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**NATIONAL  
COUNCIL ON  
ARCHIVES**

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**STRATEGY**  
**2006–2009**

## Executive Summary

The archive domain continues to give exceptional social and cultural value to the nation. Despite this, archives in the UK are facing urgent issues. These include increased demand from existing and new users, a lack of coherent, strategic infrastructure, and new modes of delivering services and accessing archival materials. There has been a chronic under-resourcing of their services over many years which have led to crises in Audio-Visual archives and large backlogs in cataloguing and preserving materials so that they may be opened to access from the public.

The National Council on Archives aims to provide an independent, representative voice for archives and their users. It works towards achieving the same awareness and value of archives by funders and decision-makers as that deservedly enjoyed by libraries and museums at present. It aims to ensure that archives are enjoyed by the widest spectrum of users.

In support of that overriding aim, the NCA's strategic priorities over the next three years focus on

- advocacy and strategic co-ordination
- marketing and publicity for archives
- funding and fundraising for archives
- research and development
- supporting and developing community archives' capacity, and
- support for sector-wide issues, activities and functions.

NCA will continue to advocate on behalf of archives and their users at all levels of government; to raise awareness of the value, and enormous potential, of archives among decision-makers. NCA will also continue to impress upon archivists the need to fulfil archives' potential in the social inclusion, education and citizenship agendas, and will continue to support research into the most effective ways of unlocking this potential.

The NCA continues to support the archival domain in marketing itself to users by the central co-ordination of the Archive Awareness Campaign, supporting ongoing efforts to identify and clear backlogs in conservation, cataloguing and digitisation, and the development of new audiences through community archives.

To enable increased access, the NCA continues to commission and co-ordinate research into effective capacity building and performance enhancement in archives and using inter-domain partnerships.

Without adequate funding, none of these developments can be achieved. The NCA continues to advocate for sustainable, distinct funding for archives, while also encouraging the archive domain to be creative in securing additional moneys from funding streams other than from the public purse.

## **Background**

The National Council on Archives 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 common concern and to provide an authoritative unified voice for the archival community.

Its specific aims are:

- To bring to the attention of the public, government or relevant institutions or organisations, matters of current concern in the field of archives
- To support and assist the work of The National Archives and The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council in such way as those bodies deem appropriate by mutual agreement
- To encourage and to assist in a continuing programme of public education in archive matters; to work to inform the public of existing archive services and of the importance of preserving our archive heritage, by encouraging or supporting conferences, publications and other such educative ventures
- To encourage funding, where appropriate and in consultation with other relevant agencies, in support of the preservation and acquisition of archives and to provide advice, when called for, on the allocation of such funds
- To pursue the definition of minimum standards for archive repositories, to investigate means of achieving them, and to encourage their attainment where appropriate
- To examine current archive acquisition policies and activities and to draw attention to such gaps or shortcomings as may be perceived
- To encourage collaborative or regional initiatives to improve or advance the cause of archive services.

Some of the objectives of the NCA are delivered through its research arm, The Public Services Quality Group (PSQG) and the specialist forum, The Community Archives Development Group, which are formally affiliated to the NCA. These groups meet independently of the NCA but with its full support. They have their own steering groups and agree their own work plans within the structure of this Strategic Plan.

The NCA is a membership organization. It became a company limited by guarantee on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2000 and a registered charity on 16<sup>th</sup> August 2001.

The National Council on Archives agrees its strategic direction with its Council. Its workload within this framework is agreed with its main funders, the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) and The National Archives (TNA). Memoranda of Understanding are signed annually between the NCA and the MLA, and the NCA and TNA.

Full member bodies of the Council also pay an annual subscription to support its work and to cover administration costs.

The Council meets four times a year with its Annual General Meeting in October. The spring meeting is held outside of London at a member archive or similar. All other meetings are held at The London Metropolitan Archive in Clerkenwell.

## **Foreword**

The National Council on Archives is moving into a new phase. Change is, as ever, the only constant. We remain greatly appreciative of the financial support of our principal funders, MLA and The National Archives, as well as our numerous member bodies and sponsors. Many of these bodies are facing considerable development with the MLA conducting strategic and organisational reviews and the appointment of a new Chief Executive of The National Archives. This combined with a change of personnel in all the key officers of the Council, makes it timely for us to take stock of what work lies ahead and to consider what we can best achieve with our limited resources.

This Strategic Plan will guide the work of The National Council on Archives for the next three years. The decision to prioritize work may be controversial, but the NCA is not the only body working to improve archives in the UK and to advocate for their well being. As a small body punching well above our weight in terms of paid and volunteer officers, we have chosen to take a strategic view of what we can accomplish, working to complement the chosen activities and expertise of other organisations. Thus, for instance, we will not be advocating for individual archives unless faced with unusual circumstances, nor does the NCA work for better working conditions or training on behalf of archivists *per se*. But we do concern ourselves with training for the profession as a whole, where it affects the sector, for example, around Community Archives.

The NCA aims to be a democratic organisation. We aim 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. We aim to develop consensus on matters of mutual concern and provide an authoritative common voice for the archival community. All our Council and Observer Members have been consulted on this Strategic Plan. If you feel that your organisation should be involved with the NCA, please contact us.

**Dr Elizabeth Hallam Smith**  
**Chairman**



## **Strategic Priorities and Ongoing Activities**

### ***Advocacy and strategic co-ordination including Policy and Development Officer activity***

The NCA will focus on strategic advocacy for archives to decision makers particularly in Parliament, Government, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Department of Constitutional Affairs, the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, the National Archives, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and others.

We will do this through:

- parliamentary briefings and events
- responding to consultations
- supporting the strategic advisory role of the Council and its member bodies
- awareness-raising of the needs of non-traditional and contemporary formats (such as digital records, audio-visual material) across the sector
- working towards contributing to the 2012 London Olympics to the archives' sectors benefit
- developing partnerships to achieve particular strategic priorities or to carry out specific activities.

We will also continue to:

- support home country and regional agendas
- monitor issues of concern and act proactively where necessary
- improve communication links between membership bodies of the NCA and between NCA members and the rest of the archives sector.

### ***Marketing for archives including Archive Awareness Campaign Officer activity***

The NCA will continue to have a central co-ordination role to play in raising awareness of archives with existing and new users, opening new markets for archives and promoting the widest possible access to archival materials. The NCA will continue to promote archives as places open to all and of relevance to all, not just a small group of stereotyped researchers. Family history, and programmes such as *Who do you think you are?* have raised the profile and popularity of archives, and the NCA will continue to build on this increased demand.

We will do this by:

- co-ordinating the Archive Awareness Campaign centrally and supporting regional and grass-roots activity of individual archives to market their services
- monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the Archive Awareness Campaign, and producing an annual report to improve the impact of the campaign and to demonstrate archives' importance to funders and decision makers.

We will also continue to:

- play a central role in developing an ongoing strategy for the effective marketing of the archive sector
- research on the effective evaluation of marketing activities.

### ***Funding and fundraising for archives including Archive Lottery Advisor activity***

The NCA will advocate for sustainable and developed funding for archives, whilst encouraging archives to explore ways to exploit funding streams other than public money.

We will do this by:

- producing strategic briefing material and guidance on fundraising activities
- liaison and advocacy with key funding bodies including the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Big Lottery Fund and member bodies such as the Association of Chief Archivists in Local Government
- advice and casework, especially the work of the Archive Lottery Adviser
- producing a fundraising strategy.

We will also continue to:

- encourage archives' own promotion and fundraising by planning and co-ordination of activities and capacity building.

### ***Research and development including Public Services Quality Group activity***

The NCA will take an active role in research and development within the archive sector.

We will do this by:

- researching, developing and publishing a strategy for evaluation and impact assessment
- horizon-scanning and co-ordination of activity on key quality of service and performance measurement issues
- liaison with key players in the different archival sectors to determine needs for performance measures
- organising quality forums and conferences
- developing standards and performance indicators.

We will also continue to:

- carry out visitor surveys, and develop new ways that this research can help archives improve their performance
- evaluate archive services from the user's perspective.



### ***Supporting and developing community archives' capacity including Community Archive Development Group activity***

The NCA will support the emerging field of Community Archives and community involvement in archives.

We will do this by:

- leading on a strategy for the Community Archive element of the aUK network
- co-ordinating research and evaluation into the most effective means of support for community archives from more traditional archives and archivists
- supporting the capacity-building of community archives, their creators and users
- advocacy and brokerage with funders and decision makers.

We will also continue to:

- support fundraising and sustainable funding for Community Archives
- organise workshops and training for all those involved in Community Archives.

### ***Support for sector-wide issues, activities and functions***

The NCA will take a leading role in supporting sector-wide activity and strategic developments. Archives are necessary in underpinning the vast potential and actual outcomes and impacts of cultural activity. Archives, as the authentic voice of the past speaking directly to people of the present, without intermediaries or interpretation, are relevant to a vast number of applications. Archival holdings are vital for the study of many branches of history, but are also crucial in other academic research, from the history of economics, geography and other social sciences to hard scientific investigations such as climate change (evidenced in ship's logs) and an essential foundation for future planning, preservation and conservation policy. Archival evidence has been used recently in support of compensation claims by miners' families under the Pneumoconiosis Compensation Act, and archives' records are constantly essential for individuals in proving their identity, property ownership and qualifications.

We will contribute to this work by:

- promoting social inclusion in archives, including positive action internships for trainee archivists and ensuring inclusion of users of archives from potentially excluded groups
- supporting and promoting digital preservation throughout the sector
- supporting the strategic work of key voluntary and charitable archive bodies
- supporting archival networking activities.

We will also continue to advocate for further funding to support:

- digitisation to serve both preservation and access needs
- preservation and collection care
- identifying and clearing conservation backlogs
- identifying and clearing cataloguing backlogs.



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