Strategic Plan
2008-2009
Introduction by the Chief Executive

I am pleased to present the Strategic Plan for The National Archives for 2008 to 2009.

This past year has been the first full year since we implemented our Vision, and in that time, we have laid the foundations needed to achieve our long-term aims.

In March 2008, we successfully relocated our services from the Family Records Centre (FRC) in Islington, north London, to our main site in Kew. This allowed us to review and improve how we deliver our public services. As a result, we're working towards providing a more integrated and comprehensive service. We aim to provide additional specialised services and expert help and advice to those visiting us here, as well as more interactive web resources.

Over the coming year, we will finish Phase 1 of our programme to refurbish and improve several of the public areas, including the Reading Room and Museum, and move on to develop our services further. At the same time, we're forging ahead with our digitisation programme to make our most popular records available online, including, at the end of this period, launching the 1911 census. This will make even more of our records available to a wider audience than ever before.

We’re also making significant progress in our digital preservation programme. We were delighted that our work in this area was recognised with an award for Digital Preservation at the Conservation Awards 2007. We have already achieved a huge amount to address the challenge of keeping digital records accessible including, in 2007, joining forces with Microsoft to ensure that historical records based on legacy Microsoft formats will remain readable. We have also completed the main phase of our own digital preservation infrastructure to keep digital records held by us readable.

Looking forward, our challenge this year is to make these digital initiatives a mainstream part of our work, and to help Government Departments keep their own records readable. We’re acting on behalf of central government departments to create a shared service solution to address the massive challenges of technological obsolescence and making sure government’s digital information remains readable in the future.

The Prime Minister declared this ‘the century of information’, and that ‘our ability to compete in the global economy, to protect ourselves against crime and terrorist attack, depends not just on natural wealth or on walls or fences but on our ability to use information’. The work we are doing here at The National Archives helps ensure that government has the skills and capability to meet the new challenges of the information age. We’ve established the cross-government Knowledge Council, and will be working together closely to help embed essential new approaches to managing government information and knowledge across the public sector.

In 2007-2008, our dedicated and professional staff worked extremely hard to set us on the road to achieving our long-term aims. In 2008-2009 the enthusiasm, talent and skills of our staff will help carry forward the momentum established in the past year, and will enable us to achieve even more of our ambitious and challenging aims in the coming year.

Natalie Ceeney
Chief Executive, The National Archives
Remit of The National Archives

The National Archives is a UK government department and executive agency of the Ministry of Justice. As the official archives of the UK government, we preserve and protect one of the most important collections in the world, holding public records dating back almost 1,000 years. Domesday Book, one of our most prized national treasures, has been carefully safeguarded for over nine centuries and is now looked after here in Kew.

But our vital role in preserving important records is just one part of our large remit of innovative work. We manage current information as well as historical information, and publish all UK legislation and official publications. We don't just hold information, but actively promote and encourage public access to that information, both at our Kew site and online. We are a world-class provider of research facilities and expert advice for the historical community as well as for government departments and other archives. We act as a supporter and leading advocate for the wider archive sector. We formulate and support the implementation of information policy and best practice, to improve government's capability when securely creating, using and storing information. We promote and regulate the re-use of public sector information. We devise new technological solutions for keeping government records readable.

All of these activities are about managing information created by the public sector for now, and for the future, whether for accountability or for the needs of future historians. And these activities are critical for the future of The National Archives. They are encapsulated in our Vision, which is to:

- Lead and transform information management
- Guarantee the survival of today’s information for tomorrow
- Bring history to life for everyone

These are ambitious aims, but they are converted to reality by the hard work we have been doing so far, and by our groundbreaking plans for the future. Our specific objectives for 2008-2009 are set out on the following pages.
Lead and transform information management

Information is the lifeblood of government. Without it, decisions cannot be made, evidence-based policy cannot be formulated and public services cannot be effectively delivered to society. To deliver world-class public services and guarantee public accountability, government must ensure it is capturing and effectively managing the information it is creating and receiving. Relevant information must be kept for long-term accountability and personal data must be held securely, in order to maintain the citizen’s trust in government.

In response to these challenges, The National Archives is shaping information management policy, helping to develop services and guidance, and showing leadership across the public sector to highlight the vital status of information as an asset. We will continue to strengthen our role as policy lead for information management, raising capability across government via the work of the Office of Public Sector Information, the established Knowledge Council, and the Government Knowledge and Information Management team, based here at Kew. In particular, in 2008-2009:

Our 2008-2009 Objectives

- We will provide leadership and support for the Knowledge and Information Management function in government by bringing together information professionals to create a Government Knowledge and Information Management Network. We will lead the development and implementation of a professionalism programme to build capability and expertise
- We will reinforce our leadership by engaging with stakeholder communities across the public and private sectors, attaining national and international reach
- Drawing on our expertise in information handling and management we will shape information policy and strategy across the United Kingdom, reinforcing our leadership role and transforming our information portfolio
- We will set standards for information management across the public sector by providing robust and respected advisory services, underpinned by assessment, regulation, mediation and complaints handling
- We will maintain a cutting edge position in information and communication technology, by interaction with the information industry, and innovation in the application of new technologies to our services and practices
- We will provide high quality outward facing services to share our expertise across the broad information spectrum we embrace
- We will promote best practice and innovation that positions The National Archives as a pioneer practitioner and a centre of excellence in the United Kingdom and internationally
Guarantee the survival of today's information for tomorrow

The information world is full of energy and innovation, with continually evolving technologies and services. Paper is no longer the dominant medium. Key information is held in websites or ‘wikis’ as well as digital files created on a range of different computer systems. In this constantly evolving environment, government must take active steps to preserve the information it’s creating electronically, as well as maintain our existing paper heritage.

Looking after the nation’s existing records is a fundamental part of The National Archives’ role. We continue to build on our expertise in preservation and conservation and to provide advice on standards across the archival community. But, crucially, we are also rising to the challenge of ensuring the survival of digital information for future generations. We are devising innovative technical solutions, for use across government and the wider public sector, to make digital information accessible and readable for both today’s business and tomorrow’s history. But, of course, paper doesn’t go away. We will continue to take in paper records, in addition to the 175km of shelving of paper records that is already here, which needs preserving for centuries to come. In particular, in 2008-9:

Our 2008-2009 Objectives

- We will provide a centre of excellence on all aspects of preservation, conservation and collection development, from paper and parchment to digital and web content, by pioneering research and innovation in techniques to the benefit of the government and archive community and for Britain’s heritage

- We will expand our capability to ensure long term readability of digital records across government, whether in document format or as websites, by development of shared services, trusted guidance and innovative, reliable technical solutions which meet the needs of our government customers

- We will maintain the appropriate environmental conditions for the preservation of our own collection, working with the wider conservation community to share and promote research and best practice

- We will support the wider Archival sector through leading the development of a new Government Strategy for Archives, which recognises the value of the archival sector to the United Kingdom, and helps us achieve even more through joined-up working across the sector

- We will develop our capability to preserve the integrity and readability of digital information held within The National Archives, in formats that meet the needs of our researchers
Bring history to life for everyone

Archives make a positive difference to people’s lives by connecting them to the past. Increasingly, people expect to find, use and learn from information online. Our vision recognises our commitment to providing people worldwide with access to our records, and to helping everyone use them to enrich their lives.

The National Archives has built up a strong reputation for delivering services that are highly responsive to customer needs. Our strategy for the future continues to focus on providing extensive access to our content online, so that researchers in all fields can find the information they want wherever they are based. This will also allow us to provide more focused specialist services onsite, for those who wish to consult original records, or take face-to-face advice from our staff. In particular, in 2008-2009:

**Our 2008-2009 Objectives**

- We will review and consolidate our onsite services so that we offer a world-class integrated research facility at Kew following the relocation of our Family Records Centre services in March 2008
- We will increasingly make our own expertise available to online users, developing our catalogue and easy to use tools for locating and interpreting research information
- We will launch our 1911 census online service to the public, beginning the release to researchers of the largest collection of census records available to date
- We will develop collaborative research tools, which will provide a platform for researchers to contribute their own expertise and build stronger communities of knowledge available to all
- We will continue to meet customer needs by making increasing numbers of popular records available online. This will be done cost effectively by the continued digitisation of popular sources with our partners and developing our own online service platforms
- We will offer guidance and advisory services that are respected and valued to government, the wider archive community and the higher education sector to support the development of standards, research and innovative services across the sectors
- We will offer world-class online services. Our family of websites will exploit the possibilities offered by emerging technology and current web developments, providing more varied, targeted and innovative services and improved search mechanisms
Achieving this Vision through a capable, flexible organisation

The National Archives continues to aim to deliver a highly ambitious strategy at a time of tight financial constraints and increasing environmental awareness. We are meeting the digital challenge, which means dealing with digital content as well as paper. And we have taken responsibility for raising standards across the information and archive sector, which can, at times, be resource intensive, but which we believe is critical to the future of The National Archives.

To achieve this, we must support our staff properly in developing new knowledge and skills during a period of rapid and profound change. Having identified the key skills and behaviours needed to deliver The National Archives' Vision, we are now investing in staff development programmes at all levels of the organisation to embed them, ensuring that we build on the existing high levels of motivation and engagement. And we are also working to ensure that we maintain the high levels of trust that our users already have in our services by continuing to develop our support services, including our facilities and environmental controls. In particular, in 2008-2009:

**Our 2008-2009 Objectives**

- We will work together to ensure we have the right skills and motivation to deliver our vision. Building on our recent Investors in People (iIP) re-accreditation, we will continue to support staff through a period of change to enable us to deliver the vision through new ways of working.

- We will improve the management of our facilities and buildings for the benefit of staff, and our collections, ensuring that we improve our environmental awareness and lower our energy usage.

- We will ensure that our services and communications are accessible to, and welcoming of, people from all backgrounds, and that we increase the diversity of our workforce.

- We will ensure the confidentiality and integrity of The National Archives systems to ensure that our operations remain trusted, secure and able to meet the needs of our business as an information provider.

- We will respond quickly and effectively to new developments and the changing needs of our stakeholders, ensuring our human and financial resources, skills, approaches and mechanisms are best placed to meet those needs.

- We will guarantee our financial sustainability through effective management of income generating services.

- We will support this vision through effective and efficient IT, Finance, Facilities and HR services, which meet recognised benchmark standards for performance, reliability and cost-effectiveness, and are fit for the needs of the organisation.
Annex A: The National Archives’ Five-Year Vision to 2012

Rapid changes in the information world continue to present the most complex and challenging set of tasks we have ever faced. It is not too much to say that the future nature and existence of government archives depends on our being successful in our objectives. Of these challenges, there are three in particular that are of immense significance and determine our priorities for our future development. These remain at the heart of our Vision as established in 2006.

Challenge 1: Government and the wider information sector need better information management to strengthen accountability and release the potential of their assets.

Our vision: Lead and transform information management

By 2012 we aim to:

• Shape future government information policy, from information creation to re-use
• Show leadership in helping the public sector understand the importance of good information management
• Create a common infrastructure of services and guidance to support these aims

Challenge 2: In addition to preserving the nation’s existing paper records, we need to rise to the new challenge of ensuring the ongoing readability of digital information for future generations.

Our vision: Guarantee the survival of today’s information for tomorrow

By 2012 we aim to:

• Preserve records of all kinds; physically at The National Archives, and through our influence elsewhere
• Work with others in the United Kingdom to ensure that between us, the right information is preserved for today’s business and tomorrow’s history
• Collaborate across the world to share expertise and innovation

Challenge 3: Increasingly people expect to find, use and learn from information online. They expect it to be personalised and connected to their wider life. They expect to have it immediately.

Our vision: Bring history to life for everyone

By 2012 we aim to:

• Make a positive difference to people’s future by connecting them to the past
• Provide researchers and customers wherever they are with easy access to records and expertise, with innovative online services, connected to trusted partners
• Increasingly focus our reading rooms on being a centre for expert help and specialist research

In addition, we will support the realisation of this vision by developing and maintaining a capable, flexible organisation, able to deliver our new services with staff equipped with the right skills for the future.