



The National Archives

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The National Archives, bringing together
the Public Record Office, the Historical Manuscripts
Commission and the Office
of Public Sector Information.

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Changes at The National Archives -

Thank you for your letter of 12th August concerned about changes at The National Archives, and enclosing a letter from your constituent, [redacted]. I hope I can address the concerns you raise.

Let me start by outlining some of the background behind the proposals we have made to change our services at The National Archives. The National Archives, like many public sector organisations, is trying to improve its services within fixed budgets. Over the past five years the organisation has doubled the customer base it serves, at no additional cost to the taxpayer. However, as more of the UK population engages in historical research, and as increasing volumes of current records are created in digital form, the demands on The National Archives have grown.

The National Archives has a strategy of bringing history to life for everyone, and increasingly this means that we need to fund some of the new challenges created by the digital environment in which we all now operate, at the same time as making efficiency savings so that we can continue to invest in the delivery of services. The changes that we announced on 29 June involve making savings by changing some of our services (including moving from a six, to a five day opening week), and making savings in staff numbers through voluntary redundancies (totalling 35 posts), as well as other changes which aim to generate additional income for the organisation.

The rationale behind these plans is a significant shift of demand from our service users towards using online resources. The National Archives have been instrumental in the growth of online genealogy over the past decade. For every one original document now delivered at our main site in Kew, over 170 are now delivered online, mostly to a family history audience. At the same time, the number of genealogists using our onsite services at Kew have significantly declined. The National Archives, along with many organisations, has a fixed budget, and as some services grow and others decline, we need to readjust our funding allocations accordingly. We are investing significantly in our services; and over the past few years we have invested in improving the standards in our reading rooms, improving the website and its catalogues, and in releasing increasing amounts of digitised content. We plan, over the next few years, to invest in service development, including more digitisation and catalogue enhancement.



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- At the same time, in order to be able to keep investing in new services within a fixed budget, we are reallocating our resources to support the demand we now receive from our customers, in order to focus developments on where the greatest need is. This does include reducing our onsite opening hours from six to five days a week, but also includes funding increased regional and online access. To illustrate this, in the past fortnight we have also announced that we are funding the creation of seven regional services to offer free access to the 1911 census, to support those researchers who are not able to come to use the London services at Kew, to make the sort of experience your constituent described more accessible to people across the UK. I hope this explains why we have proposed reducing our opening hours, but also why we do not believe that this will reduce overall access, which has significantly grown through our development of online resources, and which we hope to grow further through regional partnerships.

I am delighted that your constituent and her grandchildren enjoyed their visit to Kew, and gained so much from it in terms of their own learning. We aim to bring history alive to audiences of all ages, and the experience that your constituent reported is actually the sort of experience we hope to provide everyone! I can assure you that the changes we are making will not stop thousands of others having the same experience, and we hope that, by making these changes, we can safeguard the future of this world-renowned resource for generations to come.

I hope that my letter has addressed the issues raised. I am very happy for you to forward a copy of this letter to your constituent, if helpful. If you do wish to discuss these issues further, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



Natalie Ceeney
Chief Executive