ASA 2003 Membership Survey

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While the survey was supported by the Council of the Australian Society of Archivists, any opinions expressed in this article are my own.

Purpose of the survey

Like all professional associations, the Australian Society of Archivists exists to provide services to members and to represent their profession in the wider public arena. In order to meet the needs of its members, a society needs to understand the interests and expectations of its membership. A survey is a useful way to establish this.

The 2003 survey was the third to be conducted by the Society. Earlier surveys were conducted in 1993 and 1996.[1]

Survey methodology

In developing the survey questionnaire, the input of the ASA Council was sought on topics of interest. Some questions were also included from the 1993 and 1996 surveys so comparisons could be made. However, it was decided not to fully replicate these earlier surveys as key issues had changed. In addition, the earlier surveys were compiled manually and the 2003 survey was to be compiled using statistical software, which affected the style of questions.

A draft survey form was developed and refined after testing by Council members and selected volunteers. The form was then revised and sent to all 841 members of the Society in November 2003.

Unlike previous surveys, the 2003 survey was sent to institutional as well as individual members. While the form was difficult for large institutional members to complete due to the style of questions, it is known anecdotally that many people, particularly in smaller archives, participate in the ASA via institutional membership rather than individual membership. It was important that the interests and needs of these members were included.

The original deadline for the survey was 22 December 2003, later extended to 16 January 2004. Responses were compiled using statistical software during the month of January.

Response rate

397 responses were received, giving a pleasing response rate of 47.2%. In comparison, the response rates for the 1993 and 1996 surveys were 43.5% and 36.6% respectively.

Key findings

The 'average' profile of an archivist, as revealed by this survey, is female, aged between 50 and 64, lives in metropolitan New South Wales (NSW) and works full-time for a government archival institution, earning either $35 000 to $45 000 or over $65 000. She spends most of her working week on administration and management, policy development, strategic planning, records management and reference and user services. Professionally, she is interested in the preservation of electronic records, metadata development and management and appraisal and disposal. She is a professional member of the ASA of about nine years with a postgraduate qualification in archives, records, library or information management.

However, Ms Average hides a great deal of diversity in the picture of archival experiences revealed by the survey which is presented below. Please note that some tables have been rearranged from thier original format to show highest to lowest statistics for readability and comparison.

Demographic profile

The first questions sought information about the respondents' gender, age and location. Nearly three quarters of respondents to the survey are female. The large majority (72%) are between 35 and 64 years of age. The majority of respondents live in NSW (28%) followed by Victoria (22%). 87% live in metropolitan areas. This shows a slightly older age profile than the 1996 survey, with fewer people in the 20 to 34 and 35 to 49 age brackets and more in the 50 to 64 and 65 plus ranges.

The responses

Q1: What is your sex?

70.8% of respondents are female, 29.2% male.

Q2: What is your age?

Distribution of ages of respondents is shown in the table below.

Age range	Percentage
65 +	11.8
50 – 64	41.3
35 – 49	30.7
20 – 34	13.7

Q3: In which state or territory do you live?

State [or Country]	Percentage
New South Wales	28.3
Victoria	21.7
Australian Capital Territory	13.6
Western Australia	11.1
South Australia	10.4
Queensland	9.3
Tasmania	2.3
New Zealand	1.3
Northern Territory	1.0
Other (Overseas)	1.0

Q4: Do you live in a metropolitan or regional area?

87% live in metropolitan areas, with 13% in regional areas.

Work

In response to the question on the type of institution they worked for, nearly three quarters of all respondents work in either government archival institutions; government agencies and statutory authorities; or school, church or community archives, quite evenly spread across these three categories. The majority of respondents are employed full-time.

The most common salary ranges were $35 000 to $45 000 and $65 000 plus, at 20% each. Higher salaries are more common in government archival institutions, with over 50% of staff on $65 000 being employed in this sector. The lowest salary bracket (less than $25 000) was most common in the school, church or community archives sector. However, these figures have not been adjusted for full-time or part-time employment, and part-time employment is also far more common in this sector.

A high proportion of respondents (36.7%) are sole archivists in their institution. Another third of respondents work with between one and five other employees. Sole archivists are most common in the school, church or community archives sector, with two thirds of all sole archivists being employed in this environment.

The most common work activities have been quite consistent over all three surveys. The five most common activities reported by respondents in 2003 were:

- Administration and management
- Policy development and strategic planning
- Records management
- Reference and user services
- Arrangement and description.

In 1993 and 1996, 'policy development and strategic planning' was not an option for survey respondents and 'appraisal and disposal' made the top five. Appraisal and disposal was ranked sixth most common in this survey, indicating that its apparent drop in standing may rather be the result of expanded choice in the survey rather than a true decline in how common this work is.

The responses

Q5: What is your annual income earned from archival work?

Income	Percentage
$65 000 +	20.4
$35 001 – $45 000	19.6
$55 001 – $65 000	16.8
Less than $25 000	16.0
$45 001 – $55 000	8.4
Retired	7.9
$25 001 – $35 000	4.7
Volunteer	5.5
Student	0.8

It was noted that some people who ticked the 'retired' option still work, possibly on a volunteer basis. Some people also crossed out 'archival' and replaced it with recordkeeping, or noted that that their archival duties were a small part of broader recordkeeping work.

The option for $45 000 to $55 000 was unfortunately left off the survey form in error. Many people added this option, but this could have affected the validity of the results.

Q6: Type of Employment

Employment	Percentage
Full-time	60.2
Part-time	26.4
No response	7.8
Casual	5.5

The number of 'no responses' is more than the number of retired and student respondents combined.

Q7: Are you the only person working in the archives in your organisation? If no, how many other full-time employed (FTE) staff are employed in the archives?

Over one-third of respondents (36.9%) are the sole persons employed in archival work in their organisation. Many of the remainder had less than ten FTE staff. The table below shows the distribution of responses by number of employees.

It should be noted that the number of employees was rounded to a full number, so those with less than one FTE were rounded up to one. A zero was entered for those who had answered 'yes' for the first part of the question.

As more people answered the first part than the second part, there is a difference between the percentage of sole employees given above (from part one of the question) and in the table below.

Particularly in the higher numbers, percentages should be noted as estimates only.

Number of employees	Percentage
0	26.7
1–5	33.2
6–10	9.5
11–20	6.1
21–30	2.7
31–50	3.4
51–100	6.5
101–200	1.1
201–300	0.8
301–400	4.5
401+	5.7

Q8: What type of organisation do you work in?

The table below outlines responses:

Type of Organisation	Percentage
Government archival institution	27.5
School, church or community archives	25.7
Government agency and statutory authority	20.9
Collecting archive or manuscript library	6.8
Consultant	5.8
Private sector (commercial)	5.5

Some respondents indicated employment in an organisation not covered by the options given. These included professional associations and educational institutions. Any future survey should include these options.

Q9: What activities occupy more than 25% of your time in a typical working week?

Activity	Percentage
Administration or management	19.5
Policy development or strategic planning	11.9
Records management	11.4
Reference and user services	10.3
Arrangement and description	9.1
Appraisal and disposal	8.7
Information management	7.0
Historical research	5.0
Accessioning	4.9
Public programs or outreach	4.1
Preservation or conservation	2.6
Teaching or training	2.2
Other	1.7
Academic research	1.1
Oral history	0.5

Responses for 'other' included:

- FOI (2)
- Privacy (2)
- Legal discovery
- Collection management
- Acquisition of archives
- Information technology projects or rolling out new systems

- Digitisation (2)
- Microfilming
- Creating disposal authorities, thesauri, policy and procedures etc
- Project management
- Librarianship (2)
- Museum management

Some people also indicated that due to the multitude of tasks they performed, no single one took up more than 25% of their time.

Education

75% of respondents have postgraduate qualifications, including postgraduate diplomas, master's and PhDs. A further 16.5% have undergraduate qualifications. For all types of organisations, the most common qualification is postgraduate. The frequency is consistent across all types, from 73.5% in government archival institutions to 81.5% in collecting archives and manuscript libraries. However, qualifications in archives, records, information or library studies are less evenly distributed. They are least common in the school, church and community archives sector (50.5%) and most common in government agencies and statutory authorities (80.5%).

Responses to Question 12, 'Where have you acquired the archival component of your training?' indicates the importance placed on a variety of sources. On average, respondents selected two options for this question, the most common being 'on the job', 'postgraduate qualifications' and 'training workshops, professional development days or seminars'.

Not surprisingly, the value given to diversity of training and experience was also reflected in strong support for professional development, with over 95% regarding it as 'very' or 'somewhat' important.

There was also a great deal of consistency in the topics people were interested in for professional development. The three most popular topics were preserving electronic records, metadata development and management, and appraisal and disposal. When broken down by the

type of institution where archivists are employed there is still remarkable consistency in the top preferences for professional development. Preserving electronic records is still the top concern for five of the six institutional types, and metadata development is second choice, again for five of the six types. Appraisal and disposal and managing audiovisual records ranks equal third, and arrangement and description ranked fourth.

The responses

Q10: Highest academic level completed?

The majority of respondents (91.8%) have tertiary qualifications. The breakdown of all responses for this question is in the table below.

Highest academic level	Percentage
Postgraduate	46.4
Masters	25.1
Undergraduate	16.5
Secondary education	5.1
PhD	3.8
TAFE	2.3
Other	0.8

Q11: Did this qualification have an archives, records, information or library focus?

66.2% of respondents indicated that their highest qualification achieved had an archives, records, information or library focus.

Q12: Where have you acquired the archival component of your training?

Respondents could tick more than one option for this question. On average, people ticked two options. The most common source of archival

education was 'on the job', closely followed by postgraduate qualifications. Details are below. Please note that because respondents selected more than one option, the total percentage adds to more than 100%.

Source of archival training	Percentage
On the job	54.0
Postgraduate level courses	52.4
Training workshops, professional development days or seminars	48.1
In-house training	30.9
Graduate level courses	13.1
Continuing education courses	11.8
Total	210%

Q13: Do you consider continuing professional development important?

Value	Percentage
Very important	73.3
Somewhat important	22.4
Undecided	2.5
Not very important	1.0
Not at all important	0.8

Q14: What professional development activities have you undertaken in the past year?

Activity	Percentage
Reading professional literature	87.3
Attending seminars, conferences and workshops	84.0
Workplace development programs	31.5
Mentoring	18.3
Further formal education	12.1
Total	233.2

As respondents undertook more than one activity, the total is more than 100%.

Q15: What topics would you like to learn more about?

As respondents were asked to choose three options, total percentage adds to more than 100%. However, not all participants selected three options.

Topic	*Percentage*
Preserving electronic records	56.5
Metadata development and management	44.4
Appraisal and disposal	35.3
Managing audiovisual archives	25.9
Arrangement and description	24.5
Access and reference	20.4
Establishing archival programs	19.0
Oral history	10.2
Other	7.7
Total	210%

The most common 'other' topics included public programs; digital imaging and digitisation; electronic document and records management; and change management or project management skills.

Membership activity

The majority of respondents to the survey were individual members, rather than institutional members. Of the individual members, slightly more than half were professional members. Information was sought from associate members on whether they were eligible for professional membership and if so, what would make them consider upgrading. Of concern was the high proportion of respondents who did not know whether they were eligible, showing that the Society has more to do in

conveying information on professional membership. A wide range of answers was given on reasons for upgrading. The most common was a perceived imbalance between the additional costs of professional membership and the resultant benefits.

The average length of membership was 9.6 years, but a few particularly long standing members increased this average. The most common response was one year or less and the majority of survey respondents have been members for seven years or less. As a point of comparison, 53% had been members for five years or less in 1993, 41% in 1996 and 41% in this survey.

Information was sought on what people value about their ASA membership and what activities they are involved in. Most commonly, people value access to professional colleagues, followed by conferences and workshops, and *Archives and Manuscripts*. Respondents, on average, had participated in nearly 4 (3.8) ASA activities in the previous twelve months, however given that the 'more involved' members were more likely to return the survey than the 'less involved', this figure is unlikely to be valid for the membership as a whole. The most common activity is reading of the *Bulletin* or *Archives and Manuscripts*, subscribing to the Aus-archivists listserv, attending branch meetings and being a member of a Special Interest Group (SIG). It is worth noting that reading the *Bulletin* or *Archives and Manuscripts* was almost twice as common as subscribing to the listserv, highlighting the importance of continuing to communicate to members in paper form.

Following from the question about participation in ASA events, respondents were also asked whether they would like to be more involved with the Society. A large majority (71%) are happy with their current involvement. However, there is a sizeable proportion (27.1%) who are either not sure or would like to increase their involvement, indicating that there is an opportunity for the Society to increase participation rates. As lack of time is the most common reason for not getting more involved, attention should be paid to promoting types of involvement that are not too demanding, with provision of more general information on how to get involved.

The results of Question 23 on memberships of other institutions are of interest in light of recent debates about closer ties with RMAA. While

more ASA members also hold membership of the RMAA than any other organisation or society, only 23.6% of ASA are members of both. However, the question only asked about individual membership, not institutional. The next most common associations were with the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) and Museums Australia at over 10% each.

The final question of the survey was a free response, seeking feedback on what the Society could do to be a better or more effective professional association. While responses can only be summarised here, all responses were compiled and made available to the Council of the Society. The responses were grouped thematically, with the most common responses relating to the need for:

• more opportunities for professional development

• greater advocacy and marketing of the profession

• improvement in administration and member services (including publications and the website)

• broadening of perspective to cater for all archives.

With regard to the last point, many commented that government archivists dominate the Society and small archives are under-represented.

The responses

Q16: What type of membership do you hold?

Details of responses are shown in the table below.

Membership type	Percentage
Professional	40.9
Associate	36.8
Institutional – Category B	13.3
Institutional – Category A	9.0

Category A: Recognised archival institutions and other such corporate bodies, organisations and institutions as the Council deems to have compatible interests.

Category B: Schools, religious organisations and historical societies and other such minor societies and organisations as the Council may from time to time determine.

Q17: How long have you been a member of the ASA?

The average length of membership for all respondents is 9.6 years. Answers ranged from less than one year to forty years. While the ASA has only been in existence from 1971, the latter respondents may have been indicating membership of the preceding archives section of the Australian Library Association. The results are slightly towards the shorter end — the most frequent response was one year or less and over 50% of respondents have been members for seven years or less. While respondents could write in any length of time, for the purpose of analysis and comparison with other surveys, the responses were divided into ranges, as shown in the table below.

Years of membership	*Percentage*
0 – 2	18.4
3 – 5	20.4
6 – 9	16.1
10 – 15	20.6
15+	20.6

Q18: Are you eligible for professional membership? If yes, what would make you consider upgrading? (For associate members.)

Eligibility	Percentage
Yes	32.6
Don't know	32.6
No	24.7

Respondents gave a wide range of reasons for what would make them consider an upgrade. In general, the most common responses related to a perceived imbalance in the additional costs of professional membership compared to any additional benefits. Other responses related to perceived unfair or unsuitable criteria, access to people to guide them through the process or lack of time (either more time needed to write the application, or more time needed to be involved with the Society).

Q19: What do you value most about your ASA membership?

Respondents were asked to select the two most important factors. Many people had trouble restricting themselves to two. When this occurred, the first two selected were entered into the statistical software. This means the results are slightly skewed to the earlier options on the list.

Most value	Percentage
Access to professional colleagues	60.7
Conferences and workshops	38.8
Archives and Manuscripts	35.9
Status of belonging	27.4
Branch meetings	14.0
Contributing to the profession	12.7
Other	1.8
Total	191.2

Most of the responses for 'other' related to the concept of keeping in touch with archival issues, whether through the listserv or newsletters or the *Bulletin*.

Q20: Have you participated in any of the following in the last year?

Activity	Percentage
Read *Bulletin* or *Archives and Manuscripts*	90.8
Subscribed to Aus-archivists listserv	58.5
Branch meetings	44.1
Member of SIG	38.7
Attended ASA organised seminars or workshops	35.6
Attended ASA conference	32.6
Contributed to Aus-archivists listserv	19.2
Presented or chaired sessions at ASA conferences, seminars or workshops	12.6
Served on branch committee	11.5
Served on SIG committee	11.0
Represented ASA	7.7
Served on conference organising committee	6.4
Written articles for *Archives and Manuscripts*	6.4
Written submissions for Bulletin	6.2
Served on ASA council	3.3
Total	384.6

As respondents could select more than one option, the total is over 100%. The results indicate that, on average, each respondent has participated in nearly four ASA activities in the last twelve months.

Q21: Would you like to be more involved in the ASA?

Attitude to greater involvement	Percentage
No, happy with current involvement	71.0
Yes	18.6
No, want to reduce my involvement	8.5
Not sure	1.9

Q22: If yes, what is preventing you?

Barrier	Percentage
Lack of time	67.3
Location of events	13.5
Conflict with other activities	13.5
Unsure of how to get involved	5.8

Q23: What associations (excluding the ASA) are you a member of?

Association	Percentage
Records Management Association of Australasia	23.8
Museums Australia	11.3
Australian Library and Information Association	11.0
Association of Catholic Archivists (Vic)	5.6
Institute for Information Management	7.2
Australian Institute for the Conservation Cultural Material	1.3
Health Information Management Association of Australia	0.5
Australian Information Management Association	0.0
Other	20.5

Within the 'other' category, membership of various historical associations or international archival or recordkeeping organisations was common.

Q24: From your perspective, what does the Society need to do in order to be a better or more effective professional society?

This was an open answer question. Responses were coded thematically and the percentage of responses falling into each theme is shown below.

Theme	Percentage
Professional development	16.1
Public profile or advocacy promotion	15.6
Cater for all archives or broaden perspective	13.8
Administration and member services	13.3
Praise and positive comments	8.3
Relationship with RMAA and other bodies	8.3
Work of branches and SIGs	5.0
To make more inviting or inclusive of member needs	4.6
Professional qualifications and membership	4.1
Costs of membership and events	3.7
Education	3.2
Comments on survey	2.3
Mentoring	1.8

Analysis of Results

Demographic challenges

Results of the survey show an aging membership profile, which may present a challenge to the Society in the future. This trend has been evident over all three surveys. While older members bring a wealth of experience, it is also essential to foster younger members to ensure the future viability of the Society. However, despite the aging profile the high percentage of people who have been members for one year or less shows that the Society is successfully bringing 'new blood' of various ages into the association. Perhaps people are simply joining at a later age than in the past, or are returning from previous membership that expired. The high figure of first year members could also suggest that many people sign up for their first year and do not renew. In addition, the aging profile may provide an opportunity for the Society. Retirees generally have more spare time to devote to volunteer work and many may like to keep in touch with the profession and with the networks they have developed in the Society. The ASA should consider how to use this valuable resource to keep retired members involved with the profession.

The length of membership was examined in relation to participation in various ASA activities over the last twelve months (detailed in Question 20). On average, across all age groups, members participated in 3.8 activities in the last twelve months. When the different age groups were examined, it revealed that the longest serving members (of fifteen years or more) participate in the most activities; 4.8 compared with 3.0 for the newest members. This shows that the ASA faces a challenge in encouraging newer members to get involved in Society activities.

Participation in activities was also examined in relation to age. The least active members, who participated in, on average, 1.9 activities in the last 12 months, are in the 65 plus age group, considerably less than the other groups. Participation for other age ranges is 4.2 activities per year for 20 to 34; 4.3 for 34 to 49, and 4.0 for 50 to 64. It seems, from the steep decline in involvement after retirement age, that older members may feel as though they no longer have a role to play in the Society, at a stage when they may have more time to devote to volunteer activities.

Involvement by different sectors

The results were also analysed to investigate whether differential levels of participation in Society activities was dependent upon the sector the member worked in. Are employees of public archival institutions more involved than those in school, church or community archives, for example. Members from government archival authorities and collecting archives and manuscripts libraries are the most involved, participating in five activities in the past year. Consultants follow closely, at four. In contrast, members from school, church or community archives participate the least, joining in three activities on average. Private sector and government agency/statutory authorities are at 3.3 and 3.5 respectively.

There are a number of possible reasons for these differences. They may be due to the level of employer support — in terms of time and money — for engaging in professional activities. It is noted that the least difference in rates of participation was for reading the *Bulletin* or *Archives and Manuscripts*, which requires low levels of employer support. Another potential barrier to participation for members working in school, church and community archives is being aware of the opportunities to get involved, either through personal networks or official announcements. Members from these organisations also have the lowest rate of subscription to the Aus-archivists listserv at 36.4%. A third potential barrier is perception of relevance of activities to this sector.

The free-response final question to the survey also indicated that many small archivists felt under-represented and neglected by the Society. Even though sole archivists and workers in school, church and community archives make up a large proportion of the membership, they are under-represented when it comes to participation in activities. In a volunteer society, whether it is running seminars or contributing articles for publications, activities are planned by those that volunteer to get involved. The challenge for the Society is not just to plan more events for sole archivists and small archives, but to get members representing these sectors involved at the planning level.

Professional membership

Encouraging professional membership is another challenge for the Society. The survey results show that many people are not aware of

whether they are eligible for professional membership, and if they are, do not see many benefits in upgrading their membership type. Options for encouraging more members to upgrade their status may be to restrict some benefits to professional members only, or to reduce the cost difference between the membership types. Comments on the survey also brought to light that the separate retiree category for membership subscriptions may give the impression that a retired person cannot be a professional member. This issue requires clarification.

Professional development

One of the striking results of the survey was support for more professional development. 95% of respondents regarded it as important or very important, and professional development was also highlighted as a key area where the society could improve. Encouragingly for those involved in planning such activities, there was a remarkable consensus on topics for professional development despite the variety of organisations involved with the ASA. The survey shows that development opportunities focused on preserving electronic records, appraisal and disposal, metadata development and managing audiovisual records will attract an audience from all sectors of the archival community, though consideration would need to be given to whether courses need to be tailored to different levels of expertise. As a targeted development opportunity for school, church and community archives sectors, arrangement and description would be a suitable topic. However, this survey did not request information on the preferred format for professional development; one day seminars or workshops, small email discussion groups, printed information, etc.

Conclusion

A survey is a useful tool to gather information on membership characteristics and interests. This information is only valuable if it is used to provide direction for the Society. Particular areas for attention identified through the survey include:

- Consideration of challenges and opportunities presented by the demographic profile of the Society.

- Fostering of involvement by all archival sectors, especially the school, church and community archives, and both new and longer serving members.

- Reconsideration of the costs and benefits of professional membership.

- Fostering of professional development activities.

These challenges are for all members of the Society to respond to, not just those individuals who currently hold positions on Council, Branch Councils, SIG committees or other positions of responsibility.

Endnotes

1 Jenni Davidson, Anne-Marie Schwirtlich and Bruce Smith, 'The Australian Society of Archivists' 1993 Membership Survey' *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 23, no. 2, November 1995, pp. 306-21.

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, pp. 304-27.