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Brick Walls and Tick Boxes: Experiences of Marginalised Workers in the UK Archive Workforce

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Abstract

Archives Unlocked, the U.K. National Archives' strategic vision for the archive sector, identifies the need for diversity to be embedded in all parts of the archives sector. As workers, we need to ensure that "the rich diversity of society is reflected in our archives' collections, users and workers" (The National Archives, 2017, p.13). Despite strategic aims and investment in specific schemes (delivered by The National Archives, Creative Skillset, and the Heritage Lottery Fund) which seek to diversify the sector, there are still structural barriers which prevent the workforce from diversifying and realising these ambitions.

In 2017, the authors of this paper began collaborating on a grassroots project to explore the experiences of archive workers from marginalised backgrounds. The project collected anonymous survey data from 97 people which explored experiences of work and qualification. As two archive workers who have experience of accessing the archive sector workforce via diversity bursaries and scholarship, we wanted our research to articulate a common set of frustrations that are often shared but rarely documented or consulted when developing diversity and inclusion strategies and schemes. By utilising lived experiences as our main research data in this paper, we re-centre discussions about diversity and inclusion around the lived experience of those currently on the margins of the archive workforce.

Keywords: archives; intersectionality; marginalisation; professional development; workforce diversity

Publication Type: research article

Introduction

Before we begin this paper, we will give some background on us as authors. Kirsty (they/them) is a PhD student in Information Studies at University College London (UCL). Before this, they worked as an archivist. They qualified as an archivist in 2013 with the support of scholarship funding. They would describe their identity as white, working class, queer, non-binary, and disabled. Hannah (she/her) is working as the Local Studies and Archives Assistant at CultureNL in North Lanarkshire. She is a white, cis, queer, disabled woman. She was only able to access her diploma programme at University of Dundee by receiving a bursary from the National Archives.

In 2017 we began collaborating on a project to explore the perceived gap between words and

action that permeates the U.K. archive sector. We delivered our first paper at the *Radical Collections* conference at Senate House Library in 2017, which was then published (Henthorn & Fife, 2018). In her book, *Living a Feminist Life*, Sara Ahmed (2017) refers to “diversity work in two related senses: first, diversity work is the work we do when we are attempting to transform an institution; and second, diversity work is the work we do when we do not quite inhabit the norms of an institution” (p. 91). We gave our first paper from the position of two workers who had felt unwelcome and under-confident in our workplaces and study environments. Exploring our own career histories, we identified the barriers we faced (including low paid work, the cost of postgraduate education and volunteering, and restrictive criteria for bursaries). We reflected on the many points during our friendship in which we spoke about giving up on a career in archives, not through lack of passion, but through lack of support, solidarity, and/or socio-economic safety nets.

Archives Unlocked, the U.K. National Archives’ strategic vision for the archive sector, identifies the need for diversity to be embedded in all parts of the archives sector. As workers, we need to ensure that “the rich diversity of society is reflected in our archives’ collections, users and workers” (The National Archives, 2017, p. 13). Despite strategic aims and investment in specific schemes (delivered by The National Archives, Creative Skillset, and the Heritage Lottery Fund) which seek to diversify the sector, there are still structural barriers which prevent the workforce from diversifying and realising these ambitions. This can be verified through the findings of the recent study of the information workforce undertaken by the Archives and Records Association (2018) and the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals. This study identified key issues affecting those working in the sector, including:

- Men earning more than women and a lack of women in leadership roles despite women otherwise far outnumbering men in the archive sector.
- A larger proportion of the archive workforce are white than across other sectors (96.7% compared with 85.7% in the whole U.K. workforce).
- A smaller proportion of people with disabilities employed in the sector—15.9% with long term health issues (compared to 18.1% in the U.K. workforce).
- This report evidences what we had felt—that the archive sector workforce is not as inclusive as we would hope.

After our initial paper, we developed our work into a larger project which could connect our experiences to others. In this paper we share experiences gathered through an anonymous survey circulated in 2017. This data makes visible a combination of structures and behaviours that make the U.K. archive sector an unsafe place. As two workers with white privilege and a career history, we use this paper to write into scholarship experiences that might otherwise go undocumented in academic research. We hope that by doing so we provide the sector with an opportunity to listen, learn, and grow.

Literature Review

For this paper, we identified research which addresses diversity issues in the archive sector. We also acknowledge the work that has been done by those marginalised within the information sector to articulate how oppression, othering, and white supremacy manifests within professional environments.

It is important to state immediately that we struggled to locate scholarship exploring the

experiences of marginalised workers within the archive sector. This indicates a critical research gap worthy of a larger project than this paper. Archival theorists have called for those in the sector to acknowledge the archivist's complicity in oppressive structures and build practices centring around liberation, social responsibility, and transformation (Caswell, 2017; Caswell et al., 2018; Roberts & Noble, 2016; Drake, 2019; Olson, 2001; Connolly, 2016; Lewis, 2018). However, we have struggled to identify any dedicated research exploring how workforce dynamics can contribute or reaffirm these structures. The question of *who* becomes an archivist and works in an archive is what we wish to address in this paper.

We were initially inspired by Kathryn M. Neal's (1996) article "The Importance of Being Diverse: The Archival Profession and Minority Recruitment". This article utilises a survey to explore the experiences of archive workers of colour. During the course of this review, we also identified Nicola Waddington's (2004) article "The Employment of People with Disabilities as Archivists, Records Managers, Conservators and Assistants" (p. 181). Waddington's (2004) research indicates that disabled archive workers struggled to access part-time working patterns, participate in social events and CPD activities. However, both of these papers were published over 15 years ago, indicating the need for a more current study.

The research we were able to identify through the literature review for this paper was situated within Library Studies. Neal (1996) notes that librarianship has generated a larger amount of research about people of colour in the profession. Library workers and researchers of colour have explored the impact of whiteness in the library profession (Espinal, 2001; Espinal et. al, 2018; Neal, 1996; Schlesselman-Tarango, 2016 and 2017; Ramirez, 2015; Galvan, 2015; Connolly, 2016; Lewis, 2018; Brook et al., 2015). Experiences of disabled library workers have been explored through a predominantly autoethnographic approach (Hollich, 2020; Oud, 2018 and 2019; Schomberg, 2018; Pionke, 2019; Moeller, 2019; Brown & Sheidlower, 2019; Kumbier & Starkey, 2016). Gender oppression in the archive sector is under-explored within existing literature. There is also no scholarship exploring the experiences of trans and non-binary workers in libraries or archives. Research in other contexts indicates that a focus on binary understandings of gender equality in data gathering often erases the experiences of trans individuals (Tzanakou & Pearce, 2019). We hypothesise that reporting within the context of the U.K. information sector might similarly erase the experience of trans and non-binary workers.

The majority of the literature identified as part of this review is produced in a North American geographical context, and there is very little emerging from researchers in relation to the U.K. information sector specifically. We also were unable to locate research explicitly approaching workforce diversity from an intersectional identity-led approach, although often authors identified the need for future research to engage with these intersections (Oud, 2019; Schomberg, 2018; Schlesselman-Tarango, 2016). We hope that our research findings will contribute to this growing body of literature written by and centring lived experiences of oppression within the workplaces through exploring the context of the U.K. archive sector, and with an explicit focus on intersections of marginalisation.

In the context of this paper, we also want to acknowledge the work done by many individuals *outside* of academic literature, particularly through grassroots projects and knowledge building. This includes the recent work of Jass Thethi (2020), whose work through the blog Intersectional GLAM has criticized "diversity" and "inclusion" as "unclearly defined, and the words do not hold people accountable." Other bloggers actively engaging with this work including Nathan "Mudyi" Sentance (2017), who has written about his experiences as a First Nations worker in the GLAM

sector, and Sam Winn's (2017) deconstruction of archival neutrality. Many interventions have been presented at archive sector conferences including Gus John's keynote at ARA's (2018) conference, who reflected that "people make records, that is true, but people also determine what to record and what to do with it once it's recorded". The latter influenced the development of ARA's Glasgow manifesto (Archives and Records Association, 2018).

We also include the work of archivists of colour including the Transmission collective, who have worked "to support and build archives and heritage in and with African diaspora communities" (Transmission, n.d.), and Archives Download's work to encourage "black and minority ethnic (BAME) archive workers into the archives profession" (National Archives, 2018). It is crucial to acknowledge that those speaking out about these issues in the U.K. archive sector are all too often situated on the margins of workplaces and research institutions. This may contribute to the absence of academic writing exploring the experiences of workers in relation to broader issues of oppression and marginalisation.

Methodology

This paper utilises a combination of autoethnography and qualitative data gathered through an anonymous survey answered by 97 respondents. We chose to centre personal experiences in this paper after being influenced by other research which has utilised similar methodologies in librarianship (Espinal et al., 2018; Neal, 1996; Hollich, 2020; Oud, 2018 and 2019; Schomberg, 2018; Pionke, 2019). Similarly to Brown and Sheidlower's (2019) study of disabled librarians, we also used our work and experiences to connect with others within the sector who shared similar experiences and concerns. As they write, "In the early days of the research, it was enough to discover that we are not alone" (Brown & Sheidlower, 2019, p. 471). By representing ourselves in the following analysis, we make visible the connections between our own experiences and those articulated by those who participated in the study.

Autoethnography refers to a number of qualitative research methods centering around "the use of personal experience to examine and/or critique cultural experience" (Holman Jones et al., 2013, p. 22). Autoethnography emerged in response to quantitative research practice which did not acknowledge the emotional experiences of the researcher. We have utilised analytic autoethnography as the framework for this paper, which was developed by Leon Anderson (2006). He describes it as

ethnographic work in which the researcher is (1) a full member in the research group or setting, (2) visible as such a member in the researcher's published texts, and (3) committed to an analytic research agenda focused on improving theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena. (p. 375)

The main difference between this method and earlier autoethnographic methods is that analytic autoethnography "is grounded in self-experience but reaches beyond it as well" (Anderson, 2006, p. 386). We situate our own research within the tradition of analytic autoethnography. We are peers (and sometimes friends) with respondents within the paper's research context. By including ourselves within the data, we make ourselves and our histories within the profession visible. Finally, through connecting our data to a broader critical landscape about diversity and inclusion in the information profession, we seek to improve understanding of the intersection between diversity agendas and experiences of workers in the sector.

In order to collect data from peers, we developed an online survey called, “Marginalised in the UK Archive Sector”, which we circulated via a U.K. archive sector mailing list. This was designed to produce both qualitative and quantitative results—with questions aimed at gathering statistics, and other open-ended questions that enabled more reflection and detail to be provided. In our introductory paragraph to the survey, we gave examples of possible marginalised identities, such as being a woman, queer, disabled, person of colour, working class, and trans. The introduction and full list of survey questions is represented in appendix A of this paper.

We designed the survey to be anonymous so that respondents were able to share their experiences frankly. These survey design choices acknowledged that by sharing experiences directly with us, they were making themselves “professionally vulnerable” (Gorski, 2019, p. 677). Confidentiality was crucial to building trust within our relationships with participants, and we were conscious not to jeopardise any individual’s work situation by sharing their negative experiences more widely. Researcher Martin Tolich (2004) describes two modes of confidentiality—external confidentiality, or “traditional confidentiality where the researcher acknowledges they know what the person said but promises not to identify them in the final report” (p. 101), and internal confidentiality which is “the ability for research subjects involved in the study to identify each other in the final publication of the research” (Tolich, 2004, p. 101). The latter has the potential to cause harm, for instance through jeopardising a job or the likelihood of renewal of a fixed term contract. In the context of our research, we made efforts to further anonymise data that would make an individual easy to identify during our analysis phase, making note of when combinations of identity intersections and workplaces could informally identify an individual even when they were otherwise not named.

We circulated the survey between March and May 2017 via the Archives and Records Association listserv and by sending it directly to staff who worked on postgraduate Archives and Records Management courses in U.K. universities so they could forward it onto students. Retrospectively, we acknowledge some limitations to this approach—we had enquiries from a small number of prospective university students who struggled to locate themselves in survey options, and could not fully engage with the survey. As well as this, we would like to acknowledge that the listserv in question (which is the primary listserv in the context of our research) has been a site where oppressive views (particularly racist opinions) have been articulated by posters, particularly in recent months following the widespread Black Lives Matter protests. This has made explicit the ways in which participation on professional listservs is not always safe for people from marginalised backgrounds (particularly people of colour), and as such, if we were to do this research project at a larger scale in the future, we would employ a different approach.

We received 97 responses to the survey. We list a breakdown of our respondents by identity characteristic below, with comparable figures provided from “A Study of the UK Information Workforce” (CILIP & ARA, 2015) provided in order to contextualise our data subset:

- 52% were people who self-defined as working class, or came from a working class background;
- 27% were people who did not define as heterosexual. Sexuality descriptors varied between responses—for example, many used the descriptor “queer” but some “lesbian”, “LGBT”, and so on (compared with 93.3% heterosexual, 3.8% gay or lesbian, 2.3% bisexual, and 0.7% other across the U.K. information sector);

- 74% identified as women, 19% as men, with 7% as gender fluid, trans or non-binary (compared with 78.1% “female” and 21.9% “male” with no data about gender fluid, trans and non-binary individuals collected);
- 22% identified as disabled (compared with 15.9% with “long term health issues”);
- 88% of respondents identified as white (compared with 96.7%), 11% as people of colour (compared with 3.3%), 1% did not provide data;
- 65% of our respondents cited two or more marginalised identity characteristics (e.g. working class woman, queer person of colour). This in combination with the above breakdowns indicates that we were successful in reaching out to our desired demographic (an intersection of archive workers who would self-define as being from a marginalised background);
- The majority of our respondents were younger than middle aged, and early in their career in archives (58% working for less than five years in the sector, and 55% aged between 18 and 35). This also differs from the aforementioned report, which identifies 27.3% of women and 22.7% of men as being under 35 and working in an archives context. 55% of our respondents had accessed professional posts via postgraduate education. This is lower than the figure produced in “A Study of the UK Information Workforce” (CILIP & ARA, 2015), which is 77.7% in the context of the archives workforce.

Analysis and Findings

In this section of the article, we explore the findings from our research. We utilise our own experiences as data, along with those articulated by survey responses. The section begins with an exploration of entry routes, career progression, and perceptions of leadership within the sector. After this we identify common experiences that emerged in the qualitative data we gathered, including isolation, otherness, a lack of support, and unconscious bias.

Entry Routes

We wanted to find how people entered and progressed within the archive sector. Our experiences vary substantially—Kirsty entered the archive sector after a degree in Photographic Arts. Following the completion of this degree, they secured a part time, fixed term digitisation post at a national museum’s archive in 2009. The post (at four days a week) paid a year’s salary which was below national minimum wage, at £10,500. Their motivation for applying was a combination of an interest in archives and a need to pay the bills, rather than a strategic career plan. Others who responded to the survey also described taking on temporary posts motivated by the need to earn money, rather than get into the sector:

I signed up to a temping agency and the first thing that they offered me was an interview for a job in an archive. I said yes to look keen, got the job and found that I liked and was good at it. (Respondent #6)

I had never heard of the archive profession at all until I happened to ‘fall’ into it! (Respondent #72)

These quotes illustrate how short-term opportunities available can be a route into a sector and an opportunity to “try out” the sector for fit. However, it is also important to acknowledge that these conditions were cited as a barrier by many other respondents. For instance, respondent #93 said their experiences in the archive sector had been:

Almost impossible. Suitable vacancies are either too low paid or too short term for me to consider applying. Most openings are only suitable for middle class or those wealthy enough to work (or volunteer) for low paid jobs.

Many respondents felt excluded from positions because of inadequate salaries or fear that they would be without income between contracts. Many raised the issue that wages in the archive sector were low and stagnating or deteriorating over time:

The pay is so poor. I can't afford to earn so little for such a short period of time. I think the current system is prejudiced against people who don't have independent means of support as most of the lower-level archival jobs are extremely poorly paid and even qualified roles in London can pay not much more than £25,000/pa. (Respondent #90)

Although salary standards in the U.K. archive sector have subsequently been raised (thanks to the work of the ARA pay review group), those in entry level posts (even those which are long term and permanent) have a salary benchmark of £20,000. Given that progression to professional posts (as Archivist or equivalent) involves undertaking a postgraduate qualification which costs almost half this minimum salary in fees alone, it is easy to see how many individuals described feeling stuck and unable to move beyond entry level posts without external support.

Several respondents entered the profession through government-led employment and job creation schemes. Respondent #7 gives an example of a scheme facilitated via the Department of Social Security. This enabled entrance to entry level posts to those currently receiving unemployment benefits:

I was unemployed on leaving university (in 1976) and was offered a place at my local record office under a Job Creation scheme then operated by whatever the DSS was called that week... A number of archives (and other heritage organisations) took part in this scheme, which actually paid the rate for the job, enabling me to save some money to cover living expenses during the course (I got a bursary too). (The later Community Programme of the 1980s was a similar route in for others I think, but only paid a small supplement to the dole).

Ten percent (10%) of our respondents entered the sector via a traineeship scheme. Traineeship schemes have been implemented across the archive sector by organisations including the National Archives and Skills for the Future. Whilst these schemes have sometimes succeeded in recruiting from marginalised communities, trainees have often struggled with further progression due to the qualification barrier (McKenzie & Bolton, 2017).

Twenty-eight percent (28%) of respondents wanted to see an increase in traineeships and/or the development of vocational routes to qualification. Survey Respondent #32 sought:

more traineeships which are longer than one year and do not work on the presumption that it is feasible for you to go on to a course straight after that (in many cases not very well paid) year.

These responses suggest that traineeship schemes need to be reviewed in order to target individuals and retain trainees beyond an initial first post. This also speaks to research by Espinal et al., who call for diversity and inclusion work in the information sector to be expanded to include recruitment, retention, and promotion. White biases, coupled with complacency, results

in librarians of colour not being given access to the tools necessary to move into administration: librarians of colour are not being groomed for administration, and then, as it follows, they are not given those opportunities and are not seen as leaders. (Espinal et al., 2018, p. 155)

To transform the archive sector, people of colour must be recruited, retained, and encouraged. Progression is often unaddressed through a focus on creating entry level traineeships.

Twenty percent of our respondents entered the U.K. archive sector via volunteering within archives. These respondents shared experiences of juggling volunteer work with other paid jobs. This resonates with author Hannah, who realised she wanted to become an archivist after starting a degree and entered the sector through volunteering. She resolved to get the practical experience needed to apply for the Archives & Records Management diploma at University of Dundee. In order to pay her living costs and MLitt tuition fees, she worked three part-time jobs during her degree, while volunteering at two archives services. At the same time, she was coming to terms with the realities of living with a chronic pain condition and an autoimmune disease, and often needed to rely on walking aids and the care of her partner. A similar experience of juggling jobs alongside volunteering is described by Respondent #24:

After graduating, I worked concurrently in two minimum wage jobs in a café and a restaurant while fitting in as much archives volunteering as I could on the days I wasn't required at work. This was a fairly difficult and stressful period, as my earnings barely covered my rent and I never knew at the start of each week exactly how many hours I would be working. It was also tricky to fit in regular volunteering commitments, not least because every day I was working on an unpaid basis was a day I wasn't earning money for food and rent.

The assumption that individuals will volunteer to gain pre-course experience relies upon expectations about free time and affluent finances. For instance, Respondent #32 said:

I have found it frustrating being told to 'just do some more volunteering' by interviewers, as this is financially very difficult for me.

The archive sector often presents an uncritical and positive view of volunteering. This centres the potential for volunteer work to improve wellbeing and provide access to paid work. Heritage researchers have identified the whiteness and affluence of heritage sector volunteers. As Harald Fredheim (2018) writes, "a willingness to perform unpaid work as part of professional development restricts access to paid employment for those who cannot first work for free and that contributing to the sector is disproportionately considered attractive or feasible by certain demographics" (p. 624). Further examination of the role of volunteering in the archive sector is essential. We argue that a white, middle class sector recruiting volunteers from the same background (due to a combination of unconscious bias and circumstances that make unpaid labour possible) will not diversify the workforce but perpetuate patterns of whiteness, affluence, and other privileges.

In the responses to our survey, volunteering was not viewed as an inherently positive experience. In fact, it could dissuade some individuals from pursuing a career within the sector. Participant #36 described how volunteering contributed to feeling unwelcome within work environments:

Knowing how colleagues and supervisors regard me and the things I care about and

believe in has certainly soured the experience of volunteering, stopping it from being enjoyable or as productive as it might have been. It has made me re-evaluate whether this is a sector I should work in. I feel bitter and resentful that people like me are not welcome in public sector environments, as well as all the other places from which we are excluded, i.e. academia, teaching, arts & media.

The above quote suggests that voluntary posts could have a negative impact on an individual's feeling of belonging within the sector. Some participants described archive organisations as "exploiting" volunteers in place of paid staff. Others wanted the sector to focus less on voluntary roles and more on paid entry into the sector, as well as support towards qualification:

There need to be more ways to enter the profession, especially for people who can't afford to volunteer for long periods of time, and who can't afford to do a postgraduate degree. (Respondent #28)

Helping people gain experience in a way which doesn't necessarily involve working for free as this can be a big barrier to those not financially independent. (Respondent #41)

These negative views of volunteering by participants also show a general unease with unpaid labour. 10% of respondents wanted the sector to rely less on volunteers and unpaid labour:

We also need all our labour to be paid for. (Respondent #61)

The biggest barrier is the expectation that people will be able to afford to volunteer for free. (Respondent #69)

The assumption that those interested in pursuing a career within archives must volunteer can exclude individuals without socioeconomic privilege.

Career Progression

We next moved on to examine career progression for our respondents. In this section, we discuss mandatory postgraduate education in the archive sector. In our previous paper, Kirsty reflected on the experience of applying for funding to undertake a postgraduate qualification at UCL (2018). Hannah spoke out about being awarded a diversity bursary from the National Archives. Although both of us are grateful to have received financial support, we struggled to access that funding due to structural barriers. These included stipends below national minimum wage (with restrictive conditions around undertaking part time work), exclusionary criteria (for example, bursaries targeted at marginalised groups insisting on full-time study), and interviewing processes which undermined non-traditional educational backgrounds.

There has been movement towards the development of an alternative route to qualification since our first paper (Henthorn & Fife, 2018). However, details about this are not yet confirmed. Meanwhile, employers continue to ask for a postgraduate qualification in job specifications. Only 55% of our respondents had gained a postgraduate qualification. Of these individuals, 50% cited funding via workplace or scholarship/similar as their method of qualifying as an archivist. This indicates that many individuals are reliant on financial support of some type to progress within the sector. Others are effectively prohibited from progressing without access to this support. Unsurprisingly, a dominant suggestion for change was more funding for study (32% of

respondents). Funding should also target those who were otherwise unable to access postgraduate study. For instance, Respondent #48 said:

Funding is a huge issue these days. Bursaries used to be sufficient to live on and access to benefits outside term-time was easier. More money focused on marginalised applicants would encourage a more diverse workforce.

The hierarchy of qualification also created unnecessary workplace divides for our respondents:

There is a real sense of “us” and “them”. The non-professional vs. professional staff, I mean. (Respondent #53)

I have found that the worst is the huge barrier between qualified and non-qualified staff. There is little recognition and/or appreciation of the latter's skills. (Respondent #19)

I know many AAs [Archive Assistants] who are more competent and knowledgeable than the archivists they work with but their skills are not recognised because they cannot afford to gain a qualification. (Respondent #94)

Affording more value to knowledge gained by the qualification enforces the notion that academic knowledge is superior to archival knowledge gained in different spaces. To counter this, respondents wanted to see more flexibility from employers. For instance, by being open to candidates from different backgrounds:

just because you haven't done that exact job/degree before doesn't mean you are not capable of learning it, and even bringing new insights which the 'traditional' candidate might not be able to bring. (Respondent #45)

Increased flexibility could enable progression for those with competencies equal to qualified candidates.

The qualification was often viewed as a “checkbox exercise” (Respondent #16) which demonstrated one period of learning rather than a continued commitment to learning. The following quotes demonstrate very negative views articulated by two individuals:

[The qualification is] remarkably arid and needless for the vast majority of people working in archives... I'm unconvinced you actually need to work at postgrad level to be a good archivist - so it's not just a barrier, it's a needless one. (Respondent #11)

If I'm being cynical, the archives qualification seems little more than a bureaucratic rung on the ladder that you have to take in order to progress. (Respondent #27)

Respondents called for radical change in archival education. Respondent #11 suggested the sector should “de-academicise archive study”. Respondent #27 calls for “a systemic shift away from universities teaching the qualification for it [to] be affordable for working class folks”. This aligns with our previous paper, in which we called for the decentering of academic knowledge (Henthorn & Fife, 2018).

Some respondents engaged with archival education in a more positive way. However, they still wanted to see adaptations to curriculum. This included less attention given to “middle-class,

white, straight cis men. All the time” (Respondent #2). Respondent #62 asked for “more focus in curricula on decolonising archives, making them accessible to people of all backgrounds”. Fourteen percent (14%) of respondents called for changes to teaching methods which might make them more flexible and accessible. For example, respondent #8 said:

It would also be helpful if the course were decentralised away from a handful of universities and offered more dynamically, perhaps in a distance learning / part time hybrid. Peer support is really important and distance learning alone doesn't always provide that.

Other suggestions included changing university timetables to better enable studying alongside 9-5 work. Some respondents wanted better online training. Others sought the reduction of course fees and tying the qualification to apprenticeships or other paid work.

The postgraduate qualification required in order to be an archivist was often harder to achieve for our respondents. In general, career progression was described as slower, or sometimes stalled completely. For example, the following participant described their experience of career progression as

frustrating! I have knowledge and experience, but miss out through not being fully qualified. My ability to take part in HE has been limited by my personal circumstances, acting as carer for a family member of over 12 years... It has been limiting to the point of stagnation. (Respondent #20)

Many described feeling “stuck” or “stalled” due to being unable to access promotions or qualification:

I also feel stuck in the eternal position of assistant regardless of my experience and abilities. (Respondent #23)

I feel that my skills and enthusiasm is wasted by not being able to progress beyond my current level. As I cannot afford to complete the required qualification though I am unable to really alter my position. [...] I feel I am currently at a bit of a standstill career wise. (Respondent #77)

Respondents described having to look outside of the sector due to a lack of opportunity.

Another barrier to career progression was the sector’s reliance on precarious and fixed term contracts. Progression can be slower due to not being able to take roles with a lower salary or regularly move to take up contracts in different locations:

As someone from a low income/working-class background, who has known they want to work in archives from being 16, I have found the process to be a slow one and many of my choices regarding education and employment have been based on factors related to cost, salary and location. (Respondent #26).

[I am] unlikely to progress at all due to the availability of temporary contracts and I'm sadly considering alternatives. (Respondent #23)

I'd love to have gone for more volunteering and short-term opportunities if I wasn't

working to make a living and trying to avoid putting myself in a precarious position. (Respondent #32)

Short term contracts, and the need to be able to move, often restricts the roles available to people without financial support. Precarity is a significant problem within the U.K. archive sector, and manifests through, “unstable and unprotected work, which may result in low compensation, few boundaries between work and personal life, frequent relocation, and anxiety over finding and keeping work” (Moeller, 2019, p. 462). Precarious employment also enforces cultures of compliance for employees. This can feel like a pressure to fit in and not speak out in order to access the elusive “permanent job”. In relation to experiences of burnout within racial justice movements, Paul Gorski (2019) refers to individuals feeling that “every job was “temporary” due to their outspokenness about racism” (p. 677). The precarity of archival employment engenders professional vulnerability in individuals who speak out against oppression in the sector.

Another key theme to come out of the responses was a frustration at lack of diversity in leadership. Much of this frustration was directed at men occupying the top spots in the sector’s hierarchies. Respondents often felt that innovation around diversity and inclusion was harder to facilitate. For example, Respondent #26 said:

I’ve found that the profession is not diverse. White men occupy the top spots, even though white women occupy most spots.... It feels like that creates an echo chamber where innovation is difficult.

The following responses articulated frustration directed at gender dynamics in leadership:

I feel very much stuck in my current circumstances—but I know that opportunities for young women in my workplace are dire (oh hi, management structure of old white dudes!). (Respondent #83)

I have found it strange that my colleagues (by this I don’t mean those on the same level as me, as I was often only a volunteer, but everyone with the exception of the head) have been mostly women and yet my bosses were almost always men. (Respondent #78)

There was a general consensus that leadership is not accessed by marginalised individuals. To better enable career progression, respondents called for significant changes within the sector. Others wanted to see more routes into leadership and leaders from marginalised backgrounds:

more leaders in the sector who actively assert their own identities and take steps to dismantle the active oppressions within our sector—white supremacy, heterosexism, patriarchy, ableism, Islamophobia ... we also need leaders who help us to see that we are archives workers too— even if we don’t fit the ‘traditional’ models of what an archivist is. (Respondent #82)

Genuine progression within professionalised roles, including into management. Otherwise, the sector will not appeal to marginalised groups. (Respondent #41)

Some respondents would like to see networking opportunities for people of marginalised backgrounds. Others wanted mentors from similar backgrounds. This could provide support and connection to those who might otherwise feel isolated:

Those trying to make change or use any creativity as part of the process of developing collections and establishing their careers need support as it is lonely and stressful—both to them as change agents and to the wider archive community. (Respondent #33)

Suggestions for networks included “initiatives or associations for minorities” (Respondent #42). Respondent #65 sought “networks based on marginalised groups where members can share experiences”. The U.K. sector could learn from the Society of American Archivists’ Archivists and Archives of Color Section, which is a well-established peer-led professional network.

Issues such as childcare were also described as contributing to the lack of women in leadership within the sector. Respondent #47 said:

When I started out the women at the top of the profession were invariably single and I'm not sure this has changed that much. There were no role models for me of married women with children in the higher levels of the profession.

Respondent #24 expressed an anxiety that having children would impede her career development:

I'm afraid about the future. I'm worried that I may end up marginalised when I have children as I may have to go down to working part-time. I worried about potential maternity discrimination and childcare costs and that I will be permanently set back in my career in comparison to male colleagues.

Some individuals discussed looking outside of the sector for jobs that would accommodate childcare responsibilities. Others expressed common feelings that having childcare responsibilities would inhibit their career development.

Experiences in Workplaces and Professional Spaces

The preceding section highlighted structural barriers to entry and progression within the archive sector. This section hopes to draw out how power dynamics and oppressive behaviour manifest within workplace environments. These behaviours can lead to individuals leaving the sector or feeling vulnerable to job losses, thus reinforcing the precarity of fixed term archival work.

Isolation and Otherness

The first theme we would like to discuss is experiences of isolation and otherness in both workplaces and universities. Respondents talked about feeling conscious of their identities at work and during study. Many were conscious of being the only or one of few people from similar identity intersections. This was described by respondent #9 as “an occasional feeling of ‘otherness’, that my life experiences are different to most other archivists.” Respondent #15 also described feeling “different” within their workplace environment:

I am often aware that people come from very different backgrounds to me, particularly class backgrounds... I am often at meetings where people talk about people from similar backgrounds to me without perceiving me as “one of them” which I think is informed by ideas of what working class people are like.

Respondent #11 referred to a common assumption made about the backgrounds of archivists:

There are challenges around group assumptions (didn't we all spend our teens touring national trust properties with mum and dad and loving heritage tourism).

These quotes resonate with one of us, also from a working-class background (Kirsty). In Kirsty's own career history, they have rarely worked with other working-class professionals. They have benefited through connections made through sector networks. However, many of our respondents did not have these and felt isolated in their workplaces. Respondent #42 summarises the impact of these feelings, writing "Honestly I don't feel like there's a place for me in the archive sector but I feel like I need to just keep swimming against the tide for now".

Respondent #73 also stated "I am unsure whether to pursue an archive career as I think at times I may be unsuited due to my background".

Feeling isolated can contribute to individual decisions to leave the sector.

Experiences of isolation and otherness were also discussed in relation to classroom environments. In the following quotation, Respondent #14 articulates feeling othered on a master's course as one of few people of colour in the room:

There is all this talk of diversifying the sector and on the course you can count on one hand how many people from a BAME background there are. Sometimes I do think that I have gotten the place on the course because I allow for certain stats to be filled and boxes to be ticked.

Respondent #15 referred to feeling "like a token" within their class at UCL which was "white, straight and middle class". In reference to teaching as a black, queer woman Musser (2015) refers to individual experiences of being treated as "a specimen—that is to say, a commodity, static and rare" (p. 273). In the above examples, we can see how being one of few people of colour within educational environments contributes to feeling objectified, tokenized, or othered. Respondent #63 described this as feeling "like I should behave like a child who should be seen and not heard".

Individuals were wary of speaking out in classes, due to ongoing feelings of isolation and otherness. Respondent #29 said that:

I think that not hearing similar voices/seeing similar people to me while studying, both in the room and in the literature we were reading, held me back from expressing my opinions at points.

Respondent #42 reflected that:

I'm the only one of three students in a very big class that is a WOC which is very uncomfortable at times, especially when discussing certain topics. I come from a very working class background so the TNA (The National Archives) scholarship for BAME¹ students was perfect. Unfortunately, my university did not respond to my application until August so I was compelled to do my degree part time and save up the money while working alongside it—which is not a problem but at least some incentives to help, even a small bursary of some sort would keep my optimism up to feel like I'm doing something worthwhile. Instead, I'm just exhausted and feel like I do not belong.

Particularly in the final quote, it is clear that the combination of the experience of isolation (as a woman of colour) and structural barriers (being unable to access a bursary and needing to juggle work and study) can cause individuals to burn out before they even access professional posts.

Respondents also expressed feelings of otherness in relation to the collections they manage. Respondents wanted to see their identities reflected in colleagues, peers, and in collections in order to feel safer in the sector. Respondent #42 suggested an improvement would be to “include us in the archives first, at least,” suggesting that feelings of isolation and otherness can be heightened by absences within collections. Respondent #30 similarly called for:

collections held by archives [that] are also inclusive and meaningful, in other words representative of the myriad of stories and human experiences around us. People identify with archive materials, they like to engage with them at a sensorial and intellectual level. If archives collecting policies endeavour to build unbiased and inclusive collections, prospective professionals from marginalised backgrounds will feel a lot more inclined to jump into the profession.

The desire to be reflected in collections and workplaces connects to the concept of “representational belonging”. This was first proposed by Michelle Caswell et al., (2016) in their article, “‘To Suddenly Discover Yourself Existing’: Uncovering the Impact of Community Archives”, Caswell et al. (2016) coined the term to refer to “the ways in which community archives give those left out of mainstream repositories the power and authority to establish and enact their presence in archives in complex, meaningful, and substantive ways” (p. 74). Whilst the concept relates to how communities engage with collections, we apply the term to workplaces. Respondents wanted to see others from their backgrounds in professional posts to reassure them that they too belonged in the sector, as well as within the records. This was also echoed by individual reflections about positive encounters with other archivists from marginalised backgrounds, which were affirming.

Feeling Unsafe/Underconfident

The second theme we wish to discuss is feeling unsafe in workplaces and education environments. In particular, trans and non-binary respondents to the survey expressed fears of being misgendered in workspaces. One respondent reflected that: “there is a general lack of understanding about gender and sexual diversity.... [I am] fearful about attending professional events and being misgendered etcetera”.

Another respondent did not feel able to come out as non-binary within their workplace:

I am not ‘out’ at work about my gender identity (non-binary/genderfluid). I am not sure that I would be comfortable to be ‘out’, which maybe tells you something about the workplace. Although I can only speculate on how people here would respond. I’m not sure they’d understand a great deal! There have been discussions in the tea room which were non-binary antagonistic.

In this quote, the social space of a workplace environment (the tea room) can have a negative impact on individuals. This makes them less likely to fully participate in workplace cultures or feel safe and welcome in these environments. As we stated earlier, we have been unable to find

any academic work exploring the lived experiences of trans archive workers. The lack of trans inclusive politics within workplaces would merit further research.

Respondents who identified as LGBT² often referred to positive experiences within workplaces. This happened through working with LGBT community groups or being encouraged to develop projects. However, broader sector environments including conferences could be different. For example, Respondent #8 said “I occasionally get a discomfited reaction in broader contexts, for example at conferences, but never any hostility”.

Respondent #34 referred to not discussing sexual orientation at work, writing that:

I don't really bring up my sexual orientation at work (bisexual), more because I don't talk much about any aspects of my private life with colleagues than out of fear of negative reactions, I think.

Bisexual or pansexual respondents described feeling “dishonest” if not out at work. One of the authors has also experienced bisexual erasure within workplaces. In reference to sexuality, Respondent #82 shared experiences of “behaviours that impose or assume my identity”. The onus can feel like it is on individuals to “come out” as bisexual in workplaces after colleagues make assumptions, which can be personally disarming. The alternative is to not come out within workplaces and risk exposure to homophobia or biphobia due to presumed heterosexuality, which one of us has experienced directly in a workplace environment.

Moving on from sexuality and gender, respondents also described experiences of “imposter syndrome” (Respondent #15). Others shared a lack of confidence in professional spaces such as conferences and meetings. Feeling unsafe and uncomfortable within environments had a negative impact on mental health. For example, Respondent #4 said:

Archivists often don't seem too used to working class people! It can take a while for people to start listening to what you say rather than how you're saying it. Being large and poor often seems to put up a barrier. Having anxiety and depression, in combination with the above, really knocks your confidence and it takes a lot to prep in a professional context, in order to be taken seriously.

The following two responses also indicate how these “knocks” on confidence can also impact on ability to perform in job interviews. This could also discourage individuals from continuing to pursue a career within the sector:

A lack of confidence and the knowledge that I do not fit in may have affected my ability to simulate enthusiasm in job interviews, and has probably prevented me from getting the most out of my volunteering, which probably has a knock-on effect on my career prospects. (Respondent #36)

Struggling to break into archives has made me question my love of the profession, as well as dented my confidence in my abilities. (Respondent #74)

Confidence was cited as a barrier in educational spaces, especially for those who had previously felt excluded and oppressed in education. These feelings impacted respondents' ability to enter the sector and progress into more senior and managerial roles. It also affected their ability to feel confident enough to be vocal in professional roles and commitments.

Lack of Support

The next theme we would like to explore is a lack of support given to marginalised workers by employers. This was particularly expressed by disabled respondents in relation to adaptations. Research by Oud (2019) around disability in library workplaces indicates a clear tension between, “neoliberal ideals of competitiveness, productivity and efficiency” (p. 176) and the need for disability-related adaptations. These ideals often left people feeling inadequate compared to peers even whilst feeling as if their experiences contributed towards the facilitation of more inclusive information spaces for users (Oud, 2019). In this absence of support, as Christine M. Moeller (2019) writes, “disabled library workers experience precarity in a workplace, and a profession that does not acknowledge their lived experiences or their needs” (p. 456).

Respondents who identified as disabled talked about needing to take breaks from study and work in order to recover from ill health. Others were unable to take on full-time, 9-5 work, which restricts the number of roles available to them:

Working full time is extremely hard, as I have a disability with variable symptoms. Would prefer more flexible working times or alternative tasks - so not looking at the computer 9-5, for example. (Respondent #1)

Others described only being able to pursue career progression in times when they were more stable, such as Respondent #11 who stated, “Limited options for progression are mostly about what I can manage with unstable mental health and limited spoons most days”.

Some individuals felt unable to ask for adaptations because of fears that it might affect career progression. For example, Respondent #38 described their disability as “unseen, and therefore deniable”. This aligns with Oud’s (2019) research about disability in the library sector, who writes that “The most common reason participants mentioned not discussing their disability at work was that they did not feel safe doing so, or feared that it would have a negative impact on their job” (p. 183) Adaptation requests could be interpreted as them being “difficult” or unable to keep up with their job. Workplaces which engender such cultures, especially within the already competitive climate of the U.K. archive sector, risk excluding colleagues with disabilities from participating in the sector.

Respondents struggled within an educational environment due to a lack of adaptations and support, particularly on distance learning courses. Respondent #60 noted that “there is a severe lack of support for my disability as a distance learner”.

Respondent #41 shared their experiences of undertaking distance learning tasks:

I have social anxiety issues and high-functioning autistic traits... which means I find face-to-face studying fairly difficult. This led me to select distance learning as the method of study (though this was also due to the fact that this kind of course is not offered in my local area). I found some of the tasks (e.g. interacting with interviewees via Skype, attending conferences, etc.) quite difficult due to my preference for written communication.

The lack of support in an educational environment could leave individual learners unable to keep up with peers and could cause people to drop out. This was especially described by individuals

who were juggling disability, work, study, and volunteering simultaneously.

A common barrier to the development of more inclusive workplaces was an unwillingness to address workforce development as an issue. Participants wanted peers to admit that the U.K. archive sector does have a problem with regards to workforce diversity:

More generally, there needs to be a greater understanding that a diverse workforce, one given space to participate and make decisions, will actively help us all do a better job of preserving and making accessible our shared cultural heritage; this is a force for positive change, rather than a favour being extended to the marginalised or a box to tick. (Respondent #43)

I think that admitting there is an issue with how all workplaces still treat marginalised people is a good step towards greater cross-organisational self-awareness. (Respondent #65)

Antonina Lewis (2018) coins the term “archival fragility” which refers to an “unwillingness or inability on the part of professional archivists to fully recognize and compensate for their complicity in the historicity of the archive, and it is characterized by reticence to cede intellectual or physical control over archives” (p. 52). Although Lewis (2018) refers to control over collections, we can apply it to discussions around the archive sector workforce. In this project alone, we have regularly come into contact with individuals who do not consider workforce diversity to be an issue. This has included individuals acting in senior capacities on workforce development committees. The collective unwillingness to acknowledge this is an issue in which we are all complicit makes it harder for us to take positive action.

Many suggested that the onus for change in this area lay on existing managers. More privileged members of staff need to commit to continuing professional development in this area:

It would be helpful if there was more emphasis on awareness of privilege and the human inclination to give preference to people perceived as like oneself. (Respondent #4)

Make better efforts to train older archive workers in diversity standards and—so the onus is on existing institutions and colleagues to make archives an accessible, comfortable place to work for new staff from marginalised backgrounds. (Respondent #62)

Respondent #61 suggested that this might happen through training provided by (and paying) marginalised individuals:

We also need training to be given to non-marginalised staff members on what our experiences are like, and how to treat us decently—obviously employing marginalised professionals to run these courses would be a must.

Some professionals have engaged with these suggestions. For example, consultant Jass Thethi (2020) has developed independent training courses on intersectionality. However, training bodies such as the Archives and Records Association have been slow to implement any training engaging with privilege, oppression, or intersectionality. This implies that this area of professional development is not seen as core to professional competencies.

Unconscious Bias

Unconscious bias was another issue that was expressed by a large proportion of individuals. Mike Noon (2018) describes unconscious bias as, “forms of bias - such as racial preference - that might be ‘unconscious’; that is, not explicitly acknowledged by the individual being tested” (p. 199). Describing unconscious bias in relation to race, Noon (2018) writes that, “A contemporary line of reasoning is that traditional, blatant racism has been suppressed and that expressions of racism take more subtle, covert and less visible forms” (pp. 200-201). Subtle and covert forms of racial bias were most commonly drawn out by respondents in our survey. These experiences were articulated in relation to career development. For example, Respondent #42 described taking actions to edit their CV to appeal more to archive services:

Before studying for the qualification, I did notice a general leaning towards younger white women when applying to positions. Once I reduced certain aspects from my CV to hide my ethnic background [and] I heard more responses but still not a lot despite already having a postgraduate degree and ample volunteer work.

In education, Respondent #13 described expectations that they would achieve less due to their background as a woman of colour. Referring to course staff, they said:

They wrote me off, and had the expectation I would only receive a diploma.

These quotes demonstrate instances in which implicit assumptions or unconscious bias can negatively impact on those seeking to enter or progress within the sector.

A common criticism we received while conducting this survey was regarding the inclusion of “women” as a marginalised group. For example, Respondent #15 said:

I wouldn't consider myself as a marginalised person, so I was surprised to see women listed in the remit for this survey. Archives is a woman-dominated sector so I haven't personally found this to be a problem.

Multiple respondents suggested that women are more likely to hold roles in the archives profession than men. As such they should not be included as a “marginalised group”. We agree that the sector does not struggle to recruit white women. In the comparable profession of librarianship, Gina Schlesselman-Tarango (2016) describes how the librarian is almost exclusively represented as a white woman. However, we also received responses that highlighted ongoing issues relating to gender dynamics, which we include below to demonstrate how, even whilst a majority in the sector, women can still have negative experiences.

A number of respondents provided examples of institutional and individual misogyny and sexism that directly affected them as employees. Respondent #70 described one experience:

I have been told that my responsibilities were temporarily given to a man to push through procurement for a large digitisation project because “the organization” is sexist in nature and therefore more likely to listen to a man than a woman.

Unpleasant power dynamics emerged between men and women within offices. These affected individuals through minimising opportunities that might otherwise enable career progression. Respondent #82 said that “my boss treats me more like his secretary than anything else, and my

opportunities for development have been impacted by this”.

There were also reports of “patronising (and sometimes very sexist) superiors and researchers” (#23) and “grantees” dominating the sector (#7). Respondent #65 said that “I feel that my opinion is disregarded in comparison with male colleagues”. Young women, particularly, described feeling “belittled” (#66) or being “made to feel small/inexperienced” (#69) within organisations. Of their experiences, Respondent #82 reflected that “it feels like the Equality Act doesn’t exist”. The above examples, which are illustrative of a broader pattern within the data, demonstrate that an intersection of age and/or race with gender can have a damaging effect on career progression and retention of younger women within the sector.

Experiences of Research

Before we conclude, we want to take a moment to address what it has been like to work on this project. Though we are both either in postgraduate research or have recently graduated from a postgraduate taught course, our work was not attached to any institution at any point. Following our first papers on the project, we received a lot of vocal support. We contributed our voices within roundtables, panels, and meetings with sector bodies. These follow-up requests have always been unpaid. It has been stressful to balance studying, working, and/or volunteering alongside this project. This work has also been challenging and emotional for both of us. It has been disheartening to read some of the survey responses, especially when we were both early on in our own career progression. As disabled people with access needs, we have worried that the problems cited are what we have ahead of us. As such, we have often questioned whether this was the right sector for us.

We have found ourselves identified as the spokespeople for all marginalised workers within the sector. However, we cannot speak for everyone and it is inappropriate, for example, for us to speak on behalf of people of colour in our sector as white people, or as people without education as two educated people. As a result, we have had to make decisions on a case-by-case basis as to whether we are the most appropriate persons to take platforms or opportunities regarding diversity work.

Through our work, we have been fortunate to develop networks that are rooted in solidarity and peer support. It has been beneficial to us and others to develop a sense of camaraderie, and to support each other in speaking out. Although a community has developed, it is important to recognise the extent to which individual oppressions affect how welcome marginalised people feel in the sector. Creating a broader and intersectional network has also enabled connections that are rooted in identities regarding class, gender, race, sexuality, and disability, whilst still maintaining a commitment to working together when collective action is needed.

Conclusion

This article has examined the experiences of people from marginalised backgrounds working in the U.K. archive sector. These were collected via an online survey in 2017. We began the article with an introduction to the current emphasis on diversity and inclusion in heritage policy. Our literature review indicated critical gaps in research to date, including a lack of research about workforce diversity in archives; no research about the experience of trans archive workers; and frequent calls for diversity research to be more intersectional in its methodological approach. Our article has helped to address these gaps, but there is a lot of scope for further research.

Using our own experiences in combination with the survey's data, we have been able to identify how structural barriers, interactions with peers, and everyday experiences in workplace environments can negatively affect those from marginalised backgrounds. This combination can cause individuals to feel isolated and insecure within the U.K. archive sector. Though we have not been able to locate those who have already left the sector, it is clear that many respondents had thought about changing careers. It is imperative that we engage with these issues in order to support our peers from marginalised backgrounds. Whilst our paper relates specifically to the context of the U.K. archive sector, it is clear that similar issues could manifest in other geographical contexts and as such there is a wider relevance to these findings. We also hope that others will be inspired to explore similar projects in their own countries to build upon this body of research.

Clare McGlynn et al. (2010) write that “the discursive deployment of the terms “diversity” and “inclusion” means that the problematic reproduction of power and privilege is effectively displaced and silenced” (p. 246). Key strategic documents present diversity and inclusion as core to our future direction as archivists. However, our data has made visible issues which manifest in workplaces on a daily basis. We have illustrated an everyday reproduction of societal inequality and power dynamics in the sector. This can happen covertly—yet it still contributes to ongoing feelings of isolation or individuals leaving the sector. Those with power within the sector demonstrate a fundamental unwillingness to engage with the ways in which workplaces, education institutions, and recruitment practices can prevent transformation and change in this area.

As researchers who have experienced oppression, we are now connected with a wider community of professionals with shared backgrounds and shared realities. What once felt like isolated experiences or was informally shared amongst a few individuals at events and in workplaces has been made visible through this project. Now that we know we are not alone, we call for those in leadership and power to take action and implement changes that can embed support, solidarity, learning, and personal growth into the way in which we relate to peers, colleagues, donors, collections, and users. Such actions should move beyond previous attempts, which have tokenised, burnt out, and alienated many from the sector. Instead, changes should seek to adequately recompense, nurture, and connect individuals in webs of emotional, financial, and professional support that can sustain their involvement in the long term.

Endnotes

¹ In this article, BAME is used for Black and Minority Ethnic.

² In this article, LGBT is used for Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender.

Appendix A: Survey Questions and Introduction

Marginalised in the UK Archive Sector

Hello! We are two archive workers from marginalised backgrounds who have accessed the archive profession through diversity bursaries and scholarships. We are working on research about diversity in the archive workforce, particularly focusing on entry routes and experiences of qualification and employment in the sector for marginalised people. In order to share experiences that are beyond our own, we want to hear about your experiences of working in the UK archive sector.

The answers from this survey are completely anonymous, and will be used for analysis in future research. We will use quotes from these responses in academic publication, conference presentations and case studies. We hope to use this research to influence future strategy around archive workforce development from a grassroots level.

You can fill out this survey if you identify as marginalised in any way (as examples, if you are a woman, queer, disabled, person of colour, working class, trans).

If you have any questions about our research, you can contact us directly.

- How did you start working in archives?
- What is your current job title?
- How long have you been working in archives?
- How has your career progressed since you started working in archives?
- How have you found working in the archive profession as a marginalised person?
- Has your career progression been affected by your experiences?
- What steps do you think the archive sector can take to better support marginalised archive workers?
- Have you got a postgraduate qualification in Archives and Records Management (or similar)?
- By what study mode did you complete your qualification?
- How did you fund your qualification (if applicable)?
- Did being marginalised affect your study? If so, how?
- What steps could course providers take to make access to qualification easier for marginalised people?
- How would you describe your gender?
- What is your age?

- How would you describe your sexuality?
- Do you define as disabled?
- If yes, how would you describe your disability?
- What is your ethnicity?
- How would you describe your class background (childhood)?
- How would you describe your social class now?

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We write this article in memory of Magpie and Kira.

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