

Date of Meeting: 01/09/2020	Location: By video conference	THE
Title: User Advisory Group Meeting	Subject or Purpose: Minutes of the meeting held on the 1 st September 2020	NATIONAL
		ARCHIVES
ATTENDEES		
Sue Adams (Independent Researchers)	Jennifer Aston (Academic). Item 1 only.	
Adam Chambers (Map Room)	Stephen Daghish (On line)	
Angela Graham (County/external Archives)	Mike Grahn (On site Personal Interest)	
Francis Howcutt (Family History Societies)	Grace Ioppolo (Academic)	
Jeff James (TNA – Chief Executive & Keeper). Item 3 only.	Sadie Jarrett (Map Room and Early Career Academics)	
Valerie Johnson (TNA – Director of Research & Collections) Chair	Sophie Kay (Diversity and Inclusion)	
Susan Moore (Map Room)	Lee Oliver (TNA - Head of Venue Management & Services)	
Caroline Ottaway-Searle (TNA – Director of Public Engagement), Co-Chair	Will Reid (Diversity)	
Pat Reynolds (Family History and On line)	AV (TNA – Personal Assistant), Minutes	

1. Introduction to new delegates

VJ welcomed the new delegates, Jennifer Aston, Sadie Jarrett, Susan Moore and Pat Reynolds, to the group. The new and existing delegates introduced themselves. *Post meeting note: the profiles of the new delegates will be posted to the TNA website shortly.* Sincere thanks were offered to the outgoing delegates Adam Chambers, Francis Howcutt, Geoff Monks and Camilla von Massenbach for their generous contribution and valued support to the group during their tenure.

2. Minutes, Matters arising

2.1 Apologies had been received from Amelia Clegg (Student Users). *Post meeting note: apologies were also received from Nadine Chambers and Geoff Monks.*

2.2 The minutes from the meeting of the 2nd June 2020 were approved. There were no matters arising.

3. Update on strategic intents (JJ)

3.1JJ outlined the process involved in defining the intents. In line with most government departments, TNA sets annual business priorities at the beginning of the calendar year. These take effect from April and create a set of objectives for the organisation that cascade to department plans and individual objectives. Prior to COVID, TNA had set priorities for the financial year 2020 but it quickly became apparent these would need to be rethought. Initially the focus was on the limitations imposed by lockdown both on the Kew site and resources but within a couple of months this had shifted to a reaffirmation of the ambitions set out in 'Archives for Everyone' with the aim of being

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an inclusive, entrepreneurial and disruptive archive. The commitment to ensuring that TNA is 'the archive for everyone' remains but with a new focus on how to make substantial changes in delivering this. It was decided to take a longer term view with a set of priorities up to the end of March 2022. The priorities were shaped in an iterative consultation process with the Board and colleagues. Initially there were six strategic intents but these were consolidated to the following five:

- 3.2 1) *Capturing the record and aiding legal certainty.* As the archive of government, TNA has statutory obligations to ensure that both digital and physical transfers can take place and that the record is captured. TNA has been investing in TDR (Transferred Digital Record), a service to develop the infrastructure making it easier for government departments to transfer their digital records. With TNA's responsibilities as the Queens Printer there are also specific obligations to publish legislation including both COVID and the EU exit.
- 3.3 2) *Taking the collection to new audiences.* This speaks to the inclusivity ambitions set out in 'Archives for Everyone'. TNA aims to grow a larger, more diverse audience through public engagement, partnership and collaboration. Our ambition to ensure the public can encounter our collection online has accelerated since the pandemic. Expanding online access to our digital records will continue to be a key priority including reallocating resources to make digital content available wherever we can. This will be supported by a focus on delivering a commercial return where appropriate to ensure we can continue to deliver and expand our public services.
- 3.4 3) *Realising the value of archives through research, innovation and commercial exploitation.* This focuses on TNA's ambitions to develop a research culture and to take advantage of opportunities available to us as an Independent Research Organisation by working with others, including universities. Clearly there will be a big focus on digital research. This objective includes a focus on potential wider commercial opportunities open to TNA, whether from the estate, the collection or other intangible assets. TNA is governed by government accounting rules and will need to work to secure flexibility within these to obtain freedoms to permit investing our commercial income for the longer term.
- 3.5 4) *Leading the archive sector to a secure and sustainable future.* The pandemic has put a lot of pressure on the archive sector. As the leadership body, TNA has been working hard to ensure that guidance and advice is available to the 2,500 archive services that we cover. We also need to ensure that the nation's archival heritage is safeguarded through the current crisis. Recent difficulties for firms such as Thomas Cook who held extensive archival collections have meant that TNA has needed to step in and facilitate an outcome. The absence of digital skills within the sector is also something we're working on. TNA has a programme with NLHF on this but we will need to do more to be able to upskill the archive sector to help them respond to this new way of working
- 3.6 5) *Changing the way that we work.* As with most organisations we assume that the way that we work will change fundamentally. We will need to build the right culture and technical infrastructure to allow us to work differently. We want to ensure we can exploit the benefits from technology to work more flexibly and still deliver our objectives under 'Archives for Everyone' although in a different way. JJ then took questions.
- 3.7 MG asked what the sixth original strategic intent had been and why was it dropped?
JJ replied that originally there had been two similar intents, 2 and 3, relating to audience development and online services. These had overlapped and were consolidated into intent 2. CO-S confirmed that the first had been about access to digital material and the second about taking the

collection to the public, on further discussion it was felt they were the same.

3.8 MG asked if there would be conflict between intents 2 and 3 as they relate to digital access and commercial exploitation.

JJ replied that these intents require careful balancing. To illustrate, early in lockdown TNA responded by making the collection more accessible on line. This took over a month's work to ensure that the system could support the level of demand. This has a commercial impact as every month that downloads are available for free impacts the bottom line. Whilst TNA remains partly closed the plan is to continue to provide this access. TNA makes £11M a year through commercial ventures such as Gazettes, so not all related to digitised content, but it's an important part of how TNA reinvests into the public offering.

3.9 SM asked how TNA was going to nurture existing audiences whilst seeking new ones and would this mean that existing users would be ignored?

JJ replied that TNA's plan is definitely not to ignore existing audiences. At present TNA is working on the challenge on how to restore services safely to both existing and new audiences. We adopted an approach to start slowly and carefully and are releasing more services wherever we can but there are some very real constraints. However, we are absolutely clear that this will not be at the expense of either group. CO-S added that her current priority is existing audiences at Kew. At the beginning of lockdown and with the focus of efforts going online there was an increase in users who had not accessed the collection before and we want to continue to develop these relationships as the more people that engage with TNA the better for everyone.

3.10 GI referred to recent media coverage of the British Library and Hans Sloane collections and asked if TNA has a strategy to deal with collections related to slavery or issues of racism.

JJ replied that TNA is currently working on its inclusivity strategy. There are three strands under 'Archives for Everyone' – inclusivity, entrepreneurialism and disruption. TNA has an inclusive strategy which has been worked on extensively. Internally this has been reviewed by TNA's racial equality, and diversity and inclusion groups and with records specialists who have an expertise in these areas. The strategy is shortly to be shared with the 'Archives Unlocked' Board which helps TNA to drive the delivery of the government's vision for archives. Following this there will be wider communications. A statement was also put out in June, both internally and externally, on Black Lives Matter. For TNA, inclusivity is seen in the widest possible sense as being about all barriers to access that disadvantaged communities might face, whether economic, social or physical. In this we are trying to live up to the ambitions that we set in 'Archives for Everyone'.

3.11 PR asked if any changes had been seen over the last months in the groups of records being accessed or research questions being asked.

CO-S replied that whilst onsite capacity is currently limited, there has been a high portion of academic and professional researchers. There have also been new visitors to Kew possibly as a result of offering registration for a reader's ticket online. There has been a big take up of online Education services as parents were home educating. Our materials have been reframed to be accessed online and this has been popular. The lockdown has seen TNA engage with new audiences who we will want to retain in the future. JJ added that archives lend themselves to work well in the digital environment and as we have a strong online offer TNA has been in an advantageous position compared to other organisations. In addition, TNA has not had staff furloughed as many other cultural organisations have, which has allowed us to build an audience online. Circumstances are changing rapidly and decisions often need to be reviewed, so the focus is on being responsive, adaptive and trying to plan ahead as much as possible.

3.12 SJ asked if, given the intent on commercial exploitation, were there plans to introduce photography permits, which can be a real barrier to research?

JJ replied that commercial initiatives would be primarily business to business contracts or licensing agreements so would not be so small scale. The current thinking around commercial opportunities is about how to make the best use of the site; to ensure that we continue to license content to make the collection available; and how to offset some of the areas where we are seeing reduction in income. The consequences of being closed / partially open include a challenge to those services that require footfall but we can work to offset these in other areas.

3.13 JJ welcomed the new delegates and thanked the outgoing delegates for their service to TNA. He added that the UAG is one of our key bodies and it is great to see it thriving.

4) Delegate submitted items: i) challenges for researchers who do not live close to TNA (SK) and ii) Map Room reopening (SM). (LO).

4.1 As both SK's and SM's questions relate to the service provided since re-opening and the challenges this has posed for some user communities, LO gave some background to the recent work at Kew. TNA was the first large archive to reopen. Archives involve documents being handled, which is one of the ways COVID can be transferred, so there were real challenges on how to deliver the record safely. Our Collection Care colleagues spoke with peer institutions globally and looked at the research on the risks of COVID transmission from handling documents made from a variety of materials. In addition to the risk of transferring COVID, there is the risk of damage to the documents from hand sanitisers. The onsite provisions were directed by the findings of the Collection Care research on how long to quarantine a document between each handling and what the responsibilities of both staff and readers should be.

Reopening had to be done carefully and gradually so this started from a small scale with the view that any actions should be scalable. TNA follows government guidelines for staff, with Document Services being split into bubbles. A document is retrieved from the repository and is then quarantined before being made available to the reader, and then replaced. This builds in additional time and is why the advanced seat booking system has been introduced.

The huge demand for seats from the beginning of reopening was a surprise. TNA is aware it has been difficult sometimes for users to obtain these. Last week we expanded the service so more people can come in, and have introduced a limited bulk order so a user has two days to look at 40 documents. We recognise that for distant visitors their visit will be more challenging and hope the bulk order facility will go some way to addressing this. We have also reopened the map room in a limited way.

There have been challenges in getting the balance of communication right but the online chat and email function has remained available throughout with normal response times.

Work remains to be done on how to offer users a sequence of bookings, as this has implications for reducing availability for other users. The record copying service stopped on closure as part of the initial lockdown. We have re-started a limited service, providing copies of naturalisation certificates as a key service. The current bubble structure of the team requires balancing of resources: we are looking at restarting a fuller service, but it relies on the same staff who are retrieving the documents for readers to view.

Original records only are available on-site presently. We are looking at how to make some computer based facilities, library and original finding aids available, although these present challenges in mitigating risks of contamination and transfer of COVID. As with other cultural institutions, the 'Test and Trace' regulations will require the booking system to stay in place. We are confident that the measures we have put in place are keeping people safe, and have received a lot of positive feedback from onsite visitors to say they feel safe. We are in the process of planning the next phase of re-opening to make more seats and documents available, subject both to resourcing and the progress of the pandemic.

- 4.2 SK replied that she has received a substantial number of questions from users and would like to know what plans can be shared with them. LO advised that they should be directed to the TNA website and news pages. The FAQs are constantly updated.
- 4.3 SK advised that three groups feel disproportionately impacted: remote workers, caregivers and the chronically ill. In line with TNA's aim of being an inclusive archive, could a statement be addressed to these groups specifically, demonstrating the efforts being made to mitigate the effects on them?
ACTION: LO to follow up and will raise with colleagues who have been working with the sector about inclusive reopening. In practical terms, LO advised that users are permitted to visit with a carer and no changes have been made to reduce physical accessibility at Kew.
- 4.4 SM commented on her query related to communications, which had been felt to be poor in places, which she then outlined. LO discussed SM's points and added that information on several of them had been added to the FAQs, which are being expanded. Web chat also remains available. Communications are being continually reviewed and COS added that the feedback from both SM and SK is very helpful. COS emphasised that the overriding message has been to advise that the services offered are just a start and will be built upon. Staff and user safety are the overriding concerns.
- 4.5 MG advised that users are concerned that they are not permitted to bring paper, notebooks or pencils into the reading room. LO advised that from today, i.e. 2nd September, users are being offered paper and pencils in the reading rooms and that the prohibition on notebooks is to ensure a minimal contact approach to protect security officers. TNA has taken steps to reduce the number of points where a physical search has to take place. MG asked if this background could be added to the emails to users. **Action: LO to feedback to the teams.**
- 4.6 SK to email delegates with the remaining suggestions she has received from users on how to improve engagement for distance researchers in the longer term. SM will also circulate her feedback.
- 4.7 SA added that a proportion of users are still not ready to come to Kew. LO agreed, and stated that a larger proportion of users are using the car park.

4 Forthcoming Events and Any other Business

- 4.1 Delegates were referred to the Events pages on the TNA website for the forthcoming programme of events.
- 4.2 Given the challenges in delivering many of the activities onsite at the moment, the UAG Induction Day planned for early October will be rescheduled for Spring 2021, when it is hoped that onsite visits can be resumed.
- 4.3 The next meeting will be held on Tuesday the 1st December 2020 at 12 noon.