

**Title: The National Archives' User Forum**

**Date: 12 April 2012**

**Location: Talks Room**

**Attendees (staff):**

Tom Gregan (TG), Head of Document Services (Chair)  
Dave Priest (DP), Production Co-ordination Manager  
Richard Grocock (RG), Public Services Manager  
Mary Gledhill (MG), Commercial Director  
Lee Oliver (LO), Head of Public Services Development  
Chris Cooper (CC), Departmental Security Officer  
Colin Goldsmith-Umney (CGU), Security Operations Manager  
Emma Bayne (EB) Head of Systems Development  
James Lawson (JL), Customer Intelligence Manager

**Attendees (users):** Bill Gordon, A Phillips, P Gallagher, James Young, Graham Woolgar, Gillian Stevens, Jasmine Belloni, Peter Boydens, Scott Reeve, John Seaman, Richard Bateson, Jeff Jefford, Ralph Platt, M Alabraba

**Matters arising from the last meeting**

JL reported that there is not a Campaign Medal that was issued exclusively to the Home Guard. However, the Defence Medal was issued for various activities during the Second World War, including service in the forces in non-operational areas, Civil Defence in operational areas and service in the Home Guard. The records of the Defence Medal are held by the Cabinet Office who still administer the medal. These records are separate to the Home Guard service records which are held by the Ministry of Defence.

JL reported that although some members of the Home Guard used skills obtained from their civilian occupations and in some cases relating to specific employers, the arrangement of the Home Guard records is strictly by County.

TG noted that an agenda item had been scheduled for an update on the self service copying machines at this meeting.

TG reported that David Thomas, Director of Technology and Chief Information Officer, will attend the User Forum on 8 May to give a presentation on our overall digital storage strategy including the work of the digital Records Infrastructure project.

JL reported that there will not be a period of parallel running before Documents Online is integrated in to Discovery as it is not possible to run 2 payment systems in parallel. Further information on this can be found in the minutes of the March User Advisory Group meeting, which can be found [here](#).

JL reported that we will be implementing the suggestion for an improvement to the confirmation screen displayed when an enquiry has been submitted on the website. The text of the query will be repeated on the confirmation page, along with a time and date stamp and a message instructing the user to print or save the page. This will be implemented this financial year (by April 2013).

TG confirmed that Lord McNally will return to The National Archives to talk to users in June.

*Post meeting update: It has now been confirmed that this event will take place on 22 June and that Lord Hennessey will also attend. The event will be free to attend but ticketed (tickets are not available yet) and will be announced formally on the website and through the e-newsletter.*

JL reported that there is limited news available currently regarding the transfer of AIR 81 (Casualty Branch P4(Cas): Enquiries into Missing Personnel, 1939-45 War). It is understood that The Ministry of Defence plan to undertake a public consultation about the potentially sensitive information contained within the records to see if there are objections to their release. We hope to be able to provide more detailed information at the next User

Forum.

It was noted that the bullet point from the minutes of the last meeting, relating to the Royal Navy collation of inter war service records, required expanding upon following recent conversations regarding this particular collation:

The Royal Navy collation is likely to be the most problematic of the 4, due mainly to a complex combination of open and closed information within individual files. It is likely that this collation will be addressed last, enabling us to gain valuable experience along the way.

*Post meeting update: It has now been established that a significant portion of the Royal Navy records will be available for transfer to The National Archives sooner than originally expected. These are the record cards created when existing ratings were transferred to the new card system in 1929. They correspond to ratings born between 1880 and 1908 and take the form of a continuation of the service records already partially held in the series ADM188.*

*However it is important to note that these are currently closed records held by the MoD. It will take a considerable amount of time to agree the transfer arrangements with the MoD and make a decision regarding whether we transfer the paper records or digitise them and accession the digital copies.*

*It is also important to note that we are currently in the process of delivering the Home Guard pilot project and have already stated that the RAF series will be digitised following the Home Guard pilot. This means that the Royal Navy records will not be transferred until after the RAF records have been digitised.*

#### **Update on the self service copying machines - Tom Gregan, Head of Document Services and Dave Priest, Production Co-ordination Manager**

Dave Priest gave a presentation on the new self service scanning machines (see separate presentation document).

It was confirmed that we do not intend to go back to providing the old scanning equipment. While recognising that in some circumstances the results from scanning may surpass that provided by the new camera service, in the vast majority of cases customer feedback indicated a consistently high level of user satisfaction. This coupled with the efficiency gains achieved allowed us to conclude that a camera only service is the most viable option.

It was acknowledged that it is not currently possible to produce bitonal images with the new equipment. However, it was agreed that we will continue to investigate the possibility of improving the quality of imaging provided, including a colour printed option, as long as it can be achieved at reasonable cost.

It was noted that there are a number of benefits to the new set up, including the ability for users to email colour images of the documents scanned, for free.

The new equipment, identical to that available in the Document Reading Room, was made available in the Talks Room for users to try and Richard Grocock gave a brief demonstration of how the equipment works. Users were invited to speak to Richard Grocock if they have difficulties in using the new equipment.

It was noted that we are currently looking to provide a version of the new equipment in the library area. The equipment will be slightly modified for this purpose, with the email option disabled for copyright reasons and with the ability to use a copy card as well as a readers ticket.

#### **Update on the March 2012 User Advisory Group Meeting – Gillian Stevens, Onsite personal interest User Advisory Group delegate**

Gillian Stevens gave an update on the last User Advisory Group meeting, including Terms of Reference for the group, an update on the Discovery Service, details on our plans regarding the Red Lists (paper catalogues),

information on websites that are blocked by The National Archives (see below) and a project to pilot an Online Community for The National Archives.

Websites that are unknown to our web security software are blocked by default. The process of checking sites and unblocking them if they do not pose a risk is relatively straightforward, but is dependent on the availability of IT staff. You can report sites that are blocked to staff on the enquiries desk, but sites won't normally be checked / unblocked the same day. Some User Advisory Group delegates have been compiling lists of websites which are likely to be used legitimately. It is worth noting that some sites (or individual pages within sites) cannot be opened because they do not conform to our Acceptable Use Policy.

Full minutes of the User Advisory Group meetings can be found [here](#).

## **Actions and questions**

**Q.** As there are a number of important issues which have been deferred to the next meeting, please would you consider changing the timing so that those present today are able to attend?

**A.** (TG) We will speak to Jeff James about this but it is important to consider that the reason we vary the timing of the meetings is so that they are accessible to as many of our users as possible. For many, the later or earlier timings are more convenient than lunch time.

**Q.** Would it be possible to add an agenda item periodically to 'mop up' any items which have not been resolved at previous meetings?

**A.** (JL) We will take this suggestion away and consider it as part of our reworking of the Terms of Reference for the User Forum, which will be discussed at the next meeting.

**Q.** Please can there be an agenda item for Oliver Morley to discuss the annual report when it has been published?

**A.** *(Post meeting update: This has been scheduled for the 12 July meeting, which is at 12:30)*

**Q.** Please could the new Terms of Reference for the Advisory Council be discussed at a future meeting?

**A.** (TG) We will take this away

**Q.** Please could you provide a copy of the current management structure for the organization?

**A.** (TG) We will take this away

**Q.** The series of records AIR 27 (Air Ministry and successors: Operations Record Books, Squadrons) has recently been digitised, but I have found that the records have been cut down in to very small 'chunks' – for one squadrons record I had to download 31 separate files.

**A.** (LO) Thank you for this feedback which we will take on board. It's tricky to judge how large to make the files, as some users prefer more manageable chunks of information while others would rather be able to download a whole document at once.

**Q.** There have been problems accessing the Ancestry website for the last week.

**A.** (LO) Apologies, this is due to technical problems that Ancestry are experiencing and is not limited to users on site at The National Archives. We have been in contact with Ancestry and can confirm that the problem is receiving their full attention but is unfortunately ongoing at the moment.

**Q.** Please can you make available some statistics on the performance / availability of Discovery?

**A.** (EB ) We will look in to this. It is difficult to provide meaningful statistics as there are so many contributing factors that effect availability, but we will certainly do what we can.

**Q.** Please could you consider restoring the date range box on the front page of Discovery, so it is possible to narrow your search to a range of dates from the front screen? I found this very useful.

**A.** (EB) We will take this feedback on board. You can currently access the date range box while still on the front screen if you click on 'more options' under the search box.

**Q.** Will it be possible to search for records by release date (for example, search for recently released material) using Discovery?

**A.** (EB) Yes, we plan that this facility will be available before Discovery replaces the Catalogue. It is not available currently as it has proved quite difficult to develop.

**Q.** What is the consensus of the User Advisory Group delegates regarding Discovery?

**A.** (Gillian Stevens) I can't speak for all of the delegates but my feelings are that Discovery does work and is in many ways an improvement on the old catalogue. It is also very clear, particularly from the talk that David Thomas gave at the last User Advisory Group, that the development of a new system for accessing the records and their descriptions is both necessary and timely due to the significant increase in catalogue entries, amongst other things. The team developing Discovery have always encouraged and listened to feedback from users and fixed things that don't work.

**Q.** Thank you for the new comfy chairs in the document reading room.

**A.** Thanks for the feedback.

**Q.** I think the new security uniform is much nicer.

**A.** Thanks for the feedback.

### **Next meeting**

The next meeting is on 08 May at 17:30 in the Talks Room.