_Mimas

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Archives Hub User Survey Report 2014

Summary of the Archives Hub Online Survey of Researchers for 2014

Archives Hub User Survey Report

Introduction

The survey was run during January/February 2014. The report is very similar to the report for 2013, illustrating the close correlation to the results for last year.

This year is the second time we created a survey for first time users of the service, as well as those who have used it before. It enables us to ask more pertinent questions to those who have no experience of using the Hub.

A number of questions were asked in both surveys, but some were specific to one survey or the other, as appropriate.

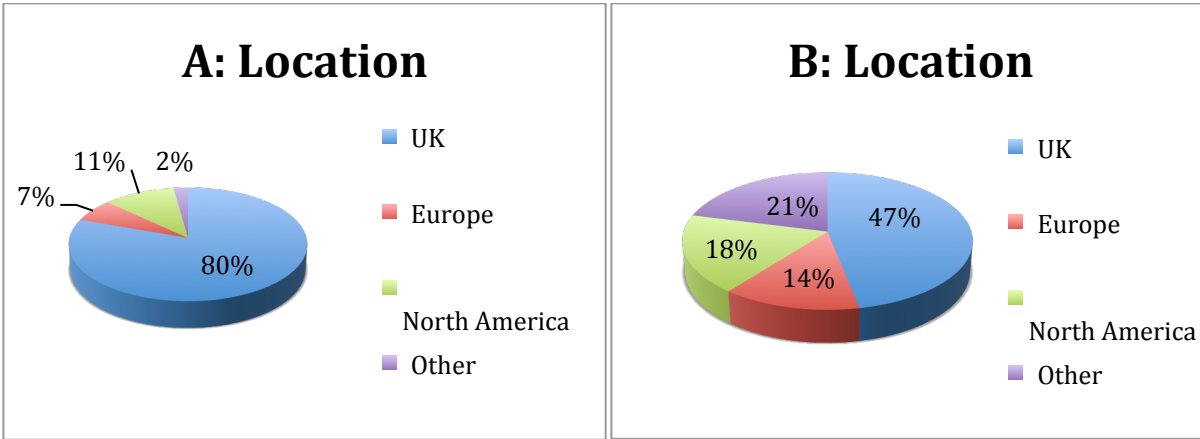In the following graphs the following references are used:

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: **46** responses
Survey B: **81** responses

Geographical Location

A: Location

11%   2%
7%

80%

- UK
- Europe
- North America
- Other

B: Location

21%   47%
18%   14%

- UK
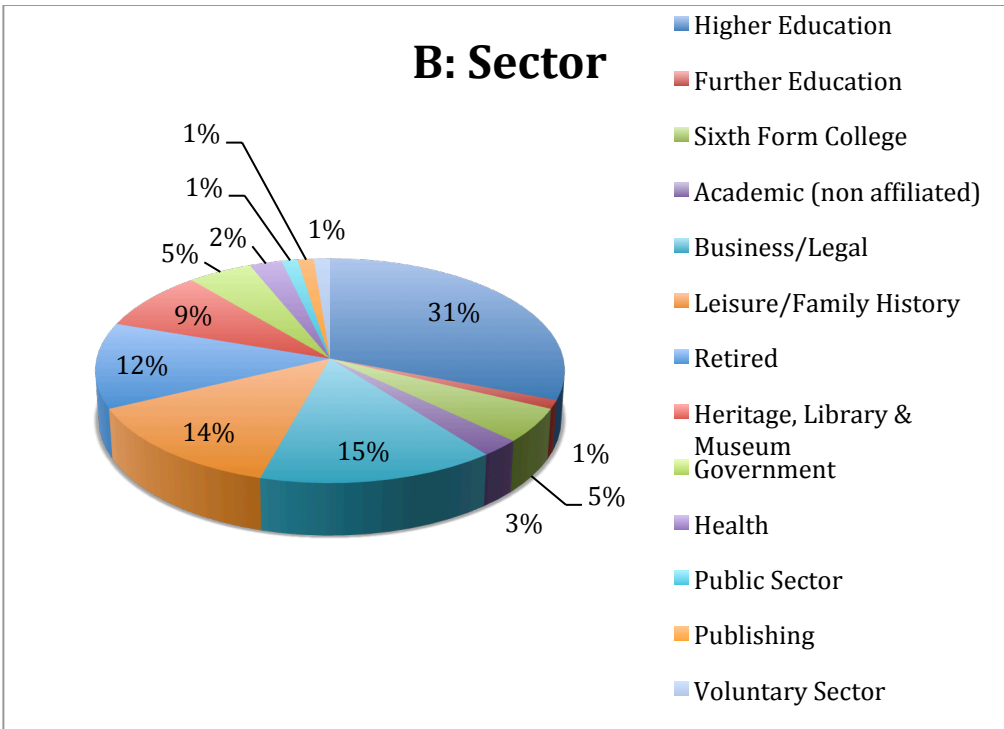- Europe
- North America
- Other

The vast majority of users are from the UK, but more first time users are from elsewhere, particularly Europe and North America. This is consistent with previous surveys.
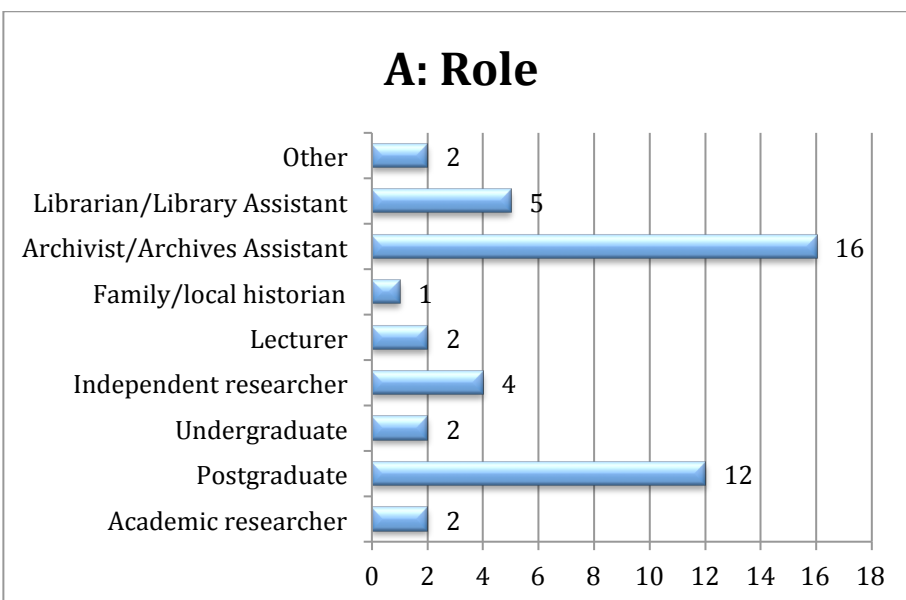
Sector

A: Sector

4%   9%
20%

63%

4%

- Higher Education
- Further Education
- Heritage, Library & Museum
- Government
- Other

B: Sector

Legend:
- Higher Education
- Further Education
- Sixth Form College
- Academic (non affiliated)
- Business/Legal
- Leisure/Family History
- Retired
- Heritage, Library & Museum
- Government
- Health
- Public Sector
- Publishing
- Voluntary Sector

Pie chart values: 1%, 1%, 1%, 2%, 5%, 9%, 12%, 14%, 15%, 31%, 1%, 5%, 3%

For regular users, 67% are from HE/FE, and for first time users 32%. This may indicate that repeated use is more likely to be for academic research, and it is consistent with previous years' surveys. The first time users survey shows a more diverse set of users, hence in this chart the responses are divided into more categories than for (A).

Role

A: Role

Role	Value
Other	2
Librarian/Library Assistant	5
Archivist/Archives Assistant	16
Family/local historian	1
Lecturer	2
Independent researcher	4
Undergraduate	2
Postgraduate	12
Academic researcher	2

B: Role

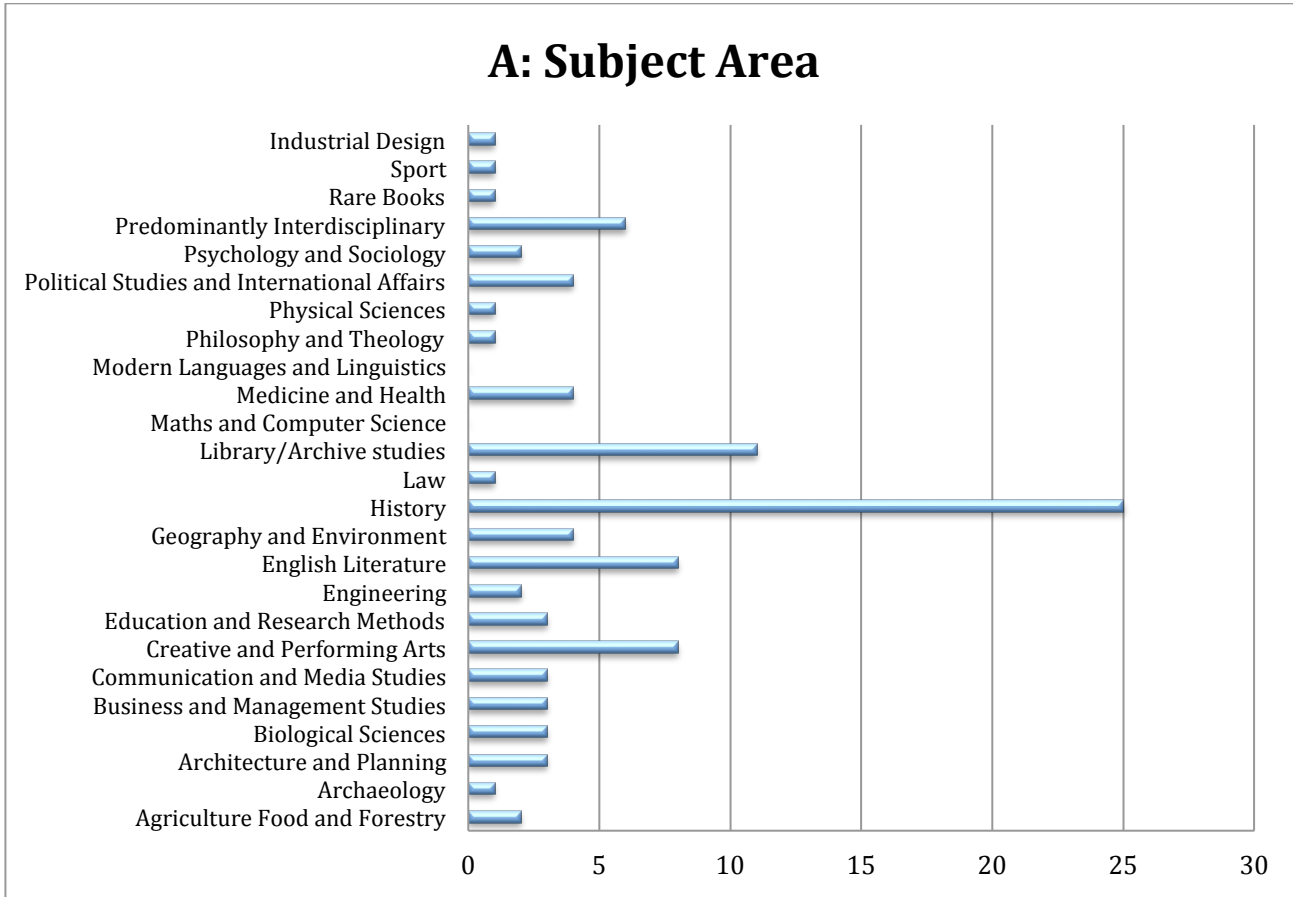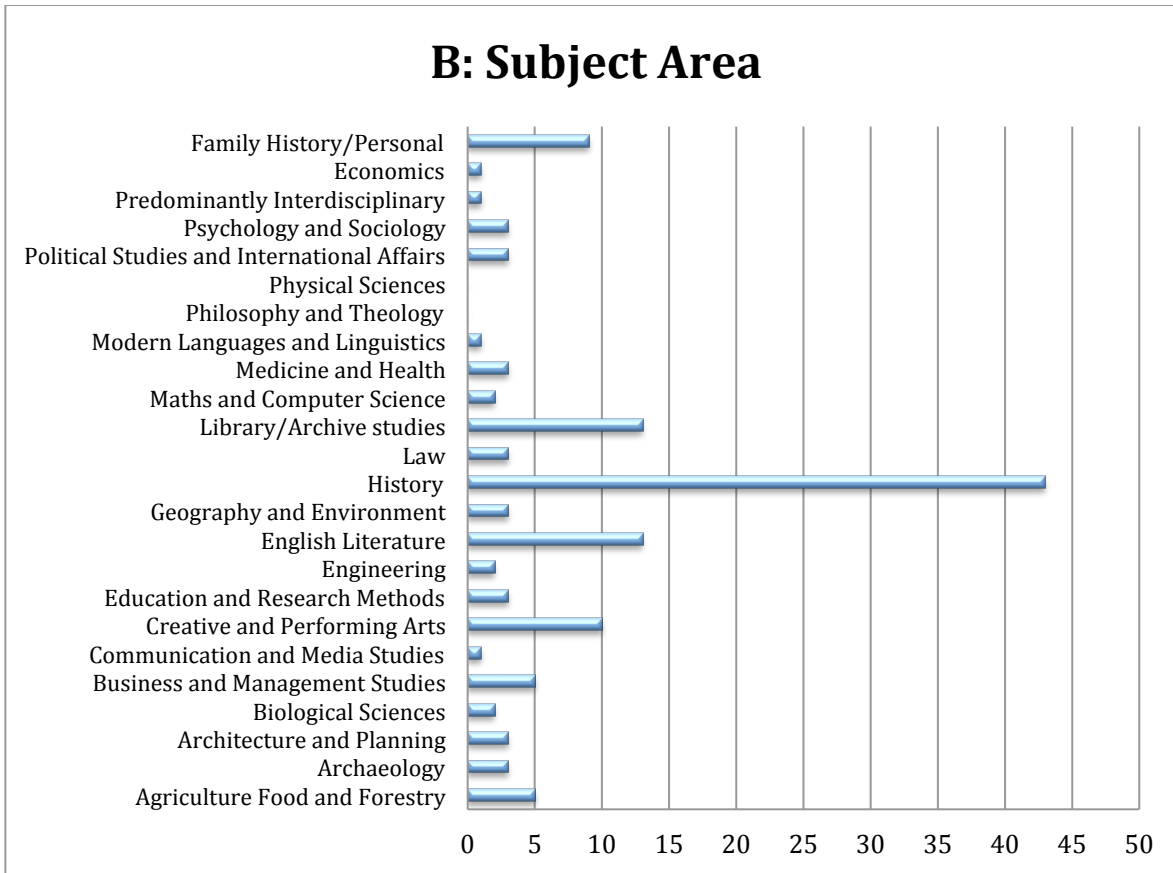| Role	Value
Other	5
Librarian/Library Assistant	4
Archivist/Archives Assistant	3
Family/local historian	23
Lecturer	5
Independent researcher	15
Undergraduate	6
Postgraduate	14
Academic researcher	6

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, showing how important the Hub is as a tool to the profession. Our experience shows that archivists (who contribute to the Hub) are more likely to fill in the survey than other users, so the results may not accurately represent the make-up of Hub users.

Academic researchers, including postgraduates, are well-represented in both surveys. Possibly academic users are more likely to have used the service before, but the numbers here are inconclusive.

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.
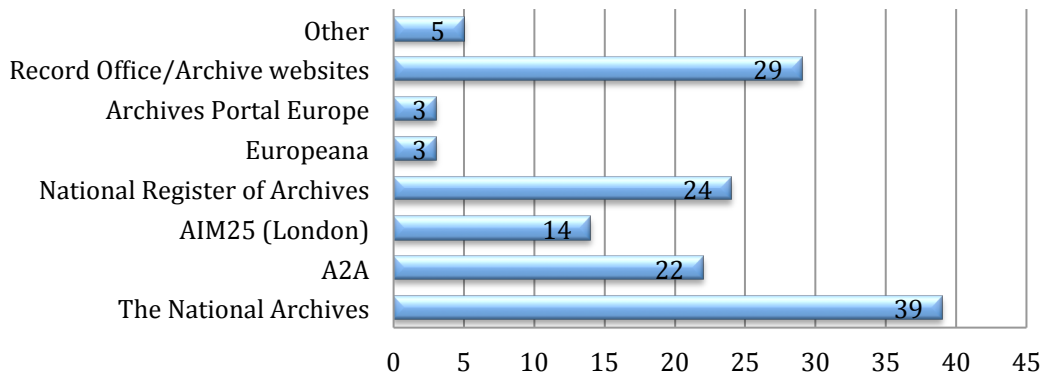
Subject Area

A: Subject Area

Subject	Value
Industrial Design	1
Sport	1
Rare Books	1
Predominantly Interdisciplinary	6
Psychology and Sociology	2
Political Studies and International Affairs	4
Physical Sciences	1
Philosophy and Theology	1
Modern Languages and Linguistics	0
Medicine and Health	4
Maths and Computer Science	0
Library/Archive studies	11
Law	1
History	25
Geography and Environment	4
English Literature	8
Engineering	2
Education and Research Methods	3
Creative and Performing Arts	8
Communication and Media Studies	3
Business and Management Studies	3
Biological Sciences	3
Architecture and Planning	3
Archaeology	1
Agriculture Food and Forestry	2

B: Subject Area

Subject Area	Value
Family History/Personal	9
Economics	1
Predominantly Interdisciplinary	1
Psychology and Sociology	3
Political Studies and International Affairs	3
Physical Sciences	0
Philosophy and Theology	0
Modern Languages and Linguistics	1
Medicine and Health	3
Maths and Computer Science	2
Library/Archive studies	13
Law	3
History	43
Geography and Environment	3
English Literature	13
Engineering	2
Education and Research Methods	3
Creative and Performing Arts	10
Communication and Media Studies	1
Business and Management Studies	5
Biological Sciences	2
Architecture and Planning	3
Archaeology	3
Agriculture Food and Forestry	5

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 for administration purposes and on behalf of researchers). However, there is a spread of use, showing that the Archives Hub has a multi-disciplinary appeal. Particularly signifant areas are the creative/performing arts and english literature, as well as interdisciplinary subjects.
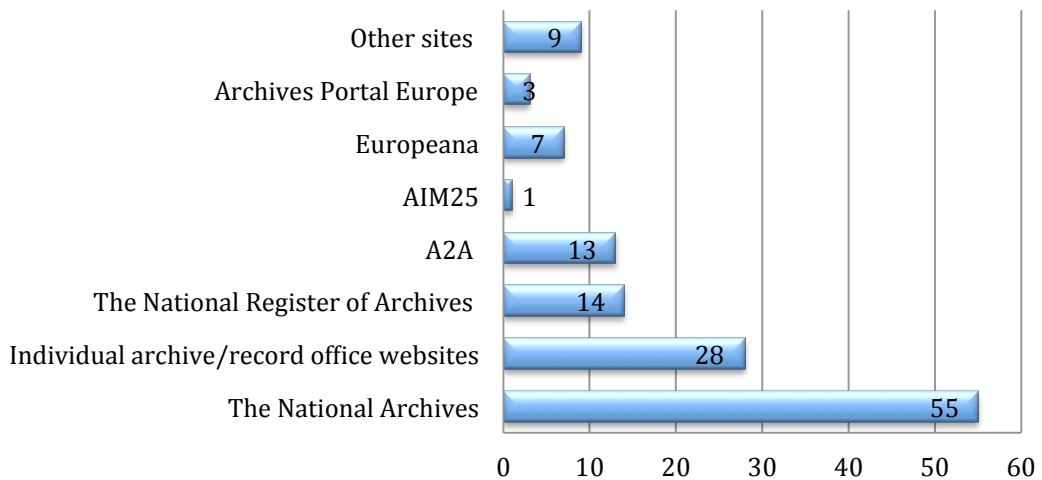
These results are consistent with the 2013 survey, which showed a similar spread of subject areas, with history and archives dominating, but the arts and humanities having substantial representation.

Websites Used to Find Archives

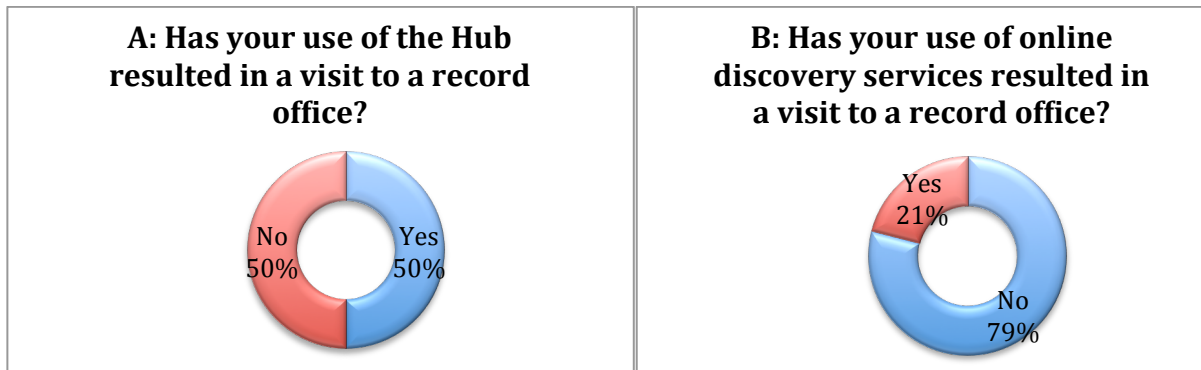### A: Other sites used to locate primary sources

Category	Value
Other	5
Record Office/Archive websites	29
Archives Portal Europe	3
Europeana	3
National Register of Archives	24
AIM25 (London)	14
A2A	22
The National Archives	39

(x-axis: 0, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40, 45)

B: Other sites used to locate primary sources

Category	Value
Other sites	9
Archives Portal Europe	3
Europeana	7
AIM25	1
A2A	13
The National Register of Archives	14
Individual archive/record office websites	28
The National Archives	55

(x-axis: 0, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60)

A large number of respondents use The National Archives website, and so clearly have prior knowledge of archives sites. In 2013, very few respondents referred to the Archives Portal Europe and Europeana, so use of these has increased slightly. Many researchers use the websites of individual record offices.
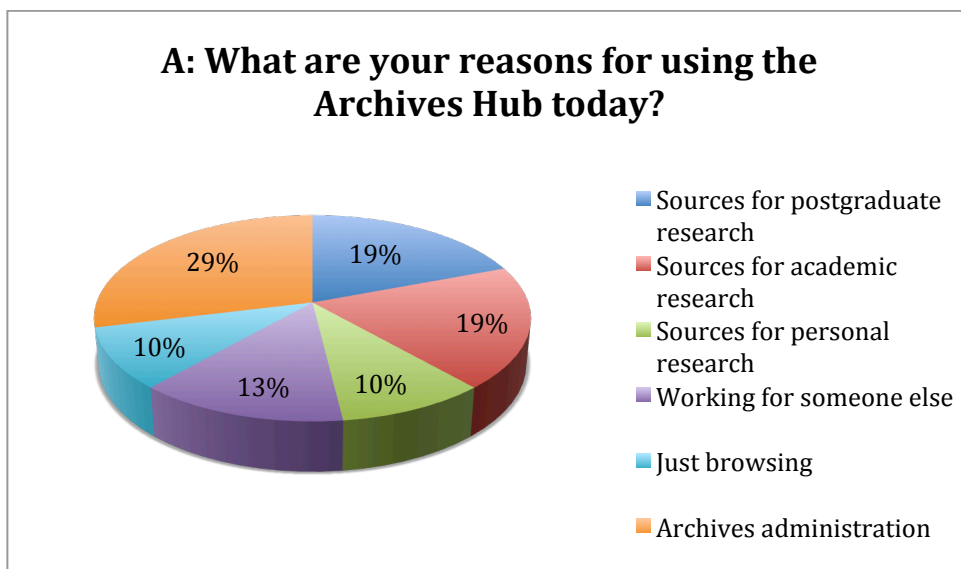
Visiting Archive Repositories

A: Has your use of the Hub resulted in a visit to a record office?

No 50%   Yes 50%

B: Has your use of online discovery services resulted in a visit to a record office?
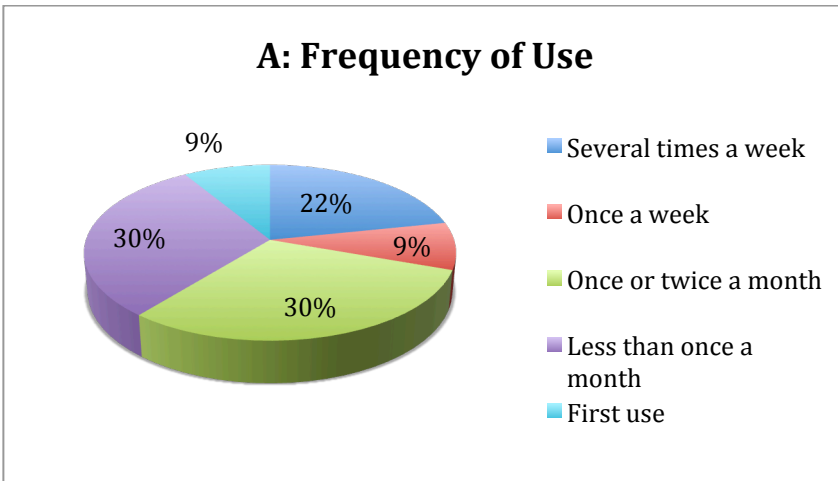
Yes 21%   No 79%

More returning users (50%) have visited a record office as a result of discovering archives online than first time users (21%). First time users of the Hub may have only just started searching for and using archives.
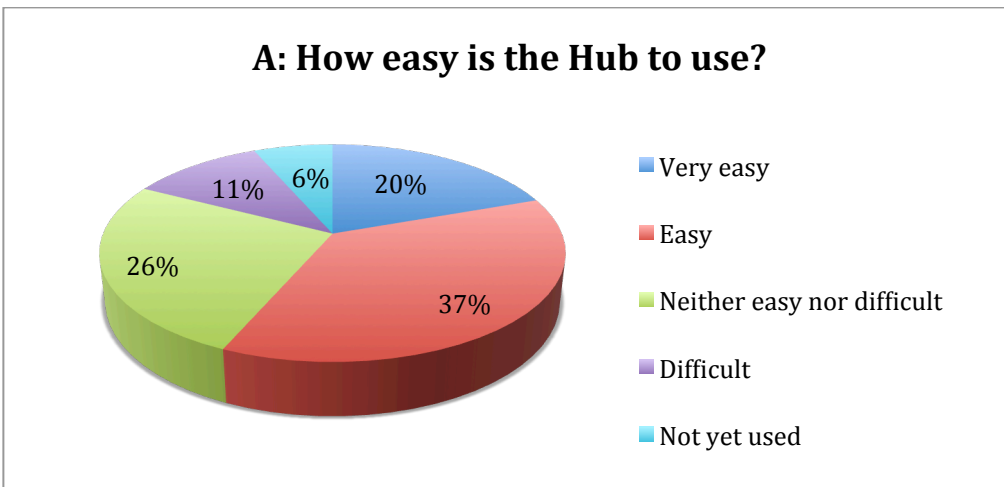
More About Returning Users

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.

A: What are your reasons for using the Archives Hub today?

29%   19%   19%   10%   13%   10%

- Sources for postgraduate research
- Sources for academic research
- Sources for personal research
- Working for someone else
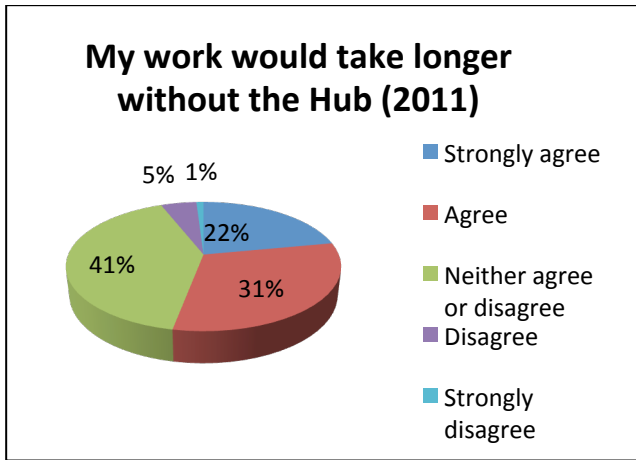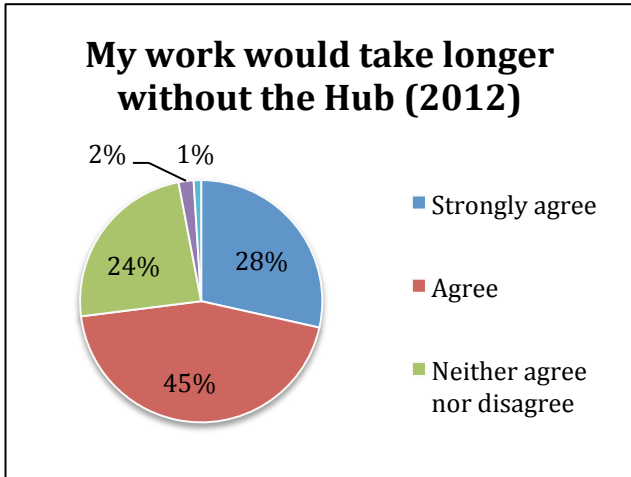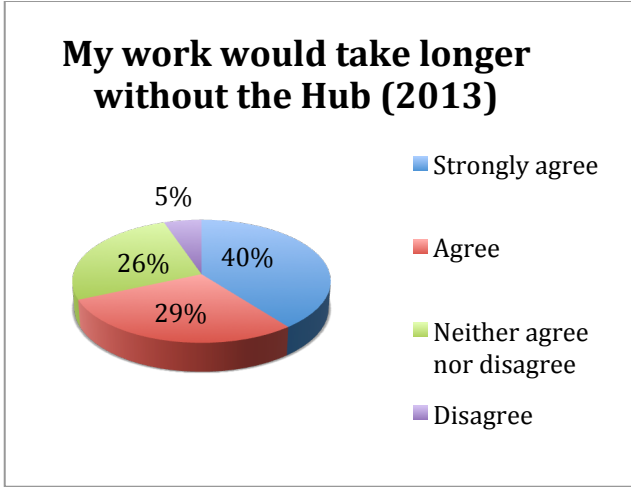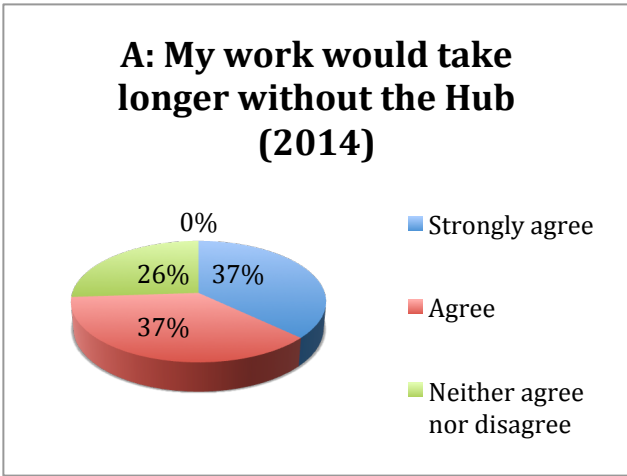- Just browsing
- Archives administration

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 substantial number of people are using the Hub for archives administration (which includes answering queries on behalf of researchers). 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. These figures are very similar to 2013.

A: Frequency of Use

9%
22%
30%
9%
30%

- Several times a week
- Once a week
- Once or twice a month
- Less than once a month
- First use

Over 30% of respondents use the Hub at least once a week, which indicates that for some it is a valued and integral service for their work or research. 61% use it at least once a month.

A: How easy is the Hub to use?

6%
20%
11%
26%
37%

- Very easy
- Easy
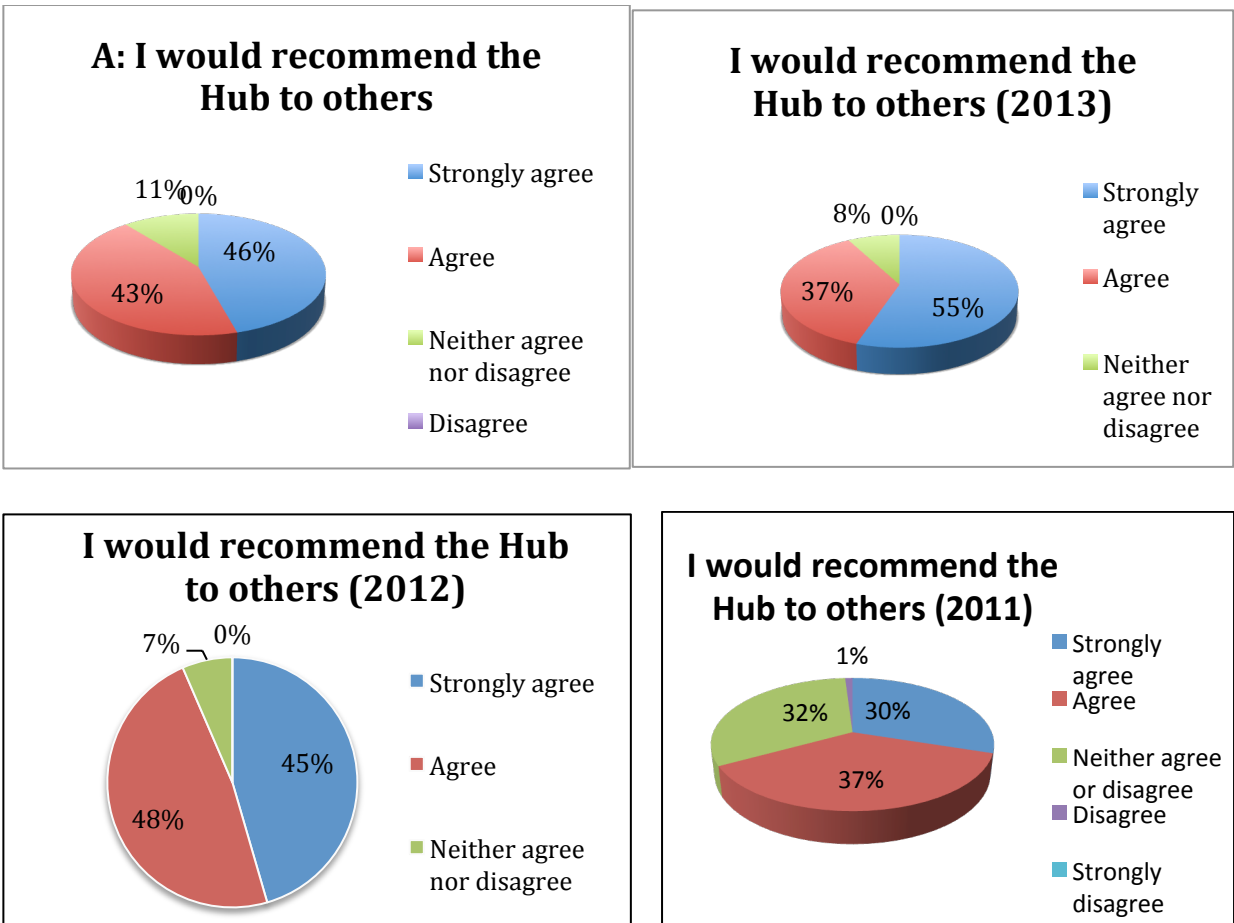- Neither easy nor difficult
- Difficult
- Not yet used

57% found the Hub easy or very easy to use, which is a drop from the 2013 figure of 76%. 11% found it difficult to use, which is higher than we would like it to be (and higher than 2013).

A: My work would take longer without the Hub (2014)

0%
26% 37%
37%

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree

My work would take longer without the Hub (2013)

5%
26% 40%
29%

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree

My work would take longer without the Hub (2012)

2% 1%
24% 28%
45%

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree

My work would take longer without the Hub (2011)

5% 1%
41% 22%
31%

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

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

2014: 74%
2013: 69%
2012: 73%
2011: 53%

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

A: I would recommend the Hub to others

11% 0%
46%
43%

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree

I would recommend the Hub to others (2013)

8% 0%
37%
55%

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree

I would recommend the Hub to others (2012)

7% 0%
45%
48%

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree

I would recommend the Hub to others (2011)

1%
32%   30%
37%

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Strongly agree or agree that the Archives Hub is worth recommending to others:
2014: 89%
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

A: Which of these is most valuable to you?
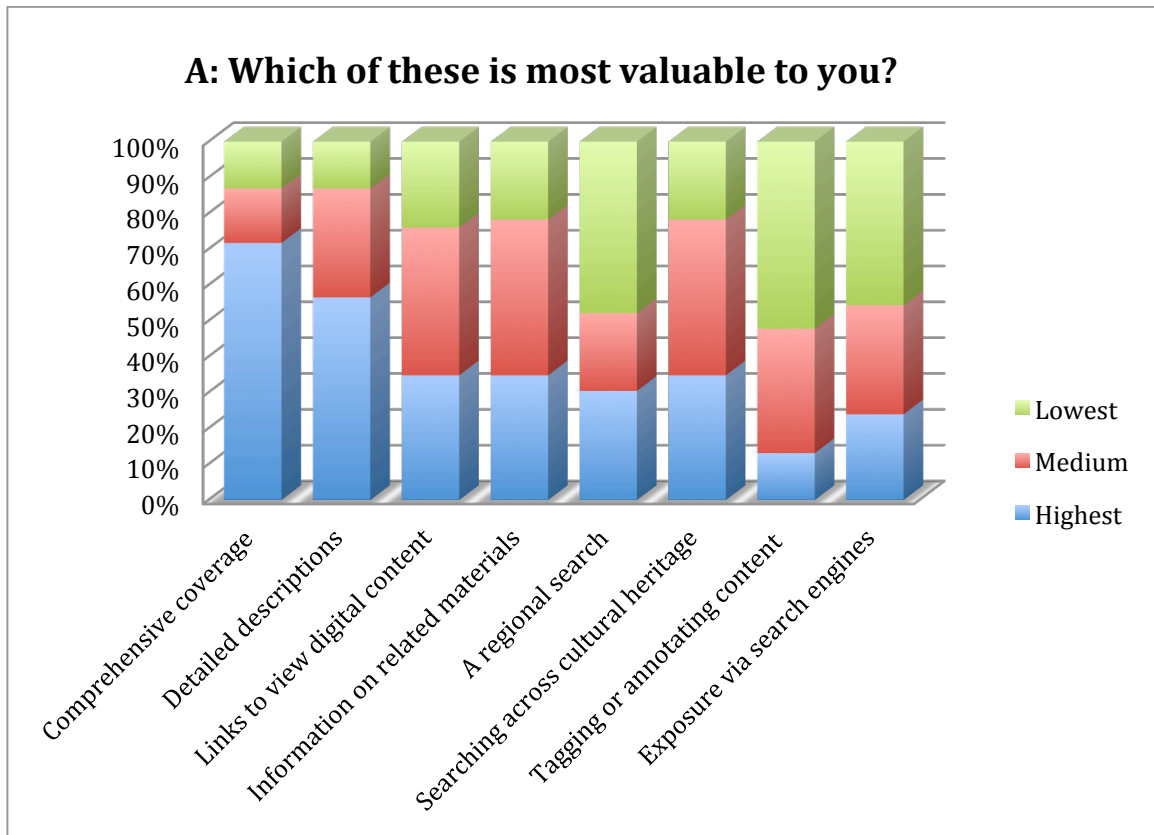
For returning users, **comprehensive coverage** still remains the highest priority (as for all previous surveys), with **detailed descriptions** seen as the second highest priority. The results are generally in line with previous years, although it could be seen as surprising that exposure via search engines is not higher; but this may be an indication that returning users do not feel this option is necessary.

B: For Online services, which of these is most valuable to you?

Legend:
- Lowest
- Medium
- Highest

X-axis categories:
- Comprehensive coverage
- Detailed descriptions
- Links to view digital content
- Information on related materials
- A regional search
- The ability to tag content/annotate
- The ability to search via search
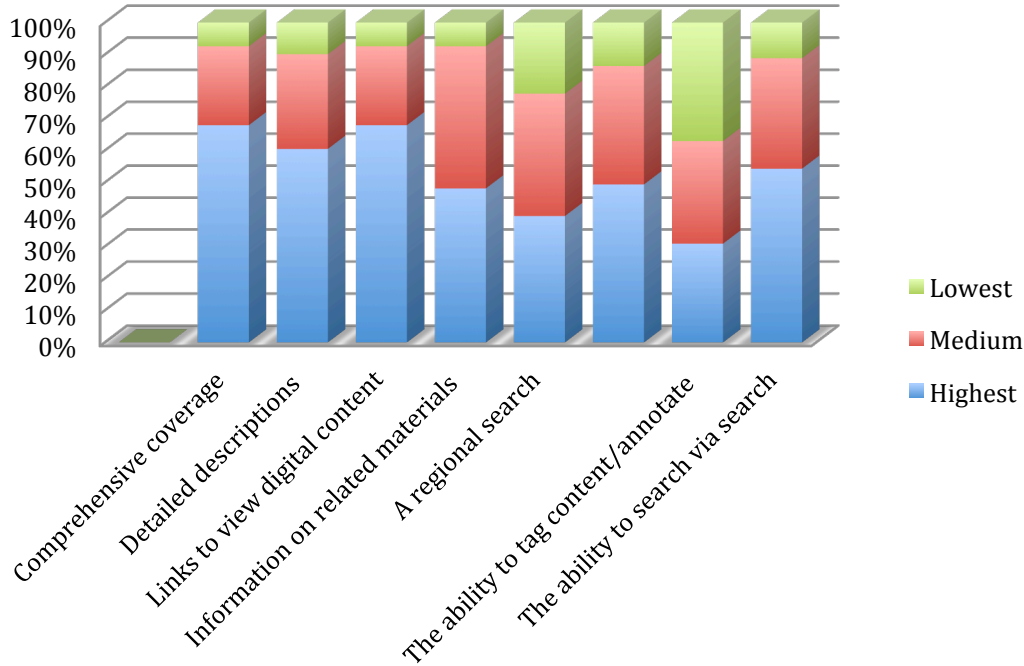
For first time users we asked about online discovery services in general. As with returning users, comprehensive and detailed descriptions are a major priority. The value of digital content appears to be higher for first time users, and also the value of exposure via search engines. As with previous years, tagging and annotation is considered less of a priority.

Coverage of the Archives Hub

A: Which repositories are most important to include on the Hub?

- 2%
- 13%
- 15%
- 70%

Legend:
- Higher education
- Specialist
- All are important
- Other
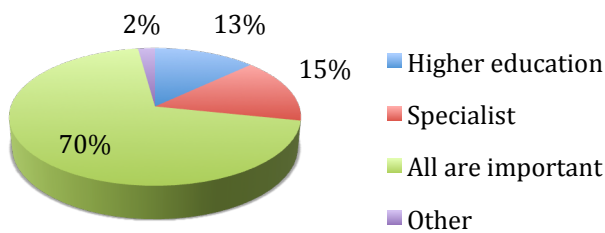
The results of this question are almost identical to 2013, with the majority of respondents indicating that comprehensive coverage is key rather than specifically coverage of HE archives.

What is Most Valuable about the Archives Hub?

- Broad coverage
- Ease of use
- Unified catalogue/no. of repositories represented
- Access to institution's collections
- 'Being there'
- Detailed descriptions
- Raising awareness of archives
- 'One place to go'
- Use for cataloguing collections
- Free
- Convenience
- Locate collections otherwise may not know about
- Archives added all the time
- 'Wonderful'
- A place to recommend to researchers
- Search options

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 **broad coverage of UK archives** that the Archives Hub gives them. **Ease of use** and **detailed descriptions** also come high, as with previous surveys.

How Could the Archives Hub Be Improved?

- More comprehensive
- A contributor administration interface
- Easier navigation / Ease of use
- Clearer message that the Hub represents all archives
- Nothing
- More information on how to access materials
- Don't make changes too frequently
- Relevance made clearer
- Search term highlighting
- Search by series
- The ability for cataloguers to insert series (EAD Editor)
- Improved search function

- Tutorials for adding descriptions
- Links between institutions
- Linked themes
- More detail on what the collections contain
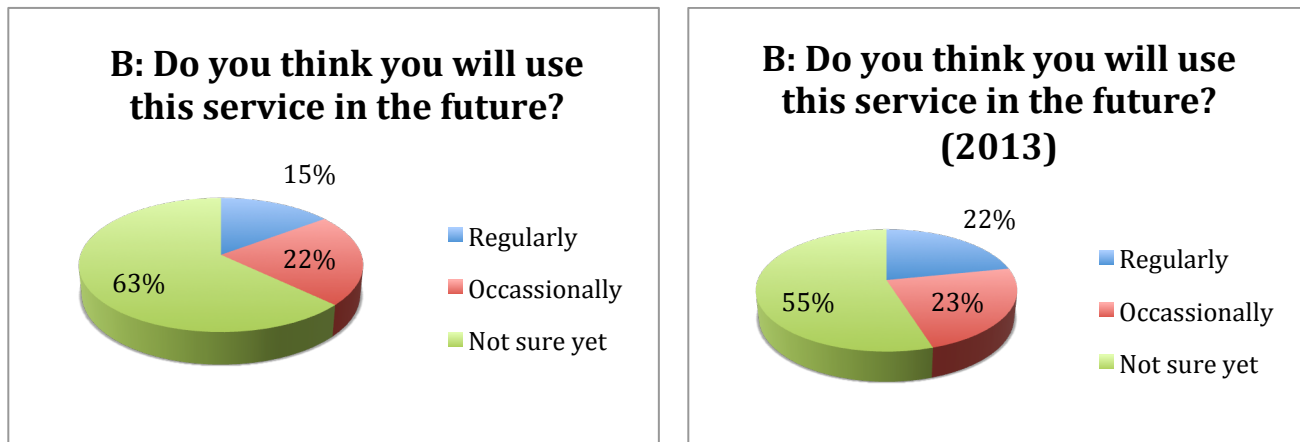- More small independent archives added
- More item level descriptions

The above list shows a very broad range of responses from returning users, so the responses cannot easily be categorised. The most responses (the only ones with more than one 'vote') were for increased coverage, ease of use and for 'nothing'.

Some suggestions are already quite well implemented, such as search term highlighting and tutorials for adding descriptions, so we may need to find ways to make this clearer to users.

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.
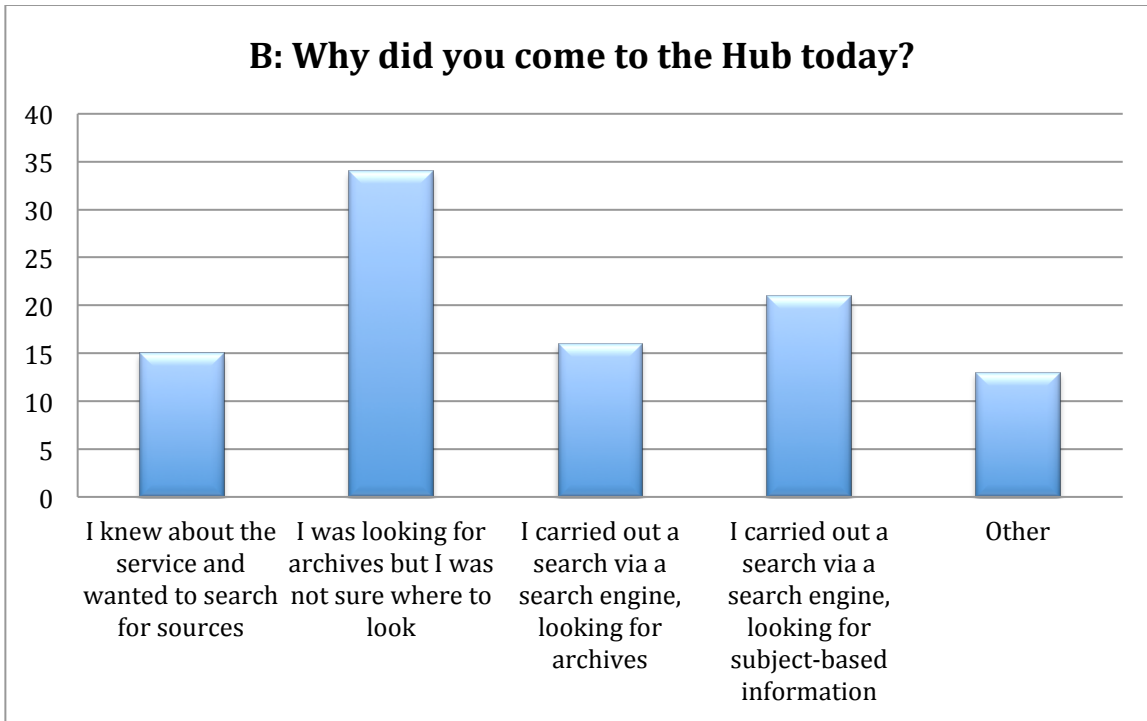
More About First Time Users

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.

B: Do you think you will use this service in the future?

15%
63%
22%

- Regularly
- Occassionally
- Not sure yet

B: Do you think you will use this service in the future? (2013)

22%
55%
23%

- Regularly
- Occassionally
- Not sure yet

A significant number of first time users feel that they will return to the service again, although this figure is less than 2013. The fact that nearly a quarter may return 'occasionally' indicates that for some users the Archives Hub is useful, but not necessarily a service that they would use frequently. This may be because once archival sources are identified the service has fulfilled its function. This is a hard question for first time users to answer, as they are not yet familiar with the service, but the indications are generally positive.
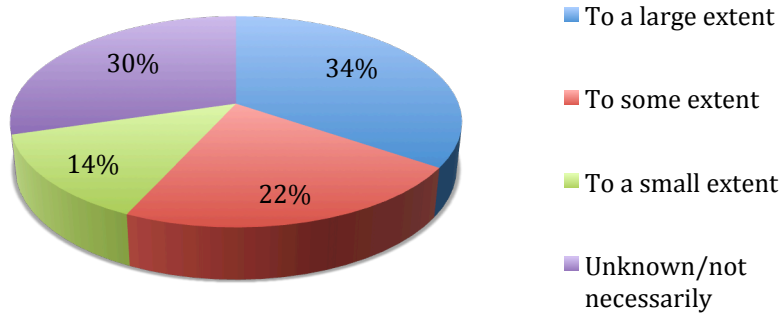
B: Why did you come to the Hub today?

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 the Hub through a general search**, whether they are looking specifically for archives or more general resources. People also come to the Hub having used a search engine to search for subjects, people or places, rather than specifically for archives. Most of those who answered 'other' here found the service via another source, such as a library website, citation or personal recommendation.
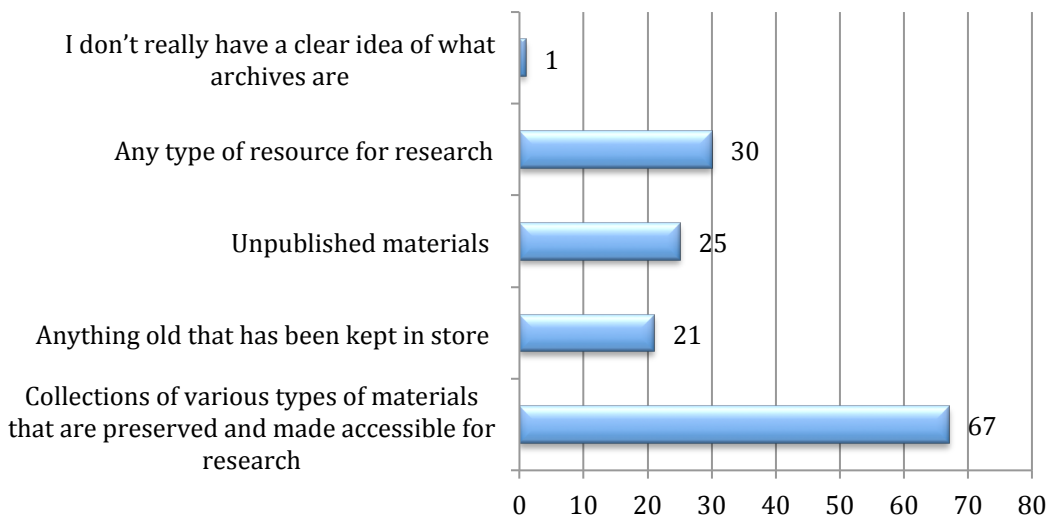
It is interesting that a number of first time users do already know about the service, but these results do show that it is not a good idea to make assumptions about users – they may be aware of the service and have an understanding of archives, or they may have no prior knowledge or expectations at all.

B: My work involves, or is likely to involve, using archives

- ■ To a large extent
- ■ To some extent
- ■ To a small extent
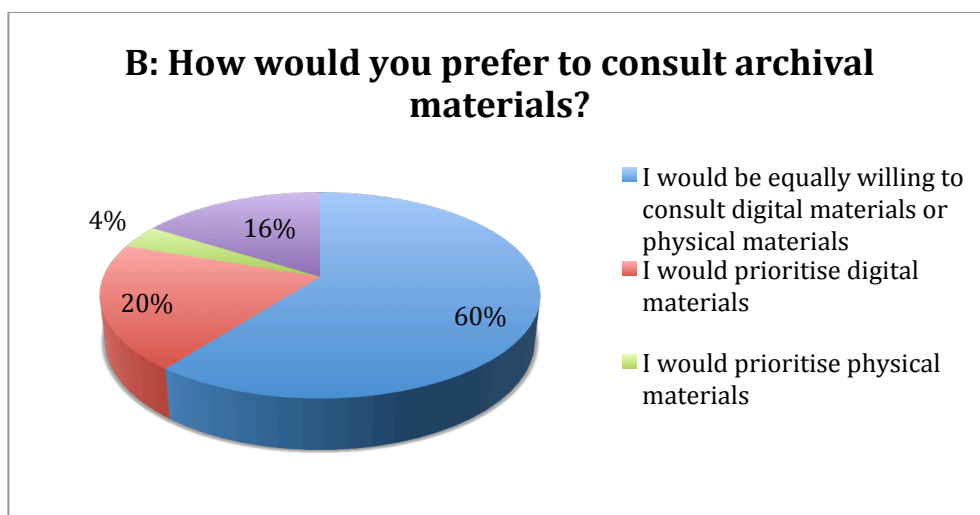- ■ Unknown/not necessarily

34%

30%

22%

14%

These results echo the survey from 2013, with about half of respondents using archives quite frequently in their work. But a third of respondents are new to archives, which means a service like the Hub needs to find ways to help them navigate and understand what it is they are looking at.

B: I would define archives as:

I don't really have a clear idea of what archives are	1
Any type of resource for research	30
Unpublished materials	25
Anything old that has been kept in store	21
Collections of various types of materials that are preserved and made accessible for research	67

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80

It is clear that **people are not always clear what 'archives' means** in the context of a service like the Archives Hub. Whilst this survey indicates that the majority of people are clear about the meaning of archives, some people think of archives simply as any type of resource or as 'old stuff'. This is in line with other 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.

B: How would you prefer to consult archival materials?

- I would be equally willing to consult digital materials or physical materials
- I would prioritise digital materials
- I would prioritise physical materials

This survey, as for 2013, suggests that **people are generally willing to work with physical and digital materials**. The number prioritising digital archives is actually lower this year than in 2013.

Conclusions

The 2014 survey has not thrown up any unexpected results; it has shown a consistency from previous years. **The need for comprehensive coverage** clearly continues to be a priority, and **researchers like to have detailed descriptions**.

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. For a Jisc funded service, it is crucial that we are valuable and useful to the higher sector, but the survey does suggest that prior knowledge within academia varies widely, so providing a service for 'novices' is useful both to the general public and academic users; we cannot assume that students and researchers understand archives, but the emphasis on the need for detailed descriptions shows that many users do have a good knowledge of archives and want to be able to pin-point resources.

This survey did not ask users about digital content represented on the Hub, but as the service increasingly displays images and links to resources, this should be a priority for future surveys.

Overall, the results are encouraging, and indicate that the Archives Hub 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.