

## **Memorandum of understanding between The National Archives and Research Libraries UK (RLUK)**

### **1. Introduction**

1.1 The memorandum of understanding (MoU) establishes a framework for co-operation between Research Libraries UK (RLUK) and The National Archives. It sets out the role of each organisation and explains how they will work together to achieve their separate and common goals.

1.2 Its aims are to:

- Facilitate contact and discussion on matters of common interest, particularly by sharing knowledge, information, expertise and best practice.
- Set out the basis on which the organisations will co-operate in respect to achieving their corporate aims and responsibilities.
- Provide a framework for co-operation in identifying shared strategic aims and ambitions.

1.3 The MoU is published on both organisations' websites. It will be reviewed at least every two years and more frequently if required by developments in The National Archives' and RLUK's respective sectors and amongst their stakeholders.

1.4 The MoU is not legally binding and is a non-contractual agreement between the two organisations.

### **2 Overview of RLUK's role and responsibilities**

Research Libraries UK (RLUK) is a consortium of 34 of the largest research organisations in the UK and Ireland, including the three UK national libraries. Founded in 1983, RLUK has directly and indirectly sponsored some of the major free online UK resources in support of research, including Copac, the de facto UK Union Catalogue. RLUK's mission is to work with its members and partners, nationally and internationally, to shape and to realise the vision of the modern research library. RLUK is a registered and incorporated charity.

### **3 Overview of The National Archives' roles and responsibilities**

The National Archives was created between 2003 and 2006 through the merger of The Public Record Office, The Historical Manuscript Commission, The Office of Public Sector Information, and Her Majesty's Stationery Office. The National Archives is the official archives of the UK Government and for England and Wales and oversees the preservation of public records in 'places of deposit', i.e. other archive services appointed under the Public Records Act 1958 to hold public records.

In 2011 The National Archives was given responsibility for archive sector leadership within England following the dissolution of the Museums Libraries and Archives Council (MLA). The National Archives works to engage with practitioners, managers and funders across the archive sector to promote service development, improvement

and sustainability, and is the assessor body of the Archive Service Accreditation Standard for archives across England. The National Archives works closely with partners across the heritage, cultural and academic sectors to enhance public access to archival collections, wherever they are held, and is an Independent Research Organisation in its own right.

#### **4. General co-operation**

4.1. RLUK and The National Archives recognise that they have complementary expertise and overlapping interests, especially in relation to The National Archives' archive sector leadership responsibilities and RLUK's role as the leading consortium of the research library community. RLUK and The National Archives will endeavour to co-operate and work together insofar as their separate interests and corporate aims permit. They will share knowledge, expertise, best practice and intelligence in relation to matters of mutual interest, and if there is overlap or a mutual interest in a particular area, they will consult as appropriate.

4.2. The organisations are committed to the principle of good communication with each other, especially when one organisation's work may have some bearing on the responsibilities or remit of the other organisation. Both The National Archives and RLUK will seek to alert each other as soon as practical to relevant developments within their respective sectors.

4.3. Senior members of staff from RLUK and The National Archives will meet on an annual basis to discuss matters of mutual interest and the operation of this MoU. These meetings will be underpinned by regular liaison between their officials on a quarterly basis or as and when required.

4.4. The organisations will ensure that it is clear who the appropriate contacts are for particular matters and that contact details are kept up to date.

- At the time of writing, the key contacts will be Matt Greenhall, Archive Sector Development (The National Archives) and Mike Mertens, Deputy Director and Data Services Manager (RLUK).

#### **5. Promoting cross-sector collaboration**

5.1. RLUK and The National Archives both encourage cross-sector collaboration between their respective stakeholders. Encouraging greater partnership working was a key strategic aim of government policy on archives, *Archives for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, and underpins much of The National Archives' activities as sector lead for archives in England.

5.2. RLUK and The National Archives agree to encourage enhanced collaboration between the archive, Unique and Distinct Collections (UDC) and academic sectors, whether through knowledge sharing, highlighting opportunities to their stakeholders, and facilitating opportunities to encourage enhanced collaboration.

## **6. Sharing best practice**

RLUK and The National Archives agree to share best practice to their stakeholders in areas of mutual interest.

## **7. Sharing skills and knowledge**

RLUK and The National Archives agree to openly and proactively encourage the dissemination of research into key cross-sector trends, developments and opportunities.

## **8. Identifying joint research agendas**

RLUK and The National Archives agree to actively investigate areas of joint research when it fits with their corporate priorities, areas of mutual interest and isn't in conflict with any other initiatives.

## **9. Deepening preservation and discovery of archival material**

9.1 RLUK and The National Archives will identify issues around intellectual property rights that impact on the use and re-use of materials for scholarly use.

9.2 RLUK and The National Archives will establish a coordinated strategy for the preservation of and access to research resources of high value in digital and analogue forms. This will be done in consultation with their respective members and stakeholders.

9.3 Hidden collections in archives are an ongoing challenge; without full disclosure the optimal relevance and status of any archival repository cannot be wholly achieved. RLUK and The National Archives agree to promote established and emerging discovery tools to enable the public and scholarly exploration of archival and UDC collections, including through The National Archives Discovery Platform.

## **10. Articulating the economic and cultural impact of archives**

10.1 Funding cuts have had an impact on local government archives that also hold personal academic archives as well as research material unique in its association not only with the locality but that is also internationally relevant. Similarly higher education archives are contending with increasing their alignment with institutional missions at a time of budgetary constraints and overall economic austerity.

RLUK and The National Archives will co-operate to raise the profile of archival and UDC collections. Both parties will examine ways of establishing formal frameworks of research to demonstrate the impact that collections can have on research, wherever they are held.

## **11. Engaging with key national and international stakeholders to understand policy directions for archival research in all disciplines**

The process of allocating research funding and the collecting and building up of archival repositories in digital and analogue forms is crucially linked. RLUK and The National Archives will look to engage with members of the national and international research community to understand policy directions, communicate these to their respective stakeholders, and examine collaborative ways of taking advantage of these for mutual benefit.

## **12. Exploring and deepening new research methodologies in relation to archives**

The emergence of new ways of working with technology to enhance the understanding of archival materials means there is an opportunity to engage with new types of research and support new types of researcher in the field commonly known as “Digital Humanities”. RLUK and The National Archives will promote the integration of both born-digital collections and digitised material into research and learning amongst the archival and academic communities.

## **13. Cementing co-operation and partnership**

RLUK and The National Archives both agree to actively explore means of cementing future co-operation through the establishment of formal frameworks for sustainable co-operation.

## **14. Agreement**

RLUK and The National Archives agree to enter into the spirit and word of this MoU and to review this after two years or at a moment required by developments.

On behalf of The National Archives

On behalf of Research Libraries UK

**Jeff James**, Chief Executive and Keeper

**David Prosser**, Executive Director