

State Archives: Summary of comments by respondents

Search engine 'Search archives' for descriptions

- Not user friendly. (unclear lay-out, complicated structure, difficult to use ...) (43)
- Incomplete. (inventories or descriptions not available in digital format/part of inventory such as introduction is missing) (31)
- Search is too general, results uncertain, too many results, not the expected results (e.g. respondents know an archival fund exists but cannot find the inventory). (19)
- Slow server. (15)
- Not possible to reserve items online through the catalogue. (4)
- Mistakes in descriptions. (4)
- It is not clear to which extent the sources of the State Archives are present in the search engine (inventories or digital format). (3)
- Confusion concerning in which depot an item is located (depot has not been indicated, wrong depot, two depots indicated). (3)
- Need for a tutorial. (3)
- Some inventories are very detailed while others contain almost no information. (2)
- Lack of uniformity in the descriptions. (2)
- Complicated tree structure. (2)
- Prior knowledge/archival knowledge needed to use the system. (2)
- It is usually indicated that an inventory is available in PDF format and yet often there is no digital version available (e.g. user arrives at empty PDF document that only contains the title of the archive or at a webpage filled with non-functional HTML code). (2)
- Some inventories can be consulted online, other inventories cannot, and yet others can only be downloaded through a separate system. (2)
- Inventory numbers are not always correct.
- Many inventories contain mistakes.
- Many archival numbers do not come with a description.
- Lack of keywords.
- Thematic classification is insufficient.
- Too many steps to arrive at results.
- No response from State Archives when errors are signalled.
- No logical ranking system for results.
- Printing of sources is complicated.
- Filter options are insufficient
- Some archives are listed multiple times in the catalogue.
- Not always clear which number has to be used to make reservations.
- There is no index.
- It is not always easy to find out which type of information can be found in certificates (except those concerning births, marriages and deaths).
- It would be beneficial if it were possible to access from the search results the digitised register or certificate.
- Many inventories are not available online and transfer lists can only be acquired through personal contact with an archivist.

Search engine 'Search archives' for digital sources

- Not user friendly (unclear lay-out, complicated structure, difficult to use ...). (47)
- Incomplete. (32)
- Slow server. (14)
- Many bugs. (3)
- Not possible to download images. (3)

- Information should be grouped per year. (2)
- Descriptions not always clear/contain mistakes. (2)
- Results are not precise/relevant enough. (2)
- No clear tutorial. (2)
- Subdivisions are incomprehensible.
- When scans are displayed, the reference of the source is not visible.
- It would be beneficial if it were possible to add bookmarks: both general ones for all users and the option of adding personal ones only the user who created them can see.
- Not possible to print sources.
- Zoom is insufficient.
- If one wishes to find useful results, one has to have knowledge of specific keywords.
- Not possible to register digital sources in a personal account.
- When missing pages are reported, no response is received.
- Errors in data.
- Time consuming.
- Not possible to use Boolean operators.
- Low quality scans.
- Sometimes pages are missing.
- Some registers appear multiple times in results.
- Files names are not always relevant to content.
- Filters do not work satisfactory.
- Sometimes there are no scans available even though it is indicated by the search engine that there should be.
- It would be good to know why certain sources are not available (e.g. they have not yet been digitised or they have been destroyed.)
- No indexation.

Suggestions for search engine 'Search archives'

- Possibility of downloading digital sources. (16)
- System should work faster. (9)
- Possibility of printing digital sources. (7)
- Zoom function should be improved (easier to enlarge sources; smaller increments). (6)
- Personal account with list of all archives the user has consulted. (4)
- Search function should be more intuitive and simpler. (2)
- Everything should be accessible in both French and Dutch. (2)
- More information on how the search engine functions. (2)
- Possibility of exporting data. (2)
- Provide list with all updates that have been carried out. (2)
- Link from homepage to overview of updates that have been carried out.
- Information concerning which sources are currently being digitised.
- Faster computers in the reading rooms to access the catalogue.
- Link scans to inventories.
- Depot should be indicated for all archival items.
- There should be a general search engine so it becomes possible to search in all present search engines at the same time.
- Bookmarks to access specific years.
- Overview per municipality of which information is available.
- Alert system so users receive an email when the sources they wish to consult have been made available.
- Possibility of searching by theme, type (corporate, private, association...) and geographic area.

- All digital sources should be available online.
- Removing black frame from around digital sources so that users have a larger image on their screen.
- Not clear which information is available in the search engines and which is not.
- Create links between Searching persons and the digital sources.
- Demogen Visu should be improved so it becomes easier to use (and the choice for which municipality to index should be simplified).
- Permanent links should be established for all digital sources.
- Navigation within archival funds should be improved.
- Possibility to request sources online.
- Remove duplicates in results.
- Make smaller files available, e.g. birth certificates per year instead of per 10 years.
- Make the transition from one search request to another smoother.
- Quality of scans should be improved.
- Implement a system that allows users to contact the State Archives if they notice mistakes in the data.
- Reference of a document should also be visible when it is visualised in the browser. Now users have to return to the previous page.
- Reported mistakes should get corrected.
- Division by province for the genealogical sources instead of only by municipalities.
- Creation of an image library.
- Better descriptions, with a more logical structure.
- Files names should be relevant for contents of documents.
- Possibility of entering a name and being directed to relevant certificates.
- Better use of keywords.
- Possibility of accessing the option 'Themes'.
- Easy way to return to search results if user has followed links from results page.
- Letting users annotate digital sources.
- Informing users of why certain sources are not available (e.g. because they have not yet been digitised or because they have been destroyed).

Reservation procedure for physical sources

- Long waiting times for sources. (18)
- Cumbersome. (16)
- Not possible to request sources beforehand through an online system. (16)
- Sources can only be requested once an hour. (14)
- Slow procedure and computers/software. (12)
- Staff members are unfriendly/unqualified/do not speak Dutch. (4)
- Time consuming. (3)
- Not possible to request multiple sources in one request (e.g. three consecutive numbers). (3)
- Staff members do not find certain sources. (3)
- Number of requests per hour is limited. (3)
- The procedure is not the same in all reading rooms (it should be possible to make a digital request in all reading rooms). (3)
- In some reading rooms there are not enough computers available to request sources. (2)
- In some reading rooms request can only be done on paper. (2)
- System is not sufficiently explained (e.g. letters have to be entered as capitals when using the computers to request sources).
- Too bureaucratic.
- Sometimes the wrong sources are taken out of storage.

- Communication about when a source is available for consultation could be clearer.
- Much more time is needed to make a reservation with the current computer system than with the paper forms.

Search engine 'Search persons'

- Incomplete. (78)
- Not user friendly (unclear lay-out, complicated structure, difficult to use ...). (12)
- Slow server. (10)
- No links to digital images. (8)
- Mistakes in information. (6)
- 'Sound as' function gives too many results or results that are not accurate enough. (5)
- Not possible to make use of wildcards (e.g. *). (4)
- Cumbersome. (3)
- Filters are unclear/not precise enough. (2)
- Archaic. (2)
- Unclear what the search engine contains and what not. (2)
- Difficult to use for novice users. (2)
- Many technical difficulties. (2)
- Not clear why certain data is not available (e.g. because the original sources have been destroyed). (2)
- Variations of family names are not treated in an efficient way. (2)
- Sometimes not available.
- Lack of accuracy.
- No response if mistakes are signalled to State Archives.
- Not possible to enter page number to move through the results.
- Not possible to search by province.
- Not clearly indicated who provided content; which would help to determine if contents can be trusted.
- Search function is limited in use.
- Printing is problematic.
- Not possible to export data.
- In some cases information has been translated from French, while in others it has not.
- Not enough links established between the data.
- Not possible to download information.
- Results are not precise enough.
- The search options should be simpler. An 'advanced search' could be made available for more experienced users.

Procedure to order reproductions

- Long waiting times. (3)
- No online form.
- Delivery times not clear.
- Cumbersome.
- Unsatisfactory quality.
- Difficulty to access database.

Procedure to pay for reproductions

- Complex.
- No online payment/payment by card possible.
- Cumbersome.

- Slow.
- Archaic.

Why do you not consult physical sources at the State Archives? (Answers other than 'I feel the reading rooms of the State Archives are located too far away.' and 'All sources I wish to consult exist in digital format.')

- Lack of time. (31)
- No need to consult physical sources at the State Archives. (18)
- Having to travel is problematic (e.g. due to personal situation, cost of travelling). (13)
- Limited opening hours. (13)
- Still working on digital sources but might consult physical sources in the future. (2)
- Making use of microfilms is time consuming. (2)
- Fear of requesting a reader card. (2)
- Accessibility (parking car, bus stop) is not good enough.
- Dissuaded by others because of time consuming nature of visiting.
- One has to pay to have access.
- Digital access is more convenient.
- Needed archives are not yet available.
- Some staff members are unfriendly.

General remarks

- Install Wi-Fi in all reading rooms. (2)
- Organise info sessions for university students.
- Bring back the 'Common catalogue of the federal libraries'.