



FORUM ON HISTORICAL MANUSCRIPTS AND ACADEMIC RESEARCH

- Date:** Thursday 17 June 2021
- Time:** 13.30 - 16.00
- Venue:** Virtual Meeting
- Chair:** Hillary Bauer, Deputy 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
(LA) Head of Conservation: Research and Audience Development
(BO) Research Software Engineer

1. Welcome, Introductions, Apologies and Declarations of Interest

- 1.1 The Deputy Chair welcomed members and other attendees to the meeting.
- 1.2 The Chair submitted apologies for absence.
- 1.3 AR noted that she was a lecturer at the University of Glasgow and noted discussions with the University of Glasgow was included as part of the Keeper's Update report.

2. Minutes, Matters Arising and Action Log

- 2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 12 March 2021 were agreed as a correct record subject to amendments proposed at the meeting.

Matters Arising

- 2.2 The Deputy Chair asked if there was any further updates on the implication of digital assets on the Capital Tax and Acceptance in Lieu scheme. EM noted discussions were on going.

2.3 The Deputy Chair requested an update on the Wallace Collection and wider collections at risk. EM noted there were no updates from the Wallace Collection since the previous meeting. She also noted The National Archives had established and run a funding scheme for archives at risk. She also updated members on the collections from the Arcadia group and Debenhams.

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

3.1 JJ introduced the paper and invited questions from members. He also noted the government had changed the dates for the original roadmap out of lockdown and Step 4 had been delayed. This meant The National Archives plan to move to Step 4 was also delayed, however this gave The National Archives more opportunities to enhance the service in preparation for Step 4.

3.2 Members asked about the panel on success of digitisation. JJ noted it would be best if the Commercial Director informed the Forum on this.

3.3 Members asked for further details on the implications of any potential decision about the Parliamentary Archives. JJ noted that any agreement between The National Archives and the Parliamentary Archives would not include record management. Any implications would also depend on the nature and length of any potential partnership. JJ noted he continued to meet with the relevant people for discussions. There were a number of ongoing discussions on the unique status of parliament and how this interacted with information legislation. Members asked about the length of time any agreement would be ongoing for. JJ noted any such partnership would need to be for a minimum of 10 years in order to be effective and worthwhile.

3.4 Members noted they were impressed by the level of engagement and the range of activities The National Archives was supporting.

ACTION: TNA to organise a briefing on measuring the success of digitisation projects, with Gemma Maclagan Ram.

4. Archives Sector Update

4.1 EM introduced the report and provided an oral update on the Honresfield Library. She invited questions and comments on the report from Forum members.

4.2 Members asked for further details from VJ on the Black Cultural Archives panel event. VJ noted it was a careers event, held virtually and covered the sector including museums, libraries, archives and conservatorship. Members expressed that they were keen to support any endeavours for further diversity in the sector.

4.3 Members asked for more details on the reopening of archives in general. EM noted most staff were beginning to come off furlough. The picture varied depending on the type of organisation with those in the local authority sector having progressed further than those in the arts.

4.4 Members asked about the apprenticeship scheme with the Institute of Apprentices. EM noted that The National Archives was still awaiting for final confirmation on the details of the scheme, as these were still being agreed but The National Archives was investigating working in partnership with the University of Glasgow who might act as a provider.

5. Update on Research and Academic Engagement

5.1 PW introduced the report and provided an update on a number of programmes and 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 noted the work which had gone into the Discovering Collections, Discovering Communities (DCDC) conference. PW noted the break between the previous DCDC had been to enable a successful and engaging online event, so far all plans for this were progressing well.
- 5.3 Members asked for further information about the implications of discussions around peer reviewing within the academic research community. PW noted discussions had highlighted the importance of peer reviewing appreciating the interdisciplinary nature of some research projects. They noted interdisciplinary funding was less available than for set disciplines and likewise it could be difficult for researchers to find an interdisciplinary reviewers. There was also a focus on the tone of peer reviewing and that it was necessary for peer reviewing to be seen as a constructive process by both parties.
- 5.4 Members asked for more details about the new approaches to research. PW noted The National Archives had been looking at ways to maximise the positive impacts of research, and to improve this the new approaches to research would look at ensuring research projects were cohesive and strategic across the organisation. Whilst individual research would remain within their community of practice there would be a new method for overseeing all researchers, including recruiting a head of collections research.
- 5.5 Members asked for further details on the Human Conference Interactions. PW stated it was proposed to have a workshop at this on the ways of using digital to be more interactive. Particularly this would focus on the ways one could use a mobile device to interact with archives.
- 5.6 Members asked about the lottery fund for heritage digital leadership. VJ responded that this had been ongoing for 18 months, with applications having been submitted at the end of 2019. The scheme focused on running a number of three-day sessions, with the majority online due to the pandemic, discussing digital leadership for not technically trained leaders and how these leaders could support cultural change.
- 5.7 Members asked about The National Archives' relationship with the Friends of The National Archives (the Friends). JJ responded that the Friends had evolved over recent years and they now contributed in a range of ways to education and research. They operated as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation and were looking at how they could dovetail their work with that of The National Archives' Trust. Their main body of work focussed around assisting with cataloguing and on the preparation of digital work, however they had wanted to expand beyond this and support the Research and Collections directorate further. They had explored supporting a fellowship, initially supporting a six-month fellowship with £15,000 and then later supporting a one year post doctoral fellowship with £30,000. Following the success of these both the Friends and The National Archives were keen to make this an annual commitment.

6. Manorial Documents Register Advisory Panel Update

- 6.1 Forum member LL gave a brief summary of his work on the manorial documents register advisory panel. This included two meetings focusing on preparation for the Manorial Documents Register 2022 centenary celebrations. LL summarised the current plans for the two celebratory events, including an evening reception and a conference.
- 6.2 Members asked about the guest list for the events. LL stated he had received a list of speakers and this list was still evolving.

7. Deep Discoveries

- 7.1 LA and BO joined the meeting to present a briefing on the Deep Discoveries project. LA stated the project was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, and aimed to remove barriers between collections and open up cross disciplinary research. The Deep Discoveries project focussed on the use of artificial intelligence to search images. The project was expected to run for a total of 18 months, with the current phase focusing on testing the product. The end aim of the project was to assess the utility of such tools.
- 7.2 Members asked who was partnering the project and what the future of the project might be. LA confirmed that the project was taking place at The National Archives in collaboration with the University of Surrey and Northumbria University. She also noted there was ongoing discussions around the potential use for these tools in the longer term.
- 7.3 Members asked about the consideration of inclusivity in the programme. LA stated that it was important to be conscientious when working with artificial intelligence to ensure software was inclusive. Artificial intelligence requires models for pre-training and for humans to train to the algorithm. One of the solutions to this is to have the algorithm train itself to each user, which keeps the service bespoke, but also reduces the proliferation of any biases.
- 7.4 Members asked for more details on Raman Spectroscopy. LA noted the technology used light to probe materials and vibrate the records to ascertain the difference between cellulose acetate and cellulose nitrate. It complemented the other spectroscopy technologies The National Archives currently uses to examine records and images in records.

8. Any Other Business

- 8.1 The Deputy Chair thanked everyone for attending the meeting and for their work.

There being no further business, the meeting was closed at 15.55am.

Date of next meeting: 21 October 2021