

Title: The National Archives User Forum

Date of Meeting: Thursday 21 May, 12:30pm

Location: Talks Room

Attendees: Staff

JJ: Jeff James, Director of Public Services (Chair)

JM: Jackie Marfleet, Head of Advice and Records Knowledge

LMO: Lee Oliver, Head of Public Services Development

JA: Jill Allbrooke, Head of Enquiry Services

PS: Paul Sturm, Service Quality and Complaints Manager

JL: James Lawson, Customer Intelligence Manager (secretary)

TG: Tom Gregan, Head of Document Services Department

DP; Dave Priest, Production Co-ordination Manager

IC: Ian Cross, Government and Remote Services Manager

CC: Chris Cooper, Head of Directorate Planning

GT: Graham Taylor, Health and Safety Advisor

AB: Anna Buelow, Head of Preservation

JS: Jessamy Sykes, Map & Large Document Room Manager

II: Ian Ireland, Public Services Development

CJAM: Carole MacCormack, Public Services Development

Readers: Bob O'Hara, Richard Bateson, Hugh Compton, John Gallehawk, Roger Lewry, Barbara Harvey, David List, Len Barnett, John Hailey, Peter Gallagher, A Mears, Michael Armstrong, William Gordon, Bruce Dennis, Tom Tulloch-Marshall, P Eismark, Norma Gunaratne, John Court, Doreen Heywood, Joyce Hoad, Barnaby Palmer

1	Welcome JJ welcomed the group; he explained that time had been set aside for a brief update on the Special User Forum, which took place on 7 th May. JJ confirmed that the minutes for this meeting, which had been distributed to those present in draft form would not be finalised until those who had attended had had the opportunity to give their feedback. All comments received will be taken on board and all questions will be answered; when finalised they will be published electronically.	Action JJ / JL
2	Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising	
2.1	(2.1) BT 381 files are still not being produced untagged. TG confirmed this, reporting that he had received some guidance from the Collection Care team on this matter. It was agreed that this issue will be discussed offline, with TG, DP and AB taking the lead.	TG / DP / AB
2.2	(2.2) The wording to 2.2 should read: Further concern was raised regarding details concerning rules with regard to the reproduction and publishing of Air Historical Branch <i>and RAF Museum Holdings</i> by a	

commercial organisation.

- 2.3 (2.5) Unfortunately Jack Lincoln (JL), Head of Security is unable to attend the next two meetings. It was therefore agreed that JJ, TG and Jack Lincoln would meet offline to discuss this issue and report back at the next forum.

JL / JJ
/ TG

It was noted that there had been instances recently of readers using other user's tickets to order documents. Please note that anyone found using another's ticket will be suspended pending an investigation (taking up to a month). It was noted that anyone who sees another user breaking The National Archives rules in this way should report it to a member of staff.

- 2.4 (2.7) All components of the lighting for the library area have arrived and been installed. The wiring has yet to be completed: the work should be finished by the end of next week (W/C 25/05).

- 2.5 (2.6.1) With so many changes within the office it was felt that it would be a waste of valuable staff resources to keep the names on the organisation chart updated.
JJ to discuss with LMO

JJ/
LMO

- 2.5 (3) Education groups will continue to have their lunch in the public restaurant; JL to arrange a discussion between Paul Davies (Head of Estates and Facilities) and Andrew Payne (Head of Education and Outreach) to see if this can be managed more effectively.

JL

- 2.6 The future of PROfile magazine is to be discussed at the next Friends AGM on 16 June. JJ mentioned that while this magazine is produced by the Friends, the acronym 'PRO' is outdated.

- 2.7 Several points were made regarding the hardcopy Record Keeping Magazine and the availability of the Society of Archivists (SoA) magazine:
- a) SoA magazine is available - please speak to staff in the shop if you would like it on sale there
 - b) SoA magazines is available in the Library
 - c) Could a hard copy of the Record Keeping Magazine be available in the Library area? – JL to investigate.

JL

3 **Feedback from Special User Forum of 7 May (JJ)**

- 3.1 Information for those not at the meeting on 7th May:
The National Archives has been awarded flat cash funding for the next three years with no allowance for inflationary rises, such as wages and energy, over that period. As a result of this, if we do not implement savings, by year 3 we will not have enough money to cover our costs, including investments and contingencies (such as IT and Repository Environmental Equipment). We have to implement savings so that we have enough funds to continue with our core

activities. For this reason The Executive Team have been looking to save 10% of the running costs (approximately £4 million).

- 3.2 Additional reasons for increasing the average production times: After a 3-year risk assessment completed 15 months ago, it was found that the greatest risk to the documents was physical damage. One of the risks of maintaining short delivery times over the last 4-5 years has been that when documents are returned to the floors there isn't enough time to put them away immediately. This inevitably means they are left in increasingly large piles and susceptible to damage. One of the necessary improvements in working practices needed to safeguard the documents was that we ceased to work towards achieving a specific average delivery time. This allowed staff to give the documents the necessary care while continuing to deliver documents as quickly as practical.
- 3.3 The target for production times has therefore been altered from an average delivery time of 35 minutes, with 100% of documents being delivered within 60 minutes, to 99.8% of documents being delivered within 60 minutes. Unfortunately, on Monday 20th April, a specific incident occurred due to an overzealous misinterpretation of this new target, resulting in staff holding documents back, so as to artificially increase the document production time to 60 minutes. JJ apologised unreservedly for this miscommunication, assuring the forum that there was never an intention to artificially increase production times. In practice, once this miscommunication was cleared up, the actual production times dropped to being well within 60 minutes.
- 3.4 JJ reported that, in addition to the savings detailed above at item 3.1, the government has announced £15 billion savings across government. It is likely that these savings will have an impact on public services. Once proposals have been made on how these savings will be implemented, The National Archives is likely to close for half-day at the end of June to enable Management to impart the results to the staff as a whole.
- 3.5 Once the staff have been informed, we will present our proposals to our users; probably at an Open Meeting – most likely on 2 July. There will be discussions over a 3-month period where we will look at ways to minimise the impact on public service provisions. These discussions will be for all interested parties; regular users (who view original documents), those who use only on-line resources and first-time users.

4 Behind the scenes tours of the repositories (TG, DP)

- 4.1 To best demonstrate the reasons behind the increased document delivery times there will be a series of tours of the repositories throughout June. These will take place on Tuesdays and Thursdays, between 12:00 and 13:00, which are our busiest times.

- 4.2 The consequences of the changes implemented would see delivery times slow down from midday. The intention of this action would allow documents to be returned throughout the day as opposed to being stock piled causing potential loss and damage to the records
- 4.3 To minimise disruption to both users and staff, the number of bulk orders and advance orders have been doubled to 8 and 6 respectively.
- 4.4 All the above measures currently in place are under review; we anticipate that the overall average delivery times will level out at between 35-40 minutes.
- 4.5 TG commented that he was proud of his staff's performance and the levels of target achieved. To be open and transparent TG was keen that users take up his offer of behind the scene tours. Tours can be booked from the Reader Enquiry Point.
- 4.6 The average delivery time message displayed on DORIS has been altered to default to 40 minutes at the beginning of each day, and rise if appropriate according to the real time data accumulated on that day (it will not drop below 40 minutes, as this can result in users queuing for documents that have not yet been delivered). The delivery time displayed is specific to the floor where the particular document is located.
- 4.7 DP explained that popular documents are stored near the delivery point, and should therefore have lower production times. Low usage documents are stored in Q2 (the extension). This is continually being reviewed, so when documents become more/less popular or are digitised, they are physically moved. Most maps are sent to the Map and Large Document Reading Room. There was a complaint that a tithe map took well over an hour to produce. DP agreed to discuss this issue with the user in question after the forum.
- 4.8 JJ reiterated his recommendation that users attend one of these tours, so as to gain insight into some of the issues facing us regarding document delivery.
- Questions arriving from this presentation**
- 4.9 Q: Do you track 'no-shows': those who place advance orders and then do not turn up – what are you planning to do in such instances?
A: TG responded that he intends to tighten up procedures regarding no shows, and potentially withdraw services from repeat offenders. He also plans to stop new readers who do not already have a readers ticket from pre-ordering documents.
- 4.10 Q: Why do your published opening times and the time you allow

DP

consultation of documents vary by 30 minutes? Can users who have documents reserved be allowed into the Document Reading Room at opening time?

A: There is a lot of work carried out in the first half hour of business – not only with Document Services but within the whole of TNA.

JJ would take this comment away to consider.

JJ

5 Emergency Evacuation (LMO)

- 5.1 LMO began by apologising on behalf of Paul Davies (Head of Estates and Facilities) who was unable to attend, and who was Incident Manager for the exercise: LMO was Assembly Co-ordinator on the day.
- 5.2 We have a legal requirement to hold evacuations with the public and we had our last one on 19th May; Tuesday was chosen as it is usually a busy day. This was the largest evacuation we have carried out, involving nearly 1000 people (staff and visitors).
- 5.3 When the fire bells went at 2.30pm, only 5 members of staff were aware that this was a drill. The primary aim of any evacuation is to clear the building as quickly and as safely as possible – this was achieved. The first floor being cleared in 4 minutes and the whole building cleared in less than 8 minutes, with no injuries sustained.
- 5.4 Two lifts have been modified for wheelchair users and those with walking difficulties. These lifts are staff-operated during an evacuation, (all other lifts default to the ground floor and open their doors). No wheelchair users were visiting on the date of the evacuation, but several users with walking difficulties were escorted out via the lifts.
- 5.5 Although there seemed to be some confusion with re-directing people to alternate exits, this happened due to staff becoming aware that certain exits were busy. With this realisation, staff re-directed those leaving to exits that were not so hectic. It is recognised that there are some issues regarding ‘bottle-necking’ which will be looked into.
- 5.6 The authorised assembly point is the ‘Pocket Park’ and not the forecourt of the building. We do realise that there is a problem with crowd handling once outside the building and this is also something we will look into.
- 5.7 There were also issues with the megaphone; we are looking into the volume of the tannoy system. There are more megaphones which shall be made available for the next evacuation.
- 5.8 Comments received:
- When the alarm bells went off a number of readers did not actually move from their seats; it took a few seconds for staff to mobilise them and direct them towards the exits. This issue

should be remedied by a new tannoy system which may allow us to make announcements over the fire alarm.

- Excessive crowding at exits (this is currently being looked into).
- Narrow loading bay with potentially hazardous objects close to the path (this is being looked into and hazardous objects have already been removed from the area).

Thanks were given for these comments.

5.9 This evacuation was independently observed by two members of the London Fire Brigade, one in the reading room and one from the Security control room. On a scale of 1-4, 4 being very good, they awarded us 4 – and were pleased with the evacuation.

6 1911 Census

LMO informed the group that it is likely that before the next meeting the separate 1911 service will cease and the booking system will stop. All PCs will return to normal service and the 1911 census will be available on all terminals.

7 Open Discussion

7.1 There had been a problem with someone being unable to pre-order more than 3 documents – this was to be discussed with DP away from this meeting.

7.2 It was noted that the letter sent by The National Archives to users in instances when we have been unable to locate an entry in the card index for their naturalisation certificate is unclear. In such circumstances, we are required to offer the alternative of employing an Independent Researcher, or making an FOI request. However, in both cases a time consuming search through the certificates themselves, without the help of an index entry is required. LMO apologised that the explanatory letter was confusing and agreed to look into having the wording altered.

7.3 Q: Is there any chance of access to Scotland's People being made available in The National Archives? A: It is unlikely that we will be able to do this but it was noted that many of the Scottish records are available at the Hyde Park Family History Centre.

7.4 There is still no release date for the Home Guard or any inter-war records. JL to talk to Howard Davies to see if there is any news relating to this.

7.5 Concern was expressed over leaving personal items when evacuating the building after fire alarms have sounded. TNA does not have insurance but it was explained that there is extensive CCTV coverage, and security and reading room staff are allowed back into the building before the public.

7.6 The barrier at the entrance to the car park makes it difficult to drive

DP

LMO

JL

through safely: JJ agreed that the barriers had proved a disappointment and ensured users that we are looking into improving them

- 7.7 A user noted that although there are terms and conditions when using the Your Archives site there does seem to be a problem with inconsistencies in how the rules are applied. JL agreed to pass on the users details to Guy Grannum, Your Archives Manger.

Please note that all minutes and presentations are available at our website at: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/events/readers.htm>

- 8 **The next meeting:** will be on Thursday, 18 June in the Talks Room on the first floor.

JL