

CATHOLIC ARCHIVES SOCIETY

Archive Advice Leaflet no. 11

Employing an archival professional

Introduction

An archive professional is someone who has obtained a postgraduate qualification in archives and/or records management. In the UK and Ireland there are courses leading to recognised qualifications. Courses usually require pre-course experience so some archivists have worked in archives before they qualify.

Advising people on employing a professionally qualified archivist is a growing part of CAS's role. In recent years, CAS members have visited organisations to discuss their requirements for an archivist, advised on advertising and short lists, sat on interview panels, and given on-going advice.

The CAS strongly advises anyone thinking of employing an archivist to consider his or her requirements carefully. There are six stages in recruiting an archivist:

- Consider the current state of your archives and what you want from and for them
- Prepare and write a job description and person specification
- Advertise the vacancy
- Shortlist the applications
- Interview the candidates
- Appoint your chosen candidate

Think about your archives and what you hope for from an archivist

Are you hoping your archivist will:

- Sort and catalogue an unsorted or largely unsorted collection of archives so you can find out what you have? If so, have the archives already been brought together or is doing this part of the job? Are more archives expected?
- Extend catalogues made by a predecessor and create paper and/or web-based catalogues/finding aids. If so, will the predecessor be available to continue work or give advice and will the archivist have other help, e.g. staff, volunteers or work placement students that he or she will need to supervise?
- Administer a catalogued collection and develop the use of the archives for mission/outreach both internally e.g. helping to promote a Cause, to identify material for a History or to develop a heritage room, and externally e.g. by advising, guiding and supervising researchers, retrieving archive material from storage, answering enquiries, giving talks and preparing exhibitions?
- Develop and implement management policies for your semi-current and current records, including managing data protection enquiries and freedom of information enquiries if applicable?
- Establish an appropriate storage area (an archive strongroom), move the documents there, pack them in archive quality materials and arrange appropriate conservation?

Please remember:

- To allow plenty of time for the work to be done. Most archive jobs last longer than the original estimate.
- It is difficult to carry out the administrative and outreach functions if a collection has not been sorted and catalogued to at least a basic level

- An archivist will not normally have training or experience in conservation or in looking after books and objects. An archivist is an administrator and not necessarily a historian.
- An archivist's main responsibility is to the archives and though outreach is a valuable part of an archivist's role, historical research and writing or speaking should not take precedence over care and cataloguing.
- To consider the financial aspects of employing an additional staff member, e.g. pension arrangements, holiday entitlement, National Insurance and possibly maternity/paternity arrangements.
- The archivist will need suitable storage and work areas and a budget for equipment
- A professional qualification does not mean every archivist is familiar with or experienced in all the above tasks.

Preparing and writing a job description and person specification

Points to consider include:

- Salary: in August 2010 the Archives and Records Association recommended the minimum salary paid to an archivist should be £22,001.
- Where will the archivist fit within your organisation e.g. title of post and grade or rank?
- Who will the Archivist report to? Will he or she be supervised? Will there be regular appraisals?
- Is there a management or advisory committee for the archives?
- How much experience would you like, i.e. would you prefer someone very experienced, someone in his or her second or later professional post or someone newly qualified? (It is inadvisable to specify x number of years of experience due legislation preventing age discrimination).
- Would you consider someone looking for a job-share?
- Will the Archivist be able to go to training days, courses and conferences as part of their work in order to develop both the job and his or her career?
- Will he or she be able to become involved in archive organisations as part of the job, e.g. the CAS and the Archives and Records Association?
- How much familiarisation time are you prepared to allow at the beginning of the job?
- Will you provide training e.g. for an otherwise suitable candidate who was unfamiliar with your computer system or inexperienced in reading Latin?
- If your chosen candidate has little or no knowledge of church and religious archives, what arrangements can you make for him or her to acquire this?
- When writing job descriptions it is often useful to include a 'catch all' statement such as '...and other duties as appropriate' in case anything's been forgotten or something unexpected arises.

Work pattern

This can be full time (37 hours per week) or part time (x hours per week or x days per month). The salary can be stated pro rata in an advertisement for a part-time position. You should specify if the position includes evening or weekend work. While the majority of archive collections require on-going care and supervision, currently a significant minority of archival positions are on fixed-term contracts. Budgeting for a permanent addition to the staff is not an option for all organisations. A possible solution could be a fixed-term contract, often for one or two years, followed by a review or with the possibility of extension. Depending on location and remuneration, a fixed term post of six months or fewer might not attract a significant number of applications from qualified archivists and is probably too short for much to be achieved.

Job description and person specification

These documents will reflect the specific requirements of the job and may eventually form the basis of a contract. They should include all key details of the post and clearly state what will be expected of the

archivist. They will explain what skills, qualifications, experience and abilities you expect the successful candidate to possess in order for them to fill the position.

A person specification helps with shortlisting as the candidates can be measured against the requirements it sets out. It also helps the interviewer to give constructive advice if an unsuccessful candidate asks for feedback. It is essential to be clear about your own priorities. Points to consider are:

- Qualifications and work related experience
- Knowledge needed for the nature of the collections: e.g. specialist language or palaeography skills, (French, Medieval Latin etc.); specialist historical knowledge
- Experience of policy writing and knowledge of FOI (Freedom of Information) and DPA (Data Protection) Laws
- Skills and competencies: ability to plan and organise, meet targets, work to deadlines and work with others; enthusiasm, flexibility, attention to detail and self-motivation
- Written and verbal communication and presentation skills
- ICT (Information Computer Technology) skills: experience of MS Office and archival description software (CALM and Adlib are the most widely used packages); an interest in new technology in archival practice

Other requirements

You may also wish to request that the archivist is:

- Physically active and able to move and lift collections
- Willing to handle documents in a poor state of preservation with mould and water damage, with appropriate protective equipment
- Willing to work alone if required
- Aware of the issues and sensitivities of the types of records held
- Willing to work within Christian/Roman Catholic ethos of the organization

Advertising the vacancy

A job advertisement could include the following information:

- Name of organisation advertising the post
- Job title
- Grade/level
- Your reference (to be quoted in communication)
- Pay scale
- Contact details so interested parties can gain further information and stating to whom applicants should apply
- Closing and interview dates
- Brief descriptions of the organisation and the archives
- Statement on the need for the appointee to be aware of/committed to the ethos of the organisation
- Statement on the equal opportunities or diversity policy of employer
- The opportunities and benefits offered by the position

Jobs for archivists are often advertised on the archivists' electronic mailing list, archives-nra. This is a discussion list for archival matters; it is free and anyone may join but you need to be a list member to send a message. A CAS member who is a list member can advertise a vacancy for you.

<https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A0=ARCHIVES-NRA>

The Archives and Records Association has a recruitment publication called ARC, which comes out approximately every two weeks. It includes contact details and costs for arranging an advertisement and indicates wording and salary. CAS can supply back issues.

<http://www.archives.org.uk/publications/arcthesocietysmonthlynewsletter/arcrecruitment.html>

The CAS does not have any way of advertising paid employment but has helped members advertise for an archivist. CAS Council members helped with the following advertisements, which appeared on archives-nra in 2010

Sisters of xx

The Sisters of xx, a Roman Catholic religious order require a part-time archivist with a postgraduate qualification in archival studies, to install and manage archives covering their history in England and Ireland since 1880. The work involved will include organising the lay-out of the archive rooms, listing the material and creating finding aids for future access.

Appointment: initially for one year part-time, hours negotiable, with a review after six months

Salary from £22,000 pro rata, based on qualifications and experience

Position based at xx

Starting date: xx

For further information and an application form, write to:

For an informal discussion please telephone:

Closing date for applications:

Sisters of xx

The Sisters of xx are seeking to appoint an archivist to manage their archives.

This position is based at xx

Salary from £22,000 based on qualifications and experience.

Initial contract: two years

You will have an appropriate degree and postgraduate qualification and good communication skills and the ability to work within a team.

As archivist, you will be expected to uphold the values and spirit of the Sisters of xx and to co-ordinate the archival material and the living story of our convents in England, Scotland and Wales. To accomplish this, flexible working hours and readiness to travel will be required.

Professional development will be encouraged

A full information pack and application form is available from:

Diocese of xx

Administrative Archivist (one year fixed term post, to be reviewed after a year)

The Catholic Diocese of xx is seeking an Administrative Archivist with an appropriate qualification in Archives and Records Management. The post-holder will assist with the planning, organization, continuing upkeep, management and safekeeping of records.

The successful candidate will be an enthusiastic, flexible and self-motivated archivist and records manager. He or she should have the ability to evaluate, catalogue, conserve and store archival materials and to develop and implement policy and procedures for the cataloguing, storage, preservation and disposal of materials. Good IT skills and knowledge of data protection legislation are essential. This post is suitable for a recently qualified archivist with an interest in ecclesiastical archives.

The post will commence in:

Hours of work: 35 hours per week (9am to 5pm Monday to Friday)

Salary: £25,500 – 27,000 per annum (negotiable)

Closing date:

Interview date:

For a job description and application form, please go to the job section of our website or apply to:

For an informal discussion about the post please contact:

Preparing an application form

For most organisations, this will be the responsibility of a Secretariat or Human Resources department, with a standard form adapted to the needs of the archives post.

Shortlisting

It is advisable to word an advertisement widely in order to attract as many candidates as possible and to be more specific while short listing and interviewing.

The short listing panel could include whoever has current responsibility for the archives, the person to whom the new archivist will be responsible, a professional archivist and someone with experience of Catholic archives (the last two could be the same person).

One method for shortlisting is to score each candidate against the requirements you asked for in the person specification. This document will provide you with a list of those qualities and abilities you would like your successful candidate to possess, which can be split into two categories, essential and desirable, if appropriate. It is important to consider how you will assess whether your requirements have been fulfilled. Make a note of ideas regarding your ideal and then score to what extent each candidate meets this ideal. This method will help to give constructive advice if someone asks for feedback regarding areas where they didn't match the person specification or provided insufficient evidence that they did.

Interviewing

The interviewing panel could include whoever is responsible for appointments or human resources in the organisation, plus the person to whom the archivist will be responsible, one person with experience of Catholic archives and one professionally qualified archivist. Archivists from local public archives are often willing to help and may be able to advise on questions to ask.

Candidates invited for interview should be sent details of the organisation and of the archives, e.g. a copy of a relevant article from *Catholic Archives* if there is one, and given the opportunity to visit the organisation if they ask to do so. Alternatively, a tour of the archives could be part of the interview process.

Sample interview questions

- Initially, this contract is for one year. What would you hope to achieve within that length of time?
- Our accommodation is not ideal and you will be required to work with limited space and facilities. What realistic changes could you introduce?
- We would like to know what is in our archives. What cataloguing, including IT, skills do you have to enable you to produce the best possible lists for our needs?
- What knowledge do you have of the history of the Catholic Church in Britain to help you catalogue the collections effectively?
- Some of the material housed in the archive is of a personal nature and would cause great distress to living individuals if released. How would you manage this sensitive material?
- What, if any, experience do you have with enquiries from the media? At times, the media has very negative preconceptions about the Catholic Church. While we would not wish to exclude researchers, we would want to know that they would conduct their research fairly and accurately and present their finding within the appropriate context. How will you ensure that this happens?
- You may be able to have work experience students and volunteers to help you. What experience do you have of dealing with voluntary staff and of managing other people?
- A lot of the time, you will be working alone. Tell us about your previous experience of lone working; how did you manage to remain motivated?
- What, if any, experience do you have of applying for grants and external funding? What do you think are the key aspects of a successful project of this nature?

- How will you deal with senior colleagues who do not necessarily appreciate the value of archives? How will you persuade them to allocate more resources, staff and money to the archives?
- What attracted you to this job? What could you bring to it and what do you hope for from it?
- What did you do to prepare for this job application and interview?

Appointing your chosen candidate

After discussion, the preferred candidate should be offered the post and appropriate starting arrangements made. This also will probably be the responsibility of a secretariat or human resources department but the person who will be responsible for the archivist should also be involved.

How CAS can help

- Meeting members who are considering appointing an archival professional
- Visiting their archives and commenting on the work involved
- Helping to draw up advertisements/commenting on draft advertisements
- Placing advertisements on archives-nra
- Supplying copies of advertisements from ARC
- Sitting on short listing and interviewing panels
- Answering post-employment queries

The CAS charges expenses but there is no other charge.

There is an annual conference where members can discuss their archive needs with others in similar positions. The CAS strongly recommends that owners of archives maintain contact with the Society once they have appointed an archivist.

Other sources of advice

- The National Archives (TNA) have an advisory service for owners of private archives, i.e. archives not created by national or local government or receiving public funding, www.nationalarchives.gov.uk
- Local archive repositories e.g. local authorities and universities can be useful contacts and may know someone who is job hunting.
- The Archives and Records Association (ARA) is the professional body for archivists, www.archives.org.uk

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www.catholicarchivesociety.org