

Subject: Request for information on reopening of National Records of Scotland buildings

FOI reference: 202000108642

Date received: 6 November 2020

Date responded: 7 December 2020

Information requested:

Full details of the plans to reopen National Records of Scotland, including the ScotlandsPeople Centre, to the public, including a projected timescale, planned opening hours, pre-booking restrictions and procedures, availability of records for each pre-booked visit and any other relevant arrangements which will be put in place. It is understood that the timescale will be dependant on Government Covid-19 regulations, but it is expected that this is to be made clear in the plans.

NRS Response:

We enclose a copy of some of the information requested below. While our aim is to provide information whenever possible, in this instance National Records of Scotland does not have some of the information requested. The reasons why we do not have the information are explained in the Annex to this letter.

Information

Currently NRS buildings are subject to restrictions on staff access due to Covid-19. In line with current guidance, non-essential Scottish Government staff continue to work from home. Access to NRS buildings, at this time, is for a limited number of essential staff to undertake tasks which cannot be completed remotely. Limiting the numbers of staff who can access the building to deliver critical services means that we can adhere to the physical distancing and safe work practices required in their buildings to meet the current COVID-19 restrictions and protect the health of their staff and customers.

Full building re-opening including public access to NRS buildings is not expected to take place until Phase 4 of the SG Route map. However within the context of the publication of Covid-19 Scotland's Strategic Framework and the application of a level based approach across Scotland, we consider that we will be in a position to facilitate wider onsite access on a limited basis in early 2021. As part of this work we have evaluated the current Historic Search Room space and have concluded that this cannot be safely re-instated in compliance with current Covid guidelines. We are in the process of identifying and repurposing alternatives to facilitate limited public access for research and other purposes. We will continue to prepare public access

space in buildings including for ScotlandsPeople Centre and to ensure that all the relevant protocols are in place to protect the health of staff and customers. There is no further detail regarding pre-booking restrictions and procedures or availability of records for each pre-booked visit available at this time and we will keep our website updated with the latest information.

We recognise the challenges that the closure of our onsite services have brought and have carried out a range of activities to support users, including: supporting access to post-graduate students through access to online digital records, providing similar online access to a research group in Glasgow studying the Spanish Flu Pandemic in relation to Covid and providing images on loan that were not available online to academics in Edinburgh and groups in Glasgow and Dublin. In addition we have provided credits for the ScotlandsPeople website to students of the University of Strathclyde MSc in Genealogical, Palaeographic and Heraldic Studies for the academic year 2020-21. These credits facilitate free online access to records to support studies and research. To date this equates to 5400 free credits for the April 2020 cohort and 24,300 free credits for the October 2020 cohort.

We will provide updates of our progress to open our public access space, which we anticipate will be achieved in early 2021. In the meantime we can continue with specific discussions to explore other ways in which research efforts can be supported within the current constraints and challenges of the pandemic.

Annex - Reasons for not providing information

National Records of Scotland (NRS) does not have the information

This is a formal notice under section 17(1) of FOISA that National Records of Scotland does not have the information requested.

NRS does not have the information requested because this information is not yet available as arrangements have not been finalised.

This is in specific reference to the request for information on planned opening hours, pre-booking restrictions and procedures, availability of records for each pre-booked visit and any other relevant arrangements which will be put in place.