

Mrs Batool Khan
Resource
The Council for Museums Archives and Libraries
16 Queen Anne's Gate
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31st July 2003

Dear Batool,

RESOURCE'S ARCHIVES TASK FORCE

Consultation Response from The National Council on Archives (NCA)

Thank you for the opportunity to formally comment on the emerging issues surrounding the Archives Task Force (ATF) . Many of our comments you may already be aware of, given Nick Kingsley's membership of the Task Force. We hope that you will not mind if we begin by highlighting strategic issues before dealing with the 10 key questions.

First, we would wish to underline what an unprecedented opportunity for change the ATF represents for the archives community. It is a once in a generation chance for us to collectively voice a vision for archives and records management that is imaginative, ambitious and yet achievable. We do not underestimate the difficulties in producing a vision that all parts of the archive community can sign up to but do it we must.

As a piece of work commissioned by Government, the ATF needs to spell out the role archives and records management have to play in meeting some of the Government's over-arching policy objectives in the areas of citizenship, lifelong learning, social inclusion, e-service delivery and accountability. We must make our case to Government in its terms rather than our own. No doubt the ATF recommendations will have resource implications for Government. If we are to achieve results in this direction we need to be thinking creatively about presenting the initial findings in such a way as to complement, and form an element of, much broader initiatives in the cultural and information arenas.

We would also like to articulate a concern about the process by which the ATF report will be received rather than its content. We are confident that Resource's commitment to the Task Force will deliver a clear vision, but we are not clear about how the report will be championed within Government. The Task Force has been quick to realise that its recommendations will inevitably cut across, and be relevant to, a number of Government departments. This is all to the good but it does mean that we should be striving to make sure that the process by which it is received in Government is effective. The Task Force report will land on the desk of the Secretary of

State for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and we will in part, be dependent on that department's ability to make the case across Government. We urge Resource to do the utmost it can to ensure that those cross Government channels are open and receptive.

In terms of garnering support for the final recommendations of the ATF, we believe that efforts should be made to harness the support of archive users and supporters rather than solely archivists and records managers. For this to be realisable, the report and recommendations will need to relate to their concerns: in other words to be user rather than supplier focused.

Turning to the Emerging Viewpoints – 10 Key Questions

A new Vision for UK archives

1. What is your vision for your organisation?

To be recognised and valued by policy makers, partners and funders as well as its constituents, as the leading lobbying organisation for all those with an interest in archives and records management in the UK.

2. Where do you see the wider world of archives and records management in 10 years time?

- The vision of the National Archives Network will be a reality. All archival catalogues in the UK with associated digitised images will be available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week over a single portal with interfaces tailored to the needs of key user groups (e.g. leisure historians and personal interest researchers; family historians; school pupils and teachers; HE users; professional researchers; archive and cultural professionals)
- The profile of users of archives will match that of the general population of the UK;
- Archives will be recognised and valued in public surveys for the role they successfully play in firing peoples' imagination, learning and curiosity. The role of "behind the scenes " services will be valued as enabling that firing;
- Local and family history will be recognised by Government as one of the key drivers behind boosting adult learning and hence employability;
- Effective electronic records management will be delivered across all organisations improving accountability and openness. It will be seen as central to the democratic functioning of public service organisations and essential to the business performance of private ones;
- To achieve the above, those caring for archives and records will have been enabled to provide sustainable and responsive services;
- Creative partnerships inside the archives domain and without will be routine and embedded.

Making archives and records management relevant

3. How should we engage more people in archives?

The NCA's groundbreaking survey "Taking Part" looked at many of the ways in which archives can, and are, engaging more people. We will not, therefore, repeat its findings here.

Perhaps, though, it is worth emphasising some of the conclusions that came out of the NCA's Road to Relevance Conference in March 2003.

We are underestimating consumption. There are certainly far more consumers of archives than any of the currently available statistics would lead us to believe. We have established routes for determining the profile and size of the audience that make physical visits, some data for on-line use, and practically nothing that assesses the use of archival material in media channels. We need to find ways to track, measure and evaluate secondary use of archives if we are truly to understand the existing level of engagement. Nor should we be ashamed of the fact that those responsible for content creation on TV, radio or print may be better at creating mass markets for our material than professional archivists.

The [Comm@net](#) programme has revealed quite clearly that people will create and connect with archives by means that lie entirely outside of the "traditional" service providers. One of the challenges to the professional archivist is to find ways of generating useful dialogues with community archiving groups as West Yorkshire Archive Service are now doing.

Archives as institutions are actively engaging more people in archives but this kind of new engagement is often sporadic, project based and not mainstreamed. We need to build on examples of mainstreaming changes in services and disseminate these more widely.

We need to recognise the limitations of what archives can achieve working in isolation and create long term partnerships with those well placed to help us reach out successfully. We also need to recognise that the attitudes and motivations of those that care for archives are as key to engaging with the wider community as the oft cited problems of funding and capacity.

4. How would you change the profile of archives and records management? Who with?

Changing the profile of archives and records management will require a co-ordinated effort within the archives domain. To some extent the ATF itself and the NCA's Archive Awareness Month represents the first attempt to do this on a national scale. We will need to evaluate and learn the lessons of both these initiatives if we are to raise the profile of archives in a consistent and sustained fashion. We would suggest that, in order to make further progress, we need to devise a market segmentation approach to profile raising. This might cover:

- Government;
- Mps and Peers;
- Policy Makers;

- Funders;
- The media;
- Governing bodies be they public or private;
- General public;
- Those underrepresented as users namely under 24s, black and ethnic minorities and higher education students.

Responsibility for different segments would need to be divided up amongst bodies within and possibly without the domain. We need to think seriously about applying resources make a long-term profile-raising campaign work and to buying in professional PR expertise that could, amongst other things, develop a list of celebrity supporters.

We would also suggest, from experience in planning for Archive Awareness Month (which parallels that of The National Archives) that it is really the power of the human stories released by archival material that creates interest amongst the media and public audiences and not institutions or processes. This argument will not hold true for contemporary records management where the audiences we would wish to target are usually internal customers within an organisation at senior management level.

Seizing the digital opportunity

5. What steps remain to complete an electronic national archives network?

6. How can we best harness the potential of digitisation?

Given Nick Kingsley's central role as Joint Convenor of the National Archives Networking Sub-group, we are sure that the views of the NCA on this matter are well known and understood.

Training and Skills

7. What should be the priorities for a new approach to training and development?

We welcome and endorse the new training framework and model produced by the ATF's subgroup on training and development. This is a considered and thoughtful response to the issues of recruitment, retention and progression now fully evidenced and analysed by the NCA's training and recruitment review. The "stratified" framework's strength is that it recognises the need for a more rounded approach to progression within the archives and records management profession.

It does not, however, make recommendations about the revolution that needs to occur in the promotion of archives and records management as a career. We clearly need some kind of co-ordinated strategy for attracting both more people and different kinds of people to work with archives, an initiative which will require new funding and partnership working, as well as intelligent planning. Without a buoyant and diverse workforce we are unlikely to be able

to better serve our customers and communities. A strategy for promoting archives as a career choice will not just require a much more targeted and skilled selling of the career possibilities to undergraduates, although this remains important. It will need to be developed in tandem with a long-term profile raising for archives in order to raise the public's consciousness of their existence.

8. Who should these be for? How can these be best achieved?

Recommendations for training and development should be jointly pursued by the Society of Archivists, FARMER, Resource, its Regional Agencies and the NCA. As the key domain employers, the Local Government Association and The National Archives, should be consulted on models for delivery. The good work carried out to diagnose the staffing problems within archives and records management and to look to a workable solution, does nevertheless present a self-diagnosis. Perhaps, we should be mindful of ensuring we will actually be meeting employers future needs rather than the current profession's view of what those needs are.

The number of people working in archives and records management is very small. Some previous initiatives have proved unsustainable because of lack of footfall. If we are to successfully develop a new model for training it will be essential to delineate where there are overlaps in training with museums, libraries and other professions within the culture and information environment lie. In doing so, we might usefully look at where we can create meaningful partnerships for delivery by joining with existing or future infrastructures that lie outside our small domain. Such partnerships might fruitfully encompass Resource's own plans for cross-sectoral workforce development through its Regional Agencies, a relationship with the forthcoming Sector Skills Council(s) and joint working between the SOA, the Museums Association (MA) and the Chartered Institute for Library and Information Professionals (CILIP).

In terms of promotion of the careers in archives and records management, the NCA would be happy to be involved in the development and execution of any strategy.

Partnerships for success

9. What are the key partnerships you would like to see developed for your organisation?

As well as continuing to foster our existing core partnerships with Resource, The National Archives, Society of Archivists and the Association of Chief Archivists in Local Government, the NCA is currently working on developing more concrete relationships with the MA and CILIP in order to improve its intelligence gathering and sharing on policy matters. The NCA is also seeking to strengthen its horizon scanning function. We are doing this by initiating relationships with organisations whose policies and programmes are likely to affect archives. Two examples of this are: the development of the NCA's Working Party on Civil Registration that aims to influence the implementation

of the Office of National Statistics's forthcoming legislative changes; and the NCA's representation on the London Mayor's Commission on Black and Asian Heritage. In the future, we will be looking to create other partnerships in order to improve our organisational effectiveness such as through the Arts and Business Mentoring Scheme.

10. How can these partnerships be best supported?

The key to the NCA's ability to create and maintain partnerships is sustainable capacity. In this respect the NCA mirrors the archive domain as a whole. This means that, if the domain continues to generate more demands of us, our effectiveness will remain dependent upon the financial and administrative support we receive from key funders. Whatever changes we might choose to make to generate further income we are, in reality, likely to still require grant-in-aid to maintain our executive arm.

We are mindful that there remains much work for us and others to do if archives are to be truly represented and heard in the context of policy development in the cultural and information spheres. As our champion within Government, we hope that Resource will strive to ensure that the NCA is routinely invited to participate in policy matters. We are not quite there yet.

If you would like to discuss any issues raised in this response, we would ask you to contact, in the first instance, our Policy and Development Officer, Katie Norgrove on 020 8392 5376 or by email

katie.norgrove@nationalarchives.gov.uk

Yours sincerely,

Nick Kingsley
Chair