

SURVEY OF RECRUITMENT OF ARCHIVISTS, CONSERVATORS AND RECORDS MANAGERS, JULY – DECEMBER 1999

The following is a report produced at the request of the National Council on Archives at its meeting in October 1999, which the Society agreed to undertake. To describe it as done in snatched moments and on a wing and a prayer is no exaggeration, but I hope fellow members of the Society will feel it to be useful. It was felt at the meeting of NCA in April 2000, that the report did provide enough evidence to enable more detailed proposals to be brought forward to seek funding for more detailed and professional research on some of the questions raised. Let us hope this proves to be the case.

Background

This report has been produced in response to concerns raised at the April 1999 meeting of NCA, specifically with regard to difficulties faced in recruiting qualified Conservators. The survey was undertaken by Bruce Jackson, for the Society of Archivists on behalf of NCA.

Methodology

Questionnaires were sent to all organisations placing advertisements in the Society of Archivists Career Opportunities between July and December 1999. A total of 109 posts seeking qualified posts were regarded as falling within the scope of the survey, as requiring professionally qualified staff, with 84 returns being received.

Returns

	Archivists	Records Managers	Conservators
Returned	66	9	9
Not returned	19	3	3
Total	85	12	12
Problems indicated	27	9	7

The ratio between the three professional groups is perhaps what would be expected – roughly 7:1:1 with archivists as easily the largest group. What is immediately apparent is the much higher incidence of prospective employers encountering difficulties in recruitment, when the posts to be filled were for Records Managers (100% with problems) or Conservators (76% problems). For archivists the figure is just under 50%. A total of 11 posts were not filled at the end of the recruitment process from the total of 84 returns. Here the picture is even more extreme between the three groups: 4 out of 66 archivists posts, 5 out of 9 records managers, and 2 out of 9 conservators.

Regional Breakdown

As would only be expected, there were significant variations in recruitment success between the different areas of the UK. No posts on Ireland were advertised in the period under review.

The new SoA regional boundaries have been employed.

	No. of Returns	Problems	Fail to recruit
Scotland	13	10	4
Wales	5	3	0
Northern	2	1	0
North West	10	5	1
West Midlands	10	5	1
East Midlands	1	1	0
South West	6	5	2
South	6	2	0
London	27	5	1
East	2	0	0
Overseas	?	?	?

Scotland does appear to have particularly acute problems from this breakdown.

Sectoral Breakdown

The returns have also been broken down by employment sector. Figures in brackets indicate the number of problems experienced.

Charities/Voluntary	5 (2)	2 (2)	1 (1)
Business	7 (0)	1 (1)	0

Higher Education does appear to have a greater problem, but this may be influenced by other factors, such as the higher incidence of fixed term posts, and also the fact that a higher proportion of posts in this sector were advertised later in the autumn. Further work would be needed to weigh the results for factors such as these.

Permanent/Temporary Posts

Permanent posts comprised only 31 out of 84 returns. Problem rates were 14 out of 31 on permanent posts, and 28 out of 53 on temporary, so although higher on temporary posts, not massively so. This imbalance would only be expected as people seek job security, and it is perhaps surprising that there is not a greater differential between the two. Further work on the proportion of first posts which are temporary, and on the comparative incidence of temporary posts in conservation, archives and records management would be useful, as would study of salary levels between temporary and permanent posts.

Non Recruitment

The following outline the posts for which no successful recruitment occurred

	Group	Sector	Level	Perm/Temp
1	RM	National	Senior	Perm
2	Archivist	Local Authority	Senior	Perm
3	Conservator	Local Authority	Senior	Temp
4	RM	Higher Education	Junior	Temp
5	RM	Higher Education	Junior	Temp
6	Archivist	Local Authority	Senior	Perm
7	Archivist	Higher Education	Senior	Temp
8	RM	Charity	Senior	Temp
9	RM	Charity	Senior	Temp

10	Archivist	Higher Education	Senior	Temp
11	Conservator	Local Authority	Senior	Perm

It is notable that a high proportion of these posts are at a senior level. While it might be expected that in a stable jobs market people might not be prepared to move for a temporary post, it is of concern that people (or at least, the people employers want) do not appear prepared to move even for permanent posts. This may be due to the low wage differentials between junior and senior posts, particularly in local government. Again, this would require further research.

Problems encountered by prospective employers.

Those completing the forms were asked to indicate if they had encountered problems, and if so the nature of the problem. Some respondents marked down more than one area of concern. It must be borne in mind at this point that the forms did not require the respondents to differentiate their comments between qualified and unqualified applicants, and in many cases these comments may relate to unqualified people. Certainly in some cases the persons appointed were not qualified in the relevant discipline. This area in particular requires a great deal more research.

Of 41 respondents:

30 felt they had received insufficient numbers of applicants. 2 received no applications at all for posts and several received only one or two. Several respondents commented that although they received applications, they were not from qualified candidates. This problem seems to be greater in Scotland, and also later in the year. One employer received 84, but felt "there was not enough strength in depth" – perhaps a rather unrealistic view in the current market.

- 22 expressed concern about the quality of applicants. As pointed out above this can relate to unqualified or qualified applicants.
- 13 felt that the application they received were under-qualified.
- 1 felt that they received over-qualified applications
- 19 felt that they received applications from under experienced candidates.

Before reaching any major conclusions from this data it would be necessary to learn how the profile of the problems (and indeed the entire recruitment profile revealed in the survey), compares with that for other posts of a comparable type.

CONCLUSIONS

The survey supports the anecdotal evidence that has existed for several years of problem areas in recruitment in all areas of archive professionals, and does bear out the concern that there are major problems in Conservation (and also in Records Management). The reality is obviously more complex than a simple survey like this (conducted on a shoestring in a few grabbed moments) can possibly convey.

It does suggest that further research is needed to determine the real size of the long-term market in all three disciplines, and also the question of how this can best be met in terms of training provision. The problem is not simply about numbers – there is also the question of how to make the work force mobile, and of the correct quality. These are issues which must be looked at both by MLAC and by the Information Sector and Cultural Heritage National Training Organisations, in conjunction with the NCA and certain of its component members.

The question is also raised by the survey about the viability of some of the short-term projects being funded, specifically in the Higher Education sector. If these are to succeed in recruiting staff, timing is of prime importance, and of course, if they succeed, it will simply move the problem to a different point in the chain.

Further work is needed in many areas, some of which have been touched on above. In addition, it will be necessary to study the differing factors affecting the different groups – archivists, records managers and conservators. Why do so few of the students recruited by the Archive Training courses have or develop an interest in Records Management? Is the short-fall in availability of conservators at least partly explicable by the virtual disappearance of the Trainee Conservator posts which existed in many English local authority? Such posts were never matched in Scotland or the Higher Education sector, which are the areas that at the moment appear to have access to funds. These are just examples of the type of questions we need to be asking.

It is to be hoped that both the Society of Archivists and NCA will find methods of encouraging the development of such research. With the current emphasis on both Heritage and Information industries in government thinking on economic development, we are surely strongly placed to be arguing for such work on developing the employment potential of the sector.

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