

Title: The National Archives' User Forum

Date: 17 August 2017

Location: Talks Room

Attendees (staff):

Tom Gregan (TG) Head of Document Services (Chair)

Jeff James (JJ) Chief Executive and Keeper

Paul Davies (PD) Director of Operations

Lee Oliver (LO) Head of Venue Management & Services

Roger Kershaw (RK) Head of Strategic Operations and Volunteers

David Priest (DP) Document Production Coordination Manager

Hafiz Sule (HS) Estates Customer Service Manager

Catherine Hill (CH) PA to Director of Public Engagement

Foluke Abiona (FA) Accessibility and User Engagement Manager (Notes)

Attendees (users):

P.Jennings (PJ), Alan Outten (AO), Joyce Hoad (JH), B.Shiels (BS), E. June Lines (EL), Jackie Speel (JS), Chris Eley (CE), Brian Swann (BS), Phil Lamb (PL), Graham Woolgar (GW), John Seaman (JS), Ron Platt (RP), Francis Howcutt (FH), Kristina Bedford (KB), David Matthew (DM), J.Greaves (JG), Jeff Jefford (JJe), Don Inskeep (DI)

1. TG welcomed all to the meeting.

2. Matters arising – February notes

2.1 New concern over lack of variety of food items in the public restaurant with the new catering contract. Available dishes are too spicy as well as alcohol and foreign based. A request is made for simple dishes to cater for all needs.

TG responded that he will take the concern on board and report to the Catering team. He also pointed out that we have recently had a change of catering providers and perhaps we should give them a chance to see what they are able to provide.

2.2 Lockers are often out of action and one may have to try several before one gets one in working order. Also locker heights seem to disadvantage those who either have medical conditions or are not able to reach high or low lockers.

LO responded that we are in the process of changing all the lock to a digital type, due to continued theft of keys. In terms of locker heights, we have put notices up in the locker room area asking users to be considerate to others. However, these notices are often disregarded.

2.3 Insufficient power points for laptops around the open reading room leading to readers having to rely on battery power. Also is there an update on the promised upgrade?

LO responded by giving a brief update on new Wi-Fi portal pages giving reasons why we have gone down that route and the benefits to the public.

3. Open House London 2017 – Roger Kershaw, Head of Strategic Operations and Volunteers.

3.1 Roger gave some background to Open House London and announced that TNA will be participating in the event. This is scheduled for Saturday 16 September 2017. It will be an opportunity to showcase the archives.

He showed a [presentation](#) going through activities that will be covered on the day.

Q. Who are the “*curious minds*” and “*cultural devotees*”? (a reference from the presentation above)

A. Curious minds refer to those with a bit of interest in art, culture and history but are not deeply rooted while cultural devotees are the deep rooted and experienced researchers.

Q. An observation was raised regarding challenges booking places on the day.

A. Most events are repeated during the course of the day. Half of the tickets are bookable in advance and the other half are available on the day.

Q. Tours used to occur years ago and was a good platform of knowing more about TNA. What happened to the tours?

A. Behind the scene tours have recently been reinstated and now take place regularly.

Q. TNA Bookshop does not stock books on history of the building. Why is that?

A. There is information on TNA’s history and architecture on our website.

BBC’s Blue Peter footage from 1978, featuring The National Archives, was shown to the forum bringing back a bit of nostalgia.

4. User Advisory Group (UAG) update – Kristina Bedford, Map Room Delegate.

4.1 Kristina introduced herself and gave a brief update on the UAG June meeting.

4.2 The main feedback is that further to the brainstorming session in March 2017 (to improve the UAG), the group will be focusing on 3 main action points – Induction, Communication and Logistics.

4.3 The ongoing issue of changes to the services provided by Northampton Archives was raised and discussed. It was generally agreed that there is a temporary measure in place, but only till April 2018. Attendees gave examples of similar issues at other archives.

4.4 Attendees noted the long wait in document delivery times and wondered if this was down to staffing levels. TG responded that there have been a few instances where readers have had to wait for documents for longer than expected, due to some logistics issues. His department is aware and this has now been addressed.

4.5 The recent increase in the number of documents you can order in advance was highlighted and most attendees found it useful. An attendee asked why this was not widely communicated. TG responded that it was a soft launch as we were unsure of how people will react to this and to avoid his team being overwhelmed with orders. All seems to be working well at the moment.

4.6. Luggage at TNA. Recently, we have seen several large pieces of luggage left in the locker room area. LO responded that we are planning to limit the size of luggage permitted, and are currently sourcing a size gauge to use. We will give sufficient notice before it is fully employed and relevant parties will be advised accordingly.

5. Jeff James – Chief Executive and Keeper

5.1 The notes of JJ's presentation are available [here](#).

JJ went on to ask if there are any questions.

5.6. Q. There's inconsistency with the release of personal data. The Information Commissioner says responsibility lies with TNA once the record is here. Is the FOI centre unable to cope with the large volume of queries submitted?

A. JJ responded that it is always good to inform the FOI team of data protection issues once identified. The same applies to the Document Services department. He continued to say that the role of supervising the selection process is a delicate one and it's a matter of getting the balance right. Overall, JJ is content with activities of the relevant bodies.

5.7. Q. *Who Do You Think You Are* (WDYTYA) Live (show previously at NEC). What's going on with it?

A. JJ confirmed that this is not a TNA-lead event, so we are not able to comment.

5.8. Q. With the increased availability of DNA data, particularly through services such as AncestryDNA, does this render the protection of personal data under the Data Protection Act redundant?

A. JJ stated that TNA will continue to operate within the legal framework of data protection, using guidance provided by the Information Commissioner.

5.9. Q. The changes described in Archives Inspire, and the creation of facilities such as the Events Space – what is TNA providing that is not available elsewhere?

A. JJ responded that TNA can provide expertise, original document displays relevant to history, architecture, and other subjects. The new facilities recognise that there are wider audiences interested in accessing the stories contained in the archives than just those engaged in independent research. We need to get the balance right in terms of free access and cost recovery in our public programming; a mixture of these events is being developed and refined.

5.10. Q. E190 Port Books were viewable many years ago. Recently unable to order as catalogue states they have mould. Is the mould new?

A. JJ stated that this is most likely to do with the document, and a better understanding of the risks caused by old mould, rather than the storage facilities TNA provides, which are conditioned to prevent the growth of mould. Where old mould has been found to be an issue, Discovery has been updated accordingly.

5.11. Q. Public Records Act guidance on records kept outside TNA: is this responsibility led by TNA? How does this relate to public access hours – do they have to match TNA at 44 hours per week?

A. JJ explained that TNA has delegated responsibility under the Act. 21 hours per week is the minimum opening hours that TNA would expect places of deposit to offer. There is scope for exceptions to this depending on the type of services offered by the place of deposit.

5.12. Q. Minutes from Advisory Council. Not up to date on the website – nothing for 2017

A. JJ to look into the matter and we will provide update. Post meeting update: the minutes are awaiting final approval and will be published shortly.

5.13. Q. Important work by government organisations is now going to private organisations – how does this relate to creating public records?

A. JJ explained that it depends on the nature of the organisation. Some of the new organisations will be public record-creating bodies, and some will not, but it is not straight-forward. Our main engagement is with the central Whitehall departments, who have responsibility for the arms-length bodies, although we will sometimes engage directly with arms-length bodies.

TG thanked everyone for attending.

6. Date of next meeting: Thursday 23 November 2017, 12.30 – 13.45