



FORUM ON HISTORICAL MANUSCRIPTS AND ACADEMIC RESEARCH

Date: Friday 12 March 2021
Time: 13.45 - 15.45
Venue: Virtual Meeting
Chair: Sir Geoffrey Vos, Chair
Minutes: Isabel Saunders, Senior Governance Coordinator and Secretary to the Advisory Council
Members: Ms Hillary Bauer (HB), Deputy Chair
Dr Helen Forde (HF)
Professor Leon Litvack (LL)
Ms Lesley Ferguson (LF)
Ms Adele Redhead (AR), Independent Forum Member
Ms Jenny Shaw (JS), Independent Forum Member
Dr Jeannette Strickland (JSt)

Others in attendance:

The National Archives (TNA)

Mr Jeff James (JJ) Chief Executive and Keeper (ex officio)
Dr Valerie Johnson (VJ) Director of Research and Collections
Dr Emma Markiewicz (EM) Head of Archives Sector Development
Mr Sam Whaley (SW) Head of Strategy and CEO's Office
Ms Pip Willcox (PW) Head of Research

The Office for the Master of the Rolls

Mr Sam Allan
Mr Terry McGuinness

1. Welcome, Introductions, Apologies and Declarations of Interest

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed members and other attendees to the meeting.
- 1.2 No apologies for absence were received.
- 1.3 No declarations of interest were made.

2. Keeper and Historical Manuscripts Commissioner's (HMC) Update

- 2.1 JJ introduced the paper and invited questions from members.
- 2.2 Members asked about The National Archives' reopening plans. JJ explained The National Archives were still waiting for final guidance to confirm archives would be covered under guidance for libraries. Work to enhance the booking system had been ongoing throughout

the lockdown and would not be completed until late April. The National Archives would not be opening until this work was completed.

- 2.3 Members asked about police records. IS confirmed she would circulate this information to members.
- 2.4 Members asked about the discussions on contested heritage. JJ stated the meeting focussed on a reassertion of the independence of Arms' Length Bodies to deal with contested heritage independently. There was also a conversation on the government's 'retain and explain' policy and how this operated in a museum environment. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) had plans to liaise with various groups on contested heritage in the future and The National Archives would put itself forward as the documentary representative at the appropriate point.
- 2.5 Members asked if there was a timescale for the partnership framework project with DCMS. JJ noted the project was a DCMS project to firm up relationships with their ALBs. He noted complexities in drafting the framework to represent The National Archives' unique situation. The focus of the framework was on exposure to risk. The aim was to submit the framework by the end of the year.
- 2.6 Members asked about the digital learning centre. JJ explained The National Archives had secured funding from the Clore Programme. Whilst traditional Clore learning focused on hands-on learning, The National Archives' learning programmes are more orientated towards online and virtual programmes. Ongoing discussions with the Clore programme would allow The National Archives to lead Clore's first digital learning centre. The National Archives had been working on a proposition for Clore and the opportunity would expand the reach of their programmes without students needing to attend in person. The space would be an embedded learning space with IT infrastructure and would allow an increase in students.
- 2.7 VJ commented on the Acceptance in Lieu scheme. She noted reports of a digital collage sold by Christie's for a large sum. The item itself was sold as a Non-Fungible Token, a technology based on block chain. This presented an interesting development for members when considering Acceptance In Lieu. The information would be for further exploration. The Chair noted the UNCITRAL Model Law on Electronic Transferable Records may prove useful in exploring this area, although to date this law had only been adopted by a handful of countries which did not involve Britain. The Law Commission was however consulting on modern legislation on digital documentation. VJ noted she would alert the legislation team to this development.

ACTION: IS to circulate the information on police records to members.

ACTION: VJ to pass on information on Non-Fungible Token and on the Law Commission's consultation to the legislation team.

3. Archives Sector Update

- 3.1 EM introduced the report and invited questions and comments from Forum members.
- 3.2 Members noted they had received very positive comments on the All Parliamentary Feedback on Archives. JJ noted The National Archives as planning to follow up with the All-Party Parliamentary Group secretariat for an event on suffrage.
- 3.3 Members asked for a further update on the Wallace Collection and the implications for its archive and library. EM noted The National Archives would continue to watch and provide support where it could, to ensure the security of the archival collection, but that currently the archive collection was not in immediate risk.

- 3.4 Members asked about the Covid-19 Archives Fund. EM noted a public announcement on recipients would be made in the following weeks. The recipients were a representative sample including local authorities, museums and archives. There were twenty-five successful candidates out of 80 applicants. The Forum wished to commend the team for the manner in which the process was run. EM noted there had been an original concern that the fund might have been needed to rescue business collections, but thankfully this had not been necessary. The Forum noted the need for the fund highlighted the perilous state the archives sector exists in and there would be a need for greater vigilance on risks to the sector in the coming years. The information gathered by the Fund would be useful for this going forward.
- 3.5 Members raised the issue of progress on the plans for the Manorial Documents celebrations in 2022 with the Chair and asked if the Royal Courts of Justice would be willing to host a reception in May or June. The Chair confirmed he agreed to the proposal in principal and would need a further check on the details.

ACTION: IS to liaise with the MR's office on booking a date to use the Royal Courts of Justice.

4. Contingency Management Plan and Failure of a Place of Deposit

- 4.1 Members queried the capacity within the sector for if there were to be a significant increase in records at risk, due to companies or charities folding. EM noted this had been taken into account when planning. The National Archives would make a further funding bid in the next year and work was ongoing to assess where the sector might be in the future.
- 4.2 Members asked if the strategic priorities had been impacted by the current pandemic pressures on the sector. EM noted the priorities were not published until after some of the effects of the pandemic were underway, however some priorities had become less significant with others now requiring more focus.
- 4.3 Members asked which, if any, areas of the sector were at particular risk. EM noted there was no specific area and all areas were currently in a period of change.
- 4.4 Members asked what was involved in securing the archive of a collapsing business. EM stated it depended very much on the business, however the main focus was on getting fast access to a collection to assess it and try and ensure a new home is found for the records. The Chair asked about the implications on confidentiality for these records. EM noted the main concern was often the General Data Protection Regulations and the data on private individuals.
- 4.5 Members asked if the team were currently aware of any potential archive failures. EM confirmed she was not currently aware of anything specific.

5. Update on Research and Academic Engagement

- 5.1 PW introduced the report and provided an update on a number of funding applications and the impact of the pandemic on doctoral students ability to work. The National Archives was doing all it could to support students with funding for extending studies, but this did not cover living costs. PW invited questions from members on the report.
- 5.2 Members asked for more detail on Safe Pods. PW explained that these could be used to access sensitive data. Currently if someone wishes to view sensitive data, they must go to the special venue where the data is kept at and this may not be convenient to researchers. Safe Pods were small bookable cupboards with secure connections which researchers could use to view sensitive information digitally, whilst maintaining the security of the data. Researchers could book a Safe Pod near to them, as opposed to needing to travel to where the data is held.

6. Terms of Reference

- 6.1 IS introduced the report and invited comments from members.
- 6.2 Members queried the history of the suggested wording change to the reporting lines section. IS clarified that the wording in the existing terms of reference was not part of a historic function but was simply a wording error. JJ confirmed that the Forum is not the successor to the Historical Manuscripts Commission, the Keeper and Historical Manuscripts Commissioner is the successor. The clarification would demonstrate the reporting lines through the Advisory Council.

DECISION: To approve the suggested amendment to the Terms of Reference and to put the updated Terms of Reference to the Advisory Council for formal approval.

ACTION: IS to ensure the Forum's Terms of Reference is included in the agenda for the next Advisory Council meeting.

7. Minutes, Matters Arising and Action Log

- 7.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 3 December 2020 were agreed as a correct record subject to amendments proposed at the meeting.

Matters Arising

- 7.2 Members queried if there was any further update on Item 60 on Capital Taxation proposals to update the regime to accommodate digital material. EM noted an event was being planned which had originally been due to take place in person, as such it was being reorganised. EM stated she would circulate the current proposals to members.

ACTION: EM to circulate the Capital Tax proposals concerning digital material to members.

8. Any Other Business

- 8.1 Members enquired if there was any information on the future location for the Parliamentary Archives, currently stored in the Victoria Tower. JJ stated The National Archives were in discussions on this matter and a decision would be taken at some point this year.
- 8.2 Members noted there had been discussion on forums online about a lack of access to records. Members suggested to The National Archives that they may wish to improve the visibility of online areas with clear explanations on closure and access for members of the public. JJ asked to take this up offline.
- 8.3 Members asked for a further update on accreditation for the Bodleian library, which was currently not accredited, despite being a pre-eminent library and archive. EM noted there had not been any significant progress towards accreditation.
- 8.4 The Chair, fellow Forum members and staff from The National Archives all wished to express their thanks to Hillary Bauer for being the Forum's Deputy Chair for the previous two years. The Chair noted this was Ms Bauer and Ms Ferguson's last Forum meeting before the end of their terms and thanked them both for their work.

There being no further business, the meeting was closed at 15.45am.

Date of next meeting: 17 June 2021