

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SERIES OF SHORT WORKSHOPS IN ARCHIVES AND RECORDS MANAGEMENT IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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A short three-day workshop in archives and records management was sponsored by the University of Papua New Guinea's Department of Library and Information Studies from October 31 to November 2, 1989. A record number of twenty-three participants attended the workshop representing different government departments, the two Universities and several private organisations. Much was discussed and recommendations made for the future, in the three short days.

The workshop was successful and participants recommended the need for such workshops in the future to assist them. A lot of the participants had never had any formal training and they expressed a hope that further workshops be run in the future. Future topics were identified, all based on the needs of the participants. These workshops would be run not only in Port Moresby, but attempts would be made to go out of the city to other provincial centres to meet the requirement of record officers in the entire country.

Introduction

The archival profession has developed very recently in the Pacific islands, although records of the nations have existed long before. The creation of the Pacific Area Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (PARBICA) in 1981 was the beginning of an attempt to bring

together archivists and records officers from the region. PARBICA, with the assistance of international organisations, will help the development of the profession, as well as bring together archivists of the region to meet and discuss aspects of archival development in their respective countries. PARBICA has held four training workshops or seminars in recent years: in Fiji in 1981, Sydney in 1985, Port Moresby in 1987 and Wellington in 1989. The next one is to be Western Samoa in 1991. These workshops are useful, but not many attend due to lack of funds. In-country workshops will help those who are unable to attend overseas workshops in the future. The steps taken in Papua New Guinea (PNG), as described below, should be an encouragement for others in the region to follow.

The Administrative College in PNG has been running three separate but lengthy courses in basic librarianship on its campus in Port Moresby: the Library Assistants Certificate, the Library Officers Course, and the Diploma in Library Science. It was not until 1989 that the Library Studies Section was transferred to the Education Faculty of the University of Papua New Guinea. The three existing staff of the College were also transferred and three others employed in late 1989. I was appointed a lecturer in June of that year, to teach archives and records management. This was the first time in the country, and in fact in the region, that someone had been appointed to teach such a course. Pacific Islanders taking the Diploma and Degree courses in Librarianship will also be encouraged to take the archives course being offered for the first time this year, 1990. Practical attachment can be arranged with the National Archives Services in Waigani for those taking the course in the future.

During 1989, I had nothing much to do apart from assisting with the teaching loads of the others in the Department. In the meantime, I was compelled to start a workshop series in archives and records management, knowing pretty well that a lot of the records officers of the country's departments lack basic training in records management. Having thought of the idea, a seminar/workshop was planned for the later part of 1989.

The local media was used to advertise the workshop, and below is a summarised version of a report that was produced after the workshop.

There was a lot of response and a lot of people rang to say they would send their representatives. A short three-day workshop was run with the assistance of the National Archives and the Public Records Office of PNG. It went pretty well and was successful and a lot of participants recommended that there be more such workshops in the future. Having gained popularity and support from the participants a report was produced and sent to each of them later.

The workshop/seminar series will be continued in the future. This will be done mostly during the semester breaks and on a yearly basis to suit

the needs of records centres and officers. International support has been sought to help run the workshops, in particular from the Association of Commonwealth Archivists and Records Managers, which has responded favourably by offering to send one of their experts to run a workshop in the near future. I look forward to having one of them in December this year. Perhaps ASA or PARBICA may also be able to assist by funding international professionals in the running of these workshops. Overtures have also been made to the School of Librarianship at the University of New South Wales to send a lecturer with the assistance of the International Development Fund based in Canberra.

The first of the workshops was held at the University of Papua New Guinea from 31 October–2 November 1989. Twenty-three officers registered for the workshop, although initially thirty people indicated they would attend. The participants in the workshop represented the two universities, government departments, the Summer Institute of Linguistics and Ok Tedi Mining Company. The instructors for the three-day workshop were Jacob Hevelawa, Nancy Lutton, and Gabriel Gerry from the National Archives Service, and I acted as the Co-ordinator, from the University of Papua New Guinea's Department of Library and Information Studies. Robert discussed conservation, while Dadara took care of micrographics. I wish to thank them for their participation; without them the workshop would never have been a success. And I look forward to their continued support in the future.

The plan for the workshop came at a time when there was a need. For a lot of the participants this was the first time they had attended such a workshop and they requested that further workshops/seminars be run in the future. I have therefore recommended that the National Archives and the University assist each other in running such workshops/seminars in the future. We have raised interest and expectation among the participants, and to let the archives and records management workshop series suddenly disappear will prove to be a disaster both for our participants and the records of this country. This report gives a summary of the program, interest expressed by the participants, and analyses the questionnaire circulated. It also lists the recommendations made at the end of the workshop for action in the future.

The Department of Library and Information Studies advertised the workshop early in October. Although I only wanted twenty participants, response to the advertising was so encouraging, I had to increase the number to thirty-five. In the end twenty-three participants attended on the day of registration.

The workshop was specifically geared towards introducing several aspects of archives and records management. The three days were broken into lectures covering records centres, functions of records officers, archives

in general, appraisal techniques, records management, conservation and the production of finding aids. For such topics, thirty-minute lectures are insufficient as the participants were not able to fully understand the crux of the topics discussed. This was supplemented by handouts that the instructors distributed during their sessions. The final part of the three-day workshop was left for class discussion about participants, their records centres, and the problems they face. Finally, time was left for the participants to visit the two archival institutions in Port Moresby, namely: the New Guinea Collection of the Michael Somare Library at the University, and the National Archives. We finished the workshop with a reception for the participants at the National Archives.

The participants who attended the workshop were mostly from within Port Moresby, representing several government departments and statutory bodies. Those from outside Port Moresby came from the Summer Institute of Linguistics at Ukarumpa, Ok Tedi Mining, Mendi Provincial Government, three participants from the University of Technology and one from Angau Memorial Hospital in Lae. Most of the participants were records officers/clerks looking after their own departmental record centres. There was time allowed for each participant to give an account of their problems, needs and plans for the future, with time for questions and answers during each session.

Questionnaires were given out during the workshop as a way of appraising individual record centres. The questionnaire had 22 questions covering description of records centres and facilities, routine duties done, training, type of materials stored, how they are stored, records management, retention/disposal schedules, storage facilities, hazards, role of the National Archives, future plans, and if further workshops were to be run, what they considered to be important for including therein. The participants broke up into three separate groups guided by Nancy Lutton, Jacob Hevelawa and myself. The responses are summarised below. Most of the participants seemed to have similar problems, of which the following were the major problems encountered in the respective centres.

1. Training

Many of the participants that attended the workshop were not properly trained in methods of records management. For many this was the first course of its kind that they had attended. They therefore requested further workshops in the future for both para-professional and professional personnel for all the records centres. It was felt that there was a need for further workshops like this one for all government records officers and private organisations. The country does not have any formal archives training institution to train archivists and records officers. The semester-long course that I will run is meant for Degree and Diploma students and will be restricted to people who have matriculated and entered University studies. Of course, institutions overseas have been mentioned

but because of the low priority of records management, departments may not have the funds to send officers overseas for further formal training.

2. Storage facilities

It would be correct to generalise that most of the records centres in this country lack space. Records are being stored in offices with no proper facilities and are often left to decay there. As envisaged, most of the participants' record centres were already running out of space and indicated a need for further storage space to be provided. One suggestion was for all departments to build temporary pre-archival storage sheds where records can be held pending appraisal decisions.

3. Staffing

Most of the participants who attended the workshop were operating on their own with no back-up or support staff. Depending upon funds, it was considered that an ideal records centre should have at least three staff, one in charge and two assistants.

The responses of the participants of course differed from each other as far as they represented different institutions and thus, have their own problems and needs. However, all the records centres represented seemed to have the basic facilities required. They all seemed to know what they have done or were doing, especially routine duties. That is, even with a lack of proper training, they seemed to be able to cope with the daily aspects of their jobs. The types of records they hold in their centres range from registry files, to salary records, student records, medical records, staff records, microfilm, photographs, maps and, in one case, computer discs.

Nearly all the participants mentioned the need for a records management schedule: a basic document of guidelines for disposal, retention or destruction of the records. Appraisal should also cover the length of the time records are to be kept, and also when to destroy or send to the archives. This schedule could form part of a procedures manual, which should cover, amongst other things, the purpose of the records centre, the routine duties of the staff, disaster plans and methods of appraisal. The manual would, if produced, also help in the training of new staff and ensure consistency even if there is a change-over in staff. The need for this is very important as at the moment none of the organisations represented have such a manual. There were few who indicated that they have certain policies that they follow. Having a policy statement is a good start but it needs to be worked on so that a proper records centre manual is kept.

Seeing that most of the participants were not so well trained, the appraisal of records should be left to the National Archives staff, who should decide whether records should be destroyed or sent to the archives for permanent

storage. The above problems were discussed at length and recommendations have been made for future action.

Towards the end of the questionnaire, a question was asked to gauge views from the participants on what they considered to be important if further workshops were run and if they would attend. They all felt that further workshops would be beneficial, again expressing that longer courses be conducted. Of all the responses we received, more than 80% of the participants felt that records management was very important and that a workshop on this should be held in the near future. Other topics requested for future workshops included: arrangement and description, conservation in tropical countries, production of finding aids, and appraisal methods.

Seeing that records management was identified as an important problem area, it will be the next topic in our series of workshops and seminars. This will have to be followed by other workshops to suit the needs of the individual participants and organisations.

Other recommendations were made on the final day of the workshop/seminar. Firstly, the group felt that there was a need for the National Government to push for the National Archives Bill/ policy still in draft form to be finalised and made into law. Such legislation will ensure the preservation of the archival records of this country and will be a guide for the processing, storage and preservation of archival documents.

The second recommendation relates to the need for all government departments and statutory bodies, though their Bureau of Management Services, to be encouraged to build temporary records centres. There is a need for pre-archival records centres to create space and to separate the semi-current from the current records. As mentioned above, there is already a lack of space, and creation of such centres will alleviate the space problem.

The participants' third recommendation was that all government departmental heads seriously consider records management as part of operational duties in their departments. Their support will mean finding funds, and staff, for proper records management in these government departments. It was felt that due to lack of support from superiors, records management had been given a very low priority in the past years.

Another recommendation was that the Department of library and Information Studies at the University run further seminars and workshops, in conjunction with the National Archives, to meet the needs of the records officers in this country.

The next recommendation carried was in relation to the question of manuals (discussed above). Nearly all the participants operate their records centres on the basis of a given policy statement, but felt that a proper records management manual is needed by all records officers.

The workshop further recommended that the National Archives reconvene the now-defunct Records Management Working Party. Such a working party, if set up, would cater for workshops like this and for consultancy services for government departments.

This was followed by a recommendation that if a working party was set up, there should be a plan for starting up a newsletter for records managers. It was also felt that a Records Managers Association should be formed, to serve as a professional organisation rather than as an industrial union, to bring records managers together to discuss common problems and needs. It is hoped that such an organisation would also inform people through newsletters of current developments in archives and records management.

Finally, the group also felt that there was a need for work attachment for records officers both locally and overseas. Government departments should encourage such a scheme, as it would prove useful to the organisation, and to the records officer, in the long run. Internally, the National Archives in Waigani, seems to be the best place to arrange for such placements, although other archival institutions in the country may be able to participate.

Conclusion

Interest and expectation have been raised in the three-day workshop. As indicated above, the archives and records management workshop series will have to continue in order to meet the needs and aspirations of records officers.

While the volume of records will continue to grow in this country, the demand for better and properly managed records will also grow. Records at present, in most cases, are stored in a haphazard manner, and records officers will continue to need to attend such workshops to enhance their skills in records management. Proper records management skills will ensure the proper processing, storage and disposal of records.

This workshop has identified major problems faced by participants, as outlined above. Participants will continue to need assistance. While recommendations made at the workshop will be considered, it is now up to individual organisations to make funds available for the better training of their records officers and for better storage facilities.

It is up to department heads, the National Archives, and the Department of Library and Information Studies at UPNG, to ensure that the valuable records of this country are properly stored and managed, by encouraging attendance at such workshops and further training.