

## **ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Higher Education (HE) sector represents a core stakeholder group for The National Archives (TNA). The working practices and requirements of the academic community have long influenced TNA's public service functions; and they remain a key user and audience group.

A growing culture of collaboration and partnership between the academic, archives and cultural heritage sectors is increasingly leading to personnel from all sides forming part of a compatible and mutually-beneficial research environment. Through partnerships, collaborative projects and knowledge exchange, academics contribute towards the research, innovation and ideas which underpin the delivery of TNA's objectives and business priorities. Conversely, TNA staff are making major contributions towards multiple academic subject fields.

The academic community is not a homogenous group. Their activities, discourse, approaches to research and their information needs differ, particularly in relation to their discipline, its culture and practice, and the stage of their career. TNA's engagement with the HE sector should seek to support and benefit from the full academic spectrum – taking into account different academic fields and research, training, teaching, impact and outreach agendas.

This strategy is guided by objectives to deliver mutually-beneficial collaborations and partnerships with the academic sector; to deliver concrete impacts and benefits to TNA; and to present a clear and unified image and offer to the academic community.

### **RESEARCH PORTFOLIO: COLLABORATION, CONNECTIVITY AND CONTRIBUTION**

TNA has a strong record and reputation for academic excellence in disciplines ranging from Heritage Science and Digital Humanities to Information Management, Legal Informatics and Education. TNA is recognised as an Independent Research Organisation (IRO) by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and holds 'Knowledge Base' status with the Technology Strategy Board. TNA has a growing record of leading on grants-funded research projects, and is also receptive to partnering and supporting relevant HEI-led research projects.

Many members of TNA staff have strong backgrounds in the academic sector whereas the shared research culture provides TNA staff with a highly-developed understanding of the research process and of the changing needs of academic peers, enabling them to keep up-to-date with changes in the academic sector in general, and with the developments and trends in their own subject fields in particular. This knowledge is translated into service delivery, and augmented through the following initiatives:

#### Collaborative research projects

By partnering with the university sector, TNA draws on relevant external expertise in helping it fulfil its research and business priorities. The organisation has a strong track record of collaborative working with academic partners to deliver impactful research projects. Through research projects into managing collections and digital sensitivity review, TNA is innovating to ensure optimal physical and digital preservation. TNA showed reach and positioning as an international research organisation by participating, through the Public Sector Information (PSI) Department, in an EU bid to identify legal barriers for the re-use of PSI in the EU. TNA provides a record that is more open and inclusive via projects such as the successful bid to catalogue and open up Board of Health records, funded by the Wellcome Trust. The Advice and Records Knowledge (ARK) and Archive Sector Development (ASD) Departments received funding for programmes on Collaborative Skills Training and Skills for the Future, which deliver on better

public services and TNA's role as archives sector lead in encouraging a more diverse profession. Overall, research grants fund work that would otherwise draw on TNA's core funding, or would not happen.

#### **FORMAL COMMUNICATIONS: RELATIONS AND REPRESENTATION**

TNA has established formal lines of communication with the academic community through the following channels:

##### Stakeholder engagement meetings and advisory groups

The Head of Research and other senior TNA staff regularly meet with individual academics and representatives from key academic stakeholder groups including Research Councils and other funding bodies to share information, discuss collaborative opportunities and to receive recommendations and feedback on service delivery.

TNA's voice and expertise is formally represented on academic forums and bodies which have influence and support innovation in disciplines ranging from Legal Informatics and Data through to History and Heritage Science. These include the Royal Historical Society, the History Subject Association, the National Heritage Science Forum, the UK Data Forum, the Digital Preservation Coalition and the EU Working Group on e-Law.

Formal mechanisms also exist for oversight of TNA's academic liaison:

- *The Forum on Historical Manuscripts and Academic Research*

The Forum was established as a sub-committee of the Advisory Council on National Records and Archives in 2010 and provides a formal route for recommendations to be made to the Council on academic research issues. The Forum meets 2-3 times a year, with the Head of Research in attendance.

- *User Advisory Group*

TNA's User Advisory Group consists of delegates representing different sectors of TNA's user community, including individuals representing academia. Members of the Research Team regularly present to the Group, as well as consulting academic members for feedback and input.

##### Research Newsletter and Academic Contacts Mailing List

The Research Team produces a quarterly Research Newsletter which is disseminated via TNA's website and an Academic Contacts Mailing List, also held by the Research Team. The Newsletter aims at keeping the academic, research and cultural heritage sectors updated with research and academic news from TNA, including information on current projects, research findings and forthcoming initiatives and events. The Academic Contacts Mailing List is also used as a platform to promote TNA academic engagement initiatives.

##### Online research profile

The Research Team is working with other TNA departments to develop an improved space on the TNA website dedicated to showcasing the broad and multidisciplinary institutional research profile. Constituting a well-established communication and profiling medium in the academic environment, this web space will provide a clear articulation, for the academic sector, of TNA research priorities, activity and successes, and opportunities for engagement and collaboration.

#### **SERVICE PROVISION: RESOURCES AND RESEARCH AIDS**

TNA collections represent a uniquely valuable research resource for the academic community. TNA is committed to making these collections as accessible and available as possible, both onsite and online, for all of its users. As part of this service provision, TNA recognises that academics want to be able to easily and quickly identify the resources that are relevant to them, and to retrieve information effectively. TNA is committed to continually improving its

resource discovery and finding aid platforms (in alignment with TNA technology platforms) for both its own collections and for the archive sector in general. Through longstanding commercial partnerships with major academic digital publishers TNA is making its collections more available and usable as a research resource.

For onsite research, TNA has highly competitive opening hours and is committed to fast document production times, advance ordering of documents, bulk ordering of documents and free user photographing of documents for research purposes.

TNA's ARK Department provides expert collections and research advice to all users: online in the form of research guides, and by responding via email to reader enquiries; by phone; and onsite, being available in the Reading Rooms to answer user enquiries. TNA's Education and Outreach Department also provides online resources for undergraduate student groups.

#### **OUTREACH: EVENTS AND DISSEMINATION**

An important strand in TNA's academic engagement is the organisation of conferences and events, often at Kew.

##### The Gerald Aylmer seminar

In partnership with the Royal Historical Society and the Institute for Historical Research, TNA organises an annual seminar designed to unite the academic, archives and cultural heritage sectors and showcase excellence in research, multidisciplinary innovation and collaboration. Recent seminars have addressed topical issues such as the global archive, material culture and new methodologies affecting archives and history. It is quickly developing into one of the most prominent events in both the historical research and archival calendars.

##### Hosting academic conferences, symposia and events

TNA regularly hosts a range of academic events led by departments across TNA, notably ASD and ARK. These act to explore best practice in partnership and collaborative working between the archive and academic sectors, promote our collections and showcase our lead in this area.

##### Academic Open Day

In the Autumn of 2014, TNA will pilot an Academic Open Day aimed at showcasing the organisation's research profile and highlighting opportunities for academic engagement and collaboration across the organisation.

##### Public talks programme

TNA hosts a series of public talks at Kew, providing a platform for invited academics and researchers to showcase their research and deliver outreach, engagement and impact initiatives.

##### University group visits

Many TNA departments host visits from university groups, whereby undergraduate and postgraduate students are introduced to various aspects of TNA's work and collections.

#### **POSTGRADUATE OFFER**

##### Collaborative doctorates

In recent years, TNA has started to build experience and a track record of partnering with universities in collaborative doctorates, winning funding in partnership for collaborative studentships from AHRC, ESRC and EPSRC. In 2012, as part of a Consortium with the National Portrait Gallery and the National Maritime Museum, TNA received funding from the AHRC for six studentships per year across the Consortium for three years. The studentship subjects are decided by TNA and focus on core business and research priorities. These various schemes mean that TNA now

has at its disposal a growing cohort of PhD students working on research projects directly relating to business priorities.

The Research Team is exploring ways of facilitating opportunities and initiatives for this growing cohort of students to embed their research and its impacts into the organisation.

#### Postgraduate training programme

In 2013, TNA received funding from the AHRC to offer archival research training workshops for postgraduate history students. ARK is now developing a co-ordinated academic training, workshop and open day programme for a wider range of academic audiences. Through this long-term programme, it is anticipated that TNA will situate itself as the pre-eminent organisation for offering records-based research training. The programme will be run on a commercial basis with a particular focus on delivery to the new AHRC Doctoral Training Partnerships (DTP) consortia. TNA is a formal external partner to a number of DTP consortia.

In collaboration with a group of leading universities and other cultural heritage organisations, the Collection Care Department is also supporting an EPSRC-funded Centre for Doctoral Training in Science, Engineering, Arts, Heritage and Archaeology (SEAHA) which will foster the next generation of world class researchers in the field of Heritage Science.

### **PROVIDING A LEAD: CO-ORDINATION AND INTERNAL RESOURCES FOR ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT**

#### Grants and Academic Support Panel (GASP)

GASP is a cross-departmental group, chaired by the Head of Research. Its membership is drawn from heads of departments from across the organisation, with a primary function to assess research priorities and, through a peer-review role, proposals for research grants – ensuring that they remain compliant with broader TNA objectives and strategy. The Panel also serves as an important research and academic knowledge exchange and horizon scanning hub, knitting together the diverse research and academic liaison functions of separate departments.

A new initiative of GASP is seeing the production of Impact Reports following the completion of research projects. These reports will be shared widely across TNA, form a valuable evidence base, and will play an important role in the development of future research and academic engagement programmes.

#### Other internal academic liaison groups

The Research Team holds corporate responsibility for overseeing, promoting and supporting the organisation's research and academic engagement strategies. However, individuals, departments and groups from across the organisation play important roles in academic liaison and delivery.

- *Advice and Records Knowledge Department (ARK) Academic Group*

In December 2013, ARK established a series of regular meetings to discuss departmental research activity and strategy, and provision of services to academics.

- *Archives Sector Development Department (ASD) HE Engagement Forum*

As part of an initiative to address the need for TNA's archive sector leadership to engage more with the HE sector, ASD established, in January 2014, a cross-departmental forum for:

- Disseminating TNA's research to the wider archive sector;
- Promoting archive sector engagement with TNA's academic liaison and research activities;
- Promoting archival collections for academic use;

- Discussing cross-sector initiatives applicable to TNA's new formal partnership with Research Libraries UK, including guidance on how archives can more effectively collaborate with HEIs and individual academics).

These two groups form an important strand within and outside TNA in setting strategy and focussing delivery for the academic sector.

### Publications and Research Prize

TNA staff have a strong and growing academic publications record, in the form of peer-reviewed articles, book chapters and monographs. Peer-reviewed publications remain the most prestigious form of research output in the academic sector, and supporting staff in this area acts to support external validation and dissemination of TNA's expertise, as well as enhancing the prestige and reputation of the organisation.

In order to support this, TNA's Research Team organises TNA's annual Staff Research Prize in recognition of the most outstanding peer-reviewed article or book chapter written by members of staff. The aim of the prize is to celebrate the research which is undertaken by TNA staff, which plays an essential role in ensuring that TNA remains a leader across a wide range of fields.

### 'Big Ideas' talk series

This monthly series of talks, organised by the Research Team, provides briefings on pioneering ideas coming out of – or related to – TNA's research programme. Covering themes of innovation, creativity and excellence, each Big Idea highlights aspects of innovative research which has the potential to provide the knowledge, ideas and expertise to be transferred into innovative practice and delivery.

## **CONCLUSION**

TNA has succeeded in developing strong, impactful and mutually-beneficial relationships with the academic community, across multiple subject fields. The growing culture of partnership is enhancing TNA's IRO function and reputation, with collaborative research projects delivering concrete benefits in line with business priorities. TNA will continue to develop a range of strategic partnerships across the cultural heritage sector in order to provide better policy and public services.