



Glamorgan Archives: how National Occupational Standards can be used to enhance staff development

Background

Glamorgan Archives serves six local authorities in south-east Wales from a base in Cardiff. It is used by officials within the authorities as well as by academic researchers, the legal profession, schools, clubs and societies. Those accessing the records are sourcing information relating to Glamorgan and the surrounding area from the 1100s to the present date. The use can be for legal, evidential or educational information, or simply for pleasure. Each year, approximately, 5,000 people use the service on-site, with the same number accessing the material through email enquiries. Seventeen full-time equivalent staff are employed by the Service.

Improving services through NOS

Susan Edwards, Glamorgan Archivist, has budget responsibility, manages the staff and is responsible for National Occupational Standards (NOS). Until a few years ago, she says, there was no unified standard relating to training or recruitment:

“There wasn’t an accepted format and everyone would borrow everyone else’s job descriptions because the tasks were fairly similar. Archivists, in particular, are trained in a very small number of places and so the tasks are standard.”

She was particularly interested in NOS in relation to her work because the standards included behavioural objectives which set out, very succinctly, how staff were to put forward the skills and knowledge that they had acquired:

“It is one thing to know something but in our work, where dealing with the public is an integral part of the job, it is important to be able to benchmark how you want people to express the knowledge that they have in a way that makes it clear to the end user,” explains Susan.

➤ *“NOS can be particularly advantageous to staff in the archive sector who are not professionals. Individuals become records assistants with no recognised qualifications but they can’t move into a professional post – so, unfortunately, there is very little career progression for them.”* ➤



Getting started with NOS

The first step for Susan was to map the job descriptions which existed for archivists against NOS. These included some of the key roles of an archivist: processing, appraising, enabling access to accessions (documents in a recognisable format) and completing documentation for the collection. These tasks were subsequently applied to four separate NOS:

“These responsibilities,” says Susan, “are now very clearly laid out in four sections which staff can be referred to so that they can benchmark their performance against NOS. All the other roles within the job will be similarly mapped out using NOS as a reference point.”

Using NOS for staff reviews

Susan believes that NOS will make it easier for her to explain to her staff how they can develop their responsibilities and make improvements in various key areas within their existing job description:

“The adoption of NOS at this stage will be an asset when I do the twice-yearly developmental staff reviews because I want staff to be familiar with NOS and recognise what they are expected to do. NOS have also helped me set developmental objectives and review job descriptions.

“In my role, NOS are useful because I use them as a template which I can refer back to. It is not a straitjacket, however, because we can take from it what we need and use that as a guide. NOS are sufficiently flexible that we can work round aspects of them and that is very important to me as flexibility is one of our core standards, the others being innovation, accessibility, skill and inclusion.”

How NOS can improve the prospects of unqualified staff

When the Sector Skills Council reviewed training and the improvement of standards for records and library assistants, Susan saw that there were some areas where NOS were particularly relevant:

“NOS can be particularly advantageous to staff in the archive sector who are not professionals. Individuals become records assistants with no recognised qualifications but they can’t move into a professional post – so, unfortunately, there is very little career progression for them. Currently, their skills don’t necessarily translate into the library sector, whereas if we use NOS as a template and use them in relation to core skills, it might be possible to help staff progress through the sectors within the business, and have more of a career.”

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