

THE PSQG *Standard for Access to
Archives: The next steps*

A report to the PSQG Steering Group

by

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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The *Standard for Access to Archives* (The Standard) was originally drafted by the Public Services Quality Group (PSQG) as a voluntary organisation in 1998-99. The existing version was formally endorsed by a number of stakeholder organisations, including the Inter-departmental Archives Committee (IDAC), the National Council on Archives (NCA) and the Society of Archivists (SoA). It was published by the Public Record Office (PRO) – now The National Archives (TNA) – in February 2000. Copies have been available free of charge from the Archive Inspection Services at the PRO. The full text has also been made available on the PSQG pages of the PRO website at <http://www.pro.gov.uk/archives/accessyoarchives.pdf>.
- 1.2 Since its publication in February 2000 the *Standard* has been widely used by individual repositories. It has also been actively promoted by various organisations – including the two main archive inspecting agencies (the Public Record Office and the Historical Manuscripts Commission before their amalgamation in April 2003) - as a standard for voluntary adoption.
- 1.3 However, the three years that have passed since the original draft Standard was launched have seen rapid change not only within the archive domain but also across the whole spectrum of activity across the museums, archives and libraries sector. It was always the intention that the draft document should be road-tested before being developed into an agreed formal Standard for Access to Archives. In the light of the pace of change since it was first written, however, PSQG felt it would be wise to take stock of current needs and issues before moving forward to any such development.
- 1.4 PSQG is keen to ensure that the document is developed to meet the actual current needs and demands of archive service providers and archive users, rather than relying on outdated perceptions of the role the *Standard*. How far, for instance, have the changing circumstances and opportunities offered by computerised and on-line access technologies affected the nature of its contents?. Similarly, has the convergence of museums, archives and libraries altered the need for a single-domain *Standard* – or would such a document still have a use and value for museums, libraries and other bodies which hold recorded information which they seek to make available for public access?
- 1.5 Accordingly, PSQG sought funding from Resource for a scoping study to assess the impact of the standard, obtain feedback from stakeholders, provide an assessment of need and identify costed options for the development of a formal standard. Resource agreed to support such a study, with a brief to:
 1. Establish views of key stakeholders
 2. Gather evidence on the impact of the draft standard to date
 3. Review existing sources of feedback to the PSQG on the draft standard
 4. Clarify the process for development of the draft as a British Standard
 5. Identify and assess alternatives to the BSI (British Standards Institute) route for publication
- 1..6 It was further agreed that the outcome of the study would include firm plans for moving forward with the Standard in 2003-04, with a timetable, estimates of costs, and a funding strategy.
- 1.7 This report therefore represents the results of consultation with stakeholders, research on the application of the *Standard* to date, and consideration of options for development. Completion of the report was originally scheduled for the end of May

2003, but difficulties in getting answers from the BSI led to delays. At the PSQG Steering Group meeting on 29 April the timetable was extended to the July meeting.

2. SCOPE AND CONSULTATION

- 2.1 Fact-finding and assembling evidence for this report has taken four main forms:
1. A review of existing feedback on the *Standard* as recorded in the files maintained by PSQG and TNA
 2. Targeted consultation with key stakeholders through a short questionnaire
 3. Open consultation with practitioners who were invited to comment on the *Standard* and given an opportunity to respond to the questionnaire
 4. Dialogue with potential hosts for a revised and improved version of the *Standard*
- 2.2 The questionnaire was designed primarily to elicit the personal views of key stakeholders in the museum, archive and library domains – senior staff in archival and cross-domain agencies (including Resource and the Regional Agencies), organisations representing users and heads of repositories. Copies were sent by post to some 270 identified individuals.
- 2.3 The form was kept short in the hope of providing a medium through which people could comment quickly and without requiring consultation with others. It asked for views on three main points:
1. Is it clear that there is a need for a separate standard for access to archives?
 2. Does the document need to be a formal British Standard, or are there other publication routes that should be explored?
 3. How could the existing *Standard* be revised and improved?
- 2.4 In addition, archive practitioners were invited to comment on the practical application of the *Standard* through postings on the ARCHIVES-NRA mailbase. Some individuals known to have made use of the document were also contacted direct for feedback on the *Standard* and for their comments on its development.
- 2.5 In all, 48 responses were received. Some of these followed the questionnaire form but other respondents chose to comment on specific issues and to raise matters for further consideration. While the results are therefore incapable of statistical analysis – and in any case this consultation is only part of a wider trawl of view regarding the *Standard* – the questionnaire has provided a very clear steer in a number of areas and a great deal of helpful and valuable comments on the way forward.
- 2.6 Of the responses received, 19 were from County Record Offices, 8 from archive bodies (including regional agencies), 6 from Higher Education, 6 from other local authority archives, 3 from specialist repositories, 3 from National repositories, and 3 from individuals (consultants / retired etc). Most responses came from archive practitioners, with only a small number from the invited key stakeholders outside the domain.
- 2.7 *Comment:* It is worth considering whether the relatively low response rate – while due to some extent to the time-pressures on those invited to participate – can be taken to imply broad satisfaction with the document as it is, or if it reflects limited awareness and engagement with the existing *Standard*. The first interpretation is supported by the general thrust of the replies received, but research undertaken for the Resource summary of standards for museums, archives and libraries provides evidence of limited usage within the domain – with 22 of the 41 sampled repositories either not using it or (more worryingly) regarding it as "not applicable". Both possibilities need to be kept in mind.

3 THE VIEWS OF KEY STAKEHOLDERS

3.1 The responses to the key questions asked in the survey can be summarised as follows:

- There is a very high level of support for an access standard for archives, with no unqualified opposition and only a very small number of respondents expressing reservations about the need for such a document
- Views on whether or not it should be a formal British Standard are polarised, with some strongly in favour and some strongly against
- There is no clear preference for any single alternative route for development and publication of an access standard
- There is a broad level of support for the existing *Standard* as it stands, and the suggested changes and improvements are all of a fairly minor nature

3.2 A full analysis of the responses has been prepared and this document will be made available to the Steering Group (if required) separately. The following notes aim to summarise the key issues identified through the consultation process

3.3 *The need for an access standard*

3.3.1 The majority of respondents (33) feel that there is a need for an access standard, with only a few (5) expressing reservations or qualifications.

3.3.2 Arguments put forward in favour of an access standard include:

- The relevance of a document encapsulating the access aims set out in the *Government Policy on Archives* generally, and specifically in extending those aims "as far as appropriate" to private organisations
- The need for a baseline for the development of 'front of house' services – "as an 'inspiration' to archivists to think about service delivery with the same commitment as they do about acquisitions or conservation"
- The need to define parameters for access in the same way as those for storage and conservation are already defined – and to raise the profile of access issues among practitioners
- The value of a standard in making the case for resources with paymasters
- Its usefulness as a self-assessment tool for service-providers
- The need for a consistent basis for monitoring by the inspecting agencies (TNA)
- The potential for benchmarking on the basis of an agreed standard
- As a means of improving services for users – and giving them a tool for monitoring performance and improvement
- A standard will encourage moves towards a common standard of service for the user and inform users on what to expect from archives offices

Two further points are worth noting here. First, that the standard should be "accessible and also inclusive" – available and relevant to all. Second, that "the longer the Standard remains a draft the less likely it is that people will actually use it"

3.3.3 The general reservations noted include:

- How far there is a real *need* for a standard, even though such a document would undoubtedly have value
- Whether or not the document really needs to be a standard – should it take the form of guidelines or best practice manual instead?
- Concern whether such a standard can realistically cover the full spectrum of access issues for repositories of different type and size in a single document
- Doubt over whether access is a suitable subject for a formal standard

- A feeling that an archive specific standard may be hard to apply where other materials (e.g. rare books) are administered in the same service environment
- Concern about emphasis on access at the expense of stewardship and cataloguing

3.3.4 The specific qualifications to general support include:

- The need to recognise that public access is not a priority for private archives
- The need in some circumstances to discriminate between levels of access for particular groups of individuals and for specific archives
- The importance of recognising that users are not homogenous, and that a "one size to fit all" approach will not work
- The desirability of allowing access policies to be properly influenced by internal priorities as well as by external drivers

3.3.5 *Comment:* It is surprising that little mention was made of the issue of whether a single-domain approach is still valid in the new era of cross-domain working. More particularly, nobody raised the question of how far the need for a standard has been affected by the Access and Learning agenda and *Inspiring Learning*. These issues have been explored separately. The prevailing view seems to be that because the common elements of the *Standard* have already been incorporated in *Inspiring Learning*, the creation of a more focused domain-specific standard may still be necessary and desirable. Even Resource, which might be expected to have a preference for a cross-domain approach, is willing to support an access standard for archives if there is a demand for it from within the domain.

3.4 ***Should it be a formal British Standard?***

3.4.1 Here, views are quite dramatically polarised, with:

- Many strongly in favour – believing a *British Standard* to be the only form of standard with sufficient "clout" within and beyond the archive domain
- Many adamantly opposed – principally because of the high cost and consequent limited availability of *British Standards*, and also on account of the cost, length of time and practicalities of production (bureaucracy etc)

3.4.2 In between, there are some who are broadly in favour and some who feel that other possibilities should be explored, i.e.:

- Some seeing it as the best available option – accepting that it should be a *British Standard*, but with the *caveat* of "if that is the best route to development, publication, credibility and long-term stability"
- Some remaining open to alternatives (but without a clear preference)
- Some positively advocating specific alternatives

But underpinning many of the responses (of all shades of opinion) is a clear view that the standard must not only carry weight within the domain but also have credibility and force with parent bodies and paymasters. Some also commented on the need for a will to implement it – however and by whom it is produced.

3.4.3 The key arguments in favour of developing the document as a *British Standard* are:

- The BSI is the pre-eminent body for producing standards in the UK
- The status of British Standards is appreciated and acknowledged beyond the archive domain
- British Standards have the "clout" that other standards simply don't possess
- A BS for access would balance the effect and impact of BS5454 on archival budgets and priorities

- An access standard would complement the existing British Standards for Storage and Exhibition of Documents (BS5454), Conservation (BS4971), Records Management (BS ISO 15489-1) etc

Several respondents stressed the value of the existing British Standards for Archives in providing powerful support when bidding for resources for improvements.

3.4.4 The counter-arguments centred on:

- The suitability of access as a subject for a British Standard
 - The prohibitive cost of British Standards – and strict copying restrictions – which makes them unaffordable and inaccessible to many practitioners. They are effectively outside the public domain
 - The cost of production (assumed to be considerably higher than the alternatives) via the BS route because of the lengthy and bureaucratic processes involved
 - Concern that British Standards Institute (BSI) would profit financially from work owned by the archive domain
 - The need for a flexible and realistic approach (i.e. less rigid than BS5454)
 - Difficulty of updating at a time when access issues are undergoing rapid change
- Comments were also made about the real effectiveness of the existing British Standards for archives, questioning whether they are really as helpful and useful as people tend to assume.

- #### 3.4.5 Clarifying the BSI position on this has proved to be difficult, partly owing to staff changes within BSI – and the need to re-negotiate on matters originally agreed two or three years ago – but also on account of their administrative and charging systems. This has led to frustration and delays. However, it is apparent that that:
- a) The BSI will charge for all work associated with the development of the Standard
 - b) They are unwilling or unable do any work in advance of the establishment of a formal Committee under contract
 - c) They seem reluctant to acknowledge the work already undertaken (i.e. they would wish to make a fresh start and run the entire development process through their standard procedures)
 - d) They have declined to provide any material advice or guidance on costs
 - e) It has proved impossible to get them to look through the existing draft and advise on the amount of work likely to be required to convert it into a fully-fledged British Standard

- #### 3.4.6 In the light of this, the PSQG Steering Committee concluded at its April meeting that the plan for developing the existing document as a British Standard should be abandoned. This decision was taken partly on account of the overall weight of argument against the BS route, and partly because of the ongoing difficulties in concluding satisfactory negotiations with the BSI.

3.5 ***The Alternatives***

3.5.1 Possible alternatives identified through consultation include:

1. The National Archives (TNA)
2. Resource
3. Archival legislation
4. As part of wider registration scheme for museums, archives and libraries
5. The National Council on Archives (NCA)
6. Society of Archivists (SoA), e.g. as a *Best Practice Guideline*

Many respondents qualified their suggestions with statements indicating that wide 'ownership' of the standard would be essential even if one of the above were to accept responsibility for developing and publishing the document.

3.5.2 The PSQG Steering Group discussed these options at their meeting on 29 April and – taking account of views expressed by the suggested 'host' bodies – concluded that production by TNA offers the only viable alternative to the British Standards route. It has been confirmed that the work could be undertaken within the section of TNA under David Thomas, Director, Government and Archiving Services. With endorsement by a range of other archival and non-archival bodies, a standard produced by TNA could achieve the required status and standing. Moreover, this would not preclude future adoption as a British Standard at a later date.

3.5.3 Briefly, the reasons against the other alternatives are as follows:

- Resource** Although Resource would be willing to host it, all budgets for the development of standards are currently committed and production would have to wait until 2004/5 or later. In addition, there is some concern that a standard produced by Resource may have insufficient 'clout' – especially outside the public sector
- Legislation** The subject matter would be too detailed for inclusion in the proposed archival legislation, so this option is not realistic
- Registration** The inclusion of access considerations in the proposed single registration scheme for museums, archives and libraries is very much welcomed. However, it cannot readily address the full range of archive-specific issues that the standard is intended to cover
- NCA** The existing document was produced by PSQG (now formally affiliated to the NCA). Although representing practitioners and users and commanding growing respect beyond the archive domain, the NCA does not yet have the standing to formally host *Standard*. NCA endorsement is, however, vital to the success of any document produced by TNA.
- SoA** The Society represents largely professional interests. Given the concerns regarding credibility and acceptance beyond the domain, it is felt that publication by the Society would be insufficient to give the required 'clout'. Endorsement by the Society is, however, vital to secure acceptance within the domain

3.5.4 The advantages of production by an agency other than the BSI were identified as:

- Control over content and format – enabling us to create a model of our own choosing, or to work with an improved version of the existing *Standard*
- Relative ease of updating – not dependent on rigid formal processes, and so the updating process will be simpler and quicker
- Cost – while BSI costs cannot be readily quantified, the alternatives are clearly going to be much less costly
- Benefits of wider circulation and freedom of access to the *Standard*
- Scope for building on what already exists – rather than 're-inventing the wheel'

3.5.5 Alongside this there are a number of disadvantages:

- The need to positively secure endorsement (rather than rely on the name and status of the BSI for accreditation)
- The combined risks of limited ownership within the domain and acceptance in the wider arena – less 'clout' all round
- The consultation workload in securing support and endorsement for the document

3.5.6 Overall, these considerations helpfully set the context and parameters for the production of the *Standard* by TNA or any other body through which it is eventually developed and published.

3.6 *What do people think of the existing Standard?*

- 3.6.1 In broad terms, the questionnaire responses indicate high levels of satisfaction with the existing document, as illustrated by the following comments:
- “I think it is an excellent document. If we can achieve this, we will have moved our service forward a long way”
 - “Broadly speaking I am very happy with the standard”
 - “I think it seems reasonable as it is at present”
 - “It all looks very good to me”
 - “It is a ground breaking and very important piece of work which I hope would be adopted”
 - “The existing standard is challenging. We have benchmarked against it and have identified considerable work to be carried out to match it”
 - “As a whole, I think it is a clear and very useful document”
- 3.6.2 One respondent offered a particularly clear statement of the value and usefulness of the document. He wrote:
- “I found it an extremely useful document for a number of reasons. Firstly, it does not simply deal with high handed notions of 'access', but rather it gets down to the fundamentals of the issues and their practical implications for repositories. It was one of the few documents I was able to source that took a practical approach and for this I was grateful. A second point is that due to this practical nature, it is a standard that repositories can aspire to. When compared to some of the documents I read it was refreshing to see targets in black and white that could be measured, rather than lots of woolly statements about social exclusion. The document, therefore, becomes a tool both for management as a useful aid to high level planning, and to staff at lower levels who can see what is expected of them”
- 3.6.3 Another respondent commented on the value of the *Standard* for policy development and advocacy purposes:
- “The PSQG standard on access to archives is a very good document and has informed a number of policy decisions or documents here, including ... the cataloguing strategy. It is also useful to show employers when arguing for improved standards and a useful reference point when having debates at search room meetings. It proved extremely useful when preparing Charter Mark applications [at my previous office]”
- 3.6.4 Particular strengths of the document identified by respondents include:
- The fact that it is centred on outcomes for users
 - Its comprehensive coverage of the full range of access issues
 - The functional approach – its usefulness as a working tool
 - The practical guidance it provides – “the guidance sections are of more use than the requirement”, “the explanation of each statement in practical terms is just as important as the requirement itself”
 - The range in the strength of requirement, which “assists in making the standard attainable” and “makes it applicable to all archives irrespective of size”
 - Its applicability across repositories of all types and sizes
 - The flexibility of the approach which allows tailoring to suit the needs of individual repositories and their users
 - The emphasis on consultation and user involvement in service planning / design
 - The partnership approach – involving users in the mission of preservation
- 3.6.5 Nevertheless, a number of helpful comments were made regarding aspects of the *Standard* that require general reappraisal or revision. These include:
- Concern that the document is too biased towards local authority repositories
 - Questions as to whether enough thought has been given to practicality and achievability – especially for smaller archives

- The need to really emphasise the importance of cataloguing in the context of access
- A view that aspects of the standard now appear a little dated – counterbalanced by another comment that “generally the standard has not dated much, because it has so few specific references [to legislation etc]”
- A feeling that the interface with BS5454 needs to be explored and refined – especially in terms of the relative priorities of access and preservation
- Reflecting the rapidly changing patterns of access to archives and use of services, and the balance between on-site and remote use
- Incorporation of general references to key principles of Data Protection, Freedom of Information and other current legislation
- Updating to lay greater emphasis on social inclusion and disability issues
- The need to recognise that many repositories are not autonomous units, and that priorities are determined by parent organisations
- Worries that the standard itself creates extra work – and bureaucracy – for small and hard-pressed services

3.6.6 Other suggested improvements to the style and format include:

- Removing jargon and improving the use of language in the *Standard* – especially if the document does not need to be issued in British Standard format
- Reviewing the “strength of requirement” sections to take account of the limits on small units by making greater use of phrases like “where possible”
- Updating the opening section (s.0 - on quality management generally) and placing it later in the document.
- Strengthening references in the guidance notes to drawing on the knowledge of front-line staff

3.6.7 As well as the general comments noted above, suggestions have been made for specific changes (by reference to paragraph number) within the text. These are listed in an appendix. These suggestions have been assembled in this form for further consideration during the revision process. Some of the views are contradictory – or conflict with other parts of the approved text – and the final version will therefore reflect a balance between conflicting viewpoints achieved through further discussion and debate.

3.6.8 Lastly, it has been suggested that additional material should be added to provide clearer practical guidance to those using the standard. Suggestions include:

- Clearer and practical guidance on how to use the *Standard*
- A checklist – as a simple means of providing services the means with which to assess their services and identify areas for improvement
- Model access statements – for a range of repositories
- Sample documentation – e.g. user-focused cataloguing strategy
- Case studies of ‘good practice’ from different types of archive
- A flow diagram illustrating how access to archives is obtained
- Key to alternative arrangement by thematic groupings, e.g. entitlement, access to facilities (physical), access to material (archive resources), and access to content (information and resource discovery)

3.7 ***Summary of consultation feedback***

3.7.1 The consultation process has:

- Confirmed that there is felt to be a need for a standard for access
- Demonstrated high levels of satisfaction with the existing document
- Identified a number of possible improvements
- Validated the approach, and

- Endorsed the concept and general tenor of the draft *Standard*
- 3.7.2 The exercise has affirmed the need for a flexible and non-prescriptive standard embracing all aspects of access. Such a standard should recognise differences of size and emphasis between repositories, yet enable every archival institution to develop strategies and approaches for each access element as appropriate and relevant to their circumstances and the needs of their users.
- 3.7.3 More specifically, the *Standard* should be:
- Relevant and applicable in the Home Countries, and not just in England
 - Capable of application in institutions where archives are administered alongside other materials (e.g. special collections, rare books etc)

4 REVISION AND DEVELOPMENT: A summary of required action

- 4.1 From the above, it is evident that the existing *Standard* does not require major revision or re-writing – but some work is needed to update and improve it along the lines identified through the consultation exercise and from other feedback gathered by PSQG since the document was first launched.
- 4.2 The revision process will involve the following main elements:
1. Reviewing the text carefully and making necessary amendments in the light of the general issues raised above (s. 3.6.5-6)
 2. Considering the suggested specific changes (as in s.3.6.7 and the Appendix) and amending the text as appropriate
 3. Developing additional supporting materials (as in s. 3.6.8) to accompany the *Standard*
 4. Consultation with key stakeholder groups and standards agencies to secure endorsement
 5. Publication and distribution
 6. Promotional activities to raise awareness of the *Standard* and encourage its use
- 4.3 At this stage it is not possible to give any meaningful indication of costs. This will depend how far the work can be undertaken within the overall remit of the National Archives or any other body charged with developing and promoting the *Standard*.

5 THE IMPACT OF THE DRAFT STANDARD

- 5.1 Evidence regarding the application and usefulness of the *Standard* was gathered by ABL Consulting for the Resource Standards Mapping project in 2001. At that time, the figures based on a sample survey of 40 repositories suggested that the *Standard* was neither well known nor widely used. The figures were as follows:

Usage of the *Standard*

Used by: 5 local authority archives, 4 local authority/PRO appointed archives, 3 independent archives, 3 university archives, 3 national archives (18)

Not used by/ not applicable to: 6 local authority archives, 1 local authority/PRO appointed archive, 8 independent archives, 3 university archives, 3 national archives, 1 national/PRO appointed archive (22)

Time used: 10 archives had used the *Standard* for 1 year; 2 archives had used it for 1 to 2 years; 1 archive has used it since inception

Usefulness: 6 found it very valuable, 8 found it valuable, and 3 considered it not very valuable

- 5.2 An update of the Standards Mapping project is currently under way, and it will be interesting to compare the figures for 2003 with those for 2001 when the new data are available.
- 5.3 Part of the brief for the Scoping study, however, was to find out how the *Standard* had been used – and with what results. Enquiries revealed that a number of offices have successfully used the *Standard* for a variety of purposes, e.g.

For guidance on policy development

- Glamorgan and Lancashire Record Offices have used it for guidance on preparing access policy statements
- Worcestershire Record Office created an “internal access policy last year (based largely on the PSQG standard) and within Cultural Services here ... it was seen as leading the way for the Council”
- At Kent Archives Office the standard has informed a number of policy decisions and document, including the cataloguing strategy
- Cheshire Record Office used it as the basis for their Service Charter, which grew out of going through the *Standard* in some detail
- The Society of Antiquaries found its main value was in providing a checklist of points to consider when developing a Society policy on access

For service audits

- Glamorgan Record Office has prepared an action plan on how to meet the *Standard*, with a timetable of costed works to full compliance
- National Library of Scotland used the *Standard* as the basis for a strategic review of access issues
- Worcestershire Record Office are embarking on an audit of present practice against the Standard
- Hackney Archives have used it for self-assessment against the Standard and to identify necessary improvements
- Cheshire Record Office have found the *Standard* a very useful tool for auditing a service in terms of access to it

As the basis for benchmarking and quality assurance

- Staffordshire Record Office have benchmarked against it and have identified considerable work to be carried out to match it
- Hampshire Record Office drew on the *Standard* when collating materials in support of their successful Charter Mark application
- West Sussex used it as part of their ‘Best Value’ audit

For staff training and development

- At London Metropolitan Archives the staff have explored a range of access issues through training sessions and team meetings based on the *Standard*
- Kent Archives Office has found the *Standard* invaluable as a reference point for discussions in searchroom team meetings
- The London Regional Archives Council (LARC) has run “Improving Access to Archives” workshops for practitioners wishing to learn how to apply the standard at the workplace
- Incorporated in professional training for archivists (London and Liverpool courses)

For advocacy and in negotiations for service improvements

- Kent have found the *Standard* useful to show to employers when arguing for improved standards

- Warwickshire Record Office found the document useful in making the case for vital resources

To inform professional debate

- The *Standard* was extensively cited in an article in the *Journal of the Society of Archivists* (Vol.24 No.1 pp.57-64) to counter suggestions in an earlier article calling for preferential treatment for academic users

5.4 These examples – admittedly drawn from a fairly small sample of repositories – indicate that it has been extremely helpful to those who have used it, and that it has resulted in tangible service improvements for archive users.

6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 The scoping study has given a clear indication of a continuing need for an access standard. It has also made it possible to refine the development options both in terms of responsibility for production and regarding what needs to be done.

6.2 It is therefore *recommended*

1. That the *Standard for Access to Archives* be updated and reissued as a formal standard – if practicable, by April 2004
2. That the proposals for developing the *Standard* as a British Standard be put aside for the time being – but without ruling out the possibility of pursuing the British Standards route at some future date (*eg* in, say, five years time)
3. That further discussions be held between PSQG and The National Archives to prepare a costed plan and timetable for the production of an access standard produced by TNA but also endorsed by the wider stakeholder community
4. That the revision process should take account of the findings of this report
5. That the endorsement of the revised *Standard* be sought from the key stakeholder bodies (including IDAC, NCA, SoA, the Association of Chief Archivists in Local Government (ACALG) and the Audit Commission) before publication – such endorsement to be explicitly stated in the document
6. That stakeholder bodies be encouraged to promote the standard and provide links to and from their websites

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APPENDIX

Suggested changes to the existing draft (by reference to numbered paragraphs)

Note: These comments and suggestions have been assembled in this form for further consideration during the revision process. Some of the views are contradictory – or conflict with other parts of the approved text – and the final version will therefore reflect a balance between conflicting viewpoints achieved through further discussion and debate.

- 3 Include definition of "access"
- 3.3 Improve definitions of user and researcher (some concern that the standard is advocating different levels of service as worded)
 - 3.3.4 Remove (or de-italicise) the word "community" – unintended conflict here between 3.3.1 (definition of community) and reference to parent body or key funding body. Or find alternative word here
 - 3.3.5 Not sure allowing employees to hide among other stakeholders is wise. Allows for significant muddying of interpretation
- 4.4 Amend to "The archives service shall encourage whatever access ..."
- 6.1.2 Strengthen insistence that the implementation of the access standard should not be at the expense of other standards designed to promote the permanent preservation of archival material without which access may be impossible in the future
- 6.1.2 Improve recognition that private archives may not be as accessible to the wider research community as to the owner/employer, and that restriction of access in accordance with the wishes of an owner does not constitute discrimination
- 7.? Strengthen references to disability (all forms, and reflecting multiple impairments)
- 7.1-2 Discrimination: Recognition of rights of private owners not to allow access to all
- 12.4 Improve guidance on equalities and inclusion (c.f. ss.7 and 15) to include reference to this (as well as professional skills) in staff training
- 12.4 Insert here [?] something about staff being equipped with information they need to answer enquiries and provide consistent and reliable information – both archival information and details on practical issues (e.g. charges, services)
- 12.4 Is this realistic in one-person operations?
- 13.1 It is a good idea to make the preservation of the material the responsibility of users as well as archivists. If you are creating a standard, though, it would be helpful to spell out a basic minimum of security requirements, protective measures and handling techniques for those places, such as small libraries, where there are documents but no trained archivists or conservators to advise on preservation precautions
- 13.3 Improve guidance on equalities and inclusion (c.f. ss.7 and 15) to include reference to this under respect for other users (including people with disabilities)

- 13.3 A bit more work needed (are children more disruptive than some readers?)
- 14.1 Improve guidance on equalities and inclusion (c.f. ss.7 and 15) to include reference to this to include all sections of society within "community"
- 14.7 Availability of user training and system education sessions – e.g. drop-in sessions, induction "new here?" sessions etc
- 14.2 Could there be a minimum level of advance information (e.g. distinct entry in phone book) above which advance information could be provided at the discretion of the repository?
- 15.7 May need to say something about suitability of service delivery environment – i.e. not just access to services, but also appearance and feel (welcoming rather than functional)
- 15.1.3 Special needs – this terminology is not popular with disabled adults
- 16.1 Finding aids
- The need for different approaches to presenting information on paper and on screen – and to educate and inform users as to the best means of searching for particular types of information (e.g. names on screen, item numbers in series on paper - when lists are good / when the computer is better)
 - The importance of fall-back systems for people uneasy with computers (an issue of choice and convenience)
 - Refer to ISAD(G) but stress that this covers structure rather than content and wording, so compliant list may not be informative or meet user needs
- 16.2 Aiming to provide collection level descriptions of entire holdings, and that holdings are catalogued to an appropriate level of detail. Concern about factors hindering these aims from becoming realities. Cataloguing is such a crucial part in providing access – although cataloguing activity is perhaps under-represented in performance indicators and related stats – and should perhaps be given more of a plug. Also need to recognise problem of access to un- or under-catalogued material, and safety and security
- 16.2 Stress (in 16.2.2) that cataloguing is a key duty – and a vital part of access / services to users
- 16.4 Refer (in 16.4.2) to redaction here
- 16.6 Benefits to community in ways other than direct access: may need strengthening in the light of recent developments
- 18.1.3 The HMC standard clearly states that it is 'highly desirable' that readers produce written evidence of identity before being given access to archives (s.4.5.3). The draft standard is rather less clear on this issue ... One would have thought that the provision of proof of identity might reasonably be considered a necessity before a potential user is given access to unique archival materials, and be explicitly stated in the standard
- 18.7 Explanatory note may be needed to indicate that the location and design of buildings falls outside the scope of the standard, being covered in BS5454 [or is this 15.2 etc]

- 18.2.3 The general question of security, supervision and the presence of intruder alarms makes the maintenance of equipment out of normal working hours impossible
- 18.3 Refer (in 18.3.3) to electronic records that are not surrogates (using term used for NDAD and EROS material)
- 19 Remote access – emerging issues
- New but less well-informed audiences, not finding what they are after and/or not understanding what they get
 - Negative perceptions – and disappointment – from use of A2A, and lack of user-focused information on A2A as to what references actually are (roles of people mentioned in documents, single mentions in 500 page items etc). Better explanations – information boards or sign screens – needed. Importance of stating limits (i.e. completeness) of on-line data
 - Communicating more clearly with remote users – especially on sites operated by others (e.g. A2A) – to avoid misunderstandings (e.g. thinking A2A documents are at PRO)
 - Managing expectations – because information is on-line, people think that whole service is automated (expect to go from A2A page to ordering copy): issue of paper replies (and copies) to e-enquiries – and related issues of response times and quality controls; mismatch of image and actual capacity
 - Getting users to use “information board” screens (always tempting to rush past and go straight to “the stuff”) – may require cunning and skill (e.g. use of shopping baskets and structured ordering, with checks on comprehension and need)
- 19.2 Refer (in 19.2) to electronic records that are not surrogates (using term used for NDAD and EROS material)
- 19.2 Consider re-wording, as it may not be right to assume or suggest that remote access will reduce demand for on-site access. Remote access can create expectations – and among those without an understanding of constraints and access difficulties
- 19.2.2 Strengthen point that provision of remote access should not be at the expense of essential preservation and access activities