

Title: The National Archives' User Forum

Date: Thursday 08 November 2012

Location: Talks Room

Attendees (staff):

Lee Oliver (LO), Head of Public Services Development (Chair)

Chris Mumby (CM), Head of Commercial Delivery

David Priest (DP), Production Coordination Manager

James Lawson (JL), Customer Intelligence Manager (minutes)

Attendees (users): Sally Neville, Jacqueline Speel, Michael Hill, Hazel Farran, Victorine Martineau, Marcus Wardle, Ron Platt, John Seaman, Graham Woolgar, Richard Bateson, Paul Blake, Revd Dennis Nadin

1. LO Welcomed all to the meeting

2. Matters arising

2.1 (1.1) It was requested that the answers to questions relating to Information Management and Practice (IMP), which were submitted in advance and therefore answered in the presentation given by Julia Stocken (Head of IMP), are provided in full in the minutes:

2.2 Royal Observer Corps service records

Records relating to the service of ROC personnel were presented by the MoD to the ROC Museum Trust in 2011. We are also aware of a number of deposits relating to specific units in local record offices noted on the National Register of Archives, and the Museum has deposited its own collection of archival material with Hampshire Archives and Local Studies. The catalogue is available on the HALS website:

[http://calm.hants.gov.uk/Dserve/Dserve.exe?dsqIni=DserveE.ini&dsqApp=Archive&dsqCmd=Show.tcl&dsqDb=Catalog&dsqPos=6&dsqSearch=\(\(text\)='observer'\)](http://calm.hants.gov.uk/Dserve/Dserve.exe?dsqIni=DserveE.ini&dsqApp=Archive&dsqCmd=Show.tcl&dsqDb=Catalog&dsqPos=6&dsqSearch=((text)='observer'))

As far as we are aware the presented service records do not form part of the deposit at HALS and remain with the Museum Trust at the Peninsula Barracks.

Records presented under s.3(6) cease to be public records and are no longer subject to the Public Records Act; however, as a matter of policy The National Archives continues to take an interest in records that have been presented and the institutions that receive them.

2.3 Re-closure policy

The re-closure of records is undertaken in accordance with section 5(3) of the Public Records Act. Applications to close material which was previously open go through the Lord Chancellor's Advisory Council on National Records and Archives in the same way as material which is to be closed on transfer. Information about the Council can be found on our web site:

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/advisorycouncil/default.htm>

This answer was queried at the October 2012 meeting as follows:

Q. You have stated that the reclosure of records is undertaken in accordance with section 5(3) of the Public Records Act, but 5(3) doesn't explicitly refer to reclosure. Please could you clarify?'

This question was taken away and the following answer supplied at the November 2012 meeting:

A. Section 5.3 of the Public Records Act was amended by the Freedom of Information Act, and now reads

as follows:

“It shall be the duty of the Keeper of Public Records to arrange that reasonable facilities are available to the public for inspecting and obtaining copies of those public records in the Public Record Office which fall to be disclosed in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000.”

It is true that reclosure is not mentioned per se; the basis is that records requiring reclosure do not fall to be disclosed in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act and therefore can be withdrawn from public inspection until the exemption(s) cease(s).”

Q. Please can you tell us if the reclosure panel has met and taken action under this new legislation?

A. Yes, we regularly receive requests to reclose records which contain personal information and there have been a number of instances where the reclosure panel has met and agreed to reclose the record(s) in question. In some cases the record has been redacted to remove personal information but the remainder of the record has stayed open.

Q. Would you be able to supply a list of pieces that have been withdrawn or redacted?

A. We will take this away and find out but I am not sure if we maintain such a list.

2.4 PP2 and PP3

We are still looking in to this question.

2.5 Remploy

As a government agency, Remploy Ltd is responsible for how it maintains staff records and records of employment. Guidance on how long to retain employment records is issued by the Cabinet Office. As a limited company, Remploy are also required to manage employment records, including pension records, in accordance with the Companies Act 2006.

The Civil Service guidance states that government agencies must retain records relating to a person's employment to (whichever is the later) age 72 or 5 years from the date that the papers were last actioned. It provides discretion to agencies as to whether to destroy relevant papers beyond age 72.

http://www.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/EPG_section_040909-tcm6-1222.pdf

The National Archives only recommends that government departments select personnel records if the process of their employment or departure led to a significant change in how the organisation (or government) was managed from that point on.

It is therefore unlikely that Remploy will select any employment records for transfer to The National Archives – however Remploy are required to keep employment records under Civil Service procedures, and are required to transfer records to The National Archives under the Public Records Act and the 20 year Implementation Plan.

2.6 Following the October 2012 meeting, some further questions were raised by a user who was unable to attend the November 2012 meeting in person:

2.7 IMP department

Q. There is no mention in the minutes of the 3 temporary posts to cover the review of Treasury records?

A. The 3 posts are shown on the first slide of the presentation, the IMP organisation chart. They are circled and marked 'Accelerated Review'. These are temporary posts which have been recruited to focus on the preparation and cataloguing of records which HMT are reviewing in an accelerated process. HMT is outsourcing the selection, preparation and cataloguing to a contractor (Iron Mountain) but retains

responsibility for the standards of the work. The HMT project plans to have reviewed all the outstanding paper records by the end of March 2014, to have selected those records worthy of permanent preservation and to have destroyed the remainder. However the records will be transferred to The National Archives in line with the 10 year transition period.

2.8 Red Lists: Treasury

Q. I would specifically like to know if the records in the series T1 will be removed as part of the Red Lists project. The answer given refers to 'the main Treasury series', but T1 is not one of these.

A. To reiterate, we will only remove series lists in this phase of the project if they contain less than 100 pieces and there have been less than 20 orders in the last year. T1 contains 15,617 pieces, so on this criteria alone is significantly out of scope.

2.9 (3.5) Correction; the second sentence should read 'The former reference number is never shown *when browsing* the old catalogue or Discovery'.

2.10 (3.5) **Q.** Please can the process of ordering those red lists that are removed from open access be made trouble free, without a requirement to provide justification.

A. No, we will require users who are ordering one of the red lists to demonstrate a genuine need to see the paper list instead of the online version. However, as we are only removing lists which are both very rarely used and which are easily browseable online, we do not expect to receive many requests of this nature.

3. Discussion on the effectiveness of the current user engagement activities.

3.1 LO noted that it had been requested by a user that some time is dedicated at this meeting to discussing current user engagement activities and specifically the relationship between the User Advisory Group and the User Forum. LO noted that the current arrangement was implemented in mid 2011 following a holistic review of engagement activities in late 2010.

3.2 There was a thorough discussion regarding the relative merits of the current arrangements compared to previous arrangements. Key points of discussion included:

3.3 Concern that the introduction of the User Advisory Group and the shift of some of the administrative resource, would result in a reduction in the effectiveness of the User Forum (there was disagreement on whether this had been the case).

3.4 The fact that the review had shown some users had indicated that they felt that the User Forum had been dominated by certain individuals.

3.5 The balance between operational / business as usual topics and more in depth / strategic topic discussions.

3.6 The importance of a closed group, enabling more robust and meaningful discussions to take place in a more controlled manner, and for sensitive issues to be discussed in confidence.

3.7 Concern that the UAG being a closed group leads to it being exclusive, despite the aim that it is representative our user communities.

3.8 Discussion on whether the make up of the group is representative of The National Archives user community and whether delegates should be chosen by The National Archives.

3.9 It was asked if we could consider adding to the Terms of Reference for the User Advisory, the option for users outside of the group to attend a part of a meeting in order to raise a particular topic. It was agreed

that we would take this request away and consider it. It was noted that a standing agenda item for 'Delegate submitted items' had already been implemented.

4. Annual mopping up session (actions carried forward from previous meetings). See separate document

4.1 LO noted that this item had been added in response to a user suggestion, to ensure that all of the actions carried forward throughout the year have been addressed and that the outcome is recorded. It was noted that this would now become an annual agenda item.

4.2 LO ran through the items that have a status of 'open' (it was agreed that it would not be necessary to go over items that are closed). Please see the separate document entitled 'User Forum carry forward action list 2011 – 2012' for further information on each action. Please also see the separate document entitled 'MOD service records'.

4.3 It was asked if there are plans to release the medal records associated with the service records referred to in this document. LO pointed out that some of these records are already available. He added that those records that haven't been transferred are generally retained as they are still being used by the MoD (for example for reference when dealing with claims for medals).

5. Any other business

5.1 **Q.** Has the space used by the London Family History Centre got larger?

A. No, it is exactly the same space they were allocated originally.

5.2 **Q.** Has a new memorandum of understanding between The National Archives and the London Family History Centre been drawn up?

A. No, the current document is valid until the end of March 2013. We have been in discussion with LFHC regarding plans after this date, but a new memorandum of understanding has not yet been signed.

5.3 **Q.** Can you tell us about how the sum of £12, 500 was agreed upon and what it will be spent on.

A. The London Family History Centre make a donation to the Friends of The National Archives, we do not charge them for using the space. Ultimately, the donation will benefit The National Archives and our users as this is the purpose of the Friends.

5.4 **Q.** Will the implementation of the 20 year rule mean that there will be 2 press events each year instead of one?

A. This is still under discussion but we are looking at this as a possibility as the amount of material being released would make it difficult for us to handle and could also potentially result in the press missing important stories.

5.5 **Q.** I have noticed that you plan to have a regular writer of the month event onsite at The National Archives. This is a good idea. Who selects the writers? Will this be a ticketed event?

A. We select the writers – we are looking to showcase authors who are publishing books that have been researched at The National Archives, or relate in some way to our holdings. This is a very new development, but we are excited about it so watch this space. Tickets are now available for the first of these events here: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/conferences/writer-of-month.aspx>

5.6 **Q.** Can you tell us about the new alumni events you are holding?

A. Further information on these can be found on our website here:

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/news/773.htm>

These events are aimed at former staff. As well as enabling staff to keep in touch with former colleagues on a social level, they also provide an opportunity for professional networking and the sharing of knowledge and skills and connections relevant to the organisation.

5.7 **Q.** Can you provide an update regarding the document cameras – has there been any progress regarding the provision of bi-tonal images?

A. We are still looking at this as part of our ongoing efforts to provide high quality images to users. It is important to note that users have different priorities with regards to this issue. Some find that grey scale images are better for their requirement as they pick up the full range of tones in an image, where as bi tonal provides very high contrast but can miss some of the mid range tones. We have recently discovered that the old scanners were actually 'grey tonal' which is somewhere between bitonal and grey scale. We are continuing to investigate how to achieve this with the new cameras. It seems at this stage that the solution will involve a combination of post processing software and effective lighting.

6. *Post meeting note – There was an omission in the Notes of the October User Forum, as follows: It was confirmed that ONS had transferred the 2011 census returns to microfilm.*

7. Date of next meeting: Thursday 10th January 12:15 for 12:30