



Delivery and Presentation Electronic Records Online version 2

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the Delivery and Presentation Project?

Today, 95% of all UK government records are produced electronically. These "born digital" records are stored and preserved at The National Archives (TNA) in increasing numbers.

The Seamless Flow Programme is a very large programme of work being undertaken to provide solutions for handling and managing electronic records, from appraisal and accessioning to providing access to our customers.

Within the Seamless Flow Programme, the Delivery and Presentation project is looking at how we can deliver digital records to our customers. Our online product is called 'Electronic Records Online'. It has to be able to display a range of file types - everything from Word documents to video and virtual reality models. It also has to cater for a host of different customers, including members of the public accessing the Internet at home; visitors to Kew; TNA staff, and staff in Government Departments.

2. What is Electronic Records Online?

Electronic Records Online (ERO) is The National Archives' web-based service for providing access to electronic records.

3. When did this new service appear?

Since June 2005 we have been running a pilot service of Electronic Records Online, which includes the records of a number of high-profile public inquiries, departmental websites, and the records of parliamentary committees and royal commissions. The pilot service is accessed through The National Archives website.

The next release 2 of Electronic Records Online, ERO2, will 'go live' at the end of March 2007, and more content will be added through the remainder of 2007 and beyond.

4. What are the main features of this new service?

ERO2 has the same functions as the present ERO plus a new search function, based on TNA's global web search service. The search will search the text of presentational copies of electronic records in addition to the ERO description (metadata) pages.

5. The search on ERO2 will only search text. Not all the records are plain text. How effective will the search be?

In addition to text, the search function will also search the ERO description (metadata) pages. However it is true that not all records are plain text -TNA also receives images of original text material, plus audio and video records. At present it will not be possible to search the content of such material. TNA is investigating the use of emerging technologies with a view to implementing further functionality in future releases of ERO.

6. Why is the service called a pilot?

ERO2 is a working and authoritative service. It is our first model of presenting electronic records, and we fully expect that its functionality will continue to be developed as technologies emerge allowing us to further exploit and search the diverse formats of the electronic records. We also expect the service to be further developed as our collection expands when government departments begin to transfer their electronic records to us in large numbers.

7. When will the service cease to be a pilot and become fully operational?

When both TNA and our users are comfortable with the functionality of ERO2 and it holds a significant number of records, probably in the spring of 2008.

8. Why are there two separate instances of Electronic Records Online?

The Internet version of ERO2 accessed from The National Archives website is available to everyone – TNA staff, members of the public, government departments. It displays presentational copies of open electronic records.

There will be a completely separate instance of ERO2 on the Government Secure Intranet (GSI). This instance will be restricted to authorised members of staff in government departments, enabling them to view their open and closed records. Some TNA staff will also have authorised access to the GSI version so that they can carry out their roles. The GSI version is currently scheduled to be implemented in May 2007.

9. When will the private (GSI) service become available?

It is scheduled to be available in May 2007.

10. What are the differences between the two separate instances of Electronic Records Online?

The main difference is that the Internet version of ERO2 is available to everyone, whereas the instance on the GSI network is only available to authorised members of TNA staff and other government departments.

11. What services on The National archives website will be affected by the Delivery and Presentation Project?

The Delivery and Presentation Project is only concerned with Electronic Records Online. No other service on The National Archives website is affected by this project.

12. What is the proposed timetable for rolling out the Delivery and Presentation Project?

The Internet version of ERO2 will 'go live' in March 2007. The GSI version is scheduled to be available in May 2007. It is likely that the service will continue to evolve, with new functionality as our electronic records base grows and we become more familiar with the expectations of the users of ERO2.

13. Will this service remain free to access?

We do not have any plans to charge for access in the near future.

14. How much money was spent on creating this new service?

All the design and development work has been done in-house mostly with existing TNA resources. Additional resources were given to the project to allow us to speed up development and undertake usability testing on the prototype sites and to ensure the website met our design brief and could be used and understood by our existing and new users.

If you are asked more specific questions regarding costs, please refer this type of enquiry to Peter Malewski, the Delivery and Presentation Project Manager. His email address is peter.malewski@nationalarchives.gov.uk

15. How can you justify the expenditure?

The digital revolution is causing a fundamental change to the environment in which we are operating. Government and businesses are no longer driven by paper, but by e-mail and e-documents. Future researchers will need to explore e-mail exchanges, Word documents, websites and dynamic databases. This requires new approaches to the way we capture, store, preserve, and make accessible e-records – including investment in new technology, infrastructure, and services. If we did not do this we would risk the possibility of e-records of today not being available to researchers in the future.

16. Who will benefit from the changes you have made?

Anyone who wants to access government electronic records, today or in the future, will benefit from the changes we have made. The new search function will help to locate exactly the records you are interested in, this is particularly beneficial as TNA's electronic records collection continues to grow.

17. Why did you decide to design the site as it is?

The design adopts the design concepts of the overall National Archives website and therefore the general ERO2 website navigation is common with that used by other applications such as the Catalogue and DocumentsOnLine. The search service is based on the National Archives' Global Search service and therefore adopts its design. The browse service has to accommodate the record referencing schema which is currently based on that of the Catalogue. The browse design therefore depicts this in what is believed to be the most effective manner.

18. How can I ask questions about or comment on this new service?

Electronic Records Online is evolving, so we are always happy to hear your comments and suggestions about the service. The best way to contact us is to use the form at <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/contact/form/>

19. Can I have an original copy of the record?

Original copies are made available through The National Archives Record Copying service, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/recordcopying/>

20. Can I have access to closed records?

You may make a request for access to certain closed records through a Freedom of Information enquiry, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/foi/>