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### **Proposed Sector Skills Councils for Archives**

I am writing to raise an issue with you about the proposed creation of two Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) which are aiming to represent the interests of archives and their employers.

By way of background, The National Council on Archives (NCA) is a membership organization, which represents a broad spectrum of the archival community including user groups, professionals, employers, national and regional bodies. It aims to provide a single voice for the archival community and to lobby on matters of common interest. The NCA works in partnership with The National Archives, Resource: The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries, the Society of Archivists and the Association for Chief Archivists in Local Government who are all represented on our Council.

We are fully supportive of your department's drive to create the SSCs in order to provide a greater focus on the needs of employers and, indeed, we understand the reasons why you are aiming to replace the 73 National Training Organisations with around 23 SSCs. This is despite the fact that this may mean less representation for a relatively small profession such as archives and records managers. However, our concerns are not about the aims of the SSCs but rather about the development of two potential SSCs aiming to encompass the interests of archives.

In the NTO landscape, the interests of archival employers have been represented by the Information Services National Training Organisation (ISNTO). Once the Department of Culture, Media and Sport created Resource: The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries in 2000, we understand that serious discussions were held about the principle of aiming to establish one SSC that would effectively bring together ISNTO and the Cultural Heritage National Training Organisation (part funded by Resource). It appears that those discussions broke down and as a result both NTOs have sought other partners. CHNTO is seeking to become part of a Creative and Cultural Industries SSC forging partnerships with the performing arts, whilst ISNTO has forged an alliance with PAULO the community and information learning NTO which may well now itself form part of a larger Lifelong Learning SSC. Both of these proposed SSCs are claiming that they will aim to represent the training needs of archival employers.

Despite taking soundings from officials within Resource and DCMS, we are still not clear as to the reasons why one proposed SSC has not emerged from an amalgamation and extension of ISNTO and CHNTO.

We believe that the development of two rivals could be damaging to the interests of archive and records management services. We would be the first to acknowledge that we would only ever form a small element of any SSC given that each will require a minimum footprint of 500,000 employees. It is, therefore, the positioning of our domain within a larger SSC that is important. It has been our experience from working with Resource that being aligned with both museums and libraries has been enormously beneficial to our domain, particularly in thinking creatively about the future needs of our profession. This benefit has been realised precisely because archives and records span both the cultural and information sectors and so we are well positioned at the centre of the alliance despite our relative size. It is this positioning that we may lose in being asked to choose between the two proposed SSCs. We are also concerned that both current proposals may fail to command sufficient support and funding to be effective, despite the very wide range of professions they are seeking to represent.

We are especially concerned because Resource's Archives Task Force, which has been commissioned by DCMS to look critically at the state of UK archives, is likely to make clear recommendations in the areas of training and development. These recommendations will reflect the fact that there are serious problems in the recruitment, retention and remuneration of archivists and records managers and that these problems can only be solved by creative strategies. Enclosed is a paper presented to the Archives Task Force that outlines these problems and a way forward.

We are aiming to meet with the Chief Executives of ISNTO and CHNTO shortly in order to find out how they envisage the proposed SSCs will be able to tackle the issues for our domain. We will then consider whether to back one of the proposals. We remain, nevertheless, concerned that our best interests cannot be served by having to choose to be at the edge of, rather than at the heart of, an SSC. We believe that this concern mirrors that of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals whose Council voted recently to back ISNTO but in doing so made clear that the situation was far from ideal.

The Government has been working through Resource to bring museums, archives and libraries in the UK closer together as a sector. We feel that it would be beneficial to both the effectiveness of training provision and the delivery of Government policy for this to be reflected in the remit of a Lifelong Learning SSC covering all these professions. As matters stand this seems unlikely to be the outcome of present discussions and we hope that if you agree you will feel able to exercise your influence to direct the parties in a more profitable direction.

Yours sincerely,

Nick Kingsley  
Chair