Operating Procedures and Assessment Criteria of the Archives and Records Association Qualifications Accreditation Panel

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1 Introduction

1.1 The role of the Archives and Records Association (ARA)

The Archives and Records Association (UK and Ireland) is the lead professional body for archivists, archive conservators and records managers. It is committed by its constitution to “advance the professional education and training of archivists, archive conservators and records managers and those engaged in related activities”.

The membership of the ARA includes a category of Registered Member for those admitted to ARA’s Professional Register, which is conferred on those with professional competence and experience, and a demonstrable commitment to Continuing Professional Development (CPD), as evidenced by successful completion of ARA’s Registration Scheme. Entry to the Registration Scheme is normally reserved for those possessing an accredited postgraduate qualification.

The means of qualification for the archives and records management profession is principally through educational programmes offered by universities in the United Kingdom and Ireland and accredited by ARA.

University programmes have strong links with the archives and records management profession, recognising the value of such interaction for both sides. This includes employing qualified archivists/records managers as lecturers and assessors, as interviewers of potential students, as hosts for student work placements in and visits to archives and records management centres. Staff who deliver the programmes participate in ARA committees which are concerned with education, training and otherwise across the professional spectrum.

In 1984, the predecessor of the ARA, the Society of Archivists, introduced its procedure for the accreditation of university programmes. The accreditation procedure ensures that:

- programmes provide professional education of appropriate content and standard to equip students with the knowledge and skills required to manage archives and records
- students have confidence in the programmes they complete
- employers have confidence in the quality of the professional qualification
- there is a continuing dialogue between ARA and professional programmes, promoting co-operation and development of the profession.
1.2 Qualifications Accreditation (QA) Panel and the Board of the Archives and Records Association

The QA Panel develops and manages the accreditation criteria used to assess the programmes. It provides from its membership Qualification Assessment (QA) Teams to evaluate programmes against the criteria and make recommendations to the ARA Board, following assessment visits. The Panel works with existing and potential programmes to ensure consistency of standards across education providers. As a group the Panel provide continuity over time.

1.2.1 Membership of the Qualification Accreditation Panel

The QA Panel shall be members of ARA who have been approved to undertake such work by the ARA Board. The members of the QA Panel shall have a broad range of professional experience and type of employment, as set out below.

- Panel members must have an interest in and knowledge of archival and records management professional education and relevant issues and selecting or recruiting for the profession and guiding the early careers of new entrants.
- Members shall be or shall have been practising archivists / records managers with a sound knowledge of current archives and records management professional standards, theory and practice. All members must keep their skills and knowledge up to date.
- The Panel shall include a member of the ARA Preservation and Conservation Section.
- The Panel shall include a representative from programme providers as an observer who will not take part in assessment visits nor have access to confidential reports or discussions relating to university programmes other than their own.
- All members must be willing and able to make the necessary long-term commitment to the work of the Panel, including meetings, in order to build up expertise and ensure continuity between assessment rounds.
- Recruitment of Panel members will be by open advertisement among members of ARA.
- Members of the Qualification Accreditation Teams must be registered members of ARA (see section 1.2.2 below).

1.2.2 Membership of the Qualification Assessment Teams

The QA Teams are drawn from among the registered members of the Panel. Team responsibilities are set out below:
Each QA Team shall consist of the Panel Leader and sufficient appropriately experienced Panel members to assess each programme.

Assessors may not assess any programme for which they are the current external examiner or where they are currently teaching substantive parts of the programme.

1.3 Responsibilities of the Qualifications Accreditation Panel and relations with the ARA Board

The QA Panel is responsible for overseeing and co-ordinating the accreditation of university programmes. This includes the establishment, review and development of accreditation procedures and criteria, and selecting the membership of the team that assesses for accreditation any particular programme.

In relation to the accreditation procedure, the Board shall:

- review and approve, or require amendments to, the membership of the QA Panel
- review and approve, or require amendments to, the criteria and procedures for accreditation and other matters relating to the accreditation of programmes, as drawn up by the QA Panel
- review and approve, or request clarification of, the recommendations of the QA Panel in respect of the accreditation of specific programmes. A recommendation to the Board of the ARA may take one of three forms:

1. Qualified Accreditation
   - Programmes that have been operating for less than three full years will be awarded qualified accreditation.
   - Qualified accreditation may be awarded to a previously fully-accredited programme undergoing change or in need of development or revision for a specified period of less than five years. Extension to the full five years is dependent on the QA Panel being satisfied that evidence submitted to it by the programme is sufficient to meet the accreditation criteria.
   - It is not expected that a programme will apply for, or be awarded, successive periods of qualified accreditation.

2. Full Accreditation
   The programme is accredited by ARA for five years from the date of the Board’s ratification of the recommendation, provided that any major changes to the programme during that time are notified to, and approved by, the QA Panel.

3. No Accreditation
A programme that does not meet the accreditation criteria will not be awarded accreditation by ARA.

- request and receive reports from the QA Team on developments in university programmes and qualifications.

1.4 QAA Subject Benchmark Statement

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) is an independent body entrusted with monitoring and advising on standards and quality in UK higher education. QAA owns, maintains and publishes the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code). The Quality Code has been developed with the higher education community, and sets out the Expectations that all providers of UK higher education are required to meet.

Subject Benchmark Statements are part of the Quality Code and set out expectations about standards of degrees in a range of subject areas. They describe what gives a discipline its coherence and identity, and define what can be expected of a graduate in terms of the abilities and skills needed to develop understanding or competence in the subject. Subject Benchmark Statements do not represent a national curriculum in a subject area. Rather, they allow for flexibility and innovation in programme design within an overall conceptual framework established by an academic subject community. They are intended to assist those involved in programme design, delivery and review and may also be of interest to prospective students and employers, seeking information about the nature and standards of awards in a subject area. Some Statements combine or make reference to professional standards required by external professional or regulatory bodies in the discipline.

The Subject Benchmark Statement for Librarianship, Information, Knowledge, Records and Archives Management was published in March 2015¹. This document defines what can be expected of a graduate in the subject, in terms of what they might know, do and understand at the end of their studies.

The ARA accreditation criteria is a professional standard whose main aim is to ensure “programmes provide professional education of appropriate content”. ARA recognises that their criteria is not an academic standard and that programmes in the UK may use the QAA Subject Benchmark Statement as a basis for learning outcomes. ARA feels that their professional criteria and the QAA Subject Benchmark Statement complement each other, but in the future it is hoped the two organisations will work more closely together to ensure closer alignment.

1.5 Broader professional developments

The QA Panel acts as a medium for conveying the views of programme directors and teachers to the profession. The visits are a means of two-way communication, and the leader of the Panel will convey the concerns of the programmes to the QA Panel and other ARA committees as appropriate.

ARA may publish general conclusions from the accreditation process about developments in the professional education and training of archivists/records managers and to draw attention to issues of particular value or concern.

2 Procedure for Accreditation

2.1 Application for accreditation

The director of any programme seeking accreditation shall apply to the Archives and Records Association via the ARA QA email address:

Newly established programmes may apply for qualified accreditation after operating for one full year.

Full accreditation is valid for five years, after which the programme may apply for re-accreditation. Accredited programmes will be notified by the QA Panel Leader when their repeat assessments are due.

The award of accreditation covers all the modules in a programme at the time of assessment.

Major changes to a programme require new assessment when introduced in order for accreditation to remain valid. Major changes may entail alteration to core modules or the withdrawal or addition of content to the programme. It is the responsibility of the programme director to notify the QA Panel of such changes. The QA Panel will determine the appropriate way to conduct the assessment, taking into account all the circumstances.

2.2 Information required prior to the assessment visit

Before the visit the programme director shall supply the following information for review by the QA Team:

- the programme brochure or on-line equivalent
- the syllabus and timetable, including outline details of the content of each subject and the amount of time spent on it
- examples of programme materials, including, where relevant, examples of distance learning materials
- the names and qualifications of the teachers and assessors, with details of their previous and/or current involvement in archive/records
management work and/or research or professional matters (including CPD)

- examples of examination papers and completed work from a variety of
different subject areas and by students of different abilities in recent
years
- bibliographies for core subjects
- summaries of feedback from students and reports from external
examiners.

It is recognised that the form and range of documentation necessary for this
will vary between institutions and it is a matter for the programme director to
determine the most appropriate method of supplying the information.

The QA Team will also review any previous report on the programme and will
seek information from external examiner.

Notice of each cycle of assessment visits will be publicised to the ARA
membership and to the programmes to be assessed. The accreditation
criteria are available on the ARA website at:

2.3 Visit of the Qualification Assessment Team

The programme director is responsible, following consultation with the leader
of the QA Team, for the preparation of a draft timetable for the visit. This shall
include provision for:

- a pre-meeting of members of the QA Team involved in the
assessment visit
- a meeting with the Head of Department, programme director and other
staff involved in the overall planning and administration of the
programme. This meeting shall consider:
  - the current state of the programme as seen by the director,
including developments since the previous assessment and
planned or possible future developments
  - issues or comments, specific or general, that have been raised
formally and informally by students, staff, university or
members of the profession
  - staff qualifications and experience
  - student numbers since the previous assessment visit
  - new developments proposed or under consideration within the
university that may affect the way in which the programme is
taught or administered or its content
  - statistical information on initial employment secured by former
students who have recently completed the programme.
- separate meetings with the teachers responsible for the various subjects. All staff teaching core modules must be available. The Team may also request to meet staff teaching optional modules.

- opportunities to view the teaching and other facilities used in the provision of the programme.

- a meeting with current students and recent graduates. The purpose of the session is to give the team an impression of the student body and its reaction to the programme, primarily as a basis for discussion with the staff. Meetings may be substituted by telephone, web-based or video conferencing to accommodate distance learners or to allow participation by students unable to attend meetings.

- a meeting with the Vice-Chancellor/Principal, Dean or other university or college officers under whose aegis the programme falls. This should normally take place towards the end of the visit and provide an opportunity for the members of the Team to indicate informally their impressions of the programme and for them to obtain an indication of the university’s or college’s attitude to the programme, its needs and its funding. In particular the QA Team will draw attention to any areas of concern which may depend on institutional policy, for example funding, staffing or accommodation.

- A final private meeting of the QA assessment team

- a final review meeting with the director and, if appropriate, Head of Department.

### 2.4 Accreditation report and recommendation

Following the visit, the QA Team will draw up a report comprising

- a description and assessment of the main features of the programme

- the accreditation recommendation to be put to the Board

- recommendations and suggestions for consideration by the programme director and team

A copy of the report will be sent to the programme director for review and comment in respect of the accuracy of its content, prior to a formal accreditation recommendation being submitted to the ARA Board.

Following the decision of the ARA Board in respect of the recommendation for accreditation, the final report, including recommendations/suggestions for consideration, will be sent to the programme director. The leader of the QA Team will be available to discuss any aspect of the report and recommendations / suggestions in greater detail with the programme director if necessary.
All aspects of the report and recommendations/suggestions will remain confidential to members of the QA team and the ARA Board. Any board member with a potential conflict of interest (programme directors or those with a substantial teaching commitment to a specific programme) will not have access to any of the full reports. In respect of Freedom of Information requests submitted to a Higher Education institution, ARA requires programme directors to seek the opinion of ARA on compliance with a request relating to the most recent QA report.
3 Criteria for Accreditation

Programmes offered by the universities vary in content and structure, reflecting the wide variety of skills and knowledge required by archivists and records managers. ARA’s accreditation criteria recognise this and acknowledge that all subjects cannot be covered to the same level and that programmes employ a variety of teaching methods. The accreditation criteria seek to ensure that all programmes include a minimum level of coverage in specific areas, as defined by the accreditation criteria in section 3, to provide students with sufficient knowledge and skills to begin work as an archivist or records manager at an appropriate level.

3.1 General

3.1.1 Overall aim

Archivists and records managers educated in the UK and Ireland should have a thorough grounding in and knowledge of the principles underlying the theory and practice of the care and management of archives and records in all formats. They should have specific knowledge of the historical, administrative and legal context of archival material and records, and of national and international legislative provision and standards. They should have awareness and understanding of current research and best practice in an international context, professional and research methodology and current issues, and should possess the skills required to carry out their work, including the potential to develop in leadership and management. They should be equipped to participate in and benefit from CPD.

3.1.2 Balance of curriculum

The professional archivist/records manager needs both academic and practical knowledge and skills. There should be a balance between the two within the curriculum. There is also a need to give sufficient weight both to traditional skills and to current contemporary developments.

There should be evidence of regular updating of programmes to reflect changes in current professional practice and the marketplace

3.2 Students

Candidates should hold a first degree, or equivalent, or qualify under mature entry criteria or by accreditation by prior learning. Selection should be based on evidence of intellectual ability, personal suitability and awareness of the nature of archives and/or records management work and/or digital curation. A practising member of the profession should be involved in the selection process.
All students should have, prior to commencement of the course, appropriate practical experience of archives and/or records management work in accordance with the FARMER guidelines for pre-course placements.

3.3 Teaching staff & resources

Each institution is expected to appoint such teaching staff as it considers necessary to deliver the aims of the programme. It is recommended that suitably qualified individuals, with appropriate experience and current knowledge of archives, records management practice and digital curation, should lead or play a significant role in delivering the programme.

The QA team will look for evidence that institutions provide sufficient and suitable resources to enable delivery of the aims of the programme.

3.4 Curriculum

Syllabus design and method of delivery are the responsibility of the teaching institution, and ARA does not seek to offer a framework for delivery of the programme. However, without prejudice to the specification of additional outcomes, either as part of a programme’s core or as options, ARA does require that all programmes deliver the core outcomes specified below.

The outcomes are expressed in two parts: firstly, those expected from programmes offering both archive and records management education and secondly, those specialising in records management.

3.4.1 Statements of Core Outcomes – Archives & Records Management combined programmes

The Panel has not separated the outcomes for combined programmes into ‘Archives’ and ‘Records Management’, rather has set out combined outcomes reflecting the inter-relationship of principles and practices of recordkeeping. Students are expected to develop skills and knowledge to practice in both archives and records management equally. A bias in teaching or outcomes towards either archives or records management may lead to failure to accredit the programme.

**Recordkeeping: theory and principles**

*Aim:*

To give the professionally qualified archivist and/or records manager a critical theoretical and practical understanding of the nature, role and purpose of records and archives and their management in organisations, communities and society and to equip him/her to continue to develop that understanding.
Outcomes
By the end of the programme students will have the professional knowledge and skills to be able to understand and explain:

- The importance of professional standards of conduct (including ethical considerations) to, and the role of professional bodies within, archives and records management.
- The theory of archives and its importance in underpinning archival practice and of archives and records management as a professional discipline.
- Where archives management and records management fit in the information spectrum.
- The nature and characteristics of records, data, documents, information and archives and the need to challenge pre-conceptions and perceptions of these characteristics.
- The evolution of types of records formats, media and of recordkeeping systems and assess the implications for their intellectual and physical management.
- The value of archives and records as information resources, the means by which citizens hold governments and others to account, evidence for legal and moral accountability and for cultural and historical purposes.
- The administrative, legal and regulatory frameworks and standards applicable to archives and records management and interpret them in their appropriate organisational context in both the public and private sectors.
- The relationship between organisations and the records and archives they create.
- The influence of the political, economic, social and technological environment, nationally and internationally.

Recordkeeping: systems and processes

Aim:
To equip the professionally qualified archivist and/or records manager to design and implement effective policies and programmes, applying best-practice principles and standards, to establish and maintain intellectual control over records and archives in all formats and media.

Outcomes
By the end of the programme students will have the professional knowledge and skills to be able to:
Use appropriate investigative and analytical techniques to collect data and identify organisational functions, records systems and records, including vital records, for the development of records management programmes and systems.

Design and implement systems and procedures for the intellectual control of records including capture, organisation, classification, identification, retrieval, tracking and disposition.

Understand, interpret and apply the principles and standards governing archival arrangement and description, regardless of age, provenance, media and format.

Identify, interpret, describe and authenticate documents, recognising the importance of the science of diplomatic across the chronological range of record-keeping.

Understand how to specify, procure and implement systems to manage archives and records.

Curation and stewardship

Aim:
To enable the professionally qualified archivist or records manager to design and implement effective strategies policies and procedures for the acquisition, storage and preservation of records in all formats.

Outcomes
By the end of the programme students will have the professional knowledge and skills to be able to understand and explain how to:-

- Design and apply an acquisitions policy, taking into consideration the legal, financial, technical and procedural issues impacting on acquisition.
- Develop and implement an appraisal strategy, taking into consideration the purpose of the archive, the range of its holdings and its role in society.
- Assess, evaluate and address risks to security and integrity, including physical composition of records regardless of media or formats.
- Evaluate and mitigate the risks of damage to records regardless of media, format or age, the importance of the role of preservation and conservation and the fundamental principles of archival conservation.
- Design and apply a preservation policy.
- Develop and implement emergency plans, business continuity and disaster recovery plans.
- Design an appropriate surrogacy programme.
• Analyse the relationship between records and archives and the historical representation of their communities and societies.
• Design and implement systems and procedures for the physical control of records in all media including appropriate and cost-effective storage.
• Demonstrate the benefits of records management and design policies and define responsibilities for its implementation.
• Design and implement systems and procedures for evaluating and auditing records management programmes.

Access, advocacy and audiences stakeholders

Aim:
To enable the professionally qualified archivist and/or records manager to design and implement strategies policies and procedures to permit archives and records to be used: to develop awareness of the role, purpose and holdings of archives, to develop the uses to which archival holdings may be put, and to ensure the effectiveness of the archivist/records manager in responding to customer requirements.

Outcomes
By the end of the programme students will have the professional knowledge and skills to be able to: -
• Evaluate different types of organisational structures and cultures and recognise their potential constraints and opportunities.
• Recognise the need for, and key principles of, effective human resources management, project management, financial management, communications and interpersonal skills in the operation of an archives and/or records management service.
• Deliver records management within a risk management context.
• Identify and use tools to support records management benefits analysis and building a business case.
• Forge and develop partnerships with professionals in related disciplines and sectors and with other stakeholders and build networks.
• Ensure effective standards of customer care, including the provision of appropriate customer training.
• Design the physical layout and contents of a search room, establishing procedures for its effective operation.
• Develop and deliver advocacy and awareness-raising including user-focused training for staff.
• Design, implement and maintain an effective digital presence.
- Exploit archives and records as a resource for learning and for the support and development of communities.
- Design educational services using archives.
- Design programmes to promote archives and records.
- Use archives for income generation and fund raising.
3.4.2 Statements of Core Outcomes – Records Management programmes

Recordkeeping: theory and principles

Aim:

To enable the professionally qualified records manager to develop a critical theoretical and practical awareness of the nature, role and purpose of records management in organisations, communities and society, including the impact of technological and social changes upon recordkeeping

Outcomes

By the end of the programme students will have the professional knowledge and skills to understand and explain:

- The importance of professional standards of conduct (including ethical considerations) to, and the role of professional bodies within, records management.

- Where records management fits in the information management spectrum and the relationship between records management and related disciplines including archives administration, information/knowledge management, information technology, information security, risk management, litigation support and compliance management.

- The nature and characteristics of records, data, documents, information and archives and the need to challenge pre-conceptions and perceptions of these characteristics.

- Professional theory and identify its implications for the processes of managing records.

- The application of the theory and principles of records management to the fast-changing information environment, including the challenges of technology and its obsolescence, change management and new ways of working.

- The value of records in different contexts as both information resources and evidence for legal and ethical accountability and cultural and historical purposes.

- The administrative, legal and regulatory frameworks and standards and interpret their relevance to records management within different organisational contexts.

- The impact of the political, economic, social and technological environment, and of international considerations, on records management.
The different mechanisms and models for delivering records management services, such as out-sourcing.

Recordkeeping: systems and processes

Aim:

To enable the professionally qualified records manager to design and implement effective policies and programmes, applying best-practice principles and standards, for the management of records in all formats and media throughout their lifecycle / continuum within their organisational context.

Outcomes

By the end of the programme students will have the professional knowledge and skills to understand and explain:

- An organisation’s records management requirements and develop effective and appropriate policies and procedures to meet them.
- The definition and assignment of managerial and operational responsibilities as appropriate for records management processes and compliance.
- Appropriate investigation and data collection techniques, including audit, inventory and interview, to identify and appraise the range, nature and role of different types of records in the context of specific organisational culture.
- Systems and procedures for the intellectual control of records including capture, organisation, classification, identification, retrieval, tracking and disposition
- The application of analysis and business classification techniques for the design of records management systems.
- Records appraisal and records retention / disposal schedules and other techniques and procedures to manage the systematic disposition of records through activities including the review, destruction or transfer to permanent archives.
- The need for regular monitoring and auditing activities as appropriate for records management programmes.

Curation and stewardship

Aim:
To enable the professionally qualified records manager to design and implement effective strategies policies and procedures for the physical control and preservation of records in all formats.

Outcomes

By the end of the programme students will have the professional knowledge and skills to be able to understand and explain how to:-

- Develop business continuity and disaster recovery plans, including the identification and protection of vital records.
- Design, assign and implement access and security classification and control requirements as appropriate for the organisation and its records.
- Assess, evaluate and address risks to the security and integrity of records.
- Develop procedures for maintaining and administering information governance and compliance, including intellectual property rights, privacy, freedom of information and open data, relevant to the organisation and jurisdiction concerned.
- Source and manage techniques for the preservation of authentic records and systems throughout the continuum/life-cycle, including media and format selection, migration.
- Implement systems and procedures for the physical control of records in all media including the pros and cons for the use of in-house or outsourced storage facilities and services to deliver appropriate and cost-effective storage.

Access, advocacy and stakeholders

Aim:

To enable the professionally qualified records manager to design and implement effective policies and programmes, to permit records to be used: to develop awareness of the role and purpose of the records manager in responding to business needs and customer requirements.

Outcomes

By the end of the programme students will have the professional knowledge and skills to understand and explain: -

- Different types of organisational structure, culture and strategy in order to manage and exploit their potential constraints and opportunities, including the distinctive nature of records and their management in the public and private sectors.
The need for, and key principles of, effective human resources management, project management, financial management, communications and interpersonal skills in the operation of a records management service.

The benefits of records management, including improving business processes and service delivery, supporting decision making, protecting the interests of the organisation and its stakeholders and maintaining corporate memory and the role and use of benefit analysis and risk management tools and methods.

The requirements of users of systems and the need to design records management procedures to assist them to access records accordingly.

The need for effective communication programmes, including appropriate documentation and training to develop understanding of and compliance with records management policies, principles and practice, and to advocate for and raise awareness of the service.

The need to forge and develop partnerships with professionals in related disciplines and sectors and with other stakeholders, building networks and developing influencing skills.

The need for appropriate training for end-users and other stakeholders.

4. Authorisation

Agreed by the Archives and Records Association Qualifications Accreditation Panel in consultation with the Forum for Archives and Records Management Education & Research (FARMER) 17 April 2015 and approved by the ARA Board in November 2015.
Appendix

Education programmes currently accredited by the ARA

The following programmes are currently accredited by ARA as postgraduate level qualifications.

National University of Ireland, Maynooth

- MA in Historical Archives

University College London

- MA in Archives and Records Management

University of Liverpool

- Master of Archives and Records Management (MARM)

University of Aberystwyth

- MSc Econ in Archives Administration, full time
- MSc Econ in Archive Administration, by distance learning
- MSc Econ in International Archives, Records and Information Management, by distance learning

University College Dublin

- MA in Archives and Records Management

University of Dundee

All programmes are by distance learning

- Dip/MLitt in Archives and Records Management
- MSc in Archives and Records Management (International)
- MSc Records Management with Digital Preservation
- MSc Records Management with Digital Preservation (International)

University of Glasgow

- Dip/MSc in Information Management & Preservation