

Headline findings from the Covid-19 sector impact survey and business continuity webinars		THE
		NATIONAL
May 2020		ARCHIVES

During April 2020, The National Archives conducted a survey into the impact of COVID-19 disruption on the wider archive sector. The main purpose of the survey was to capture a national picture of the impact of COVID disruption to archive services in order to inform our plans for sector support now and in the future, and to understand the reality of this sudden change to our normal ways of working. We have had to adapt fast too, from early experimentation in business continuity webinars using Zoom and Mentimeter to joining sector-based discussion forums like ARA Together on Discord. We have been identifying areas of risk that archives need to think about, and setting down broad principles for reopening safely, without trying to cover all scenarios. We're also constantly updating and revising guidance as things move on. Surveying on business continuity continues and we will follow up on this impact in a few months' time.

We received 203 responses to the initial impact survey. There was a good spread of responses across England, Scotland and Wales, as well as across the different parts of the sector:

Local authority	36%
Higher education	19%
Museum	8%
Business	7%
Health	2%
Religious	5%
Specialist	9%
Royal college	2%
Charity	3%
School	2%
Arts	3%
Historic house	2%
Transport	2%

The largest number of respondents came from Local Authority and Higher Education institutions, which is to be expected given the high proportion of these archives in the sector, with a good representation across other types of organisation.

The high level summary of the key themes to emerge from both this survey and the business continuity webinars are below (see also the accompanying PowerPoint).

It is worth noting that for most services recruitment has been paused or frozen while lockdown is in place, which has had an effect on some planned service restructures.

These figures capture teams that had been furloughed, redeployed and were working from home at the time of the survey. Responses to the questions do point to an overall concern that staff may be redeployed at a later date or furloughed if the lockdown period is extended (and we already know of many changes since the survey first opened).

This is also true of the budget cuts and external/internal funding impacts reported at this time; the longer-

term effects will be more far reaching.

**Survey question 1: How much impact has there been on your revenue or funding? This could include research and reprographics fees, room hire, events, wider organisational impacts, and externally funded grant programmes.**

Of the 203 responses to the survey, 199 (98%) completed this section.

- 156 (78%) respondents expect reduced income, external funding (22%) or internal (22%) funding
- In terms of income, reductions were expected in the following areas:
  - Fees (including licensing etc.) 31% (62 respondents)
  - Research fees 19% (37 respondents)
  - Reprographic 42% (83 respondents)
  - Room / Venue hire 19% (38 respondents)
  - Events 29% (57 respondents)
  - Retail 10% (20 respondents)
  - Catering 5% (9 respondents)
  - Endowments 1% (2 respondents)
- Of the 22% who expressed worries about external funding, 38 (19%) specifically mention project funding and 9 mention (5%) grant funding
- Of the 22% who expressed worries about external funding, 20 (10%) explicitly reference National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF)
- Of the 22% who expressed worries about ongoing internal funding, 24 (12%) are expecting cuts to future budgets

**Survey question 2: Has there been any impact on staffing, such as staff redeployment, furloughing, recruitment frozen or lack of staff access to collections? What have been the innovative workarounds and responses to continue collections management?**

(Total complete responses: 203; there were 4 blank entries for this question)

Furlough

- 40 (20%) respondents have utilised the furloughing scheme
- 2 (1%) of these are from local authorities
- 12 respondents (6%) that have been furloughed come from private archive sector.
- Of the 40 respondents, only 18 (9%) of the teams have been fully furloughed. The remaining 22 have seen front line staff furloughed.

Redeployed

- 24 (12%) respondents have redeployed staff.
- 16 (67%) respondents that have redeployed staff are from local authorities

Working from home

- 133 (67%) of respondents have staff working at home.

- 44 (22%) of the services with home workers are from the local authority sector
- 30 (15%) services with home workers are from the higher education sector

**Survey question 3: How have you continued to engage with existing audiences and tried to reach new audiences while you have not been able to access your collections through regular means? Are you using new/innovative resources to engage with your audiences or enhancing your use of existing platforms?**

(Total completed responses: 203)

Social media

78 (38%) respondents are utilising social media channels to engage with audiences.

Responses included Twitter (46 responses / 22%), Facebook (33 responses / 16%), Instagram (13 responses / 6%) and YouTube (11 responses / 5%).

16 respondents (7%) specifically mentioned participating in the #Archives30 campaign on Twitter.

Online engagement

Other means of online engagement including blogs (38 respondents / 19%), exhibitions (20 respondents / 10%) and podcasts (6 respondents / 3%).

62 respondents (31%) referred to online activities generally, and 33 respondents (16%) mentioned their websites.

Digitised content

15 respondents (7%) mentioned access to digitised content, with 6 (3%) specifically naming Ancestry and 3 (1%) referring to FindMyPast. Further information on use of material on Ancestry and FindMyPast is provided in responses to survey question 4 below. .

Documenting COVID-19 / Contemporary collecting

8 respondents (4%) to this question specifically mentioned campaigns to collect content relating to the pandemic/ lockdown.

All 8 responses here (4%) identified collecting diaries of the lockdown. Other material mentioned included blogs (2 responses / 1%), film content (1 response) and newsletters/ephemera (1 response)

Survey question 4: How are you enabling access to your collections for external researchers? For example, have you provided free access to digital resources that are usually behind a paywall?

Restrictions on access

10 respondents (5%) stated that there was currently no access to their collections. Of these responses, 4 mentioned staff being furloughed, and 2 said that their service was closed.

Access to digitised content

21 respondents (10%) stated that they were providing access to digitised content.

Respondents indicated that content was available through Ancestry (17 responses / 8%) and FindMyPast (10 responses / 5%). 11 responses (5%) indicated that they provided access to content through both Ancestry and FindMyPast.

6 responses (3%) indicated that their service had no digitised content.

Paywalls/ access to material

4 respondents (2%) indicated that there was a paywall in place for digitised content. A further 14 responses (7%) indicated that they did not have a paywall in place for their digitised content. No services responded to this question stating that they had removed their paywalls for the duration of the lockdown. One service was considering it, but was concerned that re-instating a paywall post-lockdown could prove difficult.

14 respondents (7%) stated that they were providing free access to content on Ancestry and/or FindMyPast. Of these, 11 responses (5%) indicated that this was being provided through collaboration with their library service.

#### Online catalogues

38 respondents (19%) referenced access via their online catalogues. 6 responses (3%) indicated that they had no online catalogue, limiting access to their collections.

#### Enquiry service and charges

44 respondents (22%) confirmed that their enquiry service was still running. However, many of these respondents indicated that the ability to respond to enquiries had been impacted by lack of access to original documents. Most services were relying on access to catalogues or digitised content to respond to enquiries or could only provide partial responses at this stage.

2 respondents stated that their enquiry service was currently suspended.

6 respondents (3%) stated that their charging structure for enquiries/ copying remained in place. 4 respondents (2%) mentioned that they had removed or reduced fees at this time. 16 responses (8%) stated that there were no research charges in place.

#### **Survey question 5: If you have anything else you would like to share with us, please use the space below.**

Of the 203 responses to the survey, 90 (44%) completed this section of the survey.

4 (2%) respondents raised concerns about the future of their archive services. All were from the private sector.

8 (4%) respondents thanked The National Archives for their ongoing support, work on capturing the impact of the lockdown and offering guidance.

2 (1%) said that large scale moves are on hold and are unsure when they will be completed

5 (2%) praised the introduction of Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Basecamp and other digital services for keeping in touch with team

8 (4%) stated that, while it's difficult, they can already see positives from the extended lockdown period and staff are being very productive

2 (1%) commented that lack of preparation has proved to be an issue as building closed within 24 hours

#### **Sector breakdown summary**

Higher Education Institutions:

- 17 have full access to catalogue systems, 1 more partial
- 11 reported recruitment freezes in their institution
- 4 reported that at least some staff had been furloughed, 6 more were considering it
- 1 reported possible redeployment, and 1 was partially redeployed

- 7 reported financial issues in their wider organisation, 2 had already had some budgets suspended, and 5 were expecting cuts next year. 4 reported that work on bids was on hold
- 21 were using social media, and 8 specifically mentioned work on online exhibitions
- 6 were teaching online
- 15 mentioned that they were still handling enquiries
- For 2 organisations, work with records management/FOI/GDPR had raised their profile within the organisation

#### Charities

- 2 respondents reported all or some staff furloughed, and another was reviewing the situation
- 2 respondents expected the wider organisation's finances to suffer

#### Religious

- 4 had all or some staff furloughed, and another 2 thought it was possible. 3 organisations were freezing recruitment
- 1 person was still working normally as they lived in the same premises as the repository.
- 3 reported a large financial impact on their parent organisations

#### Business

- 4 had at least some staff furloughed, and 1 more expected furloughing
- 2 reported recruitment freezes
- Only 1 mentioned the financial impact on the wider business, but 2 more expected an impact on budgets

#### Transport

- 2 respondents are voluntary groups. Of the remainder, half the staff in one organisation had been furloughed

### **Information captured during the business continuity webinars:**

#### What worked well overall as services changed rapidly:

- Flexible teams, supportive management approaches, wider sector support
- Remote access and systems, with good ICT support
- Remote environmental monitoring and regular building presence as needed
- Regular meetings and useful software especially MS Teams, Zoom, Slack
- Prepared working/volunteering from home tasks, including work which is otherwise often left in a backlog (digitisation useful here, also policy writing, training)
- Piloting home working early where possible
- Some business continuity plans did cover remote work and did hold up

- Promoting existing and in some cases new online resources and social media – archives could be a good news story for the parent organisation

What worked less well or would have been useful to consider beforehand:

- Constant changes at start of lockdown – scenarios were planned and dropped, school closures changed assumptions, top management changing tack, business continuity plans did not cover include measures for a wholesale shift to remote working
- Lack of mobile resilience (hardware, remote systems access, licences, permissions)
- Parent body liaison issues including slowing communications the organisation having other priorities, ICT support not responsive
- Managing multiple sites/employers/parent organisations tended to complicate quick responses
- New projects/activities/events/placements put on ice
- Systems shut down including building management systems in some cases
- Some reduced security e.g. more people have key/code access to archives
- Managing third parties generally – some were very supportive but it often added complexity when not all were working for one employer
- Current front end to digital service not being a good advert/services struggled to promote online archives activity against other organisational priorities
- Rush to online produced some poor content (though also some great), and some issues with IP in reuse of archive resources elsewhere in organisation
- Finding tasks for customer-facing staff, homeWi-Fi limits, lack of digitised images available for home working/social media
- Staff being off at start of crisis or a staggered move to homeworking, causing complexities
- Staff need support especially given different caring roles/illness
- Staff skills/needs vary, and the less tech-savvy are more isolated
- Working from home is harder: lack of focus/productivity, mental health issues, poor physical setup, anxieties, hard to keep in touch outside line management, sometimes videoconference overload, frustration at what can't be done away from collections
- A rollercoaster: from proactive planning for remote working to being furloughed is a big change of mentality. Emotional impact of furloughing – feeling unvalued
- Redeployed staff are also facing big challenges in difficult circumstances

- Training staff into new roles remotely is a challenge
- Staffing changes: recruitments frozen, handovers difficult to manage
- Struggling with volunteer activities/acceptance of change and need to close/work remotely
- “COVID brain” – struggle to focus in uncertainty, it’s not good planning time as people had anticipated at the start of lockdown

## **Next steps**

We will continue to engage with the wider archive sector during the coming weeks and months to further understand the impact of COVID on the sector, and what the medium and long term impacts of this might be. We are currently working on various aspects of business continuity and re-opening including inclusivity issues and we intend to repeat a more in-depth version of this survey in a few months to capture any emerging issues and further developments.

We welcome any feedback and observations on the findings so far.