

MINUTES OF BRANCH HEADS' MEETING
TUESDAY 4 March 2008 at 2:00pm
LORD CLERK REGISTER'S ROOM, GENERAL REGISTER HOUSE

Present: George MacKenzie, Peter Anderson, Dave Brownlee, David Brown, Jim Grady, Ian Hill, Bruno Longmore, Rob Mildren, Laura Mitchell, Linda Ramsay, Alison Lindsay, Arlene Chalmers (Development Centre), Jenny Cutts (secretary).

Apologies: Bob Phillips, Alison Horsburgh.

1. Minutes of the Meeting

It was noted that no minutes of the previous meeting held on 22 November 2007 had been produced due to the secretary's absence from that meeting.

2. Matters arising

No matters were arising.

3. Development Centre presentations

3.1 Arlene Chalmers made presentations on SG HR New Resourcing Policy and Skills for Success. It was agreed that the presentations would be placed on the NAS intranet for reference.

3.2 It was considered that only those staff members intent on applying for jobs need complete the competency framework document and that continuing professional development records may be used instead as appropriate. Arlene Chalmers explained that specialist staff are also required to demonstrate core skills. Evidence of experience is necessary for line managers to approve individual forms.

3.3 George Mackenzie explained that Skills for Success is already in operation for Senior Civil Servants and that he sees NAS relating mainly to the Operational Delivery strand but also increasingly to Policy and to Corporate Services.

3.4. The Development Centre require Personal Learning Plans to be submitted so that the business benefits of training may be evaluated and learning provision planned.

3.5 Questions were asked about the continuing use of Scottish Government's use of professional competencies. Linda Ramsay explained that Conservation specialist competencies are included in the current Competency Framework (section N) and have been posted on the Saltire. Archivist competencies are also included in the existing Competency Framework (section Q). It was not known if these professional competencies will continue to be used.

3.6 George Mackenzie noted the value of completing personal competency records as a measure of skills development aside from recruitment purposes.

3.7 It was noted that the trade unions had been consulted on the HR resourcing policies and had published summaries to their members.

3.8 It was suggested that an arrangement might be made with GROS to fulfil the requirement that one external officer be present on all external recruitment boards. Short term external appointments do not require external board members. Arlene Chalmers considered that the requirement for all interview panels to incorporate gender balance be met if reasonable to do so. It was accepted that recruitment processes can take up significant resource, but that proper planning can help smooth the process. We should also look to share experience and knowledge from colleagues who have undertaken recent recruitment exercises.

3.9 Arlene Chalmers reported on the implementation of e-HR at GROS. GROS and one other business area within SG have been used to test the new system and some glitches have been experienced. The GROS recommendation was that the system not be made live on the basis of these problems. Dave Brownlee added that plans for NAS and other agency staff without SCOTS access to be given access to their own HR records for checking have stalled. It is intended that NAS retain the in-house Flexi and Annual Leave systems but will adopt the SG Attendance Management system.

4. Staffing issues

4.1 George Mackenzie welcomed Alison Lindsay, attending the meeting in place of Alison Horsburgh, and recently returned to work following maternity leave.

4.2 Dave Brownlee reported on recent, ongoing and planned recruitment exercises. A2 Archive Attendants and two B1 casuals to cover for maternity leave and forthcoming projects will be recruited. Archivist moves will be discussed at the forthcoming Senior Management Meeting on 10th March. It is intended to effect these through consultation with the individuals involved as managed moves. Career development opportunities were also raised at the Local Partnership Board meeting on 4 March 2008. Finance and Administration Branch are recruiting permanent A2 and A3 staff to replace two long term casuals who have recently left.

4.3 Laura Mitchell commented that it is difficult to complete branch budget bids with outstanding staffing issues to resolve. Following discussion, it was agreed that the Branch Head post in CLRB will be offered to B3 curatorial staff in NAS on a TRS basis to cover maternity leave.

4.4 Dave Brownlee added that an existing member of staff, Surya Somasunda, was successful in her application for the B2 ICT Infrastructure and Domain Manager post. In consequence a further B1 ICT post has been vacated and must be filled.

5. Branch Reports

5.1 Information and Communications Technology Branch

Rob Mildren briefly summarised ICTB issues. The Valuation Rolls project progresses: 135,000 images of valuation rolls have been paid for and 100 volumes have been added to Virtual Volumes. The WRH cabling upgrade is underway and the internet upgrade is planned for early April 2008. The GRH digital imaging backshift has been established.

5.2 Court and Legal Records Branch

Laura Mitchell reported that the Lord President's Records Experts Group had met and that membership includes both administrative and judicial courts personnel. Laura Mitchell will present a paper at the next meeting of the group. The Crown Office are undertaking a records management project with NAS involvement. It is intended to recruit 6 casuals for the summer

weeding project as the 1996 transmission will require more work than previous years. The Tartan Register Bill will be launched on 26 March 2008. The Digital Data Archive procedure manual is almost complete and user testing is taking place. It was noted that a visit from Lord McPhail had been postponed due to illness.

5.5 Government Records Branch

Bruno Longmore noted that the SRAC report to the last meeting of the Scottish Records Advisory Council had been well received. He reported that various comments on the archive listservs indicated high expectations of the archives community regarding the NAS review of public records legislation. It was agreed that a timely statement issued by NAS concerning the review would be expedient. Bruno Longmore explained that the SG Information Management Unit's file reviewing complement is being reduced and the number of files reviewed will consequently fall from 100,000 to 40,000 per year. This will result in the short term in less file processing required by NAS staff but means that SG paper records will now be dealt with for a longer period than anticipated.

5.6 Conservation Services Branch

Linda Ramsay reported that she has requested conservation requirements from other branch heads as an aid to corporate planning 2008-2009. Difficulties concerning the NAS van service and deliveries in the context of Edinburgh Tram Works and redevelopment of the St James Quarter were raised. It was agreed to keep the van service under review and to evaluate the effects upon search room productions. Senior Management invited ongoing feedback and suggested solutions regarding these issues. Linda Ramsay explained that refilling Mathieson Dome shelves continues and is dependent upon the availability of appropriate records to be stored. Dave Brownlee added that a decision will be taken by the Executive Committee of the Scottish Family History Project on 27 March 2008 to determine the date that ScotlandsPeople Centre will open. It was explained that scientific equipment relating to the Volatile Organic Compounds project will be placed in NAS store rooms and that an announcement concerning these tests will be circulated amongst staff.

5.7 Private Records Branch

Ian Hill reported on progress with the replacement OPAC. He explained that publication of the NAS cataloguing standards was imminent and that staff training seminars would be held in March. It was noted that work on the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders (UCS) catalogue was nearing completion. Work to align NRAS temporary deposit (TD) references with NAS accession numbers was outlined. The missing documents register has been updated. A problem regarding the owners of some Restricted Access private collections not responding to research requests has been identified.

5.8 Outreach Services Branch

David Brown reported that the preferred supplier for video-conferencing equipment has been appointed and installation will take place during April or May 2008. It was noted that video-conferencing for schools has wide application across Scottish schools with particular utility schools some distance from Edinburgh. A discussion was held concerning the inclusion of Scottish history in the curriculum. Different perspectives of the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS) were noted. George Mackenzie decided to contact the Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) on this matter. It was agreed that NAS holds lots of material relevant to all five curriculum topics and that some of the Scottish Archives for Schools (SAfS) material also matches the intended curriculum. It was suggested

that NAS might make a bid to LTS for casual staff in relation to this. George Mackenzie added that the Chair of LTS had agreed to visit NAS.

5.9 Finance and Administration Branch

Jim Grady explained that FAB staff have been occupied with facilitating the auditors, planning budgets for the next financial year and with ongoing procurement.

5.10 Reader Services Branch

Alison Lindsay explained that Alison Horsburgh will return to work following sickness absence on 5 March 2008. The Famous Scots project was discussed. George Mackenzie explained that funding arrangements with EventScotland were not yet defined. The final products are required for 2009 so research work would need to start soon. It was agreed that a member of Historical Search Room staff would be best placed to carry out the research, with their post be back-filled by a fixed-term appointment (see 4.2 above). The publicity potential of this project was acknowledged. Staff members may be asked to suggest other famous scots to be featured in the project.

5.11 Senior Management Branch

5.11.1 George Mackenzie explained that most senior management activity has been featured in weekly Keeper's Diary reports. He added that the extra pressures currently facing NAS has increasingly been seen as an issue and that this point had also been made at the Local Partnership Board meeting. It was explained that Ministerial directives and NAS priorities have resulted in additional tasks and responsibilities. The potential impact of having to devote less resource to other core activities such as accessioning and cataloguing has been flagged to the Minister. The Keeper asserted that record deposits may be postponed in consequence as it will not be possible for NAS both to process them and undertake additional tasks. A meeting has been scheduled for 13 March 2008 involving branch heads and non executive directors to consider corporate planning issues.

5.11.2 Branch heads responded to these views and a discussion took place concerning extra pressures. Questions were asked about commitments to the Scottish Emigration Museum. George Mackenzie explained agreement to supply one-off funding as an indication of support for the project, but that there were no significant other commitments to it for now. Suggestions for corporate objectives to be dropped or deferred were invited. The amount of changes in NAS relating to building work and projects was raised as a further consideration. George Mackenzie accepted that the volume of extra pressures is unprecedented and noted the effects of the change in administration within the Scottish Government. He added that contingent upon these changes was the closer relationship between the Keeper and the current Minister as well as the higher profile of NAS within government. George Mackenzie reiterated that choices must be made between work undertaken and work stopped.

5.11.3 Specific pressures were discussed, including consideration of our working relationship with RCAHMS, the review of public records legislation and the key role of the NAS in implementing the Register of Tartan.

6. Any other business

6.1 Details of a conference called 'The philosophy of the archive' hosted by Dundee University Archive, Records Management and Museums Services (ARMMS) in Edinburgh

on 10-11 April 2008 were circulated. George Mackenzie reported that NAS will host a reception for attendees on the evening of 10th April in West Register House.

6.2 It was noted that the discussion on Digital Policy requires rescheduling and is contingent upon Alison Horsburgh's attendance to present the findings of working groups.

6.3 Attendance Management was discussed. Rob Mildren provided feedback from ICTB attendance management measures. The value of staff awareness that dismissal may be a consequence of unauthorised non-attendance was noted. It was agreed that maintaining contact with people on long term sick leave was advantageous in arranging gradual return to work. It was added that HR professionals have found no evidence that incentives to attend work are effective. Dave Brownlee explained that the Scottish Government intend to pilot a "You're a Star" incentive scheme. It was reported that the reduction in sickness absence achieved so far has exceeded the expectation of Leslie Evans, the Director of Europe, External Affairs and Culture to whom the Keeper reports. Senior Management intend to keep sickness absence under review and the Scottish Government are interested in lessons learned.

7. Date of Next Meeting

Jenny Cutts will canvass for the date of next meeting concerning NAS digital policy.

Jenny Cutts
18 March 2008