

Membership of the LHSA Committee

I was asked at the last meeting to consider how we might widen the committee's membership and this short note is intended to stimulate discussion. It seems to me there are two possible reasons for widening membership: first, do we feel there are interest groups or stakeholders that are not represented, and second, are there skills or expertise that the current committee lacks, or needs more of?

On the first point, I believe that most groups are already represented, but there is limited participation at the moment from NHS Lothian divisions. As the archive is very much one for the whole region, could we encourage the other divisions to take a greater interest and would membership of the committee be a way of achieving this? Academic and medical users of the service are represented, but not the family history or individual patient user. We might therefore seek to extend membership in those directions?

Turning to skills and expertise, I think it is worth asking what we want the committee to do? I see the role of the committee as twofold. First, it is a source of advice, on medical, historical, archival and management issues for the archivist and for Edinburgh University Library who manage the service. Second, and perhaps more important, it provides a reassurance to the NHS Lothian Board, who are the owners of the service, that the archives are being run effectively and efficiently, and within a proper professional framework.

Are there aspects of the committee's role which should be strengthened? Should it, for example, provide additional reassurance to the Board about why they need an archive service and what it does for them – which would mean strengthening the advocacy role? Or should it provide more assurance that the budget is being properly allocated between different priorities such as cataloguing, conservation and public access services – which would mean strengthening the professional advisory role? Or should it be looking at new ways of developing the archive, such as advising NHS Lothian bodies on managing their current records, or on how to ensure that the new generation of electronic records will remain accessible to future generations the way the paper ones are? Depending on the view we take of this, we could seek to strengthen the committee's capacities in a number of ways.

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