

CONSULTATIVE GROUP ON SECURITY AND INTELLIGENCE RECORDS

Meeting held on Monday 25 October 2010
in Room 1.45, Admiralty Arch at 11.00am

Roger Smethurst (In the Chair)
Professor Christopher Andrew
Professor Peter Hennessy
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Home Office
Northern Ireland Office
The National Archives
Security Service
Government Communications Headquarters
Cabinet Office
Alan Glennie (Secretary)

Roger opened the meeting by welcoming members of the Consultative Group to Admiralty Arch. Apologies for absence had been received from the Ministry of Defence and the Secret Intelligence Service.

1. Current position on the release of records under the 30-year rule

The Chairman said he had hoped to say something positive about the implementation of the provisions in the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010 but this had not proved to be possible. Ministers were considering a number of ideas on how to give effect to the commitment in the Coalition Agreement to extend the scope of the Freedom of Information Act 200 to provide greater transparency. It was, however, unlikely there would be an announcement of the outcome in the near future. .

2. Update on releases of security and intelligence records and related issues

Members of the group reported the following –

- Files relating to the 1946 UKUSA agreement on sharing intelligence between the United States and the UK had been released in June and were available on The National Archives (TNA) website. Also released were 4,000 intercept reports from files on the Soviet Bloc. A document highlighting the main recurring themes in the intercepts had also been produced to accompany the releases and provided sources where available. The next tranche of intercept reports to be released would be from the Soviet Navy Baltic Fleet files.

- The Bletchley Park archive was to be digitised as part of an intelligence history programme run by Buckingham University.
- A number of Cabinet Committee records relating to security matters had been released earlier in the year or were being processed for release before the end of October. These included the papers of the Official Committee on Communism (1949-50), Ministerial Committee on Communism (1949-51), Official Committee on Subversion at Home (1969-70), Official Committee on Security (1964-65 and 1970), Ministerial Committee on Security (1963-64) and the Counter Subversion Committee (1964 and 1969-70).
- The National Intelligence Machinery booklet which was last issued in 2006 was in the process of being updated and was expected to be published on the Cabinet Office website towards the end of the year.
- PUSD files (1939-45) had been used extensively during the writing of the History of SIS. Work was now in hand to complete the review of the files that would take into account the published History. The files are not expected to be released before the spring of 2011.
- Following a seminar to be held on 26 October 2010 the Foreign and Commonwealth Office planned the early release of a 1980 paper on 'lessons learned' from the 1979 revolution in Iran. The Consultative Group would be given details of the web link to the 100-page document when it was publicly available at The National Archives (TNA).
- The publication of the History of The Secret Intelligence Service 1909-1949 was not expected to produce any significant change to SIS policy on the release of records and this was reflected in the statement by 'C' in the foreword to the history. Overall it was too early to say whether any practical changes would result from publication of the history. SIS had, however, addressed its own archival records and was now better placed to co-ordinate advice about the release of SIS material found on files held in other departments.
- A programme of re-review of closed Home Office records had been restarted and had resulted in a number of releases from the 1950s and 1960s.

3. Meeting with postgraduate students on 4 December 2009

The meeting on 4 December 2010 had been well-received and was found extremely beneficial by those students who had attended. For such events to be a success it needed to be a collective exercise with all concerned playing their part. Giving representatives of each college and university the opportunity to spell out the areas of future study gave departments a better understanding of what records were likely

to be of interest. Allowing records staff to give presentations helped to demystify the review process and helped students gain an understanding of the reasoning behind certain categories of information being withheld and not released. It also provided the opportunity for departments and the security and intelligence agencies to give details of any forthcoming releases that were likely to be of interest. The concept of allowing time for break-out groups had worked well and should be repeated. On timing an annual meeting with students was about right.

There had been three break-out groups on 4 December 2009, ie What could be done that would help develop a better understanding between students and departments; Students producing short items on newly-released records for publication on the Consultancy Group's website; and How easy was it for students to access the open records they required. Summaries of the outcomes of the break-out groups plus points for consideration for the Consultative Group were handed round at the meeting.

The common themes in taking forward the outcomes of the break-out groups, as far as the Consultative Group were concerned, were cost and resource implications, what was desirable as against what was practical and the role to be played by the Consultative Group. The main points for consideration by the Consultative Group included whether there were any measures identified by students that could be undertaken in the current financial climate (first and third break-out groups) and was the idea of students producing short items for publication on the Consultative Group's website worth pursuing.

On the suggestion that the Consultative Group should act more as a focal point for requests and champion for students it had to be recognised that there were limitations on what the Consultative Group could do and achieve. As to the Consultative Group becoming more well-known the meeting with students on 4 December 2009 had been opened up to five additional universities and colleges and it would be worth looking at the possibility of inviting further universities and college to the next meeting with students (see Item 4 below). In attempting to make the Consultative Group better well-known it would be again be necessary to do so without creating unreasonable expectations of what the Consultative Group could deliver. Although desirable it would not in the current financial climate be practical for the security and intelligence agencies and departments to give repeats of their presentations at academic institutions outside of London.

On a more detailed point it was accepted that whilst substantive releases were preferable to releases in dribs and drabs this had to be weighed against the possible delay in the release of records. On balance it was therefore preferable to release records in dribs and drabs where a more substantive release would result in a delay in the records being released. It was also accepted that it was not practical for there to be lists of records that had been destroyed.

The possibility of students producing short items for publication was worth pursuing. It was thought that sufficient students would be prepared to provide items to make it a worthwhile and cost-effective exercise. As suggested by the break-out group each item should consist of no more than 3x4 pages and cover, for example, the context; importance of the release; main conclusions; points relevant to the present day; sources used; why the sources were important; and gaps it would be useful to fill. Ideally items would be on topics on which books had not been released. Although such items would provide a means of drawing attention to newly-released records it would not be necessary to confine publication to items only on newly-released records. It might be, for example, that there were records that had previously been overlooked.

Knowledge would ultimately be pushed forward by encouraging students to share discoveries and identifying gaps in need of research. A question that would need to be addressed was the requirement for some form of statement or editorial control on what was published. There was also the possibility of research being pre-empted but the publication of items could provide a means of getting work cited early. Any copyright and related issues would be for the author to resolve. It had been suggested that the Consultative Group's website should be made an e-forum. This would not be possible to do in a manner that would be easily accessible but it might be possible to use separate system sponsored by the Consultative Group. This along with other issues such as how would the process be publicised and kept up to date; on what basis would topics be identified for publication; and what guidelines would need to be in place for those providing items for publication would be suitable subjects for discussion by two of the proposed break-out groups at the meeting with students on 10 December 2010 (see Item 4 below).

On how easy it was to students to access open records the break-out group had put forward a number of ideas including more scanned-in files; improvements to the catalogue of search engines; putting search guidance on-line; more proactive publication of releases; catalogues listing what had been or was being released; revision of guides by The National Archives (TNA); and the possibility of student internships. It was agreed that most of these points should be remitted to TNA to consider what could be achieved, if not already planned, at little or no cost. It was also considered helpful that at the planned meeting with students on 10 December 2010 it was proposed to have presentations on open-source deepweb research and searching for records held by TNA, on partner websites and in other archives (see Item 4 below).

The Consultative Group took note of how it was proposed to take forward the outcomes of the three break-out groups that took place on 4 December 2009.

4. Arrangements for the meeting with postgraduate students on 10 December 2010

A meeting with students on 10 December 2010 had already been accepted by Corpus Christi College, Cambridge and Queen Mary, University of London. Others to be invited, as for 2009, were Aberystwyth University, Brunel University, Kings College, London, University of Salford and University of Warwick. New invitees would be Imperial College, London, London School of Economics and Political Science, Queen's University Belfast and University of Buckingham.

A draft agenda for the meeting with students on 10 December 2020 was handed round at the meeting. The meeting would take place in Admiralty Arch, London and start at 2.00pm, with the possibility of lunch being provided from 1.30pm. The aim would be to finish between 4.30pm and 5.00pm. It was agreed that a representative of each college and university should be invited to give a short talk on the areas and direction of future study. It was also agreed that there should be a repeat of last year's presentations by the security and intelligence agencies and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Ministry of Defence and Cabinet Office. This would be followed by the Cabinet Office giving a presentation on open-source research and TNA giving a presentation on searching for records held by TNA, on partner websites and in other archives.

The aim would be to have, like in 2009, three break-out groups. The possible introduction of an e-forum had already been identified as a potential topic for discussion by one of the break-out groups (see Item 3b above). The issues associated with taking forward the possibility of students producing short items for publication had also been identified as a potential subject for discussion by another of the break-out groups (see Item 3b above). It would, however, be appropriate to invite students to put forward other topics they would like to see discussed by the break-out groups.

The Cabinet Office would take account of the points made in discussion in taking forward the arrangements for the meeting with students on 10 December 2010.

5. Academic representation on the Consultative Group

At the meeting of the Consultative Group on 11 September 2009 it was agreed that the number of representatives from the academic community on the Consultative Group should remain at its present level of two for the time being. The two current representatives from the academic community were Professor Andrew and Professor Hennessy and had been on the Group since its first formal meeting in July 2004. Professor Hennessy would be standing down as a member of the Consultative Group and therefore there was a need to identify a successor to Professor Hennessy who could be invited to be one of the representatives from the academic community on the Consultative Group. One possible successor could be Professor Richard Aldrich, a Professor of International Security at the University of

Warwick. Professor Aldrich's main research interests were in the area of intelligence and security communities. He also advised a number of departments on issues of records management, declassification and corporate memory.

The Consultative Group agreed that the Cabinet Office should invite Professor Aldrich, as a successor Professor Hennessy, to be one of the two representatives from the academic community on the Consultative Group.

[Post-meeting note: Professor Aldrich has accepted the invitation to become one of the two representatives from the academic community on the Consultative Group.]

6. Any other business

A question was raised about the Official History Programme and government spending cuts. The chair said that the programme would continue to run although government spending constraints meant that suggested improvements would take longer to implement.

7. Date of next meeting

Roger said that the aim would be to hold the next meeting of the Consultative Group between April and September 2011.

. December 2010