

c/o The National Archives  
Ruskin Avenue  
Kew, Richmond  
Surrey  
TW9 4DU

Anne Young  
Heritage Lottery Fund  
7 Holbein Place  
London  
SW1W 8NR

24 February 2006

Dear Anne Young

**THE NATIONAL COUNCIL ON ARCHIVES (NCA) RESPONSE TO HERITAGE LOTTERY FUND'S DOCUMENT 'OUR HERITAGE, OUR FUTURE, YOUR SAY' – THIRD STRATEGIC PLAN PRE-CONSULTATION.**

The National Council on Archives (NCA) is a membership organization, which represents a broad spectrum of the UK archival community including user groups, professionals, national and regional bodies. It aims to provide a single voice for the archival community and to lobby on matters of common interest.

The NCA welcomes the Heritage Lottery Fund's contribution of over £81 million spent to date on the archive sector and the impact their funding contribution has had on individual organisations from large capital projects through to community based archival activity.

The National Council on Archives has identified priorities for funding for the archive domain over the next five years in its report *Giving Value: Funding Priorities for UK Archives 2005-2010*, a copy of which is enclosed. All the member bodies of the NCA have endorsed this report, and it is envisaged that the broad priorities will remain valid in the medium term; in other words, they will be relevant to the HLF's third strategic plan.

**Question 1: Our Plans**

**In the light of our three strategic aims, do you agree with our plans for the future set out above? Are there things that we should stop funding or to which we should give greater priority?**

The NCA applauds the Heritage Lottery Fund's continued efforts to encompass the widest spectrum of the UK's heritage within its remit and to work to broad strategic aims. It also strongly endorses HLF's aim to encourage an inclusive and democratic vision for the heritage sector. In light of likely reduced funding during the phase of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Strategic Plan, it is hoped that HLF will commit explicitly to ensuring that its funding is balanced across the sector so that all areas from the landscape and built heritage through to archives, museums and the intangible heritage retain the opportunity to access lottery funding via this distributor.

### *Conserving, regenerating and sustaining our heritage*

The NCA welcomes HLF's statement that it considers 'conservation will remain the engine that drives everything that we do'. For the archive sector a major barrier to effective access and learning opportunities is the lack of funding for preservation ranging from appropriate storage conditions and interventive conservation, through to appropriate finding aids and collections development. We would see this as the priority area for funding. Indeed we would ask HLF to consider funding, in some circumstances, projects that in the lifetime of the project meet only the HLF's first strategic aim of conserving the UK's diverse heritage for future generations to enjoy, where the long-term benefits of this conservation activity are appropriately evidenced.

### *Reflecting our diverse heritage*

The NCA has long advocated collections development activity to properly reflect the communities of the UK. We are aware that there is material currently held in the UK's archives which has not yet been identified as relevant to particular communities. We would ask HLF to strongly commit resources to the cataloguing of archive collections. The development of high quality finding aids are key to ensuring that hidden histories no longer remain hidden. The sector has developed surveying and indexing methodologies such as CASBAH (Caribbean Studies and the history of Black and Asian people in the UK project - [www.casbah.ac.uk](http://www.casbah.ac.uk)) that the NCA seeks to promote. In recent years, HLF has appeared less willing to provide funding for these types of access projects and we would hope that HLF would give a clear steer to its staff as to the validity of such projects in the next strategic plan.

The NCA is uniquely positioned to support both the whole range of organisations and groups involved in the collect, care and access of archives across the UK. As a result of this a new affiliated group has been created under the NCA umbrella, the Community Archives Development Group (CADG). CADG has representatives from community archives, archives engaged with community groups, strategic agencies and the like. It is tasked with taking forward some of the developments from the Community Access to Archives Project (CAAP <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/partnerprojects/caap/>) and identifying gaps in provision to aid development of community archives. A particular issue both for HLF and for the archive sector is the lack of community development or liaison officers with the capacity to support and nurture the enthusiasm of these groups, many of whom have developed through HLF funded projects. We welcome the HLF's funding for a Heritage Development Officer in the Thames Gateway region and look to HLF to work in partnership with the archive domain in future to try to develop capacity building roles such as this, where the nature of the work means that outcomes may be necessarily less well-defined.

We also acknowledge efforts by individual case officers to encourage community based projects to think about sustainability in terms of storing materials collected as part of projects, or hosted on websites. This often means recommending that groups make contact with local archive services. Whilst we applaud these efforts, we would ask HLF as a whole to consider the impact of such demands on individual services. The activities HLF is encouraging are creating an expectation and demand that HLF need to take into account when the archive services themselves look to HLF for funding for storage, cataloguing, staffing and online service support.

Despite a more restricted funding climate, we hope that the Heritage Lottery Fund will continue to support a whole range of organisations from the performing arts to the

organic farming to improve access to their archival records and to develop activities to document for posterity their social, economic and political significance in the 20<sup>th</sup>, and even, 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

### *Young People*

The NCA is also keen to promote the use of archives by young people, via both formal and informal learning. For the archive sector in general the capacity to work with young people has been hampered by the lack of education professionals working directly within the archival environment. For example, there are only 15.5 education officers working in local authority archives in England and Wales. Therefore there is a demonstrable need to upskill the sector in relation to working with young people. There have been some attempts to develop regional consortia projects aiming to develop education opportunities across a range of archives, by the use of short-term education or audience development officers. A key goal of these projects would be to transfer skills into the sector and to deliver activities which would enable archive services to demonstrate to core funders the efficacy of, and need for, education staff within their organisations. Unfortunately HLF has been unwilling to support these projects, suggesting that individual organisations should bid for individual education projects. This ignores the capacity issues and the developmental stage that the archive domain is currently at, and unfortunately may lead to the services falling even further behind those of equivalent museums or historic attractions. We also feel that the regional approach can offer better value for money. We would hope that in this 3<sup>rd</sup> strategic plan, HLF would be willing to fund projects covering a whole range of activities for young people and that a variety of models of delivery would be acceptable.

### *Volunteering*

The archive domain is a longstanding supporter of the use of volunteers as key to service delivery and the NCA is keen to promote better training and support to volunteers within the domain. We welcome HLF's positioning of volunteers as central to its plans, as we see this as a key way to enable more people to be involved in the archive sector. Traditionally volunteers within the archive domain have tended to be from an older age group. With greater emphasis from HLF on bringing in new types of volunteer, we would welcome HLF re-evaluating its guidance documents relating to volunteer use and training, so that they are more appropriate to the needs of the whole heritage sector and not so heavily skewed towards the built and landscape heritage. We would also hope that HLF would encourage through project funding, and its guidance, the opportunities that archives can and do deliver for work experience placements.

### *Learning and Skills*

The HLF has made a substantial commitment to the support of community based archive projects, an activity the NCA fully supports. We would hope that as part of the next strategic plan that HLF, working in partnership with organisations like NCA, MLA and The National Archives could support groups to develop the appropriate skills to collect, conserve, digitise and store community archives. This is an area that has been identified as one where community groups are seeking more advice and by imbedding this advice into the HLF's own guidance it would provide a sustainable value to these projects.

The HLF rightly points out the lack of special skills needed to maintain the heritage. The archives sector is seeking to address some of the workforce needs identified in reports such as the *Joint NCA/MLA Archives Workforce Study*, March 2004. We welcome

HLF's efforts in this area through its Bursaries Scheme and its commitment to learning and skills. However, we would ask HLF to consider the issue of skills in relation to the various areas of the heritage sector. There is currently an emphasis on NVQs and workforce training that is perhaps more applicable to the development of workforce skills in the built heritage than in the archive sector. Archival training and qualifications tend to be delivered via the Higher Education sector and although HLF have supported projects that have included posts designed to support the post holders through training to become qualified archivists, HLF has not agreed to fund any of the formal training costs, i.e. the fees for the courses themselves. We would hope that HLF could be more flexible on this issue in the context of training methods within the sector and the need to attract a more diverse workforce. We also look forward to HLF supporting any developments that might come from the strategic partnership between MLA and Lifelong Learning UK, particularly the goal of diversifying the workforce.

### **Question 2: Public Involvement**

#### **Which of the approaches set out above do you think would work best in the heritage sector?**

The NCA, as a representative of both heritage professionals and users, would welcome more public involvement and openness in HLF's decision making. At its broadest level this may mean being more transparent about decision-making processes and using the HLF website to deliver more detailed information about funded projects. Encouraging a wider range of people to be represented on HLF committees is certainly to be welcomed, however we would hope that any opening up the HLF's decision making process would be complemented by a robust training and awareness programme for committee members or citizen's juries to enable them to fully understand each area of the heritage sector and its own particular needs and issues.

Using the broadcast media may be a way of promoting a general interest in the heritage and raising awareness concerning its conservation and use. Certainly the BBC's *Restoration* programme had considerable effect in this area. We would, however, draw a note of caution that partnerships, with television in particular, may tend to promote the more visual or immediate projects at the expense of other projects of equal value but less instant appeal.

An online forum and public meetings may be ways of enabling the public to voice views but in the document it is unclear how these views would then be taken into account. HLF would need to be explicit about any activities of this nature in terms of how comments or issues raised will be acted upon, so that they do not raise unrealistic expectations.

### **Question 3: Access to Funding**

#### **What more could we do to make our funding more accessible?**

We welcome the Heritage Lottery Fund's continued efforts to simplify application procedures, particularly with regard to the smaller grants programmes.

The NCA would hope that these efforts would address some of the following issues that have arisen with past and potential applicants.

- 1) *Access to pre-application advice.* The introduction of Development Teams within the HLF regional structure has proved highly beneficial for organisations with regard to pre-application advice. However, the nature of this advice and the level of support

has had some regional variations. It would be helpful to have clearer information for potential applicants on the type of support available, in order to manage expectation.

- 2) *Information required of applicants for project assessment and information required to fulfil public accountability.* It is hoped that any revision of the application process will address these issues. Often potential applicants feel, because of the nature of some of the questions on the application form, that they may be refused funding if their project does not reach specific target audiences such as BME or young people. With competition for funds set to increase in the lifetime of the next strategic plan it would be helpful if HLF could make it clearer in its guidance literature that for example, a project aimed at delivering benefit to a local community in an area with very few people from a BME background would not be disadvantaged. It would also help if the application forms made even clearer the differences between questions used for monitoring purposes and those for assessment of the grant request.
- 3) *Electronic communication routes.* Feedback from the sector demonstrates there would be significant demand for opportunities to complete the application process online. There is also some dissatisfaction with some technical faults in the current CD-ROM application forms. HLF's aim to make the application process fully accessible is welcomed, but this could be improved, for example, the lack of software that can be used on Apple MACs has been flagged up as an issue for some organisations.
- 4) *Regional structure.* The regional structure of HLF has proved successful in bringing case officers closer to the applicants and has enabled potential applicants to better argue the case for funding in regional and local contexts. There are concerns, however, that as regional budgets are increasingly stretched, good, innovative projects might miss out on funding because of HLF's organisational structure. For a small sector like archives, where collections of national importance can be housed in a range of geographical locations, these issues are particular important. For example we would hope that HLF will, as part of its next plan, confirm its commitment to projects that may include partners from more than one region, or that may be based at an organisation in one region but deliver benefits in another region.

#### **Question 4: Your views count**

As the only body covering the whole of the heritage sector, HLF is uniquely positioned to encourage developments across the sector. Its financial clout and access to key stakeholders and opinion formers give a strong sense of legitimacy to its voice on heritage matters. We would hope that during both the planning or, and the implementation of, the 3<sup>rd</sup> strategic plan HLF would redouble its efforts as a partner to the sector as a whole, and to the archive domain in particular.

The archive domain prides itself on having a strong unified voice on many issues; indeed, the existence of the NCA is a testament to this. However, it has sometimes been the perception of the archive domain that HLF has not listened to, or fully understood, the particular issues of this part of the heritage sector. For example, it has been felt that in many instances HLF has ignored both the qualitative and quantitative evidence provided by the sector that users wish to see more use of new technologies for archival learning and outreach delivery, preferring to use HLF funding to steer projects towards more traditional methods based on physical activities. We would welcome HLF taking a more active partnership role within the archive domain. This more active role

could take a whole range of forms, for example; more HLF staff taking up opportunities to attend archive events; secondments or work shadowing opportunities for HLF staff; closer working with MLA on archive issues and The National Archives National Advisory Services; and more HLF support for, or joint events, with organisations like the NCA, MLA, TNA or Society of Archivists.

The NCA acknowledges that its own close working relationship with the HLF Policy team has been extremely beneficial in supporting the archive domain. We welcome HLF's ongoing work to assist archives in applying for funding with actions, such as the upcoming guidance notes for applicants. The NCA is happy to act as a conduit for greater communication between the archive domain and HLF. We would be delighted to provide HLF with information concerning the domain, so that staff and committees might have a broader understanding of activities going on in the domain as a whole, so that they have a broader perception than solely HLF-funded projects. Similarly we would welcome more transparency from HLF about decision-making processes in order to combat some of the perceptions, or perhaps misperceptions, of inconsistency in approach to assessing archive projects.

Through this consultation period, we hope to continue a dialogue with HLF over issues surrounding what might be considered 'core' versus 'additional' services, where the gaps in provision across the archive domain lie, and how best to support innovative projects and dynamic services, whilst ensuring support to improve the least provisioned services. We would also welcome further discussion on the sustainability issues around HLF-funded projects. By working together to ensure a common understanding of need in the archive domain, and how this relates to the bigger picture in the heritage sector, we hope to be able to support both archives and the HLF through the difficult funding period that the next strategic plan will cover.

We would be happy to discuss further any of the comments made in this consultation response and would ask that you contact Louise Ray, our Archive Lottery Adviser in the first instance on 020 8392 5347

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Pepler  
Chair, The National Council on Archives