Title: User Advisory Group
Date of Meeting: Tuesday 24th September 2019
Location: The Swan Room, Kew

Attendees:

Staff
CA - Acting Head of Private Office (item 2)
HC – User Researcher (item 4)
HF - Exhibition & Interpretation Manager (item 6)
JK – User Experience Manager (item 4)
Lee Oliver (LO) – Head of Venue Management & Services
Caroline Ottaway Searle (COS) – Director, Public Engagement (Chair)
AV - Personal Assistant (minutes)

Delegates
Sue Adams (SA) – Independent Researchers
Adam Chambers (AC) - Map Room Users
Nadine Chambers (NC) – Student Users
Stephen Daglish (SD) - On line Users
Angela Graham (AG) - County/External Archives
Mike Grahn (MG) – On site Personal Interest Users
Francis Howcutt (FH) - Family History Societies
Grace Ioppolo (GI) – Academic Users
Will Reid (WR) - Diversity and Inclusion
Anne Samson (AS) - On site Personal Interest Users

Apologies
Amelia Clegg (AC) – Student Users
Sophie Kay (SK) - Diversity and Inclusion
Geoff Monks (GM) – Academic Users
Camilla von Massenbach (CvM) - Online Family Historians
1 Minutes, matters arising and general updates

1.1 The minutes of the 24th June 2019 were approved

1.2 Matters arising on item 5.5 (Delegate submitted item on charges for author talks). COS reminded the group that charging for such events is necessary to ensure cost recovery; experience has shown that free events result in increased attendee cancellations. IG noted that authors and independent researchers need to charge fees to supplement their (often) low incomes. **ACTION: COS to pass feedback to the Events team.**

2 Welcome and Farewell to Delegates

2.1 COS welcomed MG, the new personal interest user representative, to the group. MG introduced himself as having a professional background as an academic in medical research and technology development. At TNA his interests focus on the history of technology and healthcare.

2.2 As this was her last meeting, thanked AS, the outgoing personal interest user representative, for her valuable contribution over the last few years.

3 International Strategy (CA)

3.1 The International Strategy has been an increasing focus for TNA over the last 4-5 years and more importantly as part of the new strategy ‘Archives for Everyone’. ‘Archives Inspire’ was implicitly an international strategy but this was an opportunity to examine how TNA might be more explicit and cohesive in this area of work.

3.2 In 2015 TNA held several engagement workshops to explore what work is currently being done – this includes presenting at international conferences, leading on collaborative ventures, peer reviews, hosting delegations and vice versa. TNA looked at the drivers for creating a new international strategy and how these fit to our digital goals and the current political climate. The goal is to be able to present TNA confidently in the wider heritage and cultural space in a similar fashion to sister institutions such as the BL or Science Museum.

3.3 From this a set of five guiding principles were created:

3.3.1 **Collections: promote their value and open up greater access.** TNA is a member of the International Council on Archives (ICA). In October Jeff James and colleagues from Digital Services will speak at the annual conference in Adelaide on creating inclusive archives around users.

3.3.2 **Digital: pioneer sustainable solutions for digital preservation.** TNA works with the DLM Forum, a global community of archives for effective information governance. The number of requests to visit us from other nations has increased specifically around digital archiving.

3.3.3 **Commercial: generate income through appropriate and profitable commercial activity.** In 2017 TNA started a collaboration with National Archives of the UAE to digitise records relating to the UAE. The Arabian Gulf Digital Archive went live in May 2019 making available 500,000 images from TNA.

3.3.4 **Research: develop innovative resources and networks to share knowledge and expertise.** The Prize Papers project is funded by the German Academy Programme and is of an unprecedented scale. It will last over 20 years and uncover hundreds of thousands of papers.

3.3.5 **Standards: support policy development, standard setting and access to legislation.** TNA’s Head of Policy now chairs an international body that explores legal matters for archives.

3.4 Membership of the International Council on Archives has raised TNA’s profile and enabled work with other archives to explore shared issues, especially emerging technologies. Jeff James is President of the Forum of National Archivists (FAN) which looks at strategic issues across the sector. Together with ICA-FAN TNA participated in the last meeting in Abu Dhabi and the next meeting in Spring 2020 will be hosted at Kew.
3.5 GI recommended the NY Times ‘1619 project’ (named for the date of the first ship bearing enslaved Africans to the American colonies) which is linked to the Library of Congress as a potential TNA partner. GI asked if any thought had been given to develop an application for TNA as this would be particularly popular with students. COS advised that there are no plans at present although TNA is active and popular on Twitter and Instagram.

3.6 AS asked how TNA are helping to support members with fewer available resources e.g. Africa where some countries face challenges in funding digitisation. CA advised that this issue is high on FAN’s agenda and they are looking at practical steps to help although they accept they don’t yet have all the answers. COS advised that the prior FAN conference was held in Cameroon which helped raise the visibility of these challenges. GI referenced the British Library’s ‘Endangered Archives’ programme which could also lend support.

3.7 FH asked if it was known if any of the UK’s overseas development budget is allocated to archives? ACTION: COS to enquire.

3.8 MG asked if there was any tension for TNA between working with commercially contributing partners as opposed to those who require funding and support. COS confirmed that TNA’s commercial income allows us to do more to deliver value to the public.

4. Audience workshops - review (JK and HC)

4.1 Project Alpha is looking at new ways of engaging with the public digitally. As part of this, a work stream is exploring the idea of purpose-led membership and different ways of engaging with new audiences. TNA is working with The New Citizenship Project (NCP), an organisation that endeavours to find ways to ‘involve people as citizens, not just as consumers’. Two workshops were held on the evenings of the 4th and 5th September at The Wellcome Collection on ‘How might we work together to create connections to the past to shape the present and future?’ Attendees discussed their stories from the past and what made these so important.

4.2 The following seven draft principles emerged from the first workshop: ‘Create a human connection’; ‘Make it engaging but with integrity’; ‘Be inclusive’; ‘Be courageous’; ‘Maximise and embrace tools that enable access’; ‘Light the fire of curiosity’ and ‘Collaborate with a wider network’.

4.3 The second workshop looked at how to realise these principles practically including drawing out what TNA could do more or less of and what people would think if we embodied these concepts. These thoughts were recorded on a pictograph (see attachment).

4.4 NCP are working on their final report and TNA will be taking part in their ‘Participator Accelerator’ to put into action some of the key findings.

4.5 WR commended this approach of working from the micro to the macro as very effective. JK recommended ‘New Power’ by Jeremy Heimans and Henry Timms which explores recent shifts in audience engagement.

4.6 SA noted that integrity is key to successful collaborations and that TNA has an opportunity to lead in this. COS agreed that the route to engagement is from the evidence of the collections creating meaning and an emotional response in audiences and TNA is starting to do more in this in exhibitions and events. AC felt that the public could see TNA as giving the government viewpoint rather than that of the community. COS agreed that as Civil Servants TNA is obliged to be neutral but as shown in the Cold War exhibition can evidence both the experience of the government and the citizen. TNA gives voice to other voices e.g. by hosting talks with differing academic perspectives on the records.

4.7 AG asked if there would be any outputs sharing best practice. JK advised that outputs would be shared with user groups and communicated through the Discovery/website. They will be reaching out to share these (see blog attached).

4.8 NC recommended the exhibition ‘Writing in Times of Conflict’ showing at Senate House Library, University of London. This shows books, photos and letters within the context in which they were written and demonstrates how problematic it is seeing contentious figures without these.
5. **Forthcoming events (COS)**

5.1 The ‘What’s On’ brochure for October to December is due to be released shortly.

5.2 As part of the Cold War programme, TNA will be marking the anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall with an Archives at Night event on the evening of Friday the 1st November. Over the weekend of the 5th and 6th October TNA will also be participating in ‘the Big Draw’ event which looks at creativity as part of wellbeing with an installation of a mini Berlin Wall for graphic messages of peace and hope.

5.3 On the 22nd November, TNA is hosting ‘Kids in Museums Takeover Day’. Over 60 children in from a local school will be working alongside a selection of staff in the shop, Collection Care, helping with education and family activities and there will be a team working with Marketing and Communications reporting on their activities. They will also be interviewing the Executive Team and drawing up a manifesto about how TNA can appeal to children.

5.4 TNA is supporting the Migration Museum’s Family History Day on Saturday 2nd November. Visitors will have the chance to find out more about genealogy and archival research, experience interactive installations on British history and hear from experts and social historians.

5.5 DCDC is scheduled for 12th to the 14th November in Birmingham on the theme ‘Navigating the digital shift; practicalities and possibilities’.

6. **Exhibition Programme (HF):**

6.1 The Cold War programme has been very successful, so far achieving 16,000 visitors of a 30,000 target of whom 57% were new to TNA. To build on this the Exhibitions team held a staff drop in session and an online survey with TNA users and non-users to test around 25 themes for potential exhibitions to meet the following tests: What does the subject say about TNA and the Nation’s Stories? Will it connect to new and current audiences? Is there strong participation potential? How does it relate to now, is it topical? What are the wider opportunities, commercial potential? Is it media friendly, easily promotable? Can we deliver it?

6.2 Approximately 1,600 responses were received to the online survey.

6.3 NC asked how the questions had been shaped in the visitor survey. HF advised that there had been free text boxes and participants had been asked to score the suggestions. The focus group had been run by an independent audience agency.

7. **Delegate Submitted Items:**

7.1 **Clock in the Map Room – this is missed by those working without electronic devices. Could it be restored? (AC).** LO advised that the clock has been reinstated. TNA’s policy is to retain clocks in public spaces.

7.2 **‘You Transfer’ process for e-mailing download links to oneself. A number of users have struggled in the Map Room. Could some of the ‘how to’ sheets in available on the first floor be supplied in the Map Room? (AC)** LO advised the changes were due to a change in provider and that there are a new set of instructions for users going into the Map Room.

7.3 **New TNA logo is difficult to identify on a browser tab compared to the old red ‘A’. Is there a remedy for this? Perhaps the logo could be coloured in the browser tab. (AC).** COS advised that the groups’ feedback on reading the new branding on small devices and online will be given to the Marketing and Communications team.

7.4 **E179 Database - when the database is fully subsumed within Discovery will the item descriptions retain the same level of detail, e.g. Membrane numbers for each location? (AC).** LO advised that there have not been any recent discussions about the E179 database
and no decisions have been made about its future. However, having looked at the data we know that there are particular challenges migrating the data to Discovery and for managing it once it is there. Should we need to retire the database and migrate the data to Discovery (or to some other system) every effort will be made to preserve the existing data.

8. **AOB:**

8.1 AS commented that there were difficulties with the computers in the reading room where users were not logging out, requiring other users to move desks. This is also putting pressure on staff. **Action: COS to investigate with Document Services**

8.2 AS remarked that the building works in the reading room have created a dark, unwelcoming space. COS advised it is scheduled for the works to be completed by the end of the Financial Year.

9. **Next Meetings:**

UAG Induction Day Tuesday 8th October 10.45 – 15.15
UAG meeting on Tuesday 3rd December, 12.00 – 14.30

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