

Title: TNA User Forum
Date of Meeting: Thursday 22 November 2007, 12:30pm
Location: Conference Room A,

Attendees: Staff: JJ: Jeff James, Head of Advice and Records Knowledge department (chair); James Lawson, Customer Intelligence Manager (secretary); IB: Isabelle Biraben, Senior Project Manager; JA: Jill Allbrooke, Head of Enquiry Services team; CC: Chris Cooper, Kew 2008 Programme Manager; TG: Tom Gregan, Head of Document Services department; LO: Lee Oliver, Head of Development team; DP: Dave Priest, Production Co-ordination Manager; JS: James Strachan, Secretary to the review of the 30-year transfer rule

Readers: Joyce Hoad, Betty Thomson, John Martin, Susan Moore, Malcolm Smith, Pauline Eismark, John King, Richard Bateson, Sue Dublen, Scott Reeve, Gillian Hughes, Paul Blake, Tom Tulloch Marshall

1 Welcome from Jeff James, Advice and Records Knowledge department (ARK)

JJ welcomed those present.

2. Minutes of the last meeting

2.1 (2.1) JL had included the names of those readers that spoke in the minutes of the last meeting. Joyce Hoad asked that the minutes of this and future meetings also include a list of those readers attending.

2.2 (2.2) *Records Review Day Meg Sweet*. A meeting had been set up between Richard Bateson and Meg Sweet (Head of Records Management and Cataloguing Department) to discuss his suggestion for a Records Review day.

2.3 (2.6) *Seat allocation during building works*. TG reported that the number of seats available in the document reading room would be reduced from 332 to 152 for the period of 17th December to 19th January (with the office closed to the public 1st – 16th

JL

December and 21st – 27th January). For this period the advanced document ordering service will be withdrawn, although there will be a procedure in place for exceptional circumstances, requiring 5 days notice (this will not guarantee the availability of a seat). During this period it will be possible to hold documents over with a seat available until 11am.

After this period the number of seats available is likely to rise to 215 for the remainder of the programme of works and the situation regarding advanced ordering will be reviewed (a decision will be made as to whether it will be necessary to continue with the above temporary measures for the remainder of the programme). TG agreed to report on the above at the January TNA User Forum.

It was noted that once the programme of works is complete, the number of seats available will increase to 368 (including the bulk reading service).

TG

2.4 *(2.9) Plan of new reading room layout*

A plan of the new reading room layout had been made available on the hoarding of the Museum on the ground floor. Joyce Hoad asked if it would be possible to have a 3 dimensional projection instead of an aerial plan. CC stated that this would not be possible due to the cost involved in producing this type of plan.

3.0 Prime Minister's announcement of 30-year rule review.

JS gave a brief explanation of his new (temporary) role as secretary to the review of the 30-year transfer rule. He explained that the purpose of the review, instigated by Gordon Brown, is to reconsider 2 pieces of law; that records are transferred to The National Archives after 30 years, and that records are made available to the public after 30 years. The Prime minister has appointed 3 members of staff to coordinate the review; Paul Dacre (Editor in Chief Associated Newspapers and member of the Press Complaints Commission), Joe Pilling (former Permanent Secretary at the Northern Ireland Office) and the eminent historian David Cannadine.

JS explained that the review was not yet fully underway, and that it was therefore difficult for him to provide any further information at this stage, but that it had been agreed that there would be a strong commitment to consultation throughout the process.

3.1 A reader asked why the decision had been taken to review the rule now. JS responded that in the new Fol climate, the rule seemed out of date and illogical, adding that the current Prime Minister has shown particular concern for these issues.

3.2 It was asked if the review would include those documents that are currently not subject to the 30-year rule. JS clarified that approximately 3% of the records taken by TNA are closed and that as far as he was aware, these would remain closed and there

would not be a change in policy regarding these.

- 3.3 A reader expressed concern over the storage strategy at TNA, and the need to expand in the future. TG noted that although space is becoming tight on site, there is a strategy in place to hold low and zero usage documents off site, and that there is plenty of room to increase the amount of material held off site in the future.

4.0 TNA's public service performance against our targets

- 4.1 JJ ran through a brief presentation, in the form of charts displaying trend data (available in separate document), giving information on TNA's performance against several of our key public service related targets.
- 4.2 A reader suggested that the information given in the charts was very general and could therefore be seen as misleading. JJ responded that our intention in displaying this information was to supply a broad overall picture of how TNA is performing against our targets and give insight into our motives and goals as dictated by government. Breaking the targets down into their detailed component parts without the necessary time to supply detailed commentary would potentially be more misleading.

5.0 Programme for improvements to TNA's public services at Kew

- 5.1 CC reported that the building programme was well under way, and that TNA would be providing weekly updates on how each of the public service points would be affected. CC noted that efforts were being made to reduce the disruption to services where possible and asked readers to speak to staff if they encounter particular problems as a result of the works (without placing blame on front line staff) and to communicate any suggestions on ways of reducing the inconvenience.
- 5.2 CC reported that the information and advice services would be maintained (except during the closure periods) with 2 exceptions; a number of books usually held in the library would be unavailable, and the number of seats in the document reading room would be reduced (as detailed at item 2.3).
- 5.3 Joyce Hoad asked which of the library books would be unavailable during the works and whether they would all be made available once the works have been completed. CC responded that unfortunately, the books had to be moved based on their location (mainly those books previously at the front left of the library) rather than subject matter / popularity. He also stated that all books would be made available once the programme is complete except for a very small amount of material that is

duplicated.

- 5.4 Richard Bateson stated that he had seen books withdrawn from the library for sale in the TNA bookshop. LL and JJ both stated that if this was the case, it was not part of the Q2008 programme. JJ asked JL to check this with Helen Pye-Smith.
- 5.5 A reader asked if the library staff would continue to be available. CC and JJ responded that although there will no longer be a specific library enquiry desk, advice on the library holdings will continue to be available from the staff at the new integrated enquires desk and from 'floor walkers'. These staff will be drawn from a pool of library staff and Reading Room Assistants / Reader Advisors and trained to a level enabling them to answer the majority of questions on both the library and the archival holdings. JJ emphasised that for particularly detailed enquiries regarding the libraries holdings, expert library professionals will continue to be available (in the same way that expert records staff would continue to be available for detailed enquiries relating to the documents).
- 5.6 A reader asked if certain computer terminals in the reading rooms could be locked down to specific functions (so as to free up certain terminals for ordering documents and allocate others for lengthy browsing etc...). LO responded that there is no intention of locking down terminals to specific functions, however behaviour would be regulated through the use of furniture and layout (e.g. by introducing more 'stand-up' terminals for quick usage).
- 6.0 Security procedures update (see items 2.4 and 2.5 of last minutes)**
- 6.1 JJ reported that he had attended a meeting with several senior members of staff to re evaluate security procedures in line with the changes to the reading rooms afforded by the Q2008 programme.
- 6.2 It had been agreed at this meeting that from April 2008, the activity of stapling loose sheets of paper by security at the threshold of the reading rooms would be ceased. Several readers expressed their appreciation for this change, which they considered to be a sensible decision.
- 6.3 The above meeting had also involved looking at the policy of allowing coats and bags into the open areas of the reading rooms. It had been agreed that the initial plans to allow coats and bags were correct, but that it would be necessary to look into how security will work with public services to ensure that this runs as smoothly as possible.

JL

6.4 A reader asked if the current policy on not allowing handbags in to the reading room areas could be re evaluated. JJ responded that there was no plan to change this rule, partly in order to maintain a clear boundary between 'open' and 'closed' areas.

7.0 Staff development hour – proposal for changing day of 10am opening from Tuesday to Wednesday

7.1 JJ explained that a proposal had come from several members of TNA staff (and agreed to be favourable through internal consultation) to change the day that the office opens at 10am instead of 9am from Tuesday to Wednesday. The reasoning behind the proposal is to allow for staff training (which happens from 9am to 10am on the day of late opening) to occur on a day when the office closes at the standard time of 17:00, meaning that public services staff can arrive at 9am for training and finish the day at 17:00 instead of 19:00. JJ explained that the next stage was to consult readers at the user forum, adding that if the changes were agreed, they would not be implemented until April 2008, in line with the introduction of the combined services at Kew.

7.2 Several readers expressed their support for the proposal, advocating the commitment to staff development and welfare. It was also suggested that the new arrangement could be beneficial to readers, making the 'longer' day on Tuesday even longer.

8.0 Payment Systems for self service copying

8.1 IB introduced herself as the project manager responsible for a project to replace the self-service copying payment systems in the reading rooms, emphasising that this will happen after April 2008 and is not part of the Q2008 programme. IB explained that the EMOS towers currently used in the reading rooms are out of date and at the end of their life. Readers were asked for feedback and suggestions.

8.2 It was suggested that payment via credit card is considered, along with the possibility of a swipe system such as Oyster. It was also suggested that a system is introduced whereby credit can be topped up remotely on the internet. A reader also noted that there is currently a problem with the queuing system for the EMOS towers (particularly for self service scanning facility). IB noted that TNA staff are aware of the queuing issue and there are already plans underway to rectify this. IB agreed to look into the suggestions made and informed those present that there will also be a survey run in the reading rooms in January, which readers are encouraged to participate in.

9.0 Terms of Reference for the User Forum

- 9.1 JJ asked for any feedback on the draft Terms of Reference for the User Forum (which had been distributed at previous meetings and made available online). Joyce Hoad suggested that section listing various other forums that 'The role of the User Forum should not duplicate' is misleading, as there is in fact some duplication. JJ agreed to look at rewording this.
- 9.2 Richard Bateson asked if it would be possible to add a member of staff from OPSI to the list of regular attendees. LO said that it would not be necessary to have a member of OPSI at each meeting, but that someone could be invited when necessary.

JJ

Date of next meeting: 20 December 2007