

Facing the Future?

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This paper is the result of a survey of Sydney Archivists on "Issues in Archives Administration," in order to determine which issues were seen as being most significant to the profession.

Between the months of March and May this year I plagued archivists in Sydney to complete a survey form from which I wished to draw data for a presentation on issues in archives administration.

As an expression of gratitude to each and every respondent who laboured over the questionnaire, as an act of communication and as a mechanism for focussing our individual and collective attention on our future I should like to present some of the results of the exercise.

My brief for the presentation was to identify and discuss some of the issues facing the archival community. In order to eliminate some of the idiosyncracies inherent in a personal perspective my wish was to elicit from colleagues which ten issues were perceived as being most significant to the profession, and its associated institutions, in the ensuing decade. The questionnaire circulated may be found at Appendix 1.

At the outset I would stress that the results of this survey cannot claim to be representative of the profession's views in Australia. The preoccupations of archivists in Sydney may not be shared elsewhere. This sample may contain an urban bias that would not be reflected if every member of the Society were canvassed. It also may contain a preponderance of archivists employed in large public institutions (in this instance the Archives Office of New South Wales and the New South Wales Regional Office of the Australian Archives) which, again, may not be true of the Society's membership as a whole.

A total of sixty-one questionnaires were circulated. It was solely for reasons of economy that circulation was confined to the Sydney area (all except three of the questionnaires went to Sydney addresses, of the three not restricted to Sydney two were completed and returned). Forty-eight replies were received (78.68%). However, one reply was in the the negative the participant finding it "impossible to establish any meaningful order or priority to the issues you identify."

The table in Appendix 2 provides a breakdown of the area of employment of the archivists approached and details of the response rate.

By far the largest component, almost 69%, were archivists employed in the public sector, although not all were from large archival institutions. The next largest employment sectors were financial institutions and tertiary educational institutions where coincidentally the same number, seven individuals or 11% in each, of archivists were contacted.

In December 1979 the Society of American Archivists conducted a poll of a proportion of its members to assist it in tailoring its programmes.¹ To enable a comparison of some sort many of the categories on the questionnaire used here are similar to those in the American survey. However, before attempting the comparison, presented below are some of the results of the survey conducted in Sydney.

The questionnaire nominated fourteen broad areas of concern, for example, Access, Resources, Finding Aids, and within each broad area narrower concerns were identified, for example, Access — protection of privacy. In all there were thirty-one issues/problems from which a minimum of ten had to be selected and ranked by each respondent.

Given that forty-seven completed questionnaires were received and that each voter had ten votes a total of 470 ungraded votes were cast. Listed below are the number of unranked votes cast for each of the *broad* areas nominated on the questionnaire:

Broad Area	Total No. of Votes	%
(13) Technology	56	11.91
(2) Administration/Management	55	11.70
(14) Workload Explosion	54	11.49
(4) Conservation	48	10.21
(12) Resources	46	9.79
(7) Finding Aids	37	7.87
(11) Public Education/Relations	36	7.66
(1) Access	35	7.45
(10) Professional Education	25	5.32
(6) Documentation Programmes	24	5.11
(3) Archival Theory/Methods	15	3.19
(5) Development of a Stronger Professional Community	15	3.19
(9) Occupational Health and Safety	11	2.34
(8) Fragmentation of the Archival Community	8	1.70
(15) Other ²	5	1.06
TOTAL	470	100.00

If the same approach were taken with *specific* issues then ten issues attracting the most votes, regardless of the ranking of the votes, are:

Specific Area	Total No. of Votes	%
(13.1) Technology — application of to archival practice	30	6.38
(14.1) Workload — coping with the mass and variety of material	29	6.17
(12.1) Resources — adequacy of	27	5.74
(4.1) Conservation — macro conservation programmes	26	5.53
(13.2) Technology — coping with archival products of	26	5.53
(14.2) Workload — coping with increased demand for services	25	5.32
(6.1) Documentation Programmes — records survey/retention programmes	24	5.10
(2.2) Administration/Management — organisational effectiveness	23	4.89
(7.1) Finding Aids — standardization of	22	4.68
(1.3) Access — administration of, in a freedom of information climate	20	4.26
(11.1) Public Education/Relations — promoting the support and use of archives	20	4.26
TOTAL	272	57.86

However, when the *ranking* of *broad* areas occurs the emphasis alters slightly. When ranked according to the number of times they were nominated as being number one on the following pattern emerges:

Broad Area	No. of Times Voted (1)	%
(12) Resources	13	27.66
(14) Workload Explosion	10	21.28
(2) Administration/Management	6	12.76
(13) Technology	5	10.64
(1) Access	4	8.51
(6) Documentation Programmes	4	8.51
(11) Public Education/Relations	2	4.25
(4) Conservation	1	2.13
(7) Finding Aids	1	2.13
(15) Other	1	2.13
TOTAL	47	100.00

When *specific* issues are *ranked* according to the number of occasions they were voted as the most significant the following order appears:

Specific Area	No. of Times Voted (1)	%
(12.1) Resources — adequacy of	10	21.28
(14.1) Workload — coping with the mass and variety of material	7	14.89
(6.1) Documentation Programmes — record survey/retention programmes	4	8.51
(2.2) Administration/Management — organisational effectiveness	3	6.38
(12.2) Resources — management/ deployment of	3	6.38
(13.2) Technology — coping with archival products of	3	6.38
(14.2) Workload — coping with increased demand for services	3	6.38
(1.1) Access — protection of confidentiality	2	4.26
(1.3) Access — administering access in a freedom of information climate	2	4.26
(2.1) Administration/Management — personnel/staffing	2	4.26
(11.1) Public Education/Relations — promoting the support and use of archives	2	4.26
(13.1) Technology — application of	2	4.26
(2.3) Administration/Management — planning/evaluation	1	2.13
(4.1) Conservation — macro conservation programmes	1	2.13
(7.2) Finding Aids — creation of regional/national data bases	1	2.13
(15) Other — records management	1	2.13
TOTAL	47	100.00

The last table I would like to present is the comparison between the ranking of the ten most significant areas in the American and Sydney surveys:

America (December, 1979)	Sydney (May, 1982)
Resources 61%	Technology 60%
Technology 45%	Workload 58%
Professional Education 39%	Resources 49%
Conservation 25%	Finding Aids 40%
Finding Aids 24%	Administration/Management 39%
Public Education 24%	Conservation 34%
Workload 22%	Community Identity 32%
Security 18%	Professional Education 27%
NARS* 18%	Public Education 26%
Certification 18%	Documentation Programmes 26%

* NARS — National Archives and Records Service

It is my contention that the distilled and quantified forecasting of archivists in Sydney is valuable not only as a yardstick for our individual projections but because it poses a challenge to the responsiveness of every archival institution and, perhaps more significantly, to the Society.

Incorporated in the introduction to the Society's *Rules and By-Laws* are the twelve stated objects of the Society. There are four specific objects that I would cite:

“(vii) to provide a means of collecting, co-ordinating and disseminating information relevant to the practice, status, and problems of the archival profession;

(viii) to promote amongst the general public and special groups an understanding of the nature of archives and their value;

(x) to promote a professional identity amongst archivists and to advance their professional standing and welfare;

(xii) to provide an authoritative voice on matters of archival concern”.³

I am unaware if members actually expect the fulfilment of the above objects. It remains doubtful if entirely honorary Executives (Central and Branch) and Council can cope with the heavy demands of such objectives. However, it cannot be disputed that the relevance and credibility of the profession and the Society is contingent on negotiating the problems besetting us. It is my hope that archivists do look to their colleagues and the Society for guidance and initiative — it is also my hope that the Society accepts this responsibility.

Editor's Note: Owing to the late submission of this article, there was insufficient time to fully edit and check expression and accuracy. However, it was felt that the article would be of value at this time rather than later.

FOOTNOTES

1. Society of American Archivists, *Newsletter*, March 1980, p. 1-2.
2. Within the “Other” category the following were nominated:
 - professional development, that is, combating professional impoverishment and alienation which all too often arise from specialization;
 - institutional co-operation, that is, networking, combined purchasing of equipment, staff exchanges;
 - records management;
 - the status, power and authority of an archives as this determines its power to acquire.
3. Australian Society of Archivists Inc., *Rules and By-Laws*, May 1982, Part 1.3, p. 4-5.

APPENDIX 1

Please rank 10 (more if you wish) of the issues/priorities listed below in the order of their importance to archival administration

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- | | |
|---|-----|
| (1) ACCESS | |
| 1. Protection of confidentiality | () |
| 2. Protection of privacy | () |
| 3. Administering access in a freedom of information climate | () |
| (2) ADMINISTRATION/MANAGEMENT | |
| 1. Personnel/staffing | () |
| 2. Organisational effectiveness | () |
| 3. Planning/evaluation | () |
| (3) ARCHIVAL THEORY/METHODS | |
| 1. Adequacy of | () |
| 2. Development of | () |
| (4) CONSERVATION | |
| 1. Macro conservation programmes | () |
| 2. Micro conservation programmes | () |
| 3. Planning for disaster/salvage operations | () |
| (5) DEVELOPMENT OF A STRONGER PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY/IDENTITY | |
| 1. Standards/certification | () |
| (6) DOCUMENTATION PROGRAMMES | |
| 1. Records survey/retention programmes | () |
| 2. Aural/photo programmes | () |
| (7) FINDING AIDS | |
| 1. Standardization of | () |
| 2. Creation of regional/national data bases | () |
| (8) FRAGMENTATION OF THE ARCHIVAL COMMUNITY | |
| 1. As a consequence of the growth of archives based on form | () |
| 2. Due to the competition for records/resources/clientele | () |
| (9) OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY | () |
| (10) PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION | |
| 1. Standards for | () |
| 2. Provision of a greater variety of,
e.g. continuing education, internal training | () |
| (11) PUBLIC EDUCATION/RELATIONS | |
| 1. Promoting the support and use of archives | () |
| 2. Archival image | () |
| 3. Applied research techniques | () |
| (12) RESOURCES | |
| 1. Adequacy of | () |
| 2. Management/deployment of | () |
| (13) TECHNOLOGY | |
| 1. Application of to archival practice | () |
| 2. Coping with the archival products of | () |

(14) WORKLOAD EXPLOSION

1. Coping with the mass and variety of material ()
 2. Coping with the increased demand for services ()

(15) OTHER — PLEASE SPECIFY

()
 ()

APPENDIX 2**DETAILS OF CIRCULATION AND RESPONSE**

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Sphere of Employment	No. Surveyed	% of Total Surveyed	No. responded	%
GOVERNMENT	(42)	(68.86)	(32)	(76.19)
Archives Office of NSW	19	31.15	11	57.89
Australian Archives	13	21.31	13	100
ABC	2	3.28	0	0
Department of Main Roads	1	1.64	1	100
Mitchell Library	5	8.20	5	100
Sydney City Council	2	3.28	2	100
BANKS AND BUILDING SOCIETIES	7	11.48	6	86
UNIVERSITIES AND CAEs	7	11.48	5	71
ACADEMIC - UNI OF NSW	2	3.28	2	100
OTHER	3	4.92	3	100
TOTAL	61	100	48	78.65