



# Archives Hub User Survey Report 2013

Summary of the Archives Hub Online Survey of Researchers  
for 2013

# Archives Hub User Survey Report

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## Introduction

The survey was run during November/December 2012. A pop-up invitation was used from the homepage of the Archives Hub.

We run a similar survey every year during November/December. This year is the first time we created a survey specifically for first time users of the service, as well as those who have used it before. It enabled us to ask more pertinent questions to those who had not used the site yet.

A number of questions were asked in both surveys, but some were specific to one survey or the other, as appropriate. Note that a significant number of the respondents for the standard survey did actually indicate that they had not used the service before.

In the following graphs the following references are used:

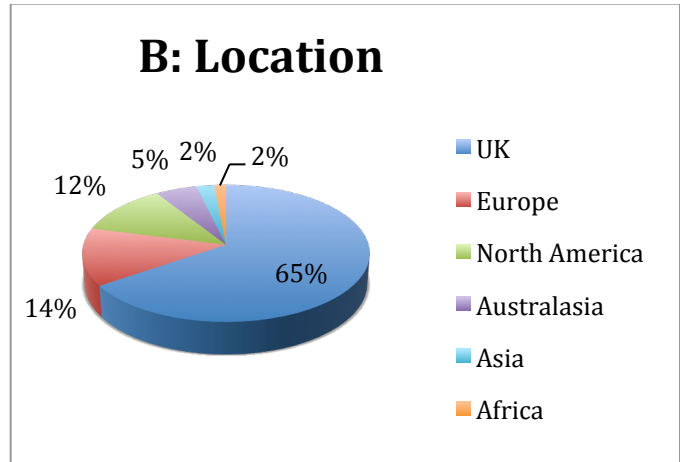
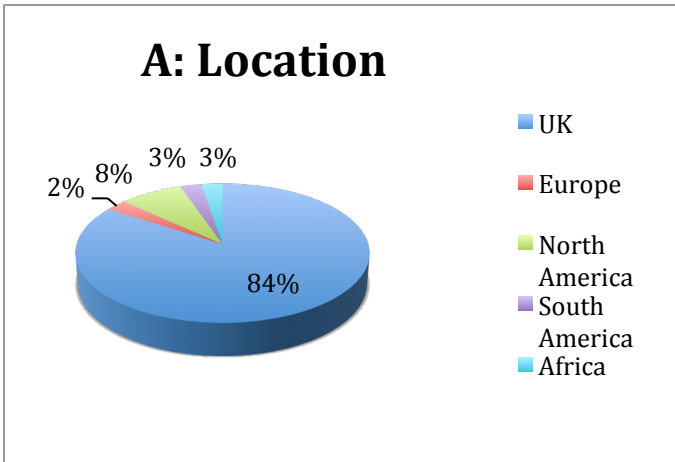
**A** = Standard survey - survey for those who have used the Archives Hub before

**B** = First-time users survey - survey for those new to the Archives Hub

Survey A: **38** responses

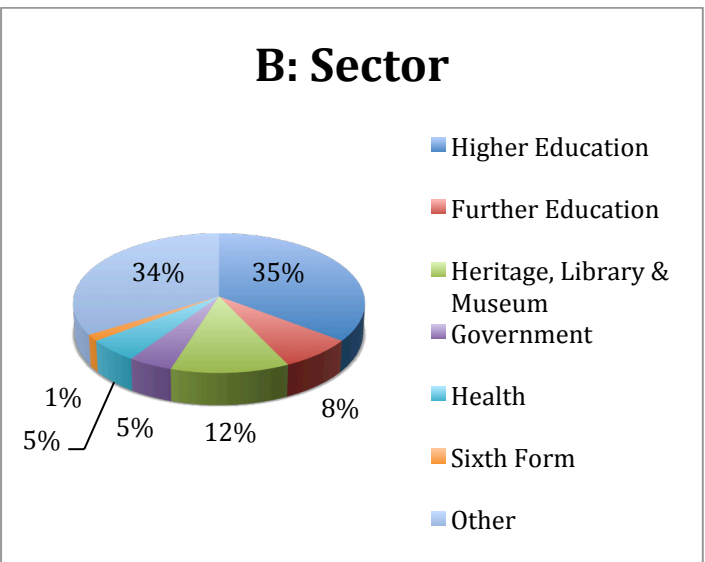
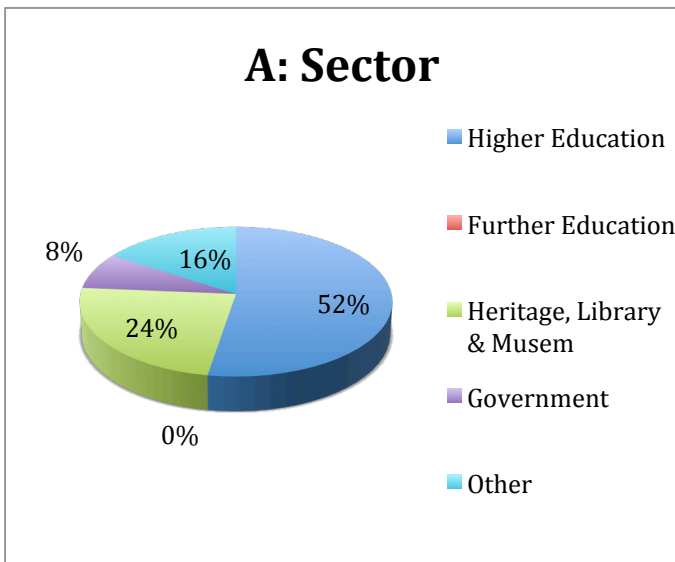
Survey B: **137** responses

### Geographical Location



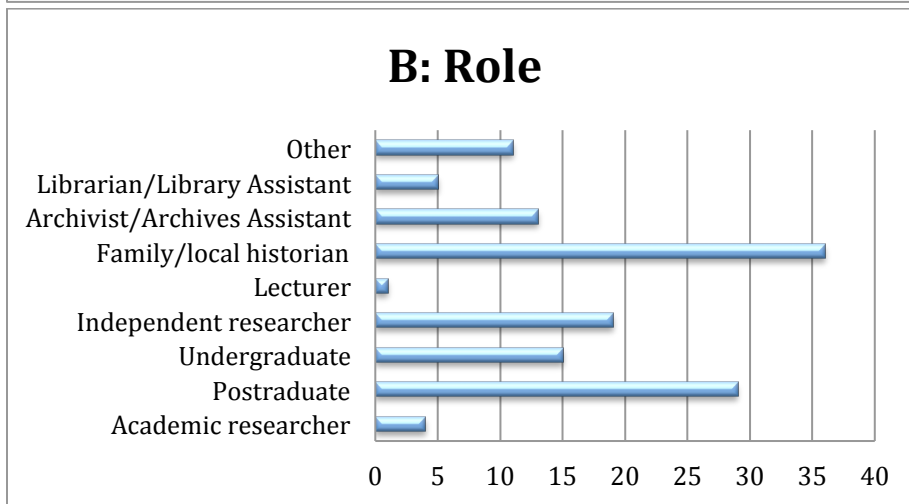
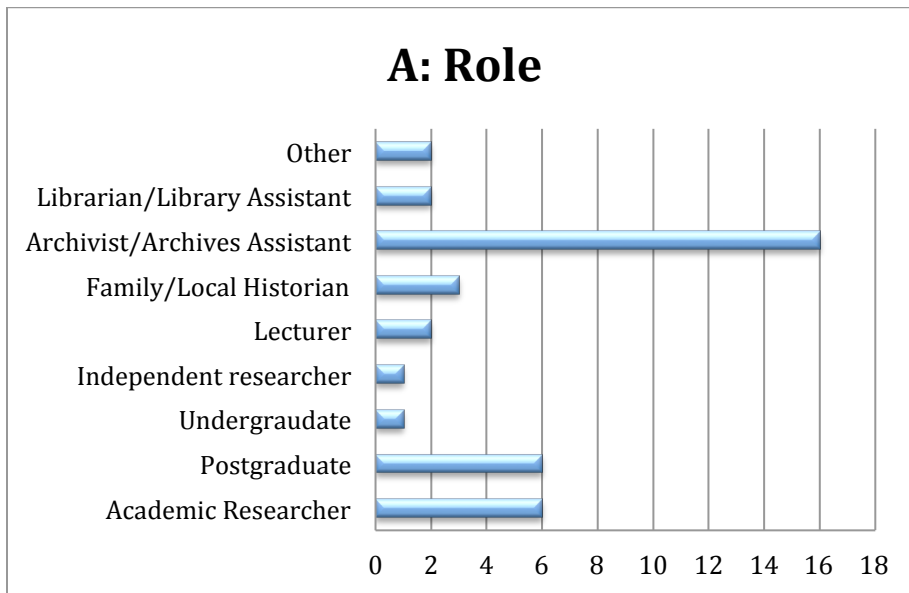
The vast majority of users are from the UK, but more first time users are from elsewhere, particularly Europe and North America.

### Sector



The answers to (B), the first-time users survey, show a more diverse set of users, including a few from college and the health sector. The standard survey shows a higher percentage of users from higher education, maybe indicating that repeated use is more likely to be for academic research (although see 'Role' below).

## Role



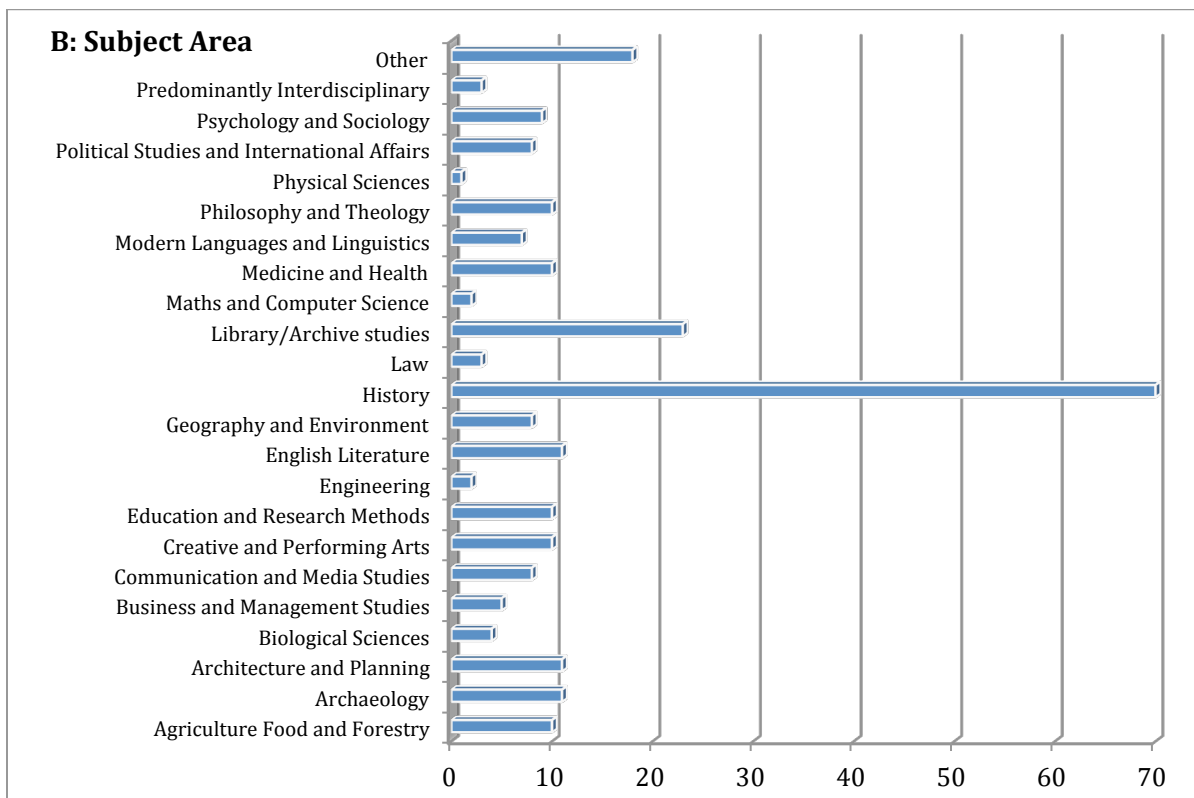
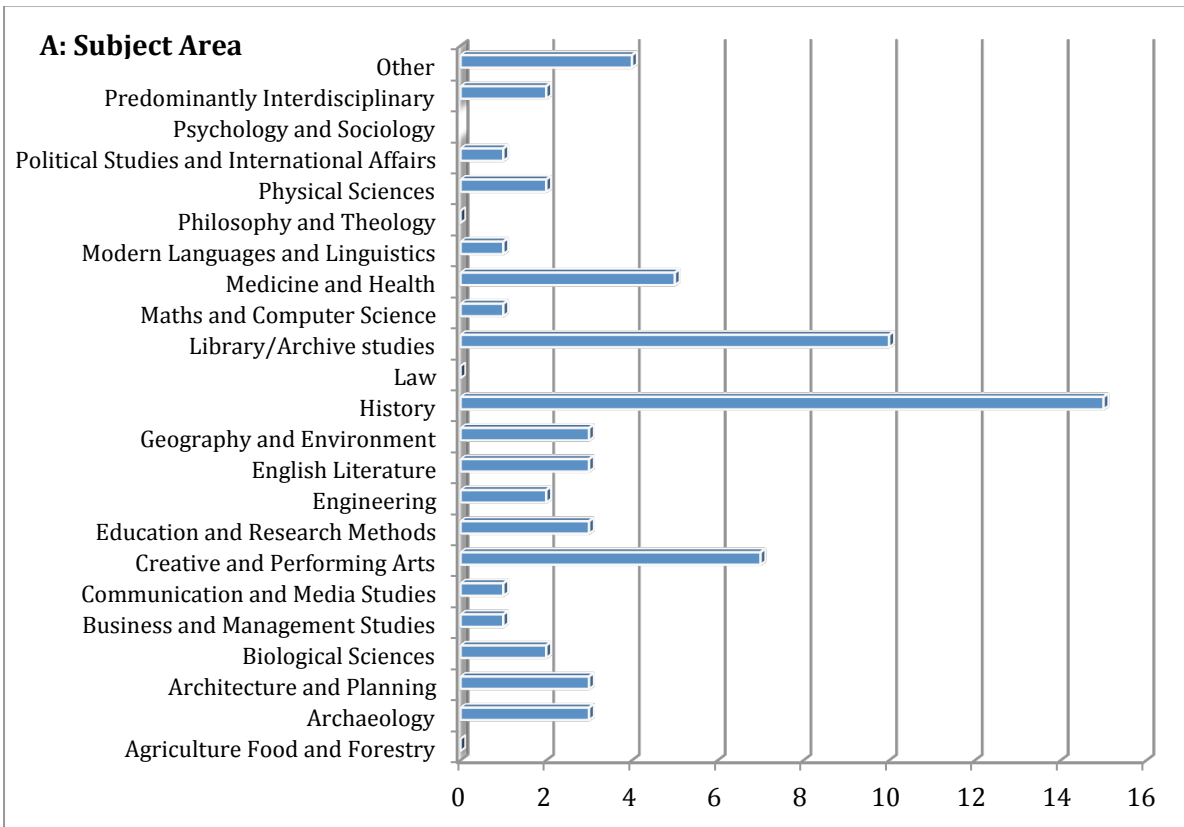
The surveys asked participants to indicate the role in which they were using the Archives Hub.

This clearly shows that many of the respondents to survey (A) are working as archivists, and using the Hub either for their own administrative work, or to assist researchers in finding archives. It may be that archivists are more likely to complete the survey than academic users, but this still demonstrates how important the Hub is as a tool to the profession.

Academic researchers, including postgraduates, are well-represented in both surveys, but postgraduates are particularly well-represented as first-time users, seeking primary sources to help them with their PhD research.

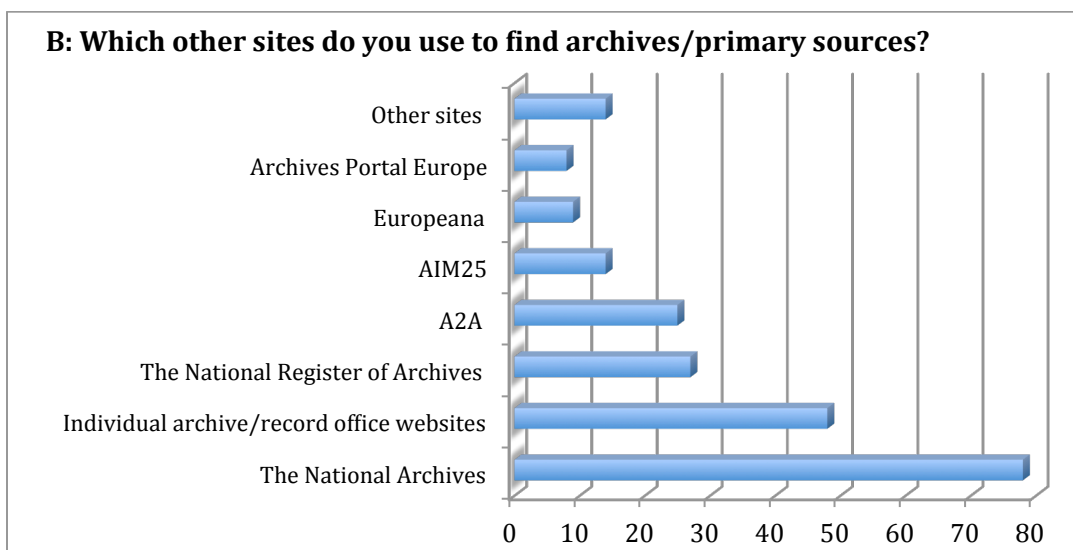
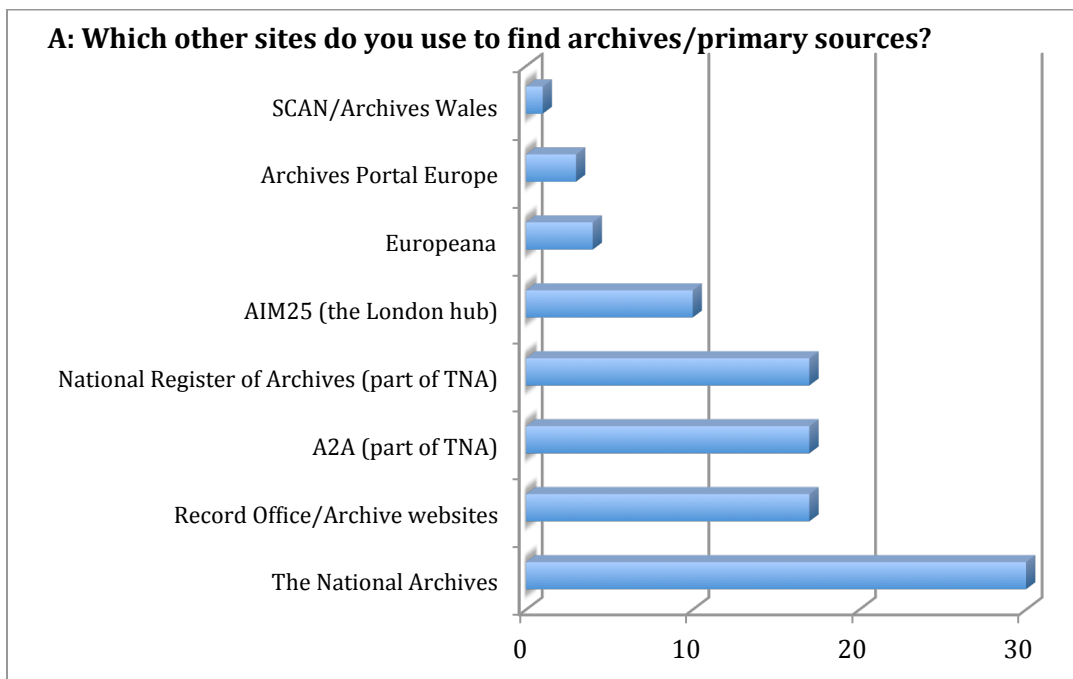
According to this survey, family historians tend to be first-time users of the service, rather than regular users. It seems likely that many of them come to the service through a general search via a search engine.

## Subject Area



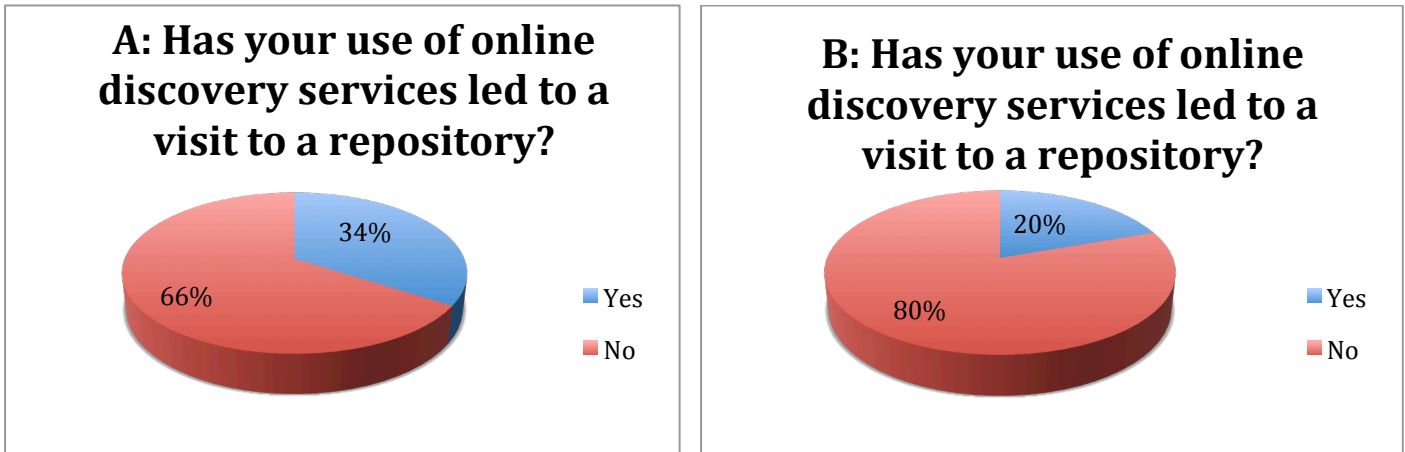
For both surveys, by far the biggest subject area of work or study is history, followed by library and/or archive studies (which may indicate archivists using the service). However, there is a spread of use, showing that the Archives Hub has a multi-disciplinary appeal. Particularly significant areas are the creative/performing arts, medicine, literature, geography/environment, education, architecture/planning and archaeology.

## Websites used to find archives



A large number of respondents use The National Archives website, and so clearly have prior knowledge of archives sites. For the first time in our annual survey, some respondents have referred to the Archives Portal Europe and Europeana, which may be an indication that these sites are starting to become more important for researchers.

### Visiting archive repositories

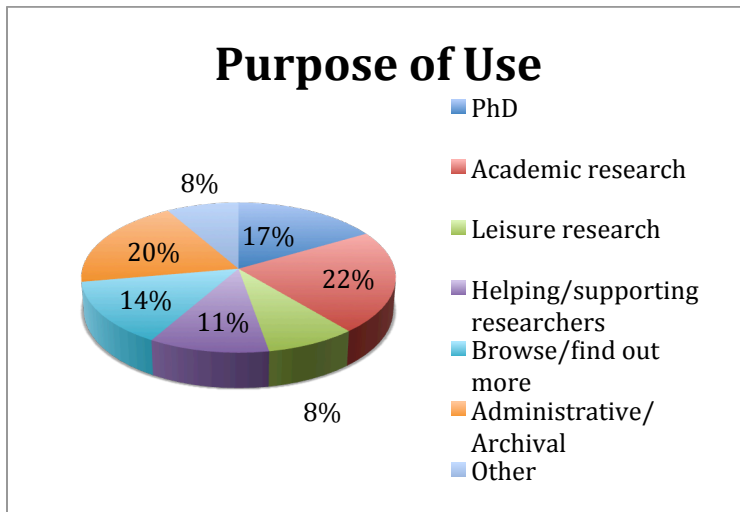


More returning users have visited a record office as a result of discovering archives online, at 34% as opposed to 20% of first time users, who may only just have started searching for and using archives. It would be interesting to discover how many of those who did not visit a record office found what they wanted online, or simply decided not to use archives because of the travelling involved in viewing them.

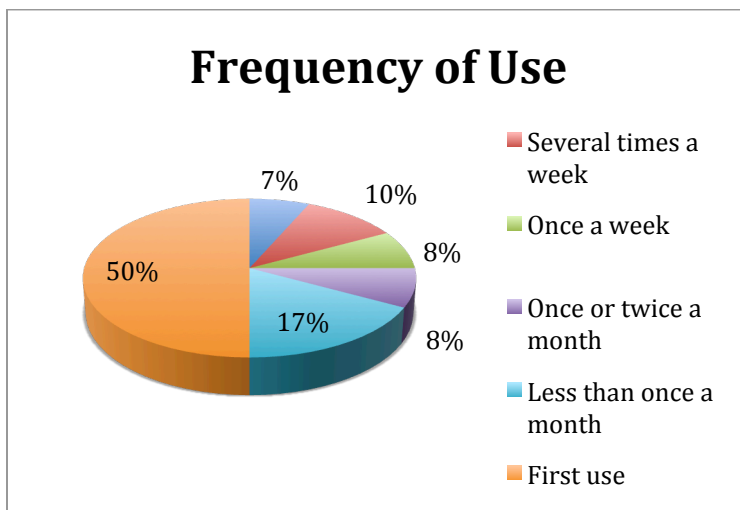
## More about Returning Users

For returning users, who have experience of using the Archives Hub, we asked a number of questions designed to find out more about purpose and pattern of use and how they rate the service.

NB: note that we found many people filling in this questionnaire are, in fact, first time users.



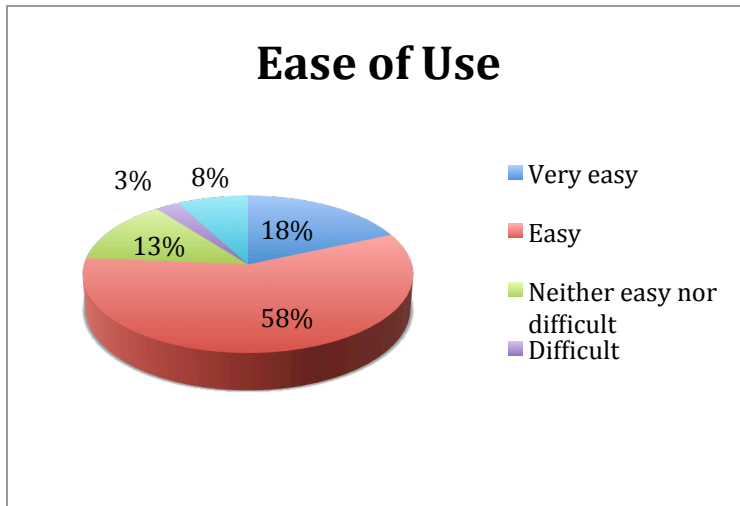
There is a spread of users answering our survey, with fairly evenly distributed numbers of PhD students and academic researchers. As with previous surveys, a number of people (usually archivists) are using the Hub on behalf of researchers, and others are using it for 'administrative' purposes (usually those who contribute their data to the Hub). We asked whether people were simply interested in browsing, not necessarily with a definite purpose to their search, and the survey indicates that a significant number may fit into this category.



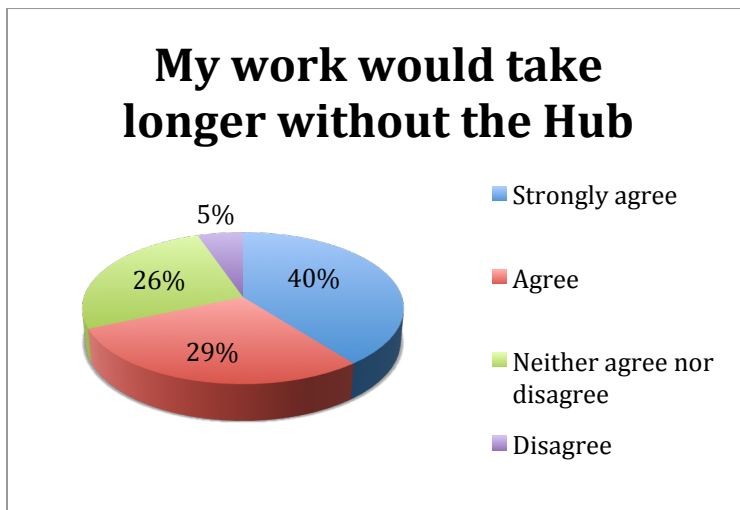
One thing to note about frequency of use is the number of respondents who actually say that this is their first time using the Hub. This is despite our prompting first time users to fill in the survey designed for



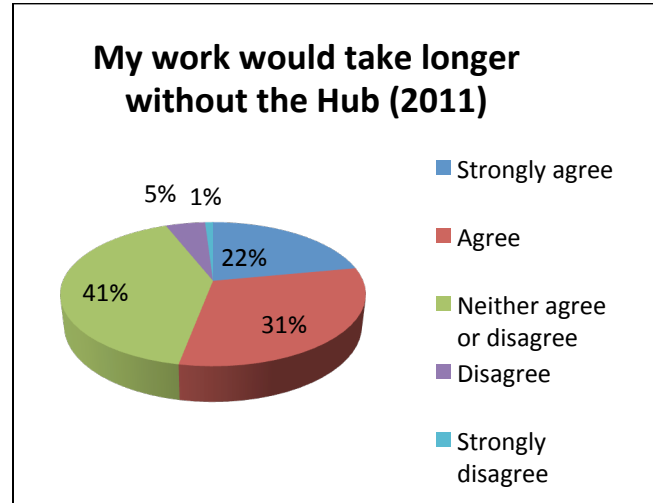
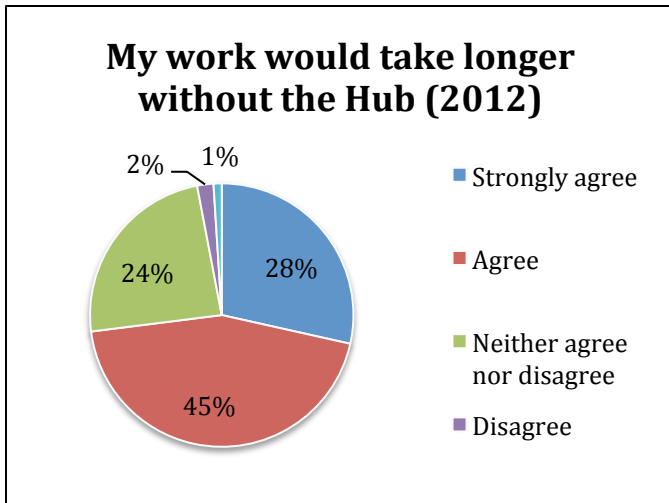
them. It highlights how many users are likely to be first time users of the service, and therefore how important it is to think about ease of use and how to convey the Archives Hub to non-experts. Over 25% of respondents use the Hub more than once a month, which indicates that for some it is a valued and integral service for their work or research.



76% found the Hub easy or very easy. This is an improvement on figures for 2012 and 2011 (68% and 46% respectively). Just 3% found it difficult to use (again, an improvement on 6% and 11% from previous surveys).



We see saving time as a key indicator of value. It is useful to compare this graph to the last 2 years:



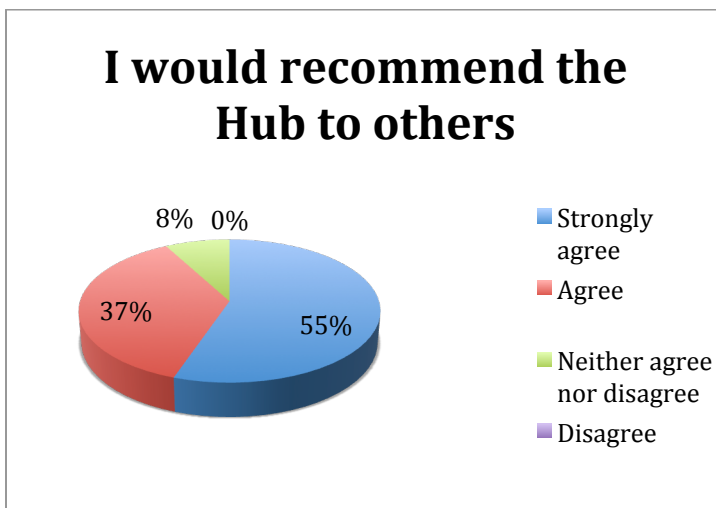
Strongly agree or agree that the Hub saves researchers' time:

2013: 69%

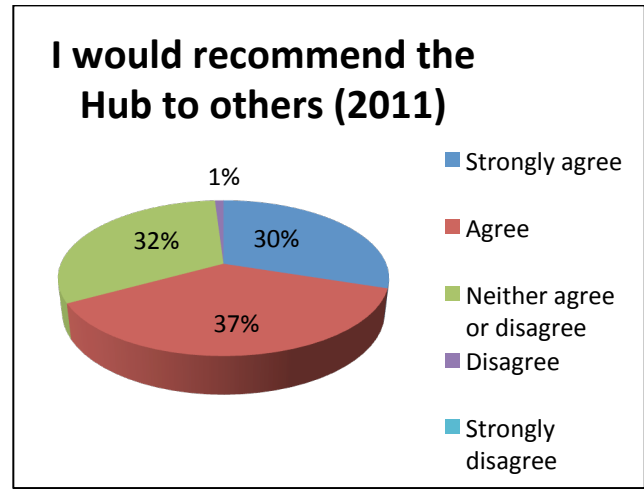
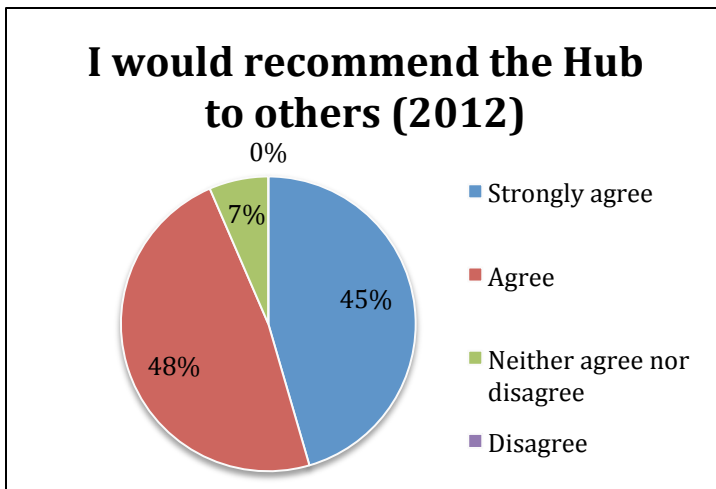
2012: 73%

2011: 53%

As well as saving time, recommendation can be seen as a key indicator of value:



This can be compared to the last two years:



Strongly agree or agree that the Archives Hub is worth recommending to others:

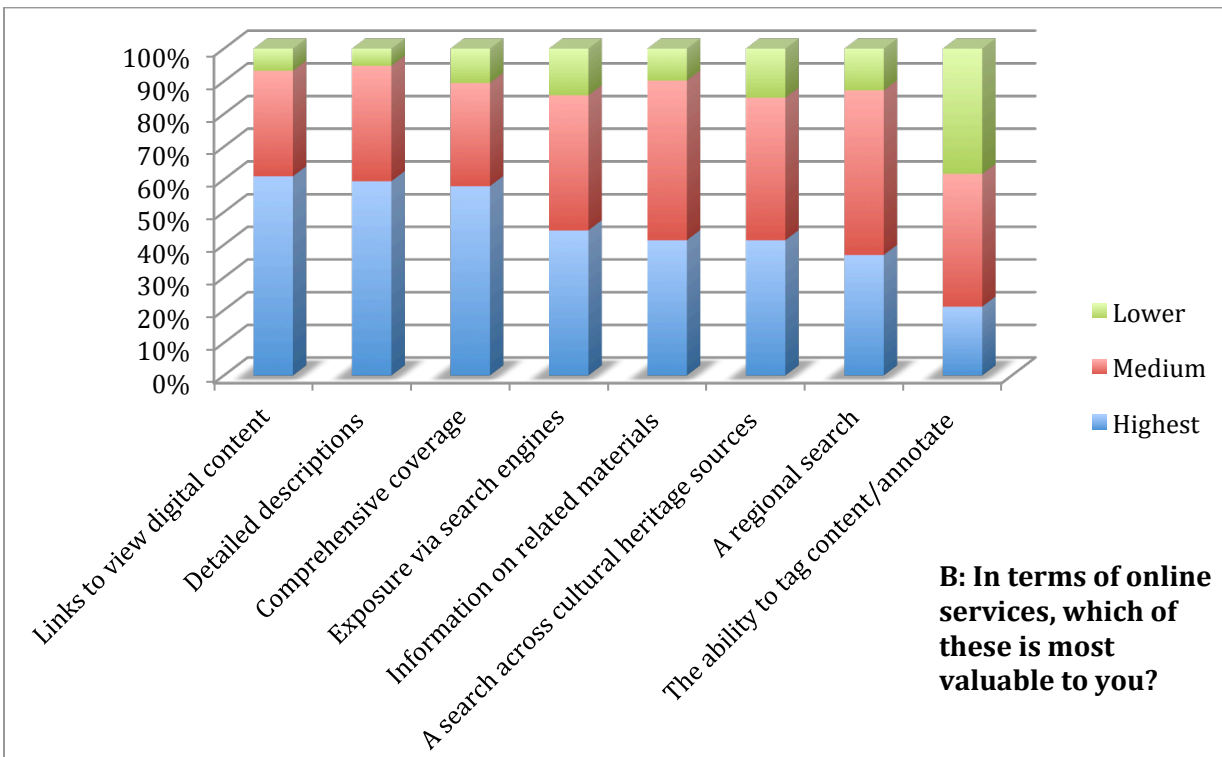
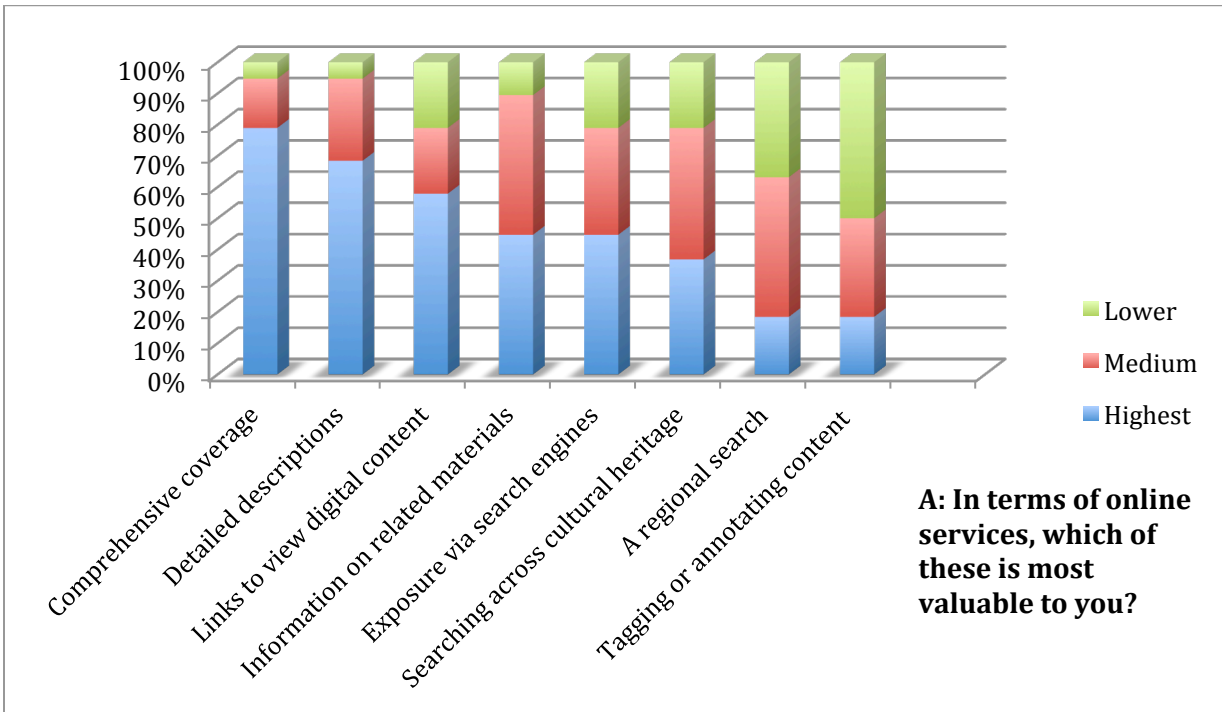
2013: 93%

2012: 93%

2011: 67%

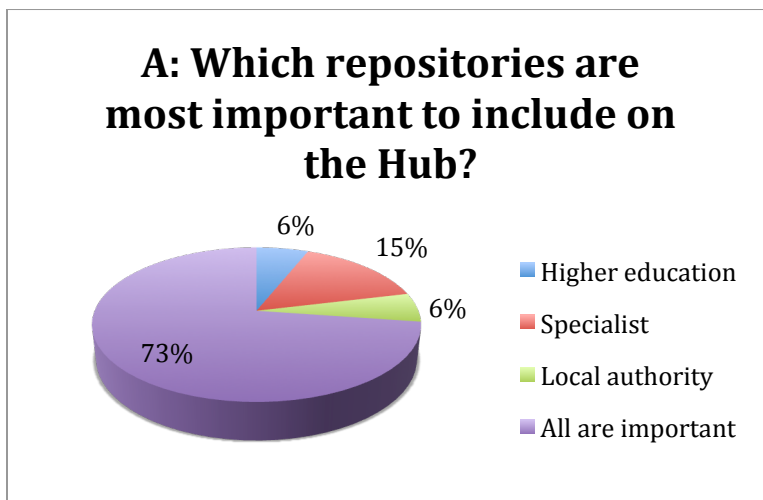
These figures are a strong indication of the value of the service, and may indicate that even if a researcher does not feel the Hub saves them time – or maybe they cannot find archives relevant for their research – they still feel the service is very useful in a general sense. It is worth recommending.

## Features of the Archives Hub



For the first time in a user survey, the value of digital content is equal to the value of comprehensive and detailed descriptions, at least for first time users. This may show shifting patterns of use and expectations, as more researchers are interested in instant access to content. It may also indicate that first time users are more interested in the convenience of quick access. However, comprehensive and detailed descriptions are clearly still a major priority, and they remain the top priorities for returning users. All of the features we asked respondents about are clearly important to some degree, although, as with previous surveys, tagging and annotating content are less of a priority.

## Coverage of the Archives Hub



For the first time, we asked about the archive repositories represented on the Hub. We were not surprised to find that most people believe comprehensive broad coverage from all types of archive repositories is important.

## What is Most Valuable about the Archives Hub?

- Broad coverage/searching across archives held in different repositories
- Online access for some collections that otherwise would not be available
- Open and free
- Authoritative
- Objective
- Detailed
- Positive and responsive team
- Cataloguing template
- Coverage of academic collections
- Instant answers to specific questions
- Records from a range of repositories on any one topic

This was a free text question, asked of returning users, and we have given an indication of the answers by grouping them into the most popular responses. Many responses overlap, but the clear indication is that what is most valuable is the ability to search across archives held in different places.

## How could the Archives Hub be Improved?

- Comprehensive detail (to help prioritise visits)
- More repositories represented, especially smaller ones with minimal resources
- Navigation of multi-level descriptions; a 'search in description' function
- A more simple 'Google-like' search interface
- Contributors to be alerted when catalogues are online; easier to edit those already on the Hub
- Reported problems to be fixed quickly
- The Archives Hub to provide an image store (for embedded images in descriptions)
- Integrate the data from A2A
- Ability to narrow/expand searches
- More flexibility to add/delete entries in the middle of catalogue records (for contributors)
- Google exposure
- Smoother operation when opening up tables of contents
- Easier to search collections held in individual repositories
- Information on individual archive locations and access
- More relationships between similar items
- Better navigation between pages (next/previous)

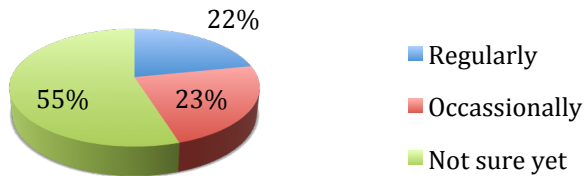
The above list shows a very broad range of responses from returning users. We would argue that some suggestions are already quite well implemented. For example, we have Google exposure, and this is building up use of the Hub very significantly (but it takes time for archives to be represented in results, and it is certainly not an exact science). We are continually representing new repositories, and we work to improve navigation, such as through faceted searching. However, there are suggestions for improvements here that we are working on, or wish to respond to in the future, such as a 'search in description' and the ability to easily edit descriptions.

The fact that there are no areas for improvement that are strongly represented by respondents seems to be a positive sign that there is nothing creating a significant barrier to use.

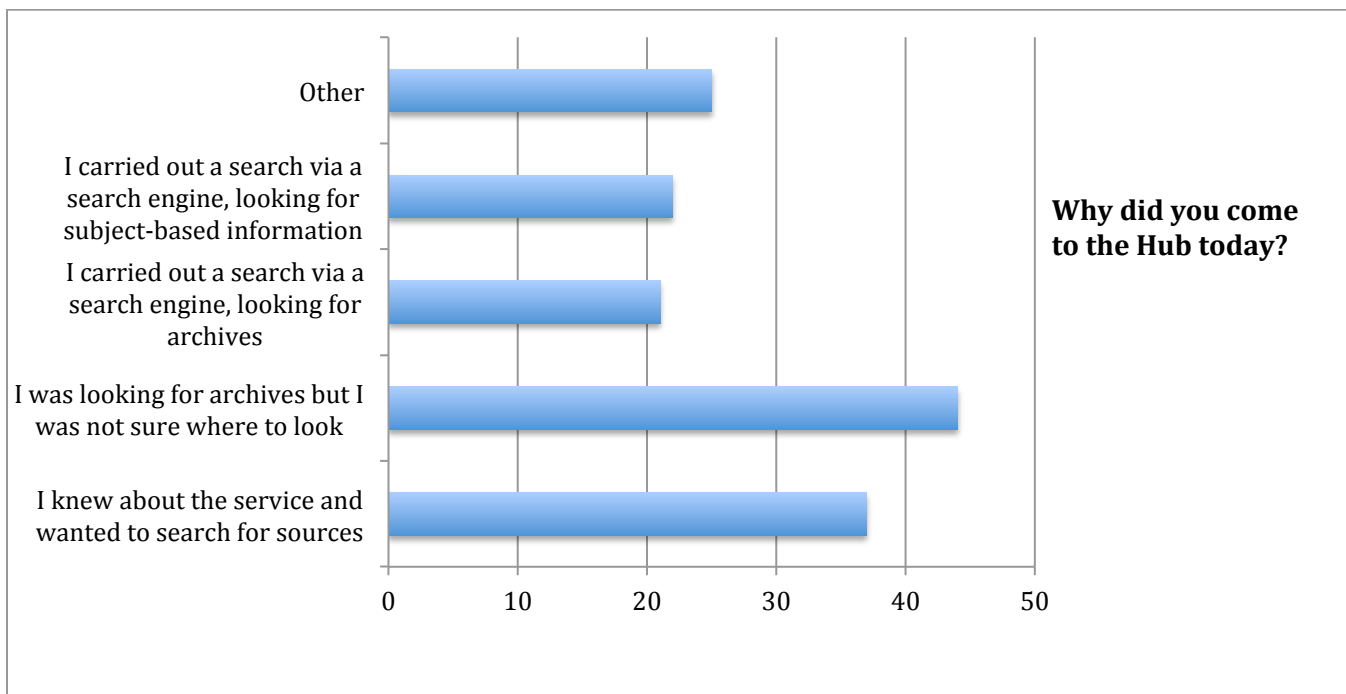
## More About First Time Users

We asked a number of questions specifically to first time users of the service, to understand more about their context and whether the service might be of use to them in the future.

## Are you likely to use the Hub in the future?

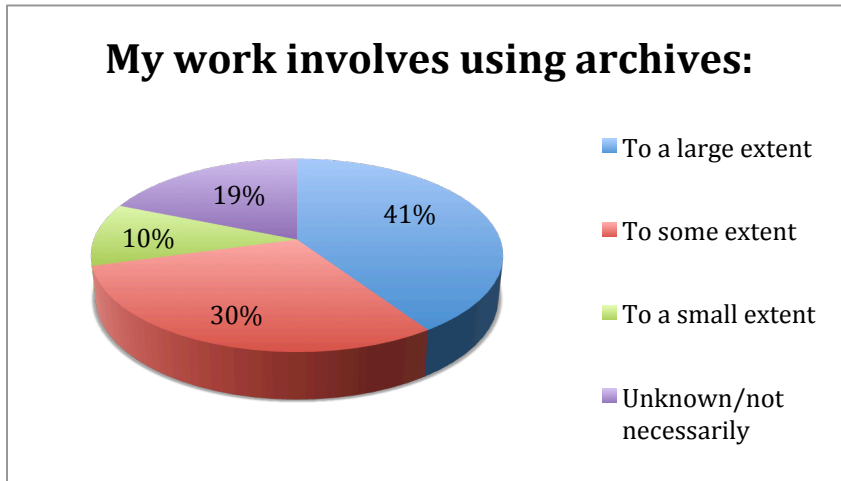


Whilst the majority of first time users are not yet sure of the utility of the service, a sizeable number do feel that they will return to the service again, indicating that their initial response is positive: the service may provide what they need. The fact that nearly a quarter may return 'occasionally' supports the proposition that the Archives Hub is not necessarily a service that researchers use frequently, as once archival sources are identified, the service may have fulfilled its function, at least for a discreet chunk of research.

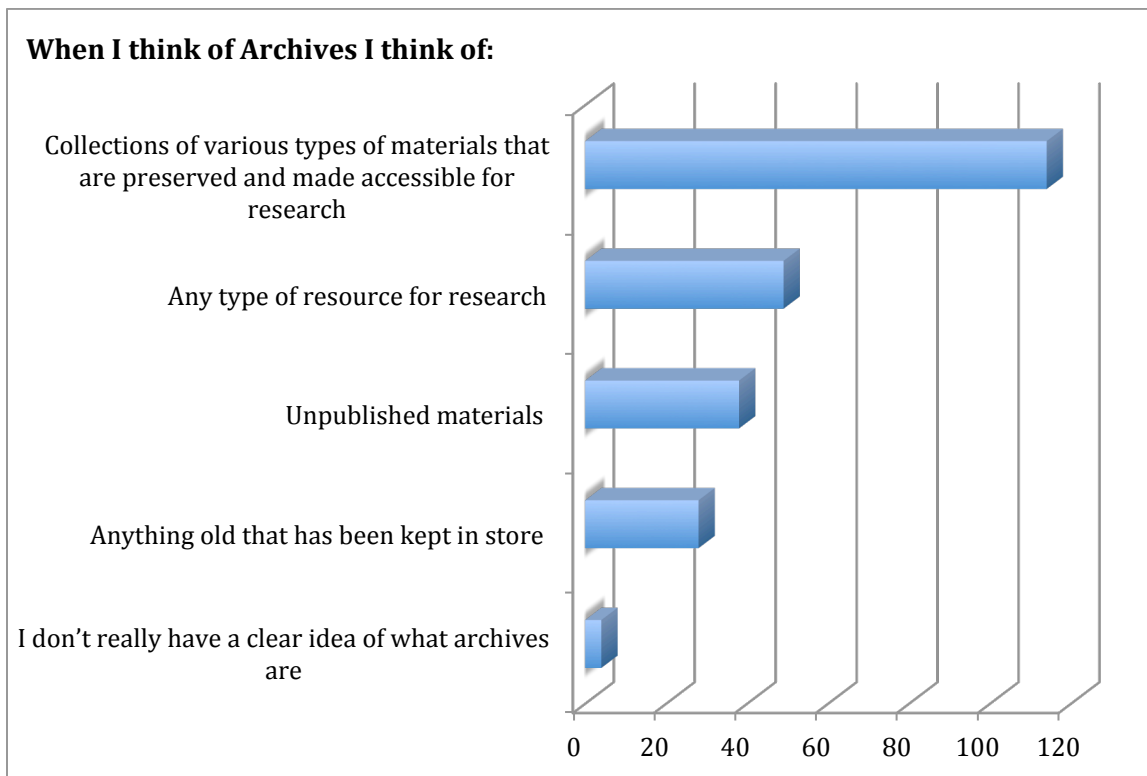


We wanted to find out how many first time users are already aware of the Archives Hub. This survey indicates that a sizeable minority do know about the service, but many people find it through a general search, whether they are looking specifically for archives or more general resources. Most of those who answered 'other' here found the service via another source, such as a library website or Twitter, or a personal recommendation.

It is interesting that a number of first time users do already know about the service, but these results do show that it is not a good idea to make assumptions about users – they may be aware of the service and have an understanding of archives, or they may have no prior knowledge or expectations at all.

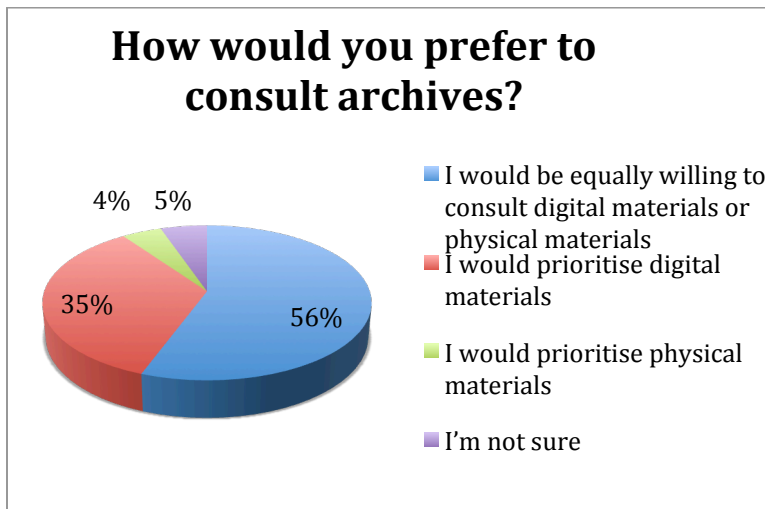


It is interesting to compare the previous graph to this graph, showing whether respondents use archives in their work or study. Clearly most do use archives, to a greater or lesser extent. This means that it is likely that many people coming to the Archives Hub may not be familiar with it, but do already use archives within their research. These are people that we should seek to secure as returning visitors.





It is clear from previous user studies that people are not always clear what 'archives' means in the context of a service like the Archives Hub. This is something worth bearing in mind when thinking about how to design the interface and what sort of help to provide. Whilst this survey indicates that the majority of people are clear about the meaning of archives, some people think of archives as any type of resource. This is in line with previous research we have carried out, showing that some people expect to find articles and other published sources on the Archives Hub; they simply think in terms of general resources related to research rather than distinguishing between library and archive materials.



It will be useful to understand more about expectations with the rise of digital materials. Our survey suggests that people are generally willing to work with physical materials, where they have to travel to visit the archives, but a sizeable proportion, over one third, do prioritise digital materials.

## Conclusions

The 2013 survey has not thrown up any unexpected results. The need for comprehensive coverage clearly continues to be a priority, and researchers like to have detailed descriptions. In the future it may be worth asking about the importance of at least getting collections represented online, even if descriptions are very summary rather than detailed.

Whilst it may be possible to present a number of case studies to draw a picture of some broad types of users of the Archives Hub, it is clear that there is no one typical user: people come from different perspectives, have different expectations and different knowledge bases. It therefore seems important to continue to strive to appeal to a broad audience and provide a flexible service that can respond to all users, from first time users, who have little knowledge of archives, to experienced researchers, who would like to search in a more sophisticated way.

Clearly it is important to continue to increase the number of digital materials represented on the Archives Hub, and encourage contributors to provide images and links to content.

The survey also supports the proposition that the Archives Hub team have a valuable educational and advisory role, helping people to understand more about archives, and about how they can be of significant value to research. Contributors clearly value the tools provided to them and use the Hub regularly to help them with their work in maintaining and developing archives.

Overall, the results suggest that the service is moving in the right direction, and that it is valued by researchers as a means to search across the wealth of archives held in the UK, to locate and consult valuable primary resource material.