



# **Learning & Engagement Policy**

**2014**

## **WYAS Learning and Engagement Policy**

### **1 Overall mission statement of West Yorkshire Archive Service**

The West Yorkshire Archive Service exists to preserve the past, serve the present and protect the future. We do this by preserving the local heritage of historical documents and helping members of the public make use of them. The Service has offices in Wakefield, Bradford, Calderdale (Halifax), Kirklees (Huddersfield), and Leeds. Anyone interested in the history of West Yorkshire, who would like to discover what records have survived, is welcome to visit or contact any of our offices.

### **2 Our potential as a learning resource**

The West Yorkshire Archive Service is one of the largest archive services in England and includes WYAS, Wakefield, which is the third largest local authority archive in Great Britain. We serve five local authorities via five district offices. This gives us a potential local audience of around 2.2 million people from a wide range of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. The archive service works closely with the Archaeological Advisory and Ecology services and together they make up the Heritage division of West Yorkshire Joint Services. The heritage division looks after 12,000 years of local history and environment records relating to West Yorkshire, the former West Riding and the wider sub-region. The possibilities for learning and engagement possibilities for this collection are vast and go far beyond traditional focus on family and local historians.

The most significant and frequently accessed collections include:

- Local government records, containing a wealth of material about the history of local communities and the lives of West Yorkshire people.
- Theatre, picture house and holiday club records and other collections documenting the entertainment history of West Yorkshire.
- Historic Environment Records detailing the archaeology, historic sites and buildings of West Yorkshire.
- Ecology records detailing the biodiversity of West Yorkshire.
- Church records, wills, parish registers and other key collections for genealogical research.
- Important family and estate collections, including the Temple Newsam and Harewood Estates, Ripley Castle, the Shibden estate, Newby Hall, Nostell Priory and Studley Royal.
- Maps of the local area from tithe maps to ordinance survey maps that track the changing topography of West Yorkshire.
- The region's industrial heyday is recorded in collections of textile mill, engineering, retail, and Coal Board archives.
- Records of local institutions including hospitals, schools, political parties, social clubs, societies and asylums.
- Criminal records including local courts, prisons, reformatory schools and records from the West Yorkshire Police.

- Private collections including letters, diaries and other ephemera that provide private responses to local and national events.

As a result of the collections being so vast we believe everyone should be able to find something in our collections that interests them, is relevant to their lives or inspires them to find out more. In order for people to come in and discover these records we need to make connections and develop activities that bring the collections to life.

### **3 Learning statement**

The Archive Service will work to provide meaningful and interesting opportunities to engage with original records in appropriate and sustainable ways. Learning and participation opportunities will balance the preservation of the collections with creative, enjoyable engagement that suits the needs of each audience. This is designed to enhance public benefit and public support for the service.

Learning and engagement staff will work alongside archivists and conservators to ensure opportunities to engage with our collections are well informed and use the most appropriate records. This partnership will also drive collections strategies. Learning and engagement staff will work directly with target community groups to ensure that their records, stories and experiences are preserved within our collections for future generations. This is designed to make the service relevant to the community we serve.

Learning and engagement staff will work in collaboration with audiences, creating a dialogue that ensures each aspect of our work is informed by the needs and interests of our audiences. This is designed to make us accountable to our local communities and help us to create a sustainable, relevant service.

We will work directly with our partner organisations across West Yorkshire to explore how our collections support their heritage and their projects. This is designed to maximise the use of culture and heritage resources across the region and create innovative and impactful learning and participation opportunities.

### **4 Legislative and strategic context**

The statutory and strategic framework for learning and engagement at West Yorkshire Archive Service is provided principally by the following:

- Anti-Discrimination Legislation
- Disability Legislation
- Health and Safety Legislation
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Public Records Act 1958 & 1967
- Local Government (Records) Act 1962
- Local Government Act 1972 (s.224)
- Data Protection Act 1998
- Ongoing Changes to Copyright Legislation

- TNA standards for Archive Services, e.g. Archives for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and Archive Service Accreditation
- Regional Priorities outlined by the 5 Local Authorities and District Councils we serve
- Inspiring Learning for All
- Henley Review 2012
- National Plan for Cultural Education
- National Curriculum
- DCMS Culture on Demand 2007
- Other WYAS policies including: Collection Policy, Volunteer Policies, Digital Archives Policy, Appraisal Policy, Access to Records Policy, Copying Policy and the Cataloguing strategy
- Wider WYJS policies: Adults and Children Safeguarding policies
- WYJS Service Delivery Plan
- Learning outside the classroom
- Museum Association
- Group for Education in Museums
- Explore your archives campaign 2013
- Representation of the People Act 2002

## **5 Target audiences**

Our target audiences are:

- Community groups not currently represented in our collections (initially focusing on multicultural communities)
- Local communities of interest and place (communities represented in our collections who can add their own knowledge and expertise to our records)
- Families (parents, carers, holiday clubs, child-minders and young children aged 5-11)
- Volunteers (current and potential volunteers)
- School groups (primary, secondary and special schools groups: teachers and students from independent, voluntary controlled, voluntary aided, faith, community, free, state, academy, private and home schools across West Yorkshire)
- Further and higher education groups (students and tutors from local, regional, national and international further and higher education institutions)
- Drop-in, casual, leisure and recreational visitors (those interested in cultural and heritage but do not have the time or motivation to undertake independent research collections).

## **6 Aims and objectives**

We have three main aims for learning and engagement within the Archive Service. These are listed below along with the measures we will put in place to achieve each one. Each aim and measure is intended to offer a sustainable and effective way to make the most of our potential as a learning resource.

**Aim 1: Welcoming places to access original records**

- Making all records routinely available for public consultation and research in the searchroom (where restrictions are not applicable – see Access to Records Policy for more details).
- Continuing cataloguing of uncatalogued collections and making them searchable via our Calm database.
- Continuing our partnership with Ancestry.co.uk, making more records available online and providing free access to the website within the searchroom.
- Providing remote help and searches through enquiries and the research service.
- Introducing a regular exhibition programme to provide browsing opportunities outside the searchroom and celebrate the diversity of the collections we hold.
- Improving access to and understanding of archaeological and ecological records. This includes adding information to our centralised Calm database and training staff to offer support to visitors accessing all heritage service records from one contact point.
- Pleasant, visible and welcoming staff who are trained to understand and provide for various audience needs.
- Atmospheres that are conducive to quiet study and separate social spaces that present opportunities for group visits, discussion and collective enjoyment of the records.
- Improving printed materials including access guides targeted at specific audiences, collections guides and information about various ways for visitors to get involved.
- Marketing and publicity campaigns that remove common perceptions of archives as unwelcoming, academic, boring places and that encourage people to visit.
- Regular and understandable opening hours that allow for engagement during evenings and weekends.
- Clear signposting in and around our buildings and information about all aspects of the service and who to ask for help.
- Clear and regular opportunities to feedback on all aspects of our service.
- Training all staff so they understand our learning and engagement programme, can help achieve our aims and promote the service enthusiastically.
- Creating safe, inclusive and trusted public spaces through health and safety measures including risk assessed activities, DBS checks and first aid trained staff.

**Aim 2: Community venues, where our heritage is celebrated and cherished by local communities**

- Playing an active and prominent role in the community.
- Offering meeting spaces to community groups.
- Creating and maintaining lasting relationships with community leaders and key stakeholders.
- Assisting in collections initiatives through project work with community groups and events aimed at gathering stories and expertise.

- Developing collections that reflect the current population of West Yorkshire.
- Lowering language barriers through staff training, searchroom support, translations and printed materials.
- Co-curated exhibitions that celebrate achievements of local individuals and community groups, past and present.
- Taking community records into the communities they relate to. Creating touring exhibitions allowing community groups to access their records in comfortable and familiar environments
- Fostering a sense of ownership among community groups over the records that reflect their experiences.
- Continue the Network Group to provide support and advice to local community archive groups.

Aim 3: Centres for learning, sharing expertise and exploring the collections in creative and engaging ways

- Additional support for adult learners through short courses aimed at improving archive and research skills.
- Lunchtime lectures and other events that offer further insights to exhibition themes.
- Involvement in national event days such as Heritage Open Day and Explore Your Archive. Where possible external experts will be invited in to add different perspectives to the collections, this could be an ex-miner to talk about our National Coal Board records or a psychology professor to talk about our Mental Health collections.
- School workshops that connect our records to National Curriculum, PLTS (Personal Learning and Thinking Skills) and ILFA (Inspiring Learning For All) frameworks through fun and interactive activities. Workshops will be designed in collaboration with teachers and cater for different learning styles. All workshops will be adaptable to meet the needs of SEN students.
- Loans boxes and downloadable resources for school groups to access when they are unable to access our offices in person.
- Continuing our Cultural Education Forum, which brings together education providers from local arts and heritage institutions to explore potential partnership events, workshops and other cross site work.
- Regular projects with further education groups that connect our records with departments, this will include working vocational and academic courses.
- Regular higher education placements, skills and subject sessions designed to introduce the collections we have that relate to their degree and furnish them with the skills they need to pursue independent research or careers in the heritage sector. Each project will be designed in collaboration with tutors.
- Having a regular presence at local conferences and networking events to share best practice and ensure our service remains relevant.
- Gathering feedback from audiences at all events and feeding it in to future work.
- Volunteer projects and regular opportunities to gain work experience though social, project based opportunities. Improved access to training opportunities for our volunteers.

- Provision for family groups, on and offsite, through crafts, storytelling, games and events aimed to bring out collections alive for young children and encourage families to enjoy local heritage and culture together.
- Conservation demonstrations and store tours that allow visitors to understand what goes on behind the scenes at the archives. Conservation demonstrations will also form part of staff and volunteer training programmes.
- Regular presence at Family History Fairs to provide support and advice on how to use our collections for family history research and promote various ways to access the service.
- Artists in residence and other events that promote creative explorations of collections.
- An active online presence including social media, e-newsletters, blog posts and accessible information on the website.

## **7 Review Date**

This policy is issued in 2014 and will be reviewed and updated as necessary every four years.