The Archives Domain Workforce now and how it might look in future

This paper has been produced by Resource at the request of the Archives Task Force at its meeting on 30 January 2003. It is a starting point for a discussion of the workforce issues that affect archives and records management training and development needs. The Task Force is invited to comment on, and discuss the issues raised by the paper with the aim of making recommendations on training and development, which might constructively be taken forward by the Task Force in its work. A suggested framework for Training and Development is given at Appendix A.

Demographics

The traditional view of the archives domain workforce concentrates on the development and support of qualified archivists, educated to masters or doctorate level, who were likely to have established and relatively predictable career paths. Many were employed in the sector full time. But increasingly, the domain is being supported by “para-professionals” or professionals “borrowed” from related professions (e.g. librarians), part-timers, freelancers, work-returners and volunteers. The small size the archives domain brings its own problems of sustaining and developing training opportunities.

Recent research by Resource undertaken by Demos (referred to in this paper as The Demos Report) notes that by 2010 there will be two million fewer 25-34 year olds and nearly three million more 45-64 year olds. The report predicts that a more eclectic mix of employees will develop. It will include an older workforce from a wider variety of backgrounds including a higher proportion of ethnic minorities than at present in the UK, and more people pursuing more than one career in a working lifetime.

Demographic changes with fewer new entrants to the workforce of the UK mean that employers in sectors where remuneration is low will be forced to offer other benefits to entice suitable people – a “new workforce”, as well as remaining financially competitive. Already, we see job advertisements, particularly in the case of short-term cataloguing and preservation projects, offering the opportunities of flexible working or secondments. The trend towards obtaining the right skills mix by using free lancers, part-timers and volunteers will increase. Therefore, employers may also need to offer more and varied training and development opportunities for all staff including contractors and free-lancers. Employers will have to look at all people employed in the domain (service directors, experienced professionals, security staff, cleaners and “non-professional” support staff) with a view to developing the right expertise to support service delivery to increasingly aware and demanding users.

The workforce is becoming broader and less easy to define and training and development models need to take account of this “new workforce” and its characteristics.

Volunteers are used in very particular ways in archives which relate to the interest, skills and knowledge of the volunteers, and are explicitly an addition to, and not a replacement for, paid staff.

There are an estimated 34,000 people employed in public and higher education libraries; and 25,000 in museums. By comparison, estimates for the archives and records management sector are around 5,000.

Towards a Strategy for Workforce Development, DEMOS for Resource, January 200
3 Contribution of workforce training and development

The Performance and Innovation Unit (now known as the Strategy Unit) of the Cabinet Office has defined workforce development as follows:

“Workforce development consists of activities which increase the capacity of individuals to participate effectively in the workplace, thereby improving their productivity and employability”

Writing about the museums, archives and libraries sector, the Demos Report observes that, at its most fundamental, workforce development improves and spreads more widely technical and professional competence. Most importantly, the report notes that in addition to classroom learning, there are skills and forms of knowledge which are basic to the functioning of the sector which are transferred through observation and gradual participation in practice.

Workforce development can also create a culture of good management and public service in which organisations work well when they concentrate on those whom they serve.

4 The archives domain: What is happening?

4.1 21st Century developments affecting the domain

The challenge of maintaining a satisfied and motivated workforce is a daunting task when the new challenges and changes of the twenty first century are considered. As indicated by the Demos Report, some of these are the impact of technology, social attitudes, politics and the policy landscape, and the institutional landscape (regionalism/devolution/local authorities). A further major consideration when considering the education and training of workforce entrants is noted by Ellis and Greening Archival Training in 2002: Between a rock and a hard place. They note that the burden of student debt is forcing graduates (in all careers) to seek employment immediately after leaving university. There is evidence to suggest that a reduction in student bursaries and the rise in student debt are skewing the socio-economic composition of the workforce. The future of funding for post-graduate courses for vocational training in the archives domain is uncertain. Without such funding they say, many would find it impossible to take up a place on a course.

It is clear from responses to a questionnaire distributed by Resource at the Society of Archivists' conference last autumn, that technology (in all its guises) is of immediate concern to archivists and records managers. Responses mention online access to electronic archives, preservation of digital media and the demands of electronic records management - with especial focus electronic records and compliance to Freedom of Information and Data Protection legislation.

Politics, the policy framework and central government’s concern with social and economic impact of the cultural sector have affected the way archivists must deliver services. The agenda for social inclusion laid out in the National Council on Archives’ Taking Part is a bold response to politics and policies but the demands it implies for training in outreach and broader service delivery must not be denied.

5 At the Society of Archivists Conference in Jersey in October 2002, at the launch of the ATF, a short 1-page questionnaire was distributed to all delegates asking 5 key questions concerning their priorities for the ATF investigations, and across the archives and records management domain.
The greater emphasis on engagement with the user in addition to curating the archive is seen by many as beneficial. As Vic Gray explained in the paper he delivered to the Society of Archivists' conference 2002 Relating into Relevance:7

“\[I am suggesting that there is a need for a shift towards the deployment end of things, putting more emphasis on how and how effectively our holding are used...I know...that there is far more focus on this in our training courses than there was in the primitive days when I was training.\]”

Changing social attitudes which lead to increased user expectations of their services in an environment where there is less trust in, and less deference for these services and the people who deliver them. Nevertheless archivists and records managers must satisfy these “new” demands.

Changes in the “institutional landscape” have wide-ranging implications for the domain which must adapt to new relationships. This may mean adapting to local, regional and countries landscapes separately or simultaneously. Further challenges result for the workforce in the creation of the National Archives fostering new relationships within the archives domain and the creation of Resource’s Regional Agencies fostering new relationships across the larger sector of museums, libraries and archives. There is huge potential for developing exciting cross-domain training opportunities to address issues which are common across museums, archives and libraries.

In the face of all this it is to be marvelled at that some of the workforce continues to survive and develop, and there is recognition from some parts of the profession that a cultural shift of perspectives from professionals and practitioners needs to take place:

“Many have developed knowledge and skills to engage with the twenty first century archive but there remains a sizeable group who have not shown willingness to change.” (quoted from one of the invitees to an ATF Ideas Seminar, December 2002)8.

4.2 Recruitment and retention – today’s reality

The challenge of the new is not the only challenge to confront the archives domain. The Demos Report notes that the museums, archives and libraries sector is inhabited by more than averagely intelligent and more than averagely articulate people – many of them are committed to ideals of public service, and believe passionately in the worth of their calling. Some of their organizations are models of good practice, serving users and their staff to the highest degree; others are less successful. There remains a dispiriting difference between public service experience and the public perception of archives and records management as a profession.

Resource has funded the National Council on Archives to conduct a wide-ranging Review of Training, Development and Leadership for UK Archives, which is due to report in late summer 2003. Emerging findings show that staff cited positive reasons for working in the archives domain. These included interest in the work, interest in history, variety of work, job satisfaction and love of the profession. It also highlighted the expectation of recent graduates, who no longer expect to be in the same profession all their working lives.

7 Relating into Relevance, a keynote paper by Vic Gray to the Society of Archivists Conference, Jersey, 2002, reprinted in ARC, December 2002
8 Two “Ideas Seminars” were held in December 2002, as part of the programme of ATF research – one for Senior Professionals, and one for Young Professionals.
“There remains a breadth of opportunities. You can choose to specialize as a cataloguer or generalize across a range of opportunities. There are wider opportunities beyond what we originally expected.” (quoted from one of the invitees to an ATF Ideas Seminar, December 2002).

However, Demos encountered what they called a cultural malaise. Staff reported that they had become demoralised by years of funding cuts and by ever mounting demands of accountability. The sector, they reported, is failing to attract the best and brightest into its ranks.

“In the face of this gradual deterioration across several fronts, there has been a tendency to pull wagons into a circle, to retreat into specialisms, to dwell in nostalgia, and at the very worst, to ignore the way the world is changing, in the hope that it will all go away.” (Demos Report)

It is true that recruitment difficulties are currently being experienced. The emerging findings of the NCA Review reports that employers have to choose from a limited number of candidates and/or make adaptations to their structures to cope with the inability to appoint the right person. Difficulties in getting conservation expertise and cataloguers to cover the increasing amount of project work are well known.

Early findings of the review have also highlighted retention difficulties. The emerging findings show that people leave the domain because of poor remuneration, feeling of being undervalued, lack of responsibility and lack of career development and opportunities for promotion. Unsurprisingly, these findings are echoed in statements made at the Ideas seminars held by Resource last December.

“Poor remuneration is not attracting people into the profession. There is a lack of empowerment of the younger professional and a “brain drain” because of the lack of opportunity to progress up the career ladder.” (quoted from one of the invitees to an ATF Ideas Seminar, December 2002).

The Society of Archivists is piloting a continuing professional development (CPD) framework which may help both managers and younger professionals but much more needs to be done.

5 The providers of education and training

David Vaisey (former Bodleian Librarian) noted in 2001 that there is “great strength in archive training and development in the UK.”, and there are currently 5 main training providers.

The NCA Review’s emerging findings reports that employers felt strongly that the core subjects/skills taught on the courses were essential but that many respondents expressed concern at the difficulty in gaining entrance to the training courses, with a feeling that the high level of experience required was now proving impractical.

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10 Currently archives and records management postgraduate training and professional training is delivered by:
   • School of Library Archives and Information Studies, University College, London
   • Department of Information and Library Studies, University of Wales at Aberystwyth
   • Liverpool University Centre for Archive Studies
   • Trinity College, Dublin
   • University of Northumbria at Newcastle
In addition there are conservation courses, such as that at Camberwell.
The academic departments continue to offer traditional courses covering “core” subjects such as the principles of archives and records management, archival description, interpretation of archives from 1500 and preservation with options such as medieval Latin, medieval archives, electronic publishing and on-line cataloguing. These courses are offered within an increasingly changing landscape. Firstly, the nature of undergraduate history programmes has changed, and that many would-be archivists have never studied any English history earlier than 1914, or any social or economic history. The courses thus find that they have to teach quite a lot of historical background to give students the context for archival work. Secondly, many of the courses experience real problems with the difficulty of fitting into courses all the things the profession regards as essential. The contact-hours for the courses are way over what is usual for MA courses, and with the addition of placements, the workload on students is almost insupportable.

In part to counter this, more flexible ways of obtaining academic training have been developed. The University of London’s Certificate in Archives and Records Management, which can be completed in one term, is a programme with some professional elements but there is a strong emphasis on practice as well as theory and full use is made of many archival repositories. Since April 2002, the University of Wales has been offering a distance-learning programme.

In addition to the academic route to learning archive and records management skills, more practical, shorter courses are available. The Archive-Skills Consultancy offers archives and records management training in one day/two day sessions which cover basic archive skills, records management and digital and preservation management. Commercial organisations such as TFPL (a specialist advisory business focusing on knowledge, information, records and content management) run numerous short courses featuring records management, including electronic records management. The Society of Archivists has a Certificate in Archive Conservation which aims to equip students with a wide variety of skills now required of archive conservators.

There are areas of real concern. The provision of training in traditional conservation and preservation skills, (for example bookbinding) is reaching crisis point. There are severe difficulties in recruiting to records management posts, and there is a need for more training (both formal and short courses in records management and information policy issues). The Society of Archivists has recently closed its own in-service training course and the course provided by the University of Wales Bangor has been suspended. However, there are some new developments - the University of Glasgow is currently exploring options for developing professional training.

6 The needs of training

6.1 Need to deliver “the traditional curriculum”

However, with changes to the make-up of the workforce, new and more flexible ways of delivering traditional “classroom” archives and records management courses may be needed. The universities are responding with new methods of course delivery including modular courses and distance learning and new levels of entry. But there needs to be greater attention to cost, geographical location, and delivery of training geared to the needs of the individual in the job they happen to have at a particular point in their career if the domain is to compete for and retain the “new workforce” (as defined above) in traditional archive and records

11 Information policy covers a raft of issues, such as access, copyright, legislation, Freedom of Information, Data Protection etc.

12 This is being envisaged as a training course for archivists, based in Scotland, rather than a course for Scottish archivists.
management roles. Ellis and Greening ask whether there is a need for more varied levels of training. They note the enthusiastic take up of the para-professional training offered by Liverpool University which suggests that archive repositories have a need for well-trained archive assistants.

6.2 Skills gaps - Core skills

The skills shortage demonstrated by the difficulty in recruiting staff to work on cataloguing or conservation and preservation projects may not be solved simply by finding new ways for people working in the archives domain to undertake “classroom” study. The Demos report noted the importance of technical skills and professional skills which are not acquired in the classroom but through observation of and gradual participation in practice (“sitting next to Nelly”). This may be a solution to training in skills in which financial pressures prohibit graduates and para-professionals taking further courses, but it is rarely a replacement for taught courses, and many archivists are employed alone. Other options which could be explored are internships, placements and other workforce partnerships.

6.3 Users

It has been mentioned that the 21st century is bringing new challenges and not the least is that of users and their increased expectations but also possible lack of trust. As Vic Gray said at the Society of Archivists conference in 2002: “We need to engage with these people [users]…and listen to what they have to say and, hopefully, by a slow process persuade them of the significance of what we have achieved in bringing to them, in usable form, the materials with which they work.” The implication is that the workforce must add a portfolio of skills to match that of the most adept spin doctor/public relations teams and advertising agencies, or buy in such expertise.

Another way of engaging with users and helping meet their expectations is to assist them, and them, to make better use of archives especially in the environment of the developing electronic network: To borrow a term from the library domain, to develop the “information literacy” skills of users. Emerging findings from Resource’s Wider Libraries and Information Project13 note that library and information professionals are concerned that users are in many cases ill-equipped to make the best use of the knowledge resources available to them in the e-environment. The move to make computer literacy a core part of the curriculum is welcomed, but users need to be trained in the wider information skills. A ‘Google generation’ is being created, who believe one or two relevant items retrieved from a search of the Web solve their information needs, when in fact they could be missing much more important and better quality information.

By making information literacy a key component of their learning agenda, archivists can make their users much more aware of the wide range of information resources available, and where to find them. Information literacy will also equip them with the ability to be more selective and critical in their use of information. Only then can information be distilled into knowledge. Whilst archivists do tackle training of users, training larger numbers on a grander scale (in the context of the developing electronic archives network, for example) calls for far greater teaching/training skills and capacity than is currently available within the archives domain.

13 The Wider Information and Libraries Project is tasked with clearly identifying the ways in which Resource can most effectively benefit the whole library and information domain. Phase One of the project is due to report in late Spring 2003.
6.4 Leadership and management

The Demos Report said that leadership was the most frequently cited development need identified during the interviews with the museums, archives and libraries sector. This is echoed across the archives domain, for example in responses to the questionnaire distributed at the Society of Archivists conference at the launch of the Archives Task Force. Responses highlighted the need to identify means to build archives leadership and management skills. Existing research strongly supports this as being a “hot topic”, although the definitions of what leadership actually means in practice vary. Concerns have been expressed about improving current leadership capability, succession planning and improving support for aspiring leaders. The recent Resource report Mapping of strategic management and leadership training for the library, archive and museum domains\textsuperscript{14} called for the development of leadership training which was sensitive to the needs of the domains whilst gaining from understanding and experience in other spheres of management. Research undertaken by the Clore Duffield Foundation has stressed that there are a range of inhibiting factors limiting the participation by the heritage sector in leadership programmes. These included the prohibitive cost of current leadership development programmes and the lack of customisation of business school programmes to the context in which heritage managers work. Remarkably, in the local authority archives sector, recent experience with current vacancies indicates that there are problems persuading people to take on senior posts.\textsuperscript{15}

6.5 ICT and electronic records

The emerging findings of the NCA review reported that respondents thought that electronic records and ICT were important aspects of training and development for the archive domain. The Demos report has noted that ICT is an area in which all commentators agree training for the present workforce is essential with the primary need of spreading basic competence training through the workforce. An example of this is the standard of the European Computer Driving Licence, which is the minimum standard of training provided under the training strand of the People’s Network programme, which is being rolled out in the public library domain, funded by the New Opportunities Fund. The Task Force has explored and endorsed the idea of developing the electronic archival network. The hoped for completion of this network should involve ICT training for more working in the archives domain and a parallel opportunity to that offered to public library services could be sought. ICT training (use of software packages, digitisation, electronic records management, website design etc) must also be regularly reviewed, renewed and refreshed to reflect the pace of technological change.

7 Workforce development models from other sectors

There are other sectors which are different from the archives domain but share common problems in recruiting, developing and retaining an appropriately skilled workforce. The models they have developed for workforce training and development might have resonance with the archives domain.

7.1 Education sector

Network Learning Communities is a programme which recognises that there is a much wider pool of latent leadership talent than is currently harnessed. Educational professionals are experimenting with new approaches to learning in the classroom and working in partnerships

\textsuperscript{14} Mapping of strategic management and leadership training for the library, archive and museum domains, Resource, 2001

\textsuperscript{15} One theory for this is that for those who enter the archives profession because it is interesting, the challenges of management and the extra salary seem to be insufficient compensation for the loss of contact with the users and the documents.
within and across schools to develop and share best practice in “Learning Communities”. Each one (which tends to be geographically based) contains at least six schools and a range of non-school partners such as local education authorities, universities and community groups.

7.2 **The National Health Service**

The NHS is keen to attract a wider range of people to work within the NHS. It is offering a variety of access and re-entry points alongside the traditional professional routes. The aim is to create a workforce that is more representative of local communities and in touch with their needs. A “Skills Escalator” has been developed in which the underlying philosophy is that there should be no obstacles to people progressing from cleaner or porter to consultant or chief executive if they have the desire and potential. A programme of training and development has been created to enable staff to constantly develop and extend their skills and knowledge.

8 **Solutions**

We have looked at the workforce now and how it might develop and what that implies for traditional and new workforce training. We have also examined the domain and what is happening in the world at large (technology, social attitudes, politics and institutions, and funding to support education, training and development) that has implications for skills development and training in the archives domain. We have also looked at models in other sectors. The most important and difficult part is to recommend the way forward. To assist the Task Force arrive at solutions we pose the following questions:

8.1 *Whom is the training and development for?*

The demographics of the future workforce indicate that new people, new patterns of working and new ways of training and development will be required. The NHS, facing recruitment and retention problems, has developed an inclusive workforce development plan. Does the Task Force wish to include every one who works in the archives domain in whatever capacity in considerations of training and development? For example, is the Task Force concerned with the training of professional and para-professional archivists or the wider range of skills and career paths to be found in archives, such as teachers, facilities managers, ICT specialists? Resource’s thinking on this is that the concept of the workforce is inclusive.

8.2 *Is a network required for “Learning and Development” for the archives domain?*

Can the daunting task of training and developing an appropriately skilled 21st century workforce which can steward (protect, organise and make available) the nation’s memory, support users/new users, act on political agendas, develop innovative services, meet the technological challenges, advertise the domain, and lead change realistically fall to one type of institution or one method of development?

There are many excellent workforce development institutions delivering high quality academic and practical courses. Institutions and agencies need to demonstrate that they are prepared/preparing to meet the new demands by offering greater flexibility of courses, entry requirements and sensitivity to the potential students’ circumstances (such as geographical location and budget). Would the creation of 4-year courses in History and Archives Management (with BA, diploma and MA qualification options) be appropriate?

There are also excellent initiatives emerging such as the National Council on Archives review of training and the Society of Archivists CPD framework. New players such as the National Archives, Resource and the Regional Agencies for Museums, Archives and Libraries are
emerging. Yet to be developed are Resource’s workforce development strategy and ideas about how the National Archives might assist the workforce in general. The Department for Education and Skills is in the process of developing the employer-led Sector Skills Councils and their impact on workforce development is as yet unknown. But might all these players, whilst not delivering training and development, foster workforce development in the archives domain by nurturing the development and co-ordination of a framework in which it could flourish?

8.3 What other elements can be encompassed within the network?

New “Centres of expertise” Whilst there will always be a need for education and training institutions providing the “core” range of skills for the profession, there may be specific skills gaps at specific times. For example, we have seen that an immediate concern to today’s professional is the management of electronic records and digital preservation and where the expertise will come from. It has also been noted that more ICT skills need injecting into the domain. The Task Force is already considering the possibility of designating centres of expertise. Does an answer to filling specific skills gaps lie in a network of centres that could not only do the task but also deliver training, perhaps by the “Sitting with Nelly” mode, to increase the skills in electronic records of working professionals? Can this model also help address skills gaps in conservation and cataloguing?

8.4 Secondment and internships

It has been said that the archives domain has skills and forms of knowledge which are basic to the functioning of the domain which are best transferred through observation and gradual participation in practice. Could the offering of secondments or internships help this process? Are there enough institutions to support such a programme? Would this be a way of encouraging young professionals to remain within the domain? Realistically, given the pressures on “front of house” activities, could staff be released to participate?

8.5 Leadership

What can be done to develop new leaders: people who can help overcome the “cultural malaise” noted in the Demos report and empower and inspire young professionals? Can lessons be taken from the education sector’s Learning Communities network? Is more research on what has and has not worked in other sectors required?

8.6 Users

It has been noted that greater engagement with users is needed. The Task Force has already decided that more research needs to be done on users/non-users. Should this research focus not only on users needs and how to meet them but also on the training that is required to develop better user engagement?

9 How can training and development of those working in the archives domain be better funded?

9.1 From Central Government

Could Central Government be persuaded to offer financial incentives like those offered to would-be teachers (e.g. £6K training bursaries available to most postgraduate trainee teachers - equivalent of £150 a week to trainees and Golden hellos)?
9.2 From the Lottery funds

One of the three key strands of the People's Network project is a £20 million NOF Programme to train all public library staff in the use and application of ICT skills. Funding has been allocated to libraries at a rate of £400 per capita, and a further £45 per head to be deployed as local circumstances dictate. A third sum of money is also available, called the Special Fund, which is being administered by Country and Regional bodies to support particular strategic issues. Examples include delivering training in rural areas and translating materials into the Welsh language. A key aim of the evaluation work that Resource and the New Opportunities Fund undertake will be to explore how the ICT training programme should be sustained and developed in the longer term, both for libraries and museums and archives. Should the Task Force strongly endorse this? It has been noted that there is a shortage of skills to support cataloguing and conservation projects. Could lottery funders be encouraged to include specific skills training in short term projects provided that the training fitted within an overall plan for workforce training and development?

9.3 HE sector funding

AIM25 (Archives in London and the M25 area) is supported by two rounds of funding from the HE sectors' Research Support Libraries programme. The principle objective of AIM25 is to provide a single point of networked access to descriptions of the archives of the 50 partners. A central team of peripatetic archivists compile descriptions for the 50 partners. Is it worth lobbying for an extension to the creation of expert teams to include trainees as well as experienced professionals? Could these teams deliver two outcomes: x thousand records catalogued or items preserved; and ten people newly skilled in elements of cataloguing or conservation?

9.4 Employers within the domain

In research conducted on the public library workforce, by Sheffield University[^16], a national system of traineeships, funded by contributions from each public library authority, was proposed. The fund was to be established to recruit the best graduates to the public library service. Research showed support for the idea of having 20/30 studentships available for places at university Departments of Librarianship and Information Science throughout the country funded by a contribution of £1K per year from each public library authority. This has not yet been implemented in the library domain but could it work in some parts of the archives domain? How can the commercial and private sector be engaged?

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March 2003

[^17]: Margaret Turner, (a former county archivist, and archive consultant) is currently the Project Manager of the Joint NCA/Resource Review of Training, Development and Leadership for UK Archives, which is due to report in late summer 2003.
Instituting in the Future: A new Framework for Training and Development

Co-ordinators
National Council on Archives
National Archives
Society of Archivists

Consultants
commercial skills
suppliers
trainers

Centres of Expertise
with training elements

HE training course providers

Co-ordinators
Regional agencies
Regional archive Councils

Institutions:
Mentoring
Internships
Seccondees

EMPLOYERS

WORKFORCE

Resource, March 2003