

## **Connections & Conversations**

### **Australian Society of Archivists Conference 2006**

#### **Directions in Archival Education**

#### ***Designing a continuing professional development program for the ASA***

#### **Sigrid McCausland**

Dr Sigrid McCausland is Education Officer for the Australian Society of Archivists. She has been University Archivist at both The Australian National University in Canberra and the University of Technology, Sydney and has broad experience as an archivist in the public sector in Australia. She contributed to the first two editions of Keeping Archives and has published articles in Australian and international journals.

*Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is one of the key services a professional association is expected to provide for its members. It is also the broadest and most complex area of the responsibilities of the ASA's recently-appointed Education Officer.*

*There are many challenges facing a relatively small organisation with a diverse and dispersed membership in meeting its members' CPD needs in times of rapid workplace change and uncertainty about the future of the profession. However, there are also opportunities to develop flexible solutions that can be implemented to support members at different career stages working in a range of archival settings.*

*This paper will report on progress towards a CPD program, including information I have gathered from ASA members about their CPD needs and my research into CPD programs implemented by other professional associations. It will also include a review of the ASA's initiatives in this area in the past few years.*

*The paper will be followed by a general discussion on issues in archival education in Australia today.*

## **Introduction**

The position of Education Officer is a new one in 2006. One reason for appointing an Education Officer was to advance the ASA's objectives concerning offering Continuing Professional Development (CPD) to its members.

CPD is one of the four priorities in the Education Strategic Plan 2005-2008 (ESP). The ESP is the culmination of policy development in education over the past few years and is now accessible from the ASA home page – see <http://www.archivists.org.au/education/education.html>. At this stage, the page provides link to current policies and it will be enhanced as relevant documents are produced. The role of the ASA in providing CPD is a reminder that education is a service to members as one of the ASA's objectives.

This paper describes progress to date in 2006 towards a CPD scheme for the ASA. It has been offered as a progress report and an opportunity for members to provide further input. There is much more to be done towards realising the ASA's ambitions in this area. The new Education & Professional Development Committee has only just been established and its members will have a role in furthering the ASA's CPD agenda.

## **The survey**

One of the most important tasks awaiting the new Education Officer was to identify members' needs. The process started with looking at the discussions of and proposals considered by the previous Education Committee and Council. The emphasis in these discussions had been on what and how to deliver CPD opportunities. The ESP provides a comprehensive structure for planning, but determining members' needs is something that had not been attempted recently.

A survey was sent to all members with the April 2006 *Bulletin* (see Appendix 1 for the text of the survey). The focus of the survey was on discovering what types of offerings ASA members wanted, together with their favoured topics and preferred modes of delivery. As CPD encompasses more than simply receiving information at seminars and workshops, members' views on how they could contribute to an ASA CPD program were

also sought. The response rate was very low, but the responses received were quite well distributed by location, employment type and length of membership. The survey was directed at personal rather than institutional members, although the latter are also stakeholders. Institutional members will be consulted later in the process.

The survey used the same identifying questions about where members live, work and how long have they have been a member as the most recent (2003) ASA membership survey, published in *Archives and Manuscripts* in November 2004. A preliminary report on the survey's findings was published in the August 2006 *Bulletin*. A supplementary survey was undertaken of Victorian school archivists in September. This survey showed that school archivists had many of the same preferences in terms of delivery and types of CPD, as well as feeling that CPD was important for building knowledge, skills and networks.

### **CPD content**

Members were asked about topics they would like to learn more about. The list of topics was based on the list used in the 2003 membership survey, with a couple of minor changes. The five most popular topics were: digitisation; preserving electronic records; electronic document and records management systems; appraisal and disposal and managing audiovisual archives. In the survey of Victorian school archivists, the votes went to preserving electronic archives; access and reference; electronic document and records management systems; appraisal and disposal; digitisation and establishing archives programs. These results show a reasonable degree of overlap between the general membership and the schools sub-group, with a cluster of interest in electronic document and records management systems, preserving electronic records and digitisation.

(The discussion that followed this presentation elicited further suggestions on topics for CPD, as did the evaluations received from participants at the end of the conference. These will be considered in CPD planning for 2007-08).

## **CPD delivery issues**

The survey found that there was a strong preference for weekday events over weekends. A mix of types of events was preferred – seminars, workshops and conferences were the most favoured, with online learning, email discussion groups, reading courses and briefings also eliciting interest. Time and distance were identified as the most significant barriers to participation, with lack of employer support and cost not far behind. Some members said they would be willing to assist in organising or presenting CPD events.

## **Recognition of CPD**

One question in the survey asked how members thought CPD participation should be recognised. For example, should the ASA provide statements of attainment, or should it adopt a points scheme. For this part of the survey, I researched the CPD programs of other professional associations to get an idea of the possible alternatives.

In some professional societies or associations, members are required to demonstrate CPD participation to maintain their membership status, for example RMAA professional members with the status of member or fellow. Some associations measure maintenance of status by hours of attendance, for example, the Career Practitioners Association of New Zealand requires fifty hours of CPD per membership year to renew professional status. With organisations using points schemes, sometimes there is an annual cycle, sometimes a longer one (for example, the Australian Library and Information Association). The administrative load to maintain most schemes is considerable, starting with detailed policies and procedures and requiring both recording by the member (using a diary system or worksheets) and oversight by the professional body concerned.

Unsurprisingly, most survey respondents expressed a preference for statements over points schemes or formal certification. Under its present membership rules, the ASA only requires evidence of qualifications when someone seeks to join as a professional or to upgrade from associate to professional membership. So it would be somewhat difficult to introduce a compulsory scheme at this point. Perhaps an interim solution could be to include a question relating to CPD activity on the professional membership renewal form.

Even this could be rather confronting to some ASA members, such as those who do not embrace the concept of continuing professional learning, those for whom distance severely limits opportunities and those whose employers do not support or encourage CPD participation.

### **Common characteristics of CPD schemes**

What can we learn from other professional associations that can help the ASA institute a national CPD scheme? Good schemes offer support for members in their efforts to learn – to update, to refresh and to upgrade their skills. They also offer members a range of options, including conference attendance and seminar participation. Keeping voluntary, not mandatory, CPD diaries can be a good tool for individuals to record their goals and their progress. For ASA members who work in small archives or by themselves, this could provide a means of demonstrating professional engagement to current and potential future employers. Most professional associations utilise members' only pages on their websites to deliver CPD services. This is an important way of reinforcing the value of belonging to the association, as well as being a key source of information about CPD programs. The current project to review the ASA website will consider how best the ASA can start to support its members in this way. Finally, some associations offer their programs "in-house" or through partnerships with providers and many adopt a mix of different approaches.

### **What do we have now?**

The ASA has its structures and networks, the Branches and Special Interest Groups (SIGs) with good local and sector knowledge. We are fortunate to have dedicated members who already work hard at the Branch level to devise interesting and topical events to serve their membership and reach out to others. But we are also aware that there is demand from the membership for a national approach, hence the objective in the ESP of providing a program that can be delivered in different locations. We have very keen audiences, as the evaluations received from recent events (such as the "Appraisal: A broad perspective" seminars), together with anecdotal evidence over a longer period, demonstrate. The ASA also has an impressive number of its own experts across many areas of professional practice, willing to share their knowledge and

experience with members. However, at the same time, we need to be nurturing the next generation of speakers and organisers. Another factor in the ASA's favour is its experience in collaborating with sister organisations, major archival institutions and universities in planning, promoting and staging high quality events, including hosting visits by international scholars. Thus we have strong foundations for a well-targeted and expertly-delivered national program, supported by a strong commitment to CPD.

### **What else do we need?**

Further development and refinement of the content of CPD components is required in the near future and this may involve online surveys. We also need to take a flexible approach to meeting the diverse needs of the ASA membership. This means acknowledging that we have more than one “audience” to satisfy, so defining the scope of individual events will be an important aspect of designing a program that will appeal to as many members as possible. How and when the events are presented is another factor to consider. A mix of one-day seminars, one-two day modules and shorter workshops held in conjunction with the annual conference is a likely pattern at this stage.

The program will require adequate funding, which will have to come from the ASA budget and from registration fees. A nationally-coordinated, well-targeted and sustainable CPD program cannot be chiefly driven by cost factors. Travel costs for presenters will be a major expense here, but these will be included in all planning. The ASA aims to have a largely self-funding CPD program. The likelihood of receiving grant funds for such activities is generally low, but we will seek such funds wherever possible. Effective promotion strategies will also be required and we have the necessary communication tools to achieve excellent coverage of planned CPD activities through the ASA website, aus-archivists, the *Bulletin*, Branch newsletters, selected hard copy advertising and good networking among colleagues. A good CPD program will require consistency in marketing our own brand, having reliable registration processes and regular advertising; and in seeking and acting on feedback. As well, a successful program will need to provide and seek recognition. Here “recognition” has two meanings: firstly, an ASA statement/certificate of attendance for participants (with details of the name, title and date of the event etc), plus acknowledgment by employers that ASA CPD events represent important learning opportunities in which their staff should participate.

**Where to now?**

A report on progress towards a CPD program will be presented to the November meeting of ASA Council. The immediate goal is to start the program in 2007 on a modest scale, hopefully including an event at next year's conference. Members are invited to provide their suggestions on any aspect of CPD to the Education Officer.

**Further information:**

The ASA Education Strategic Plan and the ASA's education policies are available from <http://www.archivists.org.au/education/education.html>

Updates on the CPD program will appear in the *ASA Bulletin*.

The Education Officer can be contacted at [education@archivists.org.au](mailto:education@archivists.org.au)



Yes

No

If so, when and where

**9. Where do you work?**

Govt archival institution

Government agency or statutory authority

School, church or community archives

University

Collecting archives or manuscript library

Consultant/private sector (commercial)

Other (please specify)

**10. In which state or territory do you live?**

**11. Do you live outside a metropolitan area?**

Yes

No

**12. What type of membership do you hold?**

Professional  
Institutional (Category A)

Associate  
Institutional (Category B)

**13. How long have you been a member of the ASA?**

0-2 years

3-5 years

6-9 years

10-15 years

over 15 years

**14. Do you have any further comments?**

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

Please return your completed survey to CPD SURVEY, Australian Society of Archivists, PO Box 77 Dickson ACT 2602 by 31 May 2006.