

EMBL Archive – Terms of Reference (2018)

1. Document Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this document is to define the vision for and mission of the EMBL Archive, and provide information on its governance, scope and objectives.

2. Vision for and mission of the EMBL Archive

EMBL exists to “promote co-operation among European States in fundamental research, in the development of advanced instrumentation and in advanced teaching in molecular biology as well as in other areas of research essentially related thereto. [...] The results of the experimental and theoretical work of the Laboratory shall be published or otherwise made generally available.”¹

In alignment with this institutional mission, the EMBL Archive’s vision is to provide a resource that supports and documents European research, instrumentation and training in the field of molecular biology. It will do so by capturing, processing (see § 5. B) and making accessible EMBL’s scientific records and archives, and institutional documentary heritage of enduring historical value created (naturally or necessarily) or received by EMBL as a product of its activities at any of its current and future sites. This specifically includes material from persons (e.g. current or former staff), and can include material from organizations closely associated to EMBL and/or the life sciences.

3. Governance

The EMBL Archive will be governed as a single entity, meaning that its procedures will be implemented uniformly across the organization. Bearing in mind EMBL’s geographical spread, these procedures will need to include storage and accessibility of material originating from the headquarters laboratory and the sites (see § 10. A).

A. Organisational Relationships

The EMBL Archivist reports to the EMBL Director General.

In addition s/he will work closely with selected persons whose positions within EMBL have been identified as relevant to meeting the archive’s objectives. While the exact nature of these working relationships will vary according to needs, close collaborations are expected with the following areas/departments: the EMBL Directorate, Heads of Units, the EMBL Council Secretariat, EMBL Administration, Alumni Relations, IT Services, and the Szilárd Library.

Outside of EMBL, the EMBL Archivist will work with relevant local, national and international institutions, as described in § 9.

4. Scope of the EMBL Archive holdings

A. Association with EMBL

The EMBL Archive is principally concerned with (moveable) cultural (including scientific) heritage associated with EMBL either:

- through origin, i.e. it was created within the context of EMBL activities

¹ “Agreement establishing the European Molecular Biology Laboratory”, Geneva, CH, 10 May 1973 (EIF 4 July 1974), United Nations Treaty Series, vol. 954, No. 13866 p. 353.

- through creator, i.e. it was created by someone working at, or who has worked at, EMBL (member of personnel or alumnus/a)
- through association to EMBL by subject matter and/or by virtue of EMBL's position as Europe's flagship intergovernmental organization in life science research.

Within this scope, material will be accessioned (i.e. formally added to the EMBL Archive) unless a more appropriate place of deposit can be identified (see § 9 and 10).

B. Geography

Cultural heritage that falls within the scope of the EMBL Archive as described in § 4. A. will not need to meet any geographical criterion regarding place of origin or creation in order to be accessioned. Specifically, accessions will not be limited to material created at EMBL sites, or in EMBL member states, EMBL associate member states or EMBL prospect member states.

C. Date and chronology

Cultural heritage that falls within the scope of the EMBL Archive as described in § 4. A will not need to meet any date or chronology criteria regarding time of creation in order to be accessioned. Specifically, records that predate the founding of EMBL can be accessioned.

D. Types of material collected

The cultural heritage of EMBL comes in many shapes and forms, and the EMBL Archive will strive to collect a representative sample (see § 4. E below) of this documentary heritage, in analogue and digital formats. Among other things, the EMBL Archive will collect lab books and notebooks, correspondence and emails, material pertaining to scientific collaborations, drafts of papers and publications, notes and annotated printouts, books and personal libraries, photographs, unpublished original material, interviews and newspaper cuttings, instruments and equipment, models, objects and artefacts, films and recordings, and material from clubs.

E. Selection of material and exclusions

A potentially enormous amount of material falls within the scope described in § 4. A-D, and the EMBL Archivist must ensure that EMBL's archival holdings continue to support the missions of EMBL and the EMBL Archive.. As well as the practical limitations detailed in the following paragraph (§ 4. E. a), accessions will be selected through archival appraisal processes, and in particular, sampling.²

- a) Some material, while fulfilling the requirements stated in § 4. A-D, will nonetheless not be accepted by the EMBL Archive. This will in particular be the case if material cannot be stored, preserved and/or made accessible long-term within the archive's infrastructure. Such items might include biological specimens, large pieces of equipment and digital material that cannot be satisfactorily preserved.

If material cannot be accepted within the EMBL Archive, reasonable effort will be made, working with the material's depositor, to determine the most appropriate way to deal with this material.

5. Objectives

To deliver the mission of the EMBL Archive, three main objectives have been identified:

² This consists of disposing of material that is repetitive or redundant while retaining enough originals to bear witness to the full collection.

A. Capture EMBL's documentary heritage

The EMBL Archive will actively collect relevant documentary heritage that falls within the scope of the EMBL Archive (see § 4), in particular historical scientific and institutional material, current scientific material, current institutional material and administrative records. (The tasks needed to carry out this objective are detailed in the EMBL Archivist's job description.) See § 6. For further detail on the methods and conditions of acquisition of material.

B. Process archival holdings

In line with professional best practice and in order to deliver the mission of the EMBL Archive, the processing of archival material needs to be performed in a timely and professional manner by the EMBL Archivist. Tasks in this area include appraisal and selection of material, cataloguing folds and collections and carrying out adequate conservation and preservation actions.

a) Cataloguing standard

All items in the EMBL Archive will be catalogued according to the International Council of Archives ISAD(G) framework. Descriptive metadata will be structured in an appropriate metadata standard, to be determined and described in a complementary document at a later stage.

C. Communication

Communication is an essential component of the EMBL Archive, enabling EMBL to further its core mission of disseminating the relevance of molecular biology and EMBL's achievements in the life sciences. Communication will be discussed regularly with the Office of Information and Public Affairs. The EMBL Archive will, as much as possible, take advantage of EMBL's usual communication channels to communicate news about new accessions and specific milestones.

a) Branding

The EMBL Archive will follow EMBL branding in all its communication and activities.

b) Web resources

The EMBL Archive will make the most of the EMBL Archive catalogue and the EMBL website to make available and communicate about archival holdings, EMBL and molecular biology. This will be done, for example through authority records, archival descriptions and historical timelines.

c) Communications with contributors

A special effort will be made to communicate with contributors to the EMBL Archive (donors and depositors of material and/or financial backers), should they wish to be kept informed.

6. Methods and Conditions of Acquisition

The two primary sources of acquisition of cultural heritage for the EMBL Archive will be donations and internal processes. Other possible methods of acquisition include bequest, purchase and automated tools. It is preferred that material is not deposited on loan: this will only be considered under exceptional circumstances.

When seeking and processing documentary heritage, priority will be given to material that is most relevant to the history and achievements of EMBL, at risk of being dispersed or destroyed, or best complements existing collections.

A. Donations and bequests

The EMBL Archive is tasked with actively seeking donations and bequests from its employees and alumni, and other appropriate sources. The EMBL Archive will accept single items and/or collections from individuals and organisations. These donations and bequests will be assessed for their appropriateness (see § 4) and will be accepted selectively.

All donations and bequests are accessioned on the understanding that the donor or depositor is legally allowed to transfer ownership of material to the EMBL Archive. Donors and depositors will be requested to help establish, with the EMBL Archivist, the status of legal rights relating to material, for example regarding ownership, copyright and confidentiality. Additionally, the terms and conditions of access to material by users of the EMBL Archive will be discussed with donors and depositors at the time of accession.

B. Internal Policies, Staff Rules and Regulations, and other governing documents

Material created by EMBL Staff within the context of their EMBL activities will, under existing and future internal policies or governing documents, be prone to automatic deposit in the EMBL Archive. A separate document (available internally only) highlights the sections of these documents that are relevant to this type of deposit. As a resource for EMBL material to be curated, the EMBL Archive enables the scientific and administrative records of the organization to meet the highest standard of good practice, accountability and transparency.

Within these rules, the EMBL Archivist will always work with individuals to manage each deposit appropriately and personally.

C. Purchase

The EMBL Archive will always seek to acquire material through the above methods (§ 5. A-B), but, under exceptional circumstances, it will consider purchasing items or collections of special interest. This would include material that does not already belong to EMBL though its origin and is outside the immediate scope of the EMBL Archive (as defined in § 4. A-D) but is of interest to the objective of the EMBL Archive.

D. Automated tools

When digital material of interest exists and is freely available online, the EMBL Archive will, under certain circumstances, acquire such relevant material from public sources (e.g. the Internet) through the use of automated tools. This refers especially to the archiving of the EMBL website and EMBL's social media accounts.

7. Access to holdings and Service to Users

The EMBL Archive exists to preserve and share EMBL's documentary heritage. It is therefore open to all, but access to material will necessarily be controlled to protect private or sensitive data and intellectual property, as detailed in § 6 C. However, this approach does not waive EMBL's immunity from jurisdiction and execution of the inviolability of its archives as specified in the "Headquarters Agreement between the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany and the European Molecular Biology".

A. Description of users

It is anticipated that the users of the EMBL Archive will primarily be scientists and social scientists interested in EMBL and its work, regardless of whether or not they are or have been staff. In line with usual archival practice, the finding aids associated with material will not be targeted at a specific user group but instead seek to enable as many searches as possible. In order to facilitate use of the EMBL Archive for as many groups as possible, the EMBL Archive

catalogue will be set up and maintained in such a way as to enable both generalist and specialist searches. In due course, subject-specific user guides may be also made available..

B. Access to the EMBL Archive Catalogue

The EMBL Archive Catalogue will be accessible via an online interface that will provide information (metadata) about the material, including information about access to the holdings. Whether an item is open, restricted or closed will be clearly indicated in the EMBL Archive catalogue.

C. Access to material

A number of issues will be taken into consideration when assigning access status to archival holdings, including (but not limited to) the following:

- the physical state of material;
- whether the material contains personal data or sensitive personal data;
- the terms of accession established between the EMBL Archive and the depositor;
- whether the material has already been made public as a result of steps deliberately taken by the individual whose personal data or sensitive personal data is featured in the material;
- what permissions are in place from the copyright holder of the material to make the material available;
- IT and software capabilities that might limit folder sizes.

Within this framework, several scenarios are currently envisaged:

- Digital material with no access restrictions: this material will normally be downloadable via the EMBL Archive Catalogue interface;
- Analogue material with no access restrictions for which digital surrogates or representations exist: the surrogates or representations will normally be downloadable via the EMBL Archive Catalogue interface;
- Analogue material with no access restrictions: the full catalogue entry and information on how to access the material in person will normally be made accessible via the EMBL Archive Catalogue;
- Material (analogue or digital) which can only be accessed on-site due to copyright or other issues: the full catalogue entry and information about how to access the material in person will normally be made accessible via the EMBL Archive Catalogue;
- Material (analogue or digital) for which access restrictions exist (restricted or closed material): the catalogue entry (edited or full, as appropriate and further access information will normally be made accessible via the EMBL Archive catalogue.

D. Service to Users

Complementing the online resources, the EMBL Archivist will provide support to interested parties and facilitate access to material and information. The EMBL Archivist will furthermore carry out certain well-defined requests. This will usually be done if the request does not require too much time, and/or if EMBL and/or the EMBL Archive will benefit from or be enriched by the research being carried out.

E. Acknowledgements

In line with good academic practice, users of the EMBL Archive will be asked to acknowledge the EMBL Archive in all outputs. Usually, this will be done by providing the full reference for the material.

F. Reproductions

The reproduction of material will be authorized depending on the open, restricted or closed status of material, and any further specific instructions if applicable. If reproduction is permitted, a single copy for personal use will be given. If more copies are requested, or if material is requested for publication, this will be discussed on a case-by-case basis with the EMBL Archivist.

8. Retention and deaccession

The purpose of the EMBL Archive is to preserve material permanently; however, under certain circumstances, it might be determined that material (an item or collection) might be disposed of or transferred to another archive. Any such deaccession will have to be approved by the EMBL Archivist, the EMBL Director General.

9. Co-ordination and co-operation with other collections

The EMBL Archive will seek to co-operate closely with archivists at other relevant institutions, such as comparable scientific institutions including EIROforum organisations. It is envisaged that co-ordination and co-operation will take the form of regular exchanges. Such exchanges will enrich the EMBL Archive by providing external, professional guidance, and should therefore be considered a long-term activity of the EMBL Archive.

Complementing these exchanges, the EMBL Archivist is expected to engage with relevant professional organisations and forums.³ This will ensure that professional standards are adhered to, be an effective network for communication, and provide opportunities for professional development. In addition, the EMBL Archive will seek to maintain collaborations with local archives.

A. Referrals

One fundamental aspect of co-operation with other relevant institutions will be to make reference to relevant, complementary holdings held at these institutions in an appropriate manner.

Similarly, in due course, the EMBL Archive will communicate its acquisitions to relevant national and international institutions to facilitate access to material held in the EMBL Archive.

10. Special Comments

A. Material from all EMBL sites

For practical, financial and legal reasons, the EMBL Archive will be located at EMBL Heidelberg, where the EMBL Archivist can take responsibility for the storage, access and cataloguing of all items. However, the EMBL Archivist is committed to ensuring that all material, regardless of its provenance, is made easily accessible to all EMBL sites.

B. The case of EMBO

The EMBL Archivist will work closely with EMBO Management in order to best communicate and share the two institutions' shared history. It is acknowledged that, though EMBO Staff are EMBL employees, EMBL and the EMBL Archive will deal with and discuss EMBO material separately. Should EMBO decide to deposit material in the EMBL Archive, this will be done within a specific, to be determined, framework.

³ In 2018, the EMBL Archivist belongs to the International Council of Archives, the Archives and Records Association, the Association des archivistes français.

11. Revision of this document

While every effort has been made to foresee and address as many relevant and appropriate areas of interest, it is inevitable that unanticipated scenarios will emerge. When this occurs, the EMBL Archivist will turn to other EMBL documents and institutional culture for guidance, and rely on standard industry practice and common sense to address these until the next iteration of this document.

This document was approved in February 2016, following discussions throughout 2015 with the EMBL Director General, the EMBL Directorate and relevant EMBL staff. Following the Scientific Strategy and Management Advice Committee (SSMAC, attended by EMBL Senior Scientists) meeting on 19 and 20 January 2016, final changes were incorporated.

A. Record of revisions

This document was reviewed in March 2017 by the EMBL Director General and the EMBL Archivist. No changes to the 2016 version were made.

This document was reviewed in February 2018 by the EMBL Director General and the EMBL Archivist. Its content was updated and reorganized.