



FORUM ON HISTORICAL MANUSCRIPTS AND ACADEMIC RESEARCH

Date: Tuesday 20th October 2015

Time: 13.00 – 17.00

Venue: The National Archives

Chair: Dr Elizabeth Lomas

Minutes: Trish Humphries

Members:

Dr Bendor Grosvenor
Dr Christopher Ridgway
Dr Ian Mortimer
Ms Hillary Bauer

Non-members:

Mr Jeff James, Chief Executive & Keeper, The National Archives
Dr Valerie Johnson, Interim Director of Research & Collections, The National Archives
Ms Isobel Hunter, Head of Archives Sector Development,
The National Archives
Mr Philip Gale, Head of Independent Archives Team, The National Archives
Mr Sam Whaley, Head of Chief Executive and Keeper's Office

	Welcome and Introductions
	In the absence of the Master of the Rolls, it was agreed that Dr Lomas would take the Chair for the meeting. Dr Lomas welcomed members to the sixteenth meeting of the Forum on Historical Manuscripts and Academic Research. Apologies were received from Mr Clive Cheesman and Ms Lesley Ferguson.
1.	Minutes and Matters Arising
1.1	The Minutes of the previous meeting, held on 14th May 2015 were reviewed and agreed as an accurate record of discussions and decisions taken. There were no outstanding Matters Arising.

2.	Machinery of Government Change - update
2.1	Mr James gave a brief update on the recent Machinery of Government changes which had resulted in the sponsorship of The National Archives moving from the Ministry of Justice to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the responsibility for the records management policy transferring to Cabinet Office
2.2	With regard to the Advisory Council, the responsibility of the Lord Chancellor was being transferred to the Secretary of State for Culture. Mr James advised that his office had been working closely with Ministers' private offices to ensure that the transfer was as smooth as possible. Engagement with DCMS had so far been very positive and constructive and Ministers had been fully briefed on the work of the Advisory Council and Forum.
2.3	The formal transfer of responsibilities would not take place until December, which would unfortunately have a delaying effect on the forthcoming Advisory Council recruitment exercises.
2.4	Members were concerned that the move might make the role of the Advisory Council more difficult. Mr James advised that although this may present some challenges, the Advisory Council would continue to work in an independent way. He also assured members that there was no change to his responsibilities as Keeper and Historical Manuscripts Commissioner.
2.5	In the light of this move, Mr James advised that, although a paper had been prepared, it was felt sensible to postpone the planned discussion on the Terms of Reference and Role of the Forum until the changes affecting the Advisory Council had been completed. Action: Terms of Reference and Role of the Forum to be considered at the next meeting.
3.	Research & Collections Directorate and Archive Sector Update
3.1	Dr Johnson briefly updated members on recent organisational changes within the Archive Sector and Research Directorates. The Archive Sector Development team would move into in the new Research & Collections Directorate at the end of October and Dr Johnson and Ms Hunter gave a short presentation outlining the role and future strategy for the new directorate.
3.2	Funding had been obtained for two new scoping studies to look at digital research challenges and the academic and research landscape.
3.3	Work was also commencing on the collection strategy and members agreed that a presentation at a future meeting would be very welcome.
3.4	Members felt that the move was a very positive one, pulling together strategic sets of relationships. Involvement and interaction by Forum members would be welcome.
3.5	Ms Hunter outlined a number of changes currently affecting the archival world, which were resulting in new expectations for audiences and pressure on record offices and local archives. The Archive Sector Department will be looking at what support can be given, and what services can be developed, including programmes around transformation to ensure collections are well looked after, training, guidance and maintaining close relationships with archives.
3.6	The role of the Archive Sector Development team is changing and a more integrated approach across teams is being developed to ensure that expert colleagues across the organisation are involved in the development of guidance and strategy.
3.7	Digital skills will also be developed in order to provide support to the sector, and again colleagues from across the organisation will be involved. Guidance will be developed as learning sets, which can be provided to the sector.

3.8	Members were pleased to note the planned direction for the new directorate and were keen to contribute where appropriate.
4.	Discovery – Manorial Documents Register
4.1	Mr Jonathan Cates and Ms Liz Hart joined the meeting to give a presentation outlining the recent changes and improvements to Discovery, the online catalogue. A detailed demonstration was provided on the Manorial Documents Register, highlighting the search capabilities and information now available.
4.2	Members were pleased to note the access improvements to the Manorial Documents Register, but felt that it should have a higher profile on the website. Mr James agreed to take this forward.
4.3	Dr Mortimer raised a number of issues regarding Discovery, and it was agreed that a separate agenda item be included at the next meeting in order to explore these more fully. Mr James advised that some of the search problems experienced by users may be because of the limitations of the data, not the system. The online catalogue had been developed to provide the most effective use for the majority and it was acknowledged that this may create challenges for more experienced researchers with specific requirements.
4.4	Action: Discovery to be included as a separate agenda item for the next meeting.
4.5	Mr James agreed to take member's comments on board, and advised that consideration would be given to any alterations to improve the search capability, although there were a number of challenges, including cost.
4.6	Mr Cates and Ms Hart were thanked for their presentation.
5.	Science & Technology Archives
5.1	Dr Tim Powell joined the meeting to present a paper on a scoping study which had been carried out in relation to Science and Technology Archives.
5.2	The study had been set up following Forum discussions on future objectives and Dr Powell advised that the representation of Science and Technology in archival research was very patchy and did not reflect the range of archives held.
5.3	The paper contained a number of proposals for consideration. It was agreed that if the project was to be taken forward, partnerships would be essential. The proposals in the paper were intended for the wider Science and Technology constituency, to encourage discussion and collaborative working.
5.4	Members discussed the paper and commended Dr Powell on his work.
5.5	The proposals and recommendations in the paper were discussed and it was agreed that there was an opportunity to consider a funding bid for a research grant to take the project forward. Dr Powell confirmed that he was keen to further discussions with a number of the organisations contacted during the study to try and engage the sector.
5.6	Mr James advised that the project would be included in the forthcoming discussions on strategic priorities for 2016 and felt that there was also an opportunity for international collaboration.
5.7	It was agreed that The National Archives would consider the proposals in more detail and report back to the Forum when a clear strategy for the project had been agreed. The paper would also be submitted to the Advisory Council for information at that time.
5.8	Action: Update provided to the Forum at a future meeting.

6.	Archives for the 21st Century
6.1	Following a request at the last meeting, Ms Hunter briefly outlined the background to the recent review of the strategy, and advised that surveys and discussions had been held with a range of archives and users within the sector. The results were still being analysed, but initial results indicated that the most successful areas were those relating to partnerships, online, digital and Discovery. It was generally felt that The National Archives played a crucial part in getting policies adopted and was appreciated and acknowledged across the sector.
6.2	A number of emerging priorities had been identified, including sustaining a professional and skilled workforce, and these will be considered in more detail.
6.3	Ms Hunter advised that formal discussions with the new Minister would be taking place on the best way to develop the new strategy.
6.4	Forum members were keen to support and be involved in the work to update the strategy. Ms Hunter suggested that once a clearer way forward was developed, formal discussion papers could be circulated to the members, with leading questions on the areas where advice was required. She advised that there was still a lot of planning and preparation to be done, but would welcome the support and advice of the members.
7.	Exhibition Proposal – Discussion and Update
7.1	Mr Gale gave a brief update on the current position regarding the proposal. He advised that there was still no really clear brief on the format an exhibition should take, and The National Archives was not currently in a position to commit resources to developing the project.
7.2	Mr James advised that the forthcoming Shakespeare 400 project had presented a very steep learning curve and felt that until the outcome of the project had been analysed, it would not be appropriate to consider another exhibition.
7.3	Members were disappointed, but acknowledged the issues. It was agreed that conversations with other organisations should continue and Forum members requested more involvement.
7.4	Mr James advised that there were certainly ambitions to take forward an exhibition project, although at present the overall programme for events was still being developed.
7.5	It was agreed that a discussion on the Shakespeare project should be on the agenda at the next meeting, and that the plans for a manuscript exhibition pause until a clearer proposal was developed.
7.6	Action: Discussion on the Shakespeare 400 Exhibition project to be included on the agenda for the next meeting.
8.	Any Other Business
8.1	<i>Acceptance in Lieu</i> Mr Gale advised the members of an Acceptance in Lieu request which had been received too late for the meeting, and would be circulated for comment within the next few days.
8.2	<i>Data Protection Regulations</i> The Data Protection regulations were discussed, specifically in relation to the provision for archives. Mr James advised that the opt-out arrangements included in the new regulations should be sufficient to be build in to the UK regulation the necessary derogations in the UK legislation.

8.3	<i>Date of Next Meeting</i> To be confirmed. Post Meeting Note – The next meeting will be held on Tuesday 26th January 2016.
	There being no further business, the meeting was closed.