

**Title: The National Archives' User Forum**

**Date: 18 November 2014**

**Location: Talks Room**

**Attendees (staff):**

Lee Oliver (LMO) Interim Head of ARK and Head of Public Services Development (Chair); Caroline Ottaway-Searle (COS) Director of Public Services and Human Resources; Julia Jones (JJo) Head of Information Management and Practice; Roger Kershaw (RK) Head of Military, Maritime, Transport and Public History, ARK; Guy Grannum (GG) Discovery Product Manager; Richard Grocock (RG) Operations, Storage and Contract Liaison Manager; Lucy Fletcher (LF) Government Relations Manager; James Hillery (JH) Duty Security Supervisor; Foluke Abiona (FA) Customer Intelligence Officer; Joanna Robinson (JCR) Customer Intelligence Assistant (Minutes).

**Attendees (users)**

Paul Blake; Marie Schneider; Naya Sucha-naya; Steve Dyke; John Seaman; Graham Woolgar; Michael Hill; David Matthew; Geoffrey Berg; Brian Swann; Timothy Peters; Richard P. Bateson.

**1. LMO welcomed all to the meeting.**

**2. Minutes and Matters arising.**

2.1 (2.2 16/10) GW said he had been told the 900 pieces in ADM 358 would be transferred in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2015. He had stated 2015 in his question, not 2014 as recorded in the minutes. GW also said he has so far not been informed of any changes by JJo.

A. JJo said she currently has no update.

LMO said we will inform GW if there is any change. *[Post meeting note: ADM 358 (3339-3591) have recently been transferred into TNA. These should be on the catalogue by the end of November.]*

2.2 Q. Can we have an update on WO 416? Will the cards be available to order in the first quarter of 2015?

A. JJo said WO 416 is currently in the building, and is in the transfer process. They will be available soon, though they are loose cards and will need to be viewed under supervision in the invigilation room.

Q. WO 345 are also loose cards and are currently available to order and view in the reading room.

A. LMO said this arrangement is under review. We will take the matter of WO 416 away.

2.3 (3.2 16/10) There was a SOE advisor at the FCO some years ago, who made decisions about access to SOE files. Does this still apply or is it purely TNA who now make such decisions?

A. JJo said that the FCO SOE advisor was operating before the FOI Act was in place.

LMO said that we now operate within the FOI Act and therefore there is no requirement for such an advisor.

2.4 (5.4 16/10) DM said he was referring to GRO in this point, not GRS.

2.5 (4.2 16/10) GW asked that this question be changed to 'Can the limit of 1,000 search results be increased'.

2.6 (4.7) GW said he did not remember saying this. His point was that the WO 97 series was created by TNA and it should be possible to use the reference numbers to locate documents on commercial sites. It is surely reasonable for TNA to request that its prime, co-branded commercial partners include the TNA reference.

A. We can't compel our commercial partners to include TNA reference numbers; however we could request it.

2.7 Q. (4.1 16/10) In the Red Lists presentation, a spreadsheet of HO 215 search results is shown. Is this standard?

A. This was used as an example of what the spreadsheets look like, not because the series had any particular significance to the presentation.

RK said the spreadsheet export facility replicates the functionality on the old online catalogue.

2.8 Q. Does this spreadsheet downloading facility apply to all classes in Discovery?

A. Yes, as long as the list consists of fewer than 1,000 search results. We can produce spreadsheets with over 1,000 results off-line by request.

GG explained that one reason why we have the limit of 1,000 is that there are many technical issues with exporting over 1,000 search results to spreadsheets. Users also have very different requirements; we recently received a request for a spreadsheet of 181,000 search results.

2.9 Q. Surely you can make an assumption of an average number which would better cater to many people's requirement to download search results of more than 1,000?

A. GG said we decided on this number having carried out research on search requests we have received over the last 15 years.

Q. What about people who have never asked for an increase in search result exporting capability, because they didn't think there was any point? We have had people at User Forum ask for an increase.

A. GG said the numbers required can vary from search result to search result and we have to find a balance.

2.10 Q. GW said he has emailed UAG members about this matter. Many have suggested that the issue of downloading higher numbers of search results is taken into account when devising TNA's four year plan. He also said it is a concern that TNA does not make high definition copies available.

A. These are two separate issues. Some of our users would not have the capacity to download high definition images.

GW said that those who do should not suffer because some people don't. He said he would dispute the assertion that there is not public demand either for the ability to download search results over 1,000, or for high definition images.

A. GG and LMO said they do not say there is not public demand for downloading greater numbers of search results to spreadsheets, but that the majority of users are satisfied with the current limit of 1,000.

GG said we do provide spreadsheets of more than 1,000 search results on request. He said we are currently scoping API (application programming interface), and he will suggest that we investigate increasing higher search result export downloads.

### **3. Update from User Advisory Group (UAG) Delegate Graham Woolgar.**

3.1 GW explained that he would be giving a personal view of the September UAG.

3.2 (1.1 16/09) GW advised attendees that Jeff James (JJ) had told UAG that TNA is happy to hear suggestions from delegates and TNA users for TNA's four-year planning cycle. GW said he had put forward the suggestion to increase the number of downloadable search results from 1,000.

3.3 GW spoke about his concern with the low definition of TNA images. He gave the example of BT 389, which pixelates if the image is enlarged. GW explained that a higher resolution version of BT 389 is available by request from TNA and that there is therefore a choice between high and low definition. GW said he suggested that more money is invested in this.

3.4 Q. Discovery 2 will incorporate everything from the Historical Manuscripts Archive. When will this be accessible?

A. GG said that all the data is now on Discovery, where you can search for MDR, A2A, Archon and NRA.

3.5 Q. With regard to the Manorial Documents Register, will the lists still be available for Map Room users to consult?

A. LMO said the migration of MDR to online access is ongoing and partially complete. The department is migrating the Manorial Documents Register to online access county by county.

3.6 (1.6 16/09) GW said that JJ had spoken about the importance for TNA of the digital future of records, particularly with regard to the 20 year rule. GW said there is a lot of emphasis on making the 20 year rule a reality, but wonders if this is at the expense of work to make older records more available.

A. JJo said that government departments have to balance both requirements. Some departments such as FCO and Treasury have the resources to deal with 'legacy' issues; whereas some, such as MoD, have to balance their resources. TNA does not find this issue a problem.

3.7 GW said that TNA seems to have accessioned less than half of the items, including ships' logs and ADM 358 that MoD should have presented for accessioning. GW asked JJo if MoD is meeting much of the requirements of the 20 year rule.

3.8 Q. This was supposed to be an update on the UAG meeting, not about your personal questions and issues.

A. GW said he had made it clear at the beginning of the update that this was a personal view of issues covered at the UAG meeting.

Q. I think GW has a relevant point. The 20 year rule does not kick in immediately, and there are concerns that some documents may be being held back because politicians don't want them released.

A. JJo said politicians' wishes would not be a reason for any documents to be held back or their release delayed.

3.9 Q. I have tried to find out where the lists of Treasury classes of 1981 currently are. I also advised someone else who was interested, that it is necessary to ask Treasury. There is no clear information about what Treasury has or hasn't done.

3.10 (2.4 16/09) GW said he wants to emphasise that it is important for TNA to choose good digitisation partners. TNA is handicapped by not being allowed to make a profit, therefore TNA can make more money if they get a partner to fund a project. TNA can't fund large digitisation projects, although they did fund the RN Navy cards. It is unsatisfying that TNA can't profit from digitising the records it holds.

3.11 (3.2 16/09) When searching on Discovery, the default order is relevance. However GG has said it is important to differentiate between relevance and relevant. This is useless. You should be able to sort by your preferred search in advance, such as by date.

3.12 Q. (4.3 16/09) The UAG minutes are informative, but I am interested to know what the further discussion about the Red Lists consisted of.

A. RK said the discussion was similar to questions and answers noted in the October User Forum minutes.

3.13 (5.14 16/09) GW said he was pleasantly surprised that part of the collection of Royal Navy service records he has spent a long time urging MoD to digitise are now being digitised. He said the collection also includes files of individuals with dates of birth up to 1913, which brings the collection into line with the 100 year rule. GW said he is very pleased this will happen.

3.14 (5.14 16/09) GW said he asked why the 1939 Health Register records are being accessioned, even though they are not public documents. LMO said that TNA does accession non-public records. Why is this?

A. LMO said that the issues are complicated. Parts of the National Health Register records can be made available to the public and parts cannot, as they contain personal information and health details which cannot be released. TNA is accessioning digitised images. We have done this as there is no census for 1941, and this is as complete as possible a substitute as is available.

Q. GW said it is not clear why TNA has to accession them. DC Thomson is digitising them.

A. LMO said this is effectively another census. The series does have an unusual status, being both a public and a non-public record. They are now being opened following a decision by the Information Commissioner. Currently the HSCIC charges £42 to search within this record.

3.15 Q. If this series has been held by the NHS, should they not benefit from the sale of images?

A. JJo explained that the records are held by the Health and Social Care Information Centre. She said that the data was not originally collected for health reasons, but it was subsequently used to help set up the NHS.

3.16 Q. Is there information on a completion date?

A. JJo said we will take it away.

3.17 (1.1 16/09) Q. How will people know what the issues are that they might be interested in influencing and commenting on? How will you seek out the opinions of your users?

A. JJo said that there we will be receiving feedback at the next UAG.

Q. How will other users know what user views have been expressed?

A. JJo said we will present you with the state of play and ask for your comments.

GW advised attendees to refer to (1.2 16/09) and also advised that they can speak to him about issues they would like raised.

3.18 JJo said if anyone has any feedback about 'Born Digital' issues, as opposed to digitisation issues, we are also interested in hearing about it.

#### **4. Extraordinary User Forum Discussion.**

4.1 LMO explained the background to the Extraordinary User Forum. Several years ago, many questions were asked at User Forum about TNA's role in making transfer decisions, and TNA's relationship with other departments who make decisions about transfers. It was decided to set up an Extraordinary User Forum, with a panel of expert staff including JJo and Carol Tullo to cover these questions in depth. We asked attendees for questions they wished to be asked at this meeting, and published the responses in the form of a Q and A. The [Extraordinary User Forum minutes](#) are available in the User Forum section of the website. RB has requested that we repeat the EUF, and has provided us with suggestions for topics to be covered.

4.2 LMO said we suggest that the February User Forum has the EUF as a single agenda item, and said that we will invite the relevant staff to attend.

4.3 RB said he would like to discuss how records are or are not transferred to TNA. He would also like it to cover statutory instruments and what TNA can and can't do, and the impact of matters such as FOI. RB said his suggestions for topics at EUF include: Record Transfer Reports (RTRs); Series Level Time Plan; TNA Accessions database; 20 Year Rule; Takedown and Reclosure Panels; The Lord Chancellor's Advisory Council on National Records and Archives; Records Decision Panel; MoD.

A. We will arrange for a FOI representative and staff from JJo's team to attend.

4.4 Q. There is a concern that documents which are potentially embarrassing to the government could be destroyed. This type of material should be kept. However, there are barriers to doing this which are not controlled by TNA.

A. JJo said TNA does not supervise First Review.

4.5 Q. Would it be possible to make the February User Forum, or EUF, longer than the usual User Forum?

A. We will consider this.

## **5. AOB.**

5.1 Q. I am concerned about the way some readers use lockers 30 to 40 in the reading rooms. Many readers consult documents on the tables. Can you put up a notice instructing readers not to do this? I have seen a reader looking at a volume directly from its box, with one side of the document hanging over the side.

Q. What is the table there for?

A. LMO said it is so people can use this to temporarily put things down while they are sorting out their locker, not for reading documents. Thank you for bringing this to our attention. RG said he will deal with this matter.

5.2 Q. In pre-Discovery days, there was a hand-out booklet about how to use the online catalogue. Are there any plans for another, similar booklet? Some of the information in the booklet is actually still relevant.

A. LMO said we will look at this.

5.3 Q. I came across a catalogue entry in WO 339 which referred to a 3rd Lieutenant. The British Army does not have 3rd Lieutenants; however this person was in the British Army. I have also seen a reference in BT 377 to someone having been born in 'North Britain', which is the old name for Scotland. It is in fact in New Brunswick though it wouldn't be possible to find this document on Discovery by searching for 'New Brunswick'. What quality checks are being carried out to prevent this type of issue impeding research?

A. Sometimes when series are re-catalogued, issues like this do crop up. Errors can be corrected.

5.4 LMO confirmed that a representative from TSO will be attending User Forum in January to discuss the London Gazette.

5.5 Q. Will the next selection of department releases be in January?

A. Yes, as far as we know they will be released in January.

**Next Meeting: Thursday 22 January 2015, 12:30-13:45**