

Title: The National Archives' User Forum

Date: 16 February 2017

Location: Talks Room

Attendees (staff):

Lee Oliver (LO), Head of Quality and Excellence (Chair)

Roger Kershaw (RK) Head of Audiences (Delivery)

David Priest (DP) Document Production Coordination Manager

Sue South (SS) Manager - Onsite Services

Foluke Abiona (FA) Accessibility and User Engagement Manager

Joanna Robinson (JCR) Support Officer (Notes)

Attendees (users):

Susan Moore (SM), Jenny Long (JL), Lynn Hammet (LH), Geoffrey Berg (GB), Chris Eley (CE), Don Inskip (DI), Farris Cadle (FC), Jackie Speel (JS), Remmika Wilson (RW), Ron Platt (RP), John Seaman (JS), David Matthew (DM).

1. LMO welcomed all to the meeting.

2. Matters arising – November notes

2.1 (Item 2.1) LO said there is nowhere suitable to install an alternative dispenser. The cups are always stored upside down and there is little risk of contamination.

2.2 (Item 6.6) LO said TNA's Web team have advised that they would not be able to keep back dated lists of User Forum and UAG meeting dates on the website. They explained that they publish only forward looking date lists, to avoid any impression that the website is not being maintained.

3. User Advisory Group (UAG) update – Anne Samson, Onsite Personal Interest Delegate.

3.1 (UAG 06/12 Item 1.3) AS said that UAG delegates are aware of ongoing dissatisfaction with user experience of Ancestry and Ancestry's Fold3 websites, and advised that TNA has asked delegates to let them know of any issues.

Q. DM said there are multiple errors on Ancestry and inconsistencies in how Ancestry allows users to make alterations. He has asked Ancestry to amend mistakes in their 1911 census platform but was told that it is 'not economical'.

A. AS said users should make a note of reference numbers where they find mistakes, and inform UAG delegates who can pass on these references to Ancestry.

3.2 (UAG 06/12 Item 3.3) AS told delegates about upcoming changes to Discovery, which will make it easier for other archives to upload their catalogues to the system.

3.3 AS told attendees that the UAG Map Room and Onsite Personal Interest delegates have signs on their desks when working on site; users are welcome to come and speak with them. She advised attendees to speak with her if they wish to be added to the UAG mailing list created by Susan Moore and presently being managed by Kristina Bedford.

3.4 AS spoke about how well the new Record Copying system has been received.

3.5 AS then spoke about the Great Wharton project, and noted that UAG comments on the project will be integrated into future similar projects.

3.6 AS said that TNA webinars are being improved via feedback coming through UAG, but noted that there are times when images cannot be used in webinars, due to copyright issues.

3.7 (UAG 06/12 Item 8.2) DM said he would have liked to have attended the HM Treasury event 'Witness History: Geoffrey Howe, the Treasury Years' at TNA. However he was told it was restricted due to 'security issues', an explanation he found questionable. DM asked why the event had been described as being restricted, and said he would like AS to ask TNA to open up similar events to more people.

A. AS said she would make enquiries about this.

Post-meeting note: This was a private event, by invitation only, for current and former senior HM Treasury officials, academics, and members of Lord Howe's family.

4. Reading Room changes update – Lee Oliver, Head of Quality and Excellence Department.

4.1 LO said the changes are progressing well. The work taking place is mostly out of hours, so there is minimal disruption to researchers. He said if attendees had any concerns about the work taking place to please speak to staff and ask them to pass concerns on. He said the new spaces are due to be completed by May 2017 and advised attendees to consult the TNA website for further updates.

4.2 Q. There are not enough seats in the restaurant area. Who decided on the pink seating? They are already dirty, and are not practical. The tub chairs were much better.

A. LO said the tub chairs used previously were worn out, and that the new seating was chosen by the architects who designed the new space. He will take away the concerns expressed.

4.3 Q. Is it still the case that food and drink may be taken from the Balcony café into the Start Here area of the open reading room?

A. LO said that this was the case. The pilot had finished but was being allowed to continue, while the pilot was being evaluated.

4.4 Q. Have you considered putting tables in the area near the entrance to Q1 and the Welcome Desk?

A. LO said we would not consider putting tables in this entrance area. He explained that this area is currently being prepared for new welcome screens.

4.5 Q. DM said the Balcony café is brilliant. However having to use the left hand door only is inconvenient and also raises concerns about disabled access to the café.

A. LO advised that the doors are due to be replaced by sliding doors as part of the works currently underway.

4.6 Q. There are no toilet facilities in that part of the Reading rooms – you are obliged to go all the way round to the other side of the Reading rooms.

A. LO said there are toilets around the other side of the Balcony café in Q2, but these are currently only accessible to staff, however we are looking into the possibility of opening these to the public.

4.7 Q. How often are toilets in the restaurant area checked? Last week many of them would not flush.

A. LO said the toilets are checked by cleaners on rota regular basis.

Q. DM asked if the disabled access toilets are checked regularly, as the first floor one is often in a poor state. It does not appear to have a chart to indicate if it has been recently cleaned or checked.

A. LO said as far as he knows it is checked as regularly as the other facilities.

5. Open discussion.

5.1. Q. DM asked why the February User Forum was held during half term; some people's responsibilities at this time mean they were unable to attend today.

A. LO said this was not a conscious decision. The forum dates are planned approximately 18 months in advance and it happens that this year's half term fell quite early.

AS said that this timing has actually provided an opportunity for some new users of archives to be able to attend User Forum.

5.2 Q. When records are only available as original documents, you can email yourself a copy taken at TNA. Now so many documents are digitised this is not possible and you can only print a digitised copy which you can't email to yourself. Can we have cameras in the reading rooms?

A. LO said it is possible to take photographs of the digital copy from the screen. Users can also download images to their devices.

AS said it has been difficult to take clear photos from the screen recently, and suggested that perhaps the moves in the reading rooms have had an effect on lighting issues which have then affected the screen image.

5.4 Q. It would be useful to add a snipping tool to the screens so that people could zone in on sections of the image to save or send.

A. LO said we do not have a snipping tool on screens.

5.5 DM said not all the PREM 19 files released on 30 December are currently described on Discovery. He said he had contacted the Cabinet Office about this which told him it was a TNA issue. DM said 45% of the transfer is not listed, and it looks like the Cabinet office is holding something back. He urged TNA to press the Cabinet office to provide better descriptions.

A. LO said he could not give an answer to this query as it is a matter for the Cabinet Office; they make the decision. He will take this away.

5.6 Q. From a bank of 60 of your lockers, I have noticed that 12 were out of order. Many also need cleaning.

A. LO said we will take this away. When lockers are out of order, it means that someone has taken the key.

5.7 Q. Can you talk about future programmes for visiting students?

A. LO recommended the questioner visit the TNA website and sign up for TNA's Research newsletter which gives details of the Research programmes we run for students. The link for the newsletter can be found here:

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/about/our-role/research-and-scholarship/>

5.8 Q. I am concerned about the closure period for FO 950 files; for example there is a file on an individual born in 1917 which the FCO has decided should be closed until 2020. There are 101 files which should by now be available.

A. LO said this is a matter for the FCO, as they undertake the sensitivity review before transfer.

5.9 Q. I have noticed that the new digital lockers are becoming difficult to use, and I have heard other people complaining of the same problem.

A. LO said we will take this away.

Q. The British Library uses a system where you insert a £1 coin deposit in the locker.

A. LO said this does not actually deter people from taking keys home with them.

AS added that the British Library is going to scrap the £1 coin deposit system.

Q. Could researchers be asked to bring in their own padlock, or buy them at the shop?

A. LO said this still leaves us with the problem of people commandeering lockers for their own use. Unfortunately there is no perfect solution to this issue.

5.10 Q. DM said the UK Information Commissioner Elizabeth Denham's speech suggested that Information Management Assessments should be mandatory.

A. LO said this would be a decision for Cabinet Office, who have responsibility for records management policy across government.

5.11Q. DM asked what TNA's policy is on photographs being taken within TNA.

A. LO said that the current rules were instituted last summer. Within the document reading rooms, people are allowed to take pictures of documents, but not their surroundings or other people. Outside the document reading rooms, photographs can be taken, but must not include people unless they have given their permission. He said this is common practice in most museums and galleries.

5.12 Q. Some digitised newspaper archives are accessible at TNA but would it be possible to have access to other 18th and 19th century newspaper archives?

A. LO said we have no plans to increase access to other newspaper sites. We have a number of subscriptions to newspaper archives already, and it is unlikely we will provide full access to the full British Library newspaper site. The British Library is not a great distance from Kew so we don't feel it necessary for us to provide such access. However these decisions are always under review.

6. Date of next meeting: Thursday 18 May 2016, 12.30 – 13.45