

**Network of (North Western) European Archival Educators – 2nd Meeting
13th – 15th September, 2006**

What kind of archivist do we need? - Requirements of archival education with special consideration of electronic records

Irmgard Mummenthey, Hamburg State Archive Service

Ladies and gentlemen,

To begin with, I have to warn you: My lecture will turn out to be very disappointing for I am not going to stick to the title suggested by Herr Dr. Uhde.

I take it for granted that there is no doubt about electronic records being a part of archival education or training. The Report on Archives in the Enlarged European Union¹ depicts the profile of the 21st century archivist. And ICA Study 16 mentions the skills archivists should develop as a strategic response to the challenge of electronic records.² The problem I see is: Traditional role models and job profiles that have not been put to the test for ages prevent us from tackling the challenges of modern information technology.

Talking about archivists working in public archives in Germany, we have two different groups in mind:

- those archivists who, having attended school for 12 or 13 years, graduate from the universities of applied sciences either in Marburg, Munich or Potsdam and receive a degree that may be compared to the Bachelor of Arts
- those archivists who, having graduated from university, pass the postgraduate training programme at the institutes of archival studies either in Marburg or Munich.

I shall concentrate on the first group. The reasons why are: A short while ago, we had two vacancies for junior archivists who belong to the first group and who were about to start their career. In 2007 we will have a vacancy for a trainee. He or she will have the legal status of a junior civil servant, do training on the job and attend courses at the university of applied sciences in Marburg. We know that students who

¹ Report on Archives in the Enlarged European Union. Increased Archival Cooperation in Europe: Action Plan, European Communities 2005, p. 142.

² Electronic Records: A Workbook for Archivists, International Council on Archives Committee on Current Records in an Electronic Environment (ICA Study 16), Paris 2005, p. 24.

are going to sit the final examinations in summer 2007 are already looking for places to train or study. Therefore, we have already placed the advertisement in the internet and produced information material to be delivered to schools in Hamburg.

Hamburg is one of the federal states within the Federal Republic of Germany. The State Archive Service gives access to the archives created by the regional government and government agencies. The Hamburg Archives Act gives us a certain responsibility for records management, be it electronic or not. It is no exclusive right as there are other government agencies involved. Ours is the responsibility to give advice, not to enforce. Records management within public administration has been rather inefficient for a long time. Since 1999 electronic records management has been introduced within a couple of government agencies. However, hopes of modern technology being the cure-all were soon dashed.

Like most of the federal states Hamburg has suffered from a significant decline in public budget funds. Consequently, staff has been reduced in all government agencies including the state archive service.

We therefore have to put every aspect of our services to the test and then to decide whether we will remain fully involved in that aspect or not. Is it still reasonable to appraise on site or should we develop models of appraisal that lead to transfers of archives on a regular basis? And as there is a wide range of museums that cover every aspect of the city's history, why then should we spend the remaining resources on large exhibitions? And on the other hand: Who might have the expertise needed to make records management more efficient?

Considering these aspects, what kind of archivist do we need here?

Among others, all three job profiles - I refer to our vacancies - contain, among others, the following aspects:

- The archivist will have to advise the government agencies on records management. He or she will have to develop and coordinate educational programmes on records management for members of public administration. He or she will have to teach the subject himself or herself.
- The archivist will have to participate in working groups together with colleagues from other government agencies.
- The archivist will have to work in project teams in order to prepare models of appraisal. Her or she may have to chair a team and to coordinate the working process.

Sure enough, the candidates who applied for the two vacancies we had a short while ago all knew the theory. But what about getting deeper into these subjects by training on the job? In fact, training on the job is always an essential part while studying at a university of applied sciences. All our candidates were graduates from the universities of applied sciences in Potsdam and Marburg. They came from all over Germany. During the job interviews we learnt that they had visited just one or two government agencies to appraise documents on site, that they had not been involved in preparing the visit and that, above all, they do not take it as natural to be involved in such a task but regard it as a favour done to them by their superiors. And there were only a few of them who had dealt with electronic records while being trained on the job. None of them had ever been in charge of a project.

How then can junior archivists train those skills they will need when they advise and instruct members of public administration on their records management, be it electronic or not? Among these skills are also soft skills such as

- being able to build effective relationships and networks
- being able to manage time effectively and efficiently
- being able to find win-win-solutions while negotiating
- later on in working life, being able and willing to develop leadership qualities.

For three years now, I have given lectures at the university of applied sciences at Marburg once a year. And for seventeen years, I have been involved in training junior civil servants within the public administration in Hamburg. Their education is quite similar to that of junior archivists. They study public administration at the university of applied sciences in Hamburg and again, training on the job, is an essential part of their studies. So I am in the position to compare. Our junior civil servants enjoy a completely different standing. While training on the job, they are already in charge. They chair meetings, they deliver lectures in front of senior civil servants, they join working groups the members of which are happy to have someone who brings new ideas. Of course, trainers are always nearby and give them feedback. This is, in fact, learning by doing.

Resources are on the decline and public archive services cannot afford wasting them by clinging to an obsolete role model that has only the archivists of the second group in mind, those having graduated from university, when referring to certain archival responsibilities. In fact, the difference between the first and second group is just a

tiny one. Members of the first group should be able to develop management and leadership skills after some years and then to take up a responsible position later on in working life. Members of the second group, on the other hand, should be able to demonstrate their management and leadership qualities when they are appointed to their first position. As they may become heads of state archive services, they should be able to design, let us say, business strategies.

I do hope that the Bologna Declaration will have its effect and lead to a standard as far as training on the job in public archives is concerned. This will, by the way, also imply a programme to train the trainers. Trainers on the job should learn about educational theory and modern training methods. Information technology is a synonym for continuous change. Archivists, both trainers and trainees, should be ready to accept the concept of lifelong learning.

Now, please allow me to turn to our future trainee. In our society, the percentage of elderly people increases continuously. Therefore, employers can no longer draw on plentiful resources when recruiting junior staff. When placing job advertisements, public archive services cannot be sure that they are going to receive many applications. They risk losing the competition among employers if they do not launch a new marketing strategy soon that does away with the image the archival profession certainly has in Germany.

When I went to an eye specialist for the first time, she asked me about my profession. She was really surprised when I told her that I do talk to people during the day, that I do experience stress and that I will not spend my whole working life covered in dust. And there are many young people who think of archivists as my doctor does.

In our advertisement, we address young people who are interested in information technology in the first place and who might have never thought of becoming an archivist. The word "history" appears only once or twice referring to the results in certain subjects at school such as German, maths and politics or history. We address young people who want to develop management skills. We do not address the loner who wishes to do some quiet research work.

So finally, what kind of archivist do we need ?

We do need archivists who are aware of changes in society and who are prepared to react accordingly. We do then need archivists who are willing to develop managerial

skills to make the best of limited resources and do not, as one management consultant put it, behave like ground squirrels who use to hide in their holes when birds of prey are about to attack³.

Thank you very much.

³ Gerd Schneider: „Archivare aufgewacht!“ Anmerkungen eines Externen zur gegenwärtigen Situation im deutschen Archivwesen. *Der Archivar* 57 (2004), p. 37-44 (p. 37).³