

# Archives for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century **action plan**

Produced by The National Archives and  
The Museums, Libraries & Archives Council

March 2010

# Background

*Archives for the 21st Century* is the Government policy on archives which was laid before parliament in November 2009. The National Archives and The Museums, Libraries & Archives Council (MLA) have created this joint action plan in response to the five recommendations within the policy, and are working together to implement the action plan with stakeholders from all parts of the archives sector.

The plan is written for an internal audience and outlines the actions The National Archives and MLA are taking to support the archives sector in delivering sustainable high quality archives services that make a difference to people's lives, as called for in *Archives for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. We are committed to the leadership role we must play in bringing the Government policy to life and helping organisations to plan and develop their current and future programmes in response to the recommendations set out in the policy.

In March 2010 we published *Archives for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in action* for leaders, funders and archives senior managers, which shows how the actions being taken by The National Archives and MLA will support action by archives and their parent bodies. It is our outward facing document and was called for by our Implementation Group of senior managers and archives professionals to help strengthen engagement between archives services and their parent organisations.

The action plan will be further developed internally by The National Archives and MLA in joint work streams to plan the objectives, timings, activities, opportunities, implementation, outcomes and measurement of each action. Some activities are already taking place whilst others require fresh planning and resource.

Through the development of the action plan we will continue to work with stakeholders and support the sector in engaging with and influencing parent organisations and government departments to make the case for the valuable contribution archives can make to the delivery of public policy agendas and outcomes. This will be achieved through identifying and informing relevant audiences about the opportunities and challenges that affect them.

# 1. Bigger, better and sustainable services

## Goals

- Leaders of local authorities and universities understand and advocate the role of archives in information management and delivering policy priorities
- There is a culture of continuous improvement in performance and archive facilities
- The value of different business models for the sector is understood and implemented where appropriate

## Actions

	<b>Activity</b>	<b>When</b>	<b>Who</b>
<b>1.1</b>	Promote the contribution that archives can make to the delivery of public policy priorities across Government through meetings, media articles, conference papers and other relevant activities with the following key stakeholders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government departments and agencies engaged in policy making</li> <li>• Representative bodies for elected members and senior officers in local government and higher education</li> <li>• Higher education funding councils</li> </ul>	2010/11	TNA & MLA
<b>1.2</b>	Develop, pilot and deliver an accreditation scheme with the support and engagement of the sector to drive service improvement	2010-12	TNA and MLA
<b>1.3</b>	Research the benefits of different business models and provide advice and guidance about governance models and delivery structures to both practitioners and employing bodies	2010-12	MLA & TNA
<b>1.4</b>	Encourage stronger information management practices in local government and higher education through the closer integration of archives and information management functions	2010-12	MLA & TNA

## Successful Outcomes

- Government, stakeholders and funders recognise the contribution archives make to the delivery of their agendas and can speak confidently about this
- Archives are better able to access a variety of sources of available funding as a result of the rise in their profile
- Users and potential users understand the range of services archives can provide, and are satisfied with the service they receive
- Archivists, stakeholders and funders can see measurable improvement in the quality of the services
- A levelling-up of standards of service provision in the archives sector takes place
- Archives are delivering more and costing less

## 2. Leadership and workforce

### Goals

- The archives workforce has the skills necessary to develop innovative and sustainable services
- More opportunities for professional development within the sector
- Increased diversity means the archival workforce more accurately reflects the wider population
- Good quality and sustainable volunteering opportunities that can be directly linked to skills development and employability

### Actions

	<b>Activity</b>	<b>When</b>	<b>Who</b>
<b>2.1</b>	Promote the value and relevance of leadership training to the archives sector and identify and remove barriers to accessing it	2010-12	MLA
<b>2.2</b>	Develop a co-ordinated and integrated training model to enable the workforce to develop required skills and to progress their careers, with the support of MLA and TNA	2010-13	LLUK and professional bodies
<b>2.3</b>	Further develop initiatives to increase the diversity of the workforce and increase the number of routes of entry to the archives profession	2010-12	MLA & TNA
<b>2.4</b>	Collect and disseminate to repositories best practice, guidance and advice around working with volunteers	2010	MLA

### Successful Outcomes

- Heads of Service are able to demonstrate to their parent bodies the contribution their services make to culture and knowledge agendas
- Archivists are taking leading roles within the profession and the wider cultural sector, and are equipped to do so
- Increased uptake of continuous professional development and leadership opportunities by the archives sector
- The archives workforce demonstrates the skills required by the profession to meet the challenges of the future
- Engagement within the wider community results in a more diverse workforce and volunteer base
- Increased numbers of volunteers working in archives who are developing or refreshing their skills

### 3. Digital preservation

#### Goals

- The risk of a “black hole in history” is avoided through effective digital record-keeping
- The capability and capacity of the archives sector to preserve and provide access to digital records is enhanced
- Users have improved access to collections to support research, learning and enjoyment

#### Actions

	<b>Activity</b>	<b>When</b>	<b>Who</b>
<b>3.1</b>	Develop and publish a digital preservation strategy and promote awareness and understanding of the preservation requirements of digital records	2010-12	MLA & TNA
<b>3.2</b>	Develop partnerships for the delivery of digital preservation to ensure access to the capability, with the support of The National Archives	2010-13	TNA & Archival institutions
<b>3.3</b>	Identify and showcase best practice in digital preservation, and monitor capability for digital preservation through the accreditation scheme	2010-13	TNA & MLA
<b>3.4</b>	Develop a methodology for the assessment and approval of digital places of deposit	2010-12	TNA

#### Successful Outcomes

- Born digital and digitised records are effectively selected, preserved and made accessible
- Policies and procedures are increasingly in place for the seamless transfer of electronic records from active systems to archival custody
- The archives workforce demonstrates the capability to manage digital and electronic records in an appropriate manner

## 4. Online access and collection development

### Goals

- The audience for archival information is broadened and enlarged, and users have access to the archival resources they need and want
- Institutions are increasingly able to make information about their collections available to the public and thereby unlock their potential
- Archives have the capacity and appropriate facilities to collect material of long-term value in all formats from relevant organisations and individuals

### Actions

	<b>Activity</b>	<b>When</b>	<b>Who</b>
4.1	Develop large-scale commercial digitisation projects with the support of archival institutions	2010-11	TNA
4.2	Publish guidance on collection development	2010-11	TNA
4.3	Develop a strategic overview of archive collecting activity and work with institutions to address gaps in provision through collaborative working and where appropriate through the establishment of new institutions or the extension of collecting remits	2010-12	TNA and archival institutions
4.4	Create The People’s Record for the 2012 Olympics	2010-12	MLA and archival institutions
4.5	Maintain the National Cataloguing Grants Scheme and keep under review opportunities for its expansion as resources allow	2010-12	TNA and funding bodies

### Successful Outcomes

- Archives are readily accessible to the online audience through comprehensive access to catalogues and increased online access to digital images
- The power of personal engagement with historical documents is widely recognised and drives a broad range of access and outreach programmes, increasing the number of people engaging with archives in a variety of ways
- Institutions have active and effective collection development policies; they collaborate proactively to eliminate gaps in their collections, and document society effectively
- Continued investment in cataloguing work progressively reduces backlogs within the sector
- People are able to access the information they need in a timely and effective manner

## 5. Cultural and learning partnerships

### Goals

- The archives sector can demonstrate the impact and value it has on users' lives and the part they can play in delivery of national, regional and local strategies
- Communities are more actively involved in the development and delivery of services, and community archives are integrated into the archival sector
- Archives increase their access to resources and contribute more effectively to wider government policies around identity, learning, community and place

### Action

	<b>Activity</b>	<b>When</b>	<b>Who</b>
<b>5.1</b>	Identify best practice in the delivery of policy outcomes by archives, create an evidence base and showcase best practice to support the inclusion of archives in Local Area Agreements, strategies and plans	2010/11	MLA and archival institutions
<b>5.2</b>	Provide guidance, advice and best practice to archive services to support service improvement and efficiencies, improved partnership working, and broaden access	2010/11	MLA and TNA
<b>5.3</b>	Improve practice around community archives and partnership working, particularly in the context of the 2012 Olympics, with the support of MLA	2010-12	Archival institutions
<b>5.4</b>	Provide guidance and advice on community engagement to support service improvement, increasing participation by a diverse audience.	2010	MLA

### Successful Outcomes

- Archives are built into national, regional and local strategies and plans
- Local authority archives can demonstrate their contribution to national indicator sets, particularly those for community cohesion and learning
- The sector is more effectively integrated with other service providers and benefits from this process in terms of investment, partnership opportunities and use
- Archive services are more active in reaching out to and working with people who do not currently use their services, resulting in a more diverse audience for archives.
- Potential partners understand the contribution archives can make to the achievement of their strategic aims, and include them in these processes
- Archivists are equipped to engage with and empower communities, and community archives are involved and embedded in local and national projects and initiatives

## For more information

If you have any questions, ideas or suggestions about this document or how we can shape and deliver the recommendations for *Archives for the 21st Century* then please contact

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*Archives for the 21st Century* is the Government policy on archives which was published in November 2009. The National Archives and MLA encourage professional bodies, individual institutions and other key stakeholders to help shape and deliver the work streams proposed in the action plan. We invite you to review your own operations against the principles of *Archives for the 21st Century* and to identify actions that you can take to bring about the policy objectives in the strategy, bringing major benefits to the whole sector.

You can download a copy of the government policy and other supporting communications at [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/policy/aft21c](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/policy/aft21c).