The National Archives

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djs research

An Evaluation of "Archives for the 21st Century"

A report prepared for The National Archives by DJS Research

June 2015

This report encompasses two distinct pieces of research, conducted by DJS Research and Elizabeth Oxborrow-Cowan respectively (Consultant Archivist).

Section 1 of the report presents the findings of DJS Research's research with members of the archive sector.

Section 2 of the report presents the findings of Elizabeth Oxborrow-Cowan's research with TNA's stakeholders.

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SECTION 1

1. Executive Summary

Background

In response to the 2009 Government policy, "Archives for the 21st Century" (A21C), The National Archives (TNA), as lead body for the English archives sector, published "Archives for the 21st Century in Action – refreshed" in 2012. This document showcases successful work under <u>five broad policy objectives</u>, and acts as a call to action for archives to put these priority areas into practice for individual users, their communities, and the nation. The plan also highlighted TNA's commitment to support archives to address these policy areas in the light of evolving contexts and expectations.

The five Government policy areas and the five corresponding TNA action points are highlighted below:

	Government policy area	TNA action point
1.	Develop bigger and better services in partnership – working towards increased sustainability within the sector	Built to last
2.	Strengthened leadership and a responsive, skilled workforce	Effective, skilled workforce
3.	Co-ordinated response to the growing challenges of managing digital information so that it is accessible now and remains discoverable in the future	Digital by design
4.	Comprehensive online access for archive discovery through catalogues and to digitised archive content	More accessible online
5.	Active participation in cultural and learning partnerships promoting a sense of identity and place within the community	Real outcomes through partnership

Having set out these aims for the sector for 2012 – 2015, The National Archives required a programme of independent research to report back on progress against the action plan. The overarching objective of the research is to gain feedback from the sector on progress to date, as well as assessing the continued relevance of key policy areas.

Taking stock of the past five years

While the past five years have seen fundamental contextual change for the sector, from rapid resourcing reductions to increasing user expectations (and a perceived diminished profile within organisations), A21C has been valuable to almost all archives, with a good proportion actively using the policy. Most services consider The National Archives to have led in the adoption of A21C.

Progress against objectives

Of the five policy areas, the archives sector identified success in increasing online accessibility and building local partnerships, due in part to an increase in the public profile of archives. Digitisation is considered an important area, but appears to have overwhelmed the sector thus far.

The value of shared services and collaborations is clearly recognised and evidenced by numerous successful projects. However, the impetus for large-scale projects can result in inconsistency and instability across the sector. The workforce also remains an area for concern, with reduced staffing, skills gaps, and a challenging leadership environment posing a real risk of de-professionalisation.

Priorities for the next five years

Though at different stages of implementation, the archives sector considers existing objectives will retain their relevance in the future. In particular, the sector requires most help with *Digital by Design*, and the continued development of an *Effective skilled workforce*.

The archives sector seeks a shift from the awareness-raising of the past five years to a desire for action in the next five years. The sector now requires the means to implement change and requires even stronger leadership from The National Archives to secure resources, advocate for the sector, and raise its profile.

Accordingly, challenges with funding, profile or value of the sector, and also the need for physical space, emerge as priority areas for inclusion in future policy. Furthermore, there is a call for a more inclusive approach overall to increase regional and cross-sector relevance (i.e. to ensure the focus is not fixed too firmly on the public sector).

2. Background

2.1. Research context

In response to the 2009 Government policy, "Archives for the 21st Century" (A21C), The National Archives (TNA), as lead body for the English archives sector, published "Archives for the 21st Century in Action – refreshed" in 2012. This document showcases successful work under <u>five broad policy objectives</u>, and acts as a call to action for archives to put these priority areas into practice for individual users, their communities, and the nation. The plan also highlighted TNA's commitment to support archives to address these policy areas in the light of evolving contexts and expectations.

The five Government policy areas and the five corresponding TNA action points are highlighted below:

	Government policy area	TNA action point
1.	Develop bigger and better services in partnership – working towards increased sustainability within the sector	**Built to last**
2.	Strengthened leadership and a responsive, skilled workforce	**Effective, skilled workforce**
3.	Co-ordinated response to the growing challenges of managing digital information so that it is accessible now and remains discoverable in the future	**Digital by design**
4.	Comprehensive online access for archive discovery through catalogues and to digitised archive content	**More accessible online**
5.	Active participation in cultural and learning partnerships promoting a sense of identity and place within the community	**Real outcomes through partnership**

2.2. Research objectives

Having set out aims for the sector for 2012 – 2015, The National Archives now requires a programme of independent research to report back on progress against the action plan.

The overarching objective of the research is to gain feedback from the sector on progress to date on the action points, as well as assessing the continued relevance of key areas for the coming years.

More specifically, the research sets out to:

- evaluate progress made by The National Archives and the sector against the *Archives for the 21st Century* action plan

- establish the sector's perception of the continuing relevance of the five policy objectives as outlined in *Archives for the 21st Century*

- identify the key current challenges and opportunities for the sector, particularly with a view to encouraging services to modernise

- outline realistic recommendations for The National Archives in relation to its support for the sector over the next 3-5 years

2.3. Research methodology

Multiple research methodologies were used across three distinct research phases, as discussed below:

Phase 1 - Literature review	
1 day consultancy	A focussed review of literature from key organisations. This stage assessed current themes and issues to feed into the further research stages.

Phase 2 - Qualitative research	
2 focus groups	A call for volunteers was made via an email to the sector from TNA. DJS Research recruited respondents from across the sector to participate.

Phase 3 - Quantitative research	
74 online surveys	An open link to the survey was placed on the TNA website between 20th February and 24th March inviting responses from the sector. The survey included prompted and unprompted questions.

2.3.1.   Qualitative research

The qualitative research phase involved focus groups in two locations and drew participants from across the country. A supplementary telephone interview was conducted to ensure representativeness across the whole sector. The number of participants representing various sectors is highlighted in the following table:

Sector	1 x **Manchester** group (19.11.15)	1 x **London** group (26.11.14)	1 x **Telephone interview**
Local Authority archive	3	2	
Private archive	1	1	
Museum / Cultural archive		1	
Business archive	2		
Charity archive		1	
National Institution		1	
University archive		1	
Community archive	1	1	
Hospital archive		1	
Independent consultant / other	1	1	
Senior Management			1
Total participants	**8**	**12**	**1**

2.3.2.   Quantitative research

The quantitative research phase included 74 participants across a broad range of organisation types. Participants were spread across England, although predominantly in London and the South East. The following tables assess the sector and geographical spread of participants:

Sector	Number of participants
Local Authority archive	23
University archive	7
Museum archive	4
Business archive	4
Religious archive	4
Charity archive	3
Private archive	2
Other type of archive	1
National Institution	6
Professional body	2
Other type of organisation	5
Individual	9
TNA staff member	4
Total participants	**74**

Location	Number of participants
London	37
South East	8
West Midlands	8
North West	6
South West	4
Yorkshire and Humber	4
East of England	3
East Midlands	3
North East	1
Total participants	**74**

2.3.2.   Quantitative research

3. The past five years: taking stock

The past five years have seen fundamental contextual change for the sector, from rapid resourcing reductions, to increasing user expectations and a perceived diminished profile within organisations; there is a palpable sense of ennui.

Despite this, significant progress and positivity is identified in two key areas:

- online access
- local learning partnerships

A21C has been valuable to almost all archives, with a good proportion actively using the policy.

Most consider TNA to have led in adoption of A21C, especially in online access, through Discovery, considered to be a significant step forwards.

3.1. Response to the policy objectives

Half of participants representing archives feel they have responded to the policy successfully to some extent. When asked why, verbatim comments reveal that the focus is on three key areas:

- Built to Last
- More accessible online
- Real outcomes through partnerships

Two policy areas are, however, cited as challenges:

- Effective skilled workforce
- Digital by design (particularly born digital)

The following chart provides an insight into the proportion of participants from archive services who feel that their organisation has been successful in responding to the five policy objectives of *Archives for the 21st Century* over the last five years.

% of participants				
2	50	29	8	10

■Very successful ■Quite successful ■Not very successful ■Irrelevant to organisation ■Don't know
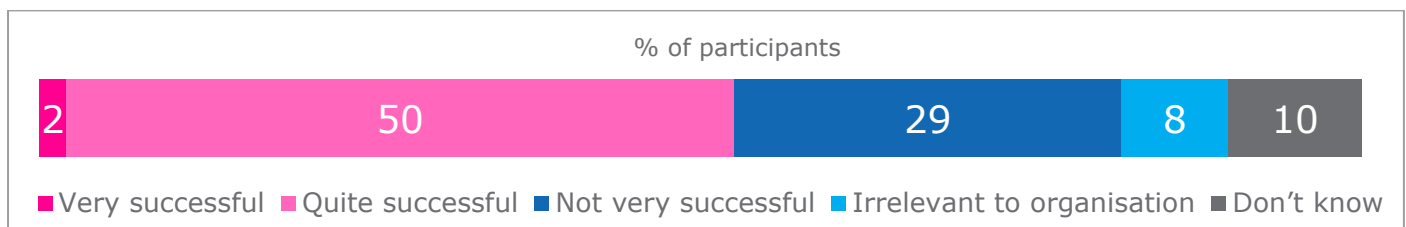
Q: Overall, how successful do you feel that your organisation has been in responding to the five policy objectives of Archives for the 21st Century over the last five years?

Base: All archive participants (48)
Prompted response

3.2. Achievements and challenges for the sector

Participants were asked what they thought had been the three main achievements of the archives sector in the last five years.

While the sector's elevated public profile is spontaneously cited as the greatest achievement over the past five years, an assessment of participants' verbatim comments establishes a clear link between the policy area of real outcomes through partnership, and the sector's elevated public profile. Almost a third of all participants refer to the survival of the sector as a key achievement. Online resources are also mentioned as an achievement.

% of participants

Elevated public profile	40
Technological advance / online resources	33
Partnerships / collaboration	31
Survival of sector	29
Innovation and adaptation	18
Maintaining standards	17
Accreditation	13
Advocacy	10
New facilities	7
Volunteering / internships	7
Heritage activities / outreach	7
Cataloguing	7
Accessibility	3
Other	35
Don't know	1

Q: What do you feel have been the three main achievements of the archives sector in the last five years?

Base: All participants answering (72)
Open response

In responding to the question, which had been the three main challenges of the archives sector in the last five years, almost all participants pointed to funding cuts. Digital preservation was mentioned by two thirds of all participants as outlined in the following chart.

% of participants

Funding cuts	92
Digital preservation	65
Raising sector profile	14
Loss of posts	14
Changing governance	11
Accessibility / hidden collections	11
Managing user expectations	10
Declining user base	8
Demonstrating value	7
De-professionalisation	6
Sustainabilitiy	3
Widening audience	3
Other	22
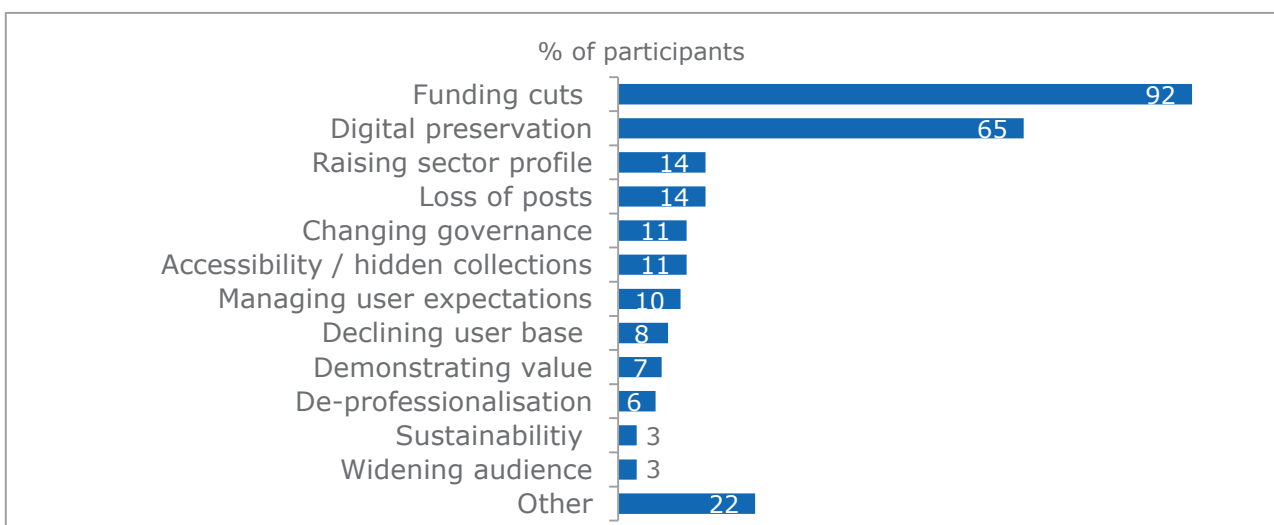
Q: Thinking about the last five years, what do you feel have been the three main challenges that the archives sector as a whole has faced?

Base: All participants answering (72)
Open response

3.3. Challenges for archives

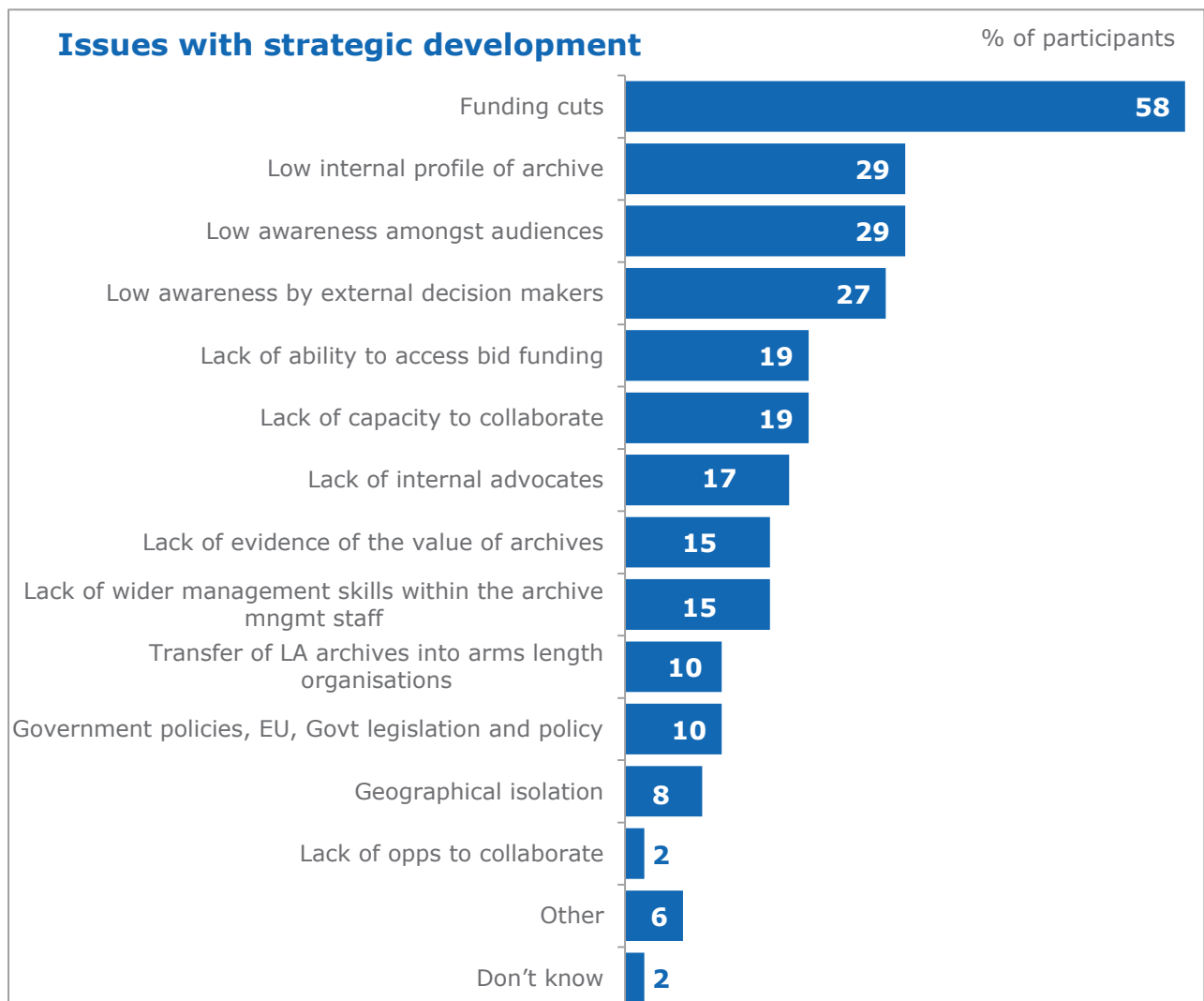Participants representing archives were asked to provide insights into which strategic and operational challenges they had faced over the past five years. Participants were allowed to select up to three strategic and three operational challenges from two dedicated lists of issues (which were developed from the qualitative research).

While the challenges to their strategic development were similar to the challenges faced by the archive sector as a whole, i.e. funding cuts and low internal profile of archives, operationally, maintaining an effective workforce, as well as cataloguing (particularly dealing with cataloguing backlogs and continuing to catalogue new collections) have been key challenges.

The following charts analyse the full range of strategic and operational challenges archives may have faced in the past five years.

Issues with strategic development   % of participants

Issue	%
Funding cuts	58
Low internal profile of archive	29
Low awareness amongst audiences	29
Low awareness by external decision makers	27
Lack of ability to access bid funding	19
Lack of capacity to collaborate	19
Lack of internal advocates	17
Lack of evidence of the value of archives	15
Lack of wider management skills within the archive mngmt staff	15
Transfer of LA archives into arms length organisations	10
Government policies, EU, Govt legislation and policy	10
Geographical isolation	8
Lack of opps to collaborate	2
Other	6
Don't know	2

Q: Below are a list of issues that some archives may have faced over the last five years. Please indicate up to three that you feel have been issues for the strategic development of your archive service in the last five years.

Base: All archive participants (48) Prompted response

Issues for the operational development

% of participants

Issue	%
Lack of capacity - staff	56
Cataloguing backlogs	54
Lack of or diminished funding	48
Lack of or diminishing resources - accomodation, online	33
Skills gaps	33
Falling site vistors	21
Increasing numbers of remote visitors	15
Geographical isolation	2
Other	6
Don't know	4

Base: All archive participants (48)
Prompted response
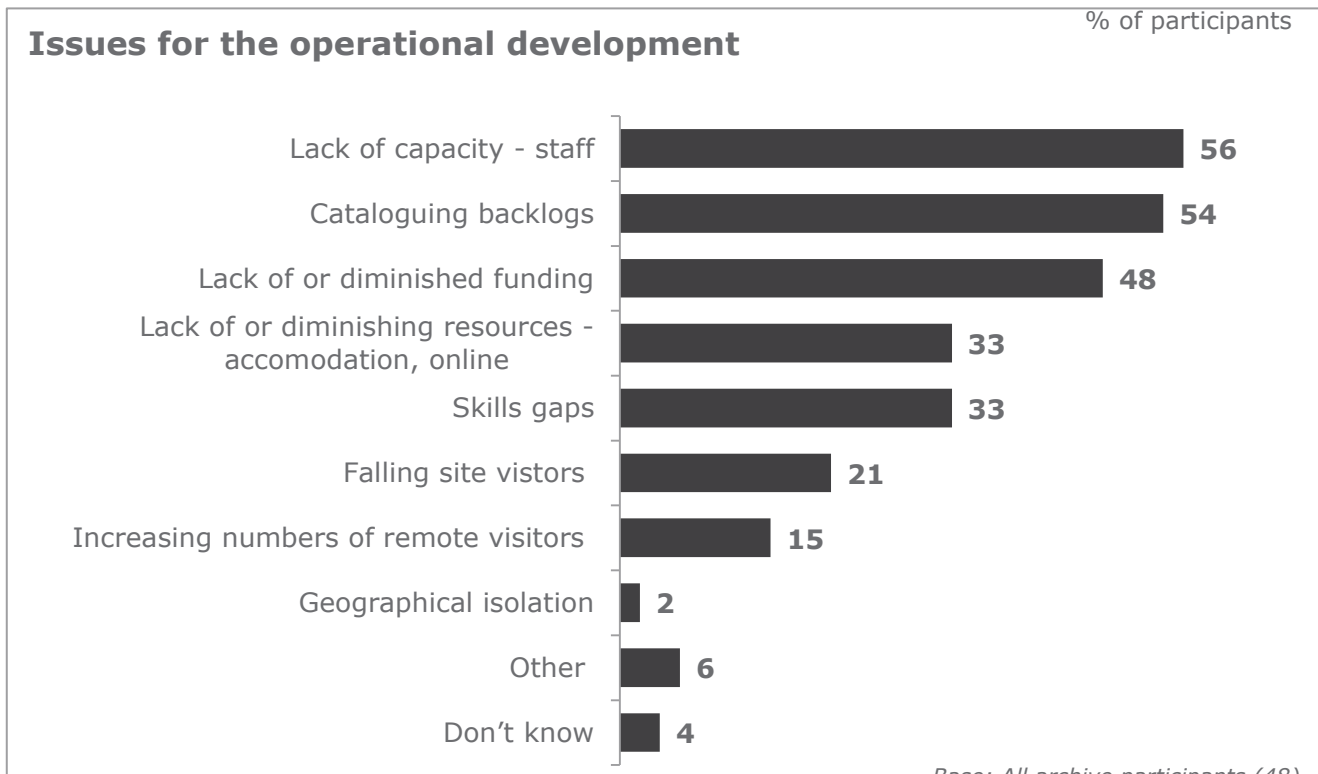
Q: Below are a list of issues that some archives may have faced over the last five years. Please indicate up to three that you feel have been the main issues which have faced the operational activities of your archive service in the last five years.

While reduced funding (92%) does indeed appear to be a preoccupation for the sector, and is identified as having had a direct impact on development, the changing nature of funding is also identified as problematic.

Participants in the London focus group noted that increased project-based funding was resulting in short-term financial partnerships, which impacted negatively on the scope for prolonged development and led to inconsistency across the sector.

Archives' low profile amongst stakeholders and the perceived reduced value of archives is also seen to have hindered development and generates a sense of dissatisfaction in the sector. Critically, participants are calling for a stronger card to play when dealing with leaders and stakeholders within their organisations in order to confront the negative dynamics that are posing a threat to the profession.

Furthermore, the changing structure of sector bodies (for example, the demise of the MLA) has resulted in notable uncertainty about governance and representation, as well as generating some anxiety regarding transparency. In particular, financial arrangements between TNA and ARA would benefit from being more transparent.

Some organisations can also feel isolated from the sector more widely, which can add to strategic difficulties. Some feel the sector is fragmenting structurally, especially as public services are outsourced. Others felt that the policy focuses mainly on the public sector, but felt that other types of archives should be more widely included, too.

3.4. Role and use of the policy

Almost all participants consider *Archives for the 21st Century* to have been valuable, both to the sector as well as to archives specifically. Participants felt A21C highlighted issues and raised awareness, rather than critically analyse or enable change. For example, fewer felt that it has encouraged collaboration or improvement in skills or analysis of key priorities.

The following charts assess how *Archives for the 21st Century* has positively impacted on **archives specifically** and the wider **archive sector more generally**:

% of participants		% of participants
58	Highlights issues archives face	**65**
58	Identifies sector wide issues	**61**
44	Raises awareness of the archives collections and their value	**51**
42	Raises awareness of the need for digital preservation	**61**
38	Independent analysis of the key priorities for the sector	**39**
33	A basis for thinking creatively	**32**
31	Authoritative analysis of key priorities	**36**
27	Raises awareness of the need for online resources	**45**
25	Encourages greater collaboration	**50**
25	Encourages improvement in skills capacity	**35**
6	Other	**8**
4	It is of no value	**1**

A R C H I V E S

S E C T O R

Base: All archive participants (48)
Q: How would you describe the value of Archives for the 21st Century for your organisation?

Base: All participants (74)
Prompted response
Codes identified from the qualitative research

Q: Thinking about the wider sector how would you describe the value of Archives for 21st Century?

More than **half of all participating archives** have used the policy in the past five years. The following table provides an insight into **how participating archives have used** *Archives for the 21st Century* over the past five years:

% of participants

Used to provide a basis for strategic planning	46
Used to advocate for service within the wider organisation	33
Used to highlight key priorities to stakeholders	21
Used to argue for additional resource	6
Other	4

Q: Which of the following best describes how you have used Archives for the 21st Century?

Base: All archive participants (48)
Prompted response

While *Archives for the 21st Century* has been used quite widely, some archives' **lack of influence or profile** within their organisations can **reduce the impact** of such documents. For example, a third of archive services felt that the archivist had too little influence within the organisation.

The following issues have **impacted on archives' usage** of *Archives for the 21st Century* in participants' respective organisations.

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% of participants

Archivist has too little influence within the organisation	35
Line managers not aware of the policy	31
Not seen as relevant by line managers of the service	19
Service staff not aware of the policy	13
Not seen as relevant by service staff	10
The objectives are not relevant to my organisation	6
Other	13
None of these	31

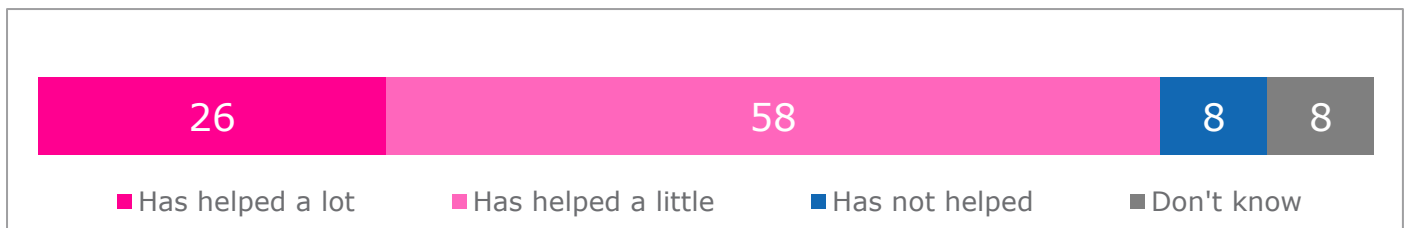## 3.5. The National Archives' role

There is widespread recognition of TNA's role in leading adoption of policy objectives, especially through Discovery. In some cases however, the verbatim comments reveal that TNA could demonstrate much stronger leadership, principally on the issue of digitisation and helping archives to deal with the growing pressures in this area. More information is provided in relation to this later in this document.

The following chart assesses to what extent The National Archives has helped the archives sector to work with *Archives for the 21st Century* through its leadership role for the sector:

% of participants

Q: *To what extent has The National Archives helped the archives sector to work with Archives for the 21st Century through its leadership role for the sector?*

Base: All participants (74)
Prompted response

26	58	8	8

■ Has helped a lot   ■ Has helped a little   ■ Has not helped   ■ Don't know

The majority of participants (84%) identify ways in which The National Archives has helped the sector more broadly. In particular, the following means of TNA support were mentioned:

- **Archives accreditation scheme** – helps provide something concrete for archives to work with, improve quality and assess progress. This in itself had helped some archive services to discuss their plans internally with senior managers because it starts to create an impetus around service development

- **Training** – many participants noted training provided by TNA, and in particular free training

- **Raising public profile of archives** through high profile projects such as TNA's collection of First World War records, as well as archives awareness week

4. Progress against objectives

The wider sector identifies its key successes to be online accessibility and local partnerships or raised public profile. Digitisation, though clearly an area of focus, appears to have overwhelmed the sector thus far.

The value of shared services and collaborations is clearly recognised and evidenced by numerous successful projects. However, the impetus for large-scale projects can result in inconsistency and instability across the sector, whilst the emphasis on "bigger and better" can appear less relevant to some.

Other than positive training initiatives, the workforce remains an area for concern in the sector, with reduced staffing, skills gaps and a lack of leadership posing a real risk of de-professionalisation.

4.1. The National Archives' and wider sector progress

Participants were asked to what extent they felt that The National Archives has met the objectives set out in each of the policy areas outlined in *Archives for the 21st Century*.

TNA are considered to have made most progress against the objectives of online accessibility and local partnerships. The workforce appears to be the area in which least progress has been made.

% of participants

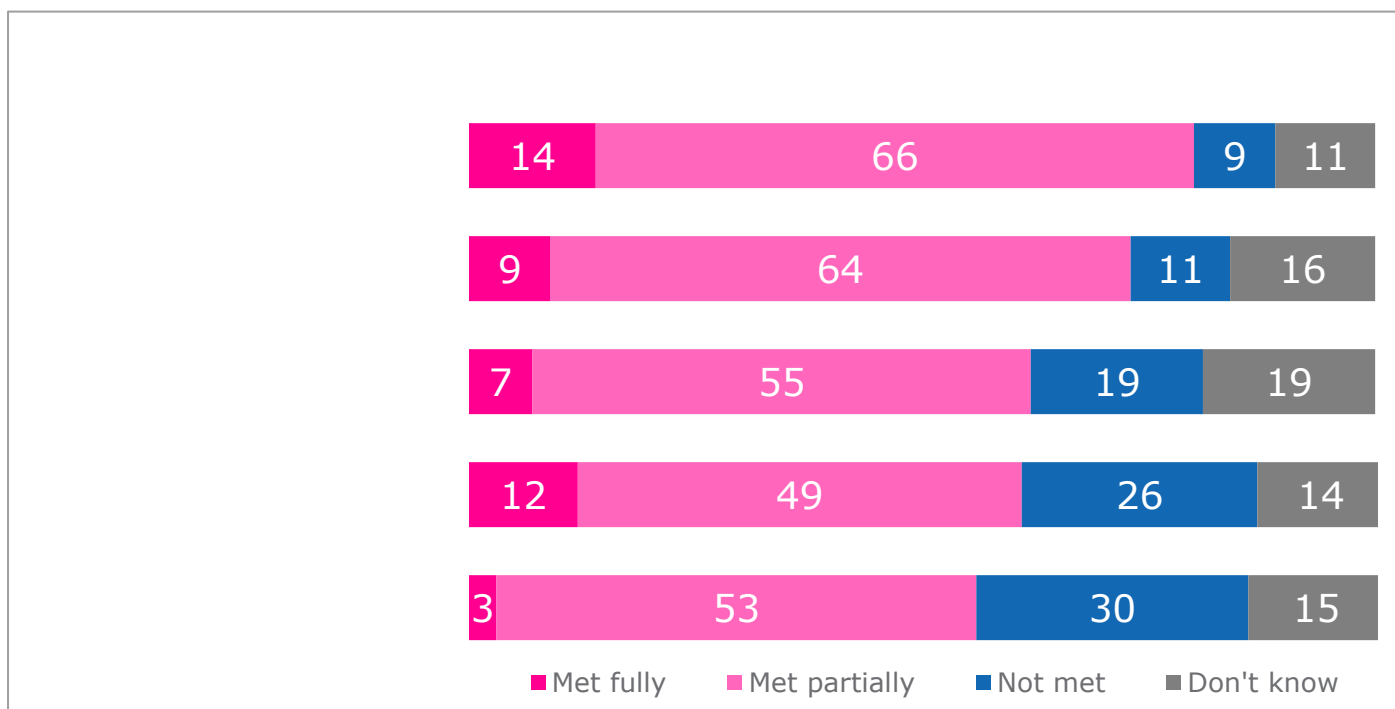**More accessible online**

Real outcomes through partnership

Built to last

Digital by design

Effective, skilled workforce

Q: For each of the policy areas outlined in Archives for the 21st Century, to what extent do you feel that The National Archives has met the objectives set out in its action plan?

Met fully	Met partially	Not met	Don't know
14	66	9	11
9	64	11	16
7	55	19	19
12	49	26	14
3	53	30	15

■ Met fully ■ Met partially ■ Not met ■ Don't know

Thinking about the policy areas outlined in *Archives for the 21st Century*, participants were also asked with which they felt **the sector as a whole has had the most success** or made the most improvements.

The sector is also considered to have improved most in the two key areas of **online accessibility** and **partnerships**. The **effective workforce** and **service collaborations** emerge as the weakest areas, as outlined in the chart below.

% of participants
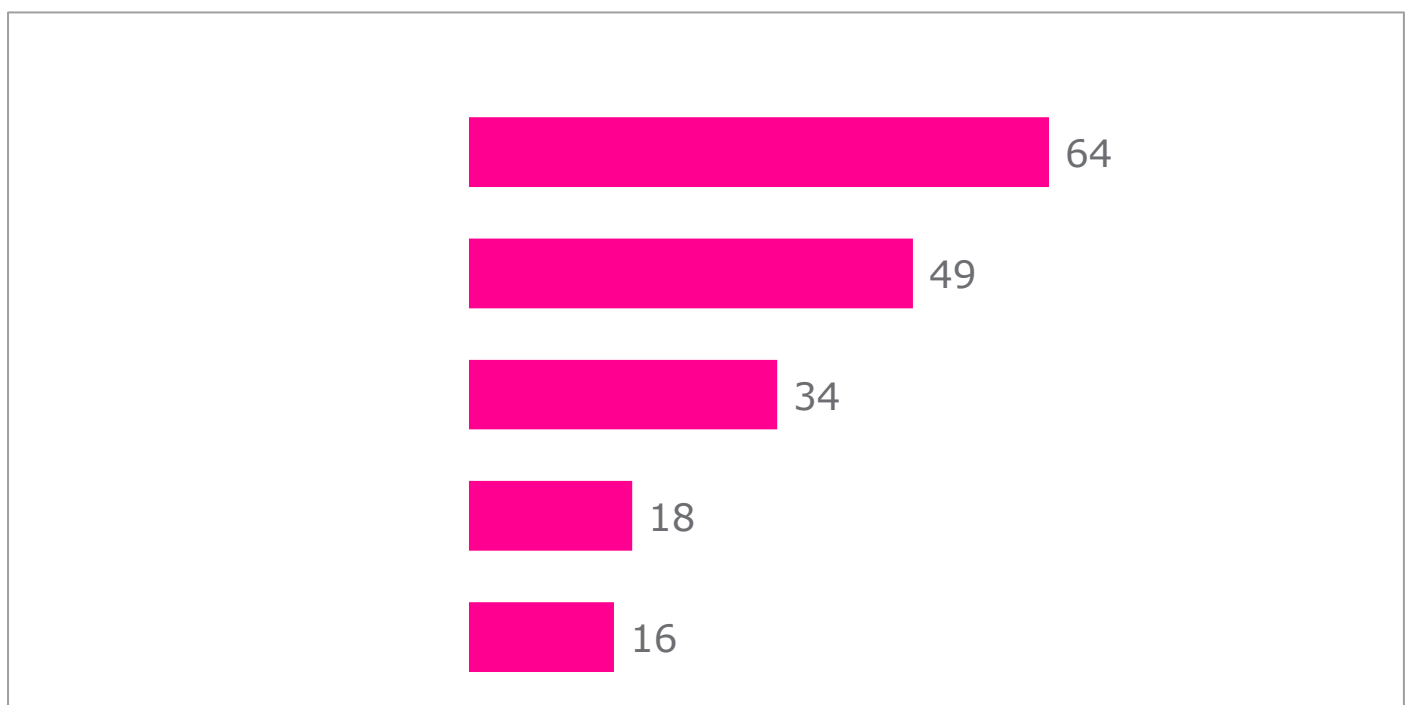
More accessible online

Real outcomes through partnership

Digital by design

Effective, skilled workforce

Built to last

Q: Thinking about the policy areas outlined in Archives for the 21st Century, with which do you feel the sector as a whole has had the most success or made the most improvements?

Base: All participants (74)
Prompted response

64

49

34

18

16

4.1.1. More accessible online

There is widespread recognition of progress in making catalogues available online and the leading role taken by TNA in the **development of its *Discovery* system**.

Online accessibility is however not identified as a success entirely, as **challenges and perceived problems** with the online systems developed, especially *Discovery*, remain a **major concern**. In relation to *Discovery*, the following three challenges were raised most frequently:

- difficult to update
- invisible in search engines
- difficult to search

4.1.2. Real outcomes through partnership

While there is recognition of the **long-standing success** of partnership initiatives, the challenge remains to render outreach relevant to and achievable for all collections.

The following **issues** and **constraints** were raised in connection with the real outcomes through partnership objective specifically:

- Dependent on inherent **appeal of collections**
- Interpreted as most relevant to **Local Authorities**
- **Time** required to develop partnerships can be prohibitive
- Dependent on **local politics** and **personalities –** i.e. it may not be possible to develop partnerships in some situations because of local politics. Individual personalities are also important – people have to be willing to drive things forward in this area.

4.1.3. Digital by design

The strategic challenges of digital development are borne of the sector's attempts to adapt to changing social trends and attitudes towards information management.

This area does indeed appear to encompass many **fundamental strategic issues**, specifically:

- Changing **social mores** whereby "soft" information is no longer valued
- Anxiety about preservation and ownership of **born-digital information** – specifically what should be preserved
- Anxiety about **information management**, changing **software** and **protocols –** what systems should be used?

Whereas progress has been made by some in the sector, others face operational challenges from the **scale of the task in this area**:

- **Lack of time** and **reduced staffing**, resulting in inability to implement digitisation
- **The extent of information** produced and **how to manage** it
- Lack of **information sharing** and transfer of **best practice** across sector.
- Not all felt they had the **technical skills** needed to progress in this area

4.1.4.   Built to last

There is recognition of the positive value of working in partnership with different organisations and examples of **successful large-scale collaborations** being cited. TNA is considered to have progressed on this objective.

Working together with **completely different organisations**, as opposed to Local Authorities, is considered a very positive step. Examples of **successful commercial**

collaborations are cited:

The wider sector interprets the development of *Built to last* to have been **inconsistent**. The focus on "Bigger and Better" was also **unpopular** with many, as this made the objective appear **exclusive to larger services**.

4.1.5.   Effective, skilled workforce

The **evolving requirements of the archive service** are broadening beyond the traditional skills of the archivist, resulting in skills gaps for organisations and **anxiety for archival professionals**.

Some of the **skills required** of an archival professional include the following:

- Digital
- Educational
- Legal governance
- Marketing
- Project management

The proliferation of **volunteers in the sector** is variously interpreted, as either being a useful **community engagement** or indeed time-consuming **extra responsibility** in particular concerning the additional requirement of dedicated volunteer management policies. Some consider the rise of volunteers as a **threat to their own jobs**.

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5. The next five years: priorities

Though at different stages of implementation, all existing objectives are considered relevant for the future.   In particular, the sector requires most help with *Digital by Design* (the 3rd policy objective) and the continued development of an *Effective skilled workforce* (the 2nd policy objective).

There is however, a shift from the awareness-raising of the past five years, to a desire for action in the next five years. The sector now requires the means to implement change and seeks much stronger leadership from The National Archives, to secure resources, advocate for the sector and raise its profile.

Accordingly, challenges with funding, profile or value of the sector, and also the need for physical space, emerge as priority areas for inclusion in future policy. Furthermore, there is a call for a more inclusive approach overall, to increase regional and cross-sector relevance.

5.1. Relevance and evolution of objectives

Each of the five policy areas contained within *Archives for the 21st Century* will are considered important for the next five years. The qualitative research however did reveal a requirement for a **more inclusive policy** moving forwards, considering regional and cross-sector relevance. **Digital by design** (81%) and **effective, skilled workforce** (65%) were considered to be **very important** by the largest proportion of participants.
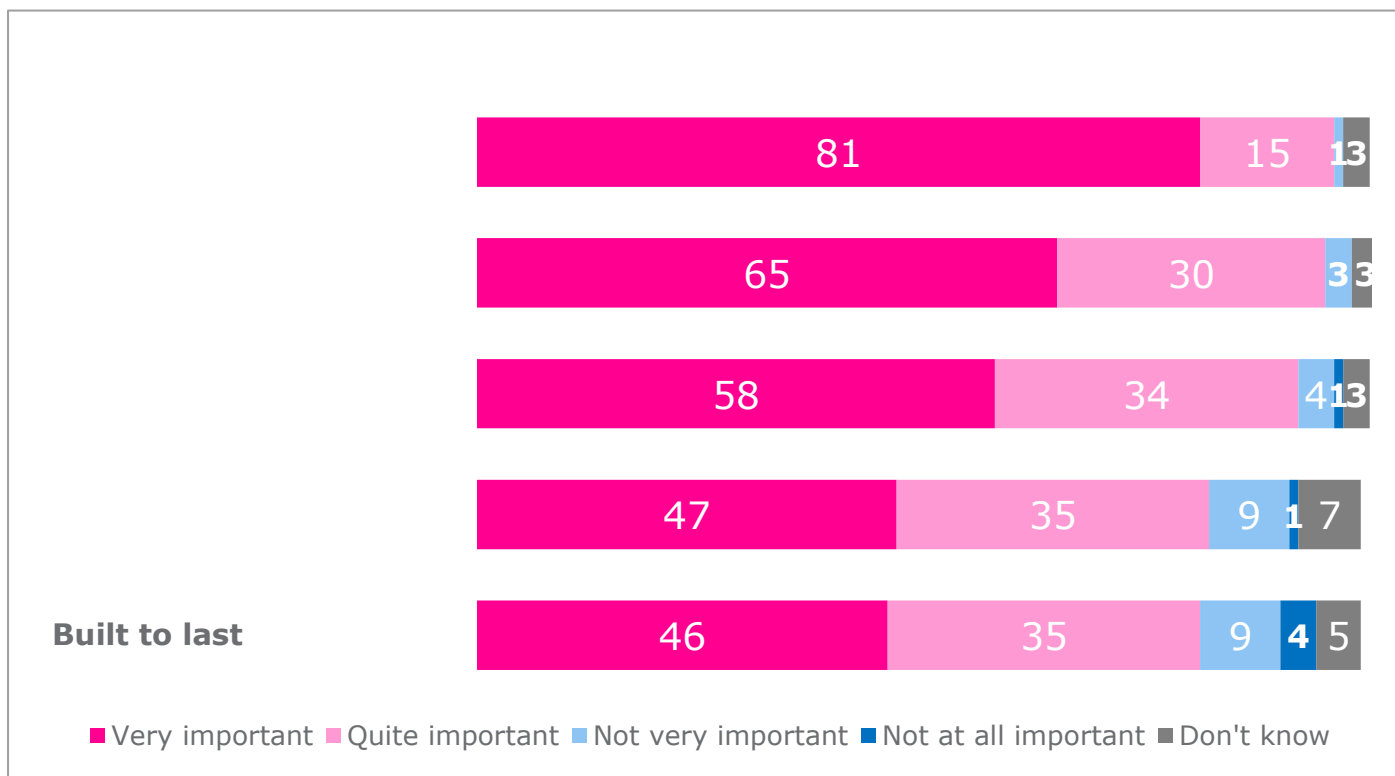
% of participants

Digital by design

Effective, skilled workforce

More accessible online

Real outcomes through partnership

Q: Moving forwards, how important do you feel that each of the five policy area contained within Archives for the 21ˢᵗ Century will be in the next five years?

81	15	1 3
65	30	3 3
58	34	4 1 3
47	35	9 1 7
Built to last 46	35	9 4 5

■ Very important ■ Quite important ■ Not very important ■ Not at all important ■ Don't know

Specifically in relation to the policy are **digital by design**, participants emphasised the distinct need to clarify **how progress** should be made.

In connection with the **built to last** policy area, participants highlighted the need to **broaden the scope** and remit to be **inclusive of businesses**. Moreover, emphasis should be on **long-term partnerships**.

Given the opportunity to select a single policy area that participants feel the sector will **most need help with** in the next five years, **digital by design** in particular emerges as a priority area for guidance.

% of participants

Digital by design
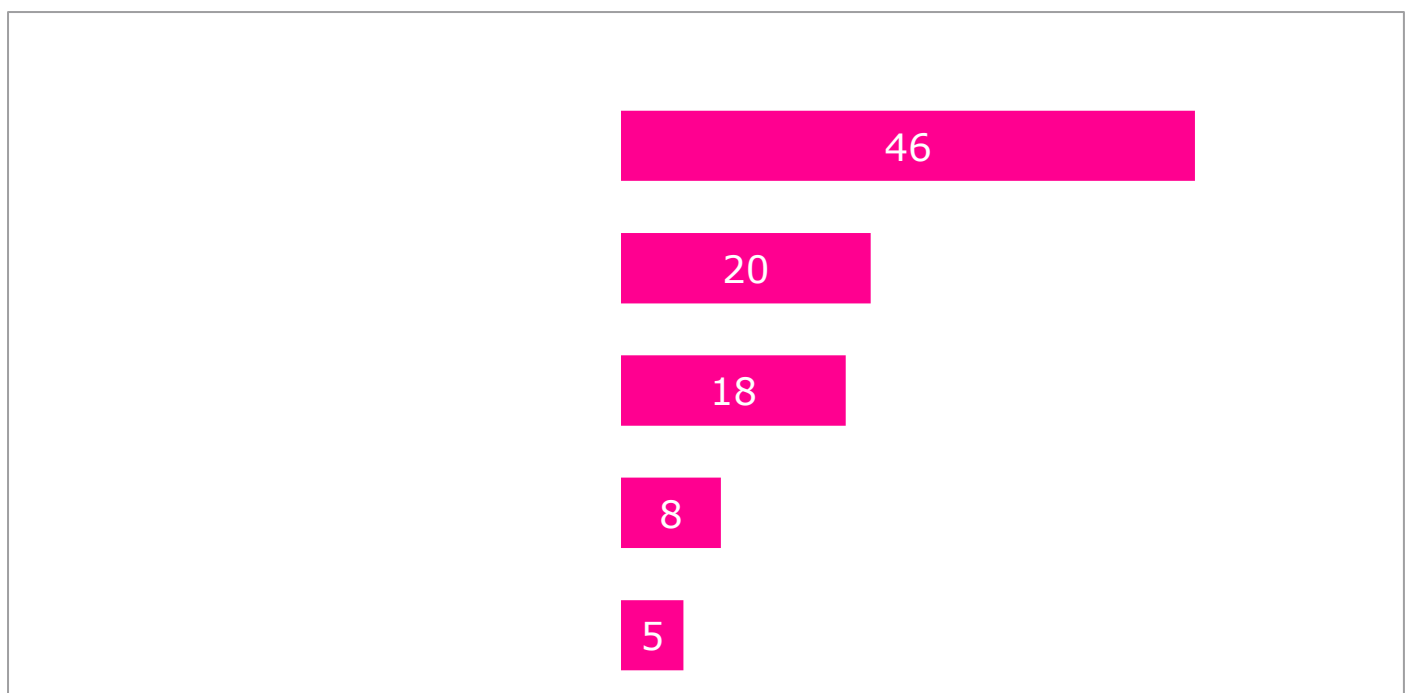
Effective, skilled workforce

More accessible online

Real outcomes through partnership

Built to last

Q: And which is the one that you feel the sector will most need help with in the next five years?

Base: All participants (74)
Prompted response

46	
20	
18	
8	
5	

5.2. The National Archives' role in achieving objectives

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Overall, the sector seeks **stronger representation** from TNA, **more leadership** and **more advocacy**. Simultaneously, there is a desire for a **more transparent**, more accountable TNA.

Furthermore, there is a desire for a **more inclusive** TNA, representative of cross-sector organisations, large and small. An exploration of the potential for **regional services** is also requested.

As highlighted in the previous section, the sector requires most support from TNA in the areas respondents consider most important in the next five years. This is particularly the case for **digital by design**.

5.2.1.   Digital by design

The emphasis for TNA in connection with this objective will be on more proactive facilitation of digitisation schemes, specifically through:

- **Advocating importance of digital preservation**

- **Engaging the IT profession**

- **Providing realistic, practical advice** in dealing with digital material

- **Securing funding** to help with progress in this area

- **Taking a leading role** in addressing the issue

- **Training and guidance** – a point of contact for questions relating to digital, providing further training courses in this area and helping archives to understand which training courses they should go on

5.2.2.   Effective, skilled workforce

TNA's role in the policy area of effective, skilled workforce should be to promote the **dissemination of knowledge** across the sector, as well as supporting a **transition to less traditional entries** into the profession. Participants commented in detail on the following issues in relation to effective, skilled workforce:

- **Assisting development of leadership skills in the sector**, and enabling leaders to become greater advocates for their services. Through the process of the research it did become clear that people felt that senior leaders were leaving the profession and taking their leadership skills with them leaving a gap in this area

- **Endorsing / supporting training**

- **Promoting knowledge sharing** and creating a marketplace for individuals to engage with each other

- **Supporting vocational entry into the profession** through financial aid, the creation of internships and apprenticeships

5.2.3.   Built to last

The sector requests support from TNA in securing funding to **facilitate long-term collaboration**, as well as assistance for **commercial negotiation** to move away from project-based funding. Participants point specifically toward more **effective liaising** with HLF and other funders.

5.2.4. Real outcomes through partnership

The priority for TNA will be to ensure the relevance and **suitability of local learning** or outreach across the sector by **advising archives** on how best to present and promote their collections.

5.2.5. More accessible online

The priority for TNA will be to **promote best practice** for online access by continuing to improve their own *Discovery* system and helping to achieve **consistency across the sector**.

Participants highlight the need for **Discovery** to be robust, easy to use and as flexible as possible in terms of uploading more content.

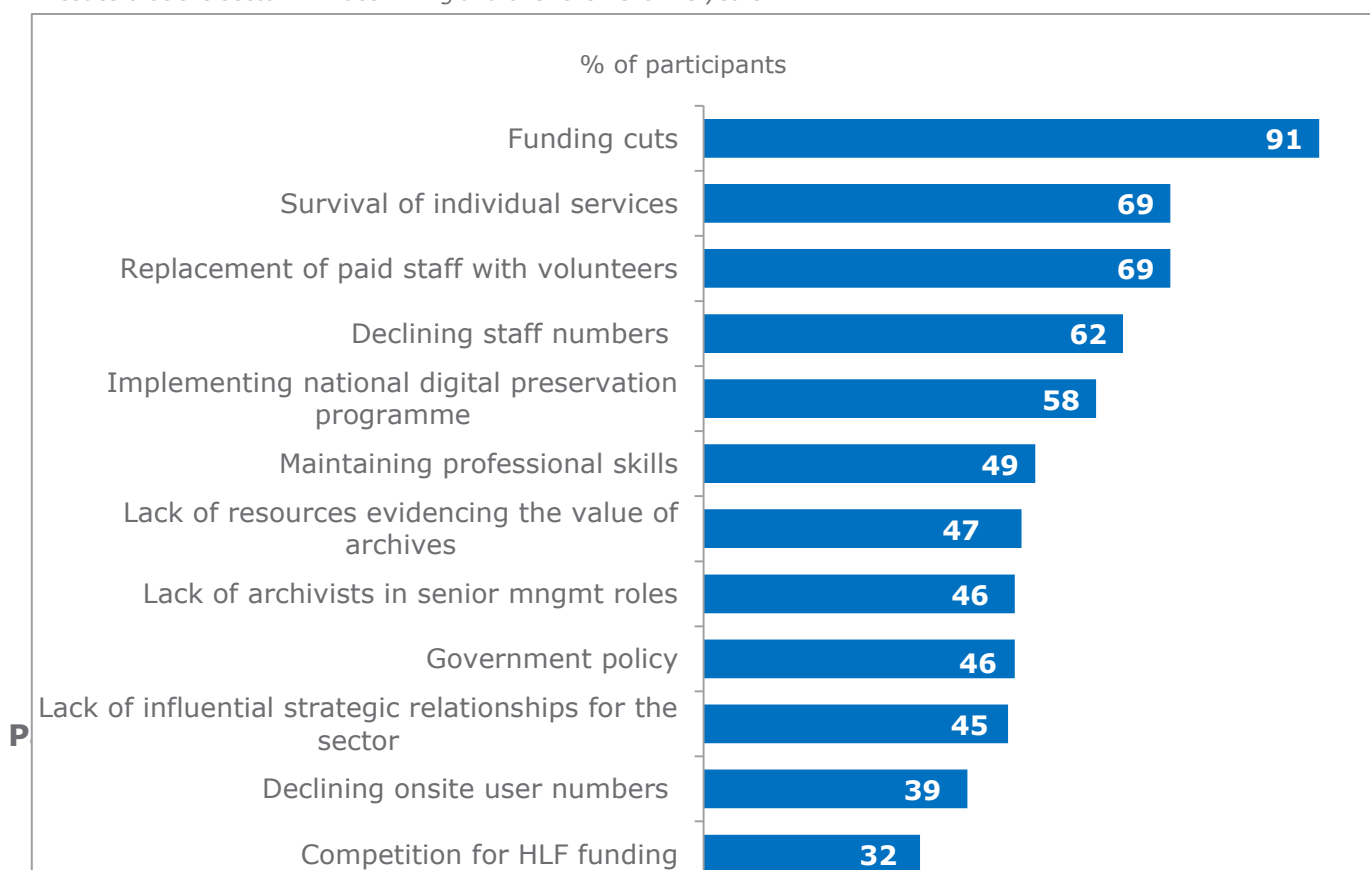### 5.2.4. Real outcomes through partnership

5.3. Future challenges and opportunities

Thinking about the wider sector, participants were asked what they felt were the **key issues** and **opportunities** that the sector will face in England over the next five years.

Perceived **challenges** for the coming years highlight the critical importance of **funding**, but also the survival of individual services.

Q: Thinking about the wider sector, what do you feel are the key issues that the sector will face in England over the next five years?

% of participants

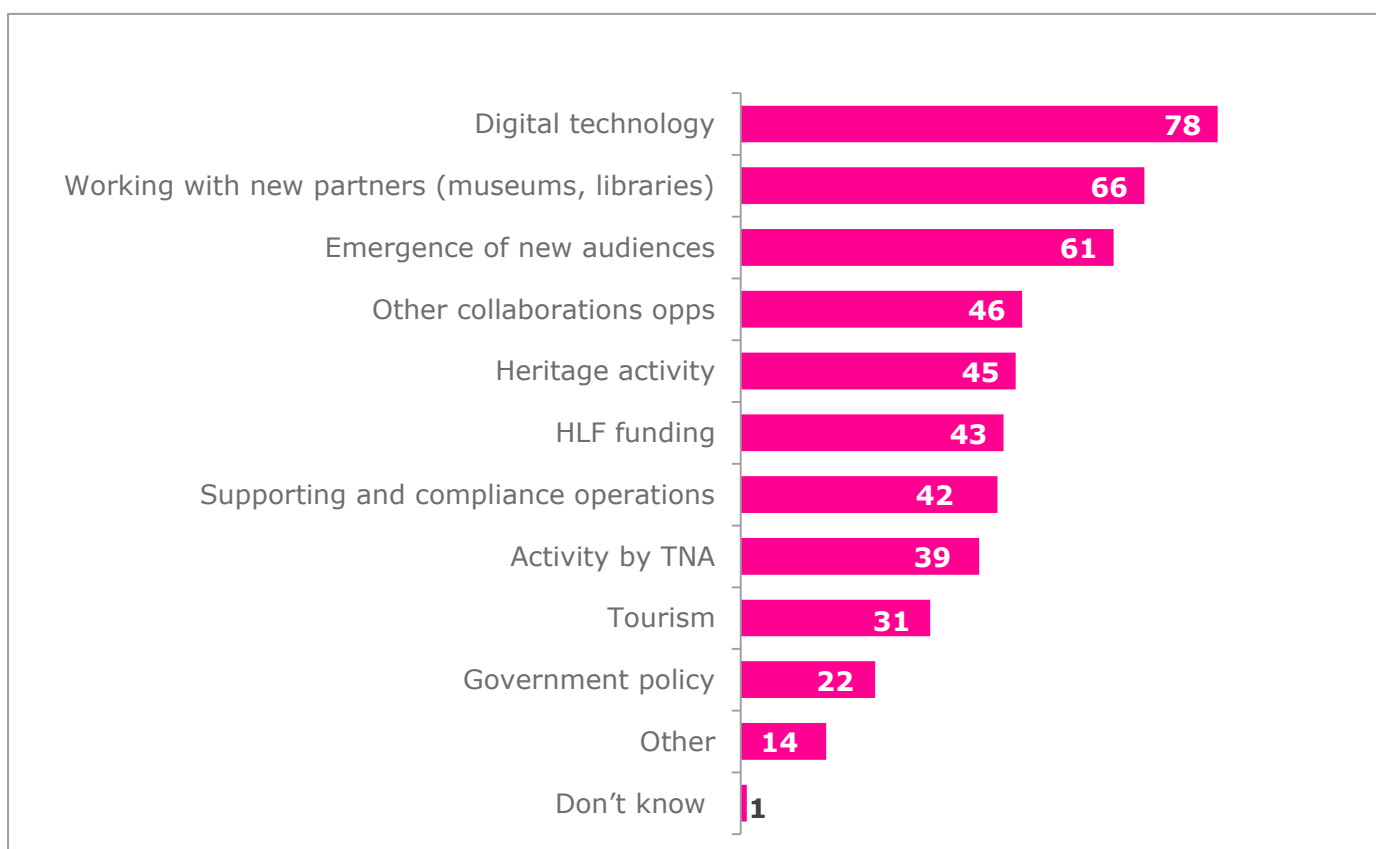| Issue	%
Funding cuts	91
Survival of individual services	69
Replacement of paid staff with volunteers	69
Declining staff numbers	62
Implementing national digital preservation programme	58
Maintaining professional skills	49
Lack of resources evidencing the value of archives	47
Lack of archivists in senior mngmt roles	46
Government policy	46
Lack of influential strategic relationships for the sector	45
Declining onsite user numbers	39
Competition for HLF funding	32

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Despite being considered one of the biggest past and future challenges to the sector and organisations, **digitisation** is also **considered the biggest opportunity**.

Q: Thinking about the wider sector, what are the main opportunities for the archive sector in England over the next five years?

Base: All participants (74)
Prompted response

Category	Value
Digital technology	78
Working with new partners (museums, libraries)	66
Emergence of new audiences	61
Other collaborations opps	46
Heritage activity	45
HLF funding	43
Supporting and compliance operations	42
Activity by TNA	39
Tourism	31
Government policy	22
Other	14
Don't know	1

5.3.1. Strategic challenges and opportunities

Participants were also asked to select the **three greatest strategic challenges** and the **three greatest strategic opportunities for the next five years** from two separate lists of pre-coded strategic challenges and opportunities respectively. Moreover, participants were asked an open ended follow-up question to list **other challenges and opportunities** which they felt would impact upon the strategic development of their service over the next five years.

Perceived **strategic challenges** for archives in the coming years hint at the critical importance of **funding**. The **lack of physical space** is highlighted by participants when asked to **list other challenges** that they feel would affect the strategic development of their service.

External collaboration, **archives service accreditation** and **digital preservation** and access are considered the most promising **opportunities for strategic development**. **Physical space** is mentioned most frequently by participants when asked to **list other strategic opportunities**.

The following charts assess the range of challenges and opportunities that are expected to impact upon the **strategic development** of participants' services.
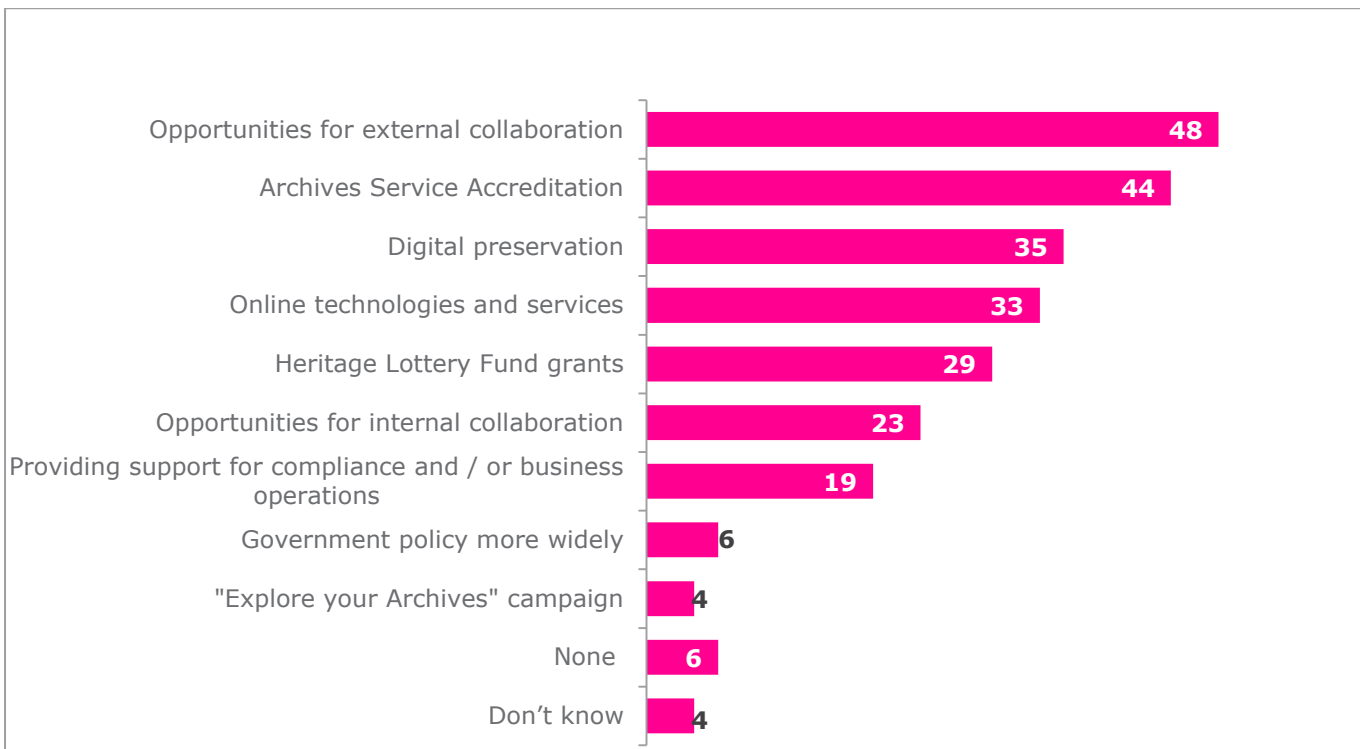
Challenges for the strategic development of services

% of participants

Q: Below are a list of issues or challenges that the archives sector may face over the next five years. Please indicate up to three that you feel will be the key challenges for the strategic development of your archive service over the next five years.

Base: All archive participants (48)
Prompted response

Challenge	%
Funding cuts	67
Lack of capacity to collaborate	27
Lack of ability to access bid funding	25
Low internal profile of archive	21
Low awareness by external decision makers	21
Low awareness amongst audiences	17
Lack of internal advocates	17
Lack of evidence of the value of archives	15
Transfer of LA archives into arms length organisations	15
Lack of wider management skills within the archive mngmt staff	13
Lack of opps to collaborate	10
Government policies, EU, Govt legislation and policy	8
Geographical isolation	6
Don't know	2

Opportunities for external collaboration — 48
Archives Service Accreditation — 44
Digital preservation — 35
Online technologies and services — 33
Heritage Lottery Fund grants — 29
Opportunities for internal collaboration — 23
Providing support for compliance and / or business operations — 19
Government policy more widely — 6
"Explore your Archives" campaign — 4
None — 6
Don't know — 4

Q: Which of the following represent the three greatest opportunities for the strategic development of your archive service over the next five years?

Base: All archive participants (48)
Prompted response

5.3.2.   Operational challenges and opportunities

Opportunities for the strategic development of services   % of participants

Participants were asked to select the **three greatest operational challenges** and the **three greatest operational opportunities** from two separate lists of pre-coded operational challenges and opportunities respectively. Moreover, participants were asked an open ended follow-up question to list other challenges and opportunities which they felt would impact upon the **operational development** of their service over the next five years.

Lack of funding and **lack of staff capacity** emerge as a critical operational challenge. In particular in terms of diminished skills, lack of **skills for digitisation** is a further operational challenge. **Lack of space** also emerges as a preoccupation for the future operations of archives.

Digitisation is also highlighted as an operational opportunity. The **Archives Services' Accreditation** scheme, considered to be one of TNA's greatest achievements in past years, continues to be viewed as positive for the future.
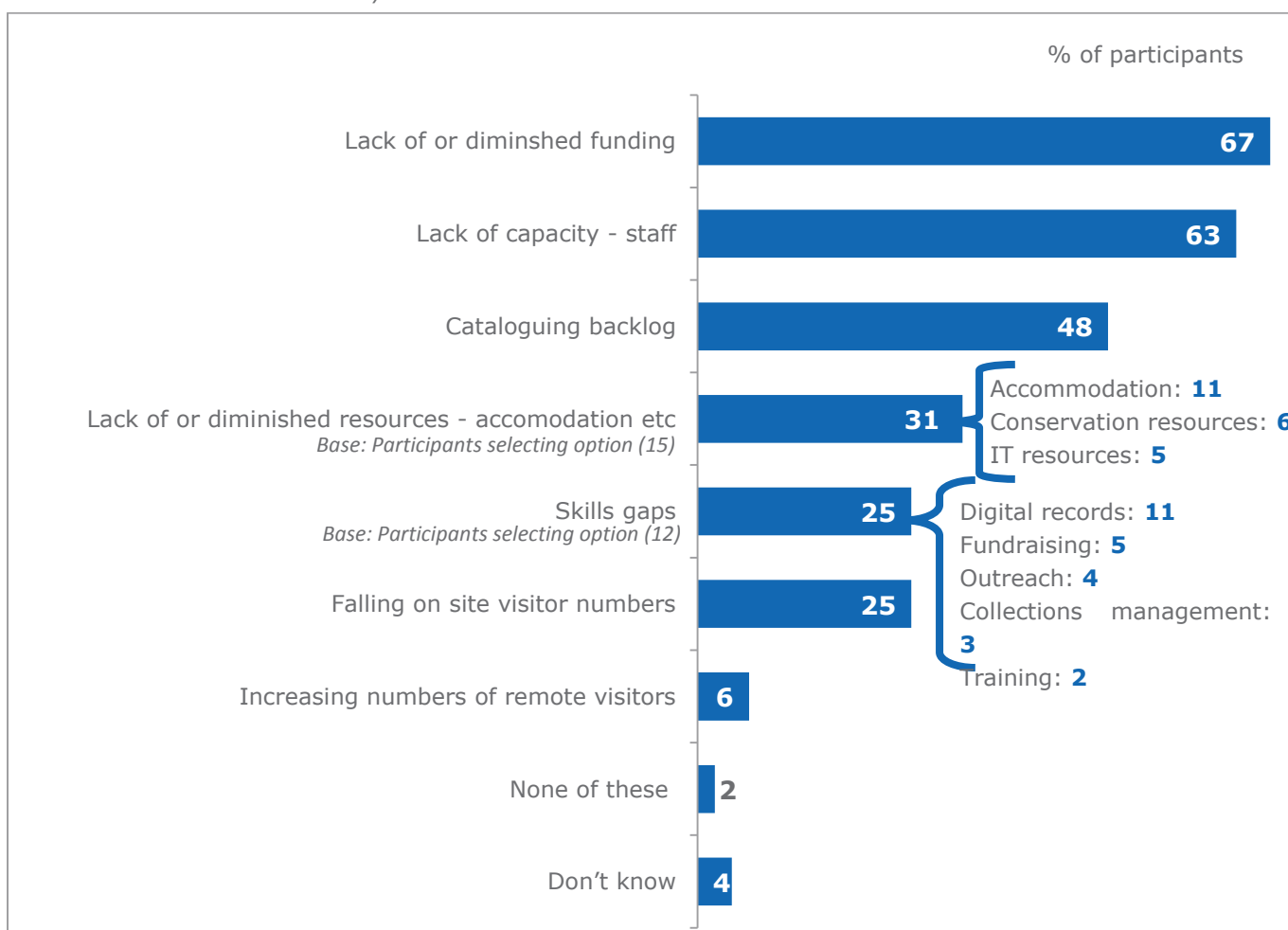
The following charts assess the range of challenges and opportunities that are expected to impact upon the **operational development** of participants' services.

Challenges for the operational development of services

Q: Below are a list of issues or challenges that the archive sector may face over the next five years. Please indicate up to three that you feel will be the key challenges which will affect the operational activities of your archive service over the next five years.

% of participants

Challenge	%
Lack of or diminshed funding	67
Lack of capacity - staff	63
Cataloguing backlog	48
Lack of or diminished resources - accomodation etc *Base: Participants selecting option (15)*	31
Skills gaps *Base: Participants selecting option (12)*	25
Falling on site visitor numbers	25
Increasing numbers of remote visitors	6
None of these	2
Don't know	4

Accommodation: **11**
Conservation resources: **6**
IT resources: **5**

Digital records: **11**
Fundraising: **5**
Outreach: **4**
Collections management: **3**
Training: **2**

Opportunities for the <u>operational</u> development of services

Q: *Which of the following represent the <u>three greatest opportunities</u> for the operational development of your archive service over the next five years?*

Base: All archive participants (48)
Prompted response

% of participants

Category	%
Managing digital records	38
Archive Services Accreditation	35
Funding from HLF	33
Opps for collaboration	31
New/improved accomodation	29
Funding from other bodies	25
Volunteers to undertake tasks	21
Opps for online resources	21
Opps for CPD	15
Working with other professionals such as IT departments	8
Pd5454	6
Networking with the sector	6
Training	2
Transfer of local authority archive services into "arms length" organisations	2
Don't know	4

5.4. Additional future policy objectives

Participants were asked whether there were any additional objectives that should be included in a revised *Archives for the 21st Century*.

In light of the anticipated context for the coming years, a number of **strategic areas** emerged as priority for future policy objectives, namely:

- Supporting access to **sustainable funding** to achieve change

- **Raising the profile** and **perceived value** of archives professionally (i.e. helping archives to raise their profile internally within their own organisations which in turn would help them to take the policy forward further)

- Support increased **awareness of governance**, ethics and accountability issues (e.g. opportunity perceived in accreditation), including TNA making **unannounced inspections of archive services** to ensure proper compliance with professional standards

These additional objectives are however set against the backdrop that there is **no legal impetus** around the policy, and it therefore becomes difficult for archive services to argue that the **policy needs to be actioned internally**.

In the coming years, the sector will also look to policy to highlight and support on **operational issues**, especially concerning:

- The **need for space** and suitable premises

- Support of **active collecting** and **cataloguing**, as well as tackling hidden collections

6.   Conclusions and recommendations

6.1. Conclusions

Progress is perceived **across objectives**, with the exception of "Effective, skilled workforce", where little to no progress is registered. Digital by design is also an area where a lot of help is still needed by the sector.

Particular **areas for success** over the past five years have been **online accessibility** and **raised public awareness** via local learning partnerships.

The National Archives and government policy are considered to have played an **important awareness-raising role** thus far, but the sector now seeks the means with which to implement the changes requested of it.

6.2. Recommendations

The National Archives' future role ought to be that of **strong leader**, advocating for the sector and **taking action itself in key areas**. The National Archives should also be the **sector's facilitator**, securing the resources (monetary, professional, physical) with which to make changes.

Specifically, The National Archives should **act as facilitator** in the following four areas:

- Advocate for and/or distribute funding from central sources e.g. HLF, Government
- Assist with commercial negotiations e.g. Ancestry
- Continue to provide training
- Support non-traditional routes to the industry

The National Archives should **act as leader** in the following five areas:

- In addition to the Archives Service Accreditation, also continue and expand inspection
- Be more accountable toward the sector
- Advocating to arts and heritage, and to organisations outside the sector's traditional audiences or stakeholders
- Continue to lead on developments such as Discovery
- Lead the way on digital preservation

SECTION 2

1. Methodology

Elizabeth Oxborrow-Cowan undertook telephone interviews with representatives of 12 stakeholder organisations. This list had been agreed with The National Archives. Interviewees were asked questions around the following areas:

- How your organisation engages with TNA

- Awareness, relevance and use of A21C

- Progress of the five recommendations and your organisation's involvement

- What are the key issues and opportunities that face the archive sector over the next five years and are the five recommendations still relevant?

- If TNA could only concentrate on one area of activity to develop the English archive sector over the next five years what would you recommend?

- What could your organisation support?

2. Stakeholder involvement with TNA

The interviews suggested three levels of engagement:

- Loose – a casual relationship with occasional meetings but with much more room for definition and development.
- Operational – regular meetings and some personal relationships.
- Collaborative – close relationships working on key strategic issues with TNA as a key partner for consultation, advice and joint working with both formal and informal relationships at both the personal and organisational levels.

The closest relationships are inevitably where there is the greatest crossover of interests e.g. the National Museum Directors' Council of which TNA is a member, the LGA's Culture, Tourism and Sport Board.

At the operational and collaborative engagement levels TNA is clearly a valued partner for their knowledge and relationships. These are built at both the organisational and personal level both via direct meetings and through other fora in which both organisations participate. Working with TNA also enables greater coherence and impact in the formulation and articulation of strategic messages. Work with TNA has produced very practical outputs such as professional guidance, conferences and toolkits. TNA's general approach was also highly valued. It was perceived as informed, approachable and 'refreshingly free on bureaucracy'. Individual members of ASD were regularly named and praised. Indeed, some organisations had been previous employers of ASD staff so there was a direct link through. The relationship with TNA was also valued as being another opportunity to exploit the current zeitgeist of joint working for the subsequent economies of scale and knowledge.

Within these relationships obviously TNA will align with just some of those organisations' activities. The most effective relationships are where TNA directly contributes to the organisations' core goals.

In certain relationships there needs to be clearer definition of the nature of the relationship and the consequent responsibilities of each party. Furthermore, some interviewees felt that TNA needed to work harder to understand or remember the role of their own organisation and incorporate that more accurate understanding into TNA's own work and approach. It is of some concern to note that the organisations that raised these issues were some of those organisations with which TNA might reasonably be expected to be working with most closely.

The Memoranda of Understanding with RLUK and ACE were clearly valued by those bodies. This may be an appropriate tool for other bodies with which TNA works closely to crystallise relationships and clarify their relative responsibilities.

3. Awareness of *Archives for the 21st Century*

Awareness differed widely but only two interviewees were not aware of the Policy. Obviously for bodies directly involved in archives, such as CyMAL, the Policy is at the heart of their work. Beyond these the most aware bodies were those for whom the goals of A21C aligned with their own aspirations and concerns, or where TNA had worked with that organisation and used A21C as a rationale for this work. Some organisations referred to A21C to ensure they did tap into TNA's priorities rather than out of an inherent interest in the policy. For some A21C was a useful summary of archival issues that they could then apply in their own work and provided shorthand for engaging with TNA.

For some interviewees there was a more general awareness that it existed but no familiarity with the specific recommendations.

It was clear that TNA staff use the Policy as a basis for their work and this was where some interviewees had become aware of the Policy.

The two respondents who did not know about the Policy had been prompted to read it for their interview. As a result they could see how the Policy could be employed in their organisation's work. This suggests an issue about the profile of the policy in some quarters. But these respondents also had the lowest level of engagement with TNA.

3. Awareness of *Archives for the 21st Century*

4.   How has A21C been used in your work?

Where A21C has been taken up by organisations they had used it to help frame their relationship with TNA, identifying or formulating strategic priorities and seeing where TNA priorities aligned with their own goals e.g. skills, digital continuity. Clearly respondents allied closely to archival issues felt that the policy captured the archive sector's concerns and thus was a very useful reference point to ensure these concerns were worked into their own planning. One interviewee described the policy as having 'a lot of generic applicability' i.e. A21C encapsulates the concerns other bodies face in their own sector.

Some bodies used the policy closely in their work whereas for others it was a point for (occasional) reference. Generally, the lower the direct involvement of the body in archives the lower the frequency of reference of A21C. In one case the organisation did not see it as very relevant, although its activity was focused on archives. This organisation wanted a more outspoken policy that clearly articulated the issues and did not shy away from controversy.

Some respondents hold archive collections so follow the government policy as a matter of course to ensure they are caring for their collections appropriately.

5. How the five recommendations have been addressed and the role of stakeholder organisations in that process

5.1. Develop bigger and better services in partnership

There was agreement that at least the concept of joint services is now embedded in organisations' thinking both inside and outside the archival sector. Some organisations, such as ACE and LGA, have been actively promoting joint working. Of particular note is the HLF's funding of combined service models including Archives+, York Explore, Hull History Centre. These stakeholders have often worked alongside TNA to do so (e.g. cCLOA's contribution to TNA's work on alternative working models) and want to continue this symbiotic working. Others have been directly involved in joint working and want to undertake more e.g. the BL's 'Save our sounds', The Collections Trust's work on sustainable digital infrastructures. Some stakeholders saw themselves as fora for discussing and learning from others about collaborative working.

Some stakeholders were not directly involved in this area but nonetheless followed the archive sector's experience for their own information, particularly as collaborative working is an increasingly common theme across the public sector in the search for financial savings.

Respondents were varied in their view as to whether 'bigger and better' is actually taking place. Some were unequivocal that it was, identifying the large number of collaborative projects whilst others either identified activity as patchy or could not see evidence of substantial collaboration. Interestingly, whilst many could point to specific examples of joint working most did not identify specific joint services i.e. there is not compelling evidence of substantial change in the nature of the archival infrastructure. Some felt that joint working was very patchy and is driven by a range of factors including the personalities of individual post holders, organisational culture (a long-term view that encourages innovation versus a short-term view that results in 'salami slicing') and financial constraints. It was also recognised that partnerships are hard work to establish and maintain.

5.2. Strengthened leadership and a responsive skilled workforce

Leadership was an area for concern. One respondent expressed concerns that leaders at the institutional level were taking short-term decisions and focusing on audience engagement, which is politically acceptable, rather than acting as leaders and daring to undertake long-term investment in technologies and skills (a concern that underpinned several interviews generally). One respondent considered that TNA did not appear to be engaging effectively with political leaders yet they are key as it is the political leaders who set the Vision. Only one respondent noted that TNA has a leadership role, which they described as 'work in progress'.

Some identified leadership from within the sector as a concern. Several respondents commented on a recurring pattern of the loss of senior staff (one described senior staff as retiring because 'they are tired of the fight'), their lack of replacement and organisational restructuring. This is pushing archive services down organisational hierarchies with only junior staff (whom one respondent described as 'compliant just to keep their jobs') to run them and no one to argue their cause at senior level. For such small service units the loss of one senior staff member has a much more deleterious effect than those in larger services, such as Social Services. Furthermore, directors have increasingly massive portfolios and do not have time to attend to individual areas, particularly small ones such as archive services. One interviewee noted that the archive sector has fewer higher profile leaders than the museums sector (which prompts the question of whether the archive sector has any high profile leaders).

Whether the workforce is more resilient was dependent on the stakeholder's point of view. There are some positive signs on workforce development. There have been some effective developments such as HLF's ' Skills for the Future' and 'Catalyst' funding. One respondent felt that the workforce has vastly improved its understanding of the need for advocacy from even two years ago and another considered that the archive profession now had a much greater awareness of the wider picture and general operating environment than it did five years ago. Another considered that the University sector workforce was more resilient as it developed skills to engage with audiences 'beyond the campus'. Yet another felt the general response of the workforce was to build 'personal resilience' with new skills or try to innovate at a very small scale. Two respondents questioned whether the workforce was adaptable for the digital world. Another felt that individuals were finding the level of change difficult to cope with, describing the response as 'something like grief'.

5.3. Coordinated response to the growing challenges of managing digital information

Several stakeholders were involved in digital preservation from their own remit e.g. technical issues, copyright issues, developing infrastructure, information reuse. One respondent praised TNA's work describing them as a 'real digital leader' and saying 'we watch what they do, extract relevant information and distribute it to our community'. Another felt TNA 'does a good job of keeping the issue alive at a higher level'. Another felt that it is the role of TNA as the sector leader to keep promoting the importance of digital preservation, particularly as shrinking archive services have diminishing capacity to undertake this advocacy. One respondent was surprised that the archive sector had not exploited more fully the HLF's funding for digital activity.

None of the respondents gave an overall view of the state of digital preservation in the archive sector, which suggests it is an area still under development and without a clear direction of travel yet.

It was interesting to note that one respondent answered this question with a response all around digital access suggesting that the concept of digital preservation still needs promotion and clarification to stakeholders generally.

5.4. Comprehensive online access for archive discovery

Respondents answered more fully on the issue of digital access rather than digital preservation, which again suggests digital preservation lacks profile and understanding generally.

There was a strong feeling that the archive sector had made progress in this area with examples such as commercial agreements (e.g. with Ancestry), digitisation programmes, elements of the Explore campaign. '2015 is a totally different world for archives online that 10 years ago and really positive.' There was a general sense of there being far more digitised archival content available online.

One stakeholder referred to TNA's role in this increased accessibility 'TNA has done really well particularly with its work around crowdsourcing. TNA has really shown you can open up collaboration without reducing quality… we want to do for our sector what TNA has done for the archival record.' Another noted that 'TNA can be creative and helpful'. Yet another felt that this was an area where TNA had a clear leadership role.

Some respondents are directly involved in developing online discovery e.g. the British Library is seeking to envisage future demands, particularly with regards to 'Big Data' and linked data. Others work either alone or with TNA to support capacity and skills in digital discovery.

Most the respondents were unequivocal in their opinion that there are now far more archival resources available online than five years ago. However, one felt that the sector had gone for quantity (i.e. creating a research and discovery base) rather than quality (i.e. the user experience). Another considered that it was a central role of TNA to provide a method by which other services could get material online, creating a central point for accessing collection information.

When respondents were prompted they agreed that it was time for archive services to move from online access to online services i.e. maturation and sophistication of this current recommendation is required. One respondent noted that the archive sector needs to move quickly in this area otherwise 'society will sail on by and make better institutions elsewhere'.

5.5. Active participation on cultural and learning partnerships promoting a sense of identity and place within the community

Respondents were divided on whether the archive sector had larger and/or more diverse audiences than before. Some respondents were very definite that neither had been achieved and rather the sector was a 'doing a better job of servicing the same ones'. Others felt anecdotally audiences had got larger and more diverse but lacked the evidence to

substantiate this opinion. Specific projects such as the World War One commemorations were identified. One talked of 'all the family history stuff we are bombarded with – it's phenomenal'. Some felt unable to comment either due to lack of evidence or because they do not have a detailed knowledge of the archive sector.

Several respondents considered that the archive sector still had a long way to go, describing audience development as 'an area of unrealised potential' and 'some distance to go'. It was noted that the HLF's own evidence showed that community archives were better at hitting this objective than publicly funded archive services. Some considered funding cuts were a break to future activity and one respondent said that they were not hearing good news stories about individual cultural and learning engagement as they used to. The cuts had already undermined this vital area of activity. One interviewee pointed out how important diverse audiences were to local authorities and stated that this was the 'whole point' of archive services.

However, some respondents considered that audience development was a key area both to date and in the future for effective advocacy and partnership working. So working towards audience expansion could meet other areas of the Policy.

Many of the stakeholders were working to change the audience profile through funding, connecting their own collections with external collections and providing relevant training, as well as working with TNA on this issue. One respondent praised TNA for a complete culture change over the last 20 years in growing and diversifying its own audience with innovative outreach making itself 'much more appealing to a wider range'. However, this was balanced with a question mark over how far TNA had helped the wider archive sector to diversify its user base.

6. What are the key issues and opportunities that the archive sector will face over the next five years?

It was interesting to see that many of the issues raised also bought opportunities, if the archive sector can be sufficiently bold and innovative:

6.1. Long-term strategic positioning of the sector

This was an issue that only a few of the respondents directly identified but many were alluding to as a consequence of the other issues that the archive sector does and will face. The archives sector needs to robustly prove its relevance and have effective advocates if it is to survive. The sector is not only a long way from achieving this but resource cuts are making this positioning even harder for individual services to undertake.

6.2. Resourcing

Funding cuts and availability of resources – which includes cutting expenditure and raising additional income.

Public policy after the next Comprehensive Spending Review – there could be 'whole-scale withdrawal of the concept of archives being a public services which will require an entrepreneurial response'. Furthermore the sector draws support from TNA which itself will be subject to the CSR.

Reducing reliance on one funding source – the sector needs to think more innovatively and look more widely for funding. Regional working opens up new funding sources.

Working towards sustainability - this is not yet happening on a large scale

Diversification of the workforce – despite years of discussion this has not yet happened and training and entry methods into the profession have remained unchanged.

Expanding the skills base – the archive profession is going to require a whole new range of skills including entrepreneurial and digital skills. If services are run on a joint basis this could be partially covered by one person providing skills to several services but this is not the whole solution. However, the opportunities for collaboration with other organisations provides potential for skills sharing and cross fertilisation of knowledge.

The extent of potential collections – will individual services have the capacity to cope with them?

Partnerships – how the archive sector can look outside itself and form partnerships, especially locally to 'get the product out there' in a form useful to local customers.

6.3. Fulfilling the digital agenda

Tapping into the digital economy – can archive services develop the means to do so?

Developing archival literacy and facility within the public realm - e.g. in schools and business. So archival skills are not just the property of the professional but are skills that need to be incorporated into business, the curriculum and society generally.

Digital engagement – an area that will only get more important. It is a really big opportunity to develop and engage new audiences. For archives there are all the budget pressures but the history industry is booming (although commercial companies have 'picked off the good bits' according to one interviewee). This is a really good time for history and developing a modern, accessible, digital offer is a really exciting opportunity and engages Councillors, who are elected representatives and want anything that encourages civic engagement and awareness. TNA needs to be educating politicians as to the nature and value of digital engagement.

Digital preservation – this is not yet established but once in place could be a powerful sales pitch for the sector

Avoiding cultural heritage being tied into bespoke systems – the move to using commercial providers of digital preservation systems could generate future issues of continuity.

The digital divide – there is a danger that wealthier organisations will turn to sophisticated commercial digital preservation solutions whilst more modest organisations do not have the same access to skills and tools. Efforts such as ICA ATOM seek to address this but such institutions will need support to tap into such resources effectively and appropriately.

Curating modern material and hybridity - Firstly how does the sector scale up to address modern materials? Secondly, the sector needs to have solutions for hybridity. Archives are now coming in all shapes and forms, including digital. The challenge is dealing with the multiplicity of forms both analogue and digital. Archivists are still dealing with the past of which much is still in analogue formats so the challenge is to deal with both analogue and digital worlds and it will be a long time before we move into an entirely digital world

Digital humanities – is both a challenge and an opportunity. The sector needs to shift from maintaining content to enabling people to know of its context and framework and to develop skills to enable reuse of data.

6.4. Engaging with the audiences of the future

The 24/7 culture - a key challenge for a lot of archives which raises the issue of archives' retaining their relevance but also opens up new audiences and would counter the issues of running a purely onsite service.

Entering new markets – the health, education and poverty agendas allied with commissioning provide new opportunities for archive services to deliver new products and on a commercial basis. But individual services do not have the capacity, specialist knowledge or networks to exploit these opportunities. They will need support to engage with these new

markets, which offer great opportunities for archives to prove their relevance, raise income and put themselves at the heart of communities.

The knowledge economy – this is a key element of the UK economy and one with which certain organisations, notably universities, are conversant and active. The archive sector generally needs to be active in promoting resources, services and expertise. But again most individual services simply do not have the capacity, knowledge or outlook to do so.

Archive services becoming more outward looking – and build stronger links with users so in turn they can become advocates for those services.

Exploiting public engagement opportunities – e.g. around family history and the First World War celebrations.

Local archive services understanding how the service can achieve their Council's wider goals/outcomes - particularly around community cohesion, education, health, economic growth, cheaper public services.

Local authorities commissioning services from a diverse range of providers - e.g. in public health delivery. Services need to be commissioning aware and ready. Archive services need to develop their offer to other services.

Linking in to the international dimension – like museums and university services British archive services have to get better at engaging with international audiences who invariably will be remote i.e. look beyond the onsite visitors.

6.5. Advocating for the sector

Leaders for the sector – individuals from the sector are not putting themselves forward and there are not high profile leaders naturally emerging.

Build a local evidence base of delivery - services need a compelling, robust evidence base which archive services can draw upon with conversations with their Portfolio Holder and Council Leader, especially as the latter may not appreciate what archive services can offer. TNA could help around creating that evidence base of the contribution of archives to wider political priorities.

Advocacy - archivists are not natural advocates or salesmen, which makes them dependent on TNA being a politically engaged advocate for them.

7. If TNA could only concentrate on one area of activity over the next five years what would you recommend?

The responses were as follows. Clearly there was a diverse set of ideas and every respondent had a different point of view. The comments have been grouped into particular themes.

7.1. Digital issues

- Accelerated digitisation to create a flourishing network of archives to increase audiences and thus increase the digital footprint of the service to reach out to wider audiences

- Digital delivery

- Digital preservation - the weakest area which needs the most help and is fundamental as the records of the future

7.2. Advocacy

- Articulate what archivists do as a vital skills set in a digital and knowledge economy. In far eastern economies there is policy recognition of the need for 'clever people', which requires investment in schools, libraries, museums and archives.

- Get off the fence and start shouting – promote the benefits that archive bring, their low cost and what you would lose if you did not have them. Create informed, sophisticated advocacy that individuals at the service level can use, to engage potential partners and to encourage services to be more innovative

7.3. Leadership and workforce

- Strong leadership – because without that nothing else happens

- An effective skilled workforce – bigger does not mean sustainable but rather the basis on which an organisation is run is how its sustainability is defined.

- Maintenance of professionalism

7.4. Transformation

- Create a new model of archive service that meets the need of modern users and is not based on the searchroom model

- Sustainability - maintaining viable networks across all the English regions and making local authority services more sustainable

- Supporting different delivery models – in particular focusing on places that have not gone down the transformation route, as that is where the biggest risk lies.

- Strategic engagement with local authorities

- Developing the capacity and products to engage with commissioning

- Accreditation and quality standards are key to performance at the local level

7.5. Audiences

- Greater accessibility – services have an obligation to share their treasures and information with the broader community

- Reuse of information

- 'Active participation on cultural and learning partnerships promoting a sense of identity and place within the community' – because it shows the archive services have purpose and if a service has purpose people will want it to be maintained

8. Are the five recommendations still relevant?

The general opinion was that all five of the recommendations are still relevant and have proven a robust checklist of the archive sector's primary concerns. No one wanted elements to be removed. However, some additions were suggested:

- A recognition of the importance of working internationally
- Being more explicit about being 'nimble' and less reliant on public money as an acknowledgement of a constantly changing landscape of public funding.
- Working towards and demonstrating relevance particularly with respect to achieving the goals of local authorities and engaging with commissioning.
- A reference to custodianship with the intention that this should also cover conservation
- Concern around the use of the word 'bigger' as it implies that only up scaling can improve the quality of a service

There were a number of comments around tone and supporting documentation. The policy needs to be more aspirational and written in a way that stakeholders can get excited about the Vision. One respondent strongly recommended using language that appeals to stakeholders such as references to creative skills, the knowledge economy and the digital workforce as well as being positive that the archive sector can do this and will make itself more efficient and sustainable. Furthermore, any recommendations should be linked to aspirations to provide 'fundable propositions around which partnerships can be built'. 'The recommendations have survived because they are familiar. But they do prompt the question 'So what?'. They need to say what the sector is bringing e.g. to the digital economy.'

9. Conclusion

The stakeholder interviews indicated that TNA has allies and is highly respected for its authoritative knowledge, working style and outputs to date. Stakeholders are keen to work with TNA and there are many areas of overlap that provide the basis for the continuation or development of fruitful relationships.

The vital themes that stakeholders feel the English archive sector faces are those of:

- Financial and organisational resilience through radical service transformation and a wider resourcing base
- Robust demonstration of relevance by engaging with technologies, new systems (notably commissioning) and valued products/services
- Urgent need for leadership to be developed within the profession and for advocates to take the message to decision-makers.

The English archival sector is at a pivotal point that could see its rebirth or its swift decline. There are many other organisations that could help reverse this decline and are keen to work with TNA but the archival sector will have to innovate quickly and on a large scale to not get left behind by funders, other information providers and potential audiences. An updated A21C will be vital in this process.

9.1. A note on evidence

Throughout these stakeholder interviews there was a constant theme that an interviewee would say they thought a particular trend was emerging or there was a particular state. However, they then went on to state that they were unable to justify their point of view with specific evidence. This resulted in completely contradictory answers to the same questions. It was very clear that key statistics about the nature and performance of the archive sector are simply not available. The sector needs to establish and provide access to an evidence database as soon as possible. Without it even the sector's allies are unable to put forward its case in a robust manner.

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