

Title: The National Archives' User Forum

Date: 08 May 2012

Location: Talks Room

Attendees (staff):

Jeff James (JJ), Director of Operations and Services (Chair)
David Thomas (DLT), Director of Technology and Chief Information Officer
Mary Gledhill (MG), Commercial Director
Paul Davies (PD), Head of Estates and Facilities
Emma Bayne (EB) Head of Systems Development
Lee Oliver (LO), Head of Public Services Development
Andrew Dyer (AD), Information Management Consultant
James Lawson (JL), Customer Intelligence Manager

Attendees (users): Ron Platt, Tim Powys-Lybbe, Richard Bateson, Tom Tulloch-Marshall, Jasmine Belloni, Grahame Boyes, J Seaman, Susan Moore, Scott Reeve, Revd Dennis Nadin, Francis Howcutt

Matters arising from the last meeting

A refresh of the Terms of Reference for the User Forum was circulated in draft form for comment. The document will be signed off at the next meeting. JJ noted that the request at the last meeting for an open agenda once a year had been taken in to consideration and included in this draft document.

JJ noted that Oliver Morley, Chief Executive will attend the next meeting on 12 July to discuss the Annual Report.

Correction: 'Please could the new Terms of Reference of the Advisory Council be discussed at a future meeting?' should read 'Please could the new Terms of Reference of the Records Review Panel be discussed at a future meeting?' JL to organise.

JL to make high level organisational structure diagram available to users concerned.

It was noted that, following a period after the last meeting when the problems with accessing Ancestry from the reading rooms had apparently been resolved, the problems had recently recurred. It was asked what the nature of the problem was.

Post meeting note: These issues were caused by Ancestry updating their servers which resulted in those institutions that gain online access to Ancestry via Internet Protocol authentication (including The National Archives) being affected. We are extremely sorry for any disruption to our Readers during this period.

Whilst we were very disappointed by this service failure, when the most recent failure occurred on Wednesday 2nd May, our IT and Licensing team were quick to provide an alternative service via a subscription log in to the Ancestry.co.uk website so that although this situation was not ideal, staff in the reading room were able to provide access to this service relatively quickly for our onsite readers.

We worked closely with Ancestry to resolve the access problems and Ancestry have agreed to put in place better levels of monitoring and more efficient reporting procedures to avert similar occurrences. Since this issue was resolved on Wednesday 2nd May, we have not experienced further disruption to Ancestry's services.

It was noted that Lord McNally's visit on 22 June will not be run as a User Forum as it was last year. JJ noted that a decision had been made to open up the event, and to run it as a debate (to involve Lord Hennessey) rather than a direct Q and A session with all questions submitted in advance. It may still be possible to submit some questions in advance, however the details of the event have not been finalised. We will ensure that User Forum attendees are informed when the plans are finalised.

AD reported that the MoD has now made a decision to transfer the Air Ministry: Casualty Branch P4(Cas): Enquiries into Missing Personnel, 1939-45 War, in the series AIR 81. The documents had previously not been

transferred due to the sensitive nature of some of the material within these files (such as autopsy reports) which were potentially covered by exemptions in the Freedom of Information act. A recent decision relating to different but comparable records where the same exemptions were successfully challenged has contributed to the decision to transfer. Equivalent records for the Army (held in WO 361) are already open and those for the Navy (held in ADM 358) are in the process of being opened.

It is not currently planned that the material in AIR 81 will be redacted but sensitive material will be housed in envelopes that are clearly marked with a warning.

It may take some time for the AIR 81 documents to become available as they haven't been catalogued or cleaned. However the 1939 material is in the process of being prepared.

Digital Records Infrastructure at The National Archives - David Thomas, Director of Technology and Chief Information Officer –(see separate presentation document)

David Thomas gave a presentation on the Digital Records infrastructure at The National Archives, which was followed by questions and answers:

Q: Do Government departments still produce paper records?

A. Generally speaking all official Government documents have been digital since 2004

Q. Do you plan to migrate to [solid state storage](#)?

A. We have investigated this, however solid state would not meet our business requirements currently due to the large volume of data that we handle.

Q. With digitised copies of paper records being accessioned instead of the original paper, what will happen to the paper records?

A. A decision about this has not been made. However it is not our intention to take the paper where a digital copy is the accessioned record.

Q. How can we access the UK Government Web Archive?

A. There is a link to the [UK Government Web Archive](#) on the front page of the website

Discovery Update - Emma Bayne, Head of Systems Development

Emma Bayne reported that the latest version of Discovery had gone live today (08 May):
<http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/SearchUI/>

New enhancements include:

- The integration of DocumentsOnline
- The addition of an 'online collections tab' on the front page which enables users to choose between searching all records or online collections only
- The addition of contextual research guidance for digital content which replaces the guidance formerly available on DocumentsOnline
- A new image viewer for viewing images of online collections
- 'Exact page' functionality, which takes you directly to the records detail page if there is only one 'hit' for your search term (e.g. if you have entered an exact reference)

- Multiple page download; where a record consists of several pages, all pages are downloaded simultaneously instead of one at a time
- Improvements to advanced search, including the facility to search within date ranges, departments or collections (series) and catalogue levels

Q. the browse function is still very difficult to use in Discovery, will this be improved.

A. Yes, we will continue to develop Discovery and Browse is one of the areas that we are aware requires a lot of development. We already plan to add an alphanumeric browse in addition to the hierarchical browse.

Q. Will it be possible to search for recently accessioned material in Discovery?

A. Yes, we will be adding record opening date to advanced search.

Café and Restaurant price increases - Paul Davies, Head of Estates and Facilities (see separate presentation document)

Paul Davies announced that, with effect from Wednesday 06 June 2012, prices for food and drink in the café and restaurant will increase. This price increase is due to rising fuel prices impacting delivery costs, together with a general rise in food prices, particularly coffee.

The price increases have been capped to an overall average of 5% and are spread across the product range. It is over 12-months since prices in the café and restaurant last changed and no further review is planned in the next 12 months.

Prices at The National Archives still compare favourably with those at other organisations and commercial outlets (see separate document for comparisons).

Open Discussion

Q. There has recently been a serious problem regarding on-site access to documents in the series WO 95, which are being taken out of circulation for digitisation. In particular, users are placing orders in advance only to find that the documents are unavailable when they arrive to see them. Staff on the document counter have been very helpful, but these issues are taking a long time to resolve and the staff are getting grief, which isn't fair as it's not their fault. Please can you reassure me that something is being done to resolve this situation?

A. (JJ) Unfortunately, the process of digitising these documents is taking longer than originally expected which has resulted in a backlog of documents that are out of circulation. I apologise for this and have set colleagues the task of speeding up both the digitisation process itself and the process for returning documents that are ordered by on-site users.

Post meeting update: We have now returned the majority of this backlog into circulation so that these pieces can be ordered again by our users. As they have already been through the sorting and conservation process, these pieces will be produced in our invigilation room under supervision. This will enable us to avoid the need to repeat work that has already taken place when these pieces go back into the digitisation process.

Looking ahead, we have simplified our internal processes to ensure that all of our staff are aware of which pieces are in which stage of the digitisation process and therefore will be available or unavailable to users. We intend to publish a schedule on our website as soon as possible outlining when pieces will be out of circulation for digitisation, which will help both staff and users understand the availability of the series.

Q. I am also concerned that there does not appear to be a Quality Assurance exercise in place between the sorting and digitalisation phases of the process.

A. (JJ) We will investigate this.

Post meeting update: The volunteers who are undertaking this work are closely supervised and have had appropriate training on how to sort the material. Whilst we don't have a formal QA process for checking the volunteer work, we believe that the risk of significant numbers of sorting errors occurring is low.

There is a formal QA step in place after scanning to check the images that are delivered back to us and that includes looking to see that the pages are in the right order as well as checking image quality etc. Where issues are identified by the QA team, we have a full audit trail in place so we know exactly who has worked on any given box so if we pick up any consistent errors from a particular individual we can pull all their boxes and do a detailed review.

Finally, once the images are digitised and online, there is always the ability to correct any sequencing errors that might have been missed. It's more efficient to do the whole re-ordering exercise on the original material at the start of the process (hence the volunteer sorting process) but we can change the order of the digital images if we need to (unlike those parts of WO 95 that have been digitised previously, these pieces are being scanned page by page so we will be able to re sort if necessary). Although we do all we can to prevent mistakes, we have an ongoing process to correct any images available on our website, as do commercial partners on their sites where applicable.

Given the various stages at which any sorting errors could get picked up and corrected through the digitisation process, we concluded that it would not be cost effective to have a separate QA process between the sorting and the digitisation. If any of our users have spotted errors, for example when reviewing sorted boxes, we would of course appreciate being made aware of them.

Q. Please could you tell us about the re-closure policy and the take down panel.

A. (DLT) I can tell you about the take down panel. It is a small group of staff who deal with requests to take down information from our website and from the UK Government Web Archive. Requests for material to be taken down are usually made because information contains personal data. Sometimes we are contacted because the wrong version of a particular document is available on a website and we are asked to replace it with the correct version. We usually receive 2-3 requests per month and generally our approach is to take the information down straight away before reviewing, then make a decision on putting it back based on the outcome.

JL to report on the re-closure policy at the next meeting.

Q. How much longer will the scaffolding be up for the roof replacement?

A. Our original plan was that the scaffolding would come down in June or July, however it may be necessary for it to stay up longer than this. We will be reviewing this over the next week and will let you know the outcome.

Post meeting update: A decision has now been made to replace the vertical glazing in the link area in addition to the roof pangs. This will add approximately 12 weeks to the original programme which results in a completion date in the autumn. Although the scaffolding will slowly begin to disappear from around Q2, the Link will be the last area to be completed so scaffolding will remain there until just before the project end.

Updates

Oliver Morley, Chief Executive and Keeper, The National Archives, will be available to answer your questions in the public restaurant between 14:00 and 15:30 on Thursday 24 May. This is an opportunity to raise any views or questions you may have about the management and future direction of The National Archives. If you are unable to come to Kew you will be able to 'Meet the Keeper' online, as Oliver will also be answering questions on Twitter. Follow [@UkNatArchives](#) and [@omorley1](#) and use [#meetthekeeper](#) in your tweets.

Next meeting

The next meeting is on 12 July at 12:30 in the Talks Room.