

Competency reference number and title	B5 – Providing intellectual and physical access to records
Level of attainment claimed	Level 2
Development period: Overall dates in which competency was developed for this assessment level	██████████

Context

Give a brief outline of the context in which you developed this competency. For example, your previous and current job roles or responsibilities

This competency was developed during my current role working as a Heritage Officer (Archives) for ██████████.

Activity

Give a brief description and examples from your professional activity and practice which demonstrate your competency at this level. Link this section to the competency definition in the Framework.

Working as part of a team responsible for making ██████████ collections accessible to the public, I respond to email, phone and postal enquiries and undertake searchroom duty, helping those who visit ██████████ reading Room to access the collections in person. I follow, and have contributed to ██████████ access guidelines relating to privacy, security and access to information legislation to ensure that those with permission to access ██████████ records can do so in a timely manner.

██████████ Reading Room opens every Tuesday-Thursday and two Saturdays a month, there is no appointment system for visits and material is retrieved and returned to storage areas during opening times. This benefits visitors as they can visit anytime during opening hours but equally it requires staff, including myself, to be flexible and work well as part of a team, as the amount of visitors, the nature of their enquiries and the number and type of retrievals, is not known in advance of any desk shift.

I support Reading Room users with their queries, helping them to use ██████████ finding aids to identify and order relevant library and archive material. I both explain and demonstrate how ██████████ on-line collections catalogue operates as this resource contains the bulk of relevant information about the catalogued collections. Additionally, I refer users to other relevant hard copy finding aids including subject guides, indexes, the borough 'master' map and related lists, to be used in conjunction with, or instead of, the catalogue.

I search the back-end of the catalogue to obtain location information for retrievals. Sometimes I'll also utilise other staff electronic finding aids to the collections, for instance, a former archives location guide and a temporary location guide for building control plans (which are in the process of being catalogued). When users ask for help in understanding the material they are consulting I assist them with interpreting the material as fully as possible by providing information about the content and the record's context and creation.

Progression & Learning

Give a brief summary of how your skills, knowledge and experience within this competency have developed or been maintained during this period. Include examples of the different skills, knowledge and experience developed and the types of learning undertaken such as formal training, study or research, work achievements, contributions to the profession etc.

My skills have improved with increased understanding of [REDACTED] collections and how best to use the available finding aids to locate material and support others to utilise these resources. With experience I now more readily understand the nature of an enquiry, irrespective of how it is expressed, and can efficiently determine what relevant collections are held at [REDACTED] and in other repositories. I have learnt about the nature and contents of local authority archives and how these relate to and overlap with the collections of other London archives e.g. London Metropolitan Archives). I have benefitted from attending internal and external training for instance, internal collections-related and Data Protection sessions and attending external talks, participating in walks, visits to local archives, and information sharing sessions. I used these acquired skills, knowledge and experience during [REDACTED] Explore Your Archive campaign for which I designed and delivered a number of introductory sessions.

These were aimed at demystifying Reading Room procedures, providing users with an overview of the different types of collections held at [REDACTED] and how to use the Reading Room's various finding aids and resources to access these, for an enjoyable and productive visit.

Reflection

Reflect on and evaluate what you have learned from the activities you have undertaken to develop or maintain this competency. For example, what went well/not so well? What would you do differently next time?

Working in the Reading Room I became acutely aware of the issues staff face when locating, retrieving, presenting and interpreting records and have used this experience to improve information specific to access and retrieval of records for the benefit of [REDACTED] staff and other users.

For instance, in 2011 I began a project to assess the contents of the Archive Strongroom. During this audit I labelled every shelf and drawer and added specific stack and shelf location details to the CALM catalogue to make it easier for staff to locate archive material. There were lots of positive outcomes of the project in terms of improved collections management, however, the work was labour intensive and extremely repetitive which aggravated an existing wrist condition of mine so I would strive to undertake future locations projects as part of a shared team activity, for instance, within the recently established twice yearly stocktakes.

My experiences of both planned and emergency closures to [REDACTED] Reading Room have been insightful, teaching me how best to deliver access to collections where physical access is restricted. It really highlighted to me what could be achieved in such challenging circumstances and the importance of managing expectations about remote access and being knowledgeable about alternative related archive collections and resources to refer users to.

With the introduction of [REDACTED] on-line catalogue in 2015 users experienced confusion concerning the hierarchical nature and different levels of information within archive records. The hard copy catalogues used prior to this were perhaps easier to navigate and showed levels of information more clearly. In 2016 I undertook a project to improve information on the CALM catalogue relating to locations and ordering material. For instance, by working with the supplier, Axiell, I helped integrate a new 'Request' field into every archive record which indicates whether an item is at a producible (orderable) level or at a descriptive level (e.g. fonds, series etc.) and for information/context only. This change has enabled ordering at the correct level and improved the process for the ordering, locating and retrieval of archival material.

Follow Up

How have you applied your skills, knowledge and experience within this competency since? What do you intend to do next to maintain or further develop this competency?

My work in this area is ongoing as I continue to provide intellectual and physical access to records at [REDACTED] and to support other staff and volunteers in this area, which has been particularly important in recent years with many staff changes on the team. I will continue to attend relevant training and build on my existing knowledge and skills in managing [REDACTED] collections and making these accessible.