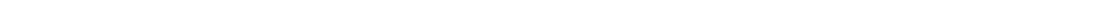


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Use of off-site storage by UK
archive services
November 2020





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Executive summary

Using offsite storage is a common practice amongst UK archive services regardless of their type or collection size and will be used in the future. Basic data relating to services applying for Archive Service Accreditation indicates that 49% used off-site storage in some form.

In the report survey the average and median percentage of collections storage offsite was 39% and 35% respectively. This reflects Accreditation applicant data which shows that majority (65%) of applicants using offsite storage hold 25% or less of their collections in offsite storage. Only 10% have more than 50% of their collections offsite.

The Accreditation data shows that of the archive services using offsite storage the majority (65%) of applicants using offsite storage hold 25% or less of their collections in offsite storage, with only 3% storing more than 75% offsite.

Pressure on space at the main site is the leading reason for using off-site storage.

The most popular types of offsite storage are commercial records management or heritage storage providers or using a property owned and operated by the archive or its parent body. The propensity of records management storage across all types of archive services may indicate that some respondents have included semi-current records in their response. It should be noted that records management storage and standard commercial storage do not provide the appropriate storage conditions for historical material as required under BS 4971:2017 Conservation and care of archive and library collections, BS EN 16893:2018 Conservation of Cultural Heritage and Archive Service Accreditation.

It is not uncommon to have material stored at a location over an hour's drive time and even over 2 hours.

Services based in London and the South East tend to use off-site storage with longer drive times than services in other parts of the country. This may indicate pressures on space usage in these areas and/or heavy traffic conditions.

Drive time in itself does not appear to drive the notice required from users to provide access to offsite material. This would suggest that there are a range of



issues that affect access notice periods such as availability of staff and processing the retrieval of material from offsite and premium rates for same day retrievals by commercial storage providers, as well as the drive time.

The most heavily used material tends to be held onsite or at the lower drive times. Less frequently used material tends to be stored at locations with longer drive times. However, collections that are well catalogued or digitised can be considered good candidates for offsite storage as contents are easy to identify and retrieve or can be accessed digitally.

Defining 'high', 'medium' and 'low' usage of collections is specific to the individual service. There is no consensus on these definitions.

Reduced costs and increasing digital services are not drivers for using offsite storage.

For the majority of services using offsite storage prohibits providing a same day service to access collections for users.

The leading concerns about using off-site storage are service levels to users and risks to collections. Costs are slightly less of a concern but still matter. However, it does free up onsite space, support better collecting and can encourage better collections management processes.

1. Introduction

The respondents of the online survey provide a good sample that is reflective of the overall formal UK archive sector including location, type and collection size.

1.1 Introduction and context

This report presents the results of an online survey distributed amongst archivists in the UK in March and April 2020. Some archive services have used offsite storage for many years and it is an element in a mature business model. Other services have taken it more recently or are planning to do so as their collections increase and/or other organisational activities inhibit provision of storage space on site.

For this report The National Archives provided anonymised data based on the responses of all applicants to the Archive Service Accreditation scheme. Applicants are required to describe what proportion of their collections are held at each location where storage takes place and the terms of occupancy.

Accreditation data from 2013 (when Accreditation started) to March 2020 shows that of the 193 applicants 94 (49%) were using storage across several locations with the following distribution¹:

% of collection stored at primary location	Number of Accreditation applicants
Up to 25%	11
26-50%	15
51-75%	25
76-99.9%	43

Of that 94, 39 services had material on three sites, 17 had material on four sites, 8 had material on five sites and 1 had material on 6 sites (all including the primary site as one of those sites).

¹ In the data provided there were some anomalous data points that have not been included in these breakdowns e.g. applicants that hold 100% of their collections at each of two locations possibly because they have several branches for the service.

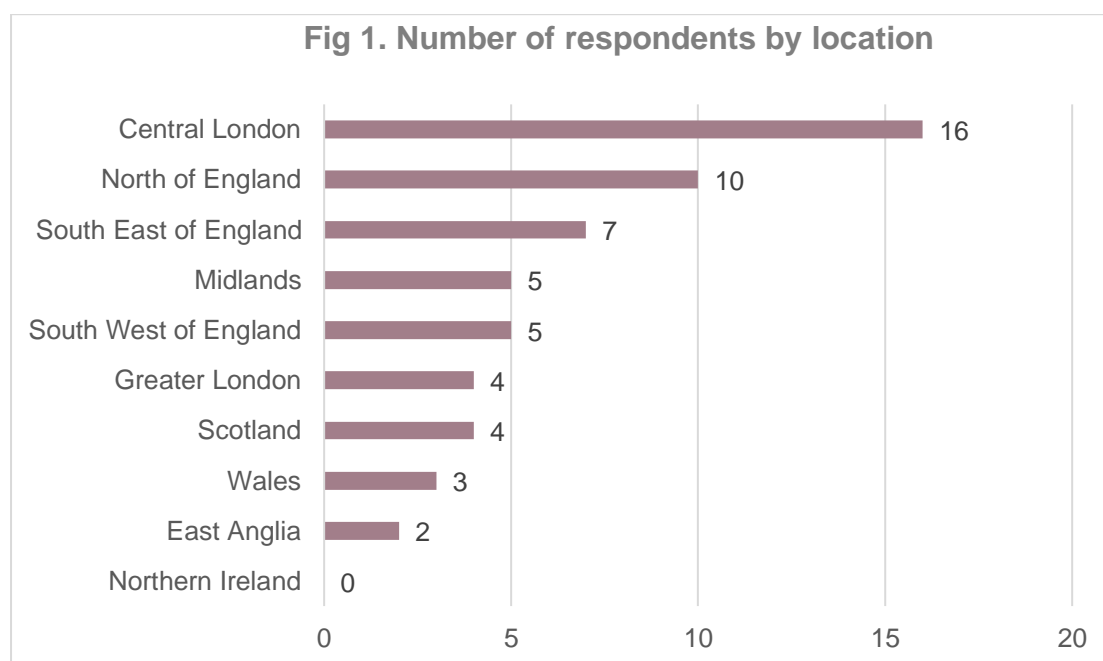
Just looking at the use of the secondary site there is the following distribution:

% of collection stored at secondary location	Number of Accreditation applicants
Up to 25%	61
26-50%	19
51-75%	11
76-99.9%	3

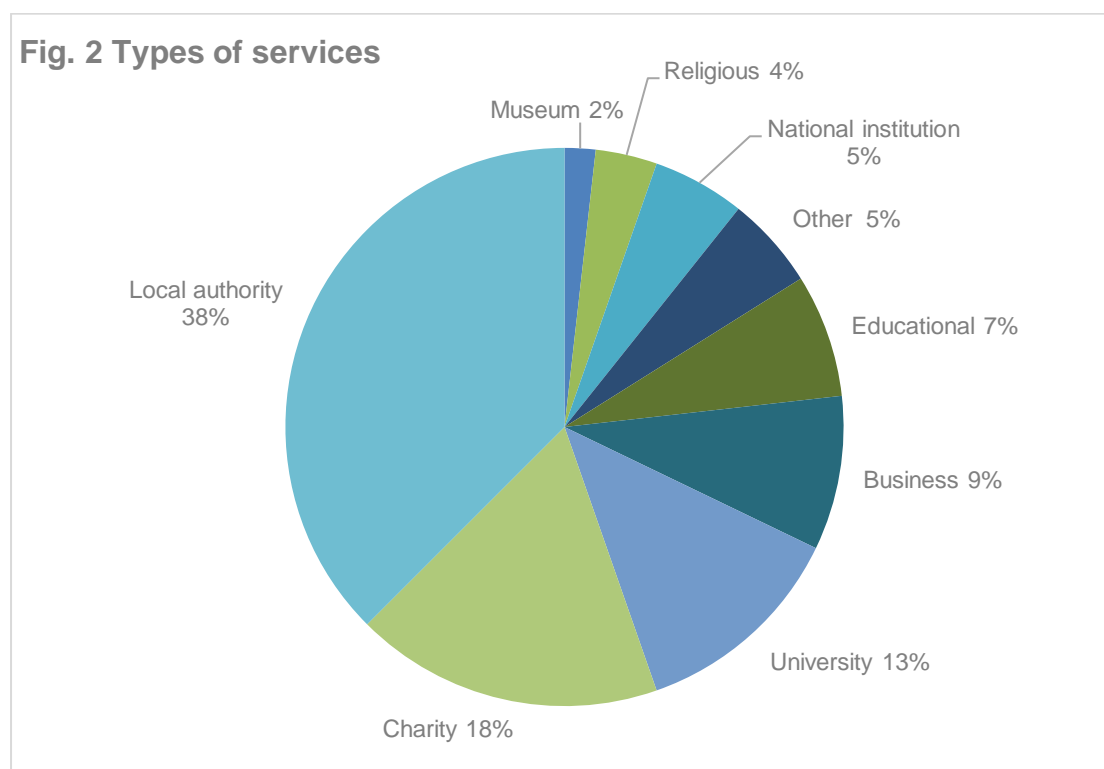
These basic figures demonstrate that storing material away from the primary serviced location is a common practice and that services vary widely in the proportions of collections they store in distributed locations. However, 65% of the Accreditation applicants using offsite storage store less than 25% of their collections offsite. Only 10% have more than 50% of their collections offsite.

1.2 Profile of the survey applicants

As Fig. 1 shows, there were 56 respondents. They were well distributed across Great Britain although it is noticeable that 29% of respondents had services located in Central London. This is probably reflective of London having a greater number of archive services than anywhere else in the UK

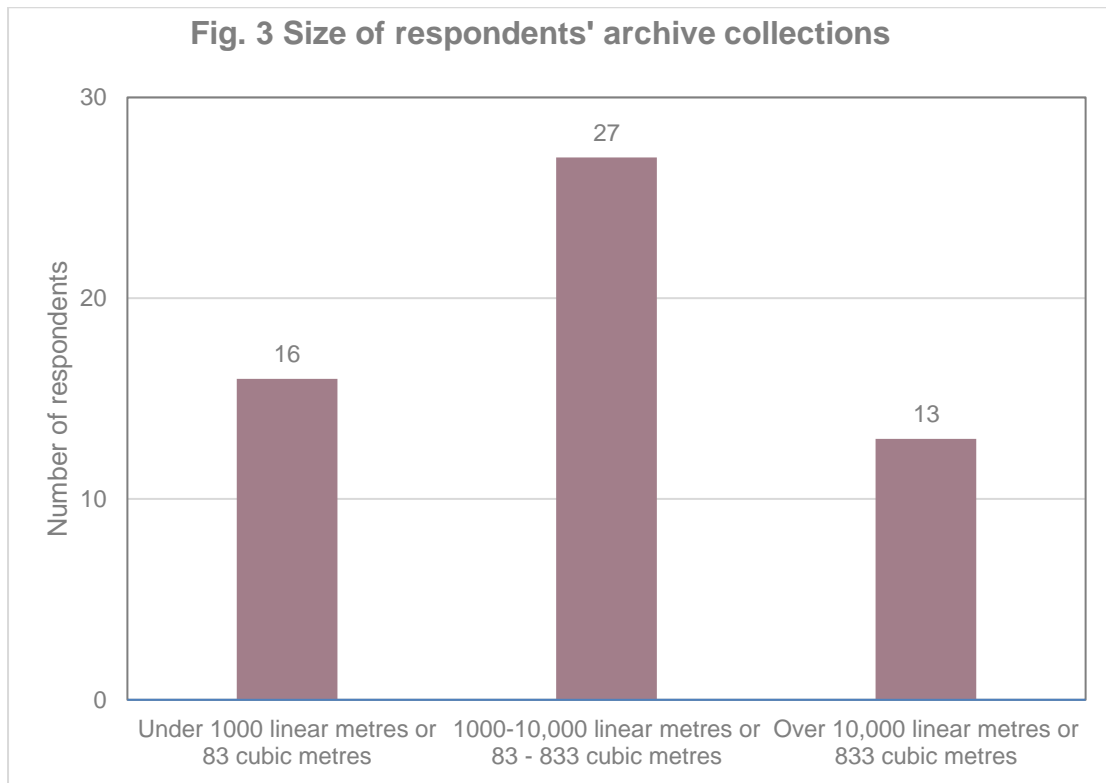


There was a very good distribution across types of archive services and reflects the diversity and relative proportions of the types of formal archive services found within the UK, as Fig. 2 shows. It should be noted that the category 'Museum' excludes national museums, which are included in the 'National Institution' category.



Local authority services accounted for over a third of responses, which is not surprising as they are the largest single element of the formal UK archive sector. However, it was interesting to see that the next largest respondent sector was charities with almost one fifth of the responses. The university, business, educational and national institutions services' proportion is probably reflective of their presence within the formal archive sector. The 'Other' covered three responses that variously described themselves as 'Health Board', 'NHS' and 'trade union'.

Fig. 3 shows that there was also a very good distribution of sizes of archive collections across respondents. Almost half had collections between 83 and 833 cubic metres (i.e. 1,000 to 10,000 linear metres) but with a fairly equal distribution either side of these parameters.



2. Where collections are stored offsite and the impact on services

Drive times do not seem of themselves a major determinant of storage location or service level but offsite storage does inhibit same day access for many services. This is countered by storing lower use material off-site and keeping higher use material on site where possible.

2.1 Drive times

Respondents were asked to describe what proportion of their collections were held onsite and at specific drive times. 43 respondents answered this question. It can be seen from Table 1 that there was a fairly even distribution of drive times in terms of the numbers of respondents using offsite storage.

Table 1 Number of respondents at each drive time

	Onsite	Under 30 minutes	30 – 59 minutes	1-2 hours	Over 2 hours
No of responses	41	14	13	11	9

The responses demonstrate that all types of service use offsite storage regardless of the type of service, the size of its collections or location.

Five respondents held all of their collections onsite. Other than that there was a wide distribution of storage arrangements right down to all of the collections being held offsite for three respondents. Local authority services tend to keep a larger proportion of collections on site than other service types but there are a few local authority services that keep very little or nothing onsite. Businesses and charities tended to keep a significant proportion (at least 25% and often much more) of collections offsite.

It was not possible to discern any overall trends in the drive times between the archive service and the storage areas, as Table 2 demonstrates. Each service had its own profile of how collections were distributed in terms of drive times.

Table 2 The average and median percentages of collections stored at individual drive times

	Onsite	Under 30 minutes	30 – 59 minutes	1-2 hours	Over 2 hours
Average % of collection stored at this drive time	61	49	37	39	40
Median % of collection stored at this drive time	65	46	30	40	25
Distribution of responses (% of collections)	0-100	1-100	2-90	1-95	10-95

Despite the average and median of collections being stored onsite being 61% and 65% respectively (and thus the average and median being stored offsite is 39% and 35% of collections respectively), the distribution of the sample was so wide in each drive time category that the offsite storage options all demonstrated a large average and median. Whilst the under 30 minute drive time had the largest average and median the other drive times had comparable figures so it is not possible to say that one drive time is preferred over others. However, it can be said that long drive times (an hour and over) are not unusual.

One clear pattern was that the three services that held all their collections off site had them all stored at under a 30 minute drive time.

However, when the drive time distances are analysed geographically there are some clear themes. Those services in Central London were very marked in displaying the widest ranging set of drive times, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Drive times for storage used by London-based archive services measured by percentage of collection by size per drive time

Onsite %	Under 30 minutes %	30 – 59 minutes %	1-2 hours %	Over 2 hours %
Central London				
60	40			
100				
100				
50				50
50			50	
20		10		70
3	0	0	30	67
90	0	0	0	10
			20	
60			40	
	100			
80				20
5			95	
Greater London				
70		20		10
5				95
20	80			

Of the 16 London services that answered this question 12 were using storage that was over an hour away and of those seven were using storage over five hours away. Only five were using offsite storage that was under 1 hour's drive. There does not appear to be any correlation between the size of collection and the storage distribution.

The next most diverse storage pattern was for services in the South East of England as Table 4 demonstrates.

Table 4 Drive times for storage used by English archive services outside of London measured by percentage of collection by size per drive time

Onsite %	Under 30 minutes %	30 – 59 minutes %	1-2 hours %	Over 2 hours %
South East of England				
50			50	
99	1			
75				25
30		70		
53		37		10
30		70		
33	66			
Midlands				
100				
10		90		
90	10			
90	10			
North of England				
75			25	
75	25			
70		30		
55		45		
	100			
72			28	
South West of England				
10		90		
0	100			
98		2		
50			50	

When compared with London services it can be seen non-London services also use offsite storage but tend to use sites that are closer. Of the 20 respondents only six used storage over one hour away and only two used storage over two hours away.

In Scotland and Wales offsite storage usage had the lowest drive times (Table 5) but bearing in mind these two countries had a very small sample size.



Table 5 Drive times for storage used by archive services in Scotland and Wales measured by percentage of collection by size per drive time

Onsite %	Under 30 minutes %	30 – 59 minutes %	1-2 hours %	Over 2 hours %
Scotland				
75	15	10		
20	80			
50	10		40	
48	52			
Wales				
100				
98		2		
100				

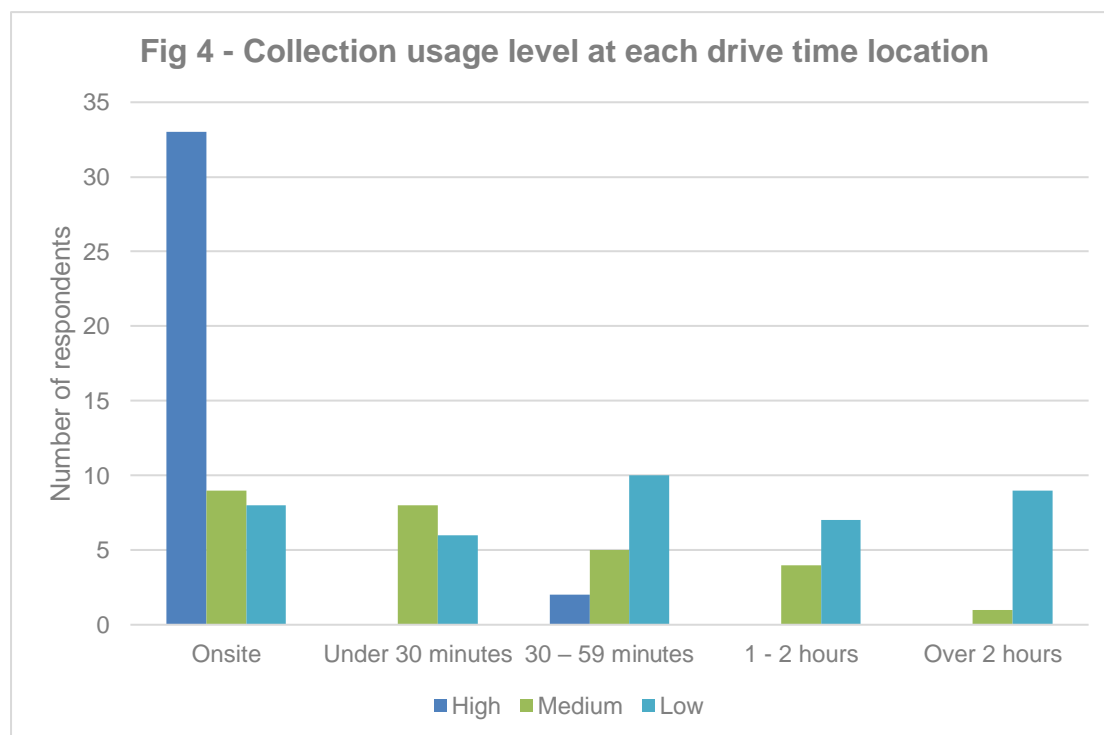
This geographical pattern of greatest drive times occurring in Central and Greater London is not surprising. Around the capital space is at a premium for all purposes. Storage is expensive and less of a priority than other uses for parent bodies. Furthermore, the two primary specialist providers of archive storage are based in Cheshire (Deepstore) and North Oxfordshire (Restore), which could explain some of the long drive times. It may also be indicative of heavy traffic increasing journey times.

Likewise the large urban areas of the South East, Midlands and North of England will face a situation where inner city storage costs will be higher than suburban locations so this will provoke longer drive times. However, affordable storage locations are likely to be closer than in London and for some respondents the Deepstore and Restore facilities would be within a reasonable drive time.

Whilst the Scottish and Welsh samples are small the very low drive times may indicate much smaller urban areas and more availability of nearby storage options.

2.2 Collection usage levels at each location

There was a very clear pattern across all respondents about the level of usage of collections held at each drive time (Fig 4).



Clearly the most heavily used collections were stored onsite with just a two respondents using offsite storage for heavily used material (and one of those stored 90% of their collections offsite). The amount of collections with medium use was held in declining amounts at further drive times whilst, unsurprisingly, the low use material was stored at all locations and became increasingly dominant as the drive time increased.

2.3 Definitions of high, medium and low usage

Respondents were asked how they defined high, medium and low usage. Their complete answers are provided in Appendix 1. Unsurprisingly the definition varied widely with the individual service. However, high usage tended to be material that was used on a daily or weekly basis. For most respondents low usage was material that either was never used (including closed records) or requested a few times a year or every few years. Medium fell in-between these two but varied widely from weekly to monthly to annually.



This information was derived from production logs and staff knowledge. Whilst most respondents identified demand as the driver for the definition. However, demand itself is a product of whether a collection was well catalogued so usage shifts as cataloguing is applied to a collection. However, a well catalogued collection might also be easier to store offsite than an uncatalogued one as its contents will be known and thus easy to retrieve at distance.

For one respondent large or bulky collections or items were held offsite so it was their physical characteristic rather than their usage that determined their location.

2.4 Service level for users requesting off-site material

Across the respondents the service levels were fairly evenly distributed..

Table 6 Service levels for access by users to material stored offsite per respondent

Respondent	Same day	Next day	2 working days	More than 2 working days
1	x	x	x	x
2	x	x	x	
3	x	x		x
4	x	x		
5	x	x		
6	x			
7		x	x	x
8		x	x	
9		x		x
10		x		x
11		x		
12		x		
13		x		
14		x		
15		x		
16		x		
17		x		
18			x	x
19			x	

Respondent	Same day	Next day	2 working days	More than 2 working days
20			X	
21			X	
22			X	
23			X	
24			X	
25			X	
26			X	
27			X	
28				X
29				X
30				X
31				X
32				X
33				X
34				X
35				X
36				X
37				X
38				X
39				X

Only six of the 39 respondents offered a same day service. Of these six all but one offered a mix of service levels. 11 services offered a next day service as a minimum and of these four offered a range of service levels. Ten services offered a minimum service level of 2 days of which just one had the additional service level of over 2 days. Interestingly 12 services only offered a service level of more than two days for their offsite material. This would suggest that general practice is that accessing offsite material for users inhibits a same day service and possibly that 2 days or more turnaround is required for access.

Interestingly there appeared to be no clear correlation between the drive time for remote storage and the service level e.g. services with collections under 30 minutes drive away were still distributed right across the service level ranges with eight of those services offering a service level either of 2 days or more than 2 days. Whilst a few services had a range of drive times and



provided three or four service levels this was not a consistent pattern. The majority of services with a range of drive times offered only one or two service levels. This would suggest that drive time is not of itself a major determinant of service level. Rather it could be that the logistical requirement to identify where material is held, organise its retrieval and source staff time to manage that retrieval is actually more significant than the drive time in itself. It should be noted that commercial storage providers typically charge a premium for same day retrievals so this may be another factor.

There did not appear to be any particular preponderance of one geographical location for archive services in the service level provided.

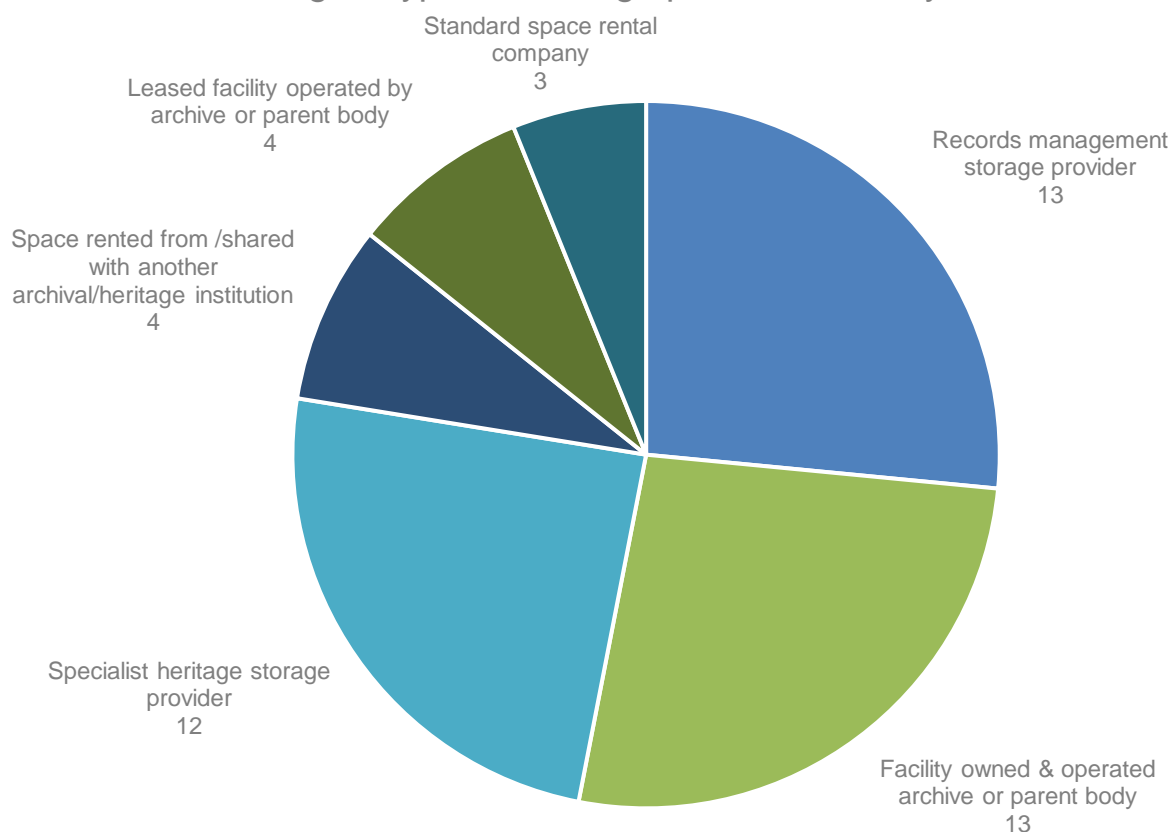
3. Offsite storage scenarios

Pressures on onsite space is the major driver for deciding to store off-site. Respondents use a range of providers but primarily commercial records management or specialist heritage storage providers or an in-house owned and operated facility. Low usage levels is the leading factor in choosing which material to store material offsite.

3.1 Storage provider type

Respondents used a variety of storage solutions (Fig. 5).

Fig. 5 Types of storage provider used by number of respondents

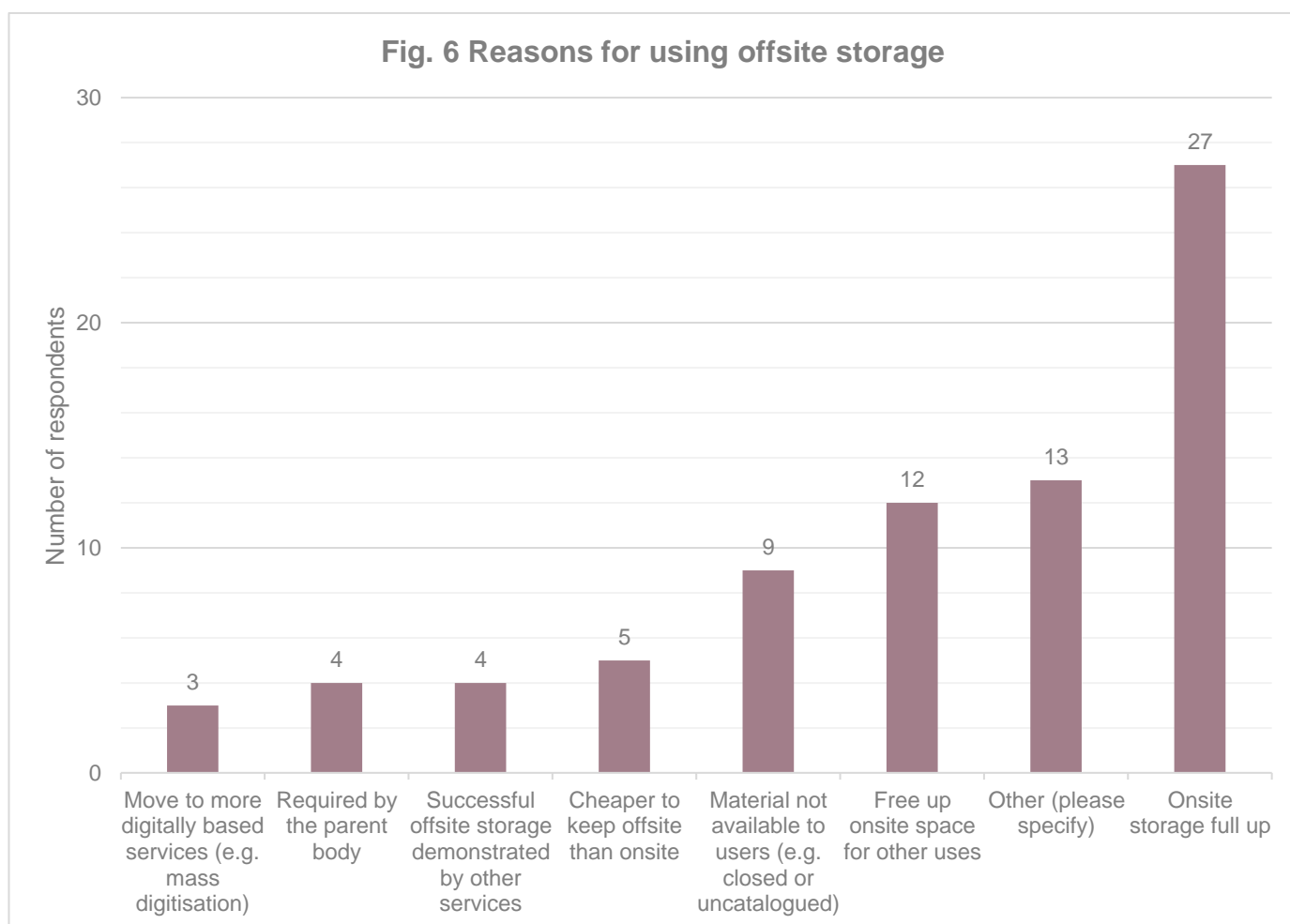


The leading types were commercial records management, a specialist heritage provider or a facility that the service or its parent owned and operated. Clearly

the vast majority of offsite storage is rented rather than owned. Of the 41 respondents six used two types of provider whilst the rest just used one. There did not appear to be any correlation between the storage provider type and the geographical location of the service or the type of archive service.

3.2 Reasons for deciding to use offsite storage

Respondents were asked to tick all the relevant reasons that they decided to use offsite storage (Fig 6).



Unsurprisingly the overriding reason was that because onsite storage was full up – of the 34 respondents to this question 27 cited this reason. Other issues such as cost, alternative uses for the space or demanded by the parent body were much lesser reasons. Moving to a more digitally based service (so delivering contact with collections online and remotely) was the least voted for reason which would suggest there is still a very strong need to have contact with physical collections despite significant strides in putting material online.

There was no obvious correlation between reasons and the service's location, type or collection size.

The 'Other' category also demonstrated issues around availability of space onsite as well as the parent body requiring a particular approach and initially temporary solutions becoming permanent offsite storage decisions. The answers from the respondents are given below:

Lack of or loss of space

- Not allowed more space in our building
- On move to new premises minimal on-site storage available
- Apart from being full, our onsite accommodation did not meet the environmental and safeguarding standards for public records required by TNA
- Records were already stored by the parent body in the offsite storage facility, but the closure of the main archive storage facility and move to a different institution meant the collection was split between the two.
- Site rationalisation - reduction in the number of site libraries

Impact of the parent's decision

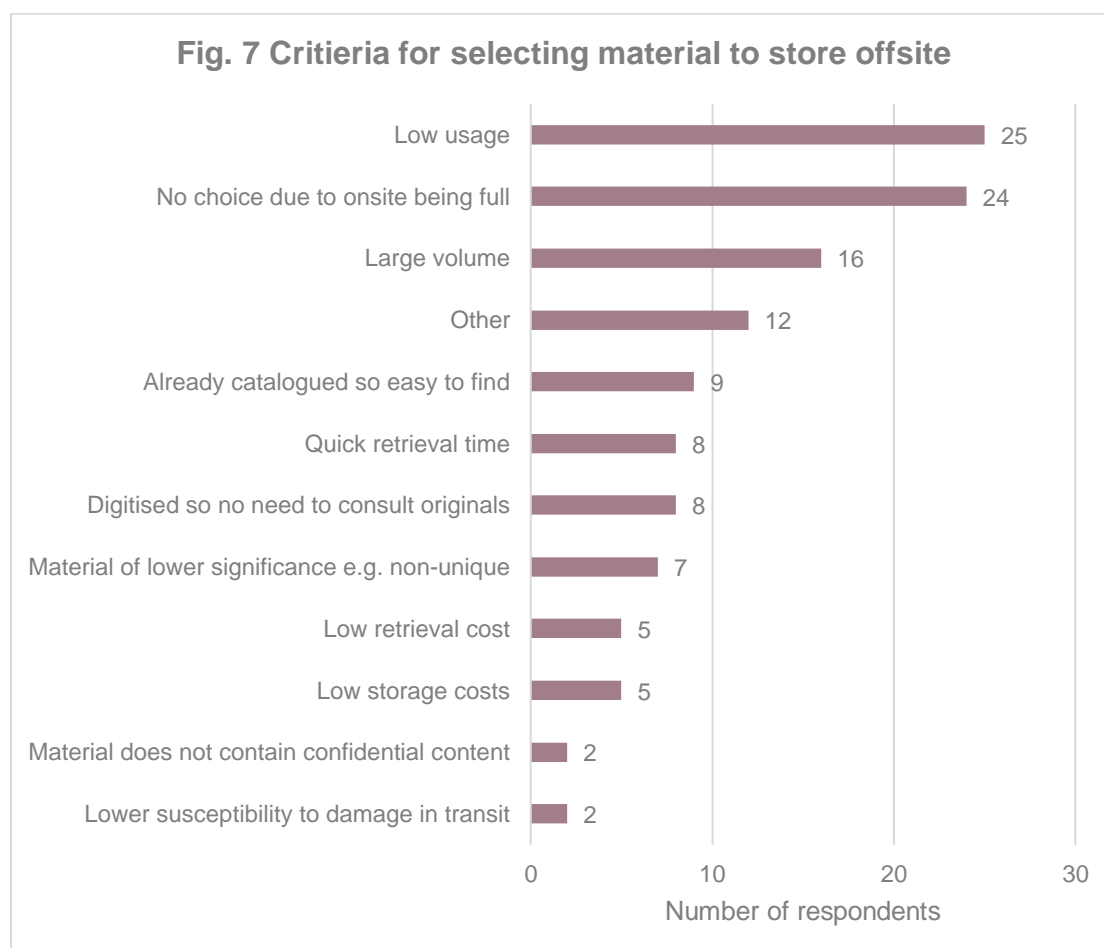
- It's what we were offered
- Parent body did not provide us with storage

Became a sensible solution for the long-term

- Onsite storage full up was the initial reason but it's also cheaper than building new storage and digitisation means it continues to make sense
- Initially, temporary offsite storage of all our collections was required because the organisation undertook a major building project to extend into the neighbouring premises. After this project was completed, a decision was made to continue storing any underused collections offsite, so making more space available onsite.
- The initial [decision was to move all of the collection into offsite storage]. However after the bulky items had been moved a decision was taken to halt the process. The items off-site cannot now be returned as we do not have enough space to store them now they have been appropriately repackaged. Also the off-site storage is marginally cheaper than keeping that material onsite and the environmental conditions are better as we do not have BS compliant stores.
- Our onsite provision is 'on display'. Archival material is not on display and is therefore off-site due to the history of the service.

3.3 Criteria for choosing material to store offsite

As Fig 7 shows, the overriding reasons for choosing material was that it was low usage, was of very large volume or that there was simply no room for it onsite.



The next most heavily used reasons were around qualities that made retrieval easy or not necessary (already catalogued or digitised or a quick retrieval time). The lowest ranked reasons were those that might be considered to reduce risk or cost (lower significance, no confidential content, lower susceptibility to damage in transit, low retrieval or storage costs). Most respondents cited numerous criteria for making their choices – of the 52 respondents only five cited just one but of these four cited onsite storage being full. Again there was no obvious relationships between criteria and location, service type or total size of collections.

‘Other’ criteria given were:



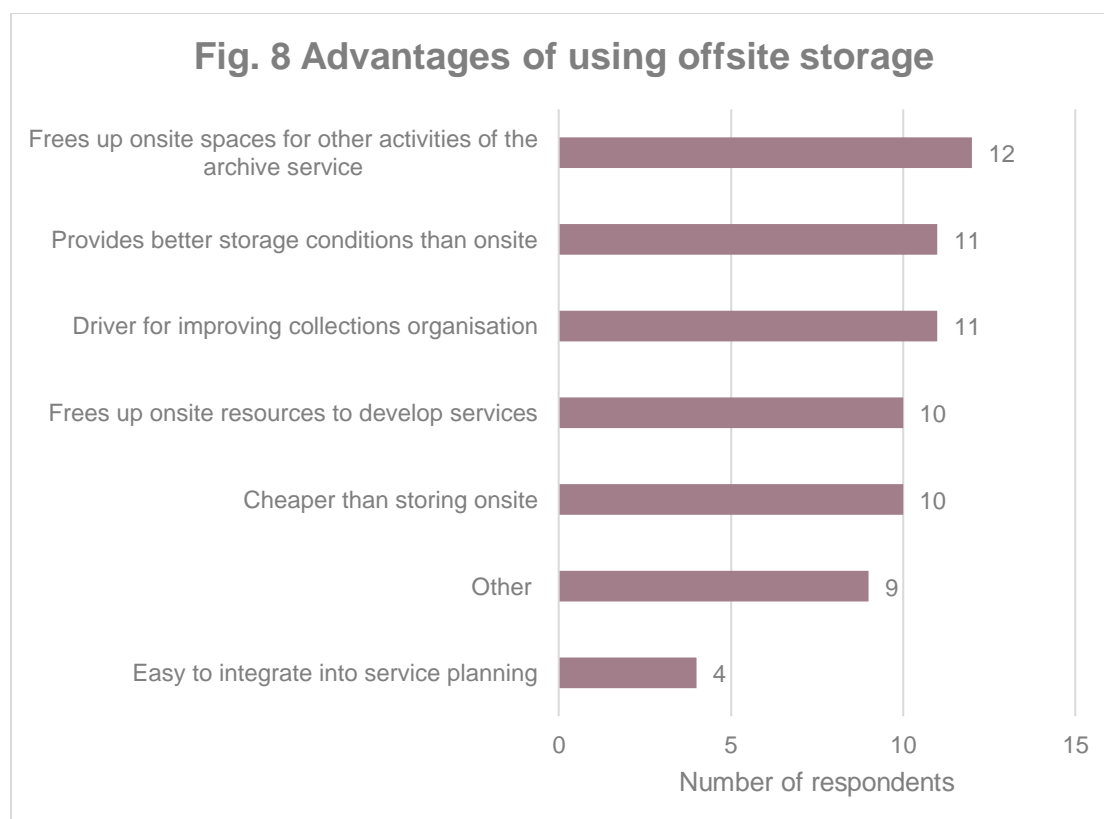
- To move collections into better quality storage and meet 'Place of Deposit' storage standards
- Collections that had not been catalogued
- Movement of confidential material to a location which is more secure although offsite
- Providing sufficient space for a new collection
- Storing offsite material which is not 'displayable'
- Material which will be used in a number of locations

4. The impact of using off-site storage

Using offsite storage does free up onsite resources and can drive better collections management and collecting. However, it does bring numerous disadvantages, notably undermining service levels to users. Storage and retrieval costs are a concern but risks to collections and demands on staff time are a greater issue.

4.1 Advantages of using offsite storage

The advantages appear to be fairly evenly spread as Fig. 8 shows:



Additional onsite space and resources, better storage and collections and lower storage costs all scored well. Of the 10 respondents who ticked

'Cheaper than storing onsite' six were in Central London and two were in the South East. Likewise of the 12 who ticked 'Frees up onsite space' four were in Central London and five were in the South East. These responses may which may reflect the immense pressures on space in these regions compared to the rest of the UK. There were no other obvious trends associated with location, service type or size of collection.

Interestingly only four ticked offsite storage as easy to integrate into service planning.

The 'Other' advantages listed by respondent focused on better storage conditions, improved collections management and collecting:

Improved collections management

- Provides expansion space and enables collections to be processed/moved around in accordance with work flows; Provides driver for institutional action to resolve the storage crisis
- Made me think outsourcing storage is better than archive staff managing a strong room. We can concentrate on intellectual control, cataloguing, customer liaison, outreach etc whilst the private sector can manage the warehousing work - physical space, locationing, retrieval, etc. If the budget allowed and I could redesign the service point provision I would outsource all of our storage needs.
- The cost of calling back material because the catalogue is insufficient to know whether we have something or not focuses the mind on why we need full catalogue descriptions. None of those boxes return to store without the catalogue being significantly improved but unfortunately we do not have the resources to make the improvements to the whole collection as a project just on an ad hoc basis when we have to call boxes back in.
- For the first time we really got our cataloguing programme scoped and written up accurately. We also had to be much more professional about locations procedures and enquiries turnaround times. So I'd say it sharpens up your professional skills.

Supports collecting

- Enabled us to acquire a collection we do not otherwise have room for.
- Frees up storage space for current collecting

Improved storage conditions

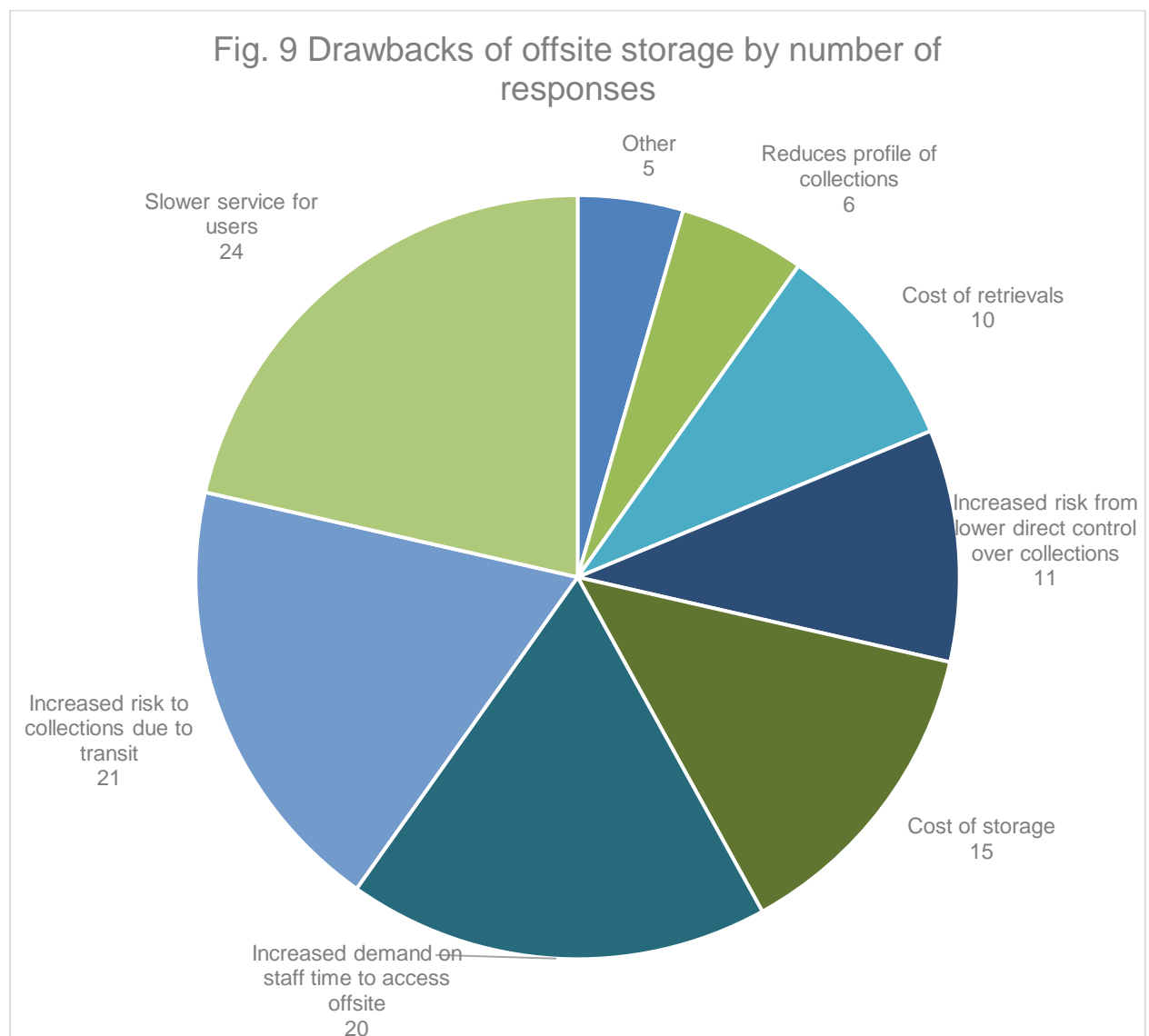
- The only professional advantage in our situation is that it provides better quality environmental conditions

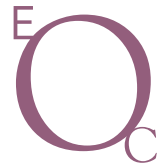
- We kept our licence as a Place of Deposit for Public Records and it gave us a breathing space to address long term accommodation project. Also when it came time to move collections back onsite, they had had a chance to acclimatize to a better environment and we weren't bringing high RH % materials into our new storage

Situation specific

- A large offsite storage facility is essential for running services as required by the institution.

4.2 Drawbacks of using offsite storage





For the 39 respondents by far the biggest individual concerns were the slower service to users, the different increased risks to collections and increased demand on staff time. However, when the scores for risks to collections in transit and lower direct control are aggregated and the scores for storage and transit costs are aggregated collection risk and costs are the biggest concerns. However, with costs it should be remembered that many services access 'free' storage on site because they are not internally charged for the use of that service. So the storage cost is made explicit by using commercial offsite storage but this cost may not actually be any more (and may be less) than the cost to the overall organisation of providing onsite storage.

Most of the respondents cited two or more drawbacks. Just five cited only one drawback and of these four chose 'Slower service to users'.

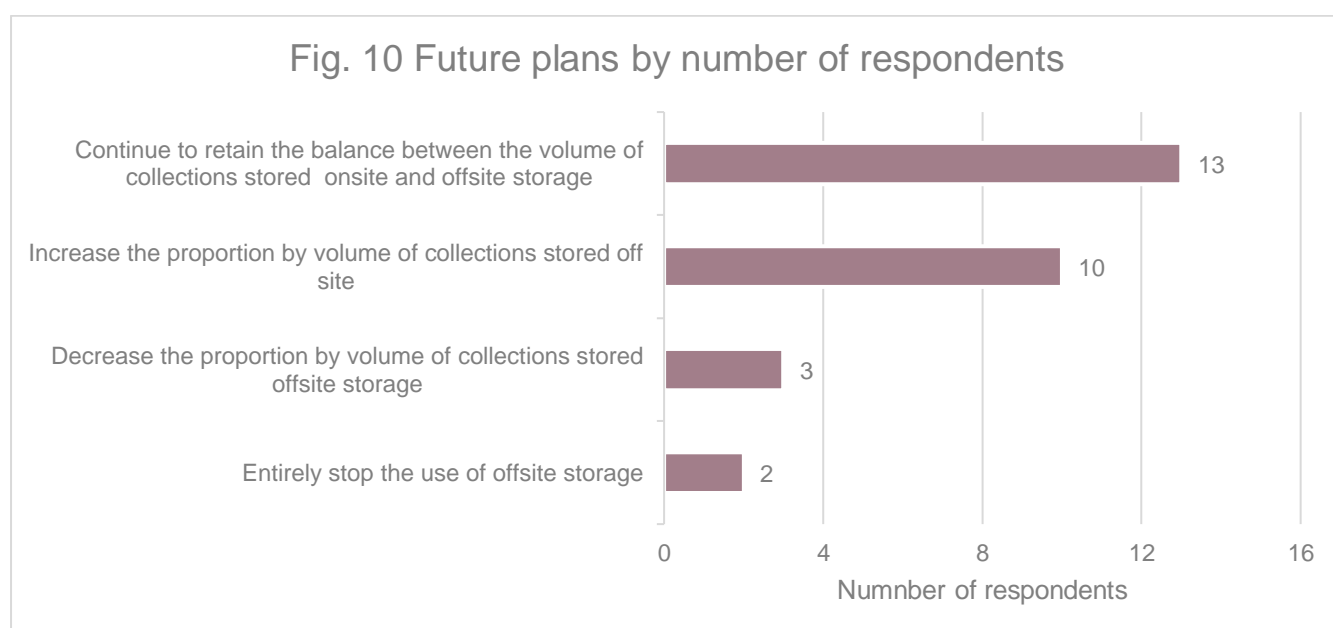
There were no obvious patterns relating to service location, service type or size of collection.

The 'Other' responses included:

- Restricts staff familiarity with collections.
- Because they were public records, we had to go there every weekday whether or not there were retrievals, to check environment and security. And do a fire alarm test every week. So there was also an environmental impact (driving). Also we had to have slave metering and fire alarm system so had to do a number of checks in tandem with another department .
- I think that the main problem is deciding which archives are going to be highly used and therefore need to be stored on site. There is one archive we did send off site and then found it was very popular with researchers. In instances such as this we tend to retain on site. On the other hand I have identified a number of archives that can be sent off site in order to create space for new accessions which by their nature need to be keep in secure conditions. So rather than increased staff time accessing offsite collections, you have staff working on bar coding, listing and send archives offsite. Then we have to update the catalogues to reflect changes in locations. It's manageable but I do sometimes worry about the dangers of transit
- Makes it tough to deal with cataloguing backlogs.
- Not as easy to manage the collections, as cataloguing and box listing can't be done as quickly as when the collections are onsite.

4.3 Future plans

It is clear that for most of the respondents to this question they will continue to use off-site storage, the majority retaining the current balance with onsite storage but a significant proportion planning to increase its use in the future (Fig 10).



Only 3 plan to reduce the amount and only 2 entirely stop the use of offsite storage.

4.4. On balance

In the comments that were received about the advantages and drawbacks there was not a clear consensus as to whether offsite storage was a good idea or not. One respondent said ‘In reality there are few drawbacks. It is a case of being organised and ordering material in-time and consistently’ and another commented that ‘I can see more benefits than drawbacks in using private sector storage. I would imagine if you were using your own authority's out stores and had no retrieval service there would be more drawbacks’.

However others described it as ‘a necessary evil’, ‘there are no real advantages to this for us - it’s just the way it is!’, ‘I would prefer the material to be stored onsite.’ ‘My preference is for onsite storage’ and ‘Our overall aim is to reduce the usage of offsite storage as it is challenging to manage.’

5. Conclusion

Use of off-site storage for archive collections is common practice in the UK. Each service develops its own approach to employing this resource in its work. Whilst some services see the use of off-site storage as an opportunity to improve the knowledge and management of collections, others find it a difficult logistical pressure on top of the existing workload. Whatever the individual experience, it is clear that storing collections away from the primary service site is going to continue and could well increase as pressures on space and operating costs, particularly in urban areas, continues to grow.

Appendix 1 Definitions of high, medium and low usage

Respondents were asked to explain how they defined high, medium and low usage. The individual responses are provided below.

High use - fully catalogued and frequently consulted

Medium use - catalogued to some level and requested occasionally

Low use - not catalogued or not to sufficient level of detail to enable use; also fully catalogued but closed; and fully catalogued and little used.

High-Public Records Parish Records, archives known to be frequently requested

Medium-Archives requested infrequently

Low- known to of infrequent use. However some archives are off site due to their sheer size rather than usage.

High, things that get asked for regularly, large rare local interest collections.

Medium, things that are asked for occasionally, locally important.

Low - things that are asked for rarely, things we keep for official reasons that are unlikely to be requested.

From production logs and experience.

High may be weekly/daily requests

medium monthly

low = rarely

High immediate access for researchers or information requests

Medium occasional use of a series or rare information request

Low required to keep as part of institutional history or government legislation e.g. research studies under legislation and which are occasionally audited; art work but loans rare

Medium = 5+ readers accessing the material per week

Low = less than 5 requests for access per month



Most used collections held onsite, lesser used collections held offsite. Use is defined as physical use, for research, answering queries, and outreach. Use doesn't include background work, such as box listing, cataloguing, etc which would swap the numbers round!

High usage - weekly retrieval
Medium usage - up to 4 x year
Low usage - hardly ever

High would be weekly requests for access
Medium monthly
Low annually

High. Use by the organisation for enquiries, resources for use in fundraising, social care enquiries and requests for product development.

Medium: academic researchers.

Low: requests for supplementary information from series held in offsite storage. Information from series recently transferred to the Archive. These have yet to reach wider audiences so their use is more limited.

High - access in general to those collections each day
Low - weekly access

High usage - daily or weekly
Medium usage - monthly

High means daily use Low usage defined as once a month

We monitor how often each item is requested and compare the usage between collections

High - enquiries/requests daily
Medium - several enquiries/requests per week
Low - several enquiries/requests per month

High use = multiple different items from that collection requested on a weekly basis.

Low = 0 - 2 requests for items from that collection annually.

Medium = everything in between



High = a proportion of the materials in any one collection are regularly requested and retrieved. They may also be the focus of digitisation programmes.

Low = a small number of artworks are occasionally retrieved for display or loan

High - used weekly, e.g. for tours, or for research

Medium - likely to be required once a year

Low - unlikely to be required for several years (e.g. closed papers)

We don't use these bands. Very high use is often material on open shelf (self service).

All our storage is off site and so usage is high in relation to what we hold.

High - regular requests for access.

Low - rare requests for access.

High - regular and daily

medium - we take a delivery every 10 working days so judged as medium

Offsite material is usually closed material that is not accessed by researchers only by staff for internal projects.

We are open to the public 4 days a week and on most days archive material is requested. The material stored off-site is rarely, if ever, required. In most cases a surrogate exists for public consultation.

Enquiries and exhibition curation

High usage is daily requests from researchers.

Low is once every couple of months

As most of our collections are on site they cover the whole range of usage. Those stored off site are generally those with long restriction periods as to access meaning one file is required from the bulk once or twice a year. We have recently sent a large quantity of public records off site and as we have never had these records before it is not clear yet what level of recall there will be - we hope not much!

High = daily

Medium = weekly

Low = monthly



High - records accessed on a daily basis
Medium - Store visited approximately every 1-2 week
Low - store visited approximately monthly

Daily / weekly access - high
Monthly / quarterly - medium
Twice a year or less - low

High would be several times a week, medium would be several times a month

Collections stored onsite are principally archive material. Not all is used regularly, but due to the remote nature and quick turnaround of most of our enquiries (internally), it would not be possible to store this material off-site and answer queries in the time needed (too much time would be lost to ferrying material backwards and forwards and damage through movement caused to material). I think the term 'usage' is misleading, the nature, cataloguing, business need etc will also have a significant bearing. All material in the out-store is fully archivally packaged and catalogued to item level, every item is also professionally photographed. this was a very long and expensive process, but saves considerable time in mis-retrievals and in many cases the high quality photographs mean items do not need to be recalled.

How often anything is asked for or used, or visited