

Equalities Participation Network – 27 November 2025

Present: Myshele Haywood (GREC), Roslynn Fowler (Aberdeen Action on Disability), Linzi Harrow (ACC), Patrick Hart (NLS), Baldeep McGarry (ACC), Ells Mchaffie (Guide Dogs), Katrina Michie (DEP), Fay Morrison (various), Mary Rasmussen (Guide Dogs), Allison Wilkie (Deafblind Scotland), (GREC), Bertha Yakubu (African Women's Group).

Apologies: Marion McLaughlin, Hector Williams, Matt Carter

Speaker: Patrick Hart, Curator (Communities & Organisations), National Library of Scotland (NLS)
(presentation attached)

Patrick opened by asking if anyone had used NLS previously. Katrina shared that she used it for textile and genealogy research, and Roslynn shared that two folk from the local Deaf Society have been putting together memorabilia, and Len wrote a book about the experience of deaf people in Aberdeen from 1895-1995.

Patrick explained that NLS is the **legal deposit library for Scotland**, which means they keep one copy of every book published in the UK and Ireland, plus translations of works by Scottish authors (or authors associated with Scotland in some way).

Bertha noted there's often not much in libraries by ethnic minority people, and shared that her group has produced two magazines and a book. They are also working with young people on collecting the social history of Africans in Aberdeen, and the project should be finished by January. Myshele noted that Marion has been working on some books for autistic children.

Patrick was keen to get copies of all these materials, and anything else folk are aware of that may be missing. He explained that NLS can help organisations make their materials accessible and 'discoverable' for a much wider range of people.

NLS collections

A major role of NLS is to be a repository for Scotland's story, and the story of all people in Scotland people. This includes books and manuscripts, but also film footage, audio recordings, photos, maps, posters, leaflets, magazines, etc. They aim to keep one copy of everything, and preserve it for the future. The current collection is estimated to have between 30 million and 60 million items.

The shelving at the library's building in Edinburgh would stretch from Glasgow to the border with England, and it's protected by air filtration, climate control, sprinklers in case of fire, and there are freezers in case the materials get wet.

Something for everyone

NLS has materials on anything people might be interested in – examples include knitting patterns, football leaflets, car repair manuals, shopping catalogues, newspapers, fashion magazines, etc. Patrick highlighted some collections:

- materials about disability rights
- the Transatlantic slave trade
- ethnic minority footballers

- Soviet posters
- images of coastal communities
- local materials from Aberdeen including local TV archives
- family history archives
- UK web archive (all websites that end with .uk)

He also highlighted a range of map-based tools, and eResources, which include access to eBooks, journals, databases and materials that require a paid subscription.

Membership and access

NLS membership is free for everyone in Scotland, and gives access to nearly all the materials in the library, much of which can be accessed online. It's not possible to borrow physical books, but there is a Reading Room in Edinburgh, where you can order the books or materials you want to see, and consult them there.

Services for Organisations

The Business and Enterprise Officer, Miriam Hussain, can help organisations find information about funding, standards and regulations, etc. She can also help organise talks, tours, events and collaborations with community groups. Her email is m.hussain@nls.uk

There is also a service to help archive any materials produced by different organisations.

Other Services

NLS staff can conduct up to an hour of research for you, on anything you want to learn about, and staff can help you find all kinds of materials. During opening hours, you can chat with a librarian through the NLS website (not a bot!).

Q&A

Baldeep – great resources to connect communities and address knowledge gaps. Query about copyright issues for digital media, for example if she wanted to reproduce images for trainings.

Patrick – case-by-case basis, but nearly all materials on the NLS website are open-access/Creative Commons, which means you can use them for most things, as long as you say they're from NLS. There are some restrictions for materials that are still in copyright, but training and educational purposes are usually fine. If in doubt, there's a rights officer who can answer specific questions.

Bertha – if you only have one copy of a book, would NLS take a copy and return it? Or what would they want to do?

Patrick – they would want to have a conversation to find out what's best. If there is only one copy of something in existence, then it would be considered a manuscript, and NLS might be the best place to preserve it – but they would understand if your organisation wants to keep hold of it. If there may be other copies out there, NLS are good at finding them. Whatever the case, it would always be decided in conversation with the person/organisation, based on their priorities and needs.

Mary – shared that her mother was born in 1904, and a cousin found her mother's exam results from grammar school.

Patrick – NLS has great resources on family history, and also house history, if people are interested in who's lived in your house in the past, etc.

Baldeep – if NLS wants a copy of everything that's been published, then what's the definition of 'published?' For example, would they want ACC's BSL plan?

Patrick – they're interested in anything produced for the public, so the BSL plan would count. They don't archive things like internal document, meeting minutes, etc. He also noted that the publication you think will be important in 100 years, rarely is – gave the example of Argos catalogues being used to track prices over time.

Katrina – didn't know about NLS business services, this will be very useful for different organisations she's involved with.

Patrick – NLS are also putting together a package of resources specifically for charities, to make it easier to see what they offer.

Roslynn – charities don't have a lot of money, so free resources and advice are always appreciated.

Linzi – a lot of NLS materials are web based. Is there an app? Some people find apps easier to use than web browsers.

Patrick – no app, but the website has been redesigned to be more smartphone friendly – it's a recent change, so they are interested in feedback on what's working well, and what can be improved.

Myshele – what kind of accessibility options does the new website have? For example, built-in translation, capacity for making the text bigger, etc?

Patrick – it should be fairly accessible, but that's not his area, so he's not sure. He reiterated that feedback on the site, including accessibility issues, is welcome.

Addendum – after the meeting, Patrick wanted to add a note about the NLS virtual reading room. If you're interested in something that's not digitised or available online, NLS staff can do a Zoom or Teams call to show you materials remotely, using a hi-tech camera setup, so you don't need to travel to Edinburgh.

Other info

Baldeep noted that Holocaust Memorial Day will be 27 January, at the Art Gallery – keep an eye out for details, all welcome.

Myshele noted that the GREC AGM is next week, 3 December, she will circulate the registration link, all welcome.

Dates of next meetings:

No meeting in December

January: Thursday 29 January 2026, 4-5pm, online

Topic: Updating the Community Directory

February: Thursday 26 February, 4-5pm, online

Topic: ACC HR – recruitment and retention of people in marginalised groups