

Title: User Advisory Group Meeting

Date of Meeting: 22 June 2011

Location: The National Archives, Kew

Staff

JJ, Jeff James	Director of Operations and Services (chair)
CM, Chris Mumby	Acting Director of Customer and Business Development
CK, Caroline Kimbell	Head of Licensing
AW, Alison Webster	Head of Strategic Projects
JL, James Lawson	Customer Intelligence Manager (secretary)

Delegates

Prof. Anne Laurence	Academic
Prof. Grace Ioppolo	Academic
Paul Dryburgh	County / External archives
Dr. Julie Anderson	Diversity / inclusion
Patrick Vernon	Diversity / inclusion
Roger Lewry	Family History Societies
Else Churchill	Family History Societies
Bob O'Hara	Independent Researchers
Dr. Nicola Phillips	Map Room users
Susan Moore	Map Room users
Ian Ireland	Online Users
Gillian Stevens	Onsite personal interest
Graham Woolgar	Onsite personal interest

Action

1 Apologies

1.1 Apologies were received from Dr. Nick Barratt, Independent Researchers

2 Welcome and introductions

2.1 JJ welcomed those present to the first meeting of the newly formed User Advisory Group. Those present introduced themselves and explained their roles. JJ apologised for the rescheduling of the first meeting which was done to allow sufficient time to prepare following the selection process.

3 Membership and Terms of Reference

3.1 JJ noted that 2 delegates had been chosen for the majority of the

user communities that had been identified for representation, adding that we had received strong expressions of interest, and that 2 reps would allow delegates to work together as a team and should lighten the workload for individuals. Responsibility for chairing the meetings is to be shared between JJ (Director of Operations and Services) and CM (Acting Director of Customer and Business Development) based on the subject emphasis of the agenda.

3.2 Terms of Reference for the group were circulated prior to and at the meeting (see Terms of Reference UAG-220611-02). Delegates were asked to make any suggestions for amendments prior to the next meeting when they will be signed off.

3.3 **Q.** Can you define what you mean in the Terms of Reference by 'strategic' and give an example of strategic issues that The National Archives (TNA) has faced in recent months?

A. One of the recent strategic considerations for the Management Board has been managing the impact of the Comprehensive Spending Review. Our aim is that this group will help to drive and define our business activities. To this end we hope to frame discussions around the business planning cycle. We have already defined our business priorities for 2011 -2012, however the planning cycle will begin again around October, which means that the next meeting in September will be a timely opportunity for delegates to feed in the opinions and priorities of the user communities they represent and help to drive direction, within the constraints of the organisation. Part of our job is to define / explain these constraints and we will aim to be transparent with regards to this.

3.4 **Q.** I hope that this group will see a different approach to user consultation than the User Forum. For example, would we have seen the proposal for Monday closure made earlier to this group?

3.5 **A.** For context, one of the drivers for the formation of a group which enables user consultation earlier and at a more strategic level was the strong criticism received by The National Archives regarding the level and timing of consultations around the recent 'TNA 2010' cost saving exercise (one of the outcomes of which was Monday closures). I hope that we don't have to face a similar situation again. However if we do, this group would have such conversations within the necessary constraints; the specific circumstances around the 2010 cost saving exercise involved particular issues around industrial relations which meant that some issues could not be discussed openly. I hope that the formal nature of this group would allow for such conversations to be more constructive.

- 3.6 **Q.** How public will the discussions of this group be? Part of our remit as delegates is to communicate what is discussed at the meetings more broadly, but to what extent will we be discussing issues that are sensitive or confidential?
- 3.7 **A.** Certainly one of the aims of the group is that it functions as a communications channel to our broader audiences. However, the strategic nature of the group will mean that there are cases when we may discuss confidential matters and, for example, show the group documents which are still closed. We hope that delegates will agree to sign a non disclosure agreement to ensure that this confidentiality is maintained. The responsibility will be ours to ensure that we are explicit when a particular piece of information is confidential.
- 3.8 We will share the formal minutes with the group for agreement prior to publishing them on our website. However, taking into account items covered by confidentiality agreements, we are comfortable for delegates to communicate what is discussed in a way that is tailored to their own needs and to the community they represent (to include means of communication as well as content).
- 3.9 It is our ambition to have a combination of both user and staff input into the setting of agendas. It is our aim that agendas will be published a month before the next meeting to allow delegates the time to consult with their user communities.
- 3.10 Delegates agreed to have their names and email addresses published on The National Archives website to enable interested parties to contact them. *(Post meeting update: It was suggested at the July Users Forum that delegate biographies and possibly photographs are also included for information and ease of identification).*
- 3.11 While individuals represent particular sections of our user community, we would expect delegates to contribute at meetings as they see fit and not feel constrained to particular subject matters.

4. Business plan

- 4.1 The National Archives business plan 'For the Record. For Good' has recently been published on the website here:
<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/how-we-are-run/our-plans.htm>
- 4.2 The document sets out our long term plans and strategic priorities for the next 4 years as well as our specific business priorities for 2011 – 2012.

4.3 A key change from previous years is that the measurement of our performance is achieved via tracking over several years and looking at trends, rather than focusing on hitting a specific target for the individual year. This reflects a new approach across government.

4.4 The document clearly sets out our strategic priorities which broadly fall in to familiar themes of collection strategy, preservation, revenue generation, people and access.

4.5 **Q.** An omission from the business plan seems to be continued cataloguing projects, to improve the descriptions in the existing catalogues?

A. The business plan takes a high level view, focusing on the top strategic priorities that the organisation needs to address in order to sustain itself. Business plans also don't tend to address business as usual activities, except in the broadest terms. Cataloguing certainly continues to be a significant activity at The National Archives (for example the Advice and Records Knowledge Department are currently undertaking approximately 50 cataloguing projects). The reality is that we have to prioritise our resources, which means that we can never complete as much cataloguing as would be desirable.

4.6 **Q.** Over recent years, it seems that TNA has focused on improving its enquiry service for new users and the influx of family historians. However, it seems that users of archives are becoming more sophisticated; for example basic information is increasingly available online, which means that non professional researchers are getting further with their research before asking for help.

This is reflected in the queries directed to independent researchers which are more sophisticated than they used to be. Family historians are now able to trace records going back several generations much faster than before and are increasingly becoming more interested in social history and the context of the records – but the speed of this process may mean that they haven't developed the archival skills and contextual knowledge they require. How is the enquiry service dealing with this trend?

A. Recently we have focused on providing guidance on common subjects on a 'one-to-many' basis, whether this is through our onsite talks programme or via the research guidance available on our website. We are becoming more sophisticated about how we provide services on the web, allowing users to intuitively find the guidance they need. This allows our records experts to focus on responding to the complicated queries that that they should be focusing on.

- 4.7 **Q.** Could you consider a regular standing item in these meetings for a cataloguing project update, in a similar vein to the digitisation update?

A. We would like to run with the proposed agenda items for the first few meetings and take a view after that. If there are still seen to be gaps in what is covered at the meetings, we would happily review then.

- 4.8 JJ reiterated that the next meeting in September will be particularly timely for users to have an input in to the business planning cycle, via their User Advisory Group delegates.

5. User Participation

- 5.1 JJ drew attention to the User Participation Update document (see User Participation Update UAG-220611-03), a high level outline of the background, progress to date and a draft set of commitments/guiding principles for The National Archives' User Participation project. The project aims to develop and commence implementation of a new User Participation strategy for The National Archives, bringing in new volunteers, communities and partners. The document is an anonymised version of a paper that was recently presented to the Executive Team. The development of the User Participation Strategy itself was put on hold to enable the team to focus on the decision making process for taking forward user participation activities (see below).

- 5.2 One of the next steps outlined in the document is to discuss progress to date and methodology/approach with the newly established User Advisory Group.

- 5.3 JJ also talked through and demonstrated the User Participation Matrix; a dynamic tool which has been used to objectively evaluate the relative merits of, and prioritise the list of proposed activities for the project to date, and which will continue to be used to prioritise future user participation activities. Key considerations built in to the process include Leadership in the Archival Sector, Innovation, Financial Cost and benefit, Outreach and Diversity and Government Drivers.

- 5.4 It was noted that there is a slight skew towards 'online' projects. This reflects the fact that key considerations in the matrix include Reach and Value for Money. For example a proposal for an onsite activity commemorating the centenary of the loss of RMS Titanic scored lower than a similar online activity because the online activity had more 'reach' potential.

- 5.5 It is hoped that the approach and possibly the tool can be rolled out across the archives sector to organisations planning /

prioritising their User Participation activities.

5.6 **Q.** Has this approach been adopted for the activities of the Friends?

A. We have yet to go through existing activities that fall under User Participation and apply the matrix to them retrospectively, but we do plan to do this (and certainly will with any new activities proposed for Friends or Volunteers involvement). We value the Friends and existing volunteers highly, but want to ensure that as much value as possible can be derived from their participation going forward.

5.7 **Q.** Can the matrix document and the overall scorings for individual activities be made available to us for reference?

A. We would need to have a discussion about this internally before agreeing.

5.8 **Q.** How much will The National Archives new leadership role within the archive sector affect your user participation strategy?

A. We will certainly be aiming to implement a strategy and approach which can be adopted by the wider archive sector (as with the matrix). We have learned a great deal from other organisations in developing the strategy so far and would aim to share what we can in terms of best practice both within the archive sector and more broadly.

5.9 **Q.** Is there a danger that a shift away from having volunteers undertake cataloguing work on site could have a detrimental effect on the diversity and accessibility of your records?

A. By broadening our approach we don't intend necessarily to stop activities that we currently do. However, we do want to ensure that there is genuine value in all of the user participation activities that take place and that our attention is focussed effectively. On site volunteering in cataloguing and collection care is highly valued and we will continue to do this. Conversely, a new activity that was proposed but scored very low in the matrix evaluation exercise was the involvement of volunteers in public service delivery.

5.10 The User Participation Strategy is still in early stages of development and we hope the User Advisory Group will play a key role in helping to shape the strategy as it develops.

6. Digitisation of Home Guard records

6.1 The Ministry of Defence (MoD) currently have in their custody a large volume of historic service personnel records which are due, ultimately to be transferred to The National Archives, or otherwise

disposed of.

- 6.2 The National Archives' usual policy, when dealing with collections of this volume is to take a representative sample of the records, rather than taking collections in their entirety. However, it has been identified that the material is of significant interest to the general public and to the research community (including family historians, independent researchers and academics). As such, it is both a preferable and a viable solution to accession the records digitally and make them available for digitisation to a third party commercial partner, who are able to finance digitising the records in turn for the right to charge for access to the images. This is known as a Licensed Internet Associateship (LIA).
- 6.3 LIA's are now a standard model for digitisation. However, there are significant additional challenges in this case, one of which is that we will be accessioning the digital images rather than the documents themselves (as it is not viable for us to store the physical documents) which we have not done on this scale before. This means that we have to be absolutely sure that the overall approach will work and that our systems and procedures are able to cope with ingesting and storing the data to the extremely high standards required. The first tranche of records that we will adopt this approach for is the Home Guard records, which are relatively straightforward compared to some of the other series due to be transferred from the MoD.
- 6.4 In order to test the robustness of our systems and procedures, we will be undertaking a pilot digitisation project of a small sample of the Home Guard records. The records are arranged by County and it has been decided that the pilot will focus on the County of Durham. Further information on the decision to use Durham can be found in a separate document (see Home Guard Pilot Digitisation Project – Identification of County Durham UAG-220611-05).
- 6.5 For the purpose of the pilot, we plan to deliver the service for searching and downloading images of the records to the public via our existing DocumentsOnline site, thereby testing and asking for feedback on the quality of the metadata and 'back end' functions and not the user interface. There are some concerns over how well we will be able to maintain this distinction in users overall comprehension of the service, and we would like the opinions of the User Advisory Group regarding this.
- 6.6 *Overall, those present felt that the benefits derived from testing the system in this way outweigh any potential confusion.*
- 6.7 Part of the digitisation process is transcribing key fields within the records which will enable users to search for and find individual

records. William Spencer, Principal Records Specialist - Military, Maritime & Transport has made a recommendation for which fields within the records should be transcribed (see Proposed searchable fields for Home Guard UAG-220611-04) and we would like the User Advisory Group to view a sample of the records in order to ratify, prioritise and make recommendations regarding the fields that we are proposing to digitise.

6.8 In order for responses to feed effectively in to the pilot digitisation project, this needs to happen before August, so would involve an additional visit to TNA. Due to the confidentiality involved it would also require delegates to sign a non-disclosure agreement prior to viewing the records.

6.9 It was agreed that JL would email the group asking for dates when individuals are not available, and set up a date for delegates to come in and view a sample before the end of July.

6.10 It was suggested that an additional field to consider for transcription may be 'occupation', as this would have relevance to those interested in social / economic studies.

6.11 **Q.** Once finalised, could your methodology be rolled out to other projects or be marketed to other partners?

A. There are very specific requirements for public records, but we certainly hope to develop an approach which we can use ourselves for future projects of a similar nature. To clarify, similar projects have been undertaken elsewhere in the past – but not with the very specific requirements that we are working with, and this is a new challenge for us as an organisation.

6.12 **Q.** Will you accession all of the Home Guard records?

A. Yes, in digital form.

6.13 **Q.** As TNA isn't accessioning the original records, will MoD keep them?

A. We will make it a requirement that MoD keeps the records for a specified period of time after digitisation, so that we can ensure that the digital records are fit for purpose. After that, the fate of the original documents will be MoD's decision.

6.14 A delegate noted that the care by TNA to ensure that the Home Guard records are dealt with appropriately and responsibly is welcomed and appreciated. He noted that it is particularly important that these records are made accessible when considering the fate of so many of the First World War records, many of which were for the same men.

6.15 **Q.** Why are you doing the pilot in-house if it is planned that the full version of these records will be delivered by a third party LIA?

A. Part of what we are looking for from the pilot is 'proof of concept' so we want to gain detailed insight into every aspect of the project in the first instance and fully understand any issues that arise.

6.16 **Q.** Could you consider building something in to the pilot system that enables users to mark images that they have viewed, to flag any issues, or to indicate that the image has been viewed and is ok?

A. As with any digitisation project, there will be a lot of Quality Assurance undertaken by us, but we will take away and consider the suggestion to build image quality testing by the end user into the system.

6.17 **Q.** Will you ensure that everything is scanned (e.g. including blank pages and empty forms)?

A. Yes

6.18 **Q.** Do you plan to leave the Durham records on DocumentsOnline following the pilot?

A. We are not sure at this stage but this is an option.

6.19 **Q.** What if the strict requirements in terms of quality and accuracy for this project (due to the originals not being accessioned) mean that none of the LIA's bid for the work?

A. This is unlikely, and it is in the interest of all involved that our plans to make these records available via an LIA works. However, if it was necessary for compromises to be made at any stage in the process, we would consult with the User Advisory Group.

7 Digitisation pipeline (standing item)

7.1 Information on agreed digitisation projects can be found on the digitisation pipeline:

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/the-national-archives-digitisation-programme-2008-2013.pdf>

7.2 However, it is our plan for future meetings to share information with this group on projects that are further 'up-stream' and not yet confirmed. This will allow an opportunity for this group to provide feedback on our plans and give us advance notice of any concerns or issues with regard to specific digitisation projects or

our general approach.

- 7.3 Due to commercial confidentiality, this is part of the meeting which delegates may not be able to communicate externally. In order for us to be able to share this information, we would need to get the group to sign a non-disclosure agreement.

8 Public Services update (standing item)

- 8.1 JJ briefly talked through recent and ongoing developments to our public services:
- 8.2 **British Nationality Cards:**
Project to make descriptions of all remaining cases of British nationality/naturalisation available in electronic format, and to support existing catalogued material in series HO 1, HO 45, HO 144, HO 382, HO 405 and the British Nationality Act index database.
- 8.3 **Digital Microfilm:**
Project to make the remaining microfilms held in the reading rooms available online for free as big pdfs' (unindexed pdf documents that are browsable in a similar way to microfilms), complete other series already available as digital microfilm and update the Catalogue to reflect these changes.
- 8.4 **FO/DO Indexing:**
Project to make Foreign and Dominions Office indexes available and accessible online.
- 8.5 **WO 25, WO 76 & E182 card indexes:**
Project to assess completeness and quality of index cards for series WO 25, WO 76 & E 182 with a view to making them available in electronic format to the public. Where possible, to absorb this information into the Catalogue.
- 8.6 **Complaints Review:**
Project to review and improve the processes for managing and responding to customer feedback.
- 8.7 **Online user Engagement:**
Project to ensure that TNA has sufficient systems and processes in place to enable us to engage meaningfully with our online user community. We are particularly interested to hear the thoughts and suggestions of User Advisory Group delegates on this topic which relates strongly to the engagement activities of this group.
- 8.8 **Web Chat / Instant Messaging:**
Project to pilot the use of web chat software for the delivery of real time interactive advice services by ARK staff. To determine

potential wider corporate applications for the product.

8.9 Digital Camera Pilot:

Project to pilot the use of digital cameras as a means for users to take images of documents in the reading rooms, with the option to send images to their own email account.

8.10 UCL rare books:

University College London (UCL) will be storing some of their rare books, archives and manuscripts collection at Kew for the next two years, while their premises are refurbished. The move of UCL materials to The National Archives will start on Friday 8 July with completion set for mid September.

8.11 A small, separate and dedicated reading room will be made available for UCL students to view their collection from September. Access to UCL holdings will be strictly by appointment only and will be managed via UCL Library Services

8.12 LDS opportunity:

A similar opportunity has arisen for us to work with the London Family History Centre, run by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, who will be closing their central London office for refurbishment. We have been in discussions regarding them temporarily running a scaled down version of their service on our premises, however this is not confirmed at this stage.

8.13 It was noted that the last 2 items are indicators of organisations working together, in response to the limitations of the current economic situation, in a way that is mutually beneficial and enhances service, efficiency and revenue.

9. Any other business

9.1 JJ drew attention to the consultation document which details the legal tidying-up exercise relating to The National Archives and its component bodies as part of the Public Bodies Bill (see Public Bodies Bill and The National Archives UAG-220611-07). The proposed change will be included in a larger formal consultation exercise. Post meeting note: the consultation referred to at the meeting is now available online here:
<http://www.justice.gov.uk/consultations/reform-public-bodies.htm>

10. Date of next meeting:

Tuesday 6th September, 11:30 – 13:30