Guidance for Mentors: Mentoring for the ARA professional development programme

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1. Introduction

The ARA’s professional development programme is a competency based process through which members can qualify as a Foundation, Registered or Fellow Member of the ARA.

Foundation (FMARA), Registered (RMARA) and Fellow (FARA) are professional levels of membership that offer designatory letters, known as professional qualifications, equal to those offered by many comparable professions. They provide a public and professional recognition of meeting nationally recognised standards of knowledge and competency set by the ARA. They also show a commitment to continuing professional development, ensuring skills and knowledge remain current.

This guidance is designed for new and existing mentors. It explains the professional development programme and competency framework, and builds on previous ARA mentor guidance and experience.

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. The role of the mentor is to be a critical friend, supporting the mentee as they develop their application. Mentors also help their candidates get the most out of their experiential learning by encouraging them to reflect on their work and progress.

The support and guidance provided by mentors will vary according to each mentoring relationship. Although the needs of mentees may vary, it is the mentee who is responsible for planning and managing their own professional development, and the development of their application. Your role as a mentor is not to tell your candidate what to do, but to guide, encourage reflection, share experience and offer critical feedback, keeping them motivated as they develop their application.

Key support offered by mentors includes:

- Initial advice and constructive feedback on the candidate’s self-assessment, helping the candidate identify strengths and weaknesses, and decide which competencies they will demonstrate in their application.

- Guidance on how the mentee should construct the content they will use to demonstrate how they meet the required levels of experience in their chosen competencies.

- Constructive feedback to the mentee on each completed competency form and the overall application.

Mentors must also provide a reference for inclusion with the mentee’s application before it can be submitted for assessment. An example is provided in this guidance note.
3. The benefits of mentoring

Benefits for the Mentor

- Mentoring helps raise your professional profile amongst your peers, increasing your own professional confidence and career satisfaction.
- Many mentors value the feeling of ‘giving something back’ to the profession, helping guide and shape the professionals of the future.
- Mentoring provides excellent CPD opportunities, and can develop key interpersonal skills including motivation, coaching and advisory skills.
- Employers benefit by demonstrating their investment in their people, developing staff from junior employees to experienced leaders and professionals. This promotes loyalty, and improves skills, job satisfaction and productivity.
- Mentoring experience can be used in applications to qualify as a Registered or Fellow member of the ARA.
- You and your mentee may maintain a professional connection after the mentoring period is over, expanding your reputation and professional connections.
- Becoming a mentor can also help improve your ability to develop and nurture your own staff, and gain insights into the new ideas and approaches that your mentee may be engaged in.

“**My mentoring experience has been beneficial**
to my professional development in a range of ways, including:

**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.

**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 find you have a new professional friend.”

Louise Ray RMARA

Benefits for the Mentee

- Mentees gain insights from an experienced professional, and as a result gain a deeper understanding of the profession.
- Mentors offer positive, critical feedback on their mentee’s application, helping ensure their evidence is clear and focused.
- They gain a better understanding of the profession’s culture, ethics and practices.
- Mentoring can increase the mentee’s self-confidence, encouraging them to reflect and discuss their own professional development with an experienced professional (the mentor).
- Mentees receive feedback on their professional development, especially in key areas such as communication, technical, written and interpersonal skills.
- The mentee has the opportunity to develop important networking contacts and opportunities.
- They benefit from being the focus of someone with greater knowledge and experience. The mentor may demonstrate a task, provide guidance in solving a problem, or critique the mentee’s work.
- As the mentee matures in their career, their mentor may remain a valued informal adviser.
4. What makes a good mentor?

A successful mentoring process relies on the 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 both interest and commitment in professional development. A positive attitude and ability to act as a professional role model is important. You must ensure you are familiar with the ARA’s [competency framework](https://www.archives.org.uk/competency-framework), [professional development programme](https://www.archives.org.uk/professional-development-programme) and [Code of Ethics](https://www.archives.org.uk/code-of-ethics). The ARA’s [programme manager](https://www.archives.org.uk/programme-manager) is happy to discuss any aspects of the programme with you.

**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 catching, and mentees want to feel that their job and career has meaning and potential.

**Willingness to share appropriate knowledge and skills.** You do not need to be experienced in the same sector as your mentee, nor do you need to be in paid employment; many of our mentors are consultants and several of the existing mentors are retired. It is the experience of others that 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, as this forms a key part of mentoring. Your guidance and feedback will help the mentee reflect on their experiences, and help them progress the development of their application. The ARA also disseminates good practice and annual feedback from assessors. You must ensure that you make contact with the ARA [programme manager](https://www.archives.org.uk/programme-manager) who will ensure you receive mentor related news and information.

**Listening.** You need to actively 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, learning experiences and competencies.

**Patient and supportive.** As the relationship is led by the mentee, you will support them towards the completion of their application at their own pace. All timetables require a degree of flexibility!

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

**Motivating.** It is important that you agree with your mentee key milestones for them, such as the completion of each competency form. These milestones will help keep them motivated and should be included in the agreed mentoring plan. Regular contact with your candidate, perhaps on a monthly basis, is an important motivator and should also be included in the mentoring plan. Should the mentee’s personal circumstances change (for example, a new job or maternity/paternity leave) then agree a new contact timetable to ensure that you keep in touch.
5. Who can be a mentor?

There are no restrictions on who can become a mentor, but a mentor is required, and the ARA recommends the following:

- Candidates on the Foundation programme should be mentored by a Foundation, Registered or Fellow Member of the ARA.
- Candidates on the Registered programme should be mentored by a Registered or Fellow Member of the ARA.
- The Fellow programme does not require a mentor, but candidates may choose to work with a colleague or a mentor in the development of their Fellow application.

Candidates are encouraged to find their own mentor who may be a workplace colleague or another professional known to them. Mentors do not need to be a member of the ARA.

Line managers should feel able to mentor a member of staff through the programme if asked, but candidates are encouraged to think beyond their line manager to maximise the support available to them, and to minimise possible conflicts of interest. 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.

Ultimately it is a matter for candidates and their potential mentors to decide whether they are able to work together.

6. How to become a mentor

Candidates are encouraged to find their own mentors, so you may be approached by a candidate or recommended by a colleague. You might also decide to make your interest in mentoring known through your own professional networks.

Mentoring can be provided in person, by email, telephone, Skype or similar platforms, so you do not necessarily have to accept an invitation from a candidate in your geographical area. It is for you to decide what works best with your available time.

Members interested in mentoring should consider joining the ARA’s mentor list. This is provided to new enrolments unable to find a mentor. This is the best way for you to connect with potential mentees and offer them the benefit of your experience. Prior experience is not required as the ARA will provide guidance and support.

“I had experience of managing volunteers before I got myself added to the Mentors 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, and I love that I have learned about new things, such as the Clore Leadership Programme. The experience needs not be onerous at all, just so long as you remember that your role is to guide and oversee and not to undertake the work yourself! Mentoring can definitely be a focus for your passion in the profession!”

Penny Hutchins RMARA
There is demand for mentors, so if you would like to join the ARA’s list of mentors please contact the programme manager.

7. The mentoring process

Step 1: Getting started & first meeting

Before enrolling onto the programme, candidates should self-assess their current level of experience and competency using the ARA’s competency framework documents. This will help them identify the competencies that they have experience in, and other competencies that they would like to develop. It will also help candidates decide whether they wish to qualify as a Foundation or Registered member, and understand the progress they need to make in order to meet the qualification criteria.

Some candidates may decide which competencies to use before they meet their mentor. Others may prefer to self-assess after their first mentor meeting with you, and then discuss options with you before deciding. Ultimately the agenda for the first meeting should be decided by both the candidate and mentor. Candidates are expected to share with you a copy of their CV and the results of their initial self-assessment, if undertaken, before the meeting.

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:

- How much experience does your mentee have?
- Have they taken time to reflect on this 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 their current level of experience?
- Candidates can use experience gained over a ten-year period to demonstrate how they meet the required competency levels.

We recommend that by the end of the first meeting your mentee should have reflected on their experience and confirmed the level of membership they wish to qualify for. In some cases, the candidate may feel ready to confirm the competencies they will use in their application. Others may need further consideration. Candidates choosing competencies that require development over a period of time should structure their learning by creating a professional development plan. This will provide them with clear learning objectives, helping them stay focussed. Further information is available from the ARA website.

“At the first meeting with a mentee I’ve found that it’s most important for you both to discuss your expectations of the relationship and how it might work. Usually the mentee is a relatively new entrant to the profession, and the mentor a bit longer in the tooth! It’s easy to forget how intimidating this can be.

“The main aim for me in this meeting is to establish a rapport and learn about each other. Archive and records jobs can be really diverse so understanding the job role of the mentee is key to being able to advise and support.”

“At this meeting you might also want to discuss the scheme itself, the role of mentoring, how often you want to meet, the best ways to communicate and levels of confidentiality. For example, I’m usually travelling, juggling work and family and timetabling meetings in advance is vital. I also find it useful to be very clear about your level of time commitment to the relationship from the start.”

Janice Tullock RMARA
Step 2: Confirm the 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. This should be agreed as soon as possible. The following should guide the formation of the plan:

Meetings
The mentee and mentor agree to make contact at least once every six months. Meetings (in person, by phone or online) should last for a maximum of two hours. The date and venue of the next meeting should be agreed as far in advance as possible, and consider any personal, professional and accessibility requirements.

Contact
Agree a communication plan to ensure you keep in regular contact. This is helpful in keeping your mentee focussed on their development. It also provides the opportunity for the mentee to share the inevitable work/life balance frustrations, and for the mentor to keep their mentee motivated. For example, you might agree to make contact on the last Friday of every month. If your mentee does not make contact then you can email them a reminder, and have the confidence of knowing that you are holding them to a plan that you both agreed to. If necessary the plan should be amended to accommodate unexpected events, such as your mentee finding a new role or taking maternity/paternity leave. In such circumstances 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 programme manager.

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. It is a matter for you and your mentee to agree.

Confidentiality
Are the contents of your meetings to be kept confidential? This is for you and your mentee to decide. Be clear at the outset what is to be kept off the record.

Step 3: The application

Once the candidate has decided which level of membership they wish to qualify in, they develop and submit an application that meets the criteria for Foundation, Registered or Fellow membership. The assessment criteria are explained in the professional development programme guidance note.

All candidates must enrol onto the programme website, hosted by Survey Monkey Apply¹ (SMAapply) and develop their application. Once your candidate has enrolled onto the programme, you will receive an invitation by email from SMAapply to register with the website. Once you have registered with the website you will have access to the contents of your mentee’s application. Please refer to the programme website user guide for further information.

Your candidate’s application includes either 6 or 8 competency forms, depending on the level of membership they wish to qualify in. The competency forms are the core part of the application, and

¹ We recommend Chrome or Firefox browsers when using the programme website.
provide the structure for candidates to demonstrate how their experience meets the required levels in their chosen competencies. The success of your candidate’s application is dependent on the strength of the evidence they present in each competency form. This evidence will be assessed by the ARA, so it is vital that candidates take care to ensure each form clearly demonstrates how they meet the required competency level. By registering with the programme website as a mentor you will have access to your candidate’s application. You will be able to view your competency forms online as they develop.

Some mentors may be willing to add comments into their mentee’s competency form to help strengthen the content, or give constructive criticism. Others mentors prefer to read through the final text before the application is submitted, and alert their mentee to any spelling or grammatical errors. Although the programme website facilitates the editing and adding of mentor comments, it is a matter for the mentor and mentee to agree whether this editing facility should be used.

There is no set time limit on how long a candidate should take to develop their application. The more competencies they need to develop, the longer the journey along the programme will be. Candidates will need to pay the annual enrolment fee for every year they wish to remain enrolled on the programme.

Some candidate might prefer to draft their competency form content offline, or by using the submission notes option within the online application. Please refer to the website user guidance for further detail.

8. Application submission and assessment

Candidates must submit their applications using the programme website, following the annual 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

The programme manager must be notified 6 months in advance of the planned application submission to ensure that resources are allocated. An assessment fee must be paid by the candidate to complete the submission process.

Applications will be assessed by two Registered or Fellow members of the ARA who are trained in the assessment of application. Each assessment round will take approximately three months to complete, but some rounds may take longer depending on the number of received applications. If your candidate is successful, and their application passes its assessment, then your candidate will be rewarded with the level of membership and professional qualification applied for. Candidates and their mentors will be notified via the programme website, and the names of successful candidates and their mentors will be published by the ARA. Successful candidates will also receive a membership certificate confirming their new status as a Foundation or Registered Member.

If your candidate is unsuccessful, and their application does not pass its assessment, then you will both 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.

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2 SMApply refer to mentors as collaborators

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There are no restrictions on how soon a candidate can reapply. Please note that the candidate must pay the assessment fee for each application.

9. Maintaining the relationship

The relationship between mentor and mentee must be based on mutual trust and respect: good rapport and understanding needs to exist.

When a candidate chooses to act against your advice

The development of the application is the responsibility of the candidate. As a mentor you guide your mentee, offer ideas, advice and encourage reflection. Your mentee is free to follow or reject your contribution. If this happens, 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.

Changing mentors

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 mentor should write a reference before the relationship ends which would include an explanation for the change in mentor. This can be included in the candidate’s application, and will also inform their new mentor. Alternatively, the original mentor may verbally brief the new mentor. In this circumstance the candidate does not need to provide two mentor references. One is sufficient.

Mentees may also enhance their support network by seeking 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.

Contact

If your candidate does not respond to your attempts to contact them, then please contact the programme manager for assistance.

10. Mentor reference

Your candidate’s application must contain your mentor reference before it can be 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
  - That I corroborate the candidate’s work as described in their application
  - I am prepared to answer any supplementary enquiries concerning this statement
11. Information and contact

The professional development programme website provides additional guidance and information, including the ARA competency framework documents and Professional Development Programme guidance. New guidance, updates and programme news will also be published on the programme website.

The programme manager also provides guidance to support candidates and mentors, as well as those interested to learn more of the programme and how it can help them progress in their career. The ARA is happy to support employers by arranging workshops with staff to discuss all aspects of the professional development programme.

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 development 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 programme manager 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.