



Access and Engagement Strategy

2014-2018

Our Mission

The West Yorkshire Archive Service exists to preserve the past, serve the present and protect the future. We do this by collecting and looking after the unique documentary heritage of the region and by helping members of the public use and enjoy these records.

Preserving the past, serving the present, protecting the future

Our Vision

To provide a welcoming and engaging service that will inspire people to use the archives of West Yorkshire, enabling them to celebrate their identity and understand their past, present and future.

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Introduction

The West Yorkshire Archive Service is one of the largest archive services in England and includes the West Yorkshire History Centre 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 possibilities for learning and engagement using the collections of WYAS are vast.

The diversity and breadth of collections held within the service provides a chance to appeal to a broad range of people who can find something in our collections that interests them, is relevant to their lives or inspires them to find out more. However, in order for people to discover these records we need to make connections with our communities, develop activities that bring the collections to life, provide welcoming, physically accessible spaces and provide well supported access routes into the collections either directly through staff at our public district offices or online.

The purpose of this strategy is to summarise the collections access and engagement methods of West Yorkshire Archive Service. It details our commitment to customer care, community engagement and equality of access and highlights how we plan to achieve these aims.

Our existing 'Access to Records Policy' outlines the restrictions on access to certain collections and how we communicate these to our community and stakeholders and should be referred to as necessary.

Learning statement

The Archive Service will work to provide meaningful and interesting opportunities for audiences 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.

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 wider 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 which reflects the community it serves.

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.

Legislative and strategic context

WYAS is committed to providing access to the resources in its care. It subscribes to the principles of the Standard for Access to Archives (National Council on Archives: Public Services Quality Group).

The statutory and strategic framework for learning and engagement at West Yorkshire Archive Service is detailed in our Learning and Engagement Policy.

Summary of access provision at WYAS

Through our centres and online spaces we provide the following opportunities to access original archive collections:

- Via our searchrooms
- Via exhibition spaces
- Via our enquiries service
- Via our copying service
- Via our research service
- Via online resources
- Via outreach projects, events and exhibitions
- Via onsite events and activities
- Via volunteering opportunities
- Via formal and informal learning programmes
- Via partnership projects

We have three strands to the access strategy which combined, will enable us to make the most of our potential as a resource for learning and engagement and to ensure the opportunities for access mentioned above are achieved across the archive service.

1: Providing welcoming places to access original records

- Visitors should be able to expect the following at each of our district offices:
 - An excellent level of service from polite, helpful and suitably trained staff
 - A range of catalogues and finding aids
 - Clean, pleasant spaces in which to work

- Fully Disability Discrimination Act compliant premises wherever reasonably possible
 - A range of opening hours
 - Professionally qualified and knowledgeable staff available to advise and support visitors
 - Opportunities to access self-service equipment such as microfilm readers
 - A range of reprographics services that meet the needs of the customer, without placing documents/items at risk of damage
 - Advice and guidance on suitable handling of original archival material
 - Free internet access and computing facilities
 - Mechanisms to provide feedback about the service
 - Access to publications that complement the collections
- An ongoing programme of works to centralise collections at our main office bases and move them from unsustainable and potentially damaging off-site stores will ensure that more collections are properly looked after and can be made available to the public through a more efficient retrievals service.
 - An ongoing conservation and preservation programme will ensure collections are cared for in the best possible way and that collections remain accessible to visitors.¹
 - An ongoing service-wide strategy which began in 2007 with the first relocation of our WYAS Bradford office, will see each of our service points operating from fully DDA compliant buildings. WYAS offices at Leeds, Bradford and Wakefield have all undergone recent moves to create more accessible, welcoming access points for our services. WYAS Calderdale will be opening within a brand new library in Halifax in 2017 and the service has just secured stage 1 HLF funding for a project which we hope will see the WYAS Kirklees office move to be located onsite at Heritage Quay, Huddersfield University.

2: Providing community venues, where our heritage is celebrated and cherished by local communities

- To enable access for local communities we will:
 - Provide exhibition programmes where possible
 - Provide spaces for community groups to use
 - Improve printed materials, marketing and publicity with a focus on removing barriers of perceptions of archives as unwelcoming, academic, boring
 - Create safe inclusive spaces
 - Have an active role in the local community
 - Remove barriers to access through staff training and better searchroom support
 - Continue to support community archive groups through our Community Archive Network Group
- Continued outreach to communities in order to encourage them into the service.

¹ See WYAS Collections Care and Conservation Plan

- Deliver an ongoing cataloguing strategy across the service to ensure that we are continually making new and existing collections more widely available, for example the National Coal Board Collection and the Winn Family Archive.²
- Have an ongoing evaluation programme based on the methodology outlined in the WYAS Evaluation Strategy developed for the HLF funded West Yorkshire History Centre project to ensure that we are meeting the needs of our audiences, being reflective and sharing best practice.³

3: Developing centres for learning, sharing expertise and exploring the collections in creative and engaging ways

- Throughout the service we will ensure our offices:
 - Provide additional support for learners
 - Participate in national events
 - Engage with the education sector through schools, FE, HE and adult learning institutions
 - Provide opportunities for volunteers to get involved with WYAS
 - Deliver an exciting and engaging events and activities programme which promotes the creative exploration of collections
 - Have an active online presence
- We will evaluate our work and use this for continual improvement
- We will promote and share our work across the professional sector

Review Date

This strategy covers the period up to 2018 and will be reviewed and updated in early 2019 upon completion of a major HLF project in Wakefield. We will use the evaluation and learning from this project to inform our future work and to disseminate this work out to other offices within the service so that wherever possible we are able to provide the same high level of access to collections at our different service points.

² See WYAS Cataloguing Strategy 2014-2018

³ See WYAS Evaluation Strategy