
Minutes

Title: Online User Advisory Panel

Date of Meeting: 14th July 2008, 13:00-16:00

Location: The National Archives (The National Archives), Kew – Training Room

Attendees: The National Archives :
Jeff James – Director of Public Services (JJ) (Chair)
James Lawson - Customer Intelligence Manager (JL) (Secretary)
Guy Grannum - Your Archives Manager (GG)
David Magee – Research Adviser (DM)
Darren Austin – Senior Project Manager (DA)
Caroline Kimbell - Business Development Manager (CK)
Olivia Dickinson – Web Team Operations Manager (OD)
Daniel Gilfoyle – Academic Strategies Coordinator (DG)

Else Churchill - Society of Genealogists (EC)
Barbara Harvey - Guild of One-Name Studies (BH)
Geoff Riggs - Association of Family History Societies of Wales (GR)
Roger Lewry - Federation of Family History Societies (GR)
Kathryn Thompson - British Association for Local History (KMT)
Paul Blake - Regular Readers (PB)
Adrian Towers - Government Records Management Community (AT)

Apologies: The National Archives :
Gemma Richardson - Strategic Development Manager (GR)
Jennifer Rigby - Head of IT Strategy (JR)
Dan Jones - Head of Business Development (DJ)
Mercedes Clark-Smith - Head of Web Team (MCS)
Ruth Selman - Head of Knowledge Transfer (RS)

Matthew Woollard - UK Data Archive (MW)
Sue Donnelly - Public Archive Sector (SD)
Ian Wakelin - Private archive sector (IW)
Richard Ambrose - eBay (RA)
Gaynor Burns - BBC (GB)

Action

- 1 Welcome – Jeff James, Director of Public Services**
- 1.1 JJ Welcomed those present to the meeting and introduced Darren Austin (senior Project Manager), Olivia Dickinson (Web Team Operations Manager) and David Magee (Research Adviser)
- 2 Minutes and matters arising**

2.1 The minutes of the last meeting were agreed.

3 Academic Users of The National Archives – David Magee, Research Advisor

3.1 DM explained his role as Research Adviser within the Research and Collections Development Department, a new strategic department within The National Archives. The main role of the department is to develop and maintain the pre-eminence of The National Archives as a supporter and originator of research.

David's main role is to gather intelligence on The National Archives's academic users and their interactions with the organisation, and to feed this research into developing the service provided to academics.

3.2 This has recently involved 3 key projects, the first of which has been to investigate the existing information we have on academic users, their areas of research, research behaviours, demographics, as well as looking in to how we define 'academic user' and how we will improve the level of understanding of this type of user in the future, in order to better direct our services to meet their needs.

3.3 The second project has been to investigate what the impact of digitisation will be on historical research (particularly academic research).

The third project has been to look in to how we can increase and broaden the appeal and use of records held by The National Archives which are of interest to social scientists.

DA said that he would welcome feedback and questions from those present, both at the meeting and afterwards.

3.4 Questions and feedback

Concern was expressed that certain types of user can be missed out when research is undertaken into broad categories of user. An example given was Local Historians, who don't necessarily fit easily into either the Family Historian or Academic categories. It was also noted that there are other examples of the boundaries being blurred, such as those studying for academic qualifications in Family History.

3.5 It was asked whether there was an intention to start catering for users separately online, according to these user types. DM responded that the intention is to focus more on the difference in users behaviours and the way that they search for information, rather than the type of documents they are looking for. DM emphasised that The National Archives's intention, and the challenge we face, is to cater effectively online for all of our users.

4. The National Archives' Family of Websites – Darren Austin, Senior Project Manager (see also the Online Strategy document: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/about/operate/online-strategy.htm>)

4.1 DA explained that the Family of Websites is the first major project that is driven by the recent work on The National Archives's Online Strategy, and stressed that it is still in its early stages. The Family of Websites will see a major reorganising of the way The National Archives's online

-
- content is presented. It will consist of a number of distinct areas (which are cross departmental and cross directorate in scope) under a single portal page, and interlinked by a central 'corporate area'. The areas will be arranged according to Key functions; 'Records', 'Gazettes', 'Education', 'Legislation' and 'Information management'.
- 4.2 It was asked if the OUAG would be able to become involved in user testing of the new site. It was agreed that the group should be involved. Several users felt that their input would be more relevant and valuable at later stages of the project.
- 4.3 Concern was expressed that 'Education' is still seen as a separate entity, as is reflected by the separate 'Learning Curve' area on the current site. It was agreed that the educational element should be much more integrated than it is currently.
Post meeting update: The Focus on Film education site has been nominated for a BAFTA Children's Award for Learning. The awards are to be held on Sunday 30th November. You can find the site here: <http://www.learningcurve.gov.uk/focus/film/>
- 4.4 It was also emphasised that the intention is to make the site accessible to users with the different online searching behaviours, which were identified by the earlier user research. It was noted that a single user might display different behaviours depending on the type of information they are looking for on a given visit. It was also noted that attempts would be made within the site to give users the opportunity to improve their online expertise (through online help and tutorials) and therefore develop their behaviours. It was agreed that, as with on site users, the least skilled online users are the most resource intensive and that a one to many approach in learning is most desirable where possible.
- 4.5 Concern was expressed that the site could potentially feel 'bitty' to users, and lose the sense that there is a single online destination for The National Archives as a whole. However it was also agreed that the current front page of the site contains too much information, which can easily overwhelm with information that is not relevant to a specific visit. It was emphasised that improvements to the website are an ongoing process and should not be seen as a finite project with a definitive outcome.
- 4.6 It was asked if there would be durable urls for the pages on the new site. DA responded that yes, this will become a requirement for all Government websites.
- 5. Digitisation update – Caroline Kimbell, Business Development Manager (see also separate Digitisation Roundup document)**
- 5.1 CK started by drawing attention to the consultation that was being run by the MoD on the early transfer of some historic armed forces service personnel records to The National Archives . Concern was expressed that the original documents are not being kept, and related issues regarding the quality of the scanned images and the potential for mistakes to be made. CK encourage those present to take advantage of the consultation exercise and have their say.
- 5.2 CK reported that unfortunately the bid made to the HLF for digitising the poor law records had been turned down, although the HLF had been very positive about the quality of the bid. It was noted that all successful

bids had been for physical structures. It was being considered whether to make a re submission later in the year.

Post meeting update: a decision has been made to continue with this work with 200 volunteers and 40% of the original HLF bid.

- 5.3 CK ran through the current and planned digitisation projects (see *Digitisation Roundup document*). Particular interest was expressed in the ADM 101 (Surgeons Logs) project and it was agreed that Bruno Pappalardo, who is leading on the project would be invited to the next meeting to provide an update.
- 6 Your Archives (YA) street indexing project update – Guy Grannum, Your Archives Manager (see also separate *Street Indexing Project document*)**
- 6.1 GG reported that the YA project was well underway. There were approximately 300 binders of street indexes to be uploaded. There had been some technical and logistical issues uploading these in a format that lends itself to inputting into YA, and in making sure that the data inputted is structured in a way that lends itself to reuse in the future (in accordance with the online strategy). There are also issues with consistency in the quality of street indexes.
- 6.2 It was emphasised that it is not planned for the project to be ‘launched’ as a product, but to gradually evolve as a tool. It is hoped that individuals and groups, such as local history groups will get involved, using the structure that we have created to upload data (in many instances, local history groups will have created street indexes to areas to which there are no ‘official’ indexes). It is also likely that The National Archives will work with groups, and possibly schools to create social history content for certain streets and places, providing finding aids for them to work with.
- 6.3 It was noted that in many ways the project is setting a precedent, particularly in terms of creating a WIKI with a complex pre existing structure for information.
- 6.4 It was noted that unfortunately users will not be able to upload large quantities of data to YA, which could be seen as an issue.
- 6.5 GG talked through slides which outline the structure of the pages (see *Street Indexing Project document*).
- 7. External member presentation: Barbara Harvey, Guild of One Names Studies (See also separate *Guild of One Name Studies document*)**
8. Any other business. It was mentioned that members of the Online User Advisory Group used to be able to claim expense for attending back from The National Archives , and asked if this could be reinstated. JL to investigate
- 9. Next Meeting**
- Date and time: 05 December 2008, 13:00 – 16:00
Location: The National Archives, Kew – IT Training Room

JL