ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ASSOCIATION NORTH WEST REGION: SKILLS AUDIT 2018

1. The Project

In March 2018 the North West Region of the Archives and Records Association commissioned an audit of the skills of those working in archives, records and information management and conservation in the region in order to assist in the strategic planning of future training.¹

An online survey was launched in July 2018 and distributed to a wide range of groups and organisations.² It was open to everyone across the region: both ARA members and non-members and paid and unpaid workers. We wanted to find out about individuals’ roles, the types of organisation they worked in, and in which area of the region they were based. We ensured the complete anonymity of individuals.

Our central purpose was to find out people’s perceived training needs by asking how confident they felt in undertaking specific skills. We also needed to know whether they wanted training in these skills either for their current role or as part of their career development. The 35 skills investigated were divided into the following areas:³

- Archives and records skills
- Preservation and conservation skills
- Digital and technical skills
- Access and engagement skills
- Business, transferable and personal development skills

Thanks to regular social media and other reminders people responded really well: 180 responses provided an excellent base of evidence on which to work.

2. Who responded to the survey? The profile of contributors.

The 180 respondents split evenly between ARA members (91 or 51%: 57% of the regional membership) and non-members (89 or 49%). 147 provided completed responses.⁴

¹ The CILIP/ARA 2016 Information Workforce factsheet for the north west of England and Merseyside states that 6,501 people work in libraries, archives, records, information and knowledge management work in the region. The ARA NW Region comprises about 160 members.
² Including professional archives, conservation, library and museum membership lists; community archives, forums and a resource centre; social media platforms.
³ Details of the 35 skills identified can be seen on the charts in the Appendix.
⁴ All answered the 4 questions in the section ‘About you and your role’. 91% completion of section on Archives and Records skills down to 81% for Business Transferable and Personal Development skills. Responses to the other three skills areas hovered around 86%.
Chart 1. Where do you work?

Most of the 180 responses came from Greater Manchester (35%). Merseyside at 19% was comparable with the Cheshire area (17%); and Lancashire at 9% with Cumbria (8%). 3% came from the Isle of Man. In the ‘other’ category (8%) people highlighted specific areas (e.g. Bury), 2 responses came from Wales and 1 each from Yorkshire and Newcastle which were kept in: however that from the National Archives of India was deleted! Freelancers noted that while based in the region they may well work outside it.

Chart 2. What is your role?

Most responses came from archivists (56), with 10 each from conservators and records managers and 11 from local studies librarians. It was good to receive responses from 14 volunteers (details below) and 7 freelancers. While nobody ticked the ‘community archivist’ box, we do know from other responses that community archives were represented.

Analysis of the 50 comments supplied in the ‘Other’ category, where job titles were refined, highlighted the large number of ‘assistants’ including 28 library/archive/collections assistants spread across libraries, archives and museums, accompanied by 10 librarians and 5 curators. 7 noted that they were involved in information/records management and/or governance in a charity, museum, library, rural estate or the NHS and 1 worked as an access and engagement officer in a university.
Volunteers
14 volunteers (4 ARA members) responded: from local authorities (4); community archives (3); charities (2); universities (2); library (1); business (1) and one ‘support worker’. 4 responses were incomplete and 7 responded to the final question, asking what people’s top three training needs are. The highest number wanted training in digitisation, digital preservation including website and social media management. Others wanted help in cataloguing and working across multiple online catalogues; semi-active records and metadata; oral history, events and outreach, marketing and promotional skills.

Archives, libraries and museum assistants
28 assistants (4 ARA members) responded, with 20 suggesting top training needs: several noted the need to understand sources (including online) in order to help customers better, noting specific sources e.g. family history; for training in all collection management and preservation processes from appraisal to cataloguing and interpretation, including digital and audio-visual data; use of CALM; storage and packaging. Several need support in engagement activities: with wider audiences; developing, displaying and curating exhibitions; communications and engagement: marketing and event planning. Working with volunteers.

Chart 3. What type of service do you work in?

The local authority sector was the most heavily represented by some margin (68), followed by higher education institutions (HEIs) (25) museums (17) libraries (13) and businesses (9). Responses came from 5 community archives and 3 each from schools, religious and specialist organisations.

Other services were identified as government departments/NHS (3); art galleries (3); charities, rural estates, freelancers, and local history/heritage groups (2 of each) and one from a research library in a university.
What are your current audiences – and your future ones?

What audiences do you currently work with?
34 responses (some with more than one audience): academic and educational (9); those reached through social media (twitter, FB) but not all are sure who this reaches (6); community based groups including social/mental health, young people (5); general public (5); volunteers (3); internal audiences (3); older people (2); library, museum (2); BAME and LGBT (1 each); business, theatre, women (1 each).

What audiences would you like to work with?
13 responses: schools (2); charities (1); teenagers and young people (3); an archivist and librarian to organise material (1); younger audiences (1); local community (1); larger social media audience (1); marginalised communities (2); disabled and adults with long term health conditions (1).

3. What are your training needs? Skills analysis.

How do you rate your skills?

Five charts show how respondents rated their skills in each of the five areas identified by the survey. For each of the 35 skills (described on the bottom axis of each chart) we asked people to

1) Rate your skill level by ticking one of the following:
   - I am confident I can do this
   - I am OK but could improve
   - I do need to work on this

2) Indicate how relevant the skill is to you by ticking one of the following:
   - I need this for my current role
   - I don’t need this for my current role but would value it for my career progression
   - I don’t need this for my current role and do not value it for my career progression

Table 1 summarises information taken from the charts, identifying priorities within each area.

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5 See Appendix for Charts 4 – 8 which provide a graphic view of people’s responses and skills needs in each of the five areas in order of priority.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills areas</th>
<th>Skills most needed for current roles</th>
<th>Skills most wanted for career development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archives and Records Skills</td>
<td>1. Understanding archives and records processes</td>
<td>1. Managing information risk</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Collecting and appraising archives</td>
<td>2. Managing current and semi-current records</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. Managing sensitive collections/information</td>
<td>3. Applying appraisal and retention processes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Assessing preservation needs</td>
<td>2. Evaluation conservation options</td>
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<td>3. Emergency prevention and disaster preparedness</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Managing born digital data</td>
<td>2. Reading and understanding archives (palaeography)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. Managing audio visual collections</td>
<td>3. Managing audio visual collections</td>
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<tr>
<td>Access and Engagement Skills</td>
<td>1. Delivering learning and outreach activities</td>
<td>1. Creating and maintaining web pages</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Displaying and exhibiting archives</td>
<td>2. Using social media to engage audiences</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. Providing online access to archives and records</td>
<td>3. Providing online access to archives and records</td>
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<tr>
<td>Business, Transferable and Personal Development Skills</td>
<td>1. Regulatory compliance (copyright, GDPR)</td>
<td>1. Fund-raising and grant application</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Oral/written communication skills and presentation</td>
<td>2. Influencing and leadership</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. Business management and project planning</td>
<td>3. People management and development</td>
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</table>

Table 1. Prioritised training needs

The charts in the Appendix indicate the need for specific skills for current roles; the degree of confidence in performing them; and the desire for training in specific skills even if not needed for current role. What stands out from all the charts is that in almost every case people’s confidence in a skill falls below their need for it in order to undertake their current role.

What are your top three training priorities?

The word clouds below have been generated from the final question, which asked what people’s top three training needs would be. They represent 345 responses out of a possible 540 (63%) and show prioritisation of requirements. Although a fairly blunt instrument (e.g. what does ‘management’ actually mean?) it clearly shows key areas of need.

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6 Other suggestions to the skills identified in the survey:
Archives and Records Skills: Understanding different kinds of records to explain to others; Benchmarking and reporting; Organising a move and planning space;
1. People’s top priorities

2. People’s 2nd choice priorities

3. People’s 3rd choice priorities

Table 2. Top training needs

**Preservation and Conservation Skills**: Ongoing CPD, given the ever-changing nature of treatments; embroidery; cds, tapes and photographs; bookbinding; minimising acidification; conservation standards

**Digital and Technical Skills**: managing obsolete formats; digital microscopy; data export; managing metadata

**Access and Engagement Skills**: managing younger audiences e.g. DBS, safeguarding; widening social media audiences

**Business, Transferable and Personal Development Skills**: writing business cases; educating and informing management; negotiating, subsisting on a tight budget; volunteer management; support into the profession; workshops for all who work in archives (not just archivists); human resources, diversity, health and safety, disabilities support; people management skills even if not in a managing role
**Conclusion**

The number and quality of survey responses have provided an invaluable base of evidence to assist the Region in the strategic planning of training for ARA members and non-members. Priorities in each of the five skills areas have been clearly identified. In addition the research demonstrates:

1. An **even spread**: from the 35 skills identified, need or want was expressed for 27 of them.
2. People are universally **lacking confidence** in the skills they need for their current roles: (confidence is highest in the provision of onsite access and in packaging archives).
3. The greatest **need** for training for **current roles** is in regulatory compliance, digital preservation processes and born digital recordkeeping.
4. The most **wanted** skills for **career development** are managing information risk, digital preservation software training and creating web pages.

**Appendix**

![Chart 4. Archives and Records Skills](chart4.png)

**Chart 4. Archives and Records Skills**
Chart 5. Preservation and Conservation Skills

Chart 6. Digital and Technical Skills
Chart 7. Access and Engagement Skills

Chart 8. Business, Transferable and Personal Development Skills