Thinking ahead about digital archiving – notes for PowerPoint presentation

[Slide 1 - Thinking Ahead About Digital Archiving]

- At the EBNA/EAG meeting in the Hague in June, we all agreed that e-archiving was one of the biggest (and most urgent) challenges that we face, and one of our collective key priorities. We also began to explore what role and potential influence the EAG have in making change happen.

- As you will recall it was agreed at the Hague that the UK would lead this strand of work. Since then, we have worked with our colleagues at the National Records of Scotland, and with Zoltán Szatucsek, Chair of the DLM Forum to develop our thinking.

- My colleague John Sheridan, our Digital Director, attended the recent DLM Forum conference in Oslo, and we look forward to hearing more about the progress made regarding the various e-archiving work and projects later today. What was clear from DLM Forum this year was that we share many challenges. The need for archives to collaborate has never been greater, but we can do it. The E-ARK project has delivered an impressive and exciting range of new tools and capabilities. That work is a testament to the archives around Europe that have contributed to it.

[Slide 2 – To disrupt or to be disrupted]

- The size and scale of the diverse nature of digital records presents significant challenges. Today, we need to ask ourselves what this means for e-archiving; how we can meet the changing expectations of users and how they will access and use digital records; and, what can we do to bridge the gap in the skills, technology and culture needed to meet the expectations of a digital world?
• If I reflect on the position within the UK – Discovery, The UK National Archives’ online catalogue, was developed to provide a search functionality for descriptions of primarily physical records. In this regard, it has been successful, providing access to over 32 million records in archives across the country. However, we have started to question how sustainable it is as a presentation system for digital records.

• Discovery is a useful portal in enabling access – but will it stand the test of time? We are part of an ecosystem, where our catalogues are available for people to search in different contexts. Services like APEF, operating at an international scale, offer archives important opportunities to engage and reach new audiences, across borders and boundaries.

• Digital records are hugely complex, and have profoundly disrupted archival practice and standards as we know them. They are made up of a myriad of types – from structured datasets, to the code we use to make decisions, and have transformed how people access and consume information and services. Their long term preservation will need radical new approaches. We will need to move away from tools that simulate paper, to creating and using software that allows greater collaboration, access and use.

[Slide 3 – Mind the gap]

• In terms of digital skills, one estimate states that by 2020, Europe will see over three-quarters of a million in un-filled ICT professional roles.

• This is just one of many challenges facing the future of e-Archiving. Today, it is vital that we discuss to what extent digital records and technologies have fundamentally disrupted archives, and how this is compounded by the gap in digital skills.
• Everyone, not just archives, needs more people with digital skills. As a digital archive we are competing for the best people with technology giants, with one arm tied behind our backs. As publicly funded organisations, we can struggle to offer market competitive salaries. On the positive side, we also have some of the most rewarding technology challenges you can find anywhere. When we communicate the opportunities in the right ways, we can attract the best and the brightest.

[Slide 4 - Conversation starters for the Sub-Groups…]

• We are therefore proposing that the ‘disruptive archive’ and the ‘digital skills gap’ form the basis of our e-Archiving sub-group discussions, and that we approach these topics with the following questions in mind:

  o Sub-group one: Revolutionise or die. What does the international archival community need to do as a result of the fundamental shift to digital – both in terms of the materials they receive, and the expectations of users for services national archives deliver? Does the EAG want to position itself at the vanguard of these developments?

  o Sub-group two: Bridging the skills gap. What are the gaps that National Archivists perceive in the digital skills and resources they have available to them? What skills and resources are currently available and will be needed in the future?

• John Sheridan, and Tim Gollins, from the National Records of Scotland, will jointly host the e-Archiving sub-groups and our colleague, Tim Ellis, Chief Executive of the National Records of Scotland, will report back during the plenary session.

• I look forward to a robust and stimulating conversation.