

## Minutes

Title: The National Archives User Forum

Date of Meeting: Thursday 17 December, 12:30pm

Location: Talks Room

### Attendees Staff

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

JA: Jill Allbrooke, Head of Enquiry Services

LMO: Lee Oliver, Head Public Services Development

JL: James Lawson, Customer Intelligence Manager (secretary)

CC: Chris Cooper, Head of Directorate Planning

DA: Darren Austin, Senior Project Manager

LW: Laura Withey, Project Manager

HPS: Helen Pye-Smith, Head of Library

JS: Jessamy Sykes, Map & Large Document Reading Room Manager

FA: Foluke Abiona, Public Services Development

CJAM: Carole MacCormack (minutes)

Readers: D.S. Faulder, D.J. Stoker, E.M.Semlyen, D.M. Heywood, K. Payne, John Court, Len Barnett, P. Eismark, Steve Morewood, Clive Gardener, Austin Butler, A.L. Mears, P. Gallagher, James Young, Paul Blake, John King, H.J. Compton, Richard Bateson, Janet Macdonald, Ken Maxwell – Jones, John Martin, Martin Kane, Tom Tulloch Marshall, Martin Roberts, Yong bae son, R. Wilcock, Joyce Hoad, Christine Geer, Bob O'Hara, Mike Jackson

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		Action
1	<b>Welcome</b> JJ welcomed the group.	
2	<b>Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising</b> (6.7) A large table has been placed in the public cloakroom and the smaller tables have been redistributed within the area. The proposed shelf will not be installed due to space issues.	
3	<b>Demonstration: New home page for The National Archives website – Darren Austin, Senior Project Manager</b> <a href="http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/">http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/</a>  Overall, it was agreed that the new design is a great improvement, making the site clearer and more easy to navigate.  Questions following presentation:	

- 3.1 Q: The Military History icon – could there be a more neutral image?  
A vote of 15-8 against showed that the image shown was the preferred one amongst those present. The images will be changed regularly and no image would be permanent.
- 3.2 Q. It was suggested that the lettering on the Family History and Military History links could be bolder or larger – it was noted that the bold text on the red background was very clear.  
A. This will be fed back to the webteam for consideration.
- 3.3 Q. It was suggested that a link to the A – Z site index is included in the ‘quick links’ section  
A. This will be fed back to the webteam for consideration.
- 3.4 Q. It was felt that basic information on document handling and how to use an archive should be added.  
A. Although the front page of the website is not considered to be the best place for this type of information (a high proportion of website users never actually visit The National Archives in person), it was agreed that this type of information needs to be better communicated to first time users on site. We are already considering how best to do this. One possibility is for document handling guidance to be issued as part of the reader’s ticket registration process, as well as being displayed on the plasma screens. It was pointed out that The British Library has an effective video on document handling displayed on their public screens, and suggested that TNA could look into creating something similar. JJ agreed to look in to this and reminded users that they should always report bad document handling practices to a Security Officer.
- 3.5 Q. Is the website designed with a fixed screen width?  
A. No, the design is fluid and adjusts according to the size / resolution of the screen being used.
- 3.6 It was asked if the FoI disclosures log (available on the website) had been updated. This work would not have been undertaken as part of the recent and ongoing website redesign, which is aimed at improving the overall top-level design, layout and organisation of the site. However JL agreed to investigate the disclosures log.

JL

JJ requested that any further questions be filtered through JL

**4 Demonstration: Cabinet Papers 1915-1977: a new online resource – Laura Withey. Assistant Project Manager**  
<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/>

- 4.1 Laura Withey demonstrated and talked through the site, which provides a route into, and contextual information behind, the Cabinet Papers 1915 – 1977, (which have been digitised as part of the project) for A – Level and Higher Education students. The project

also enables users to search the full text of the records by keyword, a feature which has been enabled by Optical Character Recognition technology. The project lasted for 2 years and was led by the Strategic Development Department with contributions from colleagues across the organisation. The project was funded externally by the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC). Some of the background technical work which required specific skills and resources, not available in house, was outsourced.

4.2 As part of the funding agreement, The National Archives have committed to making the resource free of charge for 18 months; a decision will then be made about availability and charging. Several users said that they were very impressed by the site and felt that it was a useful and beneficial resource. Concern was expressed that it will be lost after the initial 18 month period. It has not yet been decided whether this service will be available free at The National Archives once the 18 month period has elapsed. However, the charging model is likely to reflect whatever model is used for DocumentsOnline *at that time* (DocumentsOnline is *currently* free onsite).

4.3 Concern was expressed that the site may be biased and not politically correct. It was noted that the documents themselves would reflect the opinions / prejudices etc... of the cabinet ministers / civil servants who wrote them at the time, but that the site would advise teachers and students to read other contemporary documents to obtain a more rounded overview of the issues. The contextual information on the site is intended to be as politically neutral as possible.

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It was asked if a report on the success of the site would be made available after the conclusion of the 18 month period – this had not been planned, but will be considered.

There are no specific plans to undertake similar projects with the records of other government departments, such as the Foreign Office Papers (such projects rely heavily on external funding). However, it is quite possible that this project may set a precedent for future work. Much of the basic groundwork and investigation into how to go about this type of project has now been done.

LW offered to take further questions from the forum (please email any questions to JL)

## 5 Updates

5.1.1 Car Park Validation Scheme: There had been a technical hitch and the validation system was due to go live on Monday, 22 December. It was reiterated that this was not a precursor to charging; just a

means of managing car park usage and trying to ensure that it is available for TNA visitors only.

5.1.2 How to use the new system.

You will need to take a ticket when you park and validate it before you leave: once the ticket has been validated you will have to depart within 30 minutes. The car-park will be closed 30 minutes after The National Archives closes.

5.1.3 The disabled parking bays at the back of the building will not require validation parking tickets.

5.1.4 We do not have information regarding parking in the area once the car park is full; we have been and will continue to encourage those travelling to The National Archives to use public transport.

5.2 New interim Head of Advice and Records Knowledge

Jackie Marfleet is due to start with us in January 09; she is being appointed on a 6-month basis as Interim Head of ARK, to replace Jeff James who was recently promoted to Director of Public Services. Initially Jackie will work 2 days a week for TNA, whilst she sees out her contract at the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG), then from Feb 09 she'll work full time. During this period we will relaunch the recruitment process for the permanent position.

Jackie has a varied background, in both the public and private sector. Currently working at DCLG on a project to do with their Electronic Records Management System, she previously worked for TNA on the Civil Pages project and spent two years at the British Library, as Head of Reference & Research. She's also had a number of Information / Knowledge Management roles at the likes of JP Morgan and Ernst & Young.

Jackie will be attending the February Forum.

5.3 Meet the Chief Executive Day: 18<sup>th</sup> November

The comments and our position on each issue have been written up and are now available on the website here:

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/about/operate/reports.htm>

In general, feedback from the day was positive.

5.4.1 ID Regulations

It has been six months since the introduction of two proofs of identity to obtain a reader ticket, and we have recently begun to enforce the rules more strongly. This is the case for both new readers and those renewing their ticket.

5.4.2 There have been problems with the barcode on readers ticket getting worn, resulting in it being necessary to renew a ticket which hasn't

	officially expired. While full ID is preferable in any instance that a card is issued, the Enquiry Service Manager can be called to make a decision in such exceptional circumstances.	
5.4.3	It was confirmed that we do not use other organisation's validated tickets (e.g. British Library) as proof of identity – the information is second-hand and would not be legally accepted.	
5.4.4	There was a complaint that staff on the Reader Registration desk had been rude when issuing reader tickets. JJ said that he would feed this back to management.	JJ
5.4.5	Concern was expressed that Security checks were not thorough enough. JJ to speak to Jack Lincoln (Head of Security).	JJ
<u>5.6</u>	<u>Food prices.</u> Yes Dining have dropped prices by two and a half percent due to the recent reduction in VAT.	
<u>5.7</u>	<u>Information Management Practice Department</u> Meg Sweet has retired from the Records Management and Catalogue Department. The renamed department – Information Management Practice, is undergoing a restructure under an interim head of department, Adam Blackie. Due to the major changes taking place the Records Review Day is not likely to happen before July next year; this was thought an unpopular decision and JJ will filter the comment to Adam Blackie.	JJ / JL
<u>5.8</u>	<u>User Satisfaction Survey</u> Some specific questions had been raised regarding the comments received as part of the recent onsite customer satisfaction survey. These have been addressed ( <i>see separate document</i> ).	
<b>6</b>	<b>Open discussion</b>	
6.1	It was asked if there could be a clearer link to the Library catalogue pages. Enquiry Service Management to consider for PCs near the library area. It was confirmed that the link has been, and will continue to be available on the front page of the public screens throughout the reading rooms.	JA
6.2	It was confirmed that the contract for improvements to the library area lighting had been let and that work would commence shortly.	
6.3	It was stated that the library shelf stacks will not be moved and that they do conform to Health and Safety standards.	
6.4	It was confirmed that any rumours of re-instating the library desk are unfounded.	
6.5	There was a complaint that it was still difficult to contact library staff. The majority of the time there is either at least one member of library	

staff on duty on one of the public enquiry points or a member of library staff available behind the scenes and contactable via a cordless phone.

It was confirmed that all staff have now completed their training and can answer basic library-based questions.

- 6.6 (6.8) The 1911 Census will be released in 2009, with the redacted information being released in 2012. It was recommended that those interested should sign up for the regular newsletter:  
<http://www.1911census.co.uk/>
- 6.7 It was asked if there could be a presentation on Deepstore, the offsite storage facility used by The National Archives.  
*(post meeting note: this has been arranged for the January forum)* JL
- 6.8 Nick Kinsley's presentation on the work of National Advisory Services was greatly appreciated and it was requested that he be asked to return at the end of 2009 to give an update. JL
- 6.9 It was requested that a talk be given on the National Archives of Scotland. JL
- 6.10 It was asked if further information could be provided at a future forum, on the use of Places of Deposit and the reasons behind why certain series of records are housed in places of deposit instead of The National Archives. Of particular concern is ADM 335 (Admiralty: Fleet Air Arm: Fixed-Wing Flying Review Collection) which are held by the Fleet Air Arm Museum. JL
- 6.11 A suggestion for having specialist talks at the User Forum on specific types of records was rejected. There are regular one-hour talks on various subjects on Tuesdays and Thursdays. More information is available in the 'What's on at Kew' leaflet, or on the website at:  
<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/events/calendar.htm>
- 6.12 It was asked if there is any news, following the recent MoD consultation, on making Home Guard records available. JL to investigate. *(post meeting update: The MoD have posted an update on the results of the consultation on their website:*  
<http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/AboutDefence/CorporatePublications/ConsultationsandCommunications/PublicConsultations/TransferOfHistoricServicePersonnelRecordsToTheNationalArchives.htm> ) JL
- Please note that all minutes and presentations are available at our website at: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/events/readers.htm>
- 7 The next meeting will be on Thursday 15 January in the Talks Room – all are welcome**