a complex administrative background and I need to reflect this in the description
- ☐ The collection has a very simple administrative background, with one-to-one relationships between creators and series
- ☐ It allows users to search across the collection together with those of different institutions
- ☐ It allows the records to be seen as part of a recordkeeping continuum
- ☐ It helps me / us to describe electronic records with complex relationships
- ☐ It allows users and co-creators of the records to add their own information about provenance
- ☐ Other (*please state*)

---

24. If you wish, please comment further on your choice of descriptive system

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26. The most important thing a finding aid can do is: *(please choose one only)*

- ☐ help users find information easily
- ☐ preserve the context of archives by recording provenance and original order
- ☐ both are equally important
- ☐ other *(please state)*

---

27. The following statements indicate differing views of archives. Please select true or false for each: there are no right or wrong answers.

	True	False
Archives are at the end of their lifecycle	☐	☐
Archives influence, and are influenced by, their contexts of creation	☐	☐
Archives influence, and are influenced by, their contexts of use	☐	☐
Archives influence, and are influenced by, the way they are described	☐	☐
Archivists are neutral custodians of their collections	☐	☐
Individual archival items can have more than one original order	☐	☐
Individual archival items can have more than one creator	☐	☐

Please comment on any of the above statements if you wish

---

28. Have you heard of the Australian Series system (also called the CRS, or Commonwealth Record Series system)?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

(If "No", please go to question 33)

29. Do you use a form of the Australian Series system to describe your archives?

- ☐ Yes – all of them
- ☐ Yes – some of them
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

30. Please explain why you use, or do not use, the Australian Series system. Give as many reasons as you wish.

---

31. Have you ever used a form of the Australian Series system in any jobs you have had in the past?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

32. Have any other people in your Archives, including the person setting up the descriptive system you use now, used a form of the Australian Series system in the past in some other organisation?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

33. Do you believe that you could change your system of description if you wished?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Please explain why or why not

---

34. Are your finding aids:

- ☐ Electronic
- ☐ Paper-based
- ☐ Both electronic and paper

(If you answered "Paper-based", please go to question 36)

35. Did you or other archives staff responsible for description have significant input into the type of software used?

☐ Yes

☐ No

36. Do you consider that the structure of the finding aids you use allows you to describe your archives as well as you would like?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Please comment if you wish

---

37. If there are aspects of your descriptive system structure that you think could be improved, please describe improvements you would like

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38. Is your Archive open to the public?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Please comment if you wish

---

39. Are your finding aids available online?

☐ Yes

☐ No

(If "No", please go to question 41)

40. Have your finding aids been linked to any other online sites relating to heritage holdings?

☐ Yes *(please state which if known – eg The Community Archive, Matapihi, genealogy websites etc)* -----

---

☐ No

☐ Don't know

41. How do you document the creator (or provenance) of archives in your collection? *(Please select one)*

- ☐ Only by naming in the title of the collection (eg Sir George Grey Papers)
- ☐ I / We include an administrative history / biographical note within the collection description but do not create a separate descriptive record of the creator
- ☐ I / We create a separate descriptive record for each creator which is linked to the collection
- ☐ I / We create an added entry for the creator in our catalogue or index
- ☐ Not applicable
- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ Other *(please state)*
-
-

42. How do you document record series? *(Please select one)*

- ☐ The series are noted or listed as part of the collection description
- ☐ I / We create a separate descriptive record for each series which is linked to the collection
- ☐ The series are listed with the items
- ☐ Not applicable
- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ Other *(please state)*
-
-

43. How do you document the items that make up the collection? *(Please select one)*

- ☐ Items are noted or listed together with the collection description
- ☐ I / We create a separate list or inventory of items
- ☐ I / We create a separate descriptive record for each item which is linked to a series and / or a collection
- ☐ Not applicable
- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ Other *(please state)*
-
-

44. Do any of your archives, or series of archives, have more than one creator and / or provenance?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Don't know

(If "No" or "Don't know", please go to question 46)

45. How do you reflect multiple creators or provenance for single items or series in your description?

---

46. Do any of your archives have more than one original order (for example, do any items belong to more than one series)?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Don't know

(If "No" or "Don't know", please go to question 48)

47. If so, how do you record this in your description?

---

48. Do you describe relationships between agencies and / or between people in your finding aids (eg successor agency, daughter of, employed by, etc)?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Please explain (*Why or why not? If yes, how?*)

---

49. Do you describe relationships between series or items in your collection (for example, "this volume provides an index to...)?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Please explain (*Why or why not? If yes, how?*)

---

50. Do you include information about the recordkeeping systems of the creators of your archives in your finding aids?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

51. Do you allow other individuals, organisations or groups to add descriptive information to your finding aids?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Please explain (*Why or why not? If yes, how?*) , or comment if you wish

---

This is the end of the survey. Thank you very much for your time. If you would like to be sent a copy of the summarised results, please provide your contact details here:

Appendix III: Codes for qualitative data

i. Factors cited in comments on choice of descriptive system (in order of number of respondents citing)

Code	Description	Total no. Respondents citing	% of "Yes" citing (n=11)	% of "Some elements" citing (n=28)	% of "No" citing (n=45)
Res	Resources / time / staff	40	36	54	47
Acc	Desire to enable easier access	33	55	36	38
Tec	Technology (type of software) as a barrier or enabler	30	64	64	33
Eff	See as effective / perceived relative advantage	29	36	25	40
Aut	Level of autonomy, support of institution, significance of collection in organisation, imposed from above	23	27	36	22
Typ	Type of user or use	21	36	21	24
Kno	Knowledge / skills of archivist	20	9	11	36
Opp	Time of transition or opportunity	19	36	21	20
AT/C	Archives themselves – content	18	36	32	11
Nat	Nature of collection	17	27	18	20
Ctx	Importance of describing context	17	64	25	7
Inh	Inherited – my predecessor chose it	16	18	32	11
Net	Networking with others re description	14	36	21	9
AT/F	Archives themselves – format	14	9	18	18
Cpx	Relationships within collection very complex / very simple	13	36 / 0	14 / 4	0/9
Dep	Desire to describe as fully / in as much depth as possible, improve understanding	13	27	14	13
Siz	Size of collection (v. small or v. large)	12	27	14	11
AC	Archival conventions	12	55	7	9
Sta	External standards	10	27	18	4
Exp	Advised / wish to be advised by external experts	10	27	11	9
Inf	Information available regarding archives themselves	9	0	29	2
Uni	Wish to unite collections within the organisation	8	27	14	2
Nat	Nature of organisation	7	18	7	7
Con	Want description within finding aids to be consistent	5	9	4	7
Dam	Fear changing finding aids will damage them	5	9	7	4
IS/o	Want to enable information sharing between institutions	1	0	4	0
Fam	Familiar, used elsewhere	2	9	0	2

ii. Other comments on description

Code	Description	Total no. Respondents citing	% of "Yes" citing (n=11)	% of "Some elements" citing (n=28)	% of "No" citing (n=45)
Dev	Developing currently	25	45	39	20
Adj	Have adjusted system developed for different purposes	8	9	14	7
Lim	Working within or around limitations which impact negatively	7	9	18	2