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Dear Ms Hughes

**Response from The National Council on Archives (NCA) to the AHRC consultation: A strategy for supporting and sustaining high quality research in the UK's Museums, Galleries, Libraries and Archives**

The National Council on Archives (NCA) was established in 1988 to bring together the major bodies and organisations, including service providers, users, depositors and policy makers, across the UK concerned with archives and their use. It aims to develop consensus on matters of mutual concern and provide an authoritative common voice for the archival community.

The NCA welcomes this valuable opportunity to give our views to the AHRC.

**General comments**

The NCA welcomes the fact that The National Archives has been successful in being awarded 'academic analogue' status by AHRC and looks forward to more document collections being considered for this status.

While the NCA welcomes the general inclusion of archives in this consultation, it is our opinion that AHRC could take a more active role if it has a genuine interest in, and commitment to, archives as providers of professional services, as well as their potential as test beds and partners for research. The NCA would welcome a clearer inclusion of archives within the AHRC remit and activities, and would be happy to offer any advice that might be useful.

The NCA notes that in this consultation a footnote states that "by museums and galleries, the AHRC is referring to any museums, galleries, libraries and archives", but this shorthand seems to encourage a focus on museums and galleries, which AHRC has funded to an extent, and most of the document neglects the contribution which archives can and do make to the research capability in the UK.

The NCA wishes to draw AHRC's attention to the fact that overall funding from all sources received by the museums, galleries and libraries sectors is significantly more than that available to the archives sector, even on a pro rata basis, particularly since the advent of the *Framework for the Future* and *Renaissance in the Regions* schemes. This should then be put in context with rising visitor numbers to archives and general public interest in their holdings for local history research, family history research and general research. For further details and analysis, please see the NCA report "Giving Value" ([http://www.ncaonline.org.uk/materials/nca\\_giving\\_value.pdf](http://www.ncaonline.org.uk/materials/nca_giving_value.pdf)).

#### Research project funding

The two areas of interest stated (research to underpin new displays and temporary exhibitions, and preservation and conservation) relate specifically to museums in the way that they are worded. The NCA would welcome these calls being extended to archives as well, and this being made explicit in the calls and the wording adjusted to reflect the archival aspects of the research areas.

The NCA wishes to draw AHRC's attention to the emerging area of digital material and the lack of knowledge, expertise and funding to tackle an increasing number of documents and collections lost because of this lack.

We suggest that apart from the academic analogues, it might be useful for AHRC to hold bi-lateral talks with the archives domain which NCA would be willing to help co-ordinate, to discuss how the domain can respond to this strategy and how we can develop specific archive pilot projects to demonstrate the value of such funding. We already have a research basis in archives and a raft of existing data that would benefit from further analysis.

#### Partnerships

The NCA assumes that this call will be explicitly extended to include archives. There are benefits from cross-sectoral research, especially in areas of practice-based research, where there is a need to test a prototype which has been developed through research, or where user feedback is an important part of the research process. This kind of research has been carried out before, for example in the AHRC-funded LEADERS project (<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/leaders-project>), but in the past, the interaction with the profession has been led by academics. Re-balancing this partnership would be an interesting part of a new initiative, such as that proposed.

There is an issue about the ability of smaller, poorly funded, archives services to take part in any such research, but one way forward might be collaborative work between smaller archives and libraries, museums and galleries. Again, the NCA would be willing to assist the AHRC in co-ordinating activity and communications between academics and archives in the same way that the Museums Association would between academics and museums.

## People

There is a skills shortage in archives due to some significant issues about recruitment and retention in the archives profession which also need to be addressed (see the NCA Archives Workforce Study at <http://www.ncaonline.org.uk/materials/trainingreview.pdf>). Although AHRC does support a small number of students each year through its Professional Preparation awards scheme, the number of awards has been reduced significantly in recent years. There is no alternative source of government support for students on the MA programmes in archives and records management, and yet taking such a qualification is an essential prerequisite to working in the profession. Graduates from the MA programmes have a 100% success rate in finding relevant employment within 3 months of completing their degrees. Without proper professional education, archives services cannot be properly developed in future to meet the needs of, among others, researchers in the arts and humanities. The NCA suggest that AHRC works with MLA to ensure a coherent policy in this area, where AHRC can make a significant impact on the future of the archive profession and related research.

## Impact and evaluation

The archives sector has very well established and developed visitors surveys (see <http://www.ncaonline.org.uk/psqg/survey> for background) and NCA's Public Sector Quality Group has led on the development of impact and assessment work for archives, including the standard for access to archives (see <http://www.ncaonline.org.uk/psqg/access>). PSQG is also leading on new work on the Comprehensive Performance Assessment pilot 2006.

We trust that these comments are of constructive assistance, and would be happy to discuss any of them further should this be useful.

With very best wishes,  
Yours sincerely,

Ruth Savage

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Would you like us to acknowledge receipt of your response?	Yes please