Improving the Education and Professional Development of Reference Archivists

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While providing reference access is acknowledged to be a core archival function, it receives little formal attention within the archival profession. The present state of research and writing on reference theory, methodology and practice is moribund, and the coverage it receives in the professional education curricula is superficial. No-one within the profession, be they archival educators, the professional associations or practitioners, has taken a leadership role in devising research agenda or delivering education programs which focus on the integration of reference into the archival process. Without the framework, stimulus, discourse and networks that only these educational foundations can provide, reference archivists have little acknowledged professional identity. As practitioners they lack the intellectual and professional support and encouragement increasingly needed by information professionals of all kinds. Archival institutions are hindered in the recruitment of suitably qualified staff and in the planning and delivery of comprehensive reference services. This article examines the lack of professional and continuing education opportunities for reference archivists. Further, it describes an initiative by the National Archives of Australia which offers one approach to an institutionally based program of professional development. The program has the potential to be further developed and built upon by collaboration and cooperation with other areas of the profession.

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Reference as a Core Archival Function

The importance of an effective reference service to the standing and survival of an archives is widely acknowledged. Therefore it is surprising that the reference function itself is so poorly integrated into the overall professional discourse. Consider the evolution and documentation of archival theory, methodology and practice; the development of curricula for professional and continuing education; or the body of professional literature or the framework and activities of the professional associations. In each of these areas, reference has received scant attention in comparison with other related archival functions such as appraisal, arrangement and description and preservation. The view within the profession appears to be that the *use* of records is secondary to their *management.* A more balanced view might be that good management is a prerequisite to effective use, and that both are equally important in ensuring the continued survival of archives, both big and small.

For the purpose of this paper, reference as an archival function is taken to be the range of activities, knowledge and skills involved in bringing researchers and records together in ways that effectively meet researchers' needs and expectations. While it does not include the processes involved in granting approval for access, it is not limited to the mere provision to clients of information from or about records.

Reference archivists need integrated knowledge and skills in three core areas:

- Communication;

- Technical and professional responsibilities; and

- The collection, including its administrative and historical context.

An effective reference archivist requires competency in all three.

The following are illustrative of the range of knowledge and skills expected of reference archivists:

- Communications skills in dealing with clients from a diverse range of backgrounds and with varied interests and abilities;

- Skill in conducting reference interviews;

- Explaining and educating researchers in the use of control systems, finding aids and the records themselves;

- Enforcing reading room rules to encourage appropriate reading room behaviours and minimise risk to the records;

- Handling complaints;

- Identifying and explaining search strategies that suit the researcher's needs and abilities;

- Knowledge of and ability to enforce the archive's policies, procedures and standards of service;

- Monitoring and documenting feedback from researchers to identify how their needs can be better met;

- Knowledge of relevant ethical and legal issues; and

- Awareness of complementary holdings in other institutions.

There is the additional expectation that the reference archivist will have a good underlying knowledge of the other archival competencies.

By its nature, reference work is interdisciplinary. Paradoxically, although it is accepted as a core archival function, it is unique among archival disciplines for its lack of formal codification. For this reason it is easily (but wrongly) perceived as a fragmented and diverse assemblage of knowledge, skills and competencies that are essentially derivative. Its standing within the profession suffers accordingly.

Data from reader surveys conducted by the National Archives and in the literature clearly show that researchers consider a proficient and knowledgeable reference archivist to be one of the most highly valued resources an archives can offer its users. This is because reference archivists often provide the only effective link between large and complex collections and the many constituencies seeking to use them. Fundamentally they facilitate *use*, which, increasingly, is the criterion by which the value of archives to individuals, communities and nations (and, not least, to governments) is ultimately measured. It is fitting, therefore, that the archival profession acknowledges reference to be a fundamental archival function. Where the profession fails, however, is in articulating reference fully as a core area of professional knowledge and skill.

Reference: The Neglected Core Function

Ten years ago Janice E Ruth noted the lack of attention in the literature to the training of reference archivists and the profession's 'general indifference to the reference process relative to other archival concerns'. She noted similar observations by Frank G Burke as early as 1963, and referred to a review of the literature by William Saffady in 1974, who suggested that the neglect might be occasioned by archivists' view that records administration, not

research assistance, was their primary responsibility.[1] More recently Terry Eastwood, among others, has lamented what he refers to as 'the poorly developed state of research and writing about archival reference service'.[2] To this day the profession lacks a corpus of literature and debate that comprehensively articulates the theory, role and practice of reference and its contribution to the profession.

If the amount of literature devoted to the theory, role and practice of reference is lamentable, that relating to the education, training and professional development of reference archivists is virtually non-existent. A review of the literature appearing in three professional archival journals since 1988 reveals that, of the 581 articles, commentaries and case studies published since then, only 41, or 7% relate to any area of archival education and training.[3] Of these, only one is devoted to the education of reference archivists,[4] the remainder barely give the reference area even passing acknowledgment. If, as Richard Cox points out, it is difficult to develop and support more comprehensive graduate and continuing education programs when there is a weak base of professional literature[5] the prospect of improved education and training for reference archivists appears bleak.

It has been observed that, over the course of time, the professional literature tends to concentrate on a particular archival issue for several years and then move on to other issues in almost a cyclical fashion. One explanation for the lack of attention to reference in the last two decades may be the perception that reference is merely a complementary or auxiliary discipline, requiring only a basic understanding of the core archival knowledge and skills overlaid with a variety of clerical and administrative competencies. From this, it is assumed, all the knowledge, techniques and skills required to service the needs and demands of growing and diverse user communities will naturally flow. Further, there is the perception that, being essentially multidisciplinary, reference defies codification, is less amenable to the application of theory and methodology, and lacks the formal discipline and rigour that characterise other areas of the profession. If this is so, it may provide one explanation for why reference appears to lie on the fringes of the profession, valued by users but still struggling for attention from the profession itself.

For managers of archival institutions who are acutely aware of the increasing expectations of government and the public, the lack of a well-defined role for reference archivists and the inadequacy of the education and training opportunities available to them should be of concern. Confronted with an increasing volume and complexity of records, archives everywhere are faced with growing and increasingly diverse user communities, many with no

historical, academic or other training to prepare them for the complexity of using archival material. The information environment itself is rapidly changing, with expectations of greater immediacy of information, the growth and convergence of information technologies, demand for new services, and rapid expansion in the number of alternative and competing information resources. In this environment the proper utilisation of archival collections will depend increasingly on reference services run by information professionals whose work is defined by distinct and measurable competencies. These competencies need to be recognised and valued not only by the archival profession itself but by the other information professions as well.

In 1982 Mary Jo Pugh expressed the view that collections are too large and the numbers of staff too few for personal intervention to remain the primary means of accessing archival records,[6] but 17 years later reference archivists are still the primary means of accessing archival collections. Among the reasons that might be advanced for the continuing high levels of dependence on reference archivists as intermediaries and for the under-utilisation of archival collections are:

- the failure of the profession to borrow or adapt the service ethos, market research and other client-oriented management practices embraced by other information professions, and

- the slowness of archival institutions to exploit technology to facilitate access and use.

This slowness to exploit technology is no doubt due in part to the lack of uniform descriptive standards and finding aids, and the consequent unavailability of off-the-shelf software. This in turn has hindered the professionalisation and standardisation of reference services. On the other hand, reference is a well-articulated field in librarianship, and of the library skills it is the one that is most relevant and readily transferable to archives.

Improving the appeal, accessibility and use of archives needs to be made a primary objective of archival institutions. It is well recognised that archives do not enjoy the same level of support, use, or public appreciation as do libraries. Further, archival records, being largely textual in an increasingly image-oriented world, are neither easy to use nor in themselves inherently appealing.[7] This is compounded by what Lawrence Dowler refers to as archivists' essentially curatorial view of their vocation.[8] In 1984 Elsie Freeman predicted that in the competition between archivists and other suppliers of information, archivists will lose out because historical

information delivered in bulk is not inherently attractive.[9] For those researchers accustomed to using the bibliographic tools of libraries but unfamiliar with archival methods of control and description archives in the future may prove increasingly unattractive as sources of information and evidence. It has been predicted that, as researchers' expectations rise, so will their discontent with using archives. Because there is a direct correlation between the convenience of use and actual use, archives may come to be used only as a last resort by researchers with no other option.[10]

Richard Cox warns of similar consequences when arguing the need for graduate archival education programs to be expanded and strengthened to include, among other areas, reference. He says that if such comprehensive programs are developed 'the archival profession's image, practice and mission will be stronger than ever' but if they are not developed 'the archival profession will remain small, its influence meager, and its public profile uncertain'. Moreover, without such education programs he predicts that 'the average American citizen's notion of information will not include that contained in historical records'.[11]

A decade ago Dowler argued forcefully that archivists must begin to define archival practice and principles with the user in mind. He argued that research into the relationship between the uses of information and the ways in which it is or can be provided should be a primary goal of the archival profession. Such study, he contended, would provide a better conceptual basis for archival practices and principles. Although warning that there was danger in trying to 'fine-tune' an entire organisation around the whims of researchers (or indeed those of reference archivists), he argued that a perspective based on *use* should be incorporated at some level into the assessment of archival practices. He concluded that 'if use is the measure and justification of archives, then reference should be first, not last, in operational priorities'.[12]

What the observations of Dowler and others point to is the value and contribution that a focus on *use* can bring to archives, not only as a way of reinvigorating the profession but also as a way of renewing the relevance and appeal of archives in an increasingly information-rich society.

The Education and Training of Reference Archivists

Consistent with the traditional focus of the archival profession, the focus of archival education is towards the *management* of archives rather than their *use*. In defining and refining the substance of what archivists need to know, the needs of reference archivists have fared poorly, despite evidence of a perceived need for university level courses[13] in reference by archival

educators and practitioners.[14] In 1988 Terry Eastwood observed that the theory and practice of 'research use, reference service, and access' was deserving of university study.[15] However, in already crowded curricula, the typical tertiary course in archives devotes little time to reference. For example, among the 11 degree courses and 15 post-graduate courses in records and archives offered in Australia in 1997[16] there were few opportunities for the type of integrated study advocated by Richard Cox. Cox has argued that arrangement and description and reference should be focused into a single subject, with opportunities for applied studies and analysis which go beyond the basic theoretical foundations and principles of reference.[17] This is in contrast to the library profession; librarianship curricula devote entire subjects to reference work.

A number of curriculum development guidelines designed to guide educators, professional associations and archival institutions in the development of archival education and training activities acknowledge the need for integrated programs of education and training for reference archivists.[18] There have been a number of substantial proposals for reference-related research agenda.[19] Despite this recognition, universities in Australia and elsewhere do not offer anything like an integrated, comprehensive program of study in reference, nor do they adhere to a single framework or curriculum. This is not to say that variety is inherently a bad thing. However, until there is an agreed framework as to the scope, purpose and theory of reference, a miscellany of approaches to subject and curriculum content exacerbates uncertainty as what is understood by reference and its place within the profession.

The reasons for the lack of a single agreed framework may be at least partially explained by what Ann Pederson calls the 'chicken-and-the-egg' syndrome, which she observes any new profession suffers from in its self-education.

> In order to build a respected body of specialised knowledge, a profession must have a group of articulate, well-educated and trained archival researcher/writer/educators to codify, conceptualise and expand archival thought and practice into a recognised knowledge base. On the other hand, archives administration must first have a defined base of knowledge and skill to convey before it can support a specialist class of researcher/writer/educator. Which then comes first? The chicken (the knowledge base) or the egg (the educators)? Of course the answer must be both and gradually through an erratic and convoluted process.[20]

The process to which Pederson refers is not assisted by the small size of the profession, which means that there may not exist the critical mass of researchers, writers, educators, administrators and practitioners to comprehensively build, expand and refine the body of specialised archival

knowledge. It is certainly true that reference archivists themselves have contributed little to the small base of research and literature that exists. It is also the case that the professional education environment itself provides little support for institutions or practitioners seeking to improve and extend the standard of reference services. In Australia the education sector has initiated a number of innovative and collaborative programs, but these generally concentrate on archival functions located much earlier than reference in the records continuum.

Compared to other archival professionals, reference archivists must rely to a disproportionate degree on self-directed learning and in-house training provided by their parent institutions to acquire fundamental knowledge and skills. For other areas of the profession, which can access substantial undergraduate and postgraduate curricula, professional networks and an ongoing professional dialogue, professional development and continuing education take their proper place in consolidating the professional education of the practitioner. However, for reference archivists professional development constitutes a form of remedial learning that, until reference is explored, valued and embraced more fully by the profession, will continue to provide their main education and learning opportunities.

The importance of continuing education and professional development in building and maintaining high standards of professionalism and competence is now recognised by most professions. Its importance in the archival context has been stressed by a number of commentators. Richard Cox in particular has argued that if graduate archival education programs cannot be expanded and strengthened to include subjects such as reference, then one of the alternatives to be explored is the expansion of continuing education.[21] Suggestions that continuing education must wait for the foundation knowledge to be defined have been countered by Timothy L Ericson, who points to the need to 'consider the issue of graduate education and continuing education together rather than holding the latter in limbo while the former charts a course'.[22]

A survey of members of the Australian Society of Archivists in 1996 found that less than 50% of respondents had tertiary qualifications in archives or records administration.[23] The situation is similar Australia-wide, with 47% of persons working in the records and archives industry having no formal qualifications in records or archives management.[24] In 1993 Paul Conway reported that a survey of the Society of American Archivists' members found that many who consider themselves part of the archival profession simply start working in an archival repository and increase their educational experiences as they work their way through the ranks of the organisation.[25]

Although there is clearly an important place for continuing education in the development of archivists, those aspects of archival knowledge and skills that should be available through continuing education rather than professional education or on-the-job training are yet to be defined in any detail. And whilst the basic reference competencies for archives and records management practitioners in Australia have been defined,[26] the interdisciplinary nature of reference work makes it likely that formal continuing education will remain fragmented and incomplete. It is within this broad context that the National Archives' professional development program seeks to provide the necessary foundation and framework within which the professionalism and skills of its reference archivists can be developed.

Reasons for the Development of the National Archives Program

The National Archives of Australia employs over 70 staff in 8 capital cities who are engaged wholly or substantially in reference and access related work. These staff assist the 16,000 readers who visit the Archives' reading rooms annually and the 50,000 researchers who lodge their inquiries by post, telephone, fax and e-mail from around Australia and other parts of the world. With visits and reference inquiries growing at an average of 13% annually, the Archives increasingly depends upon the competence and professionalism of its reference archivists not only for the effective management of its reference operations, but also, ultimately, for its perceived value and standing in the eyes of its user communities.

A professional development program for reference archivists within the National Archives was developed in 1995 as a result of three main concerns:

• that existing professional education opportunities for reference archivists were not adequate in terms of exposing them to a comprehensive and organised body of knowledge specifically relating to reference;

• concern that on-the-job training opportunities were essentially unstructured, opportunistic and lacking a framework; and

• concern that continuing education opportunities were fragmented, not always of direct relevance, and dependent almost wholly on the courses, workshops and seminars offered by humanities departments and library and information science schools.

The objectives of the program and the areas of learning to be included were determined following a survey of the professional literature, consideration of existing professional education and continuing education opportunities, and knowledge of existing workplace practices and needs within the

National Archives. The information from these sources revealed that the problems most commonly perceived to exist in the provision of archival reference services were a lack of:

- orientation by researchers in the use of archival records;

- professional identity on the part of reference archivists arising from a poor understanding of their role;

- knowledge by reference archivists of the records in the collection, of their historical and political context, and of the administrative history of the institutions which created them; and

- knowledge of the users of the records and of systematic methods for identifying their needs and levels of satisfaction with the services provided.

The goal was to develop a continuing professional development program that would:

- provide reference archivists with training in the core knowledge and skills specific to their institutional setting;

- familiarise them with the professional and theoretical context of reference work;

- expose them to the historical and scholarly methods used by historians;

- impart an appreciation of the multidisciplinary nature of reference work, including its relationship to the other information professions; and

- acquaint them with the issues and challenges facing the archival profession as a whole.

The program was intended to address the larger, ongoing neglect of the reference function discussed in the first half of this paper.

The National Archives' Professional Development Program

The National Archives' professional development program seeks to identify the characteristics of reference work as a discipline and to develop a curriculum that provides a structured approach to the training and development of reference archivists. The competencies and areas of learning addressed are outlined in Appendix A.

While not in any sense attempting to replace the essential role of professional education, the wide-ranging scope of the proposed curriculum is based on the reality that most reference archivists at the National Archives do not have professional archival qualifications and that their reference-related

knowledge and skills are acquired on-the-job. The curriculum therefore sets out to provide a balanced program of knowledge, techniques and skills.

It is seen as important that the program avoids developing too narrow a focus or institutional bias, and that reference archivists remain aware of and receptive to the relevant learning available from related disciplines. For these reasons, the formally structured modules described below will be supplemented by other forms of learning and experience including:

- attendance at short courses, workshops and seminars presented by other institutions or professional associations;

- networking with history and heritage bodies, cultural institutions and user groups;

- readings on theory and practice;

- research projects; and

- formal tertiary courses in archives.

Objectives

The program aims to promote excellence in the provision of reference services and to encourage an appreciation of reference work as a discipline by developing and enhancing in staff, including staff not engaged directly in reference work, the following reference-related knowledge and skills:

- Knowledge of the collection and the acquisition of subject expertise;

- Knowledge of the recordkeeping systems by which the collection is controlled, and of the historical and administrative context in which the collection was created;

- Skill in working effectively with clients of all types, in anticipating and satisfying their needs, and in educating them in the best means of accessing and using the collection;

- Awareness of and participation in debate about the major issues affecting the archival profession; and

- Knowledge of and familiarity with the technologies that are available to assist with the provision of information and research services.

The program does not cover the general clerical and administrative competencies that can be acquired through other, readily available continuing education programs. Nor does it address the core technical archival knowledge and skills.[27]

Implementation

Three modules have so far been developed: *Communication Skills; History and Historical Method: Boer War to the Depression; and Australia at War: World War II to Vietnam.*

The first of these modules, *Communication Skills,* draws primarily upon areas 2 and 3 of the competencies and areas of learning - 'Reference skills' and 'Communication and User-related skills'. Module 1 aims to strengthen and improve the communication skills of staff, particularly in dealing with and assisting researchers in everyday situations and in more demanding contexts. It also looks to develop in staff strategies for ensuring the continuous development and improvement of their communication skills.

Care was taken to ensure that the content of the module was relevant to the specific needs of reference archivists. Considerable time was spent with the consultants to ensure that they were acculturated to the settings and problems specific to archives (as distinct from those of libraries or other cultural collecting institutions). Consultants were chosen on the basis of their willingness to spend time familiarising themselves with the challenges faced by reference archivists, and their success in developing and tailoring an interactive and participative program focused directly on the Archives' needs. What was consciously avoided was the 'buying in' of a generic communication skills package that failed to address the Archives' specific requirements.

Presented over three days, the module included presentations in the following five areas:

- *Foundation communication skills:* communicating assertively without disempowering readers; skills for remaining in control in difficult situations; listening skills; controlling the reference interview; and responding to differences in the ways different readers communicate their needs;

- *Self-management skills:* how to stay calm, professionally focused, and resourceful; how to deal with performance anxiety, build confidence, and evaluate one's own performance;

- *Dealing with challenging situations:* responding to readers with unrealistically high expectations; dealing with angry and aggressive readers; dealing with readers' complaints; invigilating in the reading room;

- *Dealing with difference:* dealing with cultural differences - Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people; dealing with disabilities - hearing impaired people; and

- *Continuous improvement:* what it is and how it works; encouraging and using constructive feedback from readers, how communication within the Archives' specific setting can facilitate continuous improvement in reference work.

The module was presented five times in Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne to over 80 staff, including some from other branches of the Archives and one from a state archival institution. Both before and after the module was presented participants were asked to rate their own skill levels against the specific topics covered. At the conclusion of the three days, they were asked to evaluate the module in terms of its content and whether it met its stated objectives. On average, 73% of participants considered that the module wholly or substantially met its stated objectives, and each individual presentation was rated as 'excellent' or 'very good' by an average 72% of participants. A comparison of how participants rated their own levels of knowledge and skill before and after the module showed a marked shift from the 'poor' and 'adequate end of the scale to 'good' and 'excellent'.

Module 2, *History and Historical Method: Boer War to the Depression,* also presented to over 80 staff in three cities, draws chiefly on area 1 of the competencies - Knowledge of the sources and their context. Module 2 is designed to:

- strengthen knowledge of, and stimulate interest in, early twentieth-century Australian history and how the major events of the period are elucidated in the records of the National Archives;

- provide an overview of the purposes for which history is written and the unique ways in which archives,· especially government archives contribute to the writing of history;

- provide an introduction to the main historical trends and method-ologies, the way these have changed during the twentieth century, and how these changes have affected the writing of history; and

- build an appreciation of how archives are used to support a variety of research interests and needs.

The module includes:

- a refresher in the history of the major events of the period;

- a discussion of the significant records the National Archives holds relating to these events;

- study of works using these records;

- the major themes reflected by these writings and how the themes have changed over the century;
- a study of historical method including what motivates the writing of history, the different types of history, and how historians use records.

Again, a detailed specification was prepared. The professional historian engaged to present the Module participated in a focus group of reference archivists from three cities to refine the content. Because of the Module's relevance to other areas of the Archives, we encouraged wider participation, with attendance by staff from areas such as public programs, appraisal, and preservation. Participants rated the Module highly, with over 90% rating it as 'very good' or 'excellent'.

Given the success and positive reaction to Module 2, Module 3, *Australia at War: World War II to Vietnam,* which is soon to be presented, will follow the same outline and approach.

The Future

It is important that the professional development program is seen as a continuing and regular part of the matrix of learning, on-the-job training and development already available to reference archivists and others. At National Archives, at least one new module will be presented each year, supplemented by other structured and refresher packages. As well as periodically repeating past modules, complementary modules will be developed (dealing with other aspects of communication in the reference environment and history and historical method relating to other periods of Australian history). Additional modules will be developed, dealing with subjects ranging from research skills and the effective use of reference tools, to instructional skills to assist readers, understanding information-seeking behaviour and how users approach their research, aspects of the professional and theoretical context of reference work, and current issues and trends in the archival and related professions.

The program is a previously untried initiative, at least in the Australian context, and a number of issues have yet to be examined and resolved. For example, better forms of evaluation need to be developed to measure how fully the knowledge presented has been absorbed into the understanding and practice of staff. These issues, as well as the design and content of individual modules, will be examined and refined with experience.

The Benefits

A number of benefits have already been identified from the program.

Firstly, the framework provided by the program helps the National Archives more easily identify the training and education needs of staff, and makes it possible to plan relevant training and development in a more structured way than was previously feasible.

It also helps create an awareness of relevant competencies and skills and to that extent helps guide the recruitment of staff. Overall, the program establishes a benchmark against which the training and development needs of staff can be measured and assessed.

Not least, the program reminds and reassures managers and reference archivists that reference work has a formally acknowledged framework and requires a body of knowledge and skills, the mastery of which is essential to the achievement of excellence in the provision of reference services.

Conclusion

For decades there have been calls for a greater focus on reference and use as a way of stimulating a more inclusive and comprehensive definition of archival practice, and as a way of increasing the appeal and accessibility of archives. In the same way that the records management profession has been sustained and invigorated by its increasing focus on the record at the point of *creation,* the archival profession must start focusing attention on the record at the point of *use* if archives are to continue to be used, valued and enjoyed.

Central to the notion of use is the need for competent and proficient reference archivists working within a comprehensive and recognised professional framework. If it is the case that education partly defines and ensures a profession's well-being by providing competent practitioners, much remains to be done in defining and delivering education programs for reference that fulfil this need.

It is not just archival educators but the profession as a whole that bears responsibility for articulating and defining a clear role for reference and its place within the profession. Practitioners, institutions, professional associations and researchers also have an essential role to play in stimulating debate, research, literature and discourse. In this context the National Archives' professional development program for reference archivists is one response to an operational need which may be of interest beyond its specific institutional setting. Though still in its relative infancy, the program has the potential to form the basis of a meaningful collaboration with educators, the professional associations, managers and practitioners. If the content of the program can be developed cooperatively with these

sectors, it will at the very least help stimulate a healthy dialogue, and at best might help influence the content and shape of university and continuing education curricula in this field.

Appendix A

The National Archives' Professional Development Program for Reference Archivists - Competencies and Areas of Learning

1. Knowledge of the sources and their context

Competencies

- Knowledge of the collection across a broad spectrum of subjects and formats;

- Ability to provide the link between the subject content of the collection and its provenance-based arrangement;

- Subject specialisation;

- Knowledge of and familiarity with all available reference tools;

- Knowledge of the strengths and limitations of the collection;

- Knowledge of twentieth-century Australian history, with particular emphasis on the role of the Commonwealth, its institutions and administrative history;

- Knowledge of how records are created, maintained and used;

- Knowledge of the main secondary sources which complement the collection; and

- Knowledge of other sources which complement or supplement the collection, and of the institutions which manage them.

Learning opportunities and application

- Enrolment in appropriate continuing education courses, individual university courses or formal tertiary study;

- Recommended reading;

- Attendance at history or related seminars and workshops organised by tertiary or other cultural institutions;

- Rotation or exchange of staff between Offices and with other cultural institutions.

- Preparation of fact sheets and guides to records;

- Evaluation of collections for relevance and completeness or the need for more descriptive work;

- Identification of important secondary sources relevant to the collection by the preparation of bibliographies, the preparation of critiques or abstracts of these sources, and citation analyses;

- Preparation and presentation to fellow reference archivists, researchers and user groups of collection-related information;

- Contributions to user group newsletters or journals; and

- Organisation of 'work in progress' or seminar presentations by researchers at the conclusion of their research or at an appropriate point in its development;

2. Reference skills

Competencies

- Ability to devise, conduct and document simple and complex search strategies based on the collection and its finding aids;

- Facility in using all reference tools in the reading room, both printed and electronic;

- Ability to instruct users in the full range of search techniques and strategies;

- Skill in conducting effective reference interviews, including questioning skills, skill in determining researchers' needs, and skill in matching those needs with appropriate sources and search strategies;

- Ability to search for, retrieve and organise information, and to package the results in ways that match users' needs;

- Ability to conduct effective exit or follow-up interviews with researchers to determine user satisfaction and to acquire and evaluate other feedback of value in improving reference services;

- Appreciation of the uniqueness of archival records;

- Improved information resource identification and retrieval skills, including library catalogue search and retrieval skills, and mastery of other electronic information systems;

- Ability to assist and instruct researchers in the use of electronic systems;

- Awareness of imaging and other information storage and retrieval technologies;

- Appreciation of when to refer reference inquiries, when to seek help and when to report; and

- Knowledge of how to exploit a wide range of information resources.

Learning opportunities and application

- Preparation of fact sheets and guides to records;

- Evaluation of collections for relevance and completeness;

- Study of the literature on conducting archival reference interviews; simulated reference interview practice sessions and group discussion and analysis of techniques;

- Reference case studies - group analysis and discussion of sources and search strategies;

- Workshops on instructional skills and interviewing techniques;

- Courses or training packages on the established and developing information storage and retrieval systems, including multimedia;

- Instruction in advanced on-line search and retrieval skills using the Archives' database;

- Networking with history and heritage bodies and institutions; and

- Attendance at reference related training workshops or seminars conducted by them.

3. Communication and user-related skills

Competencies

- Appreciation of what constitutes good customer service in the handling of reference inquiries;

- Ability to communicate and interact effectively with a range of clients, including those who communicate poorly; to introduce them to the Archives, its services and facilities; to determine their needs; and to provide information in a format and language that suits them (i.e. to be an educator and translator for clients);

- Understanding of user information-seeking behaviour and how users approach their research;

- Ability to establish and maintain mutually productive working relationships with a variety of clients, including working with user groups;

- Knowledge of techniques to help in dealing with conflict - client complaints, abuse, aggression;

- Skill in assisting users with disabilities;

- Skill in obtaining customer feedback (monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of services, user expectations user satisfaction, user complaints);

- Ability to work productively with volunteers;

- Awareness of responsibilities for safeguarding the security of the collection; and

- Ability to train and educate clients in the use of the Archives including the ability to deliver structured training to individuals and groups.

Learning opportunities and application

- Workshops, seminars or courses conducted by industry, the education sector, cultural institutions or professional associations on customer relations, client focus, verbal and non-verbal communication, active listening skills;

- Training on how to use interaction with clients to obtain and utilise market intelligence;

- Conducting user group training and induction sessions;

- Participation in outreach activities; and

- Readings on user behaviour; participation in the design and execution of obtrusive and unobtrusive user behaviour studies.

4. Knowledge of trends and issues in the reference environment

Competencies

- Knowledge of the professional and theoretical context of reference work - the records, the user, the processes, the organisation and professional theory;

- Understanding of reference philosophy, ethics, values, professional standards and legal responsibilities;

- Awareness of issues and trends in the information industry, with particular focus on the provision of information services;

- Knowledge of the role and activities of relevant professional associations; and

- Familiarity with research projects on aspects of the provision of reference services.

Learning opportunities and application

- Study of selected readings on theory, practice and research literature, and the preparation of critiques or abstracts thereof; organisation of discussion groups;

- Continuing education courses, university courses or formal tertiary study relating to archives, information science or information and society;

- Networking with information providers from other cultural institutions;

- Participation in relevant SIGS inside or outside the professional associations; and

- Research projects on the reference function and the presentation of research reports.

Endnotes

1.   Janice E Ruth, 'Educating the Reference Archivist', *American Archivist*, vol. 51 (Summer 1988), p. 266.

2.   Terry Eastwood, 'From Practice to Theory: Fundamentals US Style', (Archival Fundamental Series of the Society of American Archivists), review article in *Archivaria*, no. 39 (Spring 1995), p 148.

3.   The journals reviewed were *Archives and Manuscripts, American Archivist*, and *Archivaria*. A variety of other publications and library journals published in this period include writings on archival education, but none specifically relating to reference.

4.   Ruth, op. cit., pp. 266-76.

5.   Richard Cox, 'Education and the Archivist: Views and Reviews', *American Archivist*, vol. 55, (Fall 1993), p. 527.

6.   Mary Jo Pugh, 'The Illusion of Omniscience: Subject Access and the Reference Archivist', *American Archivist* vol. 45 (Winter 1982), pp. 38-9.

7.   Ann E Pederson, 'Development of Research Programs', *Archivum,* vol. 39 (Proceedings of the 12th International Congress on Archives, Montreal, 6-11 September 1992 (1994), pp. 314-5.

8.   Lawrence Dowler, 'The Role of Use in Defining Archival Practice and Principles: A Research Agenda for the Availability and Use of Records', *American Archivist,* vol. 51 (Winter and Spring 1988), p. 82.

9.   Elsie T Freeman, 'In the Eye of the Beholder: Archives Administration from the User's Point of View, *American Archivists,* vol. 47 (Spring 1984), p. 112.

10. Anne R Kenney, Commentary on Lawrence Dowler, 'The Role of Use in Defining Archival Practice and Principles', *American Archivist,* vol. 51 (Winter and Spring 1988), pp. 91-5.

11. Richard Cox, 'Archival Education in the United States: Old Concerns, but New Futures?', *American Archival Analysis: The Recent Development of the Archival Profession in the United States,* The Scarecrow Press Inc. Metuchen, NJ and London, 1990. p. 112.

12. Dowler, op. cit., pp. 74-86.

13. 'Course' is used here in the sense of a program of study rather than an individual academic unit (i.e. 'a subject').

14. In 1993 a survey conducted by New Zealand archivists found that 82% of archivists working in large archival institutions favoured a national archives qualification based on university study. Of the 19 areas of study respondents were asked to rate in order of importance, reference was nominated as the third most important. The areas which received the highest ratings were arrangement and description (80%), appraisal/acquisition (73%), reference (64%) and archival ethics (39%). In a complementary survey of archivists working in small institutions the five highest ratings were given to appraisal/acquisition (55%), arrangement and description (49%), conservation and preservation (44%), reference (35%), and archival ethics (24%). F Gerald Ham, *Towards Career Professionalisation: An Education Program for New Zealand Archivists and Records Managers,* Archives and Records Association of New Zealand, Wellington, 1993, pp. 41-77. Similar findings were made by Ann Pederson in an international survey of universities and institutions offering programs of study in archives administration. Respondents were asked to evaluate a list of basic knowledge areas as part of a basic course of study for entry level professional archivists, designed to supplement knowledge received through undergraduate studies. Reference and access were rated as warranting 'Special emphasis' or 'Essential' components of such a course by most respondents. Pederson, op. cit., pp. 312-59. While the number of respondents in each case was small they provide some indication of a perceived need for a thorough grounding in reference.

15. Terry Eastwood, 'Nurturing Archival Education in the University', *American Archivist* 51 (Summer 1988), pp. 228-51.

16.   National Finance Industry Training Advisory Body Ltd, 'Records and Archives Competency Standards', November 1997, p. 15.

17.   One partial exception to this was the University of New South Wales, which in 1996 introduced a compulsory 28 hour subject 'Archives/Records Accessibility' as part of a Graduate Diploma in Information Management - Archives/Records. Also included was an elective subject called 'Advocacy, Public Programs and Outreach'.

18.   For example, see: Ruth, op. cit., pp. 266-76; James M O'Toole, 'Curriculum Development in Archival Education: A Proposal', *American Archivist,* vol. 53 (Summer 1990), pp. 460-6; F Gerald Ham, Frank Boles (et al), 'Historians and Archivists: Educating the Next Generation', *American Archivist,* vol. 56 (Fall 1993), pp. 718-29; The Society of American Archivists' *Guidelines for the Development of a Curriculum for a Master of Archival Studies Degree,* 1994 and *Guidelines for the Development of Post-Appointment and Continuing Education and Training Programs,* 1997 (available at
www. archivists.org/education/masguide.html
and www.archivists.org/PACE97.html respectively);

    The Education Committee of the Association of Canadian Archivists' *Guidelines for the Development of Post-Appointment and Continuing Education and Training Programmes,* December 1990, *Archivaria,* no. 31 (Winter 1990-91), pp. 60-9; The Automated Records and Techniques Curriculum Development Project, Victoria Irons Walch, Project Coordinator, *American Archivist,* vol. 56 (Summer 1993), pp. 468-505; Toni Carbo Bearman, 'The Education of Archivists: Future Challenges for Schools of Library and Information Science', in Richard J Cox (ed), Educating the American Archivist for the Twenty-First century, *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* (Winter 1993), vol. 34, no. 1, pp. 69-72; and Richard Cox, 'Archival Education in the United States: Old Concerns, but New Futures?', *American Archival Analysis,* op cit, pp. 108-12.

19.   Among others, see: Dowler, op. cit., pp. 74-86; Richard Cox, 'A Research Agenda for Archival Education in the United States', *American Archival Analysis,* pp. 113-63; and Bruce W. Dearstyne, 'What is the Use of Archives? A Challenge for the Profession', *American Archivist,* vol. 50 (Winter 1987), pp. 76-87.

20.   Pederson, op. cit., p. 314.

21.   Richard Cox, 'Archival Education in the United States: Old Concerns, but New Futures?', op. cit., p. 110.

22.   Timothy L Ericson 'Forming "Structures of Exquisite Beauty": Archivists and Education', *Archivaria,* no. 42 (Fall 1996), p. 124

23.   Jenni Davidson, Anne-Marie Schwirtlich and Bruce Smith, 'The Australian Society of Archivists' 1996 Membership Survey', *Archives and Manuscripts,* vol. 25, no. 2, November 1997, p. 308.

24.   National Finance Industry Training Advisory Body Ltd, op. cit., p. 15.

25.   Paul Conway, 'Effective Continuing Education for Training the Archivist', Richard J Cox (ed.), *Educating the American Archivist for the Twenty-First Century,* op cit, p. 39.

26.   National Finance Industry Training Advisory Body Ltd, op. cit.

27.   In particular, the program does not duplicate or replace the learning available to all staff of the Archives through the in-house Technical Training Scheme, a scheme designed to upgrade the records-related knowledge and skill of National Archives' staff. It comprises four units comprising 36 subjects written by subject specialists, and involves up to 467 hours of study and readings, with optional formal and informal methods of assessment. It is designed for, and available to staff at all levels using study materials specially designed to facilitate a self-learn, distance education approach. Reference is among subjects covered. It involves 8-10 hours of study, including a number of readings, and provides a basic foundation or staff undertaking reference work.