

Gaining knowledge and expanding the skill base : the professional development of New Zealand's records managers

Amanda Cossham
Lecturer, Information and Library Studies
School of Information Science and Humanities
The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand

Gillian Oliver
Head, Information and Library Studies
School of Information Science and Humanities
The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand

Introduction

Professional development opportunities for records managers in New Zealand have been patchy to say the least. Research undertaken last year found a substantial number of practising records managers have not studied at tertiary level at all. The introduction of a new undergraduate programme in records management has highlighted issues and challenges to be faced in the provision of education for this previously overlooked occupational group. This paper is structured as follows: the first part presents a brief overview of the provision of records management education in New Zealand, and this is followed by summary findings from the research into education, continuing education and training requirements. The second part of the paper considers issues relating to the new diploma. A brief conclusion includes recommendations for the role of professional associations in fostering professional development generally.

Overview of RM Education Provision

In the early '90s The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand considered a proposal to offer a single records management course¹ in conjunction with another provider. Market research concluded there would be little interest in such a course, so the idea was abandoned. At around this time the Auckland Institute of Technology launched a Certificate in Records Management. This was a single course of study based around a short series of contact classes with a large assessment component. The scope of the certificate was broad in the context of paper records, but the limitations imposed by the shape of the programme (delivery mode, level and length) restricted the depth to which topics could be explored.

Up until 2000, this Certificate was the only undergraduate education for records management provided by an academic institution in New Zealand. Participation was

¹ 'Course' is equivalent to 'subject' or 'paper'. Multiple courses are combined to make up a programme.

largely restricted to students resident in Auckland, although the certificate was on occasion offered in Wellington and Christchurch.

In the mid '90s The Open Polytechnic took over responsibility for New Zealand's only undergraduate library studies qualification, at that time a Certificate in Library Studies. (NZCLS) The Open Polytechnic is an undergraduate degree distance education provider and operates at the national, rather than regional, level. The NZCLS was then developed into a bachelor's degree qualification, thus providing scope for elective study in related areas.

It was in this context that the first records management course was developed, a 200 hours, 20 credit course at 1st year undergraduate level. This opened for enrolments in 2000. Two years later, the Diploma in Records and Information Management (Dip RIM) was launched, consisting of six courses and equivalent to one-third of an undergraduate degree.

Profile of Records Managers in New Zealand

Research was conducted in 2002 into the professional development needs of New Zealand's records managers.² "Professional development" was defined to include both qualifications and continuing education. This was intended to be an overview of

- What qualifications records managers had
- What continuing education/training they had participated in
- What their needs were for the future - from a subject perspective.

The research involved both a series of interviews and a questionnaire. The interviews were with 13 individuals: representatives of the two organisations offering tertiary records management qualifications and education (Victoria University of Wellington and The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand); representatives of the professional associations; private providers of continuing education; public providers of continuing education; and senior members of the profession who had knowledge or involvement in this area. It also surveyed records managers by means of a questionnaire. There were 89 responses to this, out of an estimated 200-300 records managers³, which provided a relevant sample of the population. The questions were designed to enable a comparison over time with results from earlier surveys of the profession.

The inclusion of continuing education or training was considered important, as it was only the first year of the new DipRIM (which no-one then held) and there had been little else offered in the way of qualifications in recent years. It enabled the researcher to see what options or alternatives records managers had considered in order to develop their professional knowledge and skill base. The interviews enabled the researcher to evaluate what senior members of the profession considered to be important in this respect.

² Cossham, *The professional development needs of New Zealand's records managers*

³ Gillian Oliver, records manager and lecturer, conversation with author, July 2001.

The results were interesting.

Qualifications

Respondents to the questionnaire were asked to indicate their highest qualification. 62% had some kind of tertiary qualification or had undertaken study at tertiary level. These ranged from undergraduate diplomas and degrees to masters and doctorate, and include some single course programmes.

However, only 38% had what they considered to be a "records management or related" qualification. "Related" was deliberately not specified, as it was hoped to get some idea of what respondents considered was related. Some respondents listed library qualifications here, others did not. There was one Diploma of Museum Studies, but that was not considered related either, by its holder. Others listed stand-alone single courses (as opposed to qualifications) such as those available through Victoria University of Wellington and The Open Polytechnic. These records management or related qualifications likewise covered a wide range of levels and included five identifiably Australian qualifications at post-graduate level.

However, inclusion of all library, archives, records and museum qualifications, and removal of such things as "National Archives Open Day" and Diploma of Business (listed as "related"), showed that there were actually 44.5% (40 respondents) who had some relevant information qualification or course at a tertiary level.

Respondents were then asked whether they were studying towards a qualification. There were positive responses from 24.5% - and of these, 10% (9 individuals) were studying towards a records management qualification.

5StudyRM	Total
Unspecified	1
DipRIM (Open Polytechnic)	6
CoP in LIBR535 Intro to RM (VUW)	1
MIM (VUW)	1
Grand Total	9

Fig. 1 Records Management qualifications towards which questionnaire respondents were studying⁴

A further 4.5% (4 individuals) were studying towards a "related" qualification.

5StudyOther	Total
Dip Info Science (Massey)	1
DipILS (L5) (Open Polytechnic)	1

⁴ CoP stands for Certificate in Proficiency and is awarded to those completing single courses at masters level available as part of the Master of Library and Information Studies programme at Victoria University of Wellington. MIM stands for Master of Information Management.

DipILS cross crediting to DipRIM (Open Polytechnic)	1
MIM (VUW)	1

Fig. 2 Related qualifications towards which questionnaire respondents were studying.

Overall, this gives six individuals were enrolled in the DipRIM, with a further one transferring into it, while two were enrolled in the MIM., and two in the DipILS (Level 5). There were at the time 20 students enrolled in the DipRIM; currently there are 39.

Continuing education

Questionnaire respondents were also asked about the continuing education in which they had participated. The range was wide, and included both profession-specific events (such as conferences, seminars and privately-provided continuing education) and general business skills (such as database management, personnel management, and specific software packages). It also included a range of events in related professions, such as knowledge management and librarianship. Such events were attended by 46% (41 respondents) at least twice a year, and 72% (64 respondents) said that their employer actively encouraged them to participate in continuing education.

The events organised by the professional associations (then ARANZ, NZSA⁵ and ARMA) were the most popular continuing education, along with the Archives New Zealand seminars on local government archives and privately-provided short courses by SWIM Ltd. Membership of professional associations was claimed by 68% of respondents (61 respondents) and half of those belonged to more than one association.

Two thirds of respondents had access to inhouse training, notably in business skills and with training in specific software packages featuring prominently.

Although there was comment about the lack of suitable courses at suitable times and within budgets, there was a wide range of courses available - especially in the business skills areas and the related professions. Some use was being made of continuing education courses offered by Victoria University of Wellington, by the Employers' and Manufacturers' Association and the New Zealand Institute of Management courses. Records managers were clearly making the effort to obtain some kind of training in the absence of qualifications offered by tertiary education providers.

Looking at future needs

Respondents were asked to indicate their perceived needs over the next five years relating to qualifications or continuing education - or just information generally. This was from an individual perspective, not a profession-wide one, and responses varied depending on existing qualifications, sector (public or private), size of organisation and responsibilities.

⁵ Archives and Records Association of New Zealand, New Zealand Society of Archivists

A wide range of knowledge and skill areas was offered and a high degree of consistency was demonstrated in the responses.

Electronic records was considered the most important area, with 74% listing this as either "most important" or "very important". Some way behind was document management, with knowledge management, information technology and systems, Management of Multimedia tools and technologies, and, Retention and disposal scheduling closely following (see Appendix).

This provides a useful guide to what individuals think they need. One needs to be cautious about determining profession-wide needs based on personal responses, but generally there seems to be consistency between these needs and the wider profession needs reflected in published literature and highlighted by those interviewed as part of the research. It is also worth remembering that there are a number of different ways of satisfying these needs - qualifications and continuing education in its widest definition both have a place.

The Diploma

The Dip RIM consists of a compulsory core that covers the theoretical basis of records management, and an advanced course addressing electronic documents and records. Students can then choose elective pathways to pursue – there are three categories of these: information and knowledge management specialities (including an introductory archives course), information systems, and business practice (law, communication and management). Project management and the opportunity to prepare a research proposal or undertake a special project in the workplace are also options as final courses in the Diploma.

The choice and combination of the elective pathways was made after extensive consultation with industry groups.

Experience so far

The success of, and interest in, the initial records management course surprised everybody. The healthy enrolment figures and student demand for a qualification eased the passage of the Diploma. The student profile at The Open Polytechnic is very much the mature student, already employed, seeking to either upgrade or gain a new qualification so most students study on a part-time basis.

This means that the earliest we can expect to see the first graduates from the diploma is probably the end of 2004. Already however we have been approached by a major government department and a large IT consulting company, asking how they can access Dip RIM graduates – evidence of the acute need in New Zealand for records managers with a solid and relevant educational background.

Demand for further development of this qualification has emerged from students and from industry. The structure of existing degrees offered by The Open Polytechnic does not allow a coherent pathway from the Diploma into a degree. A proposal for a new degree which would have sufficient flexibility to build a major in information management has been prepared and is currently pending approval.

Problems and Issues

A sizeable number of students have been working as records managers for lengthy periods of time. A good proportion of these are daunted by the type, level and complexity of study required. Having expected to breeze through the work with ease they have found themselves in quite the opposite position, and this can be of course a real blow to confidence and self-esteem. Consequently great care is taken to provide helpful and constructive feedback and ongoing individual student support is key. It has been remarkable to observe how determined and adaptable these students can be and in the majority of cases a successful outcome is achieved.

A deliberate policy *not* to allow recognition of prior learning (RPL) for the introductory records course has been followed. RPL will normally take into account workplace experience, and certainly in the New Zealand context it would be extremely doubtful that the experience would void the necessity for study of the theoretical underpinnings of records management. We also do not allow any cross-credit from the former Certificate of Records Management for similar reasons. Managing records in an electronic environment means that a solid theoretical foundation is essential to attempt to address challenges in this area. If studying the Diploma is to raise the level of records management practised in New Zealand, then it is essential that its integrity is not compromised.

Adequate teaching resources has been a major issue, and up until comparatively recently the Diploma was extremely vulnerable because so little expertise was available. Besides resulting in unrealistic workloads this situation also had the potential to undermine the credibility of the programme, as very little research to support it could be undertaken. However, there are now 2.6 FTE academic staff members teaching the records specific components of the programme and three adjunct faculty members, and this provides a solid resource base.

Conclusions

There is evidence of demand for professional education and training opportunities for records management from both within this occupational group and from industry. In New Zealand the undergraduate Dip RIM, postgraduate courses and continuing education or training offered by private providers and professional associations now provides a much greater range of opportunities than was previously available. A key role for professional associations is to inform their members of where such continuing education can be found, and promote its benefits, as well as the more obvious task of providing such continuing education. Ongoing research, and continuing dialogue with key stakeholders will ensure that continuing education and training programmes remain relevant. It seems that professional development is not something which applies only to

individual records managers, it can be said to apply to the development of the profession itself.

Bibliography

Cossham, Amanda F. *The professional development needs of New Zealand's records managers: submitted to the School of Information Management, Victoria University of Wellington in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Library and Information Studies*. Unpublished, 2002.

Appendix

In the original questionnaire areas were sorted into "core", "related", and "business/personal". These distinctions have been omitted here. Of the top 10, only Knowledge management and Information technology and systems were not originally classed as "core" areas.

Sorted by column 1 - most important

	1 most im- portant	2 very im- portant	3 Import- ant	4 less im- portant	5 Least im- portant	N/a	No answer
Electronic records	45	21	7	3	2	2	9
Document management	22	26	18	5	2	2	14
Knowledge management	21	19	22	3	4	3	17
Information technology and systems	21	16	27	7	1	2	15
Management of multimedia tools and technologies	20	15	24	10	5	2	13
Retention and disposal scheduling	19	23	20	3	6	3	15
Active/current records management methods	19	14	26	7	3	3	17
Vital records and disaster planning	18	25	20	8	1	2	15
Metadata	18	14	21	8	3	4	21
Recordkeeping standards eg AS4390 DIRKS	17	16	21	9	1	5	20
Role of records management in organizations	16	13	14	15	9	4	18
Information storage and retrieval	15	17	27	8	4	2	16
Archives management	15	12	26	7	6	4	19

	1 most im- portant	2 very im- portant	3 Import- ant	4 less im- portant	5 Least im- portant	N/a	No answer
User education and training	14	19	28	7	2	2	17
Strategic planning	13	18	17	10	3	6	22
Legal and ethical issues	12	21	28	6	4	4	14
Staff management/supervision	12	15	17	14	3	11	17
Change management	12	11	22	12	7	5	20
Communication skills	11	20	26	8	3	4	17
Web and intranet content management	10	23	22	15	3	2	14
Project management	9	23	24	8	2	4	19
Classification and indexing systems	9	18	25	11	5	3	18
Customer service	9	16	19	11	6	5	23
Non-current records management	8	10	24	18	5	4	20
Time management	6	12	20	14	9	6	22
Records storage methods and systems	6	9	24	21	7	4	18
Report writing	5	17	26	13	3	4	21
Preservation	5	10	34	13	5	3	19
Budgeting/Financial management	5	10	27	12	10	6	19
Continuum/lifecycle models	5	9	17	25	7	4	22
Office design and layout	4	2	19	20	13	7	24
Research methods	3	14	24	14	6	6	22
Bicultural awareness	3	5	22	22	10	5	22
Mail management	2	11	18	20	10	8	20
Forms, reports and directives management	1	8	15	25	10	7	23
Filing and storage equipment and supplies	1	5	11	25	20	5	22
Records management history	1	4	13	23	22	4	22
Library management	0	9	16	18	13	12	21

Based on F. Gerald Ham, *Towards Career Professionalisation: An Education Programme for New Zealand Archivists and Records Managers*.(Wellington: ARANZ, 1994), Gillian Oliver, Salary Survey Results [cited 2 May 2002]. Available from

<http://tane/knowledge-basket.co.nz/listserv/welcome.htm>, and Catherine Hare, Julie McLeod, and Lesley A. King. "Continuing Professional Development for the Information Discipline of Records Management. Part 1: Context and Initial Indications of Current Activities." *Librarian Career Development* 4, no. 2 (1996): 22-27 and Lesley A King, Catherine E. Hare, and Julie McLeod. "Continuing Professional Development for the Information Discipline of Records Management. Part 2: Report of a Research Project." *Librarian Career Development* 4, no. 3 (1996): 4-14.