

**Archives Testbed Workshop 1 - Summary**

**DATE**: Friday, 23 April 2021

**TIME:** 11 AM – 1 PM

**LOCATION**: ZOOM

**PRESENT**: Maya Duncanson, Joe Street, Lucy Currie, Annette Coates, Claire Sutherland, Emmanuel Kabengele, Rima Hussein, Fiona McPherson, Lesley Douglas , Selene Azevedo Salavessa, Becky Cole, Ama Kondo, Andrea Phillips, Charden Pouo Moutsouka, Tim Livsey, Laura Fish, Martyn Hudson, Li Chin Khor, Kathryn Smith, Khobhi Kromel-Agamah Williams, Lauren Barnes, Ellen Cole, Brian Ward, Anita Garvey, Evie Hodgson

Northumbria team: Kath Boodhai, Hayley Mardon, Degna Stone, Susan Ashley

The Heritage Resilience Network team: Rosie Lewis, Anita Wan, Padma Rao

**APOLOGIES**: Nwanyieze Nwali, Jim Ward, Elizabeth-Jane Burnett, Ed Anderson

**MINUTES**: Hayley Mardon

The following are snippets of facilitator notes that offer an overview rather than all details:

**1. Welcome, Introductions, Overview**

Welcome and overview of Workshop schedule. Background to the AHRC funded (Multi) Cultural Organisational Archives project and the National Archives funded Black Archives Testbed project. Introduction to Northumbria team and The Heritage Resilience Network team. Discussion on etiquette, ground rules, language, terminology and respect.

**Post-It Exercise: ‘What motivated you to come here today?’**

To learn, to find out more about how to support, to develop solidarity and a sense of positivity and excitement

**2. Group Breakouts 1 ‘Vision’**

Five randomly assigned breakout groups discussed two questions, and reported a summary back to the group:

**‘What is your vision for a cultural archive in the North East?’**

* An emphasis on it being more than a space. A way to bring different communities together, including intergenerational aspects
* Black and minoritised communities, their representation and visibility, needs to be front and center
* That it should foster solid interaction, be accessible and be a place of learning
* That it should be inclusive, involve local people and local areas
* Discussions of different spaces and what they may entail (e.g., a separate space in the institution, a ‘Cultural enrichment hub’, a space away from campus in the city centre, a space that decenters whiteness)
* That it should be a ‘living archive’
* Various types of experiences that would be part of that (i.e., verbal, visual, auditory)
* What would be included - ephemera and conversations, not just books
* An emphasis on the importance of the digital as part of accessibility
* Importance of connectivity to initiatives like the REC and EDI, bringing them together, and in terms of accountability
* What are different relationships people have with archives and how meaningful are these engagements?
* Education is a key part of its social function and not just in an Academic/highbrow way/formal way. It needs to reach younger children, and different communities
* That it’s more than just a repository, it should be integrated, question culture and cultural democracy be creative and performative.

**‘Should this be based at Northumbria University and if so, why? & what are the challenges?’**

OPPORTUNITIES:

* For the University to give something back by using its financial power - place its emphasis on *investing* rather than *owning*
* The University could be useful in facilitating access, systems, reach and resources despite the tensions in different perceptions about the archive that communities have
* An opportunity for the University to put its money where its mouth is and provide a *tangible* example of an instrument for change. An ‘instrument for making things better’ at Northumbria.
* The need for resources to ensure sustainability of archive and safeguarding of the materials

CHALLENGES/BARRIERS:

* + Size of the University, its vast cultures, numerous departments and diverse people - how to realise the idea of a ‘hub’ that caters to all
	+ Existing negative perceptions of University – they are seen as institutions of power, intimidating places, elite, privileged and inaccessible. University as Patronising.
	+ Significant questions of how to navigate issues around the ownership of the archive
	+ Confronting deeper structural issues within the University - power relations, governance and the way that decisions are made The Glacial University
	+ Lack of diversity at the University is a drawback – staff, students
* There was some discussion on alternative options/models/locations for a Black and minoritised archive that would make it more open and accessible if not at Northumbria (e.g. a mobile archive) and what issues may arise (e.g. safety of communities)

**3. Group Breakouts 2 - What are the ‘Building blocks’ needed?**

**Post-It Exercise: ‘What could we include in a physical archive space?’**

Meeting places, exhibition spaces, activism spaces, creche facility, discussion/meeting spaces, a café, digital spaces, Archival and storage spaces, class room and research space.

**Breakouts**

Five assigned breakout groups divided into Library/Collections, Academics, Race Equality Charter, Students. Each discussed two questions, and reported a summary back to the group:

**‘What Resources would be needed for an archive and why? (inc. staff, tech, finance)’**

* Prioritise funding
* The archive must be embedded in all teaching, research (e.g. centered around modules)
* A range of resources around community, staffing and expertise:
	+ Language support and translators, digital access and digital archiving, the involvement of services such as Research and Innovation, Special collections teams
	+ An archivist, plus staff involved in conservation and curation (none currently at Library)
	+ Local community activists and community leaders centered around Black and minorized groups
	+ Involve University and Student Union societies
* Tensions between the University emphasis on corporate identities and Business models over the social justice angle or doing the right thing
* Adopt a Library model (more agile and shared ownership) rather than typical archives. Examples such as UCL archives and Stephen Lawrence Centre at De Montfort University.
* More archival and storage space, including specialist space (e.g. climate controlled)
* Open access IT - Noted that digital archiving would also mean less resources needed

**‘What governance structure could we deploy? How do we centre Black and minoritised communities in this structure?’**

* Confront issues around devolving power, reluctance to change and a lack of awareness
* Focus on community/(\*\*\*shared) ownership and governance to be clear both externally and internally facing
* Look at community-based and co-operative models/approaches to devolved leadership for guidance and to equip people with the knowledge, resources and support to facilitate a truly community-oriented archive
* That the University should move away from a top-down approach which raises issues around white Academics and people in management/power in favor of an approach that supports Black and minoritised communities to move forward and influence positive change
* Rather than the Executive group determining governance, the communities should propose a model to avoid issues around community ‘representation’. This should be a multi-stage process with agreement by the community before being discussed with the University.
* This should be handled in phases, be realistic in terms of time scales, be mindful of shrinking funds
* Ownership of objects, ephemera and copyright should be detailed in agreements, include policies and de-accessioning
* Relationship with the community should be inclusive, transparent, ongoing and that hired staff should come from the community
* It should be embedded and supported in the University knowledge-production structures in terms of research/teaching/for academic purposes
* Needs to be part of the Race Equality charter and policy, involving all departments rather than placed only in the cultural sector, and have an actionable plan as part of it so that each department contributes to its development.
* Remaining allocated funds for Covid-19 be given to different Departments could be used to widen ownership, draw in communities
* It should be Black and minority community led and independent of the university

**4. Next Steps**

The team will digest all input. Participants asked to reflect on the discussions, and send to Susan:

any links for further archives info or networks, any questions, and desire for further involvement.

The points raised in this workshop will guide the design of the remaining two workshops involving 1. archives experts from across the UK and 2. interested individuals and organisations from Black and minoritised communities in the North East.

An evaluation form and workshop summary to be sent to all participants.

Thank you to all facilitators and all who participated