

## What is the Archives at NCBS?

Archives at NCBS is a space located in the basement of the Eastern Laboratories building of National Centre for Biological Sciences.

It consists of a reception area, a reading room, a hot-desking area, a recording room, a processing room, an exhibition space, and an archive storage room.

Outside there are many plants and inside there are many people.



...and what happens inside this space?

Archives at NCBS is a **public archive** which aims to collect archival material and make it publicly accessible. It also aims to engage the public through a variety of activities including monthly lectures and a rotating exhibition. The archiving team works to methodically conserve, catalogue, and make accessible the material collected. In addition they work to routinely recruit speakers for monthly public lectures and create regular posts their social media. This is the day-to-day work of the archive and is in many ways monotonous maintenance work which keeps Archives at NCBS steadfast in its missions to collect material and engage with the public.

However, Archives at NCBS is also a **knowledge hub**, where the archive wraps around people's interests and lets them research new and innovative methods of archiving and working with and in archives. It then supports them in educating others in these new methods. The work done here by the archiving team is ambitious, and operates on a larger scale in comparison to the aforementioned labour in the public archive part of Archives at NCBS. This knowledge hub side of the Archives often involves larger projects which include multidisciplinary group work and demand creative thinking from all participants. An example of this is the creation of *Archives, Ethics and the Law in India: A Guidebook for Archivists in India*, which aimed to bring together people's knowledge on copyright and access in archives and then share this collected knowledge with other archivists in India. Overall the work done in the knowledge hub aims to establish Archives at NCBS as a pioneer and innovator in the Indian archiving sector.

It turns out there are two answers to "What is Archives at NCBS?" One is a **public archive** and the other, is a **knowledge hub** for the development of new archiving methods. They are, in a sense, two separate identities which live together under one roof and have to be brought to life by a single group of people in a limited amount of time. And this is where things start to get a bit complicated because the two identities of Archives at NCBS, individually demand a lot of time and work from the archiving team and, more importantly, the type of work demanded by one identity is radically different to the other. For example, within the public archive identity the work needs to be consistent and methodically, but within the knowledge hub, work needs to be experimental and creative. This means the work in each identity requires different cognitive states. The identities also work with different timescales. The work under the public archive identity is the day-to-day, yet covers the long term, while the work within the knowledge is more likely to be a limited period of time, restricted by funding. Both of these need to fit within everyone's diaries.

So, how do you manage these two opposing states of work?

### Step one: understand the two identities

It is firstly important to recognise there are two identities living within the walls of Archives at NCBS and to realise each identity will require a different mode of working. Communicating the existence of these two identities throughout the archives' team and ensuring everyone understands the different aims of each identity should make it easier for people to compartmentalise their work on a day-to-day basis. In addition if there is a collective understanding each identity requires a different cognitive setting people can align their diaries to ensure everyone is in the same state of mind. For example, if a group is working on a project for the knowledge hub they arrange a brainstorming meeting at a time when everyone's minds are free to do some blue sky thinking and are not weighed down by the heavy maintenance work need for the public archive. Having an awareness of these two identities and knowing how these identities require different modes of work will allow people to better identify their own strength and limitations within these work settings. This in turn should help them work better within a group as they are able to understand their own working style better.

### Step two: share information

Sharing information within the archives' team is essential, because the staff keeps changing. The idea behind the rotating interns is to ensure a steady flow of fresh eyes and creative minds, which is, undoubtedly, essential for the Archives' as a knowledge hub. However, when it comes to the methodical nature of work within the public archive identity the ever changing guard becomes more of an obstacle than a benefit with everyone having to learn the methods of the Archives time and time again. It becomes a balancing act between creating consistency in one mode and creativity in another while all live in the same space. On the one hand it is tempting to establish more formal methods and structures to support the more methodical side of working. And on the other hand the Archives also need to nurture creativity in its staff which requires freedom and minimal structure. But if we put down too many rules to make the consistency easier to maintain then we might risk losing the experimental space. Furthermore, the field of archiving is forever changing so any rigid how-to guide will quickly become out dated or is never able to encompass everything that might need to be archived in the first place. Therefore the solution is sharing information, because if people have access to their predecessor's work they are able to mimic it while simultaneously updating it to the present situation. Sharing information allows people to see what has previously been done but does not dictate what people should be doing, so you do not lose the creative and experimental space which is so essential to the knowledge hub. This should achieve a perfect balance between consistency and creativity within the work.

### Step three: open communication

No multidisciplinary space (and Archives at NCBS is a multidisciplinary space) can function without clear and open communication. Open communication limits mix-ups and confusion but most importantly it helps cultivate a culture of asking for support and help. People need to be comfortable to share their limitations and the moments when they are struggling, because then others will be able to support them and this, in turn, will make the work better and easier to complete. Open communication is the foundation on which the above steps are built on, without open communication, the two identities cannot be identified and information struggles to be shared.

It however is important to note how much harder this becomes as a group increases in size. Gathering and articulating information among a large group simply takes a lot of time, but it also becomes more necessary as the day-to-day chit chat amongst the team will not circulate all the necessary knowledge.

To quickly summarise, the aims of Archives at NCBS are embodied by two different identities, a public archive and a knowledge hub. Each of these identities are essential to the Archives, but require very different types of work. How the balancing of this work is negotiated depends on people's understanding of the two identities, the sharing of information, and open communication. The priorities and aims of the Archives will change over time, especially when it is at the mercy of funding requirements. However there will always be a balancing act between the long-term and the short-term, and development and maintenance, which will constantly require some form of management in order to keep a healthy work environment.

