Shape Your Own Archivist: the European Competency Template

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ABSTRACT

This proposal addresses section two: European projects on archives (experiences, plans, future). It focuses on an International Council on Archives Archival Competency project currently being completed, which has developed a European competency framework. The framework is designed to be used by national archives, professional archival associations and local archives to develop competency models, relevant to specific countries and localities. The presentation will start with an analysis of the competency framework content, which will be followed by a discussion of the issues surrounding the development of a competency model and the benefits arising from it. These include different circumstances and resources within countries and localities, the role of archival education and lifelong learning in professional competency and continuing professional development, legislative frameworks, job descriptions and recruitment and professional certification and accreditation

Il contesto europeo di modello di competenze: formate il vostro archivista

SINTESI

La presente proposta si rivolge alla sezione due: Progetti europei sugli archivi (esperienze, piani, futuro). E' focalizzata al Progetto Competenze archivistiche del Consiglio internazionale degli Archivi, in fase di completamento, che ha sviluppato un contesto europeo di competenza. Il contesto è concepito per essere utilizzato dagli archivi nazionali, dalle associazioni archivistiche professionali e dagli archivi locali per sviluppare modelli di competenza, pertinenti a specifici paesi e località. La presentazione inizierà con un'analisi del contenuto del contesto delle competenze, che sarà seguito da una discussione sulle problematiche inerenti lo sviluppo di un modello di competenza e dei vantaggi derivanti. Questi includono differenti modalità e risorse nei vari paesi e località, il ruolo della formazione archivistica e l'apprendimento permanente nella competenza professionale ed il continuo sviluppo professionale, i contesti legislativi, i profili e le assunzioni lavorative e la certificazione e l'accreditamento professionali.

Okvirni model evropskih kompetenc: oblikujmo lastnega arhivista

IZVLEČEK

Prispevek predstavlja projekt Mednarodnega arhivske sveta z naslovom Arhivske kompetence, ki je bil pred kratkim zaključen, in ki je razvil okvirne evropske kompetence. Okvir je namenjen za nacionalne arhive, strokovna arhivska združenja in lokalnih arhive, da na njegovi osnovi razvijejo primerjalne modele, relevantne za posamezne države in lokalne skupnosti. Prispevek najprej predstavlja analizo vsebine okvirnih kompetenc, temu pa sledi opis razvoja kompetenčnega modela in koristi, ki jih prinaša. To vključuje različne okoliščine in vire na nacionalni in lokalni ravni, vlogo arhivskega izobraževanja in vseživljenjskega učenja na področju strokovne usposobljenosti in stalen strokovni razvoja, zakonodajne okvirje, opis delovnih mest ter zaposlovanje in strokovno certificiranje in akreditiranje.

In recent years a number of developments, both societal and professional, has lead the profession to question itself about its identity, between scientists and information managers. This concern, raised at the International Congress on Archives in Vienna in 2004, then at the 2006 European Conference on Archives, as a prelude to possible job mobility in Europe, is far beyond daily technical problems, but seems to be for the profession one of the key issues in the years to come. The exercise of defining our competencies was therefore undertaken in a number of countries, resulting in sometimes very different models. The ICA section of professional associations, ICA/SPA, had in 2006-2007[1] compiled these initiatives as a first step of a reflection which it was asked to take on in partnership with EURBICA, the European branch of ICA, by a resolution of the 2006 European conference.

The competency project, which initially aimed to develop a European competency model, rapidly turned into a different, while more realistic, approach focusing on the methodology rather than the content, because it would have been very difficult, probably impossible, to develop a single model for Europe, taking into account the different traditions and working environments. In addition to a number of obstacles, including diverse archive traditions and approaches to recordkeeping, language barriers, specific idiosyncrasies of national and regional archive heritages and a plethora of different training and education systems and standards, and having considered different existing models throughout Europe, it appeared that the methodologies and approaches for developing the model could vary considerably between and within countries. These are the reasons why, from 2007 to 2011, the working group commissioned by EURBICA and SPA[2] developed a handbook proposing guidance on how to elaborate a competency model, whatever the professional and cultural context or the initiator could be[3]. Indeed professional competencies concern all professionals whatever their background or role. The template has therefore been conceived for a wide range of bodies and individuals: national archives, professional associations, national agencies, private companies, archival education and training institutions and many others. The final handbook covers a number of issues, including the conduct of a competency project (why one should develop a competency model and how it can be used), a reflection on professional profiles and competency profiles, the acquisition and the assessment of competencies. Various models developed by associations were used to illustrate the discourse and develop a template.

Why develop a competency model

Information manager, historical archives custodian, ERMS expert, exhibition curator: rarely other professions than that of records and archives management offered so many opportunities while building on a rich tradition. Yet it has a specific consistency through its diversity. It is this specificity that must be defined and highlighted by the creation of competency models. In our rapidly changing world, their usefulness has become even more evident and urgent. Archives and records management professionals have to be prepared and ready to meet the challenges of the digital era. In their effort to maintain high standards of professionalism, it is essential that they develop the appropriate skills and competencies.

Beyond the definition of this specific work, still not well understood or perceived, several goals to the competency model can be set, including:

– The definition of a clear long-term vision for the profession: it is important to conceptualise a vision of the profession as a basis on which the professional and competency profiles can be supported. It is easier, with a clear vision, to draw a detailed professional portrait of the archivist. Societal, economic, technical, professional, educational and regulatory contexts all impact on the archival profession and, consequently, on the competencies that they require. An important contextual issue is the societal role of the archival profession. For example, does the profession contribute to

1. International Council on Archives, Section of Professional Associations (SPA), *Sources relating to archival and recordkeeping competency and certification and accreditation programs*, 2007.

2. Josep Conejo Muntada, Associació d'Arxivers i Gestors de Documents de Catalunya (AAC), Agnès Dejaob and Christine Martinez, Association des Archivistes français (AAF), Thijs Laeven, Koninklijke Vereniging van Archivarissen in Nederland (Dutch Association), Berndt Frederiksson, Svenka Arkivsamfundet (The Swedish Association of Archivists), Carmen Cuevas Blanco, Subdirección de los Archivos estatales (Spain), Jari Lybeck, Arkistolaitos Arkkivestet (National Archives of Finland), Caroline Brown and Patricia Whatley, University of Dundee (Scotland).

3. ICA/SPA and ICA/EURBICA, *Developing a competency model: a guidance*, ICA, 2011.

justice, equality and well being in society, an issue closely related to legislation? The societal role depends largely on the organisations which employ archivists, both in the public and private domains. Economic factors are also important, if the archival profession can demonstrate that its functions bring economic benefits, the profession's position in society will be raised.

- A clearly defined position in relation to 'sister professions', librarians and other information managers who might not work with records and archives. Records and archives professionals are commonly considered as 'interchangeable' with a librarian or an IT expert, often as a result of the ignorance of competencies and skills that are ours. This could lead to a better designed inter-professional co-operation.
- An essential basis underpinning well-designed education and training policies and programmes: it is up the professionals to inform education and training institutions and organizations on the realities of the profession and to guide adjustments so that educational programmes relate to the profession's evolution and developments.
- Similarly, when they exist, examinations for public positions should take into account the specificities of the profession at all levels, from senior to tactical or operational positions.
- The competency model as a tool to support the process to validate the 'learning by doing' skills by organizations entitled to carry on this process.
- The competency model as a tool for human resources management services to develop relevant and adapted job profiles.
- The clarification of the relationship between our profession and its partners, enabling us to think about our own limitations: we work with architects, but we are not, and it is the same with I.T experts, lawyers, restorers, etc.
- The competency model is also aimed to support professionals who wish to develop their careers and take on new responsibilities: it helps them make choices, to assess their skills and abilities in order to improve them with training if necessary.
- Finally, it can help young people or students who would like to enter the profession to get a better idea of what is expected from them when performing their professional activities.

This reminder of the necessity/usefulness to develop a competency model makes clear the self-interest of professionals in this process, and thereby the vital role they must play in its design. It is therefore important to consider who will develop and define the model and which stakeholders should be involved. The professionals and professional associations have specialised professional of the relevant issues, particularly if they represent several kinds of employers. Other points of view may have to be taken into account, for example, human resources and management, if the model is to fit within the broader organisational context. The issue of responsibility will affect the implementation of the competency model and assessment, certification and accreditation.

To summarize, a competency model project aims to define the professional profiles (functions, activities and tasks) of archivists and the competencies (knowledge, skills and aptitudes) they need in order to become, to be and to remain professionals. The project has a number of goals. It promotes the profession in many ways (for example, in the field of education and training), gives the public a realistic notion of the work of archivists and helps to communicate with other professions. The national/local context will determine which goals have the highest priority.

The development of a competency model relies on a clear understanding of two main concepts: the professional profile and the competency profile.

The professional profile

The professional profile consists of a precise definition of an archivist's role, which will be determined by the strategic vision of the body in which the archive is based. The concept of a professional profile has different meanings in different contexts. For the purpose of this article we use the term as a collective profile describing the profession of archivists, 'what an archivist actually does, what his/her tasks and responsibilities are'. The professional profile constitutes the basis for the competency profile. Defining the goals/tasks that the archivists undertake and their responsibilities, one has to consider:

- The core mission: what is the basic nature of the archival profession? What makes it unique? How does it relate to other professions?
- Requirements and skills vary within different professional contexts, leading to a segmentation of

the profession. Different sectors may produce different competency models. It is desirable that the models contain, in least in part, a common set of competencies.

– In some archival traditions the professions of the archivist and the records manager are closely related. In other traditions the two domains are not so close. Whatever the adopted approach is, it is important to state it in clear terms.
– What is the role of academic/non-academic education and training?
– How can generic activities, for example, management, be taken into account?
– The list of activities and tasks may contain varying levels of detail. While it may not be necessary to mention very basic tasks the list of activities should be adapted to the objectives of the competency model.

Another factor is that archival work takes place at different levels of responsibility and competency. These include basic, intermediate and expert levels and operational, tactical and strategic. These are often seen as identical but there are differences of usage and meaning. It is possible for experts to be working at operational as well as strategic levels. The term professional profile is already in use in behavioural science, where it means a description of the experience required for a particular job. In an archival context, however, the meaning is broader and corresponds well to the term competency profile. A complement to the professional profile is a job profile, which is a more detailed analysis of what individual groups of archivists are doing. For example, in a large archival institution it can be useful to create different job profiles for different departments within an institution.
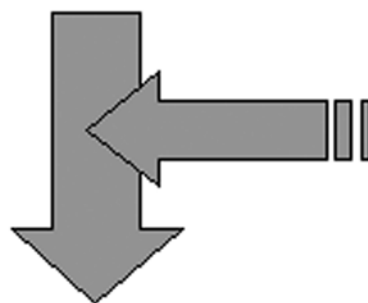
A professional profile can be used for two main purposes. Firstly, the most common purpose is to describe broadly the profession in each country. Secondly, professional profiles can be used to outline a vision, this is, what the archivist should be doing. The term is then used for the purpose of developing and defining the profession. The basis for a professional profile is to establish what is unique to each profession. For the archival profession this comprises: the time perspective, evidential value, relation to processes, appraisal, and access. When defining the archival profession it is also important to clarify what the profession does *not* include. This approach may be useful in comparing the archival profession to similar professions, such as librarians and information managers.

The professional profile can be described using the vertical model (managerial/strategic, opera-

tional, professional levels), or horizontal (categorizing the profession: public, private sectors, traditional archivists, archivists concerned with records management, consultants, educators, etc.). It is essen-

tial to ask four basic questions: what does the archivist do? How is it done? Why is it done? What knowledge and skills are required?

There are two main areas of responsibility, described as 'function'. Each function consists in its turn of activities and activities consist of different tasks. One set of functions is based on archival theory (such as control over records creation, appraisal, preservation, arrangement and description, access and outreach), the other deals with generic skills (project management, human resources management, budget and financial management, strategic planning, communication, promotion and advocacy).

Once a professional profile has been created, this will then be used to develop a competency profile.

The illustration above shows the cohesion between Professional Profiles on the one hand and Competency Profiles on the other. A Professional Profile describes an archivist's professional activities. The vertical arrow shows the relationship between what is done and the expected/required achievements or outputs that are the result of activities (the 'performance'). In order to be able to produce these outputs the archivist has to have certain competencies (indicated by the horizontal arrow). The diagram shows that there is only an indirect relationship between competencies and outputs.

There are many definitions of the 'competencies' and 'competency profiles'. These vary from the highly specialised and scientific to the informal and practical. The competency profile states the knowledge and skills needed to carry out these tasks and responsibilities. Of course, there are many professional archival profiles. For example, the profile of an archivist working in the public sector will be different from the profile of one working in the private sector. A working definition has been adopted by the SPA/EURBICA working group: 'a 'competency' is a blend of knowledge, skills and aptitudes that are required by an archivist to achieve a recognised level of professional performance'. More than one competency is required, which is measured by performance. Competency can be mastered at different levels of proficiency. Three elements are essential in this definition: **knowledge** (facts and concepts and their relationships), **skills** (capacity to achieve work related mental or physical tasks) and **aptitude** (innate ability). The three components belong together and should not be dissociated. A distinction must be made between 'competency' on the one hand and 'qualification' at the other hand. Qualification refers mainly to educational and vocational standards, certificates and diplomas. Ideally, a qualified person is always competent but a competent person does not need to be formally qualified.

It is useful to make a distinction between domain independent and domain specific competencies, although they may both be part of a competency profile. The latter relates to professional activity, for example, 'preservation' or 'access'. The former relates to many professions, for example, 'planning' or 'skills in public speaking'.

Another useful distinction is that between core competencies and others, which may be considered additional, accessory or supplementary. What is core depends on the context. For example, 'palaeography' or Latin might be considered additional, but for an archivist working in a Cathedral Archive it is a core competency. The core domain-specific competencies of the archives and records management profession are often those which distinguish it from related professions such as librarians, museum curators and information management. In developing a national set of competencies or a national competency profile, concentration on the core competencies may be the first stage. Core competencies may, of course, vary between sectors. While there may be a limited number of core competencies, a competency profile may contain other non-core competencies, described at varying levels of detail.

The skills and knowledge required to achieve practical tasks and goals must be analysed to determine the competencies required of the profession. Based on the analysis of activities, functions and tasks, a list of the elements (knowledge, skills and behavioural skills or aptitude) that belong to the competency profile(s) of an archivist must be drawn up. The following are key stages in this process:

– Deciding the key 'aptitudes' or 'behavioural skills' required by archivists and *whether they should they be included in the model;*
– Considering the working context (sectoral and national) and the related professional require-

ments. While different sectors may require different skills a flexible holistic view of records creation, management, appraisal, preservation, and reader service is required regardless of context;
– Drawing up a list of relevant terms and expressions to be used in the model. In some cases the commissioner may wish to incorporate this into a larger generic competencies project, for example, across a large organisation;
– Choosing vocabulary used to describe the competencies is very important. It involves identifying links between functions, activities, tasks and competencies and between skills, knowledge and aptitude required;
– Deciding on an appropriate level for the competencies which will be determined by the intended use of the model. In some cases it might not be appropriate to include all low level competencies;
– Assessing the competencies should be undertaken in relation to the expected outcomes. The criteria must be clear, to provide a basis for the evaluation and to define the content of training.

On the basis of this analysis, a template has been proposed as a concrete tool to compare and develop competency profiles. It is divided into separate sections, including definitions and benefits of a competency model, the domain covered by the profile, the purpose of the proposed model, the coverage, how the competencies are defined, proficiency and development (acquisition and assessment of competencies). The acquisition of competencies is approached in a number of ways. These may include education and training, continuing professional development (CPD) as well as learning on the job.

Once a competency framework is developed the next stage is a consideration of how the competencies will be acquired. This will to some extent be dependent on the environment in which the framework is being developed. The factors that may influence this include who has developed the competency framework and to what purpose. A framework developed by a professional association is likely to include competencies that can be acquired in different ways to a framework developed by a company for its employees. It may also include how the competencies are described and tested. A competency framework based on tasks will require different approaches to acquiring those competencies than one based on levels of knowledge and skill

The role of education in the professional environment must also be considered. In many countries a degree in a relevant discipline is seen as a prerequisite to becoming a professional archivist or records manager, however it should be appreciated that there are many ways to acquire knowledge and skills outside the formal educational environment and that there are generic or innate competencies that can't be taught or acquired which depend on a person's natural aptitudes. For example, public speaking, advocacy and leadership skills. It should be remembered, as Crockett acknowledges, that non-professional competencies such as management skills may be required for some positions and that a competency framework may also include skills and knowledge required by those working in non-professional or in what is sometimes referred to as paraprofessional roles[4].

When developing a competency framework it is essential to consider how these may be acquired. It would be counter productive to develop a framework without ensuring that the structures, opportunities and expertise was in place to deliver these competencies effectively. As stated above what these structures and opportunities are will vary depending on who is developing the framework and why, but the majority of competency frameworks will, and should, allow for a variety of methods of acquisition. These may be developed and delivered in the form of education and training or they may be acquired by the individual through continuing professional development.

Acquiring competencies through education

Is formal education essential in the acquisition of competencies? In many countries in order to operate in a professional environment a degree is preferred if not required, so does it follow that any competencies which are based on professional knowledge and understanding should be acquired through formal education? Education provides the opportunity for sustained, reflective learning, an understanding of theory and its role in record keeping, and engagement with current research. While

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4. M. CROCKET, 'Continuing Professional Development and the Hallmarks of Professionalism: An Overview of the Current Environment for the Record-keeping Profession', "Journal of the Society of Archivists", 28(2007), n. 1, pp. 77-102.

it is possible, for example, to have an understanding of the theory behind appraisal or to be able to carry out an appraisal decision without this, education is undoubtedly beneficial in acquiring these competencies. However education is not essential in the acquisition of competencies, indeed, as we shall see, some competencies are better acquired by other means. It does, however, play an important role in developing professional knowledge and skills. While this is not the place for a full discussion of the role of archival or recordkeeping education, anyone seeking to develop a competency framework should be aware of some of the debates and issues surrounding this subject.

What should educational programmes cover? Are there core subjects that should be considered essential in professional education and that all educational programmes should include? Should these subjects be reflected in competencies i.e. should a competency framework contain some essential elements and if so what should these be? In some countries no distinction is made between these two areas[5] while in others they are treated as two separate, albeit strongly linked, professions. Should an educational programme teach both areas or should programmes be specialised[6]? Should archival education be taught in a broader context of information and digital management? What impact does this have on what is taught? If archival programmes are embedded in larger colleges or schools such as information management or history what are the consequences of this? There are issues here for the development of a competency framework. If archives, records management or digital preservation are taught separately, can the knowledge acquired be judged by the same competency profile[7]?

If the content of archival education programmes is decided with little reference to practitioners how can these programmes guarantee that their graduates will be competent to act as professionals in a working environment? Most commonly there is a dialogue between academics and practitioners as to the contents and format of programmes. In the United Kingdom university programmes are developed by the universities themselves but accredited by the professional association[8], the Archives and Records Association UK, working to agreed criteria. These criteria outline the knowledge and skills that have been recognised by both academic and professional stakeholders as essential for someone wishing to work in a professional environment. As such they form a solid basis for developing a set of competencies for the profession[9]. The British system is not however typical in Europe and in many countries the dialogue between academics and practitioners could be improved.

Should educational programmes concentrate on theoretical knowledge and leave the acquisition of practical skills to on-the-job or other training? While it is possible to separate concepts relating to the characteristics of a record from the practical process of devising a filing system, the work of a professional involves reflecting on and understanding why you are doing something at the same time as being able to do it. Education programmes should teach theory, but with an understanding of how to apply this in practice. Preferably there should be the opportunity for students to actively apply their knowledge during internships or work experience placements. If educational programmes teach both theory and practice it is possible to acquire competencies relating to both knowledge and skills from these programmes. It is, however, rare that graduates from archival programmes become very skilled in practical tasks and it is likely that these competencies will be acquired elsewhere. When developing a competency framework the interrelationship of theory and practice should be remembered. Competency frameworks should reflect the importance of knowledge i.e. understanding the theory and concepts that underpin the profession. Programmes also depend on the educational culture of the country and the pedagogic approach may vary according to the position of the programme in the wider education system.

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5. [For example, in Swedish and Finnish education and training no principal difference is made between records and archives management.].

6. In the United Kingdom most archive degrees will include an element of records management, while several universities, such as Northhumbria and Dundee offer degrees specialising in records management only.

7. During the development of the National Occupational Standards in the United Kingdom the difficulties of creating competency levels that would suit both archives and records management was demonstrated. Does fetching and carrying require the same skill from an archivist as from a records manager for example? For more information on the National Occupational Standards see http://www.lluk.org/national-occupational-standards.htm, accessed April 2010.

8. In Sweden there is a special state agency [name?] which inspects and accredits university programmes, including records management and archival programmes. Recently the agency evaluated the records and archives management programme of the University of Stockholm.

9. The criteria are available at http://www.archives.org.uk/careerdevelopment/startingout/postgraduatecourses/revisedaccreditationcriteriaforpostgraduatecourses.html accessed April 2010.

Much of the discussion about archival education relates to degree level qualifications, usually, although not exclusively at postgraduate level. A competency framework for professionals should be developed with reference to the levels of knowledge and skills that such a programme would be expected to produce. If a country has an educational programme it is possible to base a framework partly on the criteria developed for these programmes. However, on a national level competency frameworks are increasingly developed so they map to existing or developing systems of national qualifications, often known as qualification frameworks, which cover several educational levels. Australian competency standards, for example, have been established within the context of the Australian Qualification Framework[10] and in the United Kingdom work is being done to develop qualification specifications for the Libraries, Archives and Information Services workforce that will map to National Occupational Standards already in place[11]. The range of these qualification frameworks is broad, covering school level to postgraduate, and will include vocational as well as more traditional education and training. While there may not be specific archive or records management qualifications at all of these levels using a national qualification framework to develop competency frameworks has many benefits. A framework already exits in which to place the framework and this framework will clearly map to recognised national educational and vocational standards.

There is clearly an interrelationship between archival education and competencies. What is taught, how it is taught, at what level and by whom will have an impact on the development of a competency framework. Equally the skills and knowledge identified in a framework should influence archival educators. As Marian Hoy says 'competency standards are a tool for curriculum development'[12]. However archival educational programmes are not the only way to acquire knowledge and skills. In some countries there are no education programmes available and clearly the acquisition of knowledge and skills should not end with the culmination of a university degree. Indeed, as was previously, stated some skills will be better acquired in the workplace or through some other forms of training.

Training is a key way of acquiring competencies. It is important to consider the range of training possibilities available, whether it is effective in delivering the skills and knowledge required, and how the effectiveness of this training can be evaluated. Training can be informal and delivered on-the-job and in-house or it can be delivered by external agencies such as professional associations or expert bodies. In France a training centre run by the Association des archivistes français is an important player in the field. In 2011, for example, it will arrange c. 40 2 to 3 day training courses. In Spain, the Catalan archives association (Associació d'Arxivers de Catalunya) is equally important as a training organisation. Its co-operation with the University of Barcelona started in 1988 and a new School of archival and documentary studies, Escola d'Arxivistica I Gestió documental de Catalunya (ESAGED) was established in 2002. The school is attached to the University of Barcelona, with the close collaboration of the association of archivists. ESAGED provides a master's degree in records and archives management which normally takes two years to complete. In Finland, there are three associations of archivists. One of them, the Association of Business Archivists, is active in training and provides a number of one-day courses. A more substantial training programme is the 'Professional degree´ which is provided in collaboration with the human resources development company, Rastor. The degree is delivered by blended learning, with 11 class days plus distance and online learning. A Finnish peculiarity is the substantial role of the National Archives Service (which comprises The National Archives and seven provincial archives) as a training organization. The Service provides c.850 hours of lectures, mainly for people who are already in the labour market. The training is mainly basic or training. The National Archives Service has also a higher educational program but this kind of education is mainly taken care of by universities. In order to adequately cover the range of competencies in your framework you may need to be prepared to work with several training providers. A professional association may be able to deliver effective training on archival standards but another body may be better placed to deliver management training. So therefore how do you decide who is qualified to deliver suitable training and will you recognise a training course from a particular trainer as suitable to demonstrate the acquisition of a particular competency?

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10. See M. Hoy, *'Record-keeping Competency Standards: The Australian Scene'*, "Journal of the Society of Archivists", 28(2007), n. 1, pp. 47-65.

11. Work in this area is being done by Life Long Learning UK, for more information see http://www.lluk.org/3074.htm, accessed April 2010.

12. Hoy, "Journal of the Society of Archivists", 28(2007), n. 1, p. 50.

Are courses delivered at international level suitable or should the focus be on national and local training? Does training imply some kind of practical activity and, if so, can it only be delivered in situ or are online or distance learning courses suitable? How can online courses which are teaching, for example, cataloguing, be judged to be suitable? How can we ensure that training is delivered to people who find it difficult to travel or who are not able to get time off work? Can competencies be acquired by attending training aimed at other information professionals such as librarians? If so which skills could be acquired this way? Is it in fact more beneficial to undertake training in some areas, for example management, with people from different professions? How should this be reflected in a competency framework? The French Ministry of Culture and Communication is a good example of this. It is planning to arrange cross-sectoral training courses, for example, on security issues.

This point applies to all methods of acquiring competencies. A competency framework will be beneficial to many stakeholders – the individual, the employer and the profession as a whole. Who is to pay for this? Employers need to be encouraged to allow staff time to attend training courses and preferably to contribute towards the costs. Aside from employers should we expect individuals to fund their own training and other forms of development? Or should the body which has developed the competency framework be prepared to subsidise the training and development? In the United Kingdom the Archives and Records Association have subsidised training events in what they see as core skills and there is no fee for enrolment on the Registration Scheme, while bursaries are available for candidates to attend training sessions[13]. ARMA's RIM Self-Assessment tool is also free if you are a member but an application fee is required to become a Certified Archivist in the USA[14].

Just as education can assist in developing practical as well as theoretical competencies so should training aim to impart knowledge as well as skills. To facilitate the success of a competency framework is important to ensure that a wide range of training opportunities is available and delivered by a variety of providers.

Continuing professional development (CPD) is a range of activities undertaken by an individual throughout their career which aim 'to update, expand and enhance skills, knowledge and expertise'[15]. As such CPD is an essential component in acquiring competencies and in keeping them relevant and up to date. Training can provide a core part of this and many professionals are increasingly turning to education to update their knowledge through taking modules offered by University programmes[16]. However CPD should involve more than just attending training courses or enrolling on educational programmes. It offers the opportunity to acquire competencies through more flexible, less structured means and can include activities undertaken by the individual alone rather than organised by others. As such it is available to more people than training and education programmes and has the potential to encourage the acquisition of a broader range of competencies. Some activities which could be included in CPD are: mentoring and buddy schemes; job swaps; attending conferences; writing articles and undertaking research; involvement in professional organisations and committees; teaching and training others; transfer of non-professional skills to the working environment and reflective activities at work, such as formal reviews and presentations to colleagues of goals achieved.

CPD can be encouraged formally and informally by employers, organisations and professional associations. Registration and certification schemes such as those developed by the Archives and Records Association UK and the Academy of Certified Archivists in America are aimed, primarily, at encouraging recently qualified professionals to continue with their acquisition of knowledge and skills. In the UK there is currently no formal CPD programme after Registration while in American Certification must be renewed every 5 years. In the UK most archivists will be registered, but this is not the case with Certification in America. The issue of whether CPD should be compulsory is a contentious one, a compulsory CPD programme throughout a professional career would certainly facilitate the acquisition of competencies and go some way towards ensuring the adoption and success of a competency framework. However there are many reasons why a compulsory programme may not be establi-

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13. For more information on the Registration Scheme see http://www.archives.org.uk/training/registrationscheme.html accessed April 2010.

14. See http://www.arma.org/competencies/index.cfm and http://www.certifiedarchivists.org/ both accessed April 2010.

15. Crockett, "Journal of the Society of Archivists", 28(2007), n. 1, p. 78.

16. The University of Dundee offers around 30 modules by distance learning which can be taken for CPD, for more information see http://www.dundee.ac.uk/cais/cpd/, accessed April 2010.

shed. If this is the case it is recommended that opportunities for CPD are put in place and an environment to encourage continued learning and development is created. An interesting framework has been developed in America by ARMA. Their Records and Information Management Core Competencies self-evaluation tool is itself a form of CPD. Using the tool encourages self-assessment and participation in CPD at the same time as promoting competencies within the profession[17]. As with training CPD requires the participation and support of all stakeholders. To ensure a successful competency framework it will be necessary to convince professionals, employers and professional associations of the value of CPD at all stages of a person's career.

It may be that some competencies depend on behaviours or aptitudes that are innate, such as public speaking, and cannot be learned. The majority can, however, be acquired through education, training and continuing professional development. For a competency framework to be successful the opportunities for education, training and development should be wide-ranging, supported by stakeholders in the profession and competency framework, and appropriate for and available to a broad range of people, whatever their professional level.

Established educational programmes and a well structured training and development programme can help in the creation and success of a competency framework. Similarly the continued updating of this framework, with the identification and addition of new skills and knowledge, should inform the provision of education and training.

Once competencies have been developed they must be assessed. The assessment of competencies, is the last stage in the establishment of a competency model and preliminary work is needed to identify and standardise the competencies. The assessment of competencies is a process which provides a means of testing whether all personnel working in an archive have the knowledge and skills necessary to allow them to perform their tasks. This is achieved by examining the competencies developed by an individual and comparing them with criteria set out in the competency model. This process may result in the certification of professional competence, public recognition, and acknowledgement of the ability to work professionally. Assessment and certification are valuable for the professional, as they provide professional status and wider public recognition. In addition the process of assessment publicises these professional competencies and skills.

To make the assessment of competencies a reliable process and one which is accepted by organizations and society, it has to observe a series of requirements and characteristics. First, the general requirements that an organization must meet in order to undertake the assessment process are objectivity, independence and impartiality. Secondly, the formal characteristic that is required are validity: evaluative organizations should operate within a recognised and legitimate institutional framework. These should be formally established by a representative body with authority to guarantee the validity and credibility of the process. The assessment process should be open and visible to all stakeholders and should be accountable. The process should also be defined in a public document containing the competencies.

The review mechanisms should be publicly available and be established in advance of the process. The assessment should not be regarded as conclusive due to constantly evolving professional contexts, including technological innovation and organizational changes, which may amend the qualifications and competencies. In addition, acquisition, assessment and the subsequent certification of these new skills have to be linked to the professional careers of employees and the consequent possibility of career promotion and development. A publicly available register of certified professionals should be established to document, control, update and publicise details of certified members. The register will be of special relevance in raising social awareness of the profession, as well as leading to greater awareness of the profession within both the public and private sector.

Organizations view employees as a major asset, therefore it is beneficial to employers that staff work to their full potential and that organizations contribute to the personal and professional development of their staff. The adoption of a model based on professional competencies can also form the basis for the selection and assessment of archives staff. It should be noted that the assessment of competencies has a number of utilities, to both archival organizations and their personnel, and should re-

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17. See http://www.arma.org/competencies/index.cfm, accessed April 2010.

sult in tasks being carried out more efficiently and effectively, thus leading to an improvement in the quality of services offered to the users.

The following benefits to archival organizations include the ability to contribute to the planning criteria and policy for staff recruitment, a greater understanding and knowledge of the activities of archival staff, the adoption of continuous professional development to facilitate the acquisition of new professional competencies, greater motivation and integration of staff with the objectives and culture of the organization, increased flexibility and versatility of staff, more effective selection of new staff and more effective valuation of staff

The benefits to staff include increased and improved mobility of labor, increased levels of equal opportunities for access to and maintenance of employment, the ability to develop an individual training programme, an increased knowledge of their professional status in relation to the competencies required by their particular job, the identification of competencies to be improved or developed, professional recognition of competencies gained by the professional archival organization and improved status within the organization.

During a competency process it is necessary to define and limit the area which will be evaluated. This requires taking into account the different professional profiles that may exist in an archival organization and the different competencies each has. The specific functions and tasks defined for them must also be taken into account.

Each model of assessment of competencies has to assess the following aspects: professional education, which can be considered to comprise three levels: initial education, specific education and continuing education. Initial education is the minimum education required to permit entry to the profession, normally an undergraduate degree

– Specific education in archives and records management is that which covers specialist knowledge required for the profession. These can be offered by universities at post-graduate level, or by specific archival bodies, such as Archival Associations, National Archives, etc.
– Continuing Education is carried out by professionals throughout their career, which leads to the development of their professional skills and personal development. This can be offered by businesses and organizations, trade unions professional associations and universities, through, for example, distance learning programs.
– Professional work experience, which allows the abilities and professional skills acquired in the course of professional work to be assessed.
– Critical examination of the training required to obtain professional certification: this section should allow both the theoretical and practical knowledge required to gain professional certification to be quantified and assessed.

Methods of assessing professional skills depends on the agents which carry out the process. Two basic models can be identified: the assessment by an organization that has legal jurisdiction for this purpose. This process ends with professional certification. The second method is self-assessment. This process is undertaken by the professional to assess their competencies and abilities in accordance with a predefined standard. The procedure does not necessarily end with the certification of professional competencies.

Professionals can be evaluated through two different models, the certifying agent may be an independent agency assigned this task or a national model: the first model of assessment and certification is where the body responsible for certification is an independent body, such as, for example, a professional association or a specially created certifying body. In most cases, this system only permits certification at the basic professional level of archivist and cannot differentiate between the different professional levels. In this model, aspects of both education and practical experience have to be assessed. It might also include an examination, though this is not always an obligatory part of the process. A specified level of educational achievement or a set number of years of experience can be offered in lieu of the examination.

The greatest advantage of this system is that certification is 'universal'; in other words, it is fully accepted both in the public and private sector. This is very important for communication and relations

between professional and the private sector since the contractor has access to a register and thus to professionals who have certificated professional skills in archives and records management. On the other hand, the universality of this model means that the skills which have to be demonstrated and certificated are very general and varied, which suggests that they do not emphasize the specialist nature of the profession.

The second model is the national model, where the public administration or archives that operate a selection process for potential employees are charged with certification through competitive examination. In this case, every public body (local, regional or state) or participating archive has its own assessment process. Normally, this consists of validating the experience and education of candidates by way of examination, but every agency decides on their own process and how every stage of the process is validated. The process, its stages and the standards for assessment should be published in advance. The results of each stage should also be made public.

The most interesting aspect of this system is that it adapts and changes to fit the post concerned in such a way that the required skills are adjusted to meet the needs of the workplace. On the other hand, this type of model of certification only applies within the administration or archives offering the post and as a consequence, when changing organization it is necessary to recommence the process of assessment/selection. Another disadvantage is that the process is not the same for all bodies, which indicates the heterogeneous nature of the skills and competencies being sought.

Self-assessment is the process by which the professional can assess their own competencies and capabilities in accordance with a model which they can use to compare across indicators, and which identifies the strengths and weaknesses of their knowledge and professional skills.

The objectives of this process are different depending upon the stage in career: to guide the choice of university course: if the self-assessment process is done before the start of university studies, the results may serve to enable students to target their studies appropriately. Another objective is to redirect careers: if the process takes place during an established career, the results could reorient their career or further develop their skills to better position themselves in the job market or improve their salaries. In either case, the person can develop their own training route, from college to continuing education, by the creation of a career development plan. This process can be repeated and amended as needed.

Self-assessment can relate to individuals or affect all professionals in the organization. In this last case, the process can be useful to revise the training template, to define their roles according to their skills and to develop a training plan. The self-assessment is a personal process and the results do not have to be made public.

The self-assessment is carried out through an examination or test that has different sections according to the professional competencies to be evaluated. For example, the test used by the ARMA assesses six areas: Business Functions; RIM Practices; Risk Management; Communications and Marketing; Information Technology; Leadership. The final result of the process is a document identifying the strengths and training needs to ensure the compliance of professional goals. Depending on the formality of the assessment process, this can culminate in a certificate of professional competence.

The problems observed in the self-assessment process are the reliability and credibility of the process. As this is a personal process and do not necessarily have to be made public, there are organizations that do not recognize these results.

Certification of skills, as already mentioned, is a public, formal and temporal recognition that a person has demonstrated the capacity to do their job. The skills assessed are mapped to agreed criteria, which do not necessarily have to have been acquired as a result of following an educational program. This method allows the regularization and standardization of skills acquired by archivists which have been acquired in a more 'informal' manner, such as through work experience. According to the practices and actions of each country there are two models for the certification of professional competence, which are not mutually exclusive; where the certificate is issued by the organization providing the training at the end of the training process, or where the certifica-

tion is issued by an independent specialized agency of the institutions involved in training and the acquisition of their professional competencies.

Once certified, the next step is the entry in the register of certified professionals. This register serves a double function: controlling, updating and publicity professionals in archives and by the existence of a list of professionals who certify a range of knowledge and skills, through which the labour market feeds, both for the public to the private sector. The main consequence of introducing a model of competency assessment is to be able assess objectively the professional standards of the profession. These standards have to made public to increase transparency and reliability of the assessment process, and this publicity helps the visibility of our profession in the labour market, as it explains our functions and disseminates them in both the public and private.

At the same time it signifies that the establishment of professional standards will lead to a revision and examination of the established system of education to enable it to adapt to the new professional realities.