EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. PURPOSE

SEMLAC commissioned this research from Chris Pickford, freelance archival consultant, to gain a better understanding of the make-up and nature of the archive domain in order to:

- Help balance the challenge SEMLAC faces of having to be accessible and responsive to the needs and aspirations of the South East’s diverse archival community on the one hand, but also able to channel its resources effectively in order to “make a difference” on the other
- Identify key players and allegiances in the archives domain so initiatives encouraging participation and engagement are targeting with a sharper focus on the needs and aspirations of individual services
- Provide evidence to support bids for further archive development support in the region
- Directly benefit archives in the region in terms of helping them to form communities of interest leading to new partnerships.

2. WHAT THE REPORT COVERS

2.1 This report aims to identify the key findings and issues arising from an analysis of research. It indicates the main issues that SEMLAC will need to address in developing and extending its work among institutions in the region holding archival materials, through a series of recommendations.

2.2 The analysis and findings are presented in two sections, first (s.5) by subject covering:

- Archival institutions
- Scale and resources
- Standards and status
- Collecting and collections
- On-line content
- Participation
- Public access

And second (s.6) by institution type (i.e. with key points concerning museums, libraries, university archives and business collections etc).

2.3 The research, upon which findings are based, includes the results of SEMLAC’s “Categorisation of Archives Services” 2004 survey alongside a range of other information on archive repositories and institutions gleaned from accessible sources, which was current at March 2005 (see Background and Concept and Methodology below). The data on which this report is based is freely available from SEMLAC in the form of two Excel spreadsheets. One analyses the returns of the 2004 survey, the other provides a more detailed overview of archives in the region by assembling data from a range of sources in a simple “read across” format for each institution.

3. FINDINGS and RECOMMENDATIONS: By subject

3.1 Archival institutions

3.1.1 Key findings

- There are now some 460 identified archival institutions in the region;
- 305 of these are listed on ARCHON and 160 are listed in British Archives (4th edition);
- 33% are “museums”.


3.1.2 Issues
- There is no common language amongst organisations in the South East about what constitutes “an archive”;
- More knowledge of the range of archival institutions and their holdings creates new challenges in targeting initiatives to meet all needs;
- There are cost implications in trying to keep track of all archival institutions.

3.1.3 Recommendations
- SEMLAC, along with other regions and MLA, should aim to improve awareness and understanding of what archives are and recommend management strategies for them;
- SEMLAC should work with other regions and MLA to determine the best way of maintaining data about archive, library and museums generally – noting especially the need to include management statistics;
- SEMLAC should use the template devised for this project as a means of gathering further information and evidence about archival institutions.

3.2 Scale and resources

3.2.1 Key findings
- Overall, it is not possible to adduce any meaningful conclusions from the available data.

3.2.2 Issues
- The lack of usable and meaningful data about the relative scale of archival activity across the full range of institutions in the region makes assessment of the importance of the archives within individual institutions very difficult.

3.2.3 Recommendations
- SEMLAC should encourage MLA to persist with its efforts to extend the CIPFA methodology, or similar, across the full spectrum of services so that data on these aspects can be collected and co-ordinated using a consistent formula.

3.3 Standards and status

3.3.1 Key findings
- Formal archive recognition extends only the handful of well-known principal repositories.
- Of the survey respondents, only 23% adhere to archival standards and 14% have primary allegiances in the archive domain.
- A half of survey respondents (51%) are “primarily driven by non archival-agendas” and a further 10% have “no significant identity with the archival agenda”.
- A large number of archival institutions are covered by Museums registration and consequently adhere to museum standards.
- Within each traditional archive grouping a number of institutions are already making a strong contribution to the archive agenda.
- Conversely, groups of institutions with firm roots outside the archive domain have also been identified

3.3.2 Issues
- There is evidence that many institutions have a limited awareness and understanding of the current museums, libraries and archives agenda.
- Concepts and terminology that are readily accessible and meaningful to those operating at strategic and management levels are not readily understood by others.
3.3.3 Recommendations

- Through its workforce development programme, SEMLAC should create training opportunities to increase awareness of archival principles and practices amongst those working outside the core archive community, with the aim of raising standards in collections care and access;
- SEMLAC should broker partnerships between those institutions seeking support and assistance in dealing with their archive holdings and those already well placed to provide a “pastoral care” role;
- SEMLAC should seek to define its relationship with The National Archives’ National Advisory Service (NAS) and to promote the principles of the NAS Standard for Record Repositories.

3.4 Collecting and collections

3.4.1 Key findings

- A significant proportion (38%) of the survey respondents are collecting repositories holding important archive material from a broad range of depositors;
- 18% of respondents do not collect outside their own organisation;
- A large proportion of archival institutions in the region (268) provide lists to the National Register of Archives (NRA);
- Together, the two museums reports of 2000/01 identify some 2.23 million archive items in 139 museums in the Region. This was the fourth largest category by number of items;
- There are some 101 institutions holding audio-visual archive materials, of which about 13 are not otherwise known to hold “traditional” archives.

3.4.2 Issues

- It has not been possible to identify those archives with external collecting responsibilities that have formal collecting policies;
- There are a number of institutions whose collecting activities fall outside the criteria set out in survey;
- The total number of archive collections in the region provided by the NRA figure (33,364) is, at best, an indicative under-estimate as some institutions may well be unaware of the NRA’s role. This illustrates the scale of the task ahead in making collection level descriptions and full lists available on the Internet;
- It is hard to gauge the true scale of the archive material in museums from the available figures. The quantity is considerable.

3.4.3 Recommendations

- SEMLAC’s current initiatives – Collections (s.3) in Future Archives South East – should be informed by the findings of this report and refined accordingly, especially (e.g. 3.2.1-2) where they are targeted at archive holders outside the public sector.

3.5 On-line content

3.5.1 Key findings

- Websites – not necessarily leading to significant archival content – are listed on ARCHON for 65% of the 305 institutions currently listed;
- Some 17 archival institutions make full catalogue information and/or collection level descriptions available on-line on their own websites;
- A2A currently includes 2,756 archive catalogues from 35 institutions in the region;
- There are 91 collection level descriptions and 3,735 from the region on AIM 25 and the Archives Hub respectively;
- 149 of the archival institutions in the region are already represented on Cornucopia, and for 104 of these the Cornucopia entries mention archives.
3.5.2 Issues

- There are differences of terminology and concept between the domains that need to be explored and unpicked;
- There is a need for clarity about the appropriateness of domain-specific and cross-domain approaches a) for professional use and b) for users – generally, archives users want detailed item-level descriptions rather than general guides.

3.5.3 Recommendations

- SEMLAC should work with other regions to encourage national policy-makers to define more clearly the purpose of national virtual networks to which archival institutions can add content;
- SEMLAC should broker partnerships to make the archives of a wider range of institutions accessible on-line in future initiatives, in line with its ICT strategy;
- SEMLAC should encourage the use of collection- and repository-level descriptions for institutions that do not possess detailed lists of their archive holdings, in line with its ICT strategy.

3.6 Participation

3.6.1 Key findings

- 11% of archives in the region participate in the archival on-line network
- A high percentage – 68% of the 377 archives listed in 2004 and 58% of the “new” total of 460 – are represented in the National Register of Archives
- 14 local authority archives took part in the Archive Mapping projects in 1998 and 2000, and 19 specialist archives were involved in the “Missing Link” study in 2001
- Only 3% (16) of institutions have taken part in the National Survey of Visitors to UK Archives
- 12% of the respondents to the 2004 survey see themselves as key players in professional archive networks, 37% are involved, and 44% are outside or belong to alternative networks.

3.6.2 Issues

- Many archival institutions are unaware of the opportunities for participation;
- Some survey respondents were confused about the concept of networking.

3.6.3 Recommendations

- SEMLAC should promote, and advocate strongly for, the existing archival networks and initiatives to encourage involvement by those currently “outside the fold”;
- SEMLAC should support the creation of new networks capable of linking currently disparate and fragmented activity across the whole spectrum of archival institutions, for example, through promotion of archival involvement in Subject Specialism Networks.

3.7 Public access

3.7.1 Key findings

- The survey made no distinction between entitlement and practicalities of access, but many respondents managed to place themselves in the spectrum between “fully” open and “not open” to the public;
- 32% are “open”, 55% have limited or restricted access, and 8% offer no public access;
- The research findings on entitlement present a different picture, with 47% “open”, 51% limited or restricted and only three with no public access at all;
- In the research sample of 213 archives, only 15% allow “walk in” access and for the majority (84%) appointments are necessary;
- At least 11 institutions in the region charge for access to archives.
3.7.2 Issues

- Information on access is central to allocation of resources
- In general, access to archives outside public repositories is fairly limited and may be both subject to formal admission procedures and only by arrangement
- The figures quoted above for open access – i.e. the contrast between the institutional responses and published access statements - suggest that access may be more difficult for users in practice than it appears from guides
- Even allowing for legitimate restrictions on access, there is a need to make those archives that are open to public use much more accessible than they are now

3.7.3 Recommendations

- SEMLAC and MLA should use the leverage of funding to encourage greater public access to archives, where this is practically possible

4. RECOMMENDATIONS: By institution type

4.1 Business archives (total 13; survey response 25%)

4.1.1 Recommendation

- SEMLAC should take account of the needs of business archives in promoting opportunities to participate in archival or wider initiatives. It should seek to involve a business archive in its collections development programme (*Future Archives South East 3.2.2*) and to encourage greater participation in archive on-line networks.

4.2 Charities (total 20; survey response 55%)

4.2.1 Recommendation

- SEMLAC should take account of the disparate needs of charity archives in promoting opportunities to participate in archival or wider initiatives.

4.3 Community (total 23; survey response 33%)

4.3.1 Recommendation

- SEMLAC should take account of the needs of community archives in promoting opportunities to participate in archival or wider initiatives, in particular through its support for community archive development officer(s) and the creation and sustainability of online content in partnership with more traditional archive services.

4.4 Film (total 2; survey responses 100%)

4.4.1 Recommendation

- SEMLAC should maintain its close relationship with both regional film archives as it progresses the forthcoming South East Audiovisual Archives Commercial Study and seeks to implement the recommendations of its South East Audiovisual Archive Strategy 2004.

4.5 Government (total 5; survey response 40%)

4.5.1 Recommendation

- SEMLAC should seek to involve the five governmental organisations in its programmes and initiatives, where these are relevant to their remits, for example, Creativity Programmes and the BBC Written Heritage Centre.

4.6 Health archives (total 3; survey response 67%)

4.6.1 Recommendation
• SEMLAC should take account of the needs of health archives in promoting opportunities to participate in archival or wider initiatives e.g. Health Subject Specialism Network.

4.7 Libraries (public) (total 24; survey response 21%)

4.7.1 Recommendations
• SEMLAC should aim to identify those libraries which do have significant holdings and could be engaged in the delivery of archival policy;
• SEMLAC should encourage and support initiatives to improve both the care of archive materials and public access through partnership working between archives and libraries. Much has been achieved in the Region already, and these are instances of good practice that can be adopted as the model for further development.

4.8 Military (total 24; survey response 33%)

4.8.1 Recommendation
• SEMLAC should aim to develop partnership working between military archives in aspects of marketing and audience development (Future Archives South East s.2) to build on the current popular interest in exploring military and family history.

4.9 Museums (total 151; survey response 39%)

4.9.1 Recommendations
• Only a relatively small number of museums have “type 2” (identifiable function) archives sections. SEMLAC should seek to identify museums with significant archival holdings and which are committed to the cross-domain agenda;
• As with libraries, SEMLAC should encourage and support initiatives to improve both the care of archive materials and public access through partnership working between archives and museums. Much has been achieved in the Region already, and these are instances of good practice that can be adopted as the model for further development.
• Based on the research evidence of scale of holdings, collecting policy positions and lack of specialist staff, there is a prima facie case for prioritising partnership working between archives and museums over that between archives and libraries.

4.10 Private (total 21; survey response 25%)

4.10.1 Recommendation
• SEMLAC programmes, advice and support should be sensitive to the particular issues that concern private owners and offer clear incentives for them to take part in any initiatives.

4.11 Record Offices (Local Authority) (total 14; survey responses 13/14 – 93%)

4.11.1 Recommendation
• Recognising that these natural partners have capacity issues, SEMLAC should aim to provide support and resources to enable local authority archive services to develop their own services and fulfil their wider role in relation to other archival institutions.

4.12 Religious (total 29; survey responses 6/27 – 22%)

4.12.1 Recommendation
• The potential for engaging these institutions in the broader archival fold and as agents for the delivery of SEMLAC’s policies is limited.
4.13 **Schools** (total 28; survey responses 8/26 – 31%)

4.13.1 **Recommendation**
- SEMLAC should seek innovative ways in which to engage school archives in its programmes and initiatives e.g. through making possible connections with Strategic Commissioning programme.

4.14 **University** (total 108; survey responses 45/98 – 46%)

4.14.1 **Recommendation**
- SEMLAC should take account of the wide spectrum of HE archives present in the region and work most closely with those who have a strong commitment to archival standards and public policy objectives.

5. **CONCLUSION**

5.1 The aim of this research project was to provide SEMLAC with better evidence upon which it could start to prioritise its support for archives in the South East. This meant probing beyond what was already known about archives in the Region to improve our understanding of the range of services and collections. In particular, the emphasis has been on standards, professional allegiances, and public accessibility.

5.2 Given the considerable overlap between the existing data held about archives, libraries and museums in the region, two essential questions that remain to be addressed nationally are “where does the archive domain end?” and “where do the other domains begin?”

5.3 The answers are to some extent contained in Appendix A to the main report which attempts to identify the main activists in the archive world, institutions with a significant commitment to the archive agenda, those that clearly belong to other communities or domains, and those for which further information is still needed.

5.4 As a result of the research process, three things have become clear:
- The management overview information required by strategic agencies like SEMLAC is not available from directories of archives that are designed as guides for users.
- The majority of institutions holding archives in the region are firmly rooted in the museum or library domains, or have entirely separate loyalties and agendas – they should not be seen as belonging to sub-domains of the archive domain.
- There remains a general confusion regarding the meaning of the term “archive”.