Professional registration: mentor guide

ARA professional registration is available to everyone working or volunteering in archives, archive conservation and records management, regardless of academic qualification. It demonstrates to employers, clients, peers, other professions and the public that you have met the highest standards of knowledge and competence set by the ARA. Registration also shows commitment to maintaining that competence through continuing professional development and reflective practice. We offer three levels of professional registration; Foundation, Registered and Fellow.

This guidance is for new mentors and those experienced in mentoring candidates towards professional registration. It explains the application process and offers advice on how to best support your mentee, ensuring both you and your mentee begin a productive mentoring relationship. This guide should be read together with the professional registration programme guide.

1. Introduction

1.1 The application process
Candidates apply for professional registration by submitting an application for assessment. The application consists of either six or eight competency forms, depending on which of the three levels of registration they wish to apply for.

Each competency form should show how the candidates' professional activities demonstrate their chosen competency level, and evidence progression and learning and reflection. The application must also include a mentor reference and a copy of the candidate's CV.

Before starting their application candidates must enrol onto our online application and assessment platform, known as the professional registration programme. During the enrolment process, candidates provide their mentor's email address. This generates an automated email sent to the mentor inviting them to register with the programme website. The mentor will then be able to view their mentee's application and write their mentor reference.

1.2 The role of the mentor
Mentoring is a relationship in which a more experienced or more knowledgeable person helps guide the learning and development of a less experienced or less knowledgeable person. Your role as a mentor is to help guide your mentee as they develop their application for professional registration. Mentors offer an objective viewpoint, encourage reflection and offer critical feedback. Mentors keep their mentee motivated as they develop their application. Mentors may also undertake a variety of different roles. At times, you may be a coach, a sounding board, or a career counsellor, helping your mentee consider which competencies will best help them reach their career goals.

The level of support and guidance provided by mentors will vary according to each mentoring relationship. Although the needs of mentees may vary, they are responsible for the development and success of their application, and for acquiring any additional experience or knowledge needed.
Key support offered by mentors includes:

- Advice and constructive feedback on the outcomes of your mentee's self-assessment. This will help identify their strengths and weaknesses and decide which competencies they will demonstrate in their application;

- Discussion with your mentee on the work experiences they will use to demonstrate their chosen competency levels;

- Being a critical friend, offering constructive feedback to the mentee on the development of their competency forms and the overall application;

- Helping keep your mentee motivated, offering guidance and advice as required and encouraging them to reflect deeply on their experiences;

- Providing a reference to support your mentee's application.

1.3 Who can be a mentor?
There are no restrictions on who can become a mentor. You do not have to be member of ARA and you do no need to know the candidate. Often mentors are work colleagues, or someone known to the candidate personally or professionally. We encourage candidates to look beyond their own line manager if possible, as this will help maximise the support available to them and minimise potential conflicts of interest. Some candidates may be reluctant to give an honest account of some aspects of their career development or performance in front of their line manager. In some circumstances, a line manager can be too close to offer objectivity on a question or issue.

Candidates are encouraged to find their own mentor. Ultimately, it is a matter for candidates and their potential mentors to decide whether they are best suited to work together.

1.4 The benefits of mentoring
Mentoring provides excellent CPD opportunities by developing key interpersonal skills including motivation, coaching, advisory and, of course, mentoring skills. By supporting your mentee you gain insights into other professional approaches and situations. Employers also benefit from mentoring, as developing staff from junior employees to experienced professionals can help retain talent, promote loyalty, a culture of CPD and increase job satisfaction. It can also increase your own professional confidence and career satisfaction.

Many mentors value giving something back to the profession, helping guide and shape the professionals of the future. Mentors interested in gaining ARA professional registration may choose to use their mentoring experience in their application.

1.5 What makes a good mentor?
Successful mentoring relies on a positive two-way relationship between the mentor and mentee. We have found that there are certain skills and qualities in a mentor that help promote a successful partnership.

Positive interest. Whether you volunteer to mentor independently, or whether someone asks you to be their mentor, you need to have an interest in and commitment to professional development. A positive attitude and ability to act as a professional role model is also important. You must ensure you are familiar with the ARA's competency framework, professional registration programme and Code of Ethics.

Available time. Mentoring will require time and commitment, so it is important that you agree a timetable with your mentee. This will provide both structure and direction, helping your mentee stay on track and help you manage your commitment.

Enthusiasm for the profession, CPD and reflective practice. Good mentors show enthusiasm for their chosen career and for the importance of continuing professional development and reflective practice. Enthusiasm is infectious, and mentees want to feel that their job and career has meaning and potential.

> *"My mentoring experience has been beneficial to my professional development in a range of ways, including:*
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> *Reflective learning; supporting others to reflect on their learning encourages you to consider all your own work experiences, whether successful or not, as learning opportunities.*
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> *Problem-solving; exploring challenges with mentees sharpens your own problem-solving skills and improves your ability to analyse multiple options.*
>
> *Learning about new initiatives; it is a great opportunity to learn from your mentees; about work projects or roles that are outside your own direct experience or wider professional developments.*
>
> *Broadening perspectives; talking through mentees' experiences is a reminder of how varied our workplaces are and how each archive or records management service will have a distinct set of challenges and opportunities.*
>
> *Meeting new people; once the mentoring period is over, you might have found you have a new professional friend."*
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> Louise Ray RMARA

Willingness to share appropriate knowledge and skills. You do not need to be experienced in the same organisation or sector as your mentee. The experience of others is what makes mentoring so valuable to the less experienced. So be confident with your own level of knowledge and share that knowledge where appropriate.

Provide good guidance and constructive feedback. Good communication skills are required. Your guidance and feedback will help the mentee reflect on their experiences, and help them progress their application. In addition, the ARA provides a range of guidance and support for both mentors and mentees.

Listening. You need to listen to your mentee to understand their viewpoint. Try not to lead them with your own views or suggestions, instead ask probing questions to help draw out their ideas and learning experiences relevant to their chosen competency levels.

Patient and supportive. The relationship should be led by the mentee, and your support will be available as they develop their application at their own pace. All timetables require a degree of flexibility!

Discretion. It is important that your mentee feels able to discuss their development with you in confidence.

Motivation. It is important that you agree key milestones with your mentee, such as the completion of each competency form. These milestones will help keep them motivated and should be included in the agreed mentoring plan.

1.6 How to become a mentor

Candidates are encouraged to find their own mentors. You may be approached through your own network or place of work. Alternatively, you might decide to make your interest in mentoring known through your own professional networks.

If you are a Member of ARA then you are eligible to join our mentor list. We offer the list to new enrolments unable to find a mentor. It is a direct way for you to connect with potential mentees and offer them the benefit of your experience. Prior experience in mentoring is not required. You can mentor in person, by phone, via MS Teams, Skype or similar platforms. The ARA does not recommend formal agreements. It is for you and your mentee to decide what works best with your available time.

> *"Mentoring can definitely be a focus for your passion in the profession. I had experience of managing volunteers before I joined the ARA's mentor list, and so already knew that I had an interest in the career progression of others. As a mentor to two very different professionals, I have definitely found myself thinking outside the box more – looking at my role in a different way as I have listened to how my mentees have tackled challenges and been innovative in new and interesting ways. I feel my professional network and reputation has widened through mentoring. I love that I have learned about new things, such as the Clore Leadership Programme. The experience needs not be onerous at all. Remember that your role is to guide and support.*
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> Penny Hutchins RMARA

During the development of their application, candidates may also seek advice from colleagues at their place of work, or other professionals known to them. This may be of real benefit to the candidate, but the advice and guidance provided by their mentor should always take precedence.

2.   The mentoring process

2.1 Getting started & first meeting

Before enrolling onto the programme, candidates must self-assess their current level of work experience and competency using the ARA's competency framework. This will help them identify competencies that they have experience in and the level of professional registration they wish to apply for. Some candidates may decide which competencies to use before they meet their mentor. Others may prefer to self-assess after their first mentor meeting and then discuss options with you before deciding.

Both the mentee and mentor should agree the agenda for the first meeting. Mentees are expected to share a copy of their CV with you and the results of their initial self-assessment, if undertaken, before the meeting. At this stage, your role as mentor is to consider whether your mentee has been objective in their self-assessment. You might want to consider the following questions in preparation for the meeting:

- Have they taken time to reflect on their career experience and consider how it can be used in their application?
- Have they overlooked competencies where you think they have experience in?

- Have they overestimated/underestimated their level of experience? (note: candidates may use experience gained over a ten-year period to demonstrate how they meet their chosen competency levels).

We recommend that your mentee should have reflected on their self-assessment, and confirmed the level of registration they wish to apply for, by the end of the first meeting. In some cases, the candidate may also feel ready to confirm the competency levels they will demonstrate in their application. Candidates choosing competencies that require additional development should structure their learning and experience by creating a professional development plan (see link to blog article in Appendix). This will provide them with a structure to help achieve their learning objectives.

2.2 Agree a mentoring plan
We recommend that you agree with your mentee a plan that will map out the key stages they will need to complete as they develop their application. The following should guide the development of the plan:

Contact. Agree a communication plan to ensure you keep in regular contact. This is helpful in keeping your mentee motivated and focussed on their application. For example, you might agree with your mentee to briefly discuss progress at the end of each month, and arrange an online meeting once every two or three months. If your mentee does not make contact before the agreed meeting then you can email them a reminder, knowing that you are holding them to a plan that you both agreed to. You might also amend the plan to accommodate unexpected events, such as your or your mentee finding a new role or taking maternity/paternity leave. If this happens, then it is important to agree a date for the next contact, for example in 6–12months or longer, depending on the situation. Once the communication plan is in place, if at any time your mentee does not respond to your attempts to contact them, then you should contact the ARA for advice.

Key Stages. The drafting and completion of each competency form will be a key stage for candidates and should be included in the plan. There may be other factors unique to your mentee's personal and/or professional circumstances that should be included. These are matters for you to agree with your mentee.

2.3 Maintaining the relationship
The candidate is responsible for development of their application. As a mentor, you guide your mentee, offer ideas, advice and encourage reflection. Your mentee is free to follow or reject your contributions. If they reject your advice, try to understand their point of view and be sensitive to their concerns. Is there an alternative to your original suggestion that you can both agree on? Given that the mentee is responsible for their own progress, it is not in their interest to reject good advice. Whatever the reason for rejection, it is useful to engage in open discussion with your mentee if you feel the issue is significant to their progress. Be clear that you are willing to support them in finding an appropriate solution.

The ARA recognises that occasionally there will be a need to end the relationship. One party might relocate or there is a change in their professional/personal circumstances. In all cases, the outgoing mentor should provide a brief overview of the mentee's progress for the new mentor, so that they can continue from the point where the mentoring relationship ended. The mentor who is in place at the time the application is submitted for assessment is the mentor who should write the reference.

3. Mentor reference

Your candidate's application must contain your reference before it is submitted for assessment. References should be a maximum of 1000 words and **must** follow the structure below:

- A brief explanation of how the mentor and candidate know one another
- A brief commentary on the candidate's development journey
- An overview of the candidate's progress across the three competency areas
- 1000 word limit
- Include the following three statements:

  - I have read the ARA Code of Ethics and believe the candidate's professional conduct reflects the values of the ARA and the Code of Ethics;

  - I corroborate the candidate's work as described in their application;

  - I am prepared to answer any supplementary enquiries concerning this statement.

The appendix gives an example of a mentor reference.

4. Application submission and assessment process

Candidates must submit their applications for assessment via the programme website, following the assessment timetable below:

- Foundation applications must be submitted by the **31st January** and **31st July**
- Registered applications must be submitted by the last day of **31st March** and **30th September**
- Fellow applications must be submitted by the last day of **31st May** and **30th November**

Candidates must notify ARA six months in advance of the planned submission to ensure that sufficient assessors are available. Assessors are Registered or Fellow members of the ARA trained and experienced in the assessment of applications for professional registration. Each assessment round will take approximately three months to complete, but some rounds may take longer depending on the number of received applications.

4.1 Assessment process
Each application is allocated to two assessors who undertake their assessment independently online. If both assessors return the same assessment outcome then that is the recorded decision. If one assessor fails the application and the other passes it, then the application is assessed by a third assessor. The result of the third assessment will decide the overall outcome of the assessment. To pass the assessment process the application must;

- demonstrate how the candidate's professional activities meet their chosen competency levels;
- demonstrate professional development and reflective practice.

If your candidate is successful, and their application passes its assessment, then your candidate will be awarded the level of professional registration applied for. The names of successful candidates and their mentors are be published by the ARA. Successful candidates will receive a membership certificate

confirming their new status as a Foundation or Registered Member, or as a Fellow of the ARA. They will also receive summary feedback on their application.

If your candidate is unsuccessful, and their application does not pass its assessment, then they will receive summary feedback from the assessors giving reasons for failure. It is very important that the candidate and mentor carefully review and reflect on this feedback, and plan the next steps. There are no restrictions on how soon a candidate can reapply. Please note that the candidate must pay the assessment fee when re-submitting an application for assessment.

5. Further information and support

We offer a range of support for you and your mentee. This includes examples of competency forms from successful applications, a mentor guide, webinars and a Blog. You should read the full programme guide to familiarise yourself with the application process. This will help you prevent your mentee from making mistakes during the development of your application and increase the chances of a successful assessment. The programme guide and other guidance and support are available below:

- Professional Registration Programme https://archivesandrecords.smapply.io
- Programme guide https://archivesandrecords.smapply.io/res/p/programme-guidance/
- Examples of competency forms https://archivesandrecords.smapply.io/res/p/examples/
- Enrolment and assessment fees https://archivesandrecords.smapply.io/res/p/programme-guidance/
- The competency framework
- Professional registration Blog https://arapdp.blog/
- Link to professional development plans Blog article https://arapdp.blog/2019/03/04/planning-your-cpd/

We offer informal video calls with candidates and their mentors to answer questions and help clarify all aspects of the application and assessment process. The ARA is also happy to support employers by arranging workshops with staff to discuss all aspects of the professional registration programme. For more information, please contact chris.sheridan@archives.org.uk.

Please note that candidates and their mentors will receive occasional updates by email advising them of new guidance, reminders of submission dates, and other information relating to the professional registration programme. The ARA will use the email address provided during registration and enrolment.

All enquiries and feedback on the programme and programme guidance should be made to the chris.sheridan@archives.org.uk or 07377 940696.

Appendix A: Mentor reference example

I take great pleasure in providing David with a reference for his application to become a Foundation Member of the ARA.

I have known David for approximately 5 years. Throughout his time on the programme I was employed within the same organisation as the service manager. Although I did not directly supervise David, his team operated within my area of responsibility and I maintained operational oversight of his progress and development.

David is always enthusiastic, and keen to develop and improve. His decision to work towards Foundation Membership is a logical progression for him.

David has shown great commitment throughout the process. He has taken advantage of opportunities to reflect on his learning and experiences, and where to concentrate his learning in the future. We met three times during the development of his application, with numerous phone calls arranged in between. David was always well prepared, ensuring that he had completed the tasks he had set himself before each meeting.

I believe David's application demonstrates an excellent range of skills across the three competency areas, both in archive and records management roles:

Organisational: David is by nature a very organised, thorough and methodical worker, and his competencies in this area show these skills to their best potential. David was quick to identify more efficient processes for CARN and implemented some very simple and straightforward changes which we felt the benefit of very quickly. He continues to seek improvement, including changes to the accompanying spreadsheet and data weeding.

When working with people David displays the same organisation, thought and consideration. The volunteer indexing project explained in his application has been a great success. He was methodical in his approach, clear in his communications, and continues to monitor his progress diligently. However, the biggest learning for him was around the relationship and trust that he has built with the volunteers, and the importance of those 'softer' skills.

Process: David's experience in records management and archive work are evident in his chosen competencies. As a records assistant he learnt the processes and the tools used to undertake the role. As his knowledge increased, so did his ability to communicate information to customers and better facilitate access to the collections. The two cataloguing projects that David outlines in his competency forms demonstrate a greater depth of knowledge of cataloguing processes, the differences between the processes of two services and a progression in viewing archive collections – one as documents to be catalogued, and then a wider view as he considered outreach potential and a greater consideration of cross-referencing to make the customer journey easier.

Customer/Stakeholder: The report on the Finding Aids is another stand out project for David. As fresh eyes to the service, he was quickly able to identify and communicate ways in which the finding aids could be improved. The resulting report that he produced was very tactful and diplomatic, but full of great ideas on improvement. There were multiple learning points in this project, including using the preferred learning styles of customers and staff and also in more practical ways such as report writing

for the first time. David's exhibition was also a steep learning curve, having never put an exhibition together before.

Putting this application together has highlighted to David the progression of his learning over the past few years. He has consolidated skills that he already had, recognised his strengths in organising and monitoring and also developed new skills as a result of new projects. David's application demonstrates this journey, and I recommend that he be accepted as a Foundation Member of ARA.

I confirm the following:

- I have read the ARA Code of Ethics and believe the candidate's professional conduct reflects the values of the ARA and the Code of Ethics.

- That I corroborate the candidate's work as described in their application.

- I am prepared to answer any supplementary enquiries concerning this statement.