

Archives New Zealand

– Well Placed for 2015

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Technological change and financial pressures are impacting archival organisations everywhere. These pressures have created many challenges for Archives New Zealand, not only to preserve the record of government but to maintain access for generations to come. As the demand for, and cost of digital storage increases exponentially, Archives New Zealand is building capabilities and expertise through a series of priority projects and longer-term initiatives to better position Archives to meet these challenges.

There were acknowledged difficulties in Archives New Zealand in 2013, culminating in the failure of two projects and resulting budget pressures. A number of senior staff also departed in late 2013 and early 2014.

As we come to the end of 2014 I wanted to provide a snapshot of where Archives is currently positioned. Since coming on board as Chief Archivist and General Manager in February this year, I have overseen a shift in momentum that is revitalising Archives New Zealand. There has been progress in many areas. I have put a lot of emphasis on refreshing the organisation's Vision to reinvigorate Archives, on building a more open and inclusive culture, getting staff's views about how to strengthen what we do and how we do it and involving them in decision making. I was also determined to introduce more robust project management disciplines into Archives to ensure no repeat of the difficulties faced in 2013.

One of the first steps I took as Chief Archivist was to ask staff about their concerns, then address those concerns systematically. Priorities that staff identified included a clearer vision and direction, stronger leadership and better communication.

The Archives Leadership Team worked with staff to renew the organisation's Vision. This has helped to restore focus and direction. The Vision states "We are the guardian of the record of government – its security, integrity and accessibility is paramount." It challenges Archives to improve continually in every area of operation, while keeping

its role as protector of the public record central to all its activities.

In terms of leadership, one of my early decisions was to include a Regional Archivist in Archives Leadership Team meetings. This ensured that decision making was informed by both archival and institutional knowledge. Also I have made permanent appointments to the Archives Leadership Team. Antony Moss and Jan Clark were appointed as Directors Client Capability and Holdings and Discovery, respectively in September. The team has now been completed with the appointment, in November 2014, of Jeremy Cauchi as Manager of the Strategy and Operational Services Group.

The Archives Leadership Team has worked together to lift staff morale and create a positive culture. In my first week, I introduced a daily half-hour drop-in time, for anyone to talk with me directly about concerns and issues. I also began a weekly update to all staff providing interesting and relevant information. Monthly staff meetings have become more informal and collaborative, with staff invited to have a say on how Archives' functions should be delivered. A rearrangement of teams and functions was instituted on the 1st of December, which will remove silos and promote collaboration between units. Small things, like starting a waiata group, and adopting a further Archives' waiata written and arranged by staff have also made a difference. Together these initiatives are building an Archives-wide sense of purpose and optimism. I know this because of feedback I receive from staff.

Tackling some of the core issues and providing stable and experienced management, and insisting on effective project management disciplines, has enabled Archives to build the strong platform necessary to tackle a number of significant projects. Perhaps the largest project delivered in 2014 was the digitisation and conversion of 141,000 World War One personnel records. This, combined with the digitising of World War One diaries by the Alexander Turnbull Library, highlights the role of Archives and the Department as one of the major contributors to the government's World War One commemoration activities. Combining the resources and collections of both the National Library and Archives New Zealand ensures the public enjoy the very best of both institutions.

An exciting priority project is the creation of the Film Preservation Laboratory in Wellington. At the time of writing, the laboratory build is complete and commissioning of equipment is well underway. The lab is housed in a purpose-built facility and will be able to preserve historically significant nitrate and acetate films held by Archives New Zealand by copying them to polyester. In their original formats, these films will

continue to deteriorate, so this is seen as a landmark project that will preserve and protect these films for at least another two to three hundred years. This will be the only laboratory in Australasia capable of copying colour and black and white nitrate and acetate stock to polyester.

We also remain fully involved in implementing the government's decision to move the Treaty of Waitangi, the Women's Suffrage Petition and the 1835 Declaration of Independence. Colin MacDonald, in his recent address opening the ARANZ/ASA conference, highlighted DIA's commitment to preserving the Treaty by calling it a "... living document which continues to influence work in government and our daily lives." While the documents will be housed in the Molesworth Street building, they will remain in the care and custody of the Chief Archivist and Archives New Zealand staff will be responsible for their ongoing preservation.

I have also put a lot of effort into ensuring that Archives develops a sustainable business model and remains fit for purpose. This is vital, as Archives is facing rapidly rising digital storage costs at a time when public service budgets are not growing. As well as managing internal finances prudently, Archives is reviewing its fees and charges (unchanged since 2006), and looking at commercial partnerships to undertake work that would otherwise not be possible to do.

With the ongoing health of our national archive at the forefront of my mind, I am also very focused on addressing network and physical infrastructure needs. The challenges for both staff and customers in the earthquake-damaged building in Christchurch are well-documented. The Christchurch rebuild is therefore a very high priority for me. In addition I've prioritised resolution of longstanding maintenance in Auckland and Wellington, and the Department is now looking at our future storage needs too as some of our repositories are close to capacity. Network infrastructure matters too. Long-overdue work to scope a future Archway has begun.

The Leadership Team is also focused on optimising Archives' regulatory role. For example, the new Records Management Standard was released, replacing and improving on four previous key standards, earlier in 2014. In the near future, a new Records Toolkit will be released. Expect to see more streamlined and simplified guidance and advice on sound recordkeeping practice in the future. In carrying out our statutory responsibilities, we have the advantage of being within a department which has a number of regulatory and All of Government responsibilities. This enables us to lever off the experiences and work of others with sector leadership responsibilities.

Promoting and managing access to holdings is another priority area for Archives. Changes in technology have increased user expectations around the availability of records electronically. This creates an enormous challenge for an institution whose holdings are primarily paper-based. One of Archives' priorities therefore is to develop an access strategy that segments customers and considers their different needs. This will include identifying how to best meet these needs through different channels in a cost-effective way. Preservation is at the heart of our work; without sound preservation practices, there is no public record to be accessed.

Looking forward, Archives continues to face a number of important challenges. Rather than shy away from these, we continue to work with our peers on solutions to the unprecedented issues facing archival organisations everywhere. Archives New Zealand is in a much stronger position to meet these challenges as the end of 2014 approaches than it was twelve months ago. Staff turnover has dropped to be in line with the public sector overall, we have a strong and committed leadership team with the drive and energy to take the organisation forward and we have had a sound record of achievements this year. I am confident that we will build on progress and 2015 will be a year of considerable success.