

Date of Meeting: 02/06/2020	Location: By video conference	THE
Title: User Advisory Group Meeting	Subject or Purpose: Minutes of the meeting held on the 2 nd June 2020	NATIONAL ARCHIVES
ATTENDEES		
Sue Adams (Independent Researchers)	Adam Chambers (Map Room Users)	
Nadine Chambers (Student Users)	Amelia Clegg (Student Users)	
Stephen Daghish (On line Users)	Angela Graham (County/external Archives)	
Mike Grahn (On site Personal Interest Users)	Francis Howcutt (Family History Societies)	
Grace Ioppolo (Academic Users)	Sophie Kay (Diversity and Inclusion)	
Geoff Monks (Academic Users)	Catherine Elliott (TNA - Head of Digital Services)	
Valerie Johnson (TNA - Director of Research & Collections)	Lee Oliver (TNA - Head of Venue Management & Services)	
Caroline Ottaway-Searle (TNA - Director of Public Engagement), Chair	AV (TNA - Personal Assistant), Minutes	
SW (TNA - Senior Designer)		

1. Minutes, matters arising and general updates

1.1. Apologies

Delegates were welcomed by COS to the first virtual meeting of UAG. Apologies had been received from Will Reid (Diversity and Inclusion) and Camilla von Massenbach (Online Family Historians).

1.2. Minutes

The minutes from the meeting on the 3rd March 2020 were approved but with Angela Graham's apologies to be added. There were no matters arising.

2. Project Alpha update (CE and SW)

2.1 SW provided a brief background to the project. 'Alpha' is one of TNA's most ambitious digital projects: starting in October of last year it is being undertaken by nearly 30 digital specialists from TNA and Digirati. Six full day ideation workshops have been held with colleagues and stakeholders, generating over 50 conceptual ideas. From these 10 separate prototypes were developed, covering 17 user stories. These were tested with 95 volunteer users from a wide range of abilities and backgrounds. Articles charting the project's progress have been posted on TNA's Digital blog on Medium (<https://medium.com/the-national-archives-digital>).

2.2 The primary focus has been on two types of user: those who have never encountered TNA or archives before and first-time users, both of whom may struggle to make sense of how the collection is structured or its value for them. New tools to navigate the catalogue and uncover

connections have been explored which will also benefit existing users. Users on the majority of government websites experience a linear journey but on TNA this is more complex as users drill down into the records or explore tangential areas of interest. One of Alpha's objectives is to support users in developing from a 'search' to 'explore' mentality.

- 2.3 SW demonstrated the current Alpha prototype on the TNA website. The panel for navigating the archival hierarchy uses a letter code, series or piece data and gives subseries results and catalogue descriptions. The aim has been to link the data giving continuing detail on records and enabling 'progressive disclosure' of information as the user drills down. As a result it is hoped that TNA records will become more visible in Google search results with TNA becoming a definitive source on data items for example Shakespeare's will or for a defined period of history.

'Hub' pages are planned to aggregate related data around topics, including narrative and TNA related activities such as conservation. Snippets highlighting aspects of the topic under 'Did you know?' will be posted to stimulate further discovery. This will help novice users to navigate the collection and build their confidence. Hubs focusing on human experiences such as the Western Front during WW1 are planned using maps, documents and video material. For example a page on Siegfried Sassoon could include catalogue links to his medal card.

A 'Help' button will be available and a buddy system to prompt other areas to look at and to help users track what they have been looking at. Next steps will include AI and machine learning to develop this facility.

- 2.4 GI was concerned that material was not pitched to academic users. SW advised that the current focus on new users had meant that a broader view of subjects had been taken but agreed a balance needed to be struck. CE advised that the content demonstrated is for placeholder purposes only and that during the Beta phase the team will engage with existing audiences, such as academics users, to understand their experiences and needs. The hub pages are designed to be a launching off point and to lead users into greater detail.
- 2.5 SA liked the link functionality but had concerns that the focus has been on military history, and on the time it will take to build content for the entire collection. Also, would users be able to track their previous sessions? CE advised that the areas of focus are to be agreed as part of 'Beyond Digital'. The content strategy is to be developed and will include a review of order and depth, taking into account what content is already available. TNA will be looking at project participation and crowd sourcing to assist with content. SW advised that user tracking is being looked at; it is proposed that users will either browse as a guest or sign into their account to synch in prior searches.
- 2.6 SK asked how the volunteers for the ideation workshops had been selected and how TNA had identified non users. CE advised that for the workshops, TNA colleagues from a range of departments including Marketing, CEE and Cataloguing had participated in addition to a number of external users who were largely unfamiliar with TNA.
- 2.7 AG asked if there were any outputs from this work that could be usefully shared with other archives who are similarly looking to develop their on-line presence. CE pointed to the Medium blog on the TNA website which has interesting discussions on areas of challenge. An archive of TNA's Digital blog on Medium from the start of the project is available as are the various iterations of the prototype.

2.8 There followed a discussion around digital downloads made by the public during TNA's closure (further to delegate questions submitted by FH and NC). NC asked if it was possible to report on the location of users. CE advised that this information was not currently available but that more analysis is underway to learn more. NC asked how broad interest had been. CE advised that analysis from the first five weeks of free digital downloads had shown that:

- One person ordered documents from 21 different series.
- Most people ordered from far fewer series – 18,478 ordered from just one series, with 6,196 of those ordering from WO372.
- The number of documents ordered per person is lower than expected - 35% of users only ordered 1 document, 15% ordered 2 documents, 9% ordered 3 documents and 9% ordered 10-19 documents. This is likely to have influenced by the difficulty new users have had in finding what they have been looking for combined with looking for records not held by TNA and/or looking for records held by TNA's partners.

2.9 MG asked when the Beta phase would commence and if there would be an opportunity for more volunteers to participate. SW advised that Beta would be a multi-year project and that engagement with different types of users to participate in the next phase would begin in the next few months.

2.10 SA highlighted comments seen from new users who had been unable to find what they had been looking for on TNA's website. Some commercially available series like the census are not included in the digital records made freely available on TNA's website, which had disappointed some users. CE confirmed that improvement of navigation was a key challenge in Alpha and feedback from past users have confirmed this is an issue.

3. Delegate questions

3.1 Digital uploads during closure (FH and NC). See 2.8.

3.2 Resumption of in-person access to the archive (MG). MG asked if there would on site signage and guidance to protect staff and users' safety on the reopening of Kew. CO advised that thought is being given to the creation of one way systems and signage. Communications are planned to share with the public what they could expect to see on their return to Kew. As yet no date has been set for re-opening although the grounds have remained open as a resource to the locality; feedback indicates this has been appreciated. MG asked if any impact on capacity was envisaged. CO advised that given health and safety measures, initially opening will be for limited numbers of readers. Staffing levels will be dependent on the number of staff who can safely reach Kew and the restrictions required by compliance with social distancing regulations. LO has visited Kew recently to help plan preparations for an eventual re-opening. The site is very clean and empty. Opening will also be dependent on obtaining the necessary supplies for signage and hand gel, both of which are currently challenging.

3.3 Advice to the Sector during pandemic (SA). SA thanked CO for the circulation of the guidance (Appendix 2) and commented that archives are dealing with much uncertainty. CO agreed that the situation is fluid and requires the sector to be prepared to live with that uncertainty for the time being.

VJ added that in addition to the guidance, TNA was in touch with archives around the country. Webinars on business continuity and the guidance issued and shared by TNA had proved extremely

popular with the sector. Topics covered including managing a closed archive, approaches to gradual re-opening and providing links to similar organisations such as the Museums Association. The burden of uncertainty was acknowledged to be an issue and TNA has made a grant to ARA to support the wellbeing of archivists including those recently furloughed. SA was pleased to hear that dialogue with the sector is ongoing.

CO added that a lot of work by the Events team had provided an extension in the provision of on line talks - which had proved very popular. Education resources have been popular and used for home schooling. GI noted that the CEE team was still running web chat support which was appreciated but that planning visits to Kew for the autumn may be pre-emptive at the current time.

4. Forthcoming Events and Any other Business

There was no AOB.

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday the 1st September 2020 at 12 noon.