

## Scottish Archival Education: the perspective of the Centre for Archive and Information Studies, Dundee

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Formal postgraduate archival education, based in Scotland, has been available since 2004. However, the current academic programmes in Dundee and Glasgow were preceded by much discussion on the form it might take and how it should best be provided. Throughout the previous two decades the subject was led largely by the Scottish Record Office (now National Records of Scotland). Senior staff debated how archivists based in Scotland, and unable to travel to study at existing academic programmes located during that period in London, Liverpool, Dublin, Aberystwyth and Bangor, might gain professional knowledge and expertise, and a formal academic qualification.

The discussions during the 1990s resulted in the development of the Scottish Archive Training School, a two-week training school led by the late Donald Galbraith, which introduced and taught subjects including Latin, Scottish palaeography, accounting records and basic arrangement and description. Up to that time, the Scottish Record Office had provided its own staff with legal training at the University of Edinburgh, in addition to the main archival skills mentioned above.<sup>1</sup> In the same period the Society of Archivists UK (now Archive & Records Association UK & Ireland (ARA)) established a Diploma in Archive Administration by distance learning, which required students to complete modules in a number of subjects and submit assignments to tutors, who were normally archival practitioners.

Both developments went some way to providing basic skills and knowledge to archivists but they were limited. The Scottish Archive Training School was hindered by the scale of the training possible as it was difficult in two weeks to do anything other than introduce the issues. The Diploma offered by the Society of Archivists was weakened by the lack of academic input and was discontinued in 2001. Both initiatives were skills-based and neither provided archivists with significant exposure to theories underpinning professional practice. They did nevertheless keep the subject of archival education open and current in Scotland.

Archival educational programmes are professionally accredited by ARA,

<sup>1</sup> I am very grateful to Mrs Marion Stewart, Dr Peter Anderson, Dr Frances Shaw and Donald Galbraith for this information, provided during many discussions on how archival education and training could be provided in Scotland.

assessed against criteria drawn up by the Forum for Archives and Records Management Education and Research for the UK and Ireland (FARMER) and approved by the Council of ARA. The criteria include detailed sets of aims and outcomes for both archive and/or records management programmes.<sup>2</sup> FARMER was established in 1999 ‘to provide a focus for the discipline of archives and records management in an educational context’.<sup>3</sup> Each programme therefore conforms to the criteria and provides broadly similar skills and knowledge to their students, though specialisms vary. Within a wider context, the International Council on Archives, Section on Archival Education (ICA/SAE), which draws a number of members from FARMER, provides similar peer support.<sup>4</sup>

Throughout 2002 and 2003 a Scottish-based collaboration between a number of Scottish universities was discussed, which would have offered a multisite postgraduate degree in Archives and Records Management.<sup>5</sup> Despite much support and goodwill, the discussions failed to produce a collaborative way forward and the idea was abandoned. The representatives from the University of Dundee felt strongly that a route into a career in archives and records management was needed in Scotland, and should be readily accessible to all, not only those who could travel to the Central Belt. To this end, the decision was made to develop a Masters degree in Archives and Records Management by Distance Learning. Support from the University in the form of a Strategic Initiative Grant was provided and the Centre for Archive and Information Studies (CAIS) was established within the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (now the School of Humanities), enrolling its first students in September 2004.<sup>6</sup>

A period of intense discussion and consultation preceded the initial developmental stages of the CAIS programmes and it was decided that a broad module-based degree structure with integral flexibility would be developed, conforming to the academic standards of the University. The initial degree developed was an MLitt in Archives and Records Management, which

<sup>2</sup> The Archive and Records Association, UK & Ireland, <http://www.archives.org.uk/careers/careers-in-archives.html> (accessed 21 May 2012). The document ‘Accreditation of Post-Graduate Qualifications Criteria’ is available on this page.

<sup>3</sup> Forum for Archives and Records Management Education and Research for the UK and Ireland (FARMER), <http://www.digicult.info/farmer/> (accessed 21 May 2012).

<sup>4</sup> International Council on Archives, Section on Archival Education, <http://ica-sae.org/> (accessed 21 May 2012).

<sup>5</sup> The encouragement and input of Dr David Ditchburn, Trinity College Dublin (formerly University of Aberdeen), Professor Allan McInnes, University of Strathclyde and Professor Chris Whatley, University of Dundee, during these early discussions is acknowledged.

<sup>6</sup> The Centre for Archive and Information Studies, <http://www.dundee.ac.uk/cais/>. I am pleased to acknowledge the enduring support and professional contribution of my CAIS colleagues, Caroline Brown, Alan Bell, Dr Craig Gauld and Angela Morton.

remains the most popular option. Module authors, all experts in their fields, were commissioned to provide academic and professional content, which was then assigned to the University. Many module authors become tutors and, following approval of the Dean, are appointed as Honorary Teaching Fellows of the University. As CAIS has developed, additional modules (worth 20 and 10 credits) and a 60-credit dissertation have been developed and reconfigured into a number of degree pathways: MLitt Archives and Records Management, MSc Records Management with Information Rights or Digital Preservation (with international pathways) and an MLitt in Family and Local History. Three Postgraduate Certificates in Digital Recordkeeping, Archival Studies and Records Management are also available and an undergraduate certificate in Archives and Records Management is presently under consideration.

All modules offered by CAIS are also available for single module study for continuing professional development, which broadens their relevance to all archivists and record managers. Two six-week non-accredited courses on 'Family and Local History: Beyond the Internet' have also been introduced, designed for the leisure market. All pathways are internationally focused and are not aimed solely at those working in Scotland or the UK. The University of Dundee does however offer dedicated Scottish subjects, including Scottish Palaeography and Scottish Local Government and Records, which are not available from any other institution.

Each degree pathway has specified core modules, which provide the theory, knowledge, skills and competencies required for professional practice. Optional modules make up the remaining credits, allowing students to tailor their degree to their particular speciality or interest. Student feedback suggests that the flexibility of the degree structure is a major factor in the rapid increase in student numbers since the establishment of the Centre eight years ago:

It has very good quality learning materials and very good remote support. The programme is flexible and you can spread the modules out to suit other commitments. I also chose Dundee for the good choice of optional modules.<sup>7</sup>

The CAIS curriculum is principally designed to provide students with integrated knowledge of the main theories and practice relating to Archives, Records Management and Digital Recordkeeping. The courses foster interdisciplinarity, incorporating themes and theories from other academic disciplines including history, public history, philosophy (particularly postmodern theory), strategic management, conservation and other information sciences. Students are actively encouraged to translate the theory they learn into practice in the workplace.

The CAIS programme aims to provide relevant professional education to both archivists and records managers and to promote the holistic nature of recordkeeping, as opposed to a perception of separate disciplines of archives

<sup>7</sup> Student Survey response.

and records management. It became apparent to CAIS staff that both professional groups approach this concept with broadly divergent points of view and, following discussion with tutors and other professionals, the structure of the professional degree pathways was amended to introduce the Theory and Context of Recordkeeping to all students as a common core element. Other core subjects vary according to each pathway and include Archive Services, Access and Preservation, Principles and Practice of Records Management, Management and Preservation of Digital Records and Electronic Records Management. Optional subjects include Scottish and English Palaeography and Diplomatic, Latin, Scottish Local Government and Records, Ethical Approaches to Recordkeeping, Strategic Management for Information Professionals, Understanding and Managing Rare Books, Heraldry, House History and Sound and Vision: Collecting, Preserving and Managing Film, Sound and Oral History.<sup>8</sup>

Having received provisional accreditation from ARA in 2006 for a period of three years, in March 2010 CAIS was awarded full professional accreditation for a period of five years. It also received professional accreditation in 2011 from the Records and Information Professionals, Australasia and was highly commended in 2007 by the Information and Records Management Society.

The student cohort is a diverse group which comprise practitioners, recent graduates and change-of-career mature students. All are required to be working or volunteering in an information environment, to enable them to relate theory to practice. Although the majority are UK students whose first language is English, a number are from EU countries and a growing cohort are international students from North America, the Caribbean, Africa, Australia, Iceland and Hong Kong. Students admitted to CAIS programmes normally have a first degree and many have higher degrees. If appropriate, a candidate may be admitted to the programme on the basis of the accreditation of prior learning or of prior experiential learning in accordance with University policy. Students pay for each module as they progress, thus making postgraduate study accessible to a wider range of individuals. They have up to five years to complete their degree, though the majority graduate within three years.

As expected from professional programmes, CAIS attracts students of working age seeking to enter the recordkeeping professions. Many students on the Records Management programme have had previous careers and roles, and have been asked to take on records management duties by their organisations. In general, younger students wishing to enter a career in recordkeeping apply for the Archives and Records Management options, due to the greater visibility of the archival profession. The exception to the pattern outlined above is the Post Graduate Certificate in Family and Local History. For this programme the majority of students are more mature, reflecting the fact that family and local history is often a hobby taken up in middle age or as a career-change option

<sup>8</sup> The Centre for Archive and Information Studies, [http://www.dundee.ac.uk/cais/programme\\_structure.htm](http://www.dundee.ac.uk/cais/programme_structure.htm) (accessed 15 May 2012).

for those persons wishing to become professional genealogists or local history researchers.

CAIS programmes are delivered via Blackboard, a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). Since its establishment in 2004, CAIS has developed a teaching model which in pedagogic terms has proved very successful. All modules use a similar template but the fact that they are written and taught by a range of tutors allows for a diversity of approach, while material within each module is presented in diverse ways to take account of varying learning styles.

Key to the teaching methodology of CAIS is an awareness of the particular needs of distance-learning students. Content is delivered in the style of a seminar or tutorial with students being encouraged to absorb and analyse information, think about its practical application, and extend their knowledge through their own research. Formative tasks are embedded within the module content as are links to key texts, appropriate websites or other resources such as audio-visual files. The learning experience is interactive, with students being given opportunities to engage with the materials they are studying. Students are encouraged to debate issues through the discussion forum which is used for informal as well as formal exchanges of views.

Student support is integral to teaching practice and tutors provide constructive feedback throughout the teaching period. They post regular announcements to the VLE, may contribute to the discussion boards, and are available for consultation via email or telephone. Many modules include real-time interaction by Skype or other messaging systems, which are also used by tutors to set up debates, examine particularly problematic topics or prepare for assessments. Some modules also include an optional study day in Dundee or elsewhere, which have proved particularly popular for Latin and Palaeography, although tutors are careful to ensure that students who cannot attend are not at a disadvantage. All Masters students have a mentor, someone working in the field, with whom they can discuss issues and the general learning experience.<sup>9</sup> CAIS also organises seminars and visits to archives and records management units which the students are invited to attend. Visits have been held in Scotland, England and Ireland, to encourage participation by as wide a range of students as possible.

An important part of the learning experience for Masters students is attendance at a study school at the start of the programme. Lasting five days and held in Dundee, this is a compulsory element for all except international students, who are nonetheless encouraged to attend. The study school provides an introduction to the range of topics that the students will deal with during their studies, an opportunity to become familiar with the VLE and a chance to meet tutors and other students. Interactive workshops and seminars encourage discussion of many of the issues in the core modules. Students undertaking the dissertation, the final stage of the degree, are provided with a dissertation tutor

<sup>9</sup> CAIS mentors provide invaluable support and are greatly appreciated by staff, tutors and students alike.

and structured guidance through the VLE. Dissertation subjects have included ‘The significance of disaster management toward ensuring the well-being of vital records and thus facilitating business continuity in Barbados’, ‘Record Keeping at the Akureyri Retirement Homes and the Akureyri Primary Health Care Centre’, ‘Records Managers’ attitudes towards Folksonomies as a search tool for records collections’, ‘Diverse Sorts of Hands. A palaeographic study of 19<sup>th</sup> century letters’, ‘Traditional Cultural Expression Records of the South Pacific: Sensitivities and Access in the Digital Age’ and ‘The television archive policy of the BBC during the late 1970’s: What were the catalysts for change?’.

CAIS maintains a website containing information on programme structures and indicative module content both as a tool for recruitment and as an aide-mémoire for existing students. Web 2.0 technologies are increasingly employed and the website also has links to the CAIS Twitter feed and blog. They are not part of the formal learning experience, but are designed to reduce the perceived isolation of distance learning. The VLE is the communication hub: it provides access to students and tutors and contains advice, guidance and programme regulations and discussion boards, which are an integral part of the CAIS learning experience, as well as access to the teaching materials themselves.

Feedback from a range of individuals, professional bodies and employers, as well as developments in University guidelines and policy, and changes in theory, standards and practice in the archive and records management environment, means that modules and teaching practice are constantly being reviewed and updated. Staff at CAIS are currently developing a series of video clips to embed in the modules and a podcast series featuring major theorists and practitioners in the field.

In addition to the teaching activity, CAIS also has an active research agenda and has led, and is a partner in, a number of international initiatives. With funding provided by a Royal Society of Edinburgh Arts and Humanities Research Award, CAIS has organised two international conferences on the subject of ‘Philosophy of Archives’ and ‘Memory, Identity and the Archival Paradigm: an interdisciplinary approach’. There is also a doctoral programme with PhD students undertaking research at CAIS into aspects of recordkeeping, information rights, memory and identity. CAIS is a member of the North-Western European Archival Educators Network (NAET), which generated a European Erasmus IP project, The Archives and Records Challenges in the Digital Information Society (ARCHIDIS) Intensive Program. A series of two-week Summer Schools on the subject of ‘Appraisal and Social Memory’ are being held over a period of three years, the first having been hosted by the Archivschule, Marburg, Germany in 2011,<sup>10</sup> with the following two scheduled to be held at Mid-Sweden University at Härnösand and the University of Dundee respectively. CAIS staff also publish regularly, speak at professional

<sup>10</sup> North-Western European Archival Educators Network (NAET), <http://www.naet-europe.org/>(accessed 21 May 2012).

and historical conferences and are active in a number of professional and academic organisations.

In the eight years since the establishment of CAIS over 300 current and former UK and international students have been enrolled, with additional students undertaking one or more modules for continuing professional development. The inclusion of a degree in Family and Local History has added a new student cohort to CAIS, while the 'Family and Local History: Beyond the Internet' courses reach out to a much wider audience and act as a starting point, an entry to distance learning, for a number who have gone on to enrol in the postgraduate certificate or degree. A total of 34 modules are available within five degree pathways, tutored by 40 Honorary Teaching Fellows and three academic staff of the School of Humanities.

The decades since the 1990s have therefore seen a dramatic shift in the ability of archivists in Scotland to access professional archival education. The development of a flexible distance learning programme at the University of Dundee permits those already working in the field, or those wishing to enter the profession, to study and gain transferable skills while they work or volunteer. The flexibility built into the structure of the programme allows students to work through each module within a supported student cohort, while able to take a break between modules if work or personal circumstances change. Archivists and records managers can also access individual courses to maintain their professional development. The outward-looking international approach of CAIS results in students studying with those who have different and sometimes more extreme work environments and conditions, which both inform and educate. The supported nature of the pedagogy reduces isolation and encourages communication between both tutors and staff. Finally, as the programme is taught by distance learning no-one within Scotland is excluded from entry on the basis of location.