

David Tyrell
 Teesside Archives,
 Exchange House,
 6 Marton Road,
 Middlesbrough TS1 1DB

23 December 2008

Dear David,

Self-assessment of local authority archive services in England and Wales

I am writing to advise you of the outcome for your service of the 2008 self-assessment exercise for local authority archive services in England and Wales, in which you kindly took part earlier this year. Once again, we secured over 90% participation, and I am most grateful for the care and hard work which so many archivists put into making full returns. The returns have been scored by staff in The National Archives, who may have asked you some supplementary questions to assist in their interpretation, and the scores have been reviewed and moderated as appropriate by a Self-Assessment Panel on which the local authority archive sector in England and Wales is strongly represented.

The questionnaire was arranged in five main sections, and the scores your service achieved on each section, compared with the regional and national averages and the average for comparable services, are as set out in the table below. If you participated in self-assessment last year, your score in 2007 will be given in brackets after the score for the current year

	Score for your service	Average score in North-East region	Average score of county services	Average score in the UK
Section 1: governance	67.5% (70.5%)	64% (62%)	73.5% (71.5%)	62.0% (64.0%)
Section 2: documentation of collections	70% (64.5%)	66.5% (57%)	66.5% (64%)	59.0% (57.0%)
Section 3: access and outreach services	67% (65.5%)	66% (58%)	64.5% (58.5%)	57.0% (52.5%)
Section 4: preservation and conservation	71.5% (73.5%)	72.5% (69%)	76% (74%)	65.0% (62.0%)
Section 5: buildings, security and environment	64.5% (61%)	74% (64.5%)	71% (67%)	64.5% (60.5%)
Overall score	67.5% (66%)	68.5% (61.5%)	69% (65.5%)	61.0% (58.0%)

Because the changes in the questionnaire between 2007 and 2008 were relatively modest, we feel that it is reasonable for repositories to compare their results in the two years. The one area where results are significantly affected by changes to the questions or their grouping is the Governance area (section 1), where these factors may account for the majority of the difference in score between 2007 and 2008. Other changes in results are likely to be due to the implementation of incremental improvement strategies or to identifiable changes in circumstances, such as the opening of a new building or the impact of a major Lottery grant.

In addition to scoring the questionnaires, The National Archives has banded the results for each section of the questionnaire into four performance bands (one-star; two-star, three-star and four-star), with approximately the top 10% of scores on each section of the questionnaire being rated as four-star, the bottom 10% as one-star, and the remaining 80% being divided equally between one-star and two-star ratings. **Please note that in 2007 these performance bands were labelled no-star, one-star, two-star and three-star, so that a three-star performance in 2008 is the equivalent of a two-star performance in 2007.**

The performance bands for the overall score take into account both the absolute score achieved and the consistency of performance on the five sections of the questionnaire. The boundary scores between the performance bands for the overall score do not simply reflect the overall score rankings but are based on the boundary scores set in 2007, slightly adjusted to reflect changes in the questionnaire. This is intended to allow services to show progression and improvement in their overall performance banding from year to year. It remains the case that services which have a particular area of weak performance may be held down to a lower performance band than their overall score would otherwise warrant. In addition to meeting the score required to reach the overall star ratings, services which score less than 35% on any area of the questionnaire will be held down to a one-star rating; less than 45% on any area will hold down the overall rating to two-star performance; and a score under 55% on any areas of the questionnaire would mean being held down from a four-star rating to a three star. These thresholds remain the same in 2007.

I can advise you that overall Teesside Archives has been judged to be a three-star service.

The performance bands for your score on each section of the questionnaire were as follows:

Section number	Performance Band
1	3
2	3
3	3
4	3
5	3
Overall	3

The comparison of the 2007 and 2008 results for repositories allows us to make some analysis of the direction of travel of the service. Our judgement on this matter also takes into account future plans referred to in the returns or otherwise known to us. Overall 54 repositories are judged likely to improve further; 54 repositories are judged likely neither to improve nor deteriorate; and 5 repositories are judged to be at risk of deterioration. Having taken into account all the evidence available to us **we believe that Teesside Archives is neither improving nor deteriorating.**

I am also enclosing a detailed score sheet for your service, showing how many marks were available for each question, and how your service scored on each question in the return. You should be aware that where circumstances required it, the divisor may have been adjusted to reflect the realities of the circumstances in which each service is operating. The total marks available and the total marks scored for each section of the questionnaire are also shown, together with the percentage score to two decimal places. You will notice that these percentage figures differ slightly from those quoted earlier in this letter, because we have rounded the results above to the nearest half-percentage point, to avoid any appearance of specious precision.

I hope that the information in this letter about how your service is performing in comparison with others in your region and across England and Wales will be of value to you in your internal discussions about the funding and future development of your service. Many services used the results from the 2007 survey to develop an improvement plan to address areas of weakness, or comparative weakness, revealed by the process. In this year's returns, many archivists commented on how helpful such improvement plans had been in raising issues internally within their authority, and targeting effort on achievable improvements. We would therefore encourage services to consider developing an improvement plan in response to these results.

In response to comments from authorities, and to give time for the results of improvement plans to be demonstrated before the next self-assessment exercise is held, the next self-assessment exercise will be run in 2010. We intend, however, to publish an analysis of the 2007 and 2008 data in 2009. If any authorities wish to maintain an annual sequence of returns and to make one in 2009, please let me know, as it may be possible by arrangement to assess 2009 performance against the existing questionnaire.

I trust that the results for your service will be broadly in conformity with your expectations. If you feel that they are not, please contact me to discuss the areas of concern. If I cannot allay your concerns, you can appeal to the Self-Assessment Panel against the results. If you wish to appeal, you should write to me within six weeks of the date of this letter setting out the areas of your assessment where you feel that you have scored less well than expected, and enclosing any additional information which you feel will support your case that is relevant to the information sought in the original questionnaire. The Self-Assessment Panel will consider appeals in detail, but the decisions of the

Panel will be final. Once the results of any appeals have been determined, the (rounded) scores, performance bands and direction of travel for each service and authority will be published by The National Archives.

The National Archives continues to welcome feedback from repositories on the self-assessment process. We will take into account any views which you have already expressed in your returns or accompanying e-mails, but if you would like to offer further reflections on the process or suggestions for how it could be improved, please e-mail nick.kingsley@nationalarchives.gov.uk. We hope not to make too many changes to the process between 2008 and 2010, in order to continue to build up time-series data that demonstrates the direction of travel of each service. However, we will be looking in some detail at the questions on preservation and conservation, and buildings, security and the environment, and we will endeavour to address any other areas of concern.

Thank you once again for participating in the 2008 self-assessment programme.

Yours sincerely,

Nicholas Kingsley MA Hon. DLitt FSA RMSA
Head of National Advisory Services