



The National Archives

A Research Policy and Strategy for The National Archives

Vision

To support decision-making in The National Archives through developing and testing new ideas, and through the interpretation of information and research findings for the benefit of government, the information community, The National Archives' staff and a wider constituency.

The National Archives' Research Policy

The National Archives will engage in the development of a distinct research agenda to

- Position The National Archives as the leading pioneer practitioner in the UK through pro-active engagement with research.
- Underpin The National Archives' Vision and other business objectives through the application of research findings to business critical research questions.
- Fulfil The National Archives' status as a research council (RCUK) recognised Independent Research Organisation as an originator and supporter of research.
- Ensure that The National Archives' current research activities are explicitly articulated, developed and promoted.

The nature of research in the context of The National Archives

- Research will respond to intellectual challenges and critical pressure points in the record keeping domain: in such areas as information management, the preservation of digital and analogue collections, resource discovery, collections interpretation and user behaviour. Responding to such problems will require creative responses, conceptual frameworks and solutions.
- Research will largely be applied rather than pure or 'blue skies' and will be directed towards innovatively solving problems or improving practice
- Research will continue explicitly to support a wide range of academic users across a wide range of disciplines and maintain and develop partnerships.
- Priority will be given to projects nested in the professional arenas of information and records management, conservation science, user needs and behaviour and collection strategies.
- Research undertaken by The National Archives' staff will generally conform to recognised research council standards, methodologies and practices:

identifying business related research questions; and using appropriate data collection; analysis; interpretation and dissemination methodologies

Planned outcomes of research

- Provide evidence to inform policy, decision making and practice within government and in the wider professional, academic and public environments.
- Contribution to delivery of The National Archives' Vision and other business objectives.
- Development and engagement of staff with research values, purpose and practice.
- Enhanced reputation for The National Archives' research contribution nationally and internationally through the explicit addition to knowledge articulated through traditional and digital media.
- Sustained relationships with academic and other partners.

Research Strategy

The research strategy has five overarching aims. These are:

Establish a research service within The National Archives' designed to improve decision-making and meet needs of the wider sector

- Develop a cross-disciplinary team, led by Research and Collections Development to deliver an innovative collections, research and information service sustainable in the long-term.
- Establish an administrative infrastructure to support the research team.

Develop a research programme that supports The National Archives' business priorities and the needs of the wider community

- Set the programme within relevant UK research agenda
- Identify business objectives and research areas where outputs would benefit The National Archives' overall Vision and plans
- Provide opportunities to engage users, preservation specialists and the information and records sector in developing and implementing The National Archives' research programme.
- Engender partnerships with a range of users, subject specialists, research councils, funding bodies and information services to identify and monitor research gaps.

Fulfil the opportunities and requirements that the status of Independent Research Organisation demands of The National Archives

- Build collaborative relationships with all research councils and other Independent Research Organisations.
- Identify staff who are actively engaged in research and support them in delivering the programme through targeted publication; applications for funding etc.
- Establish an Academic Advisory Panel to support The National Archives' research programme, monitor and validate grant applications and research findings.

- Establish Collaborative Working Groups with the wider scholarly community to engage in the testing and implementation of new ideas and the monitoring of services to that community.

Ensure that The National Archives establishes a leadership role in research for the archival community and beyond

- Invite participation in research initiatives from universities and professional bodies.
- Identify other people's research projects that have relevance for The National Archives.
- Ensure research findings and knowledge are disseminated innovatively and usefully to a broad community of stakeholders.
- Publish regularly information about The National Archives and partners' research and its outputs.
- Ensure that the delivery and sustainability of data generated from research projects meet best practice guidance.

Exploit funding opportunities from internal resources, partnership funding and external funding bodies

- Remain informed about funding opportunities, build new relationships and strengthen where appropriate relationships with research councils, funding bodies, and industry.
- Develop partnerships with the higher education sector to support the delivery of our research agenda effectively.
- Work closely with other independent research organisations to jointly influence research councils and funding bodies.

Sustaining the Record: Research priorities 2007-2010

The National Archives is poised to respond to a number of critical and inter related challenges that are articulated through The National Archives' Vision. For the period 2007-10 Research and Collections Development will support research applications that align with three underpinning research themes, for delivery under the banner 'Sustaining the Record'.

Research theme 1: Leading and transforming information management

Research Context: Leading and transforming information management

The development of Internet capabilities and rapidly evolving technologies is continuing to alter radically our ability to create, record, and store archival records. This requires The National Archives to commit to leading and transforming information management in Government. It also requires a critical understanding of knowledge management and its relevance to The National Archives. In addition we need to critically evaluate selection protocols, records use and data re-use in the context of c 21st government. This requires an unprecedented evaluation of what an archive is, and how information is accessed and delivered to an increasingly diverse audience. To respond to these challenges our research will be situated under distinct research clusters:

Research clusters 2007-10 Leading and transforming information management

- Improve understanding of knowledge and information architectures in a modern world.
- Define what a record is in a digital world.
- Define 'evidence': what is it and how will it inform government policy and decision making in the modern world?

- Explore ways in which government and the record keeping community can better utilise knowledge and information management protocols.
- Evaluate the changing attributes of records and information and associated use and re-use requirements.

Research theme 2: Guaranteeing the survival of today's information for tomorrow

Research Context: Guaranteeing the survival of today's information for tomorrow

As custodian of the national memory The National Archives has a responsibility for the selection and permanent retention of analogue and digital (public) records of enduring value. This requires better understanding of the kinetics of decay and the steps necessary to mitigate and manage them. It is necessary therefore, to exploit and develop existing models such as risk assessment and life-cycle management protocols to inform strategic decision making and ensure sustainable preservation policies. To respond to these challenges research will be situated under distinct research clusters:

Research clusters 2007-10 Guaranteeing the survival of today's information for tomorrow

- Investigate the character and ageing behaviours of materials.
- Investigate the impact of climate change on indoor environmental conditions and microclimates in order to calibrate preservation policies and practices.
- Undertake technical analysis to explore the synergies between the documentary evidence, the record itself and the potential of scientific analysis to better understand how objects were made and used.
- Understand the significant properties of digital information that need to endure across future preservation actions.
- Develop preservation services for automated re-use by third-parties.

Research theme 3: Bringing History to life for Everyone

Research Context Theme 3 : Bringing history to life for everyone

The National Archives is committed to the interpretation and dissemination of information from records through efficient on-line services to a diverse community of users in a range of sectors and disciplines. This requires us to develop services to a broader academic base - economics, history, social policy, law, geography, international relations, as well as to the family, local, and community historian. Exploitation of new methods of communication with user constituencies is key. To respond to these challenges research will be situated under distinct research clusters:

Research clusters 2007-10 Bringing history to life for everyone

- Exploit the potential for social software as a tool for inclusion, for example wikis
- Understand user response and behaviours.
- Explore research use of digital resources in order to inform the development of research tools at The National Archives
- Unlock the administrative processes of records to assist user understanding of their context.
- Examine the role and influence of archives on communities and wider society

You may also wish to look at the guidance we have developed for partners wishing to work with The National Archives in developing bids for external funding at <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/about/research/guidance.htm>