Collections Trust

Revisiting Archive Collections

A toolkit for capturing and sharing multiple perspectives on archive collections
The *Revisiting Collections* methodology was developed in 2005 by consultants Val Bott, Jon Newman and Alice Grant for Museums, Libraries, Archives (MLA) London and Collections Trust to support museums and archives to open up their collections for scrutiny by community groups and external experts, to reveal and record ‘hidden histories’ and to build and share a new understanding of the multi-layered meaning and significance of the objects and records they hold.

The first edition of the *Revisiting Archives Collections* toolkit was produced in 2006 by archives consultants Jon Newman and Len Reilly in partnership with archive staff from The Archives and Corporate Records Centre at King’s College London, Bexley Local Studies and Archive Centre and the Royal Geographical Society, London. Funded by the Museum, Library and Archive Council (MLA), the toolkit was piloted and refined by Jon Newman and Len Reilly in 2008, with additional input from community engagement consultants Marietta Harrow and Annmarie Turnbull, working with teams from Norfolk Record Office, Surrey Heritage and Tyne and Wear Archives Services.

This edition was updated in 2009 by consultant Caroline Reed.

The *Revisiting Archives Collections* project has been expertly shaped and guided by an external advisory panel and our thanks are due to:


Cover photograph courtesy of the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council.

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Introduction:
What is Revisiting Collections?

Since 2006, new and diverse users across England have been enjoying exciting opportunities to engage very directly with objects, images, manuscripts and records in our museums and archives.

They have been using and shaping *Revisiting Collections*, an innovative methodology developed by the Museums, Libraries, Archives Council (MLA) and Collections Trust. *Revisiting Collections* supports museums and archive services to open up their collections for scrutiny by community groups and external experts and to build and share a new understanding of the multi-layered meaning and significance of objects and records.

The collections in public museums, galleries and archives across the UK are there for the benefit of every member of our national community and visitors from every part of the world. *Revisiting Collections* is designed to help managers, staff and volunteers across the heritage sector meet our own increasing expectations, and those from the public, government and funders, that we should acknowledge and celebrate cultural ownership by: providing open and inclusive access to our collections and information about them; engaging proactively with our communities; and providing services relevant to people’s needs and the ways they access and interact with information in the 21st century.

Professionally, the *Revisiting Collections* methodology seeks to break down some of the perceived barriers between ‘people-focussed’ and ‘collections-focussed’ working in our museums and archives. It will help ensure that the resources put into cataloguing and documentation give users information that is accurate, insightful, relevant and accessible. It will support the sector to prioritise documentation planning and integrate user-focussed collections information management as part of project and programme funding bids.

1.1 The Theory

*Revisiting Collections* has its roots in research and consultation undertaken by MLA London across local authority museums and archives services. This showed that many curators and archivists believed the limited content of their existing collections to be a real barrier to engagement for new and diverse audiences. They felt not enough had been collected directly from new or minority communities to reflect their own cultures, lives and experience.

*Revisiting Collections*’s starting point is that ‘traditional’ social and local history collections, as well as many specialist collections, hold a richness of objects, images, documents and information that reflect and reveal not only the shared concerns and experience of all humanity, but more specifically: Britain’s position at the centre of world-wide empire and trade, including the trade in human beings; the centuries old diversity of our population in terms of ethnicity, culture, faith, sexuality, wealth and well being; and the international influences that have shaped our industry and culture, product design, craft skills, science, technology and the use of materials.

Beyond this, the methodology recognises that many museums and archive services, both rural and urban, are located at the heart of communities whose members could bring a wealth of new understanding and expertise to the interpretation of collections. *Revisiting Collections* provides a mechanism for tapping into that rich, multi-layered seam of knowledge.

A key strength of *Revisiting Collections* is that it provides a framework for embedding new understanding and perspectives on objects and records directly within the museum or archive’s collection knowledge management system, ensuring that it forms part of the story about the collections that is recorded and made accessible to all.
1.2 How does Revisiting Collections work?

Revisiting Collections provides two toolkits, one for museums and one for archives. Both can be downloaded in pdf format from the Collections Link website: www.collectionslink.org.uk/Increase_access/revisiting_collections

These two toolkits support and prompt museum and archive staff to

- Open up collections for external scrutiny and comment
- Acknowledge and tap into sources of information, expertise or understanding from outside the museum or archive, or from colleagues in other disciplines
- Develop a way of working with community groups or individuals - learning what people with various backgrounds and interests feel, know and want to know about our collections
- Deepen their understanding of objects and records through working closely with groups or individuals with a special perspective or knowledge
- Conduct new research into collections and identify objects and records that contribute to our awareness of the interlinking histories of a diverse population
- Give respect and value to ‘other voices’ by making newly revealed information about objects and records permanently accessible to all users through enhanced cataloguing, description and interpretation
- Use this enhanced understanding of the relevance of existing collections as a platform for proactive work with new or hard-to-reach audiences

Revisiting Collections takes an organisation through a series of steps: pre-planning; working with external subject experts and/or community based focus groups; and then capturing the specific or contextual information gained at an appropriate level within their catalogues and finding aids.

Firstly, the methodology encourages curators and archivists to think laterally about collections and the untapped evidence they might hold. This lateral thinking needs to be informed by engaging with people who might bring a new perspective on collections and by learning from them what kind of ‘back story’ about objects and records they want and expect to find in catalogues and collection descriptions, interpretative texts and captions, whether on-site or online.

Much of the information might be intrinsic to the items themselves: a simple cotton frock with a Paisley pattern in a typical social history collection has much to tell us about the ways in which our county's heritage is tangled with the transatlantic slave trade and empire; the imagery and language used on a WWII propaganda leaflet reveals colonialist assumptions and racial stereotyping. Further information will lie in the background paperwork that shows an item's provenance and history of use – and this is seldom made readily available to users other than staff.

So, Secondly, the methodology prompts and helps curators and archivists to gather the information users want, both from internal and external sources.

Within the museum or archive these sources might be, for example:

- Paper based files – including the original accession correspondence, exchanges with researchers, object history files, information panel texts, captions or records of the research done for past exhibitions, the findings from outreach and education projects etc.
- Electronic files that exist in parallel to the official catalogue database
- Sharing knowledge and understanding with colleagues e.g. subject specialists, curators from another discipline, conservators, community liaison or education staff
External sources might be, for example:

- Published research and comment
- Comparable collections held elsewhere – regionally, nationally or worldwide
- Individuals or groups with a specialist subject knowledge or interest – these could be academics, enthusiasts or people looking at the material from a fresh perspective
- People directly involved in e.g. manufacturing the objects in a museum collection or generating the records in an archive
- People who have used the objects or been affected by the services covered by the records

The *Revisiting Collections* toolkits and guidance notes on *Running a Revisiting Collections Focus Group* (all available for download from the Collections Link website: www.collectionslink.org.uk/Increase_access/revisiting_collections) give curators and archivists a framework for engaging groups or individuals directly with material from the collections and working with them to reveal and record multiple layers of meaning and significance. This might be new, verifiable, factual information or a new understanding about the cultural importance of an object or record and the sensitivities around terminology used to identify and describe it.

Finding these new ways into an understanding of the collections will help curators and archivists serve and attract non-traditional audiences and people wanting to access the material from a non-traditional viewpoint.

**Thirdly**, the *Revisiting Collections* toolkits provide a way of embedding this new information within the museum or archive’s catalogues and finding aids, ensuring that it forms part of the story about the collections that is recorded and made accessible to all. For archives, this toolkit demonstrates how effectively the methodology can be incorporated to work alongside the General International Standard Archival Description, ISAD(G).

*Revisiting Collections* sees rich, full and accessible cataloguing, description and documentation as a fundamental tool for public access to collections and information about them.

### 1.3 Gathering external voices and expertise

*Revisiting Collections* doesn’t dictate how an organisation should create the partnerships that will help it gather external input and information. Many museums and archives will be well experienced in working with community groups, e.g. on oral history or reminiscence programmes. They might already have built bridges as part of their outreach and audience development programmes or through their work with academic partners. Archives have a tradition of working closely with researchers and users providing feedback on particular record sources. *Revisiting Collections* offers a way of strengthening these existing links and programmes: making sure they offer people direct access to collections and leave a lasting legacy.

To date, most museums and archives involved in developing and trialling the *Revisiting Collections* toolkits have worked with focus groups made up of people with a particular interest or take on the collections. Sometimes these groups have been specially recruited; sometimes they have been well-established partners. The guidance note *Running a Revisiting Collections Focus Group* gives advice and models for organising and facilitating groups and maximising the outcomes.

However, *Revisiting Collections* isn’t simply a toolkit for gathering information in a focus group setting. The approach will give equally powerful results when used to capture the results of community based research or one-to-one conversations with individuals, whether academics, researchers, external subject specialists or people with experience or a perspective that throws new light on objects or records. It can be used to capture collections knowledge from curators, archivists, other staff and volunteers, ensuring that this stays with the organisation when colleagues retire or move on.
Moreover, while it is rewarding to run a ‘stand alone’ *Revisiting Collections* project, the methodology’s strength is that it can be used ‘organically’ to underpin and enrich on-going or planned programmes of work and ensure that they leave a lasting legacy of information and understanding. The methodology can even be used to capture the outcomes of past programmes and build them into the museum or archive’s collection information management system for the benefit of future users.

### 1.4 The impact

The evidence to date from museums and archives that have used the *Revisiting Collections* toolkits is that the methodology has vitalised their work with collections and stimulated:

- A real excitement about community engagement with collections
- Productive and imaginative collaborative inter-disciplinary working between colleagues: e.g. archivists, education, outreach, museum curatorial and documentation staff
- A better understanding by all staff of the power and potential of rich collection documentation and description – and of the importance of inclusive language and terminology
- A new awareness of how much valuable new information and understanding about collections can be contributed by ‘external voices’ – and recognition that the museum or archive will never be the fount of *all* knowledge about what it holds
- A user-focussed approach to tackling and prioritising documentation backlogs
- Imaginative new approaches to display and interpretation

### 1.5 A national role for Revisiting Collections

MLA Council and Collections Trust are working together to take the *Revisiting Collections* methodology forward. Between 2009 and 2012, the methodology is being used to underpin the ‘engaging communities with collections’ strand of *Stories of the World*, one of the major projects at the core of the UK’s four year Cultural Olympiad.
The Revisiting Archive Collections toolkit (RAC) has been developed as a practical tool to enable archives to collect and incorporate user-generated information systematically into their archival descriptions and finding aids. It builds on the thinking behind the Revisiting Museum Collections toolkit developed by MLA London in partnership with the Collections Trust in 2005. RAC was developed through a series of pilot projects, which demonstrated how new and relevant information could be generated and captured and be a significant asset in revealing new levels of meaning about the content of archival records.

The toolkit presents a standardised approach for working with community groups and individuals with a particular knowledge or interest in order to deepen understanding of archive collections. It takes the archive practitioner through all the stages of the programme, from deciding if the approach is relevant to their circumstances, through thinking about which records to use, how to work with an individual or group, what resources will be needed and how to generate, capture, assign and publish the new information.

It reasserts the primacy of archival description and finding aids as the most important of access tools. As well as gathering new information, the approach is a major tool for community engagement. However, it also challenges professional assumptions about the ability and indeed the desirability for the archive catalogue to provide a single, authoritative voice on the content, context, meaning and significance of the records it describes. Instead it presents the possibility of a multi-layered and flexible approach that can be responsive to and incorporate user generated input while at the same time retaining a definitive status within a General International Standard Archival Description, ISAD(G), compliant finding aid. ISAD(G) provides general guidance for the preparation of archival descriptions. It is used in conjunction with existing national standards or as the basis for the development of new national standards.

Revisiting Archive Collections develops a methodology for actively engaging with new audiences who can bring new perspectives and knowledge to inform descriptions and finding aids. It brings together professional cataloguing practice and community engagement to create informed and nuanced catalogue descriptions that will help in revealing the relevance of archival collections to a wider and more diverse public.

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1 ISAD (G) is the International Standard for Archival Description (General). It was developed by a Committee of the International Council on Archives. The Committee based its work where possible on existing national standards for archival description. The first edition came out in 1996 and it was revised in 2000. [http://www.icacds.org.uk/eng/ISAD(G).pdf](http://www.icacds.org.uk/eng/ISAD(G).pdf)
Introduction to the Revisiting Archives Collections toolkit

2.1 Archive Catalogues

Archival catalogue description and other finding aids are critical access and navigation tools for archive offices and their users. An un-catalogued archive is, arguably, a non-existent archive; it is certainly inaccessible. As a profession, archivists are working to ensure that the catalogues to their collections provide accurate, unbiased, relevant and appropriate information to enable use. Yet the focus in recent years on alternative and newer forms of access to archives has tended to downplay the importance of cataloguing.

National and regional government agendas concerned with access, inclusion, learning, training and cultural diversity have impacted on the whole museum, library and archive sector. These have been supported by funding streams that have encouraged archives to engage in new forms of practice. The Heritage Lottery Fund, New Opportunities Fund (now closed) and Big Lottery have facilitated important work around learning, digitised content and finding aids, community engagement and proactive collection development. The Archives for All programme is an example of the way these elements have been pulled together.²

2.2 User-generated Content

*Revisiting Archive Collections* is about linking these new areas of practice to the production of rich and complete catalogues and other finding aids. One of the main drivers has been the issue of user-generated content and the debate as to whether, and if so how, users of records might contribute to the content of description and finding aids alongside professional archivists.

User-generated content is an increasingly well developed idea in the world of media and the web and is driven in part by available technologies. Citizens’ journalism, reality television and public history each in their different ways assert that the voice of the user, as distinct from that of the professional creator, not only should be heard, but indeed carries an additional significance and value distinct from that of the professional. Social networking sites and Web 2.0 technologies like blogging, pod casting and digital video, have encouraged user engagement with collections and have also stimulated professional content providers to develop frameworks to harness their contributions.

2.3 National and Regional Agendas

The expectations of this user-generated culture are in part driven by technology but they also clearly align with many current agendas that are impacting on the sector. The strategic drivers of access, inclusion and cultural diversity are encouraging archives to develop proactive, audience- and community-focused engagement of users with collections that diverge from previous archive precepts. The concept of ‘relevance’ – a relatively recent addition to the archival lexicon – has encouraged archivists to engage with existing and future collections so that they are no longer perceived merely as ends unto themselves, but are instead actively managed for, and with input from, users.

However, much of this work has been project-based and often operates outside the core professional remit. The use of archive content as a tool for community engagement has often been seen as the ‘optional’, soft and interesting preserve of newer, sometimes project-funded, posts in outreach, learning or community development. Meanwhile, core functions such as cataloguing continue to be done by professionally qualified archivists. Their work is seen as definitive and enduring, while these other activities are perceived as provisional, partial and ephemeral.

² [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/partnerprojects/a4a/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/partnerprojects/a4a/)
This has been reflected in the way that much of the recent work in archives that seeks and collects the views of new audiences on documents and collections has used separate, temporary or informal systems to hold the new user-generated content (websites, oral history collections, exhibitions, publications). There have not been many serious attempts to incorporate this content within the core catalogue or collection knowledge management system and thus it cannot always be readily accessed by general users.

There are at least two reasons for this. One is because no methodology has previously existed to allow such content to be incorporated into formal catalogues. The second reason - professional assumptions about the catalogue’s single, definitive and authoritative ‘voice’, and a reluctance to open it up to other or multiple interpretations – perhaps explains a professional wariness towards this approach.

*Revisiting Archives Collections* is a methodology that will assist practitioners to bridge the perceived gap between the work of cataloguing and the increasing deployment of archive content as a tool for community engagement. There are several reasons why archive offices should engage with this: description and finding aids are among the most powerful tools for providing access to archives and few would claim their descriptions are above improvement. *Revisiting Archives Collections* can be used to collect new, useful and relevant information for catalogues.

It can be particularly relevant in the following circumstances:

- Where there are records that are poorly catalogued
- Where the office does not have a high level of expertise in the subjects represented by some of the records in its care
- Where there are records for which the organisation’s past approach to description of the material might have been culturally partial or e.g. Anglo- or Eurocentric
- Where the office has received offers of new information from members of the public, specialist researchers or academics
- Where the office has a well-developed relationship with a community group with interest or expertise in records that form part of its holdings
- Where the office is looking to develop relationships with community groups or e.g. an academic institution
- Where the office is looking to make the multi-layered content of particular records more apparent
- Where the office might have the opportunity to seek external funding for a combined community engagement and cataloguing project.

*Members of a teenage reading group revisiting collections at Bexley Local Studies and Archive Centre*

Photo courtesy of: Bexley Local Studies and Archive Centre
This toolkit has been developed to provide archive services with an effective way of gathering and incorporating user-generated information about records into their catalogue descriptions. This content can provide new or previously hidden information and reveal new values, meaning or significance, making the archives of greater interest to existing user groups and more relevant to new or ‘hard-to-reach’ users.

The idea of new or previously hidden information coming from external sources is not new. Archivists already make great use of other people’s information to contribute to their cataloguing. This includes information collected from previous owners of collections at the time of deposit, academic research that contributes to the administrative or biographical history, error corrections made by readers and the work of volunteers and friends’ groups. All of these contributions are regularly incorporated into catalogue revisions.

What is new about *Revisiting Archive Collections* is the way in which it provides a proactive and systematic methodology for undertaking such work and for targeting it at particular collections, subject areas or community groups. More particularly, it is the status given to the information and views of ‘other’, non-professional, hitherto unacknowledged, ‘non-authoritative’ voices that distinguishes RAC from previous cataloguing practice.

RAC is premised upon working with ISAD(G) compliant and structured catalogues. It does not fundamentally challenge the notion that the core catalogue is descriptive. New content sits within the ISAD structure or within other finding aids as appropriate. Linked free text systems are used to hold, display and attribute the personal opinions or interpretations of users, so that their responses can be read in parallel with the catalogue, but with a clear distinction made between the two sources of information.

The *Revisiting Archives Collections* toolkit provides a step-by-step approach to enable archive offices to work with community groups or knowledgeable individuals in order to improve and augment catalogues in a systematic and proven way. It addresses the following issues:

- With which individuals and groups will this approach work best?
- With which records is this likely to be most effective?
- What resources will be needed to run a session?
- What are the best ways of working with groups?
- What are effective ways of generating information from users?
- What are the best ways of recording this information?
- Where and how should this new information be added to descriptions and finding aids?

This approach is informed by the thinking behind the *Revisiting Museum Collections* toolkit developed for the museum sector in 2005 by MLA London in partnership with the Collections Trust. The initial *Revisiting Archives Collections* toolkit development and testing was carried out during 2007 with three London record offices (London Borough of Bexley, the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) and King’s College London). The toolkit was further piloted during 2008 with three regional record offices (Tyne and Wear Archives, the Surrey History Centre and Norfolk Record Office).

The archive offices worked with a variety of material from their collections and with a wide range of community groups. The documents tested included individual items from a fonds, a whole series and ‘artificial’ selections from a range of sources. They included printed, manuscript and typescript documents, maps and illustrations.
The community groups were equally wide ranging:

- A teenage reading group (Bexley)
- Members of a Tanzanian women’s group (RGS)
- A group of academic historians (King’s College, London)
- A group of cleaners and security staff from West Africa (King’s College, London)
- Members of a community archive (Bexley).
- A group of former shipyard workers (Tyne and Wear)
- A group of ex-patients and staff from Brookwood [mental] Hospital, (Surrey)
- A school group looking at records of the black community and links to the slave trade (Norfolk)

The aim was to introduce the groups to archive collections and encourage them to respond to and comment both on the records and on their existing catalogue descriptions. The collecting of their responses was done in a managed way using standard questions in order that any new or additional information could then be added to the catalogue descriptions.

There was an assumption that groups would enjoy and work most productively with material with which they were familiar or in which they were likely to have a particular interest or expertise. This was anticipated in the selection of documents used: former shipyard workers looking at the records of ships they had built, Tanzanian or Nigerian groups commenting on material relating to their countries of origin; and former hospital patients responding to the records of the institution where they had lived.

The pilots then tested a variety of approaches to generating and capturing comments and information: asking contributors to comment on the records themselves and also to comment critically on the existing catalogue descriptions of the records. To capture participants’ responses, a series of data collection forms were developed and used to record comment and information. These forms were then assessed and marked up to indicate the destination for the new data, which was then added to the appropriate finding aids, either as catalogue descriptions, subject keywords, subject guide content or as free text.

The work with pilot groups showed that the RAC methodology could contribute in a range of beneficial ways:

**For collections**

- RAC can generate new, relevant and useful information
- This can contribute to collections whose catalogues are inadequate, cursory, incomplete, culturally partial, or out of date
- The approach works with a variety of record types
- The existing descriptive framework for archival description, ISAD(G) and the UK Archival Thesaurus (UKAT)\(^3\), support and provide a destination for most of the new information and comments, but for new information and comment to be most effectively presented other destinations, some traditional, some new, are also necessary (see section 5.2)

**For archivists**

- RAC provides a framework for archivists to work with diverse individuals and groups and encourages a lateral and empathetic approach to cataloguing
- RAC can be a catalyst for cataloguers to reassess their whole approach to cataloguing, description and finding aids
- RAC promotes and re-prioritises catalogue description as an important access tool and reinforces good professional practice
- RAC is a tested methodology that combines cataloguing with community engagement
- RAC is likely to be attractive to external funders

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\(^3\) [www.ukat.org.uk](http://www.ukat.org.uk)
For communities

- RAC is an excellent tool for community participation which can involve new and existing users with archives in an empowering way and leave a lasting legacy
- It can also be used to support other projects or aims, e.g. contributing to an exhibition, publication, web-project etc.
Planning and running a Revisiting Archive Collections session

4.1 Planning

Please note: an extended guidance note Running a Revisiting Collections Focus Group is available for download from the Collections Link website: www.collectionslink.org.uk/Increase_access/revisiting_collections

4.1.1 Aims and objectives

The aims and objectives of your Revisiting Archives Collections project need to be clarified at the outset. They could include one or more of the following:

- To catalogue or re-catalogue a particular collection
- To obtain external sources of expertise/information
- To engage with a particular community or group
- To contribute to another project e.g. exhibition, publication
- To facilitate a volunteer cataloguing programme
- To ensure that an outreach or community project leaves a tangible and accessible legacy

4.1.2 Participants and group size

The toolkit uses the community-based focus group as the default model. However, the approach can be used with a variety of individuals and groups including:

- Staff of the archive service: RAC is an extension to good professional practice of looking critically at finding aids and maintaining their currency and relevance.
- Individuals who were associated with the records during their creation, use, or during a previous custody
- Individuals or groups who were subject to or served by the body that created the records (e.g. inmates of a prison, patients of a hospital, customers of a business)
- Individuals or groups who are likely to have a higher level of subject knowledge of the records than record office staff
- Individuals or groups who have a different cultural take on the archive from those who created or initially catalogued the records e.g. people of African descent responding to records of British colonial activity

When working with a community group the recommended group size is 5-10 participants, with a minimum of two staff to facilitate and help capture interpretations. The accurate and detailed recording of participant responses is a key outcome.

4.1.3 Deciding on the records to be used

Clearly, it will never be feasible for archives offices to apply the RAC methodology retrospectively to the description and cataloguing of their entire collections. The approach works better with some records than others; it requires a community group that is enthusiastic and likely to generate new content. While the approach is time consuming, an appropriate combination of records, group and resources will produce valuable results.

It became clear during the piloting phase that trying to use the Revisiting Archive Collections approach with un-catalogued material could be problematic. Tyne and Wear Archives worked with former shipyard workers to help describe un-catalogued photographic records. While the responses were hugely detailed and informative, the absence of a catalogue framework for the group to review and respond to resulted in contribution of a lot of highly personal, ‘free-form’ comment, better suited to an exhibition or to a ‘wiki’ than to incorporation into the structure of a catalogue.
The decision to use the RAC methodology and the selection of material for scrutiny will flow from the archive service’s planned programmes of work, for example special exhibitions, research, education or outreach programmes. The selection of material will in part be determined by the aims and objectives of the project, but the following aspects are also useful to consider:

- Do the records have a subject matter of intrinsic interest to the intended focus group (e.g. for an outreach project)?
- Do the records record an activity where those involved had a sense of community? (It was apparent that the Swan Hunter shipyard workers and the patients and staff from Brookwood Hospital had a lasting attachment to their work or institution)
- Do the records have content relevant to a subject or theme on which the archive wishes to produce a subject guide and/or exhibition?
- Does the archive office have staff sufficiently familiar with the material to introduce the records and support the session (it is not necessary for them to be subject specialists)?
- Do the records have descriptions felt to be no more than adequate or do the descriptions broadly conform with ISAD(G) and other finding aids such as subject indexes and subject guides? The focus group session and the contextual information provided for group members will need to be planned accordingly
- Collections that are un-catalogued may not be as suitable for the RAC approach.
- Do the records have a potential significance and relevance beyond their current use (and users)?
- Can records be selected that offer a range that is representative of the larger fonds?
- Ideally the records should present no major problems for physical or intellectual access – e.g. unfamiliar or specialist language or difficult handwriting
- It is helpful if the selection includes some illustrations or photographs
- Ideally select records that are in good physical condition. All material should be protected and safe handling procedures explained and followed. Where necessary, surrogates can be used for handling with the originals displayed nearby.

4.1.4 Resources

Working with community groups will be time consuming. It is important to plan what you will need and to make the external group feel that their time and contribution are valued. They need to feel part of an on-going process, with a sustainable outcome. Their financial and practical needs must be considered. It may, for example, be appropriate to reimburse travel expenses, or to provide transport, a translator or signer.

Time to prepare and run sessions

- Allow time for planning and give plenty of notice to those you are inviting. Coordinating all the people and facilities you will need is likely to take longer than you think!
- Timing of the sessions: remember that your groups cannot necessarily operate within office hours (e.g. the cleaners and security staff on the King’s College London pilot needed to come at 8.30 am after their shift).
Staff

- Each session will need a minimum of two staff from the archive service. Ideally, one of them should already be known to the group. It helps if staff have experience of facilitating groups.
- Some groups may need further external support e.g. work with members of Woking MIND needed to be facilitated with input from a known MIND staff worker; the Norfolk school group’s teacher worked alongside archivists to facilitate their RAC session.
- Sessions need to involve both archivists and outreach staff (where these exist) working collaboratively. At least one person needs to be familiar with the material and its finding aids. Ideally they should be involved in the cataloguing process and have authority to make revisions. This results in more effective collection and incorporation of information and offers participants a rich, informed experience with direct access both to collections and the information already known about them.
- If you are running several sessions then try and use the same staff team so that they can build experience.
- Ensure that the team evaluates the work and shares learning outcomes with colleagues and senior management.

Space

- Use a dedicated area with space to spread out documents.
- Provide desks or tables for people to work at.
- Have a separate area for refreshments.

Equipment

- Records: use original items wherever possible, transcriptions or surrogates where required. Allow time to prepare the records for the session: putting photos in sleeves, numbering items in bundles etc.
- Handling: don’t be frightened of asking people to wash their hands and, if appropriate, to wear gloves before handling original material. They will respond positively to being given the privileged access that this implies. Similarly, as in a normal search room, explain the dangers of mixing refreshments and documents and of using pens.
-Copies of current catalogue descriptions: as far as possible, provide these for all relevant levels, but at a minimum for item and fonds. Include copies of other finding aids e.g. subject and other indexes and narrative subject guides. You will need multiple copies, potentially one per user per item.
- Pencils, scrap paper, magnifying glasses, data collection and contributor forms (see Appendix 1) or recording equipment.
- Name labels, evaluation sheets.
- Refreshments!

4.1.5 Deciding on the recording method

In the development and piloting phases data collection forms or prompt sheets were found to be the most effective tool for capturing contributors’ comments. By following a structured set of questions it was easier to obtain consistency of response across the group and to focus the participants on the catalogue description. Sessions that did not use structured questions and allowed a free response to the stimulus of the records produced more ‘free text’ comment, but less information capable of being fitted into ISAD(G) catalogues.

The prototype data collection forms included in this toolkit offer a suite of questions. Archives can use the essential ones and select from the others depending on their knowledge of the group. For instance, the question asking for a 50-word summary of the document might only be suited to certain groups. See Para. 4.2.4 and Appendix I below.
During the pilots, only one organisation chose to audio record sessions, using a single audio device with multiple microphones to try record all contributors' comments. This did not give a sufficiently clear recording. We would certainly not rule out efficient use of audio equipment – especially by an experienced team. An audio device for each contributor might be a better approach, so long as the focus group members did not find that intrusive.

Audio/video recording and/or the staff member taking detailed notes should certainly be favoured for community groups and individuals for whom language or literacy skills might present a barrier to fluency in writing down their own responses to the records. We would recommend that if audio recording is used this is done in conjunction with the data collection sheets completed by staff. Time for listening and transcription will need to be factored into the project plan and participants’ permission must always be gained before any recording is done.

4.1.6 Participants’ consent and attribution

It is important to explain to all Revisiting Archive Collections participants that archive services and the people who use their collections, catalogues and finding aids need to understand the sources behind the information being given. Everyone is interested in what is ‘fact’ and what opinion, we want to know who is telling us this particular story about this particular object – how do they know, what has influenced them? That is why the attribution of information and comment gained through Revisiting Archive Collections is vital.

Contributions gathered must be clearly attributed to their source in the documentation record. The point of view of a museum staff member, an external researcher, an owner or donor and a viewer or user of an object may differ for many reasons. This does not mean that any view is ‘wrong’, or deemed to be of less value, but the source must be documented in order that users of the information can form an appropriate judgment.

Whatever the method used to gather external responses to the records, whether through a group discussion or in a one-to-one interview, it is essential to obtain participants' written consent to use of their contributions in a variety of ways. These might include e.g. catalogue entries, finding aids, interpretative materials and exhibition labels. All participants must be asked to complete a contributor sheet. Collecting the participant’s name, address and signed consent authorises the museum or archive to make public use of the information.

However, individual focus group participants or interviewees may prefer that their comments are not attributed to them by name, or in any way that will identify them specifically. This must be respected, but it is still important for you to gather and record as much information as you can to put their responses to the objects into a meaningful context. You will still need consent for their words to be used.

If they have attended a focus group, as a minimum, they may prefer their contributions simply to be identified to the group session itself e.g. ‘Information provided by a member of the Tanzanian Women’s Group at a Revisiting Archives Collections focus group session at the Royal Geographical Society, May 2007’.

Beyond that, they may be willing to be referred to by an agreed self-description e.g. ‘Former Brookwood nursing staff member (1980s-1990s)’

They may also be willing to provide further information about their age, cultural background, faith, sexuality etc that would provide context for their contributions.

The other personal data asked for on the contributor form is desirable, but not essential. The questions about the participants’ use of archives and other sources could be particularly useful if archive offices want their revised descriptions and finding aids to be informed by the information retrieval preferences of focus group members.
**4.1.7 Selecting the working method**

There are a number of ways of running a *Revisiting Archives Collections* focus group. The main advantages and disadvantages of these are summarised below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ways of working</th>
<th>Advantage</th>
<th>Disadvantage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Small groups of 3-4 participants each with photocopied material and a facilitator / note-taker completing data collection forms | Can encourage interaction and new insight, especially when members of a group may have particular knowledge about items  
  More time for exploring material rather than form-filling  
  Accurate and detailed recording of responses | One or two people can dominate  
  Looking at photocopied items is not as satisfactory as handling real material, but this can be mitigated if the real material is put on show in the room |
| Individuals working on their own with different items and completing their own data collection form | Participants work at their own rate and on what interests them | Disadvantages those with low confidence in their literacy or language skills.  
  No opportunity for participants to share responses and interpretations with the wider group, although this can be mitigated by providing a ‘sharing session’ at the end of the work |
| Individual paired with a staff member who completes data collection form       | Reasonably detailed and accurate capture of participant responses and thoughts and their exact use of language | More formal – potentially quite intimidating for both staff and participants  
  Staff won’t capture every word – will need to be trained to identify e.g. key use of language issues  
  No opportunity for participants to share responses and interpretations with the wider group, although this can be mitigated by providing a ‘sharing session’ at the end of the work |
| Pairs working together then each completing their own data collection forms   | Participants enjoy discussing and responding to material together.         | Disadvantages those with low confidence in their literacy or language skills.  
  Form completion occurs after discussion and does not necessarily capture immediacy and detail  
  **N.B** In the pilot, pairs recording each other’s responses was trialled. It was the least effective method for producing accuracy and detail. |
### Ways of working

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ways of working</th>
<th>Advantage</th>
<th>Disadvantage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Using audio recording backed up by staff completing data collection forms | - Participants’ verbatim and detailed responses are captured.  
- There is more time available for looking at and responding to items (rather than spending time completing the forms) | - Requires careful set-up so that participant responses are not drowned out by background noise  
- Staff time must be factored in for transcribing |

All of these methods were found to produce worthwhile material, and working in any of these ways has the potential to be successful. In groups of up to 6 the structure of sessions can be less formal. With 6 plus, more structure is needed to ensure that everyone can take part and contribute.

It is important to be flexible and to be prepared to adapt the working methods during the session if necessary. For example, if numbers of participants are fewer or greater than expected, the planned warm-up and feedback activities and/or the way of working during the session may need to be changed so that the session has less or more formal structure.

### Recommendation

If audio recording is not possible and enough staff are available, it is recommended that staff complete the data collection forms, preferably talking on a one-to-one basis with participants. This gives participants more time to look at and respond to items and allows more detailed and accurate recording as soon as participants start talking.

### 4.2 Running sessions

#### 4.2.1 Room set-up

Group facilitators need to create a welcoming environment. It is important that new groups feel comfortable as quickly as possible.

The room should be set up to create an informal atmosphere and to allow people to break from the group circle to work quietly at a table e.g. circle of chairs to start and end sessions, with the tables (and a selection point for items) arranged outside the circle.
### 4.2.2 Session structure and timings

A typical RAC session with running times is suggested below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Total running time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Introduction – purpose of project, people involved and overview of process; keep this short and support with a handout. Refreshments and name labels provided (10 minutes)</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Introduction of group members to each other and warm up (if used) (10 minutes)</td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Introduction to materials and their finding aids. Cover geographic, chronological and administrative context; broad significance; structure; format; language and legibility; handling (5 minutes)</td>
<td>25 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 4    | The process  
- How forms are to be completed or recording made  
- Distinction between commenting on the material and commenting on the catalogue  
- Need for legibility and document references.  
- Agree how people will work together  
- Agree how many items they could reasonably look at  
- Roles of staff and other facilitators present (10 minutes) | 35 minutes         |
| 5    | Selection of materials. Options might be to allocate items or to allow participants to choose from a larger pool of material (5 minutes) | 40 minutes         |
| 6    | Studying documents, discussion and recording responses (60 minutes, based on 20 minutes for each of 3 items) | 1 hour 40 minutes  |
| 7    | Completion of participant sheet, forms checked for legibility and completeness (10 minutes) | 1 hour 50 minutes  |
| 8    | Group discussion sharing the experiences of the session (c.15 minutes) | 2 hours 5 minutes  |
| 9    | Thanks, evaluation and session close (10 minutes) | 2 hours 15 minutes  |

Allow just over two hours for a session. This was judged to be the maximum amount of time that people were able to concentrate for. Any shorter will be too rushed: the process is demanding, requiring close examination of materials and recording of information.

Some groups might welcome the opportunity for a longer shared discussion period over refreshments – people might need this wind down period after intensive work and interesting dialogues can emerge. Again, it would be useful to audio record or note take at these sessions.

Sessions work best with one facilitator taking a lead role. It is also useful for one member of staff to act as timekeeper.
4.2.3 Introductions and warm-up activities

When a group has not worked together before it is sensible to give all participants name labels and to allow everyone to introduce themselves. You might wish to consider starting with a warm up activity – though this should be kept very short.

Suggested warm-up activities are attached as Appendix II. In selecting these some considerations will be:

- Are the group new to each other? If so, examples 1, 2 and 4 are better ice-breakers than example 3
- If the group will be working in pairs, a warm-up activity with the person they will be working with might be more suitable
- Size of the group and implications for timing
- Do individuals have mobility or hearing difficulties (which would make an active and noisy activity such as Example 1 inappropriate)?
- Think through any particular sensitivities that might make some of the questions or activities uncomfortable for any group member

4.2.4 Collecting and recording comments from users

There are a variety of approaches, many of which were piloted. All the pilot sessions used ‘data collection forms’. These ask a set of questions, some we suggest are essential, others optional. It is important that archive services should design their own forms to meet the specific needs of their project and participants. However some examples are give in Appendix I. See also Running a Revisiting Collections Focus Group, available for download from the Collections Link website: www.collectionslink.org.uk/Increase_access/revisiting_collections

The questions on the data collection forms address:

- What to you is important or interesting about the record?
- What would you describe as the subject areas it represents?
- What are your personal responses to the record?
- Do you have any direct associations with this type of record or its content?
- How complete and accurate do you find the current catalogue descriptions and index terms

As described above, the responses to these questions can be recorded in a number of ways. This affects how the form should look:

- If they are to be self-completed by participants or written down by other participants, the chosen questions should be printed on the form
- If they are to be recorded by staff or other facilitators, we suggest a blank form with only the headings of names and items under discussion with the facilitator having in mind relevant questions, possibly on a separate sheet to ensure a consistency of approach with the group members.
4.2.5 Managing the group process

However task-focused the group might be, in terms of group process and dynamics facilitators need to be aware of: the importance of all participants’ feelings (those brought from outside as well as those that arise on the day – perhaps prompted by the records); relationships within the group; and any emotional undercurrents that emerge.

This might be a matter of noticing e.g. if one or two people dominate the group and devising strategies to deal with this by e.g.

- Setting ground rules about turn-taking
- Asking for one feedback point per person
- Agreeing that only one person speaks at a time
- Structuring activities, e.g. pair work, so that each person has equal time
- Taking individual participants aside to give them feedback about how they come across

It might be a matter of attending to someone’s feelings. For example, in one of the pilot groups a participant became upset and angry at the racist content of some documents. It was important that the facilitator took time to validate these feelings and to respect how painful it was for this participant. In another (teenage) group, there was a disagreement between two participants just before the start. It was important to establish whether they needed to resolve their disagreement before working together. In this instance a member of staff who knew them well helped to resolve the issue.

4.2.6 Ending and reviewing sessions

Space should be given towards the end of the session to allow the whole group to share their thoughts about the material and the process. This could be done as a ‘round’ (see example in Appendix II). Ideally, you will want to use a formal evaluation form (e.g. using the Inspiring Learning for All Generic Learning Outcomes⁴), but it may be better to audio record evaluation comments from those who express themselves more spontaneously verbally than on paper. A simple, informal approach is to invite participants to jot down feedback on post-it notes – recording one thing they enjoyed in the session and one thing that could be improved.

An RAC session is a mutual process. It is a chance for people to engage with materials, to impart their knowledge and to have this knowledge valued. But it is also important that the archive service acknowledges this expertise. Where possible participants should be given the opportunity to take ownership of their contributions by continuing to be involved with the project or by receiving updates about how their interpretations and ideas have been used. This might involve them in:

- Working towards a display or exhibition of the project
- Helping create a new subject guide to for a previously unexplored research area like BAME history
- Coming back to help re-catalogue or index collections.

The archive service must always be careful to give public acknowledgement to the group e.g. in any publication or exhibition that comes out of the work. The group should always have the opportunity to comment on the outputs of the project – e.g. a revised finding aid.

⁴ www.inspiringlearningforall.gov.uk
5.1 Assessment

After completing work with a group in an RAC session, the archive will have either a series of completed data collection forms with written responses to questions or the transcript or an audio (or video) recording.

This data is likely to be of three broad categories:

- New information about the records (e.g. a more accurate date, more detailed description, a corrected place name)
- Personal or other observations about the records
- Comments on the existing catalogues (e.g. the if catalogue does not explain something adequately or uses inappropriate terms or language).

This data is now assessed to decide if, how and where it can best be used.

The structured questions in the data collection forms encourage responses and new information that can be fed into four destinations:

- ISAD(G) Catalogues – where user-generated information is used to make the catalogue more complete, factually correct, culturally nuanced or more focused on likely areas of user interest.
- Subject Keywords – where user-generated information supplies additional new, more refined or more appropriate keywords
- Subject Guides – where user opinions on the research value or significance of records informs existing subject guides or suggests the need for additional guides.
- Free Text – where user-generated opinions, associations, interpretations and narratives associated with or inspired by the records can be held as independent but linked texts outside the core catalogue structure.

5.2 Marking Up

The information in the data collection forms or session transcripts is analysed and marked up to indicate whether and where new items of knowledge will go.

A simple mark up process can be used, underlining the text in the data collection sheets in different colours:

- Green for ISAD catalogue
- Yellow for keywords
- Blue for subject guide
- Red for free text

You need to decide whether to accept this information. Sections of text not marked up are excluded. This is an important part of the process and an archive service needs to ensure that its criteria for decision making are transparent, consistent and documented - where possible involving all the archive staff who participated in the Revisiting Archive Collections session.

The pilot sessions demonstrated that groups might well provide far more information than could actually be used. Responses need to be judged sensitively. There is always likely to be some material among the responses that is superficial, poorly informed, or too specific or personal to be of interest to other users. The decisions as to which information should be included or excluded need to remain with archive staff. There may also be a hierarchy of use; for example some material not suitable for the catalogue may nevertheless find a place in, say, an exhibition or publication.
See Example 1 showing a data collection sheet taken from one of the Royal Geographical Society pilot sessions marked up. This session used staff to interview individual participants and complete the sheets.

5.2.1 Catalogue

Information that is destined for the ISAD(G) catalogue may be used verbatim if you consider it to be neutral, factual and verifiable. It is more likely, however, to be a trigger for the archivist to revisit the catalogue, investigate or authenticate the new information that has been has been offered and rework the existing description.

See Example 2 from the Capper collection at King’s College, London where previously unrecorded Arabic correspondence was noticed and flagged up by a participant and this material was then investigated and fully described in the catalogue.

New and significant factual information added directly into the catalogue must be attributed; additional work to the catalogue carried out by staff in response to a participant’s comment about the original description does not need attribution.

There are a number of potential destinations for new catalogue information. For the more likely destinations for content within the ISAD(G) structure see 5.7.

5.2.2 Subject keywords

The question ‘what topics or subjects do you think [the record] tells us about?’ asks participants to identify and ascribe their own subject terms to a record.

Any new subject keywords suggested by participants need to be checked against existing keywords. If they describe a concept that does need to be added to the catalogue/index/ description it is possible that an acceptable term for this already exists within UKAT. However, if the terminology itself is the issue addressed by the participant’s suggestion, or if no existing UKAT term captures the meaning of the suggestion, then a new term is required. This should be added to the archive service’s thesaurus and UKAT should be asked to include the new term.

New subject keywords do not need to be attributed. See Example 3 for an instance of new UKAT subject terms created from a RAC session at King’s College, London.

5.2.3 Subject guide

If the archive has existing subject guides on particular topics then the information offered may feed into a revision. Equally your project may have been set up specifically to research and create a new guide for a previously unexplored subject e.g. Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgender (LGBT) history, or disability.

The subject guide category should always be used for information that reflects current researcher and user interest and preoccupations that may develop but may not endure (e.g. the 2012 London Olympics and Paralympics). (“Of interest to x / will support research on y…”)

Remember, such guides should be to meet researchers’ and users’ needs rather than reflecting the structure of the records. The suggestions for subject guides do not need to be attributed.
5.2.4 Free Text

The free text category is used for personal responses that are subjective: opinions, narratives, associations, memories, or for new information which is presented as factual, but which can’t be verified.

These personal takes on the records cannot easily fit within the structure of ISAD(G) or other finding aids, but they do have particular value as sometimes powerful and oblique commentaries on the records. Because this content is personal and subjective it must be attributed (see comments in section 4.1.6 re attribution).

Example 4 gives some responses from two groups (a teenage reading group and a local history group) to school log books at Bexley Local Studies and Archive Centre. These include personal and inter-generational responses and detailed descriptions of content. Not all of these may be useful as additions to the catalogue, but they clearly have a value as a commentary on the record series.

Examples 5 & 6 from the Royal Geographical Society and King’s College, London show other, different forms that these personal responses might take e.g.:

- An academic interpretation of significance
- A personal response to racist content
- Specialist anthropological information based on personal knowledge
- A family narrative.

5.3 Attribution

As noted above (5.2.2) new subject keywords and subject guide content should not be attributed.

However, any new information that has either been incorporated in the ISAD(G) description or that sits outside the ISAD(G) record as free text responses, observation and comment must be attributed using the personal details supplied on the contributor’s consent form (See 4.1.7 above) or to a collective description to the group. The information added to the ISAD(G) catalogue is attributed at 3.7 Description Control Area, using 3.7.1 Archivist’s note. See Example 7.

Free text must also be attributed on the text itself. See Examples 5 & 6

In situations where participants wish to remain anonymous, as noted above, signed consent to use their material is still required and the attribution can be made to e.g. the group or session instead. This is sensible where the group title indicates their likely expertise, e.g. ‘Information provided by a member of the Tanzanian Women’s Group at an RAC session at the Royal Geographical Society, May 2007’. (See 4.1.6 above). Otherwise, the person may be willing to be referred to by an agreed description e.g. nursing staff member at Brookwood Hospital, with a date range.

5.4 Linking the free text and catalogue description

Free text commentaries need to be held in parallel, separate, but indissolubly linked information systems that are flagged from the ISAD(G) record (using Publication Note (3.5.4)). This will reference the free text information of an associative or observational nature which is held outside the catalogue e.g. Observation(s) made by Tanzanian Women’s Group about this item can be found on p. of the description or by following this link: www…
The reference should be made to this associated information source from the part or level of the description to which it most closely relates e.g. in Example 4 about the Bexley log books, the comments would best link with the administrative history of the school and its records.

For paper catalogues, the free text elements can simply sit on an inserted page at the end of the catalogue. In an electronic environment there should be cross references in stand-alone cataloguing systems, or, in a web environment, through hyperlinks. Individual approaches will vary according to cataloguing software and web interfaces. For example, these might include links from an online CALM system to text files held on a separate server or making use of a subject specialist web host to hold such content.

### 5.5 Destinations

The various destinations for information are summarised below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Destination</th>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>To be used for</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ISAD(G) Catalogue</td>
<td>Additions should be made at the highest applicable level of the hierarchy and not repeated at lower levels</td>
<td>Information that is neutral, of additional value, factually correct and of enduring interest. Such information should be identified and attributed in the description. Additions can either be verbatim or staff-created based on users' comments e.g. ‘there is insufficient information explaining why these records were created’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There are three types of addition that could be made to the ISAD(G) record:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ To record that the description has been revised</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ To point to the whereabouts of any observational or associative comment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ The incorporation of new descriptive data.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This information can be added to most ISAD(G) elements, but the likely elements are in 3 (below)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Description control (3.7) &amp; Archivist’s note (3.7.1)</td>
<td>Statement that the description has been revised to include user-generated information, by who and when e.g. Hilary Jenkinson, retired lecturer in archival studies, University College London, or if a group Bexleyheath Central Library teenage reading group, seven teenagers aged 13-16 from schools near Bexleyheath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Publication note (3.5.4)</td>
<td>Reference to the whereabouts of additional information of an associative or observational nature held outside the ISAD(G) description e.g. Observation(s) made by Tanzanian Women’s Group about this item can be found on p. of the description or by following this link: www…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destination</td>
<td>Approach</td>
<td>To be used for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative / biographical history (3.2.2)</td>
<td>Additional information on the body, person or functional process relating to the records</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scope and content (3.3.1)</td>
<td>Additional information on the record’s informational content</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dates (3.1.3)</td>
<td>Revision to creation date</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language/scripts of material (3.4.3)</td>
<td>Information about mother tongue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical characteristics (3.4.4)</td>
<td>Information about media and materials</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subject keywords</strong></td>
<td>Use for new subject keywords; check against existing keywords; choose nearest match in UKAT; if new term required, enter in archive service thesaurus and ask UKAT for the new term’s inclusion</td>
<td>New subject terms identified by participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subject guide</strong></td>
<td>Use for research interests and preoccupations that are current but may not endure. &quot;Of interest to / will support research on…” Subject guides are written from the researcher and users’ perspective rather than reflecting the structure of the records.</td>
<td>Particularly for comments that are driven by researcher and user interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Free Text</strong></td>
<td>Use for information that is not primarily objective or descriptive and should stand as a free text outside the catalogue structure, but clearly linked to it. In a paper environment, these comments can exist as additional ‘notes’ to the catalogue; For online catalogues they should be accessible through a hyperlink. These links must be indissoluble</td>
<td>To be used for interpretation, opinion, personal account or association (as distinct from description); to be expressed as far as possible verbatim, or at least giving key terms as used by the participant. Probably in first person voice, and must be attributed to the author and dated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Example 1

Data Collection sheet showing mark up with ISAD(G) catalogue additions in green, keywords in yellow, subject guide entries in blue and free text in red

**Your name**  Norah Sumari

**Item**  069786  Photograph, Tanganyika Territory (Waha Girls)

1. **Some questions about the items:**

   What is most important or interesting about this document to you?

   - The caption is important; Waha refers to a tribe from the Lake Victoria area.
   - Items of clothing are important, the necklaces and bracelets are interesting
   - The hair styles are interesting (were they cut like this? Was it a tradition?
   - Their age – puberty is obvious

   What topics e.g. *entertainment*, or *transport*, do you think it tells us about?

   - It tells us about *adolescence and coming to adulthood*
   - Young teenage girls

   Tell us your own thoughts and feelings about the item, for example:

   - Have you ever owned/seen/used anything like it before?
   - The way it looks
   - Do you have any personal experience relating to the item or ones like it?
   - Does it remind you of anything that happened to you?
   - Is there anything else you want to know about the item?

   Thoughts – interested in the picture
   - reminds me of the past and that things have changed
   - good that we can go back and see what things were like
   - I want to know the story of the picture – was it taken by missionaries?
   - I would be interested in seeing more photos by Capt. C B H Grant. Is it part of a larger collection? Did he write anything about the image?
| **CAPPER 2/3** | **1941 May-1946 Jul** | File of material, compiled by Thompson Capper, in which the neutral British Camel Corps engaged a Dervish party, strictly against orders from the Acting Commissioner, resulting in the death of the Commander, Mr. Corfield, 9 Aug 1913, including a map of North-West Somaliland compiled by the Intelligence Div of the War Department on a scale of 1:1,000,000, 1901; two copies of a map of North-West Somaliland compiled by the Topographical Section, General Staff, on a scale of 1:250,000, 1905; a printed pamphlet entitled ‘Correspondence relating to affairs in Somaliland’, *featuring translations of letters in Arabic from the Somali nationalist leader Mohammed Abdullah Hassan to the Gadwein tribe, 20 Jan 1913, and to the Commissioner, 8 Apr 1913* (printed under the authority of His Majesty’s Stationery Office by Darling and Son Ltd, 1913), and annotated by Thompson Capper; notes by Thompson Capper *examining differences between friendly and unfriendly Somali tribes*, arguing that the situation in which the commander was placed was impossible, due to the political difficulties with which the British Government was faced, [1913]. |
**Example 3**

UKAT subject keywords generated from RAC session at King’s (with information added to an existing catalogue; Additional text for ISAD(G) field in bold)

**UKAT:**

- African peoples
- Signatures
- War poetry

| CHATER 4/1 | 1941 May-1946 Jul | **Official and personal** papers mostly relating to Chater’s service as Military Governor and Commander Troops, British Somaliland and Ethiopian border, May 1941-Feb 1943, including typescript from Chater to the Chief Political Officer of West Africa Command Headquarters, concerning a proposal to disband the 1st Somali Battalion at Babile, Ethiopia, 8 Feb 1943; ‘Higher authority’, typescript poem by anonymous author describing a humorous account of a court case arising from lost army supplies at Main Force Head Quarters, Nairobi; typescript farewell address to Chater as outgoing Military Governor and Commander of troops in British Somaliland by representatives of Burao District, with signatures in Arabic, 2 Feb 1943; typescript order appointing Chater as Military Governor, British Somaliland, 9 May 1941; typescript report by Chater entitled, ‘Report on Minor Operations in British Somaliland, Apr - May 1941’, detailing operations after the reoccupation of British Somaliland by Allied troops; manuscript notes by Chater on a visit to the Sudan, typescript correspondence between Chater and Chief Political Officer, Political Branch, East Africa Command, Nairobi, relating to the formation of battalions made up of Somali soldiers, and supplements to *The London Gazette*, 1946 Jun-1946 Jul, drawn from despatches by Gen Sir Archibald Percival Wavell, General Officer Commanding, Middle East, describing Allied Operations in the Somaliiland Protectorate and East Africa, 1939-1941. 1 file. |
Example 4

Responses to Bexley school log books

LAX/STP/2/1 Infant School Log Book 1866-1886 Joan Bishop (CTA)
Pupil numbers increased greatly between 1866 and 1896. Children seem to do the same naughty things as today [and] were given moral lectures on these; stealing, being noisy, throwing stones etc. New building, but not happy as all noise heard! Sent home for being dirty. Parent complained as children kept in, told must take child away if not going to abide by the rules. One 15 year old was taken on as a teacher. Lots of poetry [and] songs seem to be learnt. 1886 visit to Colonial exhibition. Older girls sent. Pupils returned from the hop picking, fair in Village.

LAX/STP/2/2 Infant School Log Book 1886-1899 Barbara Brunner (CTA)
Annie Louise Jury Nov 3rd 1896 Scholarship was my teacher. Priest played a very prominent part, more so than when I attended in 1932 at the age of 5 years. Rev Peter Collins seemed to have had many holidays.

LAX/STP/2/10 Boys' School Log Book 1929-1942 Sheila Taylor (CTA)
It's a diary of what was happening to me at the time. I was at the Girls School and we were transferred across to the boys school when our school got bombed. They formed a prep school at the Central School, which we went to before school hours. The teachers in this diary used to teach my mother and some of them me.

It is really thorough and detailed, probably kept by head teacher, day-to-day account, which even gives details of individuals being sick. It's brought back memories of exactly what it was like at the time. We had lots of bombing in Crayford. I remember seeing the planes coming over dropping bombs because we were on the flight path to and from London. Plus Vickers was in Crayford.

LAX/STP/2/16 Primary School Log Book 1991-1997 Linran Deng (TRG)
It talked more about teachers and head teachers than students. Probably they thought everything the head did was important. I was expecting schools where you didn’t have to take exams for.
Example 5

Free text descriptions form Royal Geographical Society *Revisiting Archives Collections* session

Grant, C. H. B. Capt

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Control number:</th>
<th>069786</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class number:</td>
<td>069786</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Author:</td>
<td>Grant, C. H. B. Capt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical descrip:</td>
<td>bw, fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographic term:</td>
<td>Africa (Region)--Waha Girls--Ushingo--Kasulu--1921-3--Tanzania -- adolescence -- puberty -- costume -- traditional dress</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘My tribe is Manyema, this is Waha. This reminds me of the cultural tradition where we come from (the same region but different tribes) of playfully mocking each other. For example at our funerals the Waha come and help but try to make us laugh by joking about what has happened, which is their way of being there for you. At weddings you have to pay them their due, acknowledging their presence in your life for good fortune.’

Comment made by Mariam Mungula at *Revisiting Archive Collections* session

* New subject keywords suggested at *Revisiting Archive Collections* session

Carruthers Collection ADC/6

Boundary Commission Report; survey of boundary between Malawi and German East Africa / Tanganyika

‘This reminds me that before colonialisation Africa was one huge country. They are using triangulation for the boundaries, but that has nothing to do with Africa; it is just the implementation of the Belgian Accord and part of the colonial process. Indeed the role of the Africans in the process does not come out well, if they are referred to at all it is just as porters – they may as well have been donkeys.

Also this reminds me of my own family’s story. My maternal grandfather migrated from what is now Northern Zambia; he was a nomad and travelled across various ‘frontiers’ including this one while hunting elephants and he came to Kilwa on the coast of Tanzania. He settled there and was converted to Islam. He then went back home and persuaded his two brothers to come back to Kilwa with him where they all settled. Those boundaries didn’t exist for them.’

Comment made by Mwatumu Jasmine at *Revisiting Archive Collections* session
Example 6
Free text responses to items from the Embleton Collection at Kings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EMBLETON 1/8/1</th>
<th>[1940]</th>
<th>Two copies of <em>Victory is vital! Germans would rob West Africans of their product</em>. With black and white illustrations of German soldiers persecuting Africans [1940]. 4 pp</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EMBLETON 1/8/2</td>
<td>[1940]</td>
<td><em>Victory is vital! Germans would treat West Africans brutally</em>. With black and white illustrations of German soldiers persecuting Africans [1940]. 4 pp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMBLETON 1/8/3</td>
<td>[1940]</td>
<td><em>Victory is vital! Germans would make West Africans into slaves</em>. With black and white illustrations of German soldiers persecuting Africans [1940]. 4 pp</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Open text:

Link to two comments on this series of items arising from the *Revisiting Archive Collections* Project:

Ramon Pitan, member of *Revisiting Archive Collections* Project focus group, 01/05/2007, remarked on the depiction of the West Africans in physically subordinate positions. In view of this he felt that the leaflets ‘shouldn’t be shown to children’ in case the leaflets encourage a sense of racial inequality.

Dr Joanna Lewis, *Revisiting Archive Collections* Project focus group 02/05/2007:

‘This source contains stunning visual material and detailed written accounts of how propagandists represented British colonial rule, race and imperial history to Africans and British people in order to bolster the British claim to being a benign and caring colonial power (in comparison to Germany). It is significant in the understanding of what the British authorities thought Africans would care about and their representations of the empire’.
Example 7

Attribution and revision information added to two King’s catalogue descriptions

Embleton

3.7 DESCRIPTION CONTROL AREA

3.7.1 Archivist’s note: Detailed catalogue compiled by Zoë Browne.

Item level descriptions for EMBLETON 1/8/1 to 1/8/3 feature links to observational feedback submitted by: Ramon Pitan, cleaner at King’s College London and member of Revisiting Archive Collections Project focus group held on 01 May 2007; Joanna Lewis, LSE academic and member of second Revisiting Archive Collections Project focus group held on 02 May 2007.


Capper

3.7 DESCRIPTION CONTROL AREA

3.7.1 Archivist’s note: Item level description for CAPPER 2/3 includes additional contextual information suggested by Andrew Stuart and John Porter, King’s College London academics and members of the Revisiting Archive Collections Project focus group held on 2 Dec 2007.


3.7.3 Date(s) of descriptions: CAPPER 2/3 revised 2 Dec 2007.
Appendices

Appendix I

Data collection and contributor forms

The suite of questions:

1. What is most important or interesting about this document to you?

2. What topics or subjects do you think it tells us about? You might like to ask more specific questions here: what is going on; did you know any of the people involved; do you know when this happened; do you know anybody who might know more?

3. Is there anything you would correct or add to the catalogue?

4. Tell us your own thoughts and feelings about the item, for example:
   
   Have you ever owned/seen/used anything like it before?
   Do you have any personal experience relating to the item or ones like it?
   Does it remind you of anything that happened to you?

5. For what areas of research would this resource be useful?*

6. Does it provide authoritative and reliable evidence?

7. How would you describe this source in less than 50 words?*

8. Is there anything that interests you about the way it looks?

9. Is there anything else you want to know about the item?

10. Did you think the catalogue entry was adequate? Please consider: accuracy, level of detail evidence of bias and clarity of language and vocabulary.*

11. Did you think the catalogue description was good enough?

   ■ Was it accurate?

   [ ] Yes  [ ] No

   ■ Did it give too much or too little information?

   [ ] Too much  [ ] Too little

   ■ Did you think it was a neutral (without opinion) or a biased (based on an opinion) description?

   [ ] Neutral  [ ] Biased

   ■ Could you understand it?

   [ ] Yes  [ ] No
12. Is there anything else you would like to add?

You should always ask questions 1, 2, 4 and 12 and select from none, some or all of the others. If there is a catalogue record you should always ask question 3. If the answers are to be written by the contributor, the questions are best presented together at the top of a page. If a facilitator or member of staff is doing the recording, then the questions do not have to appear on the sheet at all.

You might want to pre-print document reference numbers and titles onto the sheets.

* These questions worked best more with academic groups
Data Collection sheet – contributor

Your name

Item title

Item reference number

1. What is most important or interesting about this document to you?

2. What topics or subjects do you think it tells us about? What is going on; did you know any of the people involved; do you know when this happened; do you know anybody who might know more?

3. Is there anything you would correct or add to the catalogue?

4. Tell us your own thoughts and feelings about the item, for example:
   - Have you ever owned/seen/used anything like it before?
   - Do you have any personal experience relating to the item or ones like it?
   - Does it remind you of anything that happened to you?

12. Is there anything else you would like to add?

[and any other questions you choose from the suite]
Data Collection sheet – facilitator

Contributor’s name
Item title
Item reference number
Name of person recording the participant’s comments
Contributor Sheet

Thank you for taking part in this Revisiting Archive Collections session on using archives. We hope that it is a useful and enjoyable experience. We very much value what you will tell us today and will want to be able to refer to it and perhaps quote it in our exhibitions or on our website. We need your authority to do that. Please take a moment to complete and sign this Contributor Sheet.

Note: Name signature and address must be obtained, but additional personal information or information on their use of archives etc is optional

Your Name

We expect to rewrite the catalogue entries for the items you look at and might identify in the catalogue the people who made contributions to these changes. Only your name will appear, not your address. If you prefer your name not to be mentioned, then we can just identify any contributions to the Revisiting Archives Collections focus group that you are a part of today.

You may prefer us to use a short description that gives an idea of how you might relate to the records – you might like to discuss this with one of our staff before you decide.

I do not wish my name to be mentioned (please tick box) ☐

I would like to be described as:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

I give my permission for the information I provide to be added to the catalogues of [insert archives office name], which may be published.

Signed ___________________________ Date ___________________________
Please tell us:

Your Address

Your Occupation

Your Age  □ Under 20  □ 21-40  □ 41-65  □ over 65
Are you  □ Male  □ Female

How would you describe your ethnicity? *(please tick)*

□ White British  □ White other  □ Black Caribbean
□ Black African  □ Asian  □ Mixed Race (please describe below)

Other (please describe)

How else would you describe yourself?

Some questions about your previous experience of using information sources

Have you previously used or visited *(please tick)*:

An archive:  □ In Britain  □ Elsewhere  □ Never
A museum:  □ In Britain  □ Elsewhere  □ Never
A library:  □ In Britain  □ Elsewhere  □ Never

If you have visited an archive before:

Were you looking for something in particular?

□ Yes  □ No  □ Not applicable

Did you find it?

□ Yes  □ No  □ Not applicable
How did you look for it? (Please tick. If you are a regular user of archives please tick your most frequend approach)

☐ catalogue

☐ Scanning catalogues for specific words or phrases you already had in mind

☐ Browsing catalogues but without any specific words or phrases in mind

☐ an index to people, places, organisations or subjects

☐ a subject guide

☐ asking staff

☐ On a computer search engine e.g. Google
Appendix II

Warm up activities

Activity 1: Mix and Match

**Timing:** 10 minutes for up to 10 people (longer if the group is larger)

This activity is active and energetic – it gets a group moving around and can be noisy. It is good for breaking the ice when a group and the facilitator(s) are new to each other as people find points of connection.

Choose 10 statements that interest you (it doesn’t have to apply to you) – tick these in the left-hand column.

*Find 10 different people who match each of the ticked statements.*

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Plays or has played a team sport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Comes from a large family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Speaks more than one language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Plays a musical instrument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Hates getting up in the morning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Likes bright clothes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Has at least one brother or sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Follows a soap (radio or television)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Shares the same star sign as you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Enjoys cooking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Is mixed heritage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Recycles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Has visited/would like to visit China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Does voluntary work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Loved school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Likes trying new foods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Collects something</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Warm-up Activity 2: Unique Introductions

**Timing:** 10-15 minutes depending on the size of the group

This activity works well as a warm-up in any group. It is moderately active and energising. It can provide points of interest or connection between participants.

Give each person (including facilitators) a post-it note, pen, piece of paper

Ask each person to write down one unique thing about themselves that they think no one else in the group knows about them (and that they are happy for everyone to know!)

If necessary give a couple of examples – ‘I can do the splits’, ‘I know how to say ‘what is your name’ in 5 different languages’ ‘I was born in an ambulance on the way to the hospital’ etc

Then, for groups who know each other:

- Collect post-it notes on flip chart and number them.
- Ask pairs to spend two minutes guessing which statement belongs to whom – they can share their own
- Read each statement and ask the person who owns it to stand up (and take a bow)
- People can tot up how many they guessed correctly. You might want to award a small prize!

For groups who don’t know each other:

- Ask them to share their name and what is on their post-it notes
- Each pair to introduce their partner and one unique thing about their partner to the rest of the group
Warm-up Activity 3: Rounds

**Timing:** 1 minute per participant

This activity works well as a warm-up in any group. It gives everyone a chance to speak briefly so it is helpful for breaking the ice if one or two participants are particularly shy. The topic can be varied to suit the group.

*The facilitator can start the round off. Each person in the group has 1 minute to say something about a selected topic e.g.*:

- What’s on top (something occupying my mind at the moment)
- One happy, one difficult and one trivial thing that has happened to me recently
- My journey here was…
- I’m looking forward to…

Warm-up Activity 4: Names

**Timing:** 2 minutes per participant

This activity works well as an informal warm-up in any group. It gives everyone the opportunity to say something personal about their name and its origins. For a group who are new to each other, it helps participants to learn each other’s names; for groups who have worked together before participants often share something new about themselves.

This activity can be run in pairs with pairs then introducing each other, or as a ‘round’ in the whole group.

If the facilitator knows the names of all group members in advance of the session, various websites can be used to look up the meanings of participants’ names e.g.

[www.namesite.com](http://www.namesite.com)
[www.thenewparentsguide.com](http://www.thenewparentsguide.com)
[www.google.co.uk](http://www.google.co.uk)

*Ask each person to say something about their name:*

- Does your name (or names) have a particular meaning that you know of?
- Who gave you your name?
- What do you like or dislike about your name?
- What are your family and cultural traditions around names?