

Title: The National Archives' User Forum

Date: 22 November 2016

Location: Talks Room

Attendees (staff):

Lee Oliver (LMO), Head of Quality and Excellence (chair)

Roger Kershaw (RK) Head of Audiences (Delivery)

Andrew Payne (AP) Head of Education and Outreach

Tom Gregan (TG) Head of Document Services

David Priest (DP) Document Production Coordination Manager

Sarah Dellar (SD) Interpretation Manager

Foluke Abiona (FA) Accessibility and User Engagement Manager

Joanna Robinson (JCR) Support Officer (notes)

Attendees (users):

John Seaman (JS), Graham Woolgar (GW), David Matthew (DM), Phil Lamb (PL), Alex Obradovic (AO), Geoffrey Berg (GB), Pauline Eisemark (PE), Dr Martin H. Folly (MF), Chris Eley (CE), Ron Platt (RP), Colin Goodman (CG), Jacqueline Speel (JS)

1. LMO welcomed all to the meeting.

2. Matters arising – August minutes

2.1 Item 4.12 – PE stated that the cup dispenser is unhygienic, irrespective of the position of the cups. LMO said we will look into this.

3. Presentation about the Education and Outreach Service of The National Archives – Andrew Payne, Head of Education and Outreach.

3.1 AP explained that three words underpin TNA's Education and Outreach programmes: Inspire, Challenge, Support. He said that the department aims to inspire the public to engage with and explore the breadth and variety of public records held by TNA, and to help people do this. He said that to reach a variety of people and enable them to engage in archives we have to re-think archives as being not just available to them, but actively presented to them. The presentation can be found here: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/presentation-user-forum-on-education-and-outreach.pdf>

3.2 Q. GW asked how far Education and Outreach's work with undergraduates extended.

A. AP explained that in broad terms Education and ARK (Archives and Records Knowledge) work together to provide service to educational institutions. He said that Education and Outreach are working to enable the transition from A-level to university level.

3.3 Q. DM pointed out that there is downside to using archives as we sometimes only have one side of the story; there are many more views than only those easily available in an archive.

A. AP agreed that it can be a difficulty but that E&O endeavours to make students aware of the diversity of records held here, so that by discovering documents which show different points of view they can start to understand why the view of history is

always changing. He added that students are tested in E&O programmes on why there are different interpretations.

3.4 Q. Has your work had an influence on traditional users of archives?

A. AP said that increasingly it does, as the way Education works with students has had an influence on how record specialists interact with other users. There is an increasing commonality in how we approach all our audience.

3.5 Q. Do you have links to archives in other countries, or have joint projects with them?

A. AP said we do to a limited extent and plan to extend this in future. AP said that we do have links with American universities, and work with American teachers about our countries' shared history, including the American colonies, the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the First and Second World Wars. This collaboration has been very interesting, and we would like to expand international co-operation.

4. Improving access to WO 416: German Index cards of British and Commonwealth Prisoners of War, Second World War – Roger Kershaw, Head of Audiences (Delivery), Advice and Records Knowledge Department

4.1 RK gave a presentation on WO 416, in which he explained how the information in the series will be captured, and how access to the records will be enabled. The presentation can be found here: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/user-forum-presentation-prisoner-of-war-november-2016.pdf>

RK explained that the sorting and indexing of the files will be completed by volunteers who will be under close supervision and working in a secure environment. The project is scheduled for completion in 2019.

4.2 Q. GW asked what the process is for looking at open records.

A. RK said the envelope with the cards for that person will be produced, probably in the Invigilation Room, in the same way as BT 372.

4.3 Q. Germans often conflate England with the UK – how will you differentiate between England and the UK for these records?

A. The volunteers are very aware of these kinds of issues, and have the skills to deal with them.

5. Changes to the First Floor – Lee Oliver, Head of Quality and Excellence

5.1 LMO explained that TNA's strategy for 2015-2019, Archives Inspire, aims to inspire the public with our collection. This philosophy has inspired us to re-imagine the Kew site as a vibrant, welcoming, learning environment, and we will continue to make changes to reflect this. A new events space is currently being developed. This will be flexible and multipurpose, with the capacity for up to 250 seats. It will allow us to cater to a wide audience including researchers, families, school children and adult learners. It will also allow us to hold more ambitious events and activities. The presentation can be found here:

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/public-space-programme-presentation-for-user-forum-november-2016.pdf>

5.2 Q. DM asked what is meant by a 'serious researcher'.

A. LMO said this is a term our architects used as a working short hand for one of the types of users at TNA, in order to help them map the space. It is not a description TNA uses.

5.3 Q. The number of computers has been reduced in the reading rooms – how much further will they be reduced?

A. We envisage more people using their own devices, and we will be increasing our WiFi capacity. The reduction of computers has not had an impact on visitors. We realise that not everyone has a device, which is why we intend to keep some computers available for public use.

6. Open discussion

6.1 Why did TNA not mark the 50th anniversary of the Aberfan disaster?

A. LMO said there was a lot of publicity concerning this some years ago, when records of the disaster were released. There are many important anniversaries which TNA could commemorate; we cannot mark them all.

6.2 GW said that the Terms of Reference for the User Advisory Group states that the UAG and the User Forum are two distinct groups, but that 'it is likely that there will be links and communication channels between the two groups, in both directions.'

In May he queried the amount of reporting back from UAG and was told there would be reports on two meetings in the August User Forum. However the August UF minutes only state that a discussion about noise in the reading room had been resolved. Two months after the September UAG took place, the minutes are still not available on the website. In the June UAG, there was discussion of digitisation issues, though there is currently nothing about this on the website.

A. LMO said that Kristina Bedford did come to the August UF to report on the UAG, however two items were confidential and could not be minuted.

He said we would have liked to have had the September UAG minutes available before this UF, but that there is currently a delay in getting them cleared for publication.

LMO agreed such presentations should be minuted, but pointed out that there were only two exceptions to reporting from UAG, firstly where the February User Forum was given over to the MoD, which had been requested by the group, and the confidential items mentioned in the August Forum. He said that Kristina and the UAG delegates are happy to be approached with enquiries.

6.3. Q. The pencil lead in the TNA shop pencils is very difficult to make a mark with.

A PRO pencil from the 1970s has a much better lead!

A. LMO said he will speak to the book shop about this.

Post-meeting note – these were old stock pencils. There will soon be a new pencil in stock.

6.4. Q. What is the future of the London FamilySearch Centre at TNA?

A. LMO said that they have been at TNA longer than originally envisaged, and their presence will diminish from June 2017 by a mutual decision. We will review the situation in March 2019. We hope to continue to be able to provide access to their records, but the LFSC do want to move to their new home in London.

6.5 CE said that AIR 81 RAF Casualties series description needs updating as no records have been transferred for some time.

Post-meeting note – the series description is correct, as the series is still accruing.

6.6 GW requested that back dated lists of User Forums and User Advisory Groups meeting dates are available on their respective home pages.

LMO said we will take this away.

7. Date of next meeting: Thursday 16 February 2017, 12:30 - 13:45