Professional Fellowship Scheme

2026-2027

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1. Introduction

As part of their well-established collaborative relationship, The National Archives and Research Libraries UK (RLUK) facilitate a Professional Fellowship Scheme to enable staff from both organisations, and for the first time, colleagues from the wider archive sector, to gain experience and insight from one another, strengthen and diversify the relationship between them, and to overcome some of the collective challenges facing research, and cultural organisations.

The scheme aligns itself with corporate aims and ambitions of The National Archives, as outlined in The National Archives' 2025-2030 strategy and Research Vision (2024-2027), and RLUK's 2026 – 2030 strategy, whilst also enabling personal development opportunities for the individuals involved. 2026/27 will be the eighth year of this collaborative scheme, and the first time in which the opportunity has been developed to include colleagues from the wider archive sector.

Professional Fellowships will be structured around a flexible, short-term visit to The National Archives, for Fellows from an RLUK member institution or eligible archive sector partner, and to an RLUK member institution, for Fellows from The National Archives or eligible archive sector partner, while being underpinned by a longer period of peer-to-peer mentoring and knowledge sharing. Depending on capacity within/across institutions, there may also be opportunities to visit relevant and eligible archival institutions throughout the course of the Fellowship.

Professional Fellowships should lead to tangible outcomes and deliverables that directly benefit the host organisation, contributing to its priorities and operations. They should also strengthen relationships between The National Archives, RLUK, and the wider archive sector, supporting collaboration, shared learning, and the

exchange of expertise and best practice. Each fellowship will last for one year or up to 18 months (part-time) and the selection and recruitment of the Fellows will be undertaken jointly between The National Archives and RLUK. A financial allocation will be made to support the work of Professional Fellows.

This document outlines the eligibility criteria and the application and assessment processes for the scheme. It should be read in conjunction with the associated pieces of guidance contained within the appendix below (Section 9). This document also outlines what is expected of a Professional Fellow and what they can expect from the scheme.

Professional Fellowships are not secondments and will be held in addition to an applicant's substantive role within their sponsoring organisation. In their application, it is essential, therefore, that applicants consider how undertaking a Professional Fellowship could enhance their daily work and help place this within a wider professional or organisational context.

The Professional Fellowship Scheme is facilitated as part of a partnership between Research Libraries UK and The National Archives:

1.1. Research Libraries UK (RLUK): represents 39 of the leading and most significant research libraries in the UK and Ireland. We aim to optimise the contribution that research libraries and collections make to the economic, technological and cultural success of the UK and Ireland. We are achieving this by working with our members, external institutions and our partners in the community, both nationally and internationally.

We are investing in and developing strategic projects, reports and innovations that are fomenting much greater engagement with, and services for, the research community we serve. These are exciting times for the research sector. We believe there is so

much more that we can do together to shape collections and services in support of academic excellence.

For more information: www.rluk.ac.uk

1.2. The National Archives: is a non-ministerial department and the official archive and publisher for the UK Government, and for England and Wales. We are expert advisers in information and records management and are a cultural, research and heritage organisation. We fulfil a leadership role for the archives sector in England, working in partnership to encourage innovation and sustainability and secure the future of physical and digital records. As an Independent Research Organisation (IRO), we lead high quality research which seeks to innovate our practice, unlock the potential of our collections, and respond to opportunities and challenges in the academic and archive sectors.

In April 2026, Baroness Twycross, Minister for Museums, Heritage and Gambling and Lords Minister, officially launched the Government's new vision for archives. As sector lead, The National Archives will support the delivery of *Archives at the Heart of Society* through a series of new programmes designed to embed the vision's themes across the sector. The vision is shaped around three core themes that will guide archive services, funders and partners across England: sustainability, accessibility and inclusivity. Together, these themes aim to support archives to become financially, environmentally and organisationally resilient; reduce barriers so collections are easier to discover and use online and in person; and ensure archives better reflect the diversity of lived experience in England by engaging communities that have historically been under-represented in collections and practice.

Our Research Vision sets out our plan of action for 2024 – 2027. It outlines our concept of what a researching archive might be: an institution that preserves the past, sustains

the future, provides truly equitable access, and which travels beyond its own front doors to engage with the society of which it is part.

For more information: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk

2.0 Structure of the scheme

Each Professional Fellowship will last for one-year (full-time). Requests for part-time Professional Fellowships will also be considered (up to 18 months). They are not secondments and colleagues will be expected to continue in their substantive role within their sponsoring (home) organisation. Allowances should be made in terms of workload and performance objectives to take into account the commitment of the Professional Fellowship. We would estimate that up to 10% of an individual's working time should be spent on Fellowship activities during the period of their Fellowship (c. 5% for part-time Professional Fellowships). It is worth noting that each Fellow will have a preference regarding how to allocate their time; this may be regular ring-fenced periods of time throughout the duration of the Fellowship, or a more flexible approach that ensures individuals are able to progress reflexively alongside their business as usual. The responsibilities of the sponsoring institution in supporting the Fellow are outlined in the 'Guidance for Participating Organisations'.

Each Professional Fellow will be 'paired' with a mentor in a corresponding organisation. This mentor will be chosen from a pool of mentors created for the purposes of the scheme. Mentors will be professionals from RLUK institutions, The National Archives and the wider sector with expertise in the themes listed in *Section 9.1*. The Mentor will be responsible for monitoring the Fellow's progress, but also providing support and additional points of contact both between The National Archives and RLUK, and where possible the wider archive and library sectors..

The Professional Fellowship scheme will consist of five key components:

Professional-practice question: each Fellowship should identify a professional practice question at the outset which will form the focus of the Fellowship. Wherever possible, the Fellowship should focus on a tangible output which can serve as a measurement of success. Outputs might include developing training, producing best practice guidance or recommendations, or designing a new workflow. Professional Fellows will be requested to produce a version of their output that will be shared with the broader community. The question and outcome should be aligned with, and broadly contribute to, the wider strategic goals of the sponsoring and host organisations. Aligning a professional-practice question with one's role and responsibilities is also encouraged as a way of managing a Professional Fellowship alongside other duties.

Continuous Professional Development (CPD): Peer mentoring and knowledge sharing is at the centre of the Fellowship, forming the basis of a CPD plan developed by the Fellow as a part of their application. The Fellowship should enable colleagues to refine their skills and professional practice, learn from the experience of others, and support them in their career development.

Short-term residencies: Fellows should be able to see and experience work and professional practices in another institution as a part of their Fellowship, enabling them to place their work within a wider disciplinary context and to complement the peer mentoring and knowledge exchange central to the scheme. Usually, a flexible, two-week residency will be undertaken by the Professional Fellow during the period of the Fellowship at their host organisation. Fellows should discuss this residency with their Mentor and may

find it more beneficial to visit over a more extended period (for example, 1 day a week over several weeks) or follow a hybrid approach.

Dissemination: The Fellows will be expected to share and disseminate the outputs and findings of their Fellowships through a variety of outlets for the benefit of the wider sector and profession. This may include blogs, podcasts, publications, presentations or other forms of outreach activity. These should be outlined in the application and can be developed across the duration of the Fellowship. A shareable version of the final output of a Professional Fellowship will be published by RLUK and TNA.

Monitoring and Support: each Fellowship will be monitored throughout. It will be assessed on its professional practice question and intended outcome by a joint Board representing TNA and RLUK. The Board acts as a 'critical friend' throughout the Fellowship through providing feedback and helping Fellows stay on track.

A financial allocation of £1,500 will be made to each Professional Fellow to support Fellowship activity. This may be used to support travel and subsistence during a visit to the host organisation, for conference attendance, training, or to enable outreach activity (for instance, providing access to a platform to run a webinar). Expenses should be agreed with the relevant scheme representative in advance. Any remaining allowance can be used by the Professional Fellow for dissemination and engagement purposes up to 3 months after the official end of the Fellowship. Any expenses in excess of this amount must be met by the Professional Fellow's sponsoring (home) organisation. For further information, see *Section 6.3. Financial allocation*.

3.0 Eligibility[1]

Applications are open to employees of The National Archives, RLUK member organisations and for the first time, people working with archival collections across the wider archive sector.

3.1 Employment eligibility

- Be permanently employed by The National Archives, an RLUK member organisation, or another organisation working with archival collections; or
- Be employed on a fixed-term contract with one of these organisations, with a contract end date at least three months after the proposed end date of the Professional Fellowship.
- To be eligible for the wider archive sector programme, an archive must be located in the UK, Channel Islands or Isle of Man; hold a permanent collection in dedicated, secure storage; provide public access to its collections; and have dedicated staff with appropriate access to professional archival expertise. Its collection should exceed at least one of the following thresholds: 4,000 items, 50 linear metres, 4.2 cubic metres or 20 GB of digital records.

3.2 Additional requirements

- Have formal approval from their line manager (for TNA and RLUK members additional approval from their Head of Department) at the point of application.

3.3 Background and qualifications

You do not need an academic or research background to apply, and there is no formal qualification requirement for the scheme.

[1] These eligibility criteria are the same as for The National Archives' Research Secondment Scheme, 2018.

3.4 Our commitment to inclusion

We welcome applications from people of all ages, levels of experience and backgrounds. We particularly encourage applications from those currently under-represented in the library and archive sector.

4.0 Number of Fellowships

It is anticipated that The National Archives and Research Libraries UK will award up to a total of six, one-year to 18 months, Professional Fellowships per year, divided as follows:

- x2 Fellows from The National Archives
- x2 Fellows from RLUK member organisations
- for the first time, x2 Fellows from the wider archive sector.

This number is not fixed and the exact number of Professional Fellowships awarded may vary depending upon the quality of applications made and staff capacity to support and host Fellowships.

5.0 Application process

The Professional Fellowship Scheme has a single-stage application process. Applicants should discuss their application with their line manager and agree the time to be committed to the Fellowship. Applicants from within The National Archives should endeavour to speak to members of Research Impact, Culture and Engagement Team regarding their application, applicants from the archive sector should speak to members of the Archives Sector Leadership Team at The National Archives, and those applying from within an RLUK member, with a member of the RLUK Executive. Contact details for further information is included in *Section 8* below.

5.1. Key themes/areas of professional practice

A joint call will be made by RLUK and The National Archives for Applications for the 2026/27 Professional Fellowships scheme. Due to the breadth of shared interests between both organisations, these will be based around four key themes or areas of professional practice. These are:

1. Sustainability
2. Equality, diversity, inclusion and cultural change
3. Impact, value and affect
4. Rethinking the record

Further information regarding these themes and areas of interest, including potential practice challenges, can be found in *Section 9.1* below. Applicants should propose a project relating to one of these areas, stating how it relates to their work, and what contribution it would make to their own professional development, their sponsoring (home) organisation, and the wider archive and library sectors. Proposals outside these topics which can demonstrate the significance of the proposed professional-practice question for the sector may also be considered. The assessment panel may also consider exceptional proposals which suggest an alternative model or approach for conducting a Professional Fellowship. In making their initial application, colleagues are encouraged to familiarise themselves with work occurring across RLUK members and within The National Archives in their chosen field by contacting their scheme lead given in *Section 8*, below.

Applicants should also provide details of a:

CPD plan: Applicants should include a Continuous Professional Development (CPD) plan within their full application, demonstrating how the Professional Fellowship will

contribute to their daily work, performance objectives and what skills it will help them develop. Candidates should consider whether any additional training or support might be required during the Fellowship and what tangible steps they will take to support their professional development. A good guide to creating a CPD plan, with examples, can be found here: https://www.cipd.co.uk/learn/cpd/about.

Proposed Mentor: Candidates are encouraged to identify a mentor before submitting their application. Those who wish to discuss their application or potential mentors should contact their scheme representative (see Section 8). Applicants should illustrate how working together with this mentor over the course of their Fellowship will be beneficial for their work. This should include details of areas of joint work, and what support, knowledge and expertise they may offer to the Fellow. However, candidates are not required to have a mentor in place at the time of submission. Applications will be assessed on the same basis regardless of whether a mentor has been identified before the application deadline. For the assessment criteria, see Section 5.2 below.

5.2 Assessment

Applications will be assessed by a joint board made up of representatives of RLUK and The National Archives. Each EoI application will be judged on the following criteria:

- Availability of a host institution with an interest in supporting a Professional Fellowship in this area
- Feasibility of the project
- Benefit to applicant's professional development
- Strategic fit to areas of shared interest
- Benefit to the wider secto

5.3 Successful candidates

Successful candidates will begin their Professional Fellowship from October 2026. A flexible start date may be negotiated depending on the individual circumstances of the Fellow and their host organisation. Flexible start dates should be discussed with scheme representatives outlined in *Section 8*, below.

6.0. Post-Award

6.1. Outcomes and dissemination

Professional Fellowships should lead to tangible outcomes and deliverables that support the Fellow in their substantive role, enhance the operations of their sponsoring organisation, , and are of benefit to the wider library and archive sector. They should also enable the sharing of best practice and underpin knowledge exchange.

Professional Fellows will be expected to disseminate and share their findings and experiences through blogs, podcasts, publications, presentations or other forms of outreach activity. A shareable version of the final output of a Professional Fellowship will be published by RLUK and TNA. The intended outcomes of a Fellowship should be outlined in the Full Application (Stage 2). There is additional guidance on the Full Application in *Section 9.3*.

6.2. Monitoring and Support

Professional Fellows will be monitored throughout their Fellowship to ensure that they receive support from their sponsoring and host organisations, undertake the

activities in their CPD plan, and successfully deliver the outcomes of their Fellowship. The undertaking of a Professional Fellowship will not alter or affect an individual's line management, which will remain unchanged within their sponsoring (home) organisation. The Fellow will be monitored and supported throughout their Fellowship in three ways:

Line management: The Professional Fellow will continue to be line-managed in their sponsoring organisation. The Fellow will be expected to undertake their Fellowship alongside the duties of their substantive post. The Fellow and their line manager should ensure that the Fellowship is recognised in the Fellow's performance objectives and supports them in their substantive role. They should also discuss whether undertaking the Fellowship should necessitate any changes to their responsibilities or workload. The line manager should ensure that the Fellow's workload is adjusted as necessary to give the Fellow sufficient capacity to carry out their agreed timetable. The responsibilities of the sponsoring organisation are outlined in the 'Guidance for Participating Organisations'.

Host organisation mentor: A mentor will be identified within the Professional Fellow's host organisation. They will act as the lead contact for that organisation and should have professional experience or expertise in the area of the Professional Fellowship. They will be responsible for organising and facilitating the Fellow's exchange to that organisation and to offer peer mentoring throughout the Fellowship within the CPD process. The responsibilities of the host organisation are outlined in the 'Guidance for Participating Organisations'.

Fellowship Board: The Fellow will also be monitored by the joint Fellowship Board, formed of members of The National Archives and Research Libraries UK and will be required to submit quarterly reports to the Board. The Board will act as a 'critical friend' through providing feedback and additional support, when required, throughout

the Fellowship. It will also act as an arbitration panel should disagreements/ difficulties be experienced by the Fellow during the time of their Fellowship that cannot be resolved within their host or sponsoring organisation. Fellows are encouraged to bring any difficulties to the Board via their organisation's scheme representative (in *Section 8)*. Please note that scheme representatives will keep in regular contact with mentors and line managers to ensure that Fellows are supported appropriately throughout the duration of the Fellowship.

The Fellowship Board will provide support and guidance and approve the outcomes of the Fellowship, taking feedback from the Fellow, line manager, and host mentor. They will be responsible for awarding the Professional Fellowship Certificate of Completion. At the time of writing this guidance (June 2026) the Fellowship Board consists of the following members:

For Research Libraries UK	For The National Archives
Christopher Cipkin Director of Library, Learning Support and Culture, Royal Holloway, University of London	David Morris Head of Regional and Networks Team
Joanne Fitton Deputy Director Libraries, Museums, Galleries University of Liverpool	Mollie Clarke Research Impact and Engagement Manager
Christina Kamposiori Executive Programme Officer Research Libraries UK	TBC

The success of the Fellowship will be formally judged based on its intended outputs and deliverables, as outlined in the Fellow's full application.

Research Pathways: is a development programme delivered by The National Archives and designed to empower all colleagues undertaking research, to grow as confident, skilled researchers. With sessions running regularly each month, starting in the Autumn, it provides clear pathways for professional development, offering training and networking opportunities that strengthen both individual expertise and cross-sector research culture. Professional Fellows will be invited to attend relevant sessions throughout the course of the Fellowship, as well as opportunities to present their own work as part of the programme. Sessions are both on-site at The National Archives and online, and include:

Research Cafes: in-person informal spaces for researchers to get together, to find out more about each other's work, and even 'brew' up new ideas. These are often themed with light facilitation.

Research Drop-ins: informal training sessions relating to elements of the Research life cycle, such as how to plan for and monitor impact, evaluation techniques for engaged research, and disseminating your research. These are a mixture of online and in-person.

Virtual Research Hubs: grab your lunch and join us virtually for 30-minute sessions showcasing fascinating projects from across TNA. Held monthly, each session features a short talk followed by a Q&A. Not only is this your change to learn more about research at/with The National Archives, but a space for you to present yourself: works in progress, research conundrums or to celebrate finished projects!

6.3. Financial allocation

Following the success of their stage two, full application, Professional Fellows will be awarded a financial allocation of £1,500. These funds will not be held by the Fellow, but will be held centrally and administered by RLUK on behalf of the scheme.

This allocation is to support the Fellow for the duration of the Fellowship and can be used for the following:

6.3.1. *Travel and Subsistence:* To support the Professional Fellow in their travel and subsistence when undertaking their residency at their host organisation. Travel and subsistence bookings will be supported by RLUK. Questions relating to travel and subsistence bookings can be made to: melanie.cheung@rluk.ac.uk, RLUK, Executive Assistant.

6.3.2. *Other Fellowship expenses:* To cover other expenses in support of the Professional Fellowship (e.g. to buy resources, attend a course or workshop, or to support the delivery of outreach activity). Such claims should be agreed with the sponsoring institution and the Professional Fellowship Scheme representative before payment is made.

The financial allocation should not be spent on any other activities without the permission of the Fellowship Board. If additional finance is required to support the Fellow's activities, applications should be made to their sponsoring (home) organisation through established channels.

7. Application, assessment, and fellowship timetable

The Professional Fellowship scheme operates on an annual cycle. The timeframes may change from year-to-year. In the 2026-2027 round, the timetable is as follows:

22nd July 2026: Call made for applications
10th September 2026: Full applications due.
Late September 2026: Assessment of full applications. Fellows appointed.
From October 2026: Professional Fellowships begin.

Two drop-in sessions where potential applicants can ask questions about the Professional Fellowship Scheme, and the application and assessment processes will be organised in July and August.

The dates and times of the drop-in sessions are:

Thursday 30th July, 11.00am-12.00pm - Registration
Thursday 6th August, 11.00-12.00 - Registration

Variations may be made to the start date of the Fellowship depending on the Fellow's personal circumstances or the requirements of either the sponsoring or host organisation

8. Further Information

For further information, please see the application guidance material in the Appendix below or the scheme FAQ document. If you are considering an application and would like to discuss this further, you may also contact your scheme representative:

For colleagues at a Research Libraries UK member:

Dr Christina Kamposiori, Executive Programme Officer, Research Libraries UK:
christina.kamposiori@rluk.ac.uk

For colleagues at The National Archives:

Dr Mollie Clarke, Research Impact and Engagement Manager, The National Archives:
Mollie.clarke@nationalarchives.gov.uk

For archive sector colleagues:

David Morris, Head of Regions and Networks, The National Archives:
david.morris@nationalarchives.gov.uk

9.0 Appendix

In this section are documents and guidance that applicants will find useful in their application to undertake a Professional Fellowship.

9.1. Themes and areas of professional practice

Sustainability

Area Outline:

This area is concerned with issues around the sustainability of archive and research collections. This might include challenges surrounding funding, data or software management or other issues around the digital and physical challenges that affect the longevity of archive and research library collections, such as the risks posed to archives by climate change, and the effect on climate change of the increasing use of technology in and by archives. The continued demand for increased access to institutional collections to meet the needs of different audience groups has posed new challenges for archives and research libraries. In the current landscape, and with the multi-faceted implications of the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI), facilitating access involves greater investment in digital infrastructure and staff members with advanced skill sets to manage, preserve and present material in a range of formats, such as print, digitised, born digital and as datasets. At the same time, archives and research libraries collections face new or increased risks to the longevity of their collections; for instance, the impact of a rise in global temperatures on sensitive paper records.

In the context of this theme we seek proposals that focus on the skills required for identifying opportunities and responding to related challenges. Proposals might

examine practices for strategy development or seek to explore challenges to the digital and physical longevity of archive and research library collections. Applications might explore the following areas in the context of sustainability.

Potential Professional Practice Topics:

- Strategy design
- Models of collaboration and funding
- Developing resilient collections and services
- Skills for sustainability and resilient workflows
- Risk and mitigations as a result of climate change (to collections, staff or engagement)
- Forms of access and public engagement
- Strategies for software and data management
- Sustainable investment through the development of research and innovation infrastructures
- Emerging technologies and sustainable approaches to library and archival collections

Keywords:

Funding, collections, collaboration, sustainability, resilience, access, infrastructure, strategies, skills, software management, data management, risk, artificial intelligence

Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Cultural Change

Area Outline:

Cultural institutions play an important role in the dialogue around equality, diversity and inclusivity and seek to champion professional practices that make a positive impact on society. Both institutional collections and organisational cultures are tied to questions of equality, diversity and inclusivity – whether around the way collections are catalogued, how they reflect diverse voices and engage new audiences, or strive towards a sector that is more representative of the population. Thus, this theme explores how archives and research libraries can respond to these questions and how both organisational culture and collections are adapting to meet this need.

Institutions are also reviewing their collection development practices, and the way they provide access to and represent information. This includes reviewing the metadata associated with resources, the discoverability and accessibility of records, and professional practice. In institutional collections and the work of the institutions themselves, practices must respond to concerns surrounding transparency, equality, diversity and inclusivity. These are important characteristics of the organisational cultural change underway in many archives and research libraries. Proposals submitted in this area may seek to understand how archives and research libraries are evolving through changes in working practices and values, explore strategies that promote equality, diversity and inclusion and address existing opportunities and challenges. Applications might explore the following areas in the context of equality, diversity, inclusion and cultural change:

Potential Professional Practice Topics:

- Embedding equality

- Diversity and inclusion in organisational strategy, and/or developing strategies to promote equality, diversity and inclusion
- Managing risk and uncertainty around culture change in organisations
- Developing inclusive and diverse collections and infrastructures
- Critical approaches to technology in collection practice
- Development of frameworks and guidance to support underrepresented colleagues within our institutions
- Work to support and engage underrepresented communities (through public engagement and access initiatives)

Keywords:

Agile working, transparency, culture change, skills, equality, diversity, inclusivity, equity, inclusive leadership, strategies, infrastructure, critical practice

Impact, Value and Affect

Area outline:

Archives and special collections have a meaning and value that go beyond content; they also enrich society and contribute to our cultural heritage. Their collections form a vital part of our national collective memory. In the context of economic pressures, the need to demonstrate the value of archives, research libraries, and of culture more generally, has never been more acute. Impact is a major facet of the research landscape, with a focus on the many ways research can lead to a positive change in the world, from influencing policy and professional practice to cultural enrichment and preservation.

We are increasingly thinking about impact and value in relation to archives and research collections and articulating how they create impact on individual and collective levels. Exploring the experience of the archive – the ways in which people who create, keep or access archives and research collections encounter and respond to them – allows us to consider a range of issues including memory, trauma, identity and representation. Moreover, research libraries have been constantly increasing their reach through audience-focused strategies and activities that have a direct and transformative effect on research, teaching and the way public audiences engage with unique and distinctive collections. Doing research of this kind helps us to articulate the transformative potential that collections hold and their valuable contribution to individuals, communities and society as a whole. Applications might explore the following areas in the context of impact and value:

Potential Professional Practice Topics:

- Demonstrating the value of archives and special collections

- The role of collections in civic engagement
- Approaches to gathering and using ‘meaningful’ impact metrics around collections
- Expanding the reach of archives and special collections
- The emotional and psychological impact of archives and special collections on institutions and it’s users
- Collection development practices
- Corporate culture and organisational identity
- National identity, memory, and culture
- Assessing the impact of digital collections and initiatives
- Libraries and archives as cultural infrastructure

Keywords:

Impact, value, measurement, metrics, cultural change, cultural infrastructure, identity, advocacy, audiences, public and civic engagement, digital initiatives, strategic planning

Rethinking the Record

Area Outline:

As a community, we are fundamentally interested in the nature of records, both physical and digital, and how we can best carry out our responsibilities towards the records we hold and the communities and societies we serve. Archives and research libraries across the UK and beyond are radically reimagining their theory and practice to meet the evolving challenges of preserving born-digital and digitised records and providing access to them. As institutions with a number of audiences, we also seek to develop new interpretations of our records and the administrative contexts in which they have been produced. Thus, proposals in this area might explore how the management of our holdings, and the holdings themselves, contribute to the construction of scholarship, history, identity and memory on local and global scales.

Research interests around the record also extend into conservation and preservation science. Therefore, under this theme we seek proposals that look to develop novel techniques in collection care, shed new light on the origins and processes of records and other collection materials, or otherwise draw the knowledge of conservators, collections professionals and historians together in new ways to create enriched interpretations of our records. As we move from a consideration of physical records and collection items into digital records and data, we also seek to explore what materiality means in digital contexts Applications might explore the following areas:

Potential Professional Practice Topics:

- Exploring historical record series as data
- Managing and presenting complex digital records at scale

- New business models for archives and research libraries in a digital landscape
- The role of emerging technologies in preserving and providing access to our records
- The changing roles and responsibilities of recordkeeping and collecting institutions
- Building digital capacity and resilience
- Creating and managing born-digital collections
- Rethinking collection development
- Strategies and risk assessment for digital preservation
- Uncertainty and trust in the digital record

Keywords:

Digital preservation, datafication, conservation and materiality, technology, capacity and skills, strategies, emerging technologies

9.2. Professional Fellowship: Application Guidance

This document provides guidance to applicants when completing the 'Professional Fellowship Application. If applicants have any further questions, in addition to those covered by this guidance and the scheme FAQs, please contact:

- For **Research Libraries UK** members: christina.kamposiori@rluk.ac.uk
- For **The National Archives** staff: mollie.clarke@nationalarchives.gov.uk
- For archive sector colleagues: david.morris@nationalarchives.gov.uk

1. Applicant details

Please complete the necessary details in this section. Please note that 'Sponsoring organisation' refers to your normal place of work/home institution.

2. Line manager and (where relevant) Head of Department approval

In order to apply for a Professional Fellowship, you must have the support of your line manager or head of department (where relevant). It will be important to discuss with them how the undertaking of a Professional Fellowship would contribute to your wider work or objectives, how it can support your professional development, and how it compares with other opportunities within your organisation. At this stage, you should agree with your line manager how much time will be committed to the fellowship. Please ensure that your line manager or head of department is aware of the responsibilities of the sponsoring organisation as outlined in the 'Guidance for Participating Organisations'.

Line manager statement of support (300 words maximum)

Please include here your line manager's statement of support.

3. Please state how you meet the eligibility criteria for the Professional Fellowship scheme, as outlined in the 'Professional Fellowship Scheme Guidance, 2026-27'.
Please provide a few details regarding how you meet the eligibility criteria contained within the scheme guidance.

4. Please outline your current role and identify the areas of professional practice that you have focused on in current or previous roles. (200 words maximum)
Please provide details of your professional role and responsibilities as well as of any past roles and practice that may be relevant to this application.

5. Have you identified a host organisation for your Professional Fellowship?
Please state if you have identified a host organisation for the fellowship. If yes, please provide the required details.

6. Have you identified a potential mentor in the host organisation?
Please state if you have identified a potential mentor in the host organisation. If yes, please provide the required details.

7. Have you attached a copy of your Continuous Professional Development (CPD) plan?

Applicants should include a Continuous Professional Development (CPD) plan within their application, demonstrating how the Professional Fellowship will contribute to their daily work, performance objectives and what skills it will help them develop. Candidates should consider whether any additional training or support might be required during the Fellowship and what tangible steps they will take to support their professional development. A CPD plan template can be found here: Applicants are welcome to use a different one if they wish.

8. Title of Proposed Fellowship project.

Please provide the title of the Professional Fellowship project. This may change slightly post-application following feedback from the Board and/or conversations with your Mentor.

9. Summary of the project you would like to undertake if awarded a Professional Fellowship (1000 words maximum)

Please provide a summary of the proposed project to be undertaken during the Professional Fellowship, including its key objectives, methodology and outcomes. You should outline any practice questions that the Fellowship seeks to address, outline the significance of this work, and explain how it will contribute to the themes and areas of professional practice outlined in the scheme guidance. You should also outline how this topic would benefit from being explored in the context of a Professional Fellowship and through your engagement with others outside of your organisation.

If you propose an alternative model of conducting the Fellowship, please elaborate on the rationale of this approach.

Please briefly summarise the main outcomes from the project and how these might be communicated at the end of the Fellowship. At the end of the Fellowship, you will need to submit a shareable version of your final output(s) to be published by RLUK and TNA.

Please use clear and unambiguous language in describing the project, as this may be read and assessed by a non-expert audience.

Please state if this will be a 12-month or 18-month Professional Fellowship and how you plan to safeguard your Fellowship time.

10. Please provide a simple timetable or timeline for your Fellowship.

Your timetable should include:

- your proposed start date
- the main activities you plan to carry out
- key milestones or outputs, and when you expect to complete them
- the timing of any visits to your host organisation and other Fellowship activities (such as workshops or sharing your findings)

11. How does your project relate to the areas of shared interest, as explained in Sections 5 and 9 of the Scheme Guidance? (200 words maximum)

Please explain how your project relates to one of the themes listed in *Section 9.*1. If your project falls outside the suggested topics, please explain why you think this is an important issue to explore for the library or archive community.

12. How will this Professional Fellowship project benefit your professional development? (200 words maximum)?

Please state how undertaking a Professional Fellowship will support your own professional development. Please state how it would support your career progression, acquisition of new skills, and benefits to you as an individual.

13. Are there any particular risks associated with undertaking this project? If so, how will you mitigate against these? (150 words maximum)

Risks might include the use of sensitive data, experimental research techniques, or the requirement of particular pieces of software not normally available. Risks can be also related to any ethical considerations related to your approach. If your project involves collaboration or partnerships, please explain how you will you ensure that these are equitable. Practical risks may include lack of engagement with your project (e.g. when conducting interviews, focus groups etc.) or time management. You should also outline whether there is a need for additional training or mentoring to help mitigate these challenges.

14. How do you intend to disseminate the outcomes of your Professional Fellowship? (200 words maximum)

It is important that Fellows share their experiences and the outcomes of their Professional Fellowship project. Please provide details of how you intend to share your experiences as a Fellow and the outcomes of your Fellowship. This might be through blogs, podcasts, publications, presentations or other forms of outreach activity. Fellowship applications will be judged on their ability to share and disseminate knowledge between colleagues, the partnership between The National Archives and RLUK, and the wider professional community.

15. How do you see your proposed Professional Fellowship project benefiting the library and archive sectors? (350 words maximum)

Please explain how your Professional Fellowship project would support the strengthening and development of relationships across the wider archive and library sector. What outcomes do you envision will be of wider benefit to libraries, archives, special collections and the communities we engage with.

Assessment criteria

Criterion	Evidence
Availability of a host institution with an interest in supporting a Professional Fellowship in this area	Questions 5-6. The Professional Fellowship Board will seek confirmation from relevant institutions on applicants' behalf.
Feasibility of project	Questions 8, 9, 10,12, 13
Benefit to applicant's professional development	Questions 7, 12
Strategic fit to areas of shared interest	Question 11
Benefit to the wider sector	Question 14, 15