

Title: The National Archives' User Forum

Date: 10 January 2013

Location: Talks Room

Attendees (staff):

Jeff James (JJ), Director of Operations and Services (Chair)
Oliver Morley (OM), Chief Executive and Keeper
Lee Oliver (LO), Head of Public Services Development
James Lawson (JL), Customer Intelligence Manager
Julia Stocken (JS), Head of Information Management and Practice
Roger Kershaw (RK), Head of Military, Maritime, Transport & Family
Tom Gregan (TG), Head of Document Services
Guy Grannum (GG) – Discovery Product Manager
David Priest (DP), Production Co-ordination Manager
Stuart Abraham (SA), Accessions and FOI Centre Manager
Mark Jones (MJ), Customer Intelligence Assistant (Minutes)

Attendees (users):

Susan Moore, John Seaman, Richard Bateson, Jasmine Belloni, Don Inskeep, Tom Tulloch – Marshall, Glen Phillips, Tim Powyse – Lybbe, Gillian Stevens, Victorine Martineau, Graham Woolgar, Francis Howcutt, P Gallagher, P Eismark, David Matthew, Anne Ramon, Maggie Loughran, Paul Blake, Ron Platt, Chris Baker

1. JJ welcomed all to the meeting

(1.2) The dates of all forthcoming User Advisory Group and User Forum meetings for 2013 were shared with attendees. The dates can be found here:

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/get-involved/user-forum.htm>

2. Open discussion with Oliver Morley, Chief Executive and Keeper

(2.1) OM began by explaining that TNA are currently 9 months into the financial year (which runs from 1 April to 31 March) and that we are on track with our business plan for 2011-2015. He added that following negotiations with Her Majesty's Treasury TNA had been obliged to take an additional 1% cut in 2013/2014 and a further 2% cut for the following year. OM assured that these cuts shouldn't make a significant difference to our business plan, but noted that we are in a position where any expenditure requires careful consideration.

(2.2) **Q.** The government has announced that £50 million is being committed to commemorations marking the 100th anniversary of the start of the First World War. What are TNA's plans regarding the centenary commemorations and would it be possible to invite Dr Andrew Murrison MP to this forum to give a talk?

A. We are planning to bid for a portion of the grant money which would be used for a combination of online and onsite centenary commemorations of the First World War. I am not sure what would be the best forum to invite Dr Murrison to but it is certainly a good idea and we will look in to this.

(2.3) **Q.** You mentioned the discussions with Treasury regarding the savings TNA have been obliged to accept for the next two years. How much did they actually want you to save?

A. The 1% cut for 2013/2014 and the further 2% cut in 2014/15 were effectively imposed. However, the discussion with Treasury was a lengthy and robust one. TNA has taken on additional responsibilities - such as the implementation of the 20 year rule – and we have asked that this be taken into consideration during future negotiations, so it was very important that we made a strong case.

(2.4) **Q.** You are still referred to as the Keeper. Do you not think the title is somewhat old hat?

A. My full title is Chief Executive and Keeper. I consciously decided to adopt this title as I feel it suitably represents both the statutory and executive responsibilities of the position. I do not believe it should change.

Note: Many users expressed strong support for this stance.

(2.5) **Q.** Discovery has brought TNA into disrepute. It is unusable, inaccurate and by removing PROCAT (the old catalogue) you are doing a great disservice to users of TNA. Why remove the old system before the new version is ready?

A. User research and feedback has demonstrated that the old catalogue does not work effectively and many people find it difficult to use. From a technical perspective, the old catalogue is at the end of its life and is not fit for purpose going forward. Detailed information regarding this can be found [here](#). Due to the economic situation, we have to think very carefully about making investments now which will enable us to continue to deliver our key services in coming years, when we will not have money to invest. Therefore, it is absolutely essential that we replace the catalogue now with a system that is robust for the future. It is not true that we have taken away the old catalogue. However, we have made it harder to find and Discovery more prominent as it is vital that people use it. We have extended the availability of the old catalogue until such a time as Discovery is fully fit for purpose. Building a new system on this scale is an incredibly complex undertaking and it is virtually impossible to build a new system that does not have bugs. We have worked with users and staff to identify and prioritise the issues that need to be resolved in Discovery and are working very hard to fix them. Although we have extended the transition date we will, in the long term, have to close the old catalogue as we cannot afford to maintain both systems.

(2.6) **Q.** Do you think consultation with users was extensive enough in the initial stages of developing the Discovery product?

A. We have sought a great deal of user feedback throughout the development process. In hindsight I would accept that even more user input should have been obtained during the very early stage of the project and there was some dislocation between the developers building the system and its users. We are currently focusing on the high priority changes required for Discovery to fully replace the catalogue, but we will continue to take on board all feedback that we receive.

(2.7) **Q.** Are you investing in future testing of Discovery?

A. There is a feedback option available on Discovery and we have accepted a number of changes as a result of user contributions through this function. Additionally, every time there is a new release on Discovery we consult with both the User Advisory Group and our onsite staff testers.

(2.8) **Q.** Are you still within budget for the development of Discovery?

A. Yes. The development of the Discovery product was the subject of a Freedom of Information request which has been published and can be viewed here:

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/foi/introduction-catalogue-discovery-new.htm>

(2.9) **Q.** Do you have a view on Treasury's decision to transfer the document selection process out to Iron Mountain?

A. I am not inherently against a third party being involved provided they are appropriately security cleared and they are properly invested in the process. I would also expect them to be committed to finding a way forward for dealing with document backlogs.

(2.10) **Q.** Treasury have retained a number of files. Are you concerned by this?

A. I cannot comment on individual files. However, there should be a Lord Chancellors Instrument in place, and we would always expect an explanation, for any retention. There are backlogs in other departments too. One of the requirements of the 20 Year Rule is that there will be full transparency regarding any backlogs, via publication on our website.

(2.11) **Q.** 2013 will mark the 50th anniversaries of the Profumo Affair and the assassination of JFK. It will also be the 125th anniversary of the Jack the Ripper murders. Will there be any talks at TNA about these events?

A. We don't currently have any talks scheduled on these events but we will look into the possibility. Thank you for your suggestions, which are always welcome.

(2.12) **Q.** What is the status of the records of the keeper of the Privy Purse (PP 2 and PP 3)?

A. Two classes of Privy Purse Office records deposited for safe custody and not open to public inspection have been transferred to the Royal Archives at Windsor. (*Keepers' Report 1967 Page 7 paragraph 42*)

The Keeper of the Privy Purse is the Officer of the Royal Household charged with all payments out of the sum set apart in the Civil List for the personal and private use of the Sovereign. (*ref PRO 54/219*)

PP2 contained Queen Victoria's Vouchers for Privy Purse expenditure, 1853-1869. PP3 contained Visitors Books of members of the Royal Family, 1837-1954. Original lists to these series can be found in OBS 1/1049/20.

(2.13) **Q.** Helen Grant MP's list of responsibilities includes The National Archives. What is her actual position?

A. Helen Grant MP is the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice and she is our minister. Lord McNally and Chris Grayling MP also have an involvement in our policies but Helen Grant is our day to day minister.

3. Matters Arising

3.1 (Item 2.3 November 2012) Re-closure policy: A letter was sent to the reader who made this enquiry inviting him to meet with Stuart Abraham (Accessions and FOI Centre Manager) to discuss the matters raised. *Post meeting note: this meeting has now been arranged.*

3.2 (Item 2.4 November 2012) PP2 and PP3: See item 2.12 above.

3.3 (Item 3.9 November 2012) Suggestion of allowing non User Advisory Group (UAG) delegates to attend UAG meetings in order to raise specific issues was considered and rejected as this goes against the idea of delegates representing their communities.

3.4 (Item 5.2 November 2012) A new memorandum of understanding between The National Archives and the London Family History Centre has not yet been signed but has been agreed.

3.5 **Q.** (Item 2.2 November 2012) Royal Observer Corps service records. Do TNA have any say in what happens to records that are presented to places of deposit?

A. Details of our role are annexed in our annual report 2011-2012 which can be viewed here: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/annualreport-11-12.pdf>

Post meeting note: TNA's responsibility is the supervision of the selection of records for permanent preservation (i.e. those that are selected to be treated as public records, for ultimate transfer to TNA or to another approved Place of Deposit). We do not supervise the disposal of records not selected (and disposal includes presentation under s 3.6).

The decision to offer records that have not been selected for permanent preservation to another institution is made by the relevant government department (sometimes in consultation with TNA, but not always). These offers require the approval of the Lord Chancellor under s 3(6) of the Public Records Act; a power that has been delegated to the Keeper and thence to the Head of Archive Sector Development. TNA advises on the suitability of the institution to receive the records. We endeavour to ensure that records are only presented to institutions which can manage them responsibly and sustainably, especially where they involve ongoing Data Protection issues. It is fair to say that we are more pro-active in this now than we have been in the past. Presentation is described more fully in the Records Collection Policy (para 4.2) <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/records-collection-policy-2012.pdf>. The draft of this recently published policy did go out for consultation.

Operational Selection Policies occasionally make reference to disposal under s 3(6) for records which are not to be selected. Again, the OSP's are subject to public consultation before being finalised.

As presentation of records is a matter for the relevant government department, TNA has not gone out to consultation over decisions or proposals on the presentation of specific collections, such as Royal Observer Corps service records. However, as stated above, it is sometimes covered more widely within the OSP's.

3.6 **Q.** (Item 5.4 November 2012) Introduction of 2 press events annually following the implementation of the 20 Year Rule: This is a very important point. Can you provide any more information about this?

A. There will be 2 press events per year but there is no confirmation yet about how these will work in practice following the implementation of the 20 year rule.

4. Update on the December 2012 User Advisory Group Meeting – User Advisory Group delegate, Graham Woolgar

4.1 GW advised that three new User Advisory Group delegates have now been appointed. The new delegates are Margaret O’Sullivan (representing County/external archives), Andrew Chapman (representing online users) and Nell Darby (representing student users). GW also advised that Dr. Nick Barratt has resigned from his position on the UAG following his appointment as Head of MEMLEX at TNA.

4.2 GW explained that he submitted a series of questions regarding the Records Decision Panel and Re-closure Policy on behalf of a member of the onsite user community. He advised that a one-to-one meeting between the user in question and Stuart Abraham (Accessions and FOI Centre Manager) has now been arranged.

4.3 GW explained that the UAG delegates were presented with the recommendations for business activities for the coming year and how this will reflect TNA’s longer term Strategic Priorities. He advised that he had made a suggestion for the UAG members to be provided with a timetable stating key milestones in the business planning timetable so that they can consult with the communities they represent. He added that he had also suggested that an inventory of documents being held by government departments be added to the TNA website.

4.4 GW advised that the UAG delegates were provided with an update on the outcome of the online community pilot. He explained that following the pilot a decision has been made to proceed with the launch of a full scale online community as it had demonstrated the potential to fulfil its aims effectively.

4.5 GW informed the attendees that the UAG had been given a tour of the new Keeper’s Gallery (formerly the Museum).

4.6 GW reported that there was a discussion regarding the relationship between the User Advisory Group and the User Forum. He explained that several of the UAG members expressed that they felt they had had a positive influence in their capacity as representatives of their respective communities and had specifically been able to give valuable input during the development of the Discovery product. It was also asked if it would be possible to schedule a User Advisory Group Meeting on the same day as a User Forum Meeting so that UAG delegates could attend both. This has subsequently been agreed to take place in December.

4.7 **Q.** The three new members of the UAG do not fill the role left by Dr. Nick Barratt who represented independent researchers. Why is this?

A. We have decided not to replace like with like. We were keen to have new representation and the original intention with the UAG was to have only one

representative per community. Bob O'Hara will continue to provide representation for independent researchers.

4.8 Q. How is the removal of the Red Lists from the Research Enquiries Room going to operate?

A. The gradual removal of selected Red Lists (i.e. lists with fewer than 100 descriptions and where productions have not exceeded 20 in the past 12 months, as well as fully digitised series with new metadata, and wholly re-catalogued series) has now commenced. We have begun to remove series which have been digitised and will then proceed alphabetically with series A-C in February/March. There will also be a deliberate period of feedback and reflection in May 2013.

The Red Lists removal schedule can be viewed in full here:

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/uag181212-red-lists-removal-schedule.pdf>

The minutes from the User Advisory Group meeting which took place on 18 December 2012 can be viewed here: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/uag181212-minutes.pdf>

5. Any other Business

5.1 We are very sad to announce that Bruno Derrick died unexpectedly on Sunday 23 December. Bruno joined The National Archives in July 1987, initially at Chancery Lane, before transferring to Kew in 1993. He worked in a number of departments including Record Copying and E-Access but he spent most of his time here as a Reader Adviser in Advice & Records Knowledge, acquiring a deep knowledge and understanding on our records. His most recent position was Records Specialist, Maritime and Transport.

Bruno will be much missed by all his colleagues at The National Archives. Our thoughts and wishes are with his friends and family at this sad time.

5.2 JJ advised that following the decision to proceed with the launch of a full scale online community, all those on the User Forum mailing list will be invited to join the community in February.

6. Date of next meeting: Tuesday 12th February 11:00-12:15