

IMPROVING ACCESS TO ARCHIVE USERS: Ten Years of UK experience

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PUBLIC SERVICES QUALITY GROUP

**A STANDARD FOR ACCESS FOR
ARCHIVES**

2008

National Council on Archives: Public Services Quality Group, 2008

The Access Standard: the five aims

- 1. Designed for use with the whole archive sector – not just local government
- 2. Adoption would be voluntary
- 3. Recognition of diversity in archive services
- 4. Success through outcomes for users – not counting numbers of readers
- 5. Avoid stating principles in ways that might become out of date due to technological changes

Take up of the draft from 1999

- Some resistance – especially from archivists responsible for privately owned papers
- No invites to speak to professional groups
- Hard to obtain feedback from services
- Review commissioned by Public Sector Quality Group (PSQG) in 2003

Aims of the review, 2004

- Find out what key bodies thought about the Standard – and what to do next
- Gather evidence about the use and impact of the Standard
- Collect evidence to revise the Standard
- Seek to develop it as a British Standard or assess alternative means of publication

Outcome of the review

- People were broadly happy with the Standard – only minor changes needed
- Intended new version for 2004 delayed – and draft Standard remained in place for a further four years
- In the interval the Standard was drawn on widely – by New Zealand Archives for their standard and in the UK National Archives self assessment process

The 2008 revision 1

- UK's Museums Library & Archives council no longer interested in standards intended only for archives
- UK National Archives(TNA) was no longer so directly involved.
- PSQG commissioned work to turn the Standard into a completed document in 2008

The 2008 revision 2

- Sharp timetable – so no extensive consultation
- Aim to make the Standard easier to use with changes to layout
- Revisions to references – and to update means of communication
- Provision of a tool-kit to encourage use
- Evidence of use – again proved difficult to find

Access Standard - structure

- Short introduction with history of development
- Definition of terms
- Information structure of each element defined
 - Desired outcome
 - Levels of importance – from ‘may’ to ‘shall’
 - Help includes notes, appropriate good practice and how performance can be audited

What is covered by the Standard?

The 14 headings

- 1. Access aims and objectives
- 2. Equity – serving all equally
- 3. Communications and openness
- 4. Responsivness
- 5. Efectiveness and efficiency
- 6. Service management
- 7. Staff participation and duties
- 8. User responsibilities
- 9. Service information
- 10. Access to services
- Access to content – collections and catalogues
- 12. Services to new researchers
- 13. Accommodation and facilities
- 14. Remote service delivery

Standard for Access to Archives: sample page

A Standard for Access to Archives: 2008

Sample page

1.2 It is clear what the *archive service* is intending to achieve in providing access to its collections.

Requirements: The *archive service* shall have a clear statement of its objectives in relation to access, drawn up following consultation with *stakeholders* and explicitly balancing their disparate interests. The statement shall be reviewed with consultation of *stakeholders* at moments of significant change, and at least once every five years.

Notes: The definition of '*stakeholder*' is important and the *archive service* must establish who its *stakeholders* are.

Guidance: The statement could be expressed through a *user* charter, service information leaflet or a policy document. Stakeholders can also be defined as part of business planning or audience development work.

Audit methods: Check that document exists, has appropriate content and has approval of the *responsible body*. Verify consultation process has been comprehensive, has been documented and that the results are reflected in the final document. Check that objectives, including that relating to *user* satisfaction, are measurable. Check with sample of *stakeholders*.

Changes in practice

- Greater use of the Internet for information on services, and to access content
- Publicity in the UK over recent cases of theft from record offices and libraries
- So need in future for a new balance between access and security? Under debate.

Standard for access to archives – action plan template

STANDARD FOR ACCESS TO ARCHIVES

ACTION PLAN TEMPLATE

Provision for access should be reviewed on a regular basis. This implementation table is intended to enable archive services to check each element of the standard against current policies, procedures and practices. It can form the basis of a recorded audit or an action plan to ensure the office complies, or remains in compliance with the Standard for Access.

Archive Service:

Date of review:

No	Standard element	Audit method	Current policies and procedures	Date of policy etc.	Action and implementation date
1. ACCESS AIMS AND OBJECTIVES					
1.1	It is clear who the archive service is intended to serve	Check that documentation exists, has appropriate content and has recent approval of the responsible body.			
1.2	It is clear what the archive service is intending to achieve in providing access to its collections	Check that document exists, has appropriate content and has approval of the responsible body. Verify consultation process has been comprehensive, has been documented and that the results are reflected in the final document. Check that objectives (including that relating to user satisfaction) are measurable. Check with sample of stakeholders.			

Published November 2008

- Launched at the Public Services Quality Group Annual Forum in November 2008
- Trailed in *The National Archives Recordkeeping*, December 2008
- Available on the PSQG pages of the UK's National Council on Archives web site
- http://www.ncaonline.org.uk/research_and_development/access_standard/

The future

- PSQG will need to continue to promote and encourage use of the Standard
- May need to follow the example of the Scottish Quality Matrix for Libraries – self auditing questions –
 - How well are we doing?
How do we know?
What are we going to do now?
- PSQG will need to ensure the right balance in future between security and access in the future.

A Standard for Access to Archives

- National Council on Archives. Public Services Quality Group, 2008
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