

# Attitude to Professionalism

**Guna Kinne**

*Standards for the training and admission of practitioners of Archival Science are remarkably high and strictly defined in West Germany, as illustrated by some of the regulations which apply in two of its states. While this largely reflects Germany's much longer history, there may be lessons in it for Australia, where professional standards are currently defined rather loosely.*

“Archives administration is always deeply rooted in the distinctive historical character of the society it serves.”<sup>1</sup> This observation certainly applies to Australia. The settlers brought with them established attitudes to professionalism in disciplines such as medicine and law. The continual need for doctors and lawyers resulted in the passing down of these attitudes from generation to generation. But because archival services were hardly needed in a new country, the development of this profession in Europe was overlooked here. In fact, the profession was virtually unknown by the wider society and, therefore, no attitude to it was formed at all. Even at the Federal Government level no organised effort was made to preserve archives until after World War II. Then limited funds and lack of experienced archivists combined to ensure that the profession was not more widely known for a long time.

Now, although recognition of the need for archival services is increasing steadily, attitudes to the profession by society as a whole and by employers specifically, are still very vague. This is to be expected because the Australian archivist is searching for an identity and even a basic level of specialisation e.g. is the archivist also a records manager? (But, on the other hand, employers often expect records managers to act as archivists.) The main reason may be that professional standards are, at present rather loosely defined.

Fortunately, most advanced countries with a longer history have passed this initial phase. They have formed their own attitude to, and a standard they deem necessary for, the provision of archival services. Australia can only benefit by learning about these standards and comparing them with our own.

A report from West Germany, though daunting to the general reader in

its format and legal phrasing, on closer inspection, provides a good example. In *Der Archivar*<sup>2</sup> Dieter Weber and Margret Pollen show in a summary the legal determinations and administrative regulations adopted by 1979 for general archival matters in the German Federal Republic. Besides setting fees for reference services, these rules deal with the training and admission of practitioners of Archival Science.

A person seeking to become a professional archivist at Bavarian state, municipal or church archives must first pass a selection test to be accepted for preparatory training. Eligibility criteria for the test include an age limit, proficiency in Latin and an educational standard allowing admission to the Bavarian Technical College for Officials (presumably, public servants). The selection test consists of two two-hour essays which are written under supervision and cover Bavarian history (16th to 20th century), Germany's foreign affairs, society structure, federal/state administration, law, economics, current politics and contemporary development. The rules set these test subjects, giving the level of testing and also strictly regulating the evaluation of the applicants. The marks obtained in these tests are combined with school results, and preparatory training is offered to those applicants who have scored the highest marks. (The cut-off point is not known.)

Preparatory training entails a probationary appointment in the public service. The appointees hold the title of Candidate for Archives Inspector and are enrolled in the Archives and Library Course at the Bavarian Technical College for Officials. The aim of this training is to acquaint the candidate through "basic scientific findings", with the duties of an archivist, and bring him to a professional standard at which he can identify and solve problems independently.

The duration of this training is three years, not counting holidays, and involves at least 2,600 hours of lectures. The training consists of four periods of study alternating with three periods of practical work. Each period, depending on the training stage, lasts from three to seven months.

The compulsory subjects in the College course consist of:

1. history of Bavarian provinces, constitution, administration and economy;
2. legal history and canon law privileges;
3. archival theory;
4. Bavarian archives and their holdings;
5. types of records;
6. record arrangement and storage;
7. record reproduction; storage of reproductions; restoration of records;
8. user services and publishing of holdings;
9. disposal of records and selection of permanent value records;

10. archives buildings, interior design and fittings;
11. ADP and its use in archives;
12. documentation of records and information management;
13. (old) German and Latin texts;
14. coats of arms, seals, numismatics;
15. constitutional law;
16. public jurisprudence;
17. public service law;
18. Bavarian State administration and economic management;
19. State archives funding and financial arrangements;
20. management techniques and office organization;
21. library management;
22. methodology for intellectual work;
23. psychology as related to archival services.

A selection may also be made from additional subjects on offer. The study schedule details have to be approved by the State Ministry of Education and Culture. Each study period at the College entails numerous tests. To be eligible to continue beyond the second study period the candidate has to prove ability to type 120 strokes per minute. A final study mark is determined from marks obtained in the last two study periods.

The practical training schedule also has to be approved by the Ministry. This training takes place in one of several institutions which comprise the Bavarian State archives, or, with special permission, at the archives of an educational institution. Each host institution appoints, according to certain rules and regulations, a training co-ordinator who guides and supervises the trainee. During the time of such attachment, the trainee learns through experience of practical work assigned and through lectures and seminars co-ordinated with such practical work. The trainee's ability, diligence and behaviour are judged at the end of each practical work stage, and a certain pass mark must be obtained in order to proceed further.

The probationary appointment changes to permanent appointment on the result of an examination. Only trainees who have successfully completed the preparatory training are admitted to this examination, which has both written and oral sections. The written examinations consist of six single and three double questions. The time given for each single question is three hours and for each double question five hours. Only trainees who pass these written examinations are admitted to the oral examinations which last forty-five minutes. Both the written and oral examinations cover all subjects taken in preparatory training. The testing committee consists of three of the highest grade archivists and two other archivists. They mark the examination papers and combine the examination result with the preparatory training result, ranking all successful applicants in order of achievement. Permanent employment is then offered depending upon vacancies.

Requirements for appointment to the highest category of archivist appear in a section of the regulations which apply in the State of Lower Saxony. Again the applicant has to possess certain qualifications before he can be accepted to a preparatory service. The most interesting of these are: studies in history with qualifications to teach at tertiary level as well as a Ph.D. (obtained with good results), and an extensive knowledge of Latin and some French. This preparatory service is of two years duration and consists of six months' practical training and eighteen months' theoretical training (in that order). The aim of the preparatory training is to introduce the trainee to the work methods and tasks of the higher services. Over and above the archival knowledge to be acquired, a familiarity with cultural, legal, economic and social matters has to be developed.

During the practical training period at an archival institution, the trainee learns all aspects of archival services and through practical exercises becomes acquainted with archival tasks and methods. The performance of the trainee is judged as to ability, diligence, practical achievement, standard of education, behaviour and character.

Theoretical training is undertaken at the State's Institute for Archival Science, according to a schedule devised by the Ministry. Once that is concluded an examination is held. Consideration is also given to practical training results. The trainee may fail the examination once. The successful trainee receives the title of Assessor of Archival Services.

"Deep divisions . . . exist between traditions of training and administration in different regions . . ." of the world. This is evident when the standard of applicants, and methods and the standard of training in Germany is compared with Australian conditions.

The age limit of the applicants for training to become a professional archivist in Germany indicates that the applicant is seeking a life-time career when applying. The length of preparatory training and the number and type of compulsory subjects taken equal or exceed the requirements of a Diploma course taken at a tertiary institution in Australia, but the specialisation occurs already at graduate level.

Note that German rules do not allow even one failure in the study process. Moreover, the applicant's practical work aptitude, and attitude are assessed over a much longer period. In addition to the tests and examinations during and at the end of study periods, which should be similar to Australian testing procedures, an appointment examination has to be passed. The duration of this examination is astonishing, judging by Australian standards. The applicant has to sit for a total of 33 hours of examinations. The only explanation for such an examination could be that an Archives Inspector's position in Bavaria (and in Germany) is very much desired, either for remuneration or status. The training and examinations can serve as proof that the professional standard of archivists must be

extremely high in Bavaria.

The higher service selections and required studies in Lower Saxony show the same trend and indicate that in order to obtain an archives management position one has to have a Ph.D. and be familiar with all aspects of archival services learnt through practical involvement. The latter is also deemed necessary by Michael Cook, Lecturer in Archival Studies at the University of Liverpool. He, explaining the professional structure, says:

there is a higher level in which personnel who are already experienced become more concerned with management and planning and with external relations, than with the conduct of professional processes within the service.<sup>1</sup>

We might argue that Germany's long history has naturally resulted in large archival holdings collected over many centuries, and that therefore the overall situation differs from ours. This is true only to a certain degree. German holdings contain Latin and medieval texts, requiring mastery of these languages. German history is also more complex than Australian. But the diversity and volume of holdings might well require more archivists without making any difference to the chosen standard of service. One has to admit that in Germany the care of archives was started a long time ago and that the Germans have had greater opportunity over the years to research and develop methods and systems for handling archives, necessitating the education of archivists. As the above rules show, they have come to the conclusion that archivists have to be specialists to be entrusted with the keeping of such national treasure.

Australia is still trying to determine the standard of professionalism needed for archival services. The establishment of the Australian Society of Archivists in 1975 was a great step forward. The biennial conferences of the society, besides discussing old problems and new ideas, provide a venue for archivists to meet, and learn from each other. The society is also the link with other national bodies overseas, represents Australian archivists internationally and at least tries to represent the profession in all matters in Australia. However, its influence on government and other archival institutions remains small.

A benefit to the profession is the provision of the postgraduate course at the University of New South Wales, but this remains the only opportunity to take a serious study course in Australia. The introduction of a proposed course for a Graduate Diploma in Records Management and Archives Administration at the Melbourne State College was postponed because of government cutbacks.

Unfortunately, there are other actions retarding the standard of professionalism in Australia. It seems that in some management areas comprehension of archival science, as the Germans call it, is rather limited. One example was a management development programme offered in 1981

by the Australian Institute of Management of Victoria. A course called "Record Retention Scheduling" promised to teach within seven hours (for a fee of \$110) how to create a record retention schedule, identify what records may be destroyed, design a storage layout and retrieval system for inactive and archival records, and install a records disposal system. The size of the business organisation catered for was not mentioned.

Another case shows a review team in an archival institution recommending a "generalist" as against a "professional" archivist concept. The reason given was that there are greater career opportunities in general services, meaning promotions in other than archival services areas.

But the above is contrary to international trends as advocated by the Records and Archives Management Programme (RAMP) of Unesco's General Information Programme. It will shortly bring out a "Model curriculum in records management and the administration of modern archives: a RAMP study with guidelines."<sup>1</sup>

In discussing these guidelines Michael Cook finds that

Like all other service industries, archives and records management services need an infrastructure in society. Primarily they need the presence of a government with modern development aims and a programme of forward planning. Archivists and records managers . . . should have a suitable niche in the manpower development plan.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, he recognises that the question of career structures is important and distinguishes three career levels: para-professionals; professionals recruited at graduate level and further trained in archival services to attain a master's degree; higher grade professionals. "Entrance... [to the latter]... will mainly be by selection after experience... [but] there is a strong case for the provision of advanced training in specialized subjects."<sup>1</sup> Besides management sciences, these specialisations might include the development of automated systems, educational or publications programmes, and the ensuing qualification should approximate to a doctor's degree.

Comparing these international findings with the training of archivists in Germany, one must notice that the German method does seem to be more realistic than at first thought, and it is Australia which is lagging behind. Therefore, the Australian Society of Archivists should heed the development of an international standard and do its utmost to introduce such a standard into Australia. With the introduction of the standard the attitude to professionalism in the archival services of Australia will improve.

**FOOTNOTES**

1. Cook, M. "An International Standard for the Training of Archivists and Records Managers" in *Unesco Journal of Information Science, Librarianship and Archives Administration*, Vol.IV, No.2, 1982, pp.114-122.

2. Weber, D. and Pollen, M. "Gesetzliche Bestimmungen und Verwaltungsvorschriften für das staatliche Archivwesen und zur Archivpflege in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland" in *Der Archivar*, Year 34, Vol.1, 1981, pp.65-94.