

Archives for the 21st Century in action

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

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'Archives for the 21st Century'

'Archives for the 21st Century' is the Government's policy on archives, which was published in November 2009. The National Archives and the Museums, Libraries & Archives Council (MLA) have published a joint action plan with stakeholders from all parts of the archives sector to support the recommendations of the policy, and we are working with CyMAL on the Welsh action plan.

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 policy and the action plan at nationalarchives.gov.uk/policy/aft21c

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Archives for the 21st Century in action

Introduction

Leaders of public services face challenging times. Government has recognised that archives play a vital role in our national life, but need to develop to meet the growing needs of society. Organisations – especially public bodies such as local authorities and universities – need to get more out of their archives services. This document explains how that can happen.

Archives are among an organisation's most valuable assets because culture and information are a vital part of the economy, our intellectual capital and the decision-making process. Archives can help an organisation to meet its statutory responsibilities and retain its corporate memory. They have an important role to play in supporting any strategy that seeks to increase the number of people who are involved in formal and informal learning; strengthen evidence-based research and decision making; engage young people in positive activities; develop people's skills; build sustainable communities; and improve governance and accountability. Archives are services that attract loyal and passionate supporters. More people than ever before are now using archives to discover their family tree, undertake academic research, perform legal searches, prove their rights, understand how and why decisions are made, market their business or to pursue formal and informal learning. Increasingly they want information at a time and place that suits them.

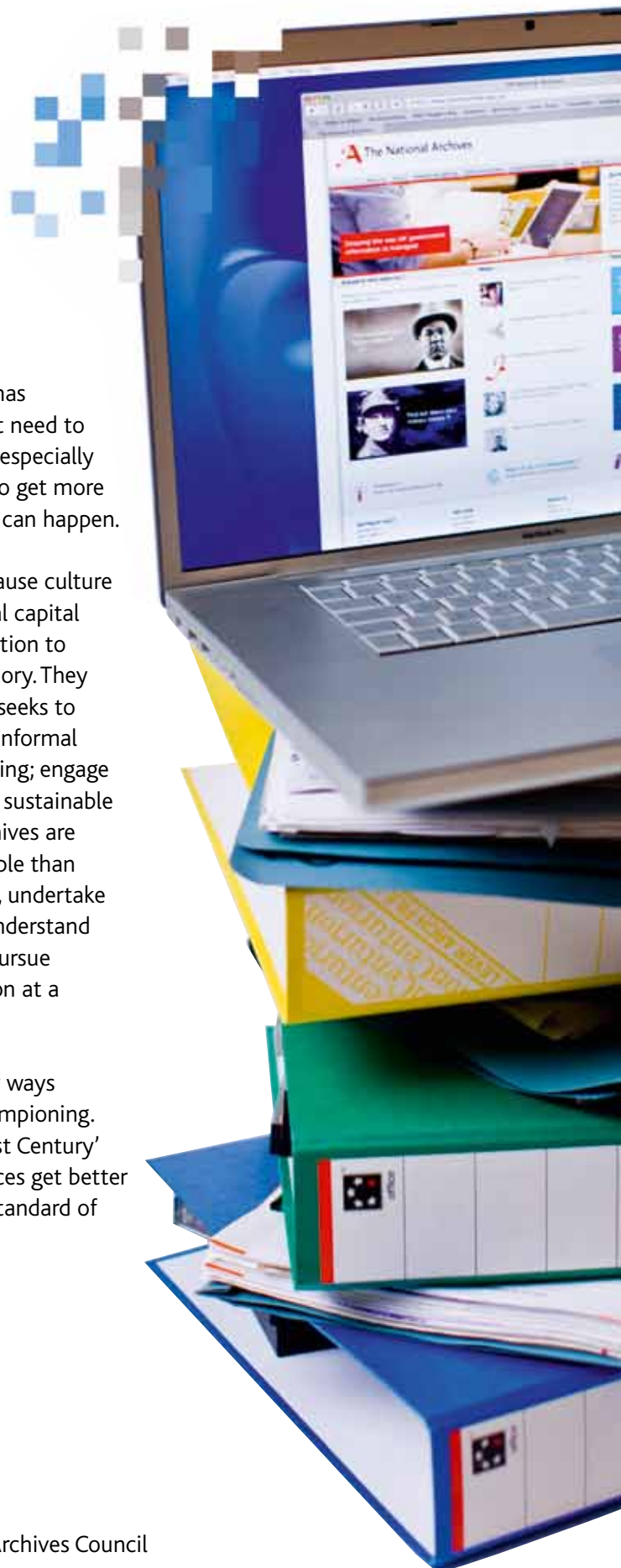
To meet these demands, archives have to work together in new ways and with new partners. To do so they need challenging and championing. Working in the new ways recommended in 'Archives for the 21st Century' will help to ensure that those who lead and fund archives services get better value for money from them, and those who use them get the standard of service they expect and need.



Oliver Morley
Acting Chief Executive
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Roy Clare
Chief Executive
Museums, Libraries & Archives Council



Bigger, better and sustainable services

‘Develop bigger and better services in partnership – working towards increased sustainability within the sector.’

Recommendation One, Archives for the 21st Century

Sustaining services in the 21st century requires a culture of collaboration and partnership. Many organisations are reviewing governance arrangements, and are looking for more integrated solutions and opportunities to work with partners to improve services and deliver more with less.

Archives work collaboratively to form a network of provision for our national archival heritage, but there is great variation in the resources available to them, and the standard of service smaller archives can deliver may be inadequate. To strengthen the quality and sustainability of archives services requires consistent national standards and best practice guidance as well as collaboration.

When organisations are making very substantial investment in a new building they have a particular opportunity to engage with new partners and develop shared services that can transform the reputation, profile, outlook and delivery of the archives. It is vital that such opportunities are exploited to the full.

The benefits of creating bigger and better services in partnership will be:

- organisations, archives and partners make savings and offer better value for money
- organisations are better able to meet their statutory responsibilities, for example, under the Freedom of Information Act
- greater consistency of service provision for a better user experience
- increases in the number of users visiting and accessing the service, and higher customer satisfaction.



Why take the opportunity?

Sometimes working together can create something that is **better for everyone**. Building **partnerships** to help **create growth** and **opportunity** can help make the most of your **resources** and connect with users about **what's on offer**.



Together we can start to take action by...

Chief Executives and Vice Chancellors

- recognising that your archives service is part of a national network of provision. Consider collaborating across the authority and across institutional boundaries to make decisions about resources, priorities and collecting. This will benefit your organisation and contribute to the nation's historic record for future generations
- identifying the right business models, investments and partnerships to give value for money and greater efficiency
- maximising the contribution your archives service can make to the delivery of wider public policy objectives and outcomes by building them into policies and plans, and identifying opportunities for the service to support the private and charitable sectors.

Archives Managers

- engaging with decision makers about finding the best governance model for your service
- engaging with the development of the new accreditation scheme for archives, which will help set standards for your workforce and service delivery
- showing key stakeholders the value of archives and where you can contribute to the delivery of their objectives.

The National Archives and MLA

- providing advice and guidance on how to improve the service for customers, particularly in the areas of governance models, partnerships, standards, resource allocation, collecting and best practice
- developing an accreditation scheme for archives services
- promoting the contribution that archives can make to the delivery of public policy priorities with key stakeholders and showcasing best practice where archives have made an impact on social, economic or learning objectives.

Leadership and workforce

‘Strengthened leadership and a responsive, skilled workforce.’

Recommendation Two, Archives for the 21st Century

Archives should be a vibrant and outward-looking service that enhances the learning and skills of both citizens and staff. This needs strong leaders who see the challenges ahead, who can drive engagement and collaboration and who will inspire staff to seize the opportunities to transform the service.

Creating a more diverse workforce with a broader range of skills will help archives to develop sustainable, innovative and effective services. This does not mean letting go of the traditional skills archivists will always need, but recognising the continued development of new skills that are essential within the archives workforce to help them respond to the challenges we face today.

Investment in the development of the archives workforce will deliver the following benefits:

- better customer experience and increased user engagement
- staff with the skills needed to run 21st century archives
- better staff retention and stronger leadership across the service.

Can you see the route in?

A modern archives service needs a **diverse** range of **skills** and **people**. We need to provide **opportunities** to help people find the **right roles** for them, so they can flourish and improve the services our **customers deserve**.





Together we can start to take action by...

Chief Executives and Vice Chancellors

- setting a clear vision for the contribution you want to see archives making to local strategies and ensuring that staff have the skills to deliver that vision
- ensuring that archives staff can participate in leadership and development training within your organisation.

Archives Managers

- creating a culture of staff development that is strongly aligned to the vision for the service and seeking new ways to provide quality services that make the most of the available resources
- creating a more diverse workforce with the skills required for the future through positive action schemes and training
- developing your volunteering programme so that it offers a wide range of opportunities that benefit the organisation and develop your volunteers.

The National Archives and MLA

- advocating the value of leadership development within the sector and creating opportunities to engage with decision makers, managers and staff to share evidence of best practice
- working with partners to develop training initiatives to diversify the workforce and widen entry routes into the sector.

Digital preservation

‘Co-ordinated response to the growing challenge of managing digital information so that it is accessible now and remains discoverable in the future.’

Recommendation Three, Archives for the 21st Century

The way businesses, governments and citizens are communicating is changing and keeps on evolving. The internet, email and office technology have led to huge volumes of digital information being generated which is at risk of becoming unreadable and unusable. It is important that the challenge of sustaining and managing such records is seen as an information management – and not just an information technology – issue.

There is a real risk that unless the challenge of preserving digital records is grasped, there will be no raw materials for history in the future, and that the information which organisations need to defend their rights and reputation, and to inform their decisions, will simply have disappeared. This is a particular challenge for archives that collect records from many different individuals and organisations; they will need to adapt their collecting strategies to ensure they continue to fulfil their remit.

Every organisation has to face the growing challenge of how to capture, manage and select the right digital records for preservation. Ensuring that the close connection between records management and archives is developed and protected as part of your information strategy is an important step. Working in partnership to access the facilities, technology and people who will manage and collect digital records may help make the most of investment and resources.

Establishing the priorities and resources needed to manage and collect digital records will deliver the following benefits:

- the risk of a 'black hole in history' is diminished
- organisations are able to select, manage and preserve the records they need for ongoing business purposes
- improved arrangements for information management to support better decision making and governance
- the collecting remit of the archives service is met, and it is ready to move into the age of digital record keeping.

Are you getting the full story?

Knowing **what to keep** and how best to **preserve it** is a real skill. Preserving history calls for the right **training**, the right **environment** and the right **technology**. When people look back at your collections, will they be getting the full story?





Together we can start to take action by...

Chief Executives and Vice Chancellors

- ensuring that your organisation is actively managing its information and archiving paper and digital records of long-term value
- investing in your archives service and establishing partnerships to ensure that the service can continue to fulfil its collecting remit
- ensuring that both your IT and archives managers are working together to provide information management solutions for your organisation.

Archives Managers

- knowing what digital assets are already in your collections and developing a plan for continuing to meet your collecting remit as organisations create more, or only, digital records
- developing a workforce that has the skills and expertise to give advice on records management and digital records
- developing partnerships to help preserve, collect and make accessible the right digital records.

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- developing and publishing a national digital preservation strategy
- promoting awareness about digital preservation and engagement with it, and giving support, guidance and advice
- sharing evidence of best practice and developing standards for digital places of deposit.

Online access

‘Comprehensive online access for archive discovery through catalogues and to digitised archive content by citizens at a time and place that suits them.’

Recommendation Four, Archives for the 21st Century

Access to knowledge and information is at the heart of a democratic society and academic excellence. It underpins formal and informal learning and research and it enables people to make choices and decisions about their lives. Increasingly, people expect information resources to be available online 24 hours a day and to be able reuse and create online content in a way that is meaningful to them; recording their own lives and research and the activities of their communities.

Online access provides a great opportunity to open up the archives service so that it can connect more widely with people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds. Decisions on the provision of online archives services must be based on giving people the online experience they expect and deserve. This will require investment in detailed archives catalogues and digitisation, in the context of a strategy for getting the right content online to support users’ educational, research, leisure and business needs.

The benefits of investing resources in the delivery of online access will be:

- more awareness and use of archival information by users at a time and place that suits them
- resources that are available worldwide, supporting academic research and economic development
- using the power of online delivery to improve customer experience and drive the development of collections
- archives contributing to the delivery of objectives and outcomes on identity, learning, community and place
- hidden archives being available for the first time, as backlogs of catalogues are reduced and collecting is made more active and effective.



Are you part of the information revolution?

Now is the time to **invest** in the **technology** and **skills** needed to make archives accessible to **everyone**.



Together we can start to take action by...

Chief Executives and Vice Chancellors

- recognising the critical importance of the online audience for archives services and ensuring that relevant key performance indicators reflect this
- challenging IT managers to remove the technical barriers to providing a high-quality online experience for users.

Archives Managers

- cataloguing to international standards, delivering catalogues online, and participating in digitisation projects
- ensuring that staff have the skills they need to provide online access, and getting volunteers to help digitise and catalogue the information they are passionate about
- setting clear goals for digitisation, raising awareness with users as information becomes accessible, and evaluating how it is used.

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- working in partnership to deliver comprehensive online access to catalogues through the UK Archival Description (UKAD) Network
- publishing guidance and giving advice on collection development
- co-ordinating large-scale commercial digitisation projects and maintaining the National Cataloguing Grants Scheme.

Cultural and learning partnerships

‘Active participation in cultural and learning partnerships promoting a sense of identity and place within the community.’

Recommendation Five, Archives for the 21st Century

Archives hold and record our national and local stories; they are a rich source of inspiration, information and enjoyment. They have a powerful role to play in supporting formal and informal learning, and in creating a sense of pride and belonging. Archives can ensure that citizens are able to access information that explains why their country and neighbourhood are the way they are, and can give them opportunities to collect and share their stories.

This means that archives can help local authorities and universities to deliver their objectives for their students, citizens and communities in some key areas, notably formal and informal learning, skills development, community cohesion and regeneration and growth.

Getting better value from the archives in these areas requires them to be built into the business and planning process, and to be embedded in key strategies and partnerships.

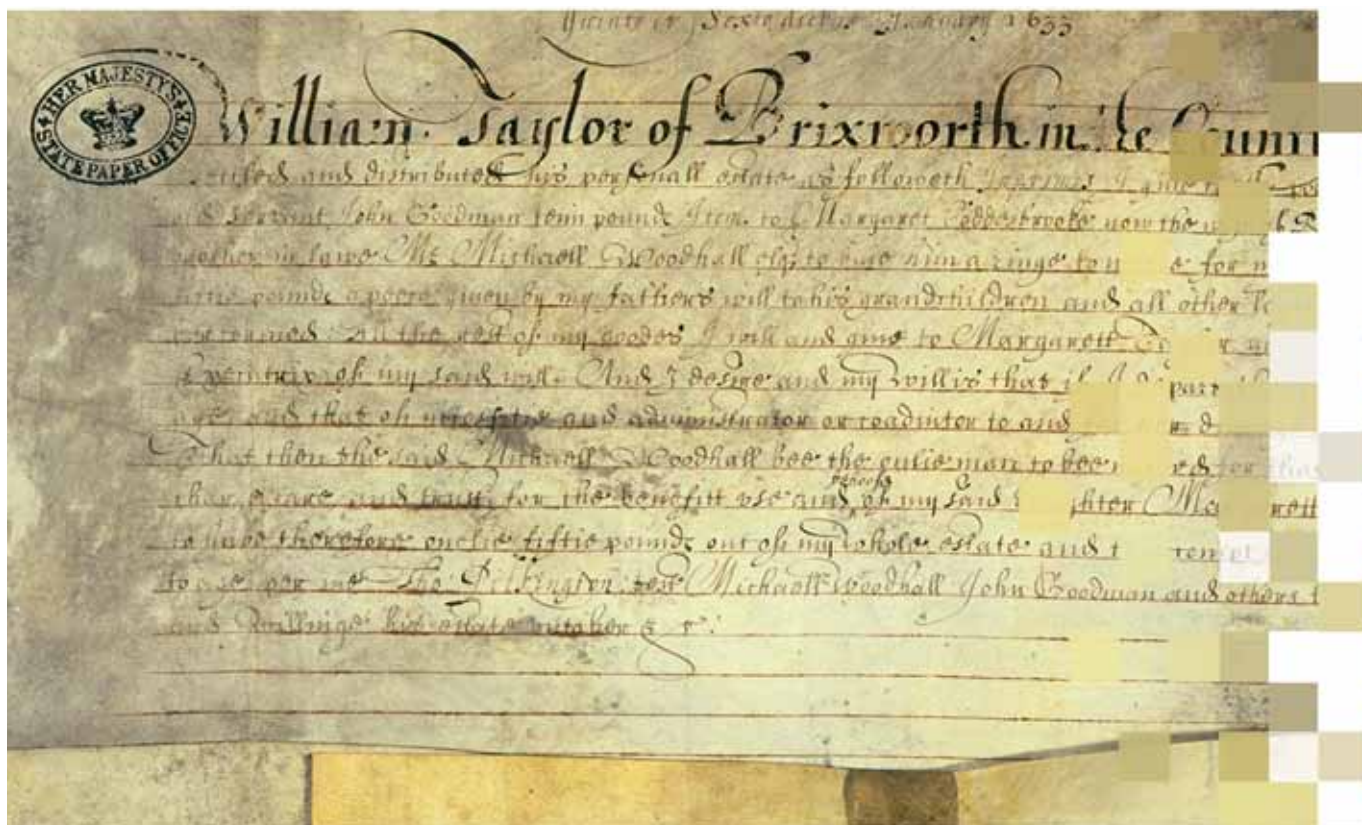
The benefits of involving archives in more cultural and learning partnerships will be:

- archives making a stronger contribution to stakeholder objectives for research, formal and informal learning and communities
- users being more involved in the development and delivery of services and participating in local and national projects and initiatives
- services working in partnership to deliver their strategic aims and sharing their resources.



What do your archives say about your organisation?

It takes time to build **relationships** but we can achieve **so much more** when we work **together**. Partnerships help to create **something special** that celebrates our culture and tells a story about the places we live, work and study, and what they mean to us.



Together we can start to take action by...

Chief Executives and Vice Chancellors

- engaging your archives staff in the decision-making process so that they can contribute to, and understand, the choices you make
- making archives services part of your frameworks for supporting learning and research, community engagement and social cohesion
- agreeing strategies and targets for improving access, creating partnerships and delivering on policy outcomes with archives senior managers.

Archives Managers

- widening and enriching the experience of diverse users through community engagement and partnership working
- improving engagement with research groups and community archives about their work and interests.

The National Archives and MLA

- showcasing best practice on partnership working and engaging with community archives
- providing guidance and advice on community engagement to support archives services.

What happens next?

In response to 'Archives for the 21st Century', leaders and Archives Managers need to have conversations about the implications of Government policy and how the recommendations can benefit their organisations. Issues to be discussed might include the challenges senior managers face, opportunities for the development of the service, and the contribution archives can make to the delivery of the organisation's policy objectives.

We would like to talk to you about the the work The National Archives and MLA are doing to support the recommendations in 'Archives for the 21st Century', and how your organisation and archives service can benefit. We will be in touch later in the year to discuss the work that is taking place and how your organisation is responding to the policy.

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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or:

MLA field team for your region

Regional Managers and Area Directors of Engagement build relationships with local authorities, helping them link up and access contacts, advice and resources. Contact details are at mla.gov.uk/about/who/staff

Photographic references:

- p. 5 – 1-566 Cubbits workers
- p. 7 – E6 266 Black Box of Exchequer Drawing accompanying gos
- p. 9 – 420 Einstein
- p. 13 – Bf114 Will of William Taylor of Brixworth, Northamptonshire

