

Archives for the 21st Century





Archives for the 21st Century

**Presented to Parliament by the Lord Chancellor
and Secretary of State for Justice
by Command of Her Majesty**

November 2009

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Foreword

Our history is preserved and protected in a nationwide network of archival services. These treasure chests of information hold our national, local and family histories. If there is to be a record of the present for future generations, however, the importance of capturing digital material to form the historical record must be acknowledged and the challenges of preserving digital information grasped.

The information world has changed beyond all recognition since the last policy on archives was published ten years ago. Both the creation and the use of information have been revolutionised, not least through our ability to go online without being tied to a computer at home or in the office, or to work while on the move with technology that has become smaller, faster and more sophisticated.

The speed with which the digital world has been embraced across society means that people have come to expect information to be accessible online, at all times, and their approach to archives is no different. It is essential that the archives sector is able to respond to this challenge and continues to increase the proportion of records that are accessible online.

Archives are an increasingly popular cultural and educational resource, used to support the study of local and family history. This is due in part to the wider availability of digital sources and also encouraged by the popularity of TV programmes such as *Who Do You Think You Are?* Archives are also a major resource for academic research and publishing, which contribute significantly to the UK's international research competitiveness across a broad range of academic disciplines.

To survive for posterity, our archives must be actively collected, well cared for and readily accessible. However, publicly funded archives have a wider role than simply being custodians of our national memory. The availability of information is an essential part of a healthy, robust democracy. It helps to empower people to participate in the decisions affecting their own lives. It promotes a better understanding of how policy is developed and how it applies to individuals. Increasingly, the archive sector has an important role to play in understanding and therefore contributing to outcomes of government policies at a local, regional and national level.

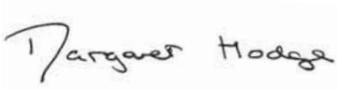
Archives can, and indeed in many cases do, make a clear contribution to the delivery of local policy initiatives, often through partnerships with other cultural, learning and information organisations. Local government and universities play a leading role in delivering key policy goals, especially in the areas of education and learning, empowering and engaging communities, supporting regeneration and growth, and facilitating volunteering opportunities. Archives need to be embedded more closely within the business and planning processes in their parent organisations to help deliver such key objectives.

Therefore, this is a call to action – particularly to the parent organisations of publicly funded archive services in local authorities and universities – to recognise the essential value that archives can add to the development of policy and the delivery of services locally. The policy does not offer a single blueprint for service provision. However, it is time to demand more from these valuable resources and to harness the knowledge, skills and enthusiasm of the professionals working in them. Archive services already play a vital role in the communities they serve. The potential for archives to contribute even further to democracy and accountability, social policy, education, history and culture, is yet to be fully realised in the digital age.



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Executive summary

The power of archives

Shaping the shared sense of national, community and individual identity that creates the framework for our democracy and accountability, gives people a frame of reference for their place in society, and helps them to understand how their location, community and family have developed.

Providing a stimulating environment for individual, family and lifelong learning in formal education, academic and personal research and outreach activities that stimulate an interest in people, places and our shared histories and experiences.

Sourcing evidence that demonstrates the integrity and judgement of public and private decisions and actions, which lasts longer and is more reliable than individual memory. Archives thus support evidence-based policy making and accountability and have an impact on the lives of individuals by providing authentic and reliable evidence of past actions.

Publicly funded archive services have a vital role within the communities they serve to contribute to local democracy, strong and cohesive communities, social policy, education, research, history and culture. The variety and historical significance of the collections held in archives can empower citizens to participate in community decisions and the shape of local services, and they can support people in developing a deep sense of place and identity. Around 300 institutions in England and Wales actively collect archives in a variety of formats including paper and electronic documents, film or sound recordings. A large proportion of these are within local authorities and universities, forming the backbone of publicly funded archival provision. There are also many private archives, preserving and often providing access to the records of individual businesses, families and organisations. Without the work of these public and private services, much of the nation's documentary heritage would not survive.

Since 1999 the archives sector has had some major achievements. Many archives have transformed the accessibility of their services both through the use of online facilities and through targeted projects with communities and schools based on important historical events, such as the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade in 2007. The role of archives as keepers of community memory, promoting social inclusion and a sense of place, has been reinforced and developed into widespread community outreach programmes. The Archive Awareness Campaign has raised the profile of archives nationwide.¹ The *Access to Archives (A2A)* database was developed by The National Archives to widen the opportunities for online searching of catalogues for a wide range of archive collections across England.

1. The Archive Awareness Campaign (www.archiveawareness.com) exists to promote public awareness of archives throughout the UK. It is co-ordinated by the National Council on Archives with the support of The National Archives and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council.

Similarly, in Wales, the Archives and Records Council Wales developed *Archives Wales* (AW). Hosted by The National Library of Wales, AW provides comprehensive summaries of archive collections held across Wales. Both A2A and AW have been used extensively for personal and academic research. The higher education and specialist sectors have parallel provision of rich online descriptions, through the complementary work of the *Archives Hub* and *Archives in London and the M25 Area* (AIM25).²

The public profile of archive services has been significantly enhanced through television series like *Who Do You Think You Are?*, increasing the numbers of visitors inspired to use archives to explore their family or local history. Archives have contributed to broader public policy agendas, such as community cohesion, through projects like Birmingham City Archives' *Connecting Histories* and Plymouth and West Devon Record Office's participation in the Cultural Olympiad by documenting the build-up to the Olympic Games in 2012. The Community Archives Wales (CAW) project similarly aims to strengthen community identity and contributes to regeneration in some of the most disadvantaged areas in Wales. There has been significant investment in new archive buildings, for example in Devon, Northumberland, Glamorgan and Norfolk, and at the universities of Manchester and York. A partnership between the University of Hull and Hull City Archives is delivering improvements through a shared building project. New buildings improve the standard of care for collections and provide the facilities to enable the future development of services. They can also have an important impact on the archive service as a whole, making it an attractive place to visit and thus broadening use and raising community awareness of the facility.

This policy sets out the strategic vision for the sustainable development of a vigorous, publicly funded archive sector across England and Wales. The policy is being issued in parallel versions. It replaces the government policy on archives that was issued by the Lord Chancellor in 1999 and builds on both the positive achievements around public access to information and technological developments. It focuses on actions for publicly funded archives while acknowledging that private archives remain vital to the archival health of the nation. The challenges facing the archives sector and the actions to address them are outlined in the five sections of this strategy:

Section I outlines how the landscape in which archive services operate has also changed radically in that time. Large organisations now keep most, if not all, of their information in electronic form, and many individuals and smaller organisations are also moving in that direction. Technology has made the traditional concept of the 'record' more complex as new channels and tools for recording and communicating information proliferate. Individual citizens increasingly expect information to be accessible online as a right, not a privilege, while society is becoming more diverse, mobile and transient. At the same time, the expectations of public services, both by government and citizens, have become more demanding, and the evidence base needed in bidding for funding has become more detailed.

2. The Archives Hub (www.archiveshub.ac.uk) and AIM25 (www.aim25.ac.uk) provide online access to descriptions of archives held by over 250 services, primarily based in universities and specialist repositories such as museums, learned societies and Royal Colleges.

Section 2 provides a vision of the true potential of publicly funded archives and what they can aspire to offer. Archives have the power to inspire, inform and entertain. They can provide accounts of the way individuals, families and communities interact, make decisions, learn and enjoy themselves and provide vital links between past, present and future generations. The value of this major resource should be recognised and harnessed for the benefit of all.

Section 3 outlines the challenges facing archive services in the delivery of their core task of preserving authentic information and helping people to access and understand the past. These include the impact that the considerable variation in size and resources between publicly funded institutions has on the consistency of service across England and Wales. The condition of some buildings that house archives can place collections at physical risk and can also place a real constraint on accepting new material or providing wider public access. The major challenge to manage digital records effectively, ensuring access now and in the longer term in a readable archive, is familiar to many organisations. The task of providing online access to catalogues is incomplete, and work to digitise collections is as yet mostly small-scale and piecemeal. There are many changes in the way that local services are delivered, particularly in learning and culture. This has enhanced the need to create opportunities to collaborate with other archives or other relevant partners. Just as critical is the need to further develop clear and strong leadership within the sector at all levels.

Section 4 sets out five key recommendations. These will help create a more vibrant and sustainable archive sector, that participates actively within the many diverse communities that it serves. The five recommendations are:

- Develop bigger and better services in partnership – working towards increased sustainability within the sector
- Strengthened leadership and a responsive, skilled workforce
- Co-ordinated response to the growing challenge of managing digital information so that it is accessible now and remains discoverable in the future
- Comprehensive online access for archive discovery through catalogues and to digitised archive content by citizens at a time and place that suits them
- Active participation in cultural and learning partnerships promoting a sense of identity and place within the community

Section 5 highlights the need for concerted action by all parties connected with the archive sector to ensure a sustainable future, allowing strong participation in the activities that support a healthy and robust democracy and community. It is vital to offer a clear sense of direction to the public sector in the current challenging economic climate, to ensure the potential of archives continues to be realised. Implementing the principles outlined above will help to provide archive services with a firm foundation for the future and assist in raising their profile to demonstrate their value and importance within the wider community.

This policy is accompanied by a report on the consultation phase, which can be downloaded from www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/policy/Aft21C. An action plan for England and an action plan for Wales for the delivery of the policy are being developed by The National Archives, the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) and CyMAL: Museums Archives and Libraries Wales, a division of the Welsh Assembly Government.

I. The archives world today

‘The archival record is . . . the direct, uninterpreted and authentic voice of the past: the primary evidence of what people did and what they thought; the look of places and events recorded through images – both still and moving; life’s beginnings and life’s endings; the growth and decline of industries and the ebbs and flows of communities and cultures. The archival record is the foundation on which are built all our histories, with their many and varied voices . . .

‘Archival records fulfil another unique role. They can be the evidential components of the public record and are therefore essential to understanding the processes of decision-making and governance. Preserving and managing these records has a long and honourable history that is now visible in the work of the UK’s national archival services and the network of local record offices, and specialist archives.’³

- I.1 Archives are the record of the everyday activities of governments, organisations, businesses and individuals. They are central to the record of our national and local stories and are vital in creating cultural heritage and supporting public policy objectives. Their preservation ensures that future generations will be able to learn from the experiences of the past to make decisions about the present and future.
- I.2 In today’s rapidly changing information world the archive sector faces complex challenges, both in documenting the evolving present and in delivering the core task of helping people to access and understand the past:
 - There is a growing expectation in society that all information resources should be available online, 24 hours a day.
 - There is a shift from paper to digital record keeping and other non-traditional record formats. This has been accompanied by a decline in the recognition of the need to link current record keeping in all formats with preserving archives.
 - The complex digital environment requires archivists to develop new expertise with a wider range of skills and knowledge.
 - The changing profile of local government delivery has required a shift to strategy, delivery and performance management, based upon tangible outcomes to communities. This is often increasingly achieved through a joined-up partnership approach with public, private and third sector providers across the cultural sector and beyond.
- I.3 Business and government, as well as most of the population, have changed the way they communicate in radical ways. In the last decade, developments in the internet, email and office technology have led to an enormous growth in the volumes of digital information being generated. Quite often a key communication method for government policy or guidance is on websites, with daily or more frequent updating (for example, during an outbreak of animal disease the online guidance is updated frequently).

3. *Listening to the Past, Speaking to the Future*: Report of the Archives Task Force, March 2004 (www.mla.gov.uk/what/publications/~~/media/Files/pdf/2004/listening_to_the_past_report.ashx)

- I.4 Technology is transforming the way all organisations communicate, including national and local government, but it can also put information at risk; information can be lost as technological obsolescence renders it unreadable and unusable. The volume of information that now only exists in electronic format is already vast and growing rapidly. This brings its own problems for identifying and capturing the key records that must be kept, in addition to then preserving them for the future. Managing electronic records presents a number of issues both in the scale of the challenge and the required technical skills set.
- I.5 Archive services, alongside their duty to preserve the record of both the past and the present, also aim to make the information in their collections discoverable, accessible and relevant to all. This may be achieved by supporting independent and academic researchers to make optimal use of the material available, and increasingly by developing cooperative partnerships to deliver cultural, research, education and information priorities.
- I.6 A large part of the nation's archival heritage is held by around 300 publicly funded archive services across England and Wales that collect material actively. Local authorities in England and Wales make up about half of these, and universities a further quarter, providing the backbone of the network of archival provision. National institutions (including The National Archives, The National Library of Wales and some national museums) and professional bodies have a significant role in acquiring archives. There are also a large number of mainly privately funded organisations that maintain their own records, and those of their predecessors.

Exploring climate change – what the sailors of the past can tell us

CLIWOC is an EU-funded international collaborative project between museum archives, universities and international institutes. Led by the University of Sunderland and the National Maritime Museum, it has drawn on historic collections to produce scientific material with real, practical benefits for meteorology today. The researchers aimed to discover more about the changing climate over the oceans in the period before industrialisation had any significant effect on climate and weather. The project was designed to abstract, interpret and analyse the data from logbooks kept by ships' officers from the 17th century onwards and to prepare a database that can be used by scientists to gain a better understanding of the climates over the ocean during this time. They also planned to compile a dictionary of logbook weather terms that convert old and seemingly curious descriptions into terms that make scientific sense.

Seasoned mariners compiled the logbooks in the vocabulary unique to their profession and their times. As observations were made several times each day during the voyages – many of these journeys lasting for months – logbooks contain huge amounts of detailed information. Instruments were only used rarely and the observations of the weather described those aspects influencing the navigation and progress of their ships.

Although these records were not originally compiled for this purpose, the abundance of data for wind force and direction is now invaluable, as it has been drawn from sources that pre-date global warming. It tells us much about the broad patterns of atmospheric behaviour related to the high- and low-pressure systems over the oceans. These systems govern the everyday weather that we recognise as rainfall, snow, temperatures, cloud and sunshine. In that sense, the data can be regarded as more fundamental to our understanding of climate than instrumental data, such as temperature and rainfall measurements.

2. Vision: the true potential of publicly funded archives

- 2.1 Access to publicly funded archives, and the information derived from them, should be available to every citizen. If the true potential of publicly funded archive services were realised, we would live in a world where:
- 2.1.1 **Every citizen** feels a connection to their nation state and their local community and can readily find out why their country and their neighbourhood is the way it is. **Communities are empowered** to collect and share their stories to inspire, inform and entertain.
 - 2.1.2 **Every child** experiences history brought to life through innovative access to our written, recorded and visual heritage, enriching their learning and inspiring creativity. **Young people** are inspired to take an interest in politics and their local community through the creative use of archive material to promote active citizenship.
 - 2.1.3 **People of all ages and abilities** can explore their personal identity by finding out about aspects of the past, such as their family history, and can do so easily through access to the internet at home or even on the move. Engaging in cross-generational learning is an enriching experience that archives are uniquely placed to support.
 - 2.1.4 **The community is offered a range of volunteering opportunities**, enriching lives and benefiting archives alike.
 - 2.1.5 **Public sector organisations and businesses** make better decisions because they have access to all the relevant evidence and are fully informed about lessons from the past. The **economic potential of historic information** to the business community is unlocked and fully exploited.
 - 2.1.6 **The value of the nation's archive heritage is unlocked**, supporting the UK's internationally significant research and its intellectual and economic benefits.
- 2.2 Archives have the power to narrate the essential record of our national and local story and so to enable future generations to learn about their origins. As the academic community fully appreciates, history is constantly, but often unconsciously, at work underpinning the operation of our society and giving context and meaning to individual and community life. Without archives, we would have no comprehensible history and without history we would have no roots or clear future direction.
- 2.3 Archives are the raw material of history, evidence of decisions made, of lives lived, of fashions, medical advancements and architectural change, as much as of wars, politics and economic expansion. Primary historical research material is critical to branches of scholarship as diverse as climatology, epidemiology, ethnography and linguistics, as well as all the various aspects of historical and socio-economic study with which it is most closely associated.

2.4 Archives have great potential to support public policy objectives. Over recent years, for example, changes to local government service delivery have required archive services to think increasingly about how their activities can contribute to policy priorities and how they can articulate the contribution they are making.

3. Challenge: what is stopping publicly funded archives from reaching their potential?

- 3.1 Many publicly funded archives across the UK are delivering significant and valued services to their community. There is not, however, a consistent picture across England and Wales and **the provision of archive services varies significantly** in size, budget, facilities and local profile. Historically, the value of archives has not been recognised in the same way as museums and libraries and so they have received a lower priority within the process for setting budgets. They face complex challenges both in continuing to deliver on their core mission and in adapting to the changing requirements of service delivery and new ways of working in response to the current trends in society.
- 3.2 **Inequalities of funding** across the sector have meant that a consistent offer is difficult to achieve and there are major disparities in the scale and quality of provision.⁴ The archive sector is characterised by a large number of small institutions with very few staff. This means that in many places important elements of archival activities, such as active collection development, conservation and cataloguing, are not being carried out at an adequate level, or even at all. The growing technical complexity of record keeping, and the increased range of administrative and management skills required by archival institutions, make operational effectiveness ever harder for small services, some of whom also find it a struggle to release staff for the professional training that develops and maintains their skills.
- 3.3 Building **the capacity to improve** can be a complex process for archive services. They are usually small units within parent organisations and can be missed when business and delivery priorities are set. Archive services need to actively demonstrate where they add value to policy targets both in their own right and in cooperation with other culture, learning and information partners. Although, in local government, archives are not explicitly included within local performance frameworks, there is potential for archive services to make a major contribution to the overall delivery of many local authority priorities. Correspondingly, research collections make a vital contribution to universities, adding value to a university's reputation and scholarship.

4. Funding for local authority archive services varies from £56,000 to £2.35m (£0.21 to £4.69 per capita) per annum (Source: Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, Archive Statistics 2006-07 Actuals). Of the archive services completing The National Archives' self-assessment exercise in 2008, 71.5 per cent of the top-scoring quartile reported over 15 staff to CIPFA in 2007-08. None of the lowest-scoring quartile reported over 15 staff. Seven per cent of the top-scoring quartile reported having fewer than five staff; 68 per cent of the lowest-scoring quartile reported fewer than five staff.

- 3.4 Performance within local authority archive services across England and Wales has been monitored over the last two years through a self-assessment process co-ordinated by The National Archives. This provides an up-to-date overview of sector performance within key areas of archival activity and also enables each service to benchmark its performance against the rest of the local authority archives sector. By using the self-assessment results, local archive services can develop improvement plans to address their real needs. A number of services have already secured additional resources for core functions in this way.
- 3.5 The universities sector is a diverse one, and the role of university archives differs according to institutional priorities. Within each autonomous university, the archive's role may be primarily to support research within the institution itself, to keep an authentic record of activity or to raise the university's profile as an institution within its local and academic community. Until the recent formation of the Higher Education Archivists Group, the university archives sector has tended to work collaboratively only on specific issues, principally in successful networking initiatives, such as the Archives Hub and AIM25.
- 3.6 Small services often lack ready access to expert preservation advice that can make prioritising limited resources a major hurdle. Being located in **inadequate buildings** can make the optimum preservation environment difficult to achieve, especially with escalating energy costs, and may put some archive collections at risk of damage or destruction. Inadequate management of environmental risks such as temperature, humidity, pest control and danger from fire or flood contributes to the possible loss of important material.
- 3.7 The buildings of many archive services are simply too small and not fit for purpose in various ways. This imposes a real constraint on collection development as well as on innovative approaches to public access. The image presented to users and potential funders is not enticing and can be a barrier to new visitors.
- 3.8 **Active collection development**, where archives staff seek out and collect significant material from individuals or key organisations, is being limited through insufficient staff capacity and/or physical storage space. Important documents are at risk of being destroyed simply because they are not being acquired by archives. Collecting to meet changing research priorities can leave a university archive with 'orphan' collections, no longer core to their institutional aims but which nonetheless have a research value external to the university.
- 3.9 The sale of private collections risks key elements of the national heritage being lost to overseas purchasers or into private ownership with no guarantee of public access. To date, little archival material of key importance has been lost or dispersed in this way because the funding has been made available, largely from charitable or grant aid sources, to secure successful acquisition by the appropriate repositories. However, the need to raise large sums to tight timetables can be a major distraction from other priorities, especially for small archive services.

- 3.10 **Backlogs of un-catalogued material** exist, and are growing, in almost every repository. This means that people are unable to find out that these materials exist and information that may be important for research remains undiscovered and invisible to archive users. Information can also remain hidden from sight in older catalogues that need to be reviewed to offer better interpretation.

Removing the invisibility cloak – making archival material more accessible

The **National Cataloguing Grants Scheme for Archives** is an innovative five-year programme designed to reduce the volume of archive material that has not been catalogued. Catalogues provide a detailed description of each item held within archives and are a vital tool for archive users in tracing the information they need for their research. The scheme started in 2008, and will run until 2012, following a successful pilot phase. The project is funded through the generous support of the Pilgrim Trust, the Foyle Foundation, the Wolfson Foundation, the Monument Trust, the Gladys Kriebel Delmas Foundation, the Mercers' Company Charitable Foundation, and the Goldsmiths' Company. It is administered by The National Archives.

As part of the 2007 pilot, the *Writing Lives – archives of literary craft and kinship* project at Exeter University has already resulted in greater access for users to manuscripts, letters and much-loved poems by South West writers such as Ted Hughes, Daphne du Maurier and Charles Causley, as well as the Devon poet and critic Patricia Beer. Indeed, a number of newly discovered letters from Siegfried Sassoon, found in the papers of Charles Causley, are now available for research through this project.

- 3.11 **Dynamic leadership** is needed across the archives sector to create a more vibrant, outward-looking service that reflects and enhances the community it serves. There are challenges for leadership at national, professional and institutional levels. The small size and low profile of most archival institutions can make it challenging to attract and retain high-calibre professionals with the vision, skills and energy to develop effective archive services. All too often, archive leaders lack the skills and the status to be effective advocates for the value of their service. Equally, in common with many other cultural organisations, there is a challenge for archive services in developing a diverse workforce that reflects the communities they serve. In Wales, archive services need to ensure that there are sufficient suitably qualified staff to deliver a fully bilingual service.
- 3.12 **Many archive services are not yet able to manage digital records** and, indeed, their parent bodies often do not have active record management systems for identifying paper or digital records of long-term value and transferring them to the archives. Rapid obsolescence of hardware and software may also lead to important records that have been retained becoming unreadable and, in some cases, lost. This is a threat to the effective administration and accountability of public and other bodies, and to the quality of the services they provide. Although the digital challenge is most obvious in organisations, archive services are already finding that the records of private individuals donated to them are also vulnerable to the same risks of loss.

- 3.13 There is currently **online access** to barely 50 per cent of the descriptions of archive collections across England and Wales, and images of less than one per cent of the collections are available electronically. This means that the growing public expectation for immediate access from home cannot be fully met. Providing comprehensive access to electronic catalogues is now urgent and necessary if archives are to remain visible to a generation that increasingly seeks information online. Making electronic descriptions available online and to international standards makes it possible to open up data to different user communities.
- 3.14 Building the capacity for making as much archival content as possible available digitally, via both national and local partnerships, must also be a priority. It is unrealistic to think that the cost of digitising all of the material held in archives could be justified, and there are reasons why it would not be appropriate to digitise some types of record. However, access to digitised images and documents plays an important role in a wide range of educational, research, leisure and business purposes. Archives need a dialogue with users over priorities for digitisation to develop a strategic approach that maximises the value of public and voluntary investment in such work.

Connecting histories – the discovery of a common sense of belonging

Britain today is a multicultural nation, and the history of the West Midlands in the 20th century is central to this story. It is a history of the emergence of multicultural, multilingual and multi-faith communities of Black, Muslim, Sikh, Jewish, Irish, refugee and travelling people. Yet the stories that make up this history have remained largely hidden in archival and library collections; stories of common experiences, shared struggles and aspirations. *Connecting Histories* – a project spanning 30 months – aimed to make these collections accessible and realise their potential, so that connections can be made between the past and present. The increased access to such culturally diverse archival material, in the form of documents, photographs and sound recordings, promoted debate about shared identities, a common sense of belonging and multiple heritages.

The project brought local people together to learn about archiving their own histories and gaining new skills essential for exploring their joint histories. Adult learners were supported in developing their research and IT skills around linked themes of Black history, social campaigning, migration and settlement. The rich sources of information about the cultural, industrial and religious diversity held in small collections around the city have become visible for the first time and are accessible to everyone online in an e-learning environment. The project expanded the heritage knowledge and skills of local communities through user participation, particularly among non-traditional users. It also helped preserve at-risk sound and photographic archives while increasing the number and diversity of users of archive collections.

Connecting Histories was an innovative partnership project led by Birmingham City Archives, the University of Birmingham, Warwick University and the *Black Pasts*, *Birmingham Futures* group and supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund. It was hugely successful in its main aim of increasing access to a culturally diverse archive collection.

Challenging prejudices using archives and drama

Forgotten, a new play created and acted by adults with learning difficulties, describes the history of learning-disabled people over the last century and the mistreatment of residents in long-stay hospitals. It is based on research into the archives from long-stay hospitals and the real life experiences of the participants. It was the result of a partnership between ACTA (a community theatre company providing arts opportunities to excluded communities) and Misfits Theatre Company for adults with learning difficulties. Staff at the [Bristol Record Office](#) helped the participants to identify suitable material in the archive and to interpret the records for use in their play.

The project was an opportunity for the participants to share with a wider audience how they feel and wish to be seen and treated; it provided a vibrant voice for themselves and others. The play succeeded in getting people together to talk about these experiences and also to start to begin challenging the prejudices around people with learning difficulties. The project was funded through the Heritage Lottery Fund.

4. Response: how do we achieve the vision?

Recommendations:

- Develop bigger and better services in partnership – working towards increased sustainability within the sector
- Strengthened leadership and a responsive, skilled workforce
- Co-ordinated response to the growing challenge of managing digital information so that it is accessible now and remains discoverable in the future
- Comprehensive online access for archive discovery through catalogues and to digitised archive content by citizens at a time and place that suits them
- Active participation in cultural and learning partnerships promoting a sense of identity and place within the community

- 4.1 In the long term, there is significant value in moving towards a **collaborative culture** for archive services. Offering greater efficiency and effectiveness through innovative partnerships within or between funding authorities will allow scope for improvements in the quality of services provided. **Developing bigger and better services in partnership** is not about imposing solutions. It may operate in a variety of ways depending on the local context, and must arise out of local need and active consultation, empowering communities. This could mean, for example, two small local authority services combining to provide a more effective and sustainable service on one site or for services to collaborate on the delivery of some specialist functions while maintaining separate identities. Cross-sector collaborations between local authorities, universities, the NHS or other public sector partners should also be explored. Robust joint arrangements are vital to this approach, to allow any partnership to fulfil its potential. There are already examples where such partnerships have been developed, for example the Norfolk Record Office and the University of East Anglia and the Hull History Centre which will offer improved facilities for the City Archives and University Special Collections.
- 4.2 New arrangements that draw collections, facilities and staff expertise together can offer a higher level of stewardship for archival holdings and better use of investment opportunities. This can also highlight the efficiencies to be gained from sharing services and corporate facilities with other publicly funded institutions, such as shared-service contracts for IT and specialist conservation work.
- 4.3 The exploration of closer cooperation between archive services and with libraries, museums and other information services will also create exciting opportunities to develop more innovative services. Partnerships beyond the local authority sector offer a rich variety of opportunities, such as collaborations with universities to support research and innovation; working together with the creative industries to develop new audiences for both sectors; or community archive partnerships with local authorities that can enrich outreach and audience development opportunities.

- 4.4 **Strengthening leadership** and raising the profession's profile is necessary at a national, local and institutional level. Strategic engagement with policy- and decision-makers across both local and national government will demonstrate the role and value of archives in the development of a robust democracy, the implementation of social policies and in supporting research. Active management and promotion of the important role of archive services will enhance their profile and value within their parent organisations and communities. Making the best use of skilled professional staff, developing innovative partnership working and actively linking with current information management will build a firm foundation for sustainable archives services in the future.
- 4.5 Activities to support the development of leadership and professional skills will be promoted to create a diverse, vibrant and skilled workforce that can respond to consumers' needs in even more creative and imaginative ways. The workforce already includes many valued staff with unique skills in stewardship and record keeping. Vital traditional interpretative skills that are valued by users and make the past come alive must be retained. The conservation skills that are key to allowing collections to survive and remain accessible must be maintained. However, further transformation of the workforce can be taken forward: professional skills can be enhanced through higher education to reflect the sector-recognised National Occupational Standards. In addition to the traditional skills needed by archivists, training bodies must ensure that the content of their courses continues to develop in line with the requirements of the sector. Opportunities provided through continuing professional development, for archives staff to update or add to their skills, also need to be enhanced. Smaller services may risk finding themselves ever more stretched as the challenges grow, unless they can collaborate with other services to gain the necessary support.
- 4.6 Developing the existing systems of assessment and recognising and measuring service quality in public sector archives will support the culture of continuous improvement and help to define, recognise and promote excellence in the delivery of archive services. Sharing innovative ideas and promoting good practice will support this bid to drive up standards and are consistent with the principles of service improvement.
- 4.7 Every organisation has to face the ever-growing challenge of managing digital information. This requires a shift in priorities and skills at all levels of administration to establish systems for the comprehensive capture and management of digital records, ensuring that the information is available to support the business of the organisation. It is important to establish clear connections between records management and archival functions within an organisation to make sure that key records are identified and transferred into the archive. In this way, the information remains discoverable for researchers in the future.

Bringing history to life for millions of people

The National Archives does not just hold information; it actively promotes and encourages public access to, and re-use of, that information. Increasingly, people are demanding information online and The National Archives has responded positively by embarking on an ambitious programme to digitise the most popular documents in its collections.

The programme aims to digitise over 100 million pages by 2012, making them available across the globe through instant digital access. They range from iconic documents of great historical interest, such as Domesday Book, through to the hugely popular census records, prisoner of war and war service records, as well as government legislation.

The National Archives works successfully with private sector partners to make records available electronically. The commercial partners manage the financial risks, while all intellectual property rights in the digital material are retained at The National Archives and income from royalties is ploughed back into developing new services at The National Archives. The programme encourages competition, innovation and the development of cutting-edge services. Over 112 million documents from The National Archives' collection were downloaded in 2008-09, from a zero base just over eight years ago. Over 170 documents were downloaded electronically over the internet for every one document requested in the reading rooms.

- 4.8 Providing comprehensive online access to archive information is a necessary response to the increasing proportion of archives users who now expect resources to be available online at a time and place that suits them. As users increasingly operate in an online environment, it is ever more vital to capture the volume and value of online use. There are many archives of international significance in England and Wales, and provision of online access to information allows this to be highlighted, with benefits to the knowledge economy and our international research profile. In addition, public authorities, including publicly funded archive services, have a range of statutory responsibilities including a Disability Equality Duty to promote equality of opportunity for disabled people, and to take steps to meet disabled people's needs. Digital technology, if used effectively, can also help the archives sector meet their statutory duties by making archive materials more accessible to disabled people.
- 4.9 By harnessing partnerships with the private sector and charitable trusts, the co-ordination of large-scale opportunities across England and Wales to develop such services can be maximised. This can include the conversion of paper catalogues into online resources and digitisation of selected archival content.
- 4.10 Building active participation in cultural and learning partnerships is key to promoting a sense of identity and place within the community. By doing so, archive services, with their delivery partners, are capable of making an important contribution to improving the quality of life for local people, assisting the understanding of identity, building bridges across social and cultural divides and generally shaping better places to live.

Learning from experience and uncovering the history in archives, museums and libraries

The library, archive and museum services of Bexley Council cooperated to help four schools deliver Key Stage 2 history – by reliving the history of childhood during the Blitz. A number of Second World War evacuees visited the schools to talk about their experiences alongside representatives from the Bluebell Railway and Second World War re-enactment groups. A mobile exhibition, made up of archives and artefacts from the local archive centre and museum, was also taken to schools in the borough. In addition, all the primary schools in Bexley received a Blitz Kids resource pack.

The project aimed to open up libraries, museums and archives to children, and to help teachers deliver the National Curriculum in different ways. Teachers were able to get a better idea of the resources available in the borough, and how to access them. Unexpected benefits included raising the community profile of the services involved in the project, and promoting a positive working relationship between them.

The original evacuees were keen to share that they had benefited from this as well – some had been traumatised by their experiences, and the ‘reminiscence therapy’ that they experienced through the project proved to be very helpful for them.

This project was funded by the Single Regeneration Budget and Bexley Council.

- 4.11 Volunteering in archives already brings great benefits to the sector and to participants, and this key aspect should continue to grow and be strengthened. Volunteers can undertake detailed description work that many archives cannot resource from their core budgets, but which opens up collections to new users. Preservation work, particularly tasks such as repackaging and flattening of documents, has led to the development of active volunteer communities in many archives, and to the better care of the collections. Volunteering in archives has also proved its value in supporting return to work initiatives for the long-term sick or unemployed.
- 4.12 Where archives are positioned within their parent organisation may have a significant impact on the ease with which they can form partnerships for service delivery. In reviewing organisational structures, there is a need to consider both the desirability of partnerships with other cultural providers and the importance of the role the archive service plays in information management within the parent organisation. Direct involvement in the decision-making process is key to ensuring the informational and cultural value of archives is realised to the full.
- 4.13 Collaborative arrangements have the potential to enhance the status and role of archives within communities, providing social benefits and opening up new ways in which the resources of archives are made available. Innovations in areas such as network provision and digital preservation will be greatly enhanced by sustained partnerships between archive services.

- 4.14 Archive services and the professionals responsible for them, by adhering to best practice in community engagement, not only involve communities in the planning and delivery of services, but can realise the contribution made by archives to empowering communities in the broadest sense.
- 4.15 Recent education initiatives in both England and Wales have highlighted opportunities for archive services to participate in innovative learning experiences in schools and for lifelong learning. By harnessing the diverse resources within archives, as well as libraries and museums, archive services can respond to the requirements of the National Curriculum in new and exciting ways. Strengthening the links between education services and archives can maximise learning opportunities and unlock the rich potential in our archives. Archive services should develop work with after-school clubs and specific student groups on curriculum-based projects. These partnerships could make better use of shared exhibition and display spaces, and open up meeting rooms and community spaces for education use.

A model for excellence for publicly funded archive services

High performing archive services should aim to:

- Broaden and deepen public access to their resources
- Embed excellence, scholarship, creativity and diversity in all they do
- Support evidence-based policy making and the accountability of decision makers
- Ensure the sustainability of services by balancing resources across their responsibilities and placing continuous improvement and value for money at the heart of all activities
- Offer high levels of stewardship to their unique collections and work towards meeting relevant national and international standards for preservation and description
- Collect actively to fulfil their collecting remit within the national network of archives, to ensure the survival and authenticity of key collections that make up the nation's unique documentary heritage
- Perform to the highest levels and champion continuous professional development
- Integrate with other cultural, learning and information services to offer essential resources that meet people's needs
- Innovate, be entrepreneurial and able to adapt to new working methods
- Provide places for people to visit and use that are accessible, fit for purpose, attractive and enjoyable

5. Action: what needs to be done?

- 5.1 In the current challenging economic climate, it is more important than ever that archive services demonstrate the impact and value of what they do and have a clear sense of direction and purpose.
- 5.2 To ensure a sustainable future for archives, concerted action is required from all parties across the archive sector. The National Archives will be working with both the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) and CyMAL: Museums Archives and Libraries Wales, a division of the Welsh Assembly Government, to develop strategic leadership for the archive sector. These bodies can broker greater understanding of the value and need for archives, both for maintaining a record of public life and for their wider contribution to the community.
- 5.3 *Archives for the 21st Century* will be accompanied by two action plans, one for England and one for Wales, to demonstrate how The National Archives, MLA and CyMAL will provide clear leadership and action in taking forward this policy. The National Archives, MLA and CyMAL will monitor progress in the implementation of the English and Welsh action plans.
- 5.4 The National Archives is well placed to lead on negotiating national deals for projects across the sector, such as the digitisation of catalogues and archival content. Such projects can benefit individual archive services, delivering large quantities of content online and offering limited income streams.
- 5.5 The National Archives and MLA will work together with key sector bodies to develop the skills and capabilities to take these opportunities forward. CyMAL and the professional bodies in Wales will continue to work together with The National Archives to realise the value of Wales' rich heritage and to ensure that all Welsh archive services are empowered to realise their full potential in this digital age.
- 5.6 For publicly funded archive services and their parent organisations, this policy provides an opportunity to identify where archives can contribute to organisational objectives such as delivering public policy goals. These may particularly include community engagement, well-being, education, research, lifelong learning and local regeneration and growth. It also addresses the challenges limiting this contribution at present. Implementing incremental change within existing resources and exploiting the opportunities created through reviewing priorities as part of the regular business planning process make it possible to build major improvement into the delivery of archive services and the wider organisation.
- 5.7 When investment is being planned in archival and cultural services, consideration should be given to incorporating innovative and cross-sector partnership arrangements that can deliver benefits in greater efficiencies and effectiveness.

5.8 Archive services across England and Wales have the potential to be an even more valuable resource at the heart of their communities. Their contribution to local democracy and accountability, education, learning and culture and the sense of identity and place for local people, communities and organisations, is frequently understated and consequently unrecognised. The archive sector needs to harness the skills of those dedicated professionals within its ranks who are best placed to identify and articulate the opportunities for archives to contribute in this vital way in their own local communities.



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