

Cuckoo in the Nest of Welcome Addition to the Archival Family? The UK Public Services Quality Group (PSQG) for Archives and Local Studies

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The Public Services Quality Group for Archives and Local Studies – PSQG for short – is the "new kid on the block" of the United Kingdom archival scene. To those of us most closely involved it seems surprising that the Group is almost five years old. To the casual observer it must appear remarkable that an informal and largely voluntary organisation can have achieved so much in such a relatively short space of time.

As this article aims to show, the Group has already made an innovative and significant contribution to archive work in the UK – notably in its pioneering National Survey of Visitors to UK archives and through its having taken on the task of drawing up a Standard for Access to Archives. These projects will, of course, be covered in the scope of this article but first it would be sensible to take a step back and look at the reasons why the group was established and to consider what it aimed to achieve.

A time of challenge and change

The UK public sector, finding itself unpopular in the eyes of the public it exists to serve and in those of successive governments, has had to cope with an enormous burden of change and adaptation in order to survive. There have been spectacular winners and embarrassing failures as different organisations have risen – or failed to rise - to the challenges before them. The message to all public services has been clear. Each and every public body has had to take stock of the new operating environment, to seize new opportunities, or to fail – in short, to adapt, adopt, or die.

In the context of the big picture, of course, our heritage services (including museums, libraries and archives) have not faced the same threats and challenges as the high-profile and high-spending services which have undergone rapid and radical change. The initial emphasis was on high yields and quick returns on a scale that "minnow services" like archives, even at national level, could never deliver. Nevertheless, the lessons learned in other areas where benefits accrued from new ways of working and new approaches to the treatment of service customers inevitably fed through into the archive world. Moreover, every repository has felt the pressure to contain public expenditure, yield tangible benefits to the community and demonstrate value for money.

On the financial front a number of distinct trends were evident. First, there was a relentless drive to reduce the scale of public expenditure running hand in hand with pressure to explore alternative means of funding. Since 1979 there has been a strong political current in favour of privatisation, though this

has softened following the change of government in 1997 to allow a cross-sectoral approach bringing public and private finance into partnership. Second, income generation assumed increased priority as a means of covering – or at least offsetting – the cost of public services. Third, archives services – not themselves in the sights of the cost-cutters – often fell victim to cuts resulting from the financial pressures facing their parent organisations (e.g. local authorities). Fourthly, the new arrangements often led to the creation of internal markets with "purchasers" and "providers".

The new climate brought with it, or arguably created, a new public sector phenomenon – customer power. No longer can professional groups simply prescribe the levels of service for their customers on a "we know best" basis. There is an expectation that users will be consulted and that they will have a genuine say in how things are run. It is now much harder to secure funding for services on the grounds of tradition or nebulous cultural benefits. Special projects and even core services have to be justified not only by sound financial arguments but also by tangible evidence of user demand. The archive repository as an academic institution was not under threat *per se* but services funded from the public purse had to serve a broader and even popular audience too.

Archive professionals in the UK therefore faced significant challenges to their accustomed and accepted ways of working. The public image of archives as a dusty world inhabited by unworldly folk living in an isolated and arid academic environment was hardly dented by the welcoming and vibrant atmosphere to be found in many public repositories. Moreover, when archivists did start to seek the views of customers empowered by the new public service culture they found, often to their surprise and disappointment, that their services were not as user-friendly as they had naively believed.

The situation, familiar to archivists throughout the world, was that in a climate of declining resources both paymasters and users expected services to deliver more and more. At a time when archivists wanted to improve their services, the sheer demand generated by a growing public interest in local and family history meant that many could do no more than hold their own against the rising tide.

The professional response

It might seem natural at this stage to criticise the professional organisations and senior archivists for their response to these changes and to suggest that PSQG came into being as a result of their lack of interest and inertia. I must make it clear that this is neither my wish nor my intention. On the contrary many leading figures in the archive community were quick to respond positively. This is hardly surprising, since many who could have done well in other, more remunerative and more traditional professions such as the law or high finance, have chosen out of interest and "belief" to pursue a more modest career in archives.

With their capacity for original thought and creative action such dedicated professionals have done much to strengthen and sustain our archives services in inauspicious times. One of the most striking things about recent times is the way that our archives have embraced the changes and led the way for other public services to follow. Significantly, several archivists have gone on to take up posts as policy advisers and senior managers within their organisations – the loss to archives being offset by a growing recognition that members of our profession have expertise and influence way beyond their traditional confines. At one time it was not uncommon for archivists to be seen as "wannabe historians (failed)". Instead we are now often accepted as accomplished service managers with a healthy grasp of management theory and with our fingers on the political pulse.

Nor was this positive approach limited to talented and foresighted individuals working in isolation in their own repositories. The Society of Archivists' Professional Methodology Panel, then chaired by Patricia Methven of Kings College London, did much to stimulate debate, encourage archivists to adopt modern management techniques and to promote "best practice". The work of the Panel continues, now under the chairmanship of Richard Childs who also plays an active role in PSQG.

The professional organisations were quick to see the need for action. The Society of Archivists ran training courses specifically on topics such as customer care and out-sourcing. The Association of Chief Archivists in Local Government (then the Association of County Archivists) held conferences at which these and other topical issues were regularly aired. The Historical Manuscripts Commission (HMC) was not slow to challenge government thinking where necessary and to provide advice to organisations affected by the changes. The Public Record Office (PRO) was quick to demonstrate how the archive sector could contribute to the achievement of government policy – at the same time raising the profile of archival services and issues. The newly formed National Council on Archives helpfully took a strategic view and facilitated dialogue between a range of professional bodies, regulatory authorities and user groups with an interest in archives. Overall, the professional literature of the time reflects the way in which the archival community responded to the challenges it faced.

There was, however, a gap in the market – a place for those who wished to take advantage of the new opportunities and embrace change. While the professional organisations did a great deal to bring archives and archivists safely through troubled waters, there was an extent to which – as is inevitable in any such sphere – the established bodies followed what was going on instead of taking a lead. Their response to new initiatives sometimes came over at best as a cautious welcome, at worst as problems to be overcome. Moreover, these matters – important though they were and are – formed only a relatively small part of the overall remit of the bodies concerned and so there was a limit to the extent to which they could be addressed.

Within the profession, too, there was a widening gap between those who were prepared to embrace the new culture and the disengaged - those who wished

to "bury their heads in the sand" in the hope that the trouble would all blow over. Interestingly, it was often the archivists in middle management who were eager to press for change.

It was in order to bridge this gap that the PSQG came into being as a forum for those wishing to press ahead and seize the opportunities created by the new climate.

The origins of the Public Services Quality Group

The Public Services Quality Group owes its existence to the foresight and enthusiasm of Iain Watt, now Head of Reader Services at the Public Record Office. A Librarian by training, Iain had come to the PRO from Westminster City Libraries where, as quality and contracts manager, he had been responsible for looking after the relationships between the separate business units (including the City Archives department as well as the branch libraries) and the Council itself (as client). Westminster City Council was one of the local authorities which had moved ahead full steam in adopting the approach to public service funding and delivery advocated by government. The Director of Libraries, David Ruse, had come to Westminster from Berkshire County Council where similar policies had been pursued and there was a clear agenda for radical change.

The idea of an independent quality group came from the public libraries sector where a similar body had been working alongside the established bodies for some time. Having canvassed support for the idea among archival colleagues with a known interest in quality issues and having obtained permission to set up an initial meeting, Iain organised the first Quality Forum meeting which took place at the PRO at Kew in November 1996.

From the start it was intended that the Quality Group should be an informal and open body that anyone with an interest could join – or leave – at will. There is no constitution or hierarchy and no formal membership list. Responsibility for organising events and pursuing initiatives rests with a small group of volunteers. From the start the PRO has kindly and generously provided administrative support. At the first meeting I was rather unceremoniously proposed and elected as Chairman. It was a role I did not seek, but it has been my pleasure to coax and steer the Group through its initial phase aided and abetted by keen and able colleagues.

It was never the intention that the Group should seek to offer an alternative to or to rival the established professional bodies. Quite the opposite is the case, in fact. The aim of the Group was to work alongside and complement the professional bodies by encouraging and supporting innovation and networking. Where we have taken a lead, it has been in response to suggestions arising from within the Group in areas where practitioners have seen a greater degree of urgency than the established bodies. It is typical of our approach that both the National Survey and the Access Standard – initiatives which have been pioneered by the Group – may eventually be taken over by others. This illustrates in a very practical way how we see our role as

taking on jobs that need to be done, involving the broader archival community, and feeding the results of our labours into the archival mainstream.

What were those labours to be? In a sense, the programme for the inaugural meeting set an outline agenda for the future work of the Group. But in another sense we had a completely open remit – a blank sheet of paper – from which to begin. In this, I think, lies the secret of our success since we have been able to pick up on ideas from within the group by consensus and to work on projects with the highest levels of relevance and appeal.

The aims and objectives of PSQG and the scope of its activities

There was, of course, general agreement that the Group should concern itself with quality issues relevant in the field of archives and local studies – the alliance between these two services being the result, it should perhaps be explained, of the particular circumstances of many of the London repositories represented at the initial meeting coupled with an awareness of the moves towards cross-boundary working in the cultural and heritage sector. But what were these quality issues to be?

What we have covered will become clear from the account of our activities given below, but a general summary might be helpful here. Essentially we sought to take account of public service management initiatives and service delivery innovations relevant to the world of archives. The aim was to promote the positive advantages of latching onto these schemes, to draw on the experience of those who had ventured into the field and to look outside the world of archives in seeking examples of good practice.

There was an awareness, of course, of the need to protect and build on the genuine strengths of our existing services. This was accompanied, however, by an increased willingness to accept and acknowledge weaknesses with the aim of making real improvements. Not everyone who came to that first meeting was wholeheartedly in favour of change, but it quickly became clear that we had tapped into a seam of people within the profession who were enthusiastic to explore new ideas to help them to improve their services and – critically – to engage with their customers.

Our activities fall into four main categories, namely 1) the annual Quality Forum meeting, 2) networking and promotion of best practice, 3) the National Survey of Visitors to UK archives, and 4) the Standard for Access to Archives.

Annual Quality Forum meetings 1996-1999

The frequency of Quality Forum meetings so far has been annual, though there is no reason why PSQG should not meet more often. There was originally a plan, shelved owing to the amount of organisational work involved, of having two meetings a year – one in London and one out of town – covering broadly similar topics. In practice this proved to be too ambitious but our November meetings at the PRO have each attracted between 90 and 110 delegates, filling the conference venue to near capacity. It became our

practice to seek – and use – feedback from delegates in planning future meetings. From the start, we also circulated papers to participants and published reports of our meetings in the professional journals.

The topics covered at the first four meetings illustrate the breadth of issues that we have addressed. The following brief *résumé* of the programme for each meeting, supported by an indication of the relevance of the subjects of the presentations, should give a fair view of what has been covered and what we have hoped to achieve.

The 1996 workshop was very much an exploratory meeting to tackle some topical issues and canvass support for the idea of setting up a group. Liz Hallam-Smith (Director of Public Services at the PRO) opened the meeting by setting the scene before handing over to David Ruse (Westminster Libraries) who outlined the work and achievements of the Quality Forum for Libraries. Attention then turned to some recent examples of customer service initiatives – the theme for the day. Marilyn Lewis (Chester) spoke about Customer Care at the Chester City Record Office and Ann Morton (PRO) described the PRO's "Readers First Programme". This was followed by a paper from me on the benefits obtained in the Bedfordshire Record Office by securing the government's "Charter Mark" award – for excellence in public services – in 1993. Margaret Vaughan Lewis (Surrey) spoke about planning the searchroom for the new Surrey History Centre. During the day a number of computer systems for archives had been demonstrated, and a paper by Sean Toffel (Essex) on "preparing for automation" ended the formal programme.

Planning for future Forum meetings was left in the hands of a small steering group which met twice in 1997. We reviewed the feedback from the first meeting and took stock of the lessons learned by practical experience. By July we had a programme for a second meeting which took place at Kew on 27 November. The broad themes covered by the presentations were comparability and comparisons between services – especially in the context of performance measurement objectives – coupled with examples of service innovations in archives.

Bill Cook (Ernst & Young) was booked to speak on benchmarking in the public sector. In the event he was unable to attend and I spoke in his stead, but fortunately we were able to distribute copies of an excellent publication *Adapt, Adopt or die: a survival kit for the next millennium* largely written by Bill and containing detailed advice on benchmarking. David Leitch (PRO) gave an account of the then recently completed archival mapping project which took stock of the state of English archives service and the challenges and opportunities facing them – work which led in 1998 to the publication of *Our Shared Past: an archival Domesday for England*. Iain Watt (PRO) then aired the possibility of a national survey of readers, sowing the seeds of a scheme later taken forward by the Group. Other speakers included Trish Rowsby (Kent) on "developing the public service", Deborah Jenkins (London Metropolitan Archives) on "Turning a public service around", and David Simpson (consultant) on work in Suffolk to identify and exploit the commercial opportunities for archives.

The theme for the 1998 meeting was "What is success? – and how do we secure it?". The title was based on the idea that unless we clearly understand what makes a successful archives service we cannot tell how successful we are. The morning presentations were intended to provide ideas and background information for group discussions in the afternoon. The day began with a challenging paper from Sarah Tyacke (Keeper of Public Records) on "Access and the National Network in the New Millennium". Max Beekhuis from the Rijksarchief in The Hague – our Dutch colleagues have supported PSQG from the start and ran a parallel survey of visitors in 1998 – spoke about "Service Developments in the National Archives of the Netherlands". Adrian Ailes and Iain Watt (PRO) drew out some of the main findings from the 1998 survey, pointing out areas where visitors have their own ideas on what makes an archives service successful. The afternoon discussion groups were lively and interesting, looking at diversification, volumes and values, and means of access in detail before everyone reconvened for a plenary session.

The most recent Quality Forum, in November 1999, had two separate elements within the overall theme of "Taking Quality Forward". The main business of the day was to give members a chance to comment in details on the draft Standard for Access to Archives, but the morning session was given over to a review of current public service initiatives. Steve O'Leary (Cabinet Office) spoke about "Quality Networks and Service First". Anne Mackintosh (Cultural Heritage National Training Organisation) gave a review of "Benchmarking and self-assessment in the museums sector" and Simon Crownshaw (Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions) looked at "Best Value in archives".

This essentially factual review will, I hope, give an idea of the ground we have covered and show how we are pursuing a modern agenda for archives services.

Networking and sharing best practice

Networking and sharing best practice are integral to the concept and aims of the PSQG and need not be explained separately in detail. The annual meeting offers opportunities for the exchange of ideas and allows people from different sectors of the archival community to benefit from presentation topics at the edge of – or beyond – the traditional professional bounds. There are, however, two specific examples which illustrate our attempts to encourage networking at a practical level outside the confines of the Forum meetings themselves.

First, as a result of the initial meeting we produced and circulated – from information volunteered by delegates - a *Register of Interests*, listing individual members by name and office address under different aspects of service quality management. The aim was to encourage people to share their experiences and to enter into partnerships with others in order to implement schemes to improve their services. The lists were arranged to show people who had "completed" work on a particular topic (and who would therefore be

able to advise on best practice), those with work in progress, and those who were at an exploratory stage. There was also a section listing people who wanted to make an early start. The main headings were as follows:

Handling Comments and Complaints

Reader Surveys

Reader consultation

Customer Care

Service standards and best practice guidelines

Service specifications

Performance Measurement

"Charter" statements

Process improvement methods

Benchmarking (also broken down into specific services for closer analysis)

Award schemes (e.g. Charter Mark, European Quality Award and Investors in People)

Although such a tool inevitably became quickly out of date, the publication of the *Register* was an important first step towards encouraging the sharing of expertise and closer collaboration in the PSQG community.

The second example was a by-product of the 1998 National Survey of Visitors to UK Archives. Because there was anxiety that the project might lead to the production of "league tables" the survey had to be undertaken on the basis that the results would be confidential. Each repository was able to compare its own results with the national average and find out where it was doing well and where there was clearly scope for improvement. It was impossible, however, for anyone to take an overview and compare the performance of individual repositories or, even, to know which had done well. Concern among the poor performers is understandable, but even those who had done well were reluctant to be named publicly in case it created an impression that their services were too generously funded or too well staffed!

After some debate, we were eventually able to secure agreement on the production of a list of "Centres of Excellence" which was issued in February 1999. The aim was to identify repositories whose customers had expressed very high levels of satisfaction with particular aspects of the service by giving "excellent" markings in the survey. These were not overall markings for the repository as a whole, it must be stressed, but marks for particular services or

products such as catalogues and indexes, in-house leaflets and guides, delivery systems, copying services, microform readers, advice and courtesy from staff and so on. For each aspect, the centres of excellence were listed by repository size – small, medium and large – to encourage like-for-like comparison when looking for benchmarking partners.

There is little evidence that either initiative, sadly, led to increased contact between repositories working on similar projects and wishing to share best practice. There is, however, plenty of scope for developing this aspect of PSQG's role if members see the value of so doing. We may need to link this with financial incentives or tangible benefits if it is to work. The 1999 National Survey provides a mechanism for repositories to club together to obtain comparative reports across groups of archives services by sharing costs and comparing performance data. The level of interest shown for this service suggests that contact and co-operation may be on the increase.

The National Survey of Visitors to UK Archives

The idea that a standard questionnaire should be piloted to survey visitors across British archives and local studies collections was taken up by PSQG at the 1997 Quality Forum meeting. Although a similar survey had previously been implemented in some public libraries this was the first time that such a standard questionnaire had been proposed for voluntary adoption by the archival community nation-wide. Various archives had undertaken survey work locally, but the results were not comparable between repositories or available as the basis for benchmarking performance against national standards. There was no data on the archive user population as a whole or on its interests and views – and nothing to assist in identifying national trends in the user population as a whole.

Numerous advantages for a common archive survey were put forward: the possibility for services to benchmark against group data and against 'best in class', increased understanding of the national archive user population, its interests and needs, increased understanding of local user populations, building long term trend data if the idea were to be pursued over a number of years, reduced input for individual services in survey design and analysis, and, finally, the opportunity to produce data which in turn could be used to mobilise resources at local and national levels.

A working party was set up to devise a standard questionnaire, establish a methodology and to make all the necessary arrangements for the survey which took place in June 1998. The results of the survey were published at the November 1998 Quality Forum meeting. The project has been written up in detail both in the main survey report and in an article by Adrian Ailes and Iain Watt. The article includes a full analysis of the results and a commentary highlighting the key findings. It also draws attention to some of the pitfalls encountered and lessons learned from this ambitious and groundbreaking venture.

On completion of the pilot survey it was agreed that the exercise should be repeated on an annual basis but with fewer topics and with an occasional catch-all survey to maintain benchmarks. An open invitation to join the survey's Working Group was again extended to those present and at the next meeting of the Group in March 1999 it was decided that a shorter version of the questionnaire should be produced for a second national survey in October 1999. To relieve the PRO of the administrative burden and to bring in expert support, the 1999 survey – for which results will be available shortly – has been carried out in association with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA).

The survey has proved to be of considerable value to the archival community. Because of the range and depth of its coverage and the complexity of the data it has produced, it would be meaningless to attempt a summary here. Anyone wishing for further information should study the survey report and/or the *Journal* article in detail. Suffice it to say that the value of the survey is such that it seems likely that PSQG may well pass over responsibility for it to the new Museums Libraries and Archives Council (MLAC) which will become operational in April 2000.

The Standard for Access to Archives

The need for a National Standard for Access to Archives was identified in the discussions at the 1998 Quality Forum. Access lies at the heart of a government policy and the standard will help repositories to provide evidence of their performance (e.g. for public service initiatives such as the "Best Value" and "Charter Mark" schemes). It will also assist them in their applications for external funding (e.g. the Heritage Lottery Fund and government programmes).

We decided to take the matter forward by establishing a working party and, just twelve months later, a draft standard was approved in November 1999. The document will soon take its place among the standards available to the profession. It is now simultaneously a) available for use where it is needed and b) out for consultation in order to obtain further feedback from all who have interests in it. Widely welcomed within the archive community, it will fill a significant gap in the current range of standards - so much so that the Standard for Access has already been included in lists issued by the HMC and the PRO, notably in the appendix to the recent government policy on archives.

Access is covered in part in the HMC *Standard for Record Repositories* and there have been a number of attempts at preparing statements on access for specific user groups (e.g. family historians) or repositories. However, previous standards of this sort have tended to be either too general or too specific to provide a yardstick against which performance can be measured. Some have been unduly weighted in favour of a particular constituency or sectional interest.

In undertaking to produce a Standard for Access, the PSQG Working Party has attempted to address these problems by compiling a document aimed at custodians and users alike. The draft standard also takes account of the views and needs of the broad spectrum of stakeholders with an interest in archives services.

Membership of the working party was (and is) open to anyone with an interest in the subject and those taking part have been drawn from a broad spectrum of public archives services. The PRO, the HMC and the Society of Archivists are also represented. Administrative support has been provided by the PRO and the working party is especially grateful to Steven Jones, David Leitch and Iain Watt for their invaluable help.

Early discussions focussed on the nature of the proposed document. As a result of a lively debate, we have gone away from the prescriptive and rather inflexible "rule book" approach in search of a format that will encourage innovation and offer a sustainable model in times of rapid change. Accordingly, the document is based on outcomes with explanatory paragraphs on a) what each outcome means (including any conflicts of interest) and why it matters, b) alternative means of achieving the outcome, and c) suggested audit methods. In other words, the standard is intended to reflect the needs of users and paymasters (tempered where appropriate by professional concerns) and to offer a means of auditing performance against published targets.

The resulting standard:

- Covers all aspects of access, including advance information, on-site access, and remote access services
- Has been designed by professionals but it is intended (subject to validation) to reflect the principal concerns of all stakeholders including users, front-line staff, depositors and paymasters.
- Is aimed at all archives - not just public-sector services - and institutions of all sizes
- Is intended to assist in raising standards - it isn't just a statement of current universal practice (the lowest common denominator)
- Is not prescriptive – in line with other recent guidelines of this sort, it sets the framework within which repositories should define their aims and set standards for their services. Self determination is the key (within a recommended framework)
- Does not specify absolute standards or recommended minima - but the standard may be supplemented by best practice guidelines and checklists for particular types of service
- Focuses on desired outcomes - subtly different from inputs and outputs

One of the key advantages of the way in which the standard has been drawn up is that it can be used **now** in repositories where it is needed. One major national archive is intending to implement the standard fully this year, and other repositories may wish to work towards meeting those parts of it most

relevant to their services. It will help to improve the standard of services overall if each archive starts thinking about how it might affect their services and start using the standard to press for much-needed changes to improve access for their users.

Approval of the document by PSQG as an interim standard for voluntary adoption is, however, only the first stage in the passage of the document as a fully-fledged standard. It is hoped that it will eventually go forward for formal recognition by the British Standards Institute. It will also be promoted in Government through the Inter-Departmental Committee on Archives. We are also embarking on a programme of formal consultation in order to validate our representation of the opinions of stakeholders and to "bench test" the application and auditing of the standard.

Perceptions of the PSQG

While the Group has not encountered any outright hostility by the "archival establishment" it would be dishonest not to admit that its role and future direction have been questioned and challenged. There are some within the profession who have treated the newcomer with suspicion – rather like a cuckoo in the nest. There are others who believe that we have strayed into the territory of the professional bodies by carrying out tasks which would have been better left to the existing organisations.

In answer to these concerns it is perhaps worth stressing that the Group has been borne of enthusiasm – and not of frustration. There is no desire for authority or position – simply eagerness for action. The informality of the Group makes it possible for us to deliver results where the established channels are complicated by obstacles and protocols. Our philosophy is to consult, involve and deliver – and to be judged by the results. There are plenty of signs to suggest that many people within and outside the profession welcome this approach and value what we do.

There is, however, a fundamental problem. At the end of the day the PSQG has neither the resources nor the *locus standi* to implement and maintain a programme of action. This means that we are committed to working alongside the established bodies and to making our work available to and through them to others. There is no "threat" – only a positive source of support, though we have yet to secure a full understanding of this throughout the archival community.

What of the future?

In the short term it is clear that PSQG is committed to its work in maintaining and developing the National Survey and in completing the Access Standard. In time, though, these projects are likely to be taken over by the professional bodies referred to above. This will give us the capacity and freedom to take on new tasks. Various ideas have been suggested, but at the time of writing there are no firm plans – largely because the level of our commitment to existing projects precludes embarking on anything new.

Plans are already in hand for the 2000 Quality Forum meeting. We are considering topics such as Knowledge Management, Cross-boundary working in the heritage sector and user requirements from archival cataloguing systems as possible subjects for the programme. We are also aware that for some of our members, the subject matter of our annual meeting has become a bit too theoretical. We therefore plan to redress this by reviewing some recent innovations in the field of actual service delivery – information services, remote access developments, and customer service initiatives. There is a continuing need for us to present new ideas in a positive light and promote them within the archive community.

We might also hope that the PSQG might "come of age" – not in the formal sense of becoming an established body with all that that entails – but at least of being taken seriously and respected within the profession. The Group is an example of what is nowadays being referred to in business theory as a "community of practice". Crossing traditional boundaries and not constrained by formal work structures, such communities have a key role in developing understanding through practical experimentation and human contact. It is in this context that PSQG will continue to operate – and hopefully to thrive.