



The National Archives

The National Archives

Strategic Plan 2009–10

Introduction by the Chief Executive

I am pleased to present the strategic plan for The National Archives for 2009–2010.

Like all organisations, The National Archives is currently facing the unprecedented demands of the digital age, against a backdrop of an increasingly challenging global economic climate. Constantly evolving technologies and new ways of working mean opportunities will often be matched by new challenges emerging in the year ahead. Our plans for 2009–2010 are about embracing these opportunities, and meeting the challenges, by using innovation and enterprise.

The National Archives' role is not only to preserve and protect historical documents, but to open up access to key public information, both current and historic. At the same time, we also support and advise our colleagues across government in managing current information effectively and in identifying and keeping information for the future. New technologies demand new ways of thinking, and we are committed to developing innovative, cost-effective solutions for government colleagues and for members of the public who use our services.

Our goals for the coming year are inspired and shaped by the needs of our users, and we are dedicated to making sure that our services meet – or exceed – their expectations. Increasingly, those using our services expect information resources and expertise to be available online, and we are seeing a growing demand for our web services. In 2007–2008, over 80 million of our documents were downloaded via the web, and when the 1911 census went live online in January 2009 nearly five million searches were carried out in the first 48 hours alone. By enhancing our e-services we can provide access to historic public records, to our knowledge and expertise and to information held elsewhere, as never before. Our plans for the future include delivering more straightforward and intuitive online searching and cataloguing for the public, and building a unified, comprehensive online resource for all UK legislation.

As ways of working evolve, and memos and minutes make way for websites, wikis and blogs, our role has grown to include working to protect the survival of key information from the point of creation. In 2009–2010 we will further develop our services for colleagues in government, offering expert support in managing their information, helping them identify what they need to keep for the future and implementing strategies for making sure that crucial data survives in a usable form.

At the same time, we will continue to develop the public services at our Kew site. We are committed to making our operations as cost-effective and environmentally conscious as we can, while maintaining the protective conditions essential for the survival of the unique collections we hold, and continuing to provide our renowned services to the public.

None of The National Archives' ground-breaking initiatives would be possible without the continued hard work of all of the people who work here, whose commitment and professionalism are at the core of all we do. In the coming year we will be working on a programme of staff development to ensure all colleagues have the support, resources and training they need, so we will continue to provide a world-class service.



Natalie Ceeney,
Chief Executive, The National Archives

Remit of The National Archives

The National Archives is a government department in its own right as well as an executive agency of the Ministry of Justice. As the official archive of the UK government, we preserve and protect one of the most important collections in the world, holding public records dating back almost 1,000 years.

A core part of our work is the care and preservation of government's historical archives, but in today's digital world, our role has necessarily expanded. Information has become a key currency in our society, and increasingly we support colleagues across government in managing current information. We have evolved through the decades to meet the changing needs of government and the public, and The National Archives' work now encompasses a wider range of disciplines and expertise in the field of information management.

As well as keeping and preserving important public records and historical documents, we work to influence and support the creation of policy and best practice in information management, developing our expertise and creating strategies to tackle the evolving demands of the digital age. We undertake vital research and continually develop new tools and projects in information management, so that we can offer guidance in looking after current as well as historical information. In this way we can serve as a key resource for our government colleagues when effectively creating, storing, using and preserving vital information for today as well as for tomorrow.

Our role is no longer simply to keep or to publish important public information, but to actively promote and facilitate access to it – increasingly through our online services and through our regulatory and assessment responsibilities. We are also dedicated to encouraging and supporting innovative new practice in using information across government. We are a world-class provider of research facilities and expert advice for the historical community, as well as a supporter and leading advocate for the wider archive sector. We are the official publishers of government information including legislation and the authority on its use and re-use.

Our aims are expressed through our vision, which is to:

- Lead and transform information management
- Guarantee the survival of today's information for tomorrow
- Bring history to life for everyone.

We have identified five key priorities for the coming year to help us achieve our aims:

- Drive the shift to online services
- Make sure government knows what it must keep and keeps it
- Ensure government has long-term access to business-critical information through web and digital continuity
- Build excellence in our services by innovating and driving efficiency in all we do
- Deploy the right people, skills and technology to deliver our vision.

Our overall aims are ambitious, but the ground-breaking results we have already achieved demonstrate our readiness and determination to tackle these vital issues.

Drive the shift to online services

The demand for online services is growing rapidly across all aspects of society, and The National Archives is no exception. Not only is there an increasing demand for online access to the rich seam of historical information we hold, but as technology evolves there is a continuing demand for entirely new services that keep pace with technological advances. This year we will respond by improving and widening our range of online services and expertise, to innovate and offer new ways of finding, combining, using and re-using government information.

We will make more content available online, and make it easier for our customers to find what they are looking for. Improving our online purchasing and licensing facilities will make it easier for online visitors to complete their searches. As part of our enriched online facilities we will also provide more targeted advice and expertise for our different customer groups.

We will simultaneously maintain and develop the quality of our on-site services and facilities for all those who need or choose to use them at our site in Kew.

In particular, in 2009–2010:

- We will radically improve our online and remote experience through a number of initiatives, **embedding the ethos of our online strategy throughout the organisation, developing enhanced search technology and providing an integrated single point of contact** for our remote customers
- We will reclaim the catalogue as a vibrant and comprehensive way of presenting all we have to offer by starting to replace our online catalogue with a **unified presentation system that genuinely drives customer behaviour** and increases the accessibility of our records
- We will drive the re-use agenda to the next stage through online solutions, **unlocking public sector information for re-use** using a combination of demand-led approaches
- We will create an integrated online legislation and government information service with a **unified source for access to legislation online**, with improvements and enhancements to capture, register, manage and store legislative information.

Make sure government knows what it must keep and keeps it

In this digital world, more and more information is being produced than ever before, and this presents significant challenges both to private and public sector organisations. With such volumes of data, keeping everything created will become increasingly unaffordable. And in a complex world where, for example, policy debates and consultations may be carried out on websites or blogs, and not in neat, structured paper forms, the tools to capture information are no longer straightforward. What information needs to be kept for ongoing business needs? What needs to be kept for long term accountability and history? And what information has only short term value and can therefore be deleted? In a digital world, if we are to keep the important content, decisions need to be made proactively at the start of the information life cycle, or else the information may be lost.

We will work with government departments to ensure that information that underpins the business of government that needs to be kept, whether for short term decision making or for long term accountability, is clearly identified, and that business-critical information remains recognisable and accessible. This is particularly crucial for digital information – as failure to identify it could lead to its loss – but the same principles apply to managing paper-based records.

We will create a framework to help government departments manage their information more effectively, ensuring they have the right tools and processes for creating, storing and categorising key documents.

As part of the drive to identify and capture for preservation key digital data, we will analyse the types of government information published on the web with a view to creating strategies for ensuring its capture and long-term survival.

We will also take the lead in planning how to implement any accepted recommendations from the review of the '30-year rule' for transferring to The National Archives those government records which have been identified as having historical value.

In particular, in 2009–2010:

- We will lead a 'What To Keep' project developing a methodology, creating buy-in and piloting, aiming for **ten key departments to have statements and schedules about what information they keep for business purposes** and processes in place to ensure that this happens
- We will lead on implementation planning for recommendations of the 30-Year Rule Review, coordinating with other government departments a **clear Government response to the 30-Year Review Team's recommendations that shapes our retention and transfer policy**
- We will drive change process internally to create robust processes for handling of government documents, implementing recommendations of the Document Process Review to **safeguard records being transferred from or loaned to government departments** and being preserved in The National Archives
- We will identify an appropriate technological solution for capturing Web 2.0 based information, developing technological strategies to enable us to **ensure the long-term or permanent survival of Web 2.0 based information.**

Ensure government has long-term access to business-critical information through web and digital continuity

Information is a priceless asset (one that is increasingly in digital formats) and without it, government simply cannot function. Business-critical digital information needs to be preserved for as long as required to support ongoing business activities or to provide a record for audit or governance procedures. In addition, it may need to be preserved to meet legislative requirements. These include the obligation to provide access under the Freedom of Information Act or the Data Protection Act or, in the case of central government, the obligation to transfer material to The National Archives.

Unlike paper which can be kept on a shelf for lengthy periods, digital data needs active intervention; it cannot simply be left in a computer or stored on tape or disk. Electronic information is more complex, with a multitude of formats in use. File corruption or technical obsolescence can mean the irretrievable loss of vital data, or the loss of the metadata essential for interpreting it. However, active intervention costs money and consequently it is important that an informed decision is taken early in the life of a digital object as to how long it will be needed for ongoing business purposes.

We will continue to lead the way in information management across government by creating technical solutions to these issues and helping to embed skills and expertise in day-to-day business activities throughout all departments.

We are creating a digital continuity shared service for government: a mixture of guidance, tools, services and standards. Departments will be able to use these to help them understand and identify the digital continuity risks they face and create tailored action plans to address them.

In particular, in 2009-2010:

- We will deliver the benefits of the Digital Continuity Project: our own digital continuity risk will be fully assessed and understood and steps will be put in place to mitigate it; we will establish a Digital Continuity Shared Service so that guidance, standards and a framework agreement for tools and services are in place for use by departments
- We will implement fully our own digital transfer system for digital records of different types ensuring that this becomes embedded in government information management and our What to Keep plans
- We will deliver a plan and funding for web continuity ensuring that all government websites are archived once every four months and that tools are in place so that if significant documents have been removed from the websites of their parent departments, enquirers will be redirected to the relevant page on the government web archive.

Build excellence in our services by innovating and driving efficiency in all we do

In these uncertain economic times and as the needs of our customers change, the character and priorities of our organisation will continue to evolve. Flexibility, responsiveness and efficiency will be at the core of all our services so that we can remain leaders in the field of information management and a provider of outstanding services.

We will maintain the conditions vital for preserving our unique collections while reducing costs and the environmental impact of our services. Planning for savings across the organisation will entail investigating where we can be smarter in our processes, as well as identifying any areas where direct savings can be made in our work in the future. We will streamline our commercial services to make sure they remain efficient and effective. We will also restructure our internal purchasing processes, using innovative technology and cutting-edge ideas to ensure that we continue to use public money as effectively as possible in the challenging year ahead.

Meanwhile, further developing our information management, assessment and regulatory capabilities will allow us to increase our effectiveness as an information sector leader.

In particular, in 2009-2010:

- We will deliver against the Estates Capital plan, ensuring we **reduce our ongoing costs, and protect the repository environment**
- We will achieve a 5% year-on-year saving in energy costs
- We will deliver the Civil Pages Pilot Project to act as a **catalyst for civil service innovation**
- We will plan for savings across The National Archives, getting the organisation ready for a **culture of continuous savings** by education and challenge
- We will embed a culture of 'can do' across all directorates **channelling front line talent and ideas** to improve the way we do things
- We will review the viability of the Public Library Scheme and develop options for **sustainable delivery of a cheaper ongoing service**
- We will implement an e-Procurement system for The National Archives to allow **greater control over expenditure and better value for money.**

Deploy the right people, skills and technology to deliver our vision

With the pace of technological advances, the information world has changed beyond all recognition in the past decade, and in ways we could not have imagined twenty years ago. This pace of change is certain to continue in the years to come, and we must put plans in place to ensure we can keep up with, adapt to and maximise the potential of these changes as and when they happen. This will allow us to continue to deliver our vision in the longer term, through deploying the right people, skills and technology.

We are already a responsive department that has demonstrated how we can rise to the challenges the changing world can bring. We continue to work hard to maintain and develop our traditional record-keeping skills, but also to develop new skills and expertise alongside this in emerging areas, such as electronic records, digital preservation and creating better online access to our information.

This is a continuous process, but ensuring we have the right skills and capability now and for the future in The National Archives is only one part of the bigger picture in the creation, use and preservation of government information. In order to achieve our vision, we must also work closely with and provide support to our partners in this digital information world, which spans government departments creating information, to those wishing to re-use it, and to the archive sector which ultimately preserves it.

Our plans must support the foundations which underpin the entire information chain. We will support and develop the Knowledge and Information Management profession throughout government to help raise capability and will also use our regulatory and assessment functions to help improve information skills in all areas. We will also work to build capability in the archive sector, through our response to and implementation of the government policy on archives.

In particular, in 2009-2010:

- We will develop **strong reputation-based relationships** with key stakeholders to ensure The National Archives' value is recognised
- We will raise capability in government knowledge and information management (KIM) and **deliver the Government's KIM strategy**, building capability and embedding skills across government departments and devising programmes of training tailored to need
- We will build capacity in data handling and ensure that The National Archives has the capacity to deliver an **appropriate level of information security and that it is embedded within our culture**
- We will review our IT infrastructure, develop a programme to simplify The National Archives' IT in order to **reduce costs of support and maintenance and to facilitate the provision of enhanced services** in the future
- We will ensure that **The National Archives meets its 2010–11 sustainability targets** by progressing our sustainable development action plan
- We will develop a constructive organisational culture that underpins the employee proposition by marketing The National Archives as an employer of choice to attract and retain staff

- We will raise capability in the archive sector by **repositioning The National Archives as the sector leader** in response to the new Government policy on archives and related archive policy roll out

- We will agree with the business a clear resourcing strategy that articulates the skills and knowledge we will need for the future and how we will recruit or develop to obtain them.