

Action 4 Archives

The National Archives User Forum presentation 24 September 2009 'Myths and the Facts'

On 24th September 2009, The National Archives revealed their plans to make budget savings of 10%. Part of their presentation tackled the issue of 'Myths and the Facts' in response to our claims about the impact of their changes on public service; and the fact that the crisis was caused by top-loading the budget with senior staff. The following statements were challenged by Jeff James, Director of Operations and Services, as being myths.

'£1.42m or 34% of the savings to come from Operations and Services Directorate, hitting public services disproportionately'

The figure of £1.42m was provided by Jeff James and Natalie Ceeney on 20 August at the previous User Forum. £1.42m expressed as a percentage of £4.2m is 34%. Of this total, £900k comes from Public Services, as previously circulated by Jeff James in July; the total equates to 21% of the total saving, and is therefore twice the level of the intended overall savings of 10% operating costs. This supports our claim that public services are hit disproportionately. It is simply a case of TNA providing alternative interpretations to the statistics, or presenting them out of context.

'12 redundancies in the specialist Advice and Records Knowledge Department'

This figure for the number of redundancies has been provided by TNA, and equates to 33% of total redundancies expected across the whole of TNA. It is claimed that administrative posts are being lost; whilst this may be true, the new job descriptions for Principal Subject Specialists demonstrate that they are expected to cover the administrative work formerly undertaken by the redundant posts, thus reducing their specialist work time. Note that TNA is misleading the public by interpreting the word 'specialist' in our statement to describe the nature of the posts, not the nature of the department; the original statement was carefully worded to avoid exactly that type of sleight of hand.

'Reduction of record development duties, for example cataloguing'

As discussed during the User Forum, TNA are not freeing up more of their experts to be experts - see the previous point above about the Principal Subject Specialists. Until the full schematic of TNA's departmental structure is published after the redundancy exercise, the complete picture will not be known; however, the job descriptions of the subject specialists and the removal of the Research and Collections Department shows that the emphasis has moved away from curatorial care of the archive.

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'The Chief Executive misled the public over the introduction of car parking fees'

Note that the comment stops here, before the evidence found and presented to TNA can be recited. Note also the response: 'we considered parking charges openly in 2006 and dropped it due to consultation.' In 2007 they wrote to Richmond Council, stating that they had not yet publicly announced their intention to charge for parking to their users. The document is in the public domain on the Richmond Council website, and has been referred to on Action 4 Archives.

'Removing microfilm from reading rooms is pushing people towards priced pay-per-view'

This statement is correct! TNA are withdrawing alternative surrogates which are of specific use to non-family historians – for example, you can't search for a property in the 1891 census by address online, whereas you can onsite via microfilm. The quality of access to First World War army service records WO363 and WO364 online is far inferior compared to microfilm access, as our study has shown.

'Money saved by closing to the public on Mondays will be used to fund free access to the 1911 census at seven regional centres'

This was taken directly from a letter written by Natalie Ceeney to an MP, which we have put on the Action 4 Archives website. Their rebuttal statement makes no sense - 'the total cost of the hubs was £70k. It built so much interest that it made more money than it cost.' That has no relevance to the statement made by Action 4 Archives, and raises more questions than answers. How does it make money if it's free? And if it doesn't, surely that emphasizes the previous point about pushing people towards priced pay-per-view.

'The Chief Executive took a big pay rise of £20k last year'

These figures were taken from TNA's own accounts from 2008-09, compared to 2007-08. TNA have subsequently admitted they made a mistake in their accounts for 2007-08, which we are following up with the National Audit Office. This is linked to the next point:

'The CEO's salary has risen by 50% since she was appointed 4 years ago'

This statement was based on the published annual accounts from 2005-06 onwards, showing her pay to be:

2005-06	£90k - £100k
2006-07	£115k - £120k
2007-08	£115k - £120k
2008-09	£135k - £140k

It's pretty basic maths. The difference, using the lowest figures, between £90k and £135k

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is £45k, which expressed as a percentage of her starting salary, is 50%. Whilst we don't want to get into a debate about individual pay rates and rises, it is important to stress that this makes the wider point about a disproportionate rise in executive salaries – including the introduction of a large number of senior staff earning £40k upwards over the last few years, many of whom received starting salaries at mid or high band that breaches civil service and Cabinet Office protocol, with some individuals receiving market supplements that take them over the maximum possible pay level. It is this practice that we are particularly concerned about in the current funding crisis, as we believe that it was a root cause of the problem and has not been tackled in the current plans.