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# Radical Collections

Re-examining the roots of collections,  
practices and information professions

Edited by Jordan Landes  
and Richard Espley



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## 5. Decentring qualification: a radical examination of archival employment possibilities

*Hannah Henthorn and Kirsty Fife*

As two archive workers from marginalised backgrounds who have accessed MA courses through diversity schemes and scholarships, we wanted to produce a paper for the Radical Collections conference held on 3 March 2017 which would critically examine the current climate for archival employment and qualification, propose forward measures for change and suggest practical steps that can be taken to create more access routes into the profession. This chapter is an adapted version of that paper. We were responding to a recent National Archives (TNA) consultation paper on a new strategic vision for archives.<sup>1</sup> Later developed and published as *Archives Unlocked*,<sup>2</sup> it defined a 'diverse, flexible and skilled workforce' as an emerging priority for the archive sector's future development.

In the current climate where diversity and inclusion are becoming more present in our collecting, engagement and access agendas, those employed in the sector are all aware that work must be done to ensure that the individuals and community groups we wish to engage with are reflected in our workforce. However, the current processes for qualifying as an archivist actively exclude many marginalised people. With tuition fees increasing, apprenticeships paying inadequate wages, and scholarships and bursaries dwindling, the cost(s) of qualification are often too much for aspiring archivists to afford.

To give some background information about us, Kirsty Fife is curator of library and archives at the National Science and Media Museum in Bradford. She qualified as an archivist in 2013 after studying at University College London (UCL). She is a working-class queer disabled woman and accessed the archive profession through scholarship funding at UCL. Hannah Henthorn is currently studying archives and records management, as a distance-learning student, at the University of Dundee. She volunteers at the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, and has worked or volunteered at the National Records of

- 1 TNA, 'Consultation on a new strategic vision for the archive sector' (2016). See <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/archives/consultation-strategic-vision-for-archives.pdf> (accessed 25 Sep. 2017).
- 2 TNA, 'Archives unlocked'. See [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archives-sector/projects-and-programmes/strategic-vision-for-archives/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archives-sector/projects-and-programmes/strategic-vision-for-archives/) (accessed 25 Sep. 2017).

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Scotland and the Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Archives. She is a queer disabled woman, and was only able to access her diploma programme by means of a TNA bursary. It is important to acknowledge that we are white and British and recognise that other groups experience marginalisation in a way we do not. We do not speak on their behalf, but have prioritised the voices of people of colour in reviewing existing scholarship.

This chapter begins with a discussion of contemporary research regarding diversity and inclusion – both external to and within the archive profession. It then highlights some examples of existing diversity schemes run by organisations in this sector. Our own experiences of qualification are then described, and the chapter concludes with proposals for some forward steps for the sector to consider, both as professionals and as institutions.

In her book, *Living a Feminist Life*, Sara Ahmed refers to ‘diversity work in two related senses: first, diversity work in 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.’<sup>3</sup> Our own impression that we do not, to borrow from Ahmed, ‘inhabit the norms’ of archive institutions has led us to begin this project together, writing from the position of two employees who work and study within these institutions, but who simultaneously have felt unwelcome and underconfident in our workplaces and study environments. We hope this chapter and our subsequent research together will encourage our colleagues and peers to interrogate the archive sector and the process of qualification as an archivist, as part of active work to diversify our collections and workplaces, and to consider the ways in which the current system can marginalise and exclude many groups, and the practical steps that the sector and we as professionals can take to create more access routes into this career.

## Review of the literature

Existing literature, policies and schemes about diversity and inclusion in the archive workforce, both in the UK and internationally, will be explored in this section including reports and schemes by the Archives and Records Association (ARA), TNA, Society of American Archivists (SAA), and UCL. The academic research we draw on includes some of the broader pool of diversity research relating to employment in universities and other equivalent sectors.

Before examining the archive sector’s approach to the need for diversity and inclusion, it must be understood that research in this area can, even unintentionally, ultimately be interdisciplinary – that is, the arguments in favour of diversity initiatives and inclusivity practices being applied across multiple sectors. A number of multidisciplinary and collaborative opportunities have taken place, from the one-day conference Making

3 Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2017), p. 91.



Diversity Research Everyone's Business, at the University of Birmingham on 22 September 2017,<sup>4</sup> to the establishment of fora such as the Essex Critical Diversity Research Group.<sup>5</sup> These have brought together academics and sector professionals to examine existing policy and legislation, while sharing insight into recent research and considering the challenges faced by policymakers and marginalised groups: those who would benefit the most from diversity policy and practice. Some of the most fundamental scholarship examining these issues comes from Sara Ahmed. Her *Living a Feminist Life* focuses on diversity policy and practice within universities and academia, and has many clear parallels with the work being started in this chapter, a relationship that will be explored below. Other key research can be found in Reynolds et al.,<sup>6</sup> who examined the barriers to career progression faced by disabled persons – interestingly, they do not just refer to denial of physical access (to buildings, for example), but denial of access to specific training and preparation for work, and exclusion based on job-design. Additionally, they note that disabled people are 'unjustly assessed' by a 'narrow and misplaced' definition of 'skill'.<sup>7</sup> The importance of addressing the lack of inclusivity in even the path towards the desired career is echoed by Kirton and Greene:<sup>8</sup>

We start from the position that certain groups of people enter employment and organizations already disadvantaged by wider social inequalities as reflected in, for example, the education system. The discrimination they meet in employment reinforces their disadvantaged position and militates against their career progress.

In 2006, Kersley et al., based on their analysis of the results of the Workplace Employment Relations Survey (2004), recommended that minority groups 'underrepresented in the labour market' could be more encouraged to apply for vacant posts if they were actively targeted in recruitment – for example, with roles advertised in a variety of ethnic minority media, or simply by adding the statement in job listings that applications are 'explicitly welcome' from marginalised groups.<sup>9</sup>

4 University of Birmingham, Making Diversity Research Everyone's Business (2017). See [www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/business/research/creme/events/2017/09/Making-Diversity-Research-Everyones-Business.aspx](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/business/research/creme/events/2017/09/Making-Diversity-Research-Everyones-Business.aspx) (accessed 27 Oct. 2017).

5 University of Essex, Essex Business School, Essex Critical Diversity Research Group (2017). See <https://www1.essex.ac.uk/eps/research/diversity/default.aspx> (accessed 27 Oct. 2017).

6 Gillian Reynolds, Phillip Nicholls and Caterina Alferoff, 'Disabled people, (re) training, and employment: a qualitative exploration of exclusion', in Mike Noon and Emmanuel Ogbonna (eds.) *Equality, Diversity and Disadvantage in Employment* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001).

7 *Ibid.*, p. 192.

8 Gill Kirton and Anne-Marie Greene, *The Dynamics of Managing Diversity: a Critical Approach* (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 6.

9 Barbara Kersley, Carmen Alpin, John Forth, Alex Bryson, Helen Bewley, Gill Dix and Sarah Oxenbridge, *Inside the Workplace: Findings from the 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 75.

Specific to the archives sector, the ARA has done periodic reports and research into analysing the makeup of the workforce in the UK. Most recently, a study of the UK information workforce, co-produced with the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP),<sup>10</sup> aimed to map the UK information workforce and identify key issues affecting those in the sector. The full results have yet to be published but the executive summary indicates a number of issues and notable points 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 per cent compared with 85.7 per cent in the whole UK workforce)
- A smaller proportion of people with disabilities employed in the sector – 15.9 per cent with long-term health issues (compared to 18.1 per cent in the UK workforce).

The ARA-CILIP report does not survey certain areas of the workforce – for instance, there is nothing about anyone with gender identities other than male or female, and no data about sexuality. This lack makes it harder to draw conclusions about gender and sexual diversity in the archive sector, and can be raised as a diversity issue in itself. However, the demographics that have been reported on indicate a substantial lack of diversity in this workforce overall, consistency which means one could assume that it is also the case with unrepresented groups as well.

The archive sector's recent and historical academic research and policy documents do acknowledge the lack of diversity in the workforce as an issue. In late 2016 and early 2017, TNA began consulting about a new vision for the profession. A 'diverse, flexible and skilled workforce'<sup>11</sup> was defined as an emerging priority for the sector's future development. But this isn't an 'emerging' priority – the issue has been raised repeatedly for decades in various contexts. Seven years ago, TNA itself proposed an action plan to address their equality and diversity commitments, including developing internal internship guidance and using diversity networks within the media to advertise traineeships.<sup>12</sup>

Even earlier, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the SAA, together with the American Association for State and Local History and the American Association/

10 ARA and CILIP, 'A study of the UK information workforce'. See [https://archive.cilip.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/executive\\_summary\\_nov\\_2015-5\\_a4web.pdf](https://archive.cilip.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/executive_summary_nov_2015-5_a4web.pdf) (accessed 25 Sep. 2017).

11 NA, 'Consultation on a new strategic vision for the archive sector' (2016). See <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/archives/consultation-strategic-vision-for-archives.pdf> (accessed 25 Sep. 2017).

12 NA, 'Equality and diversity action plan April 2010–January 2012' (2012). See [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/ed-action-plan-january-2012.xls](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/ed-action-plan-january-2012.xls) (accessed 27 Oct. 2017).

Alliance of Museums, formed a joint committee to address the problems of minimal minority recruitment.<sup>13</sup> Alongside this was the establishment in 1987 of – what is now known as – the Archivists and Archives of Color Roundtable (AACR), which aims to ‘identify and address’ concerns facing minorities within the profession<sup>14</sup> (joined, later, by the Native American Archives Roundtable in 2005<sup>15</sup>, and the Latin American and Caribbean Cultural Heritage Archives Roundtable in 2008).<sup>16</sup> The SAA have established various scholarships in recent years to support students from minority backgrounds.<sup>17</sup>

In 1996 Kathryn M. Neal circulated a survey to archivists of colour in the United States, the results of which were published in her article ‘The importance of being diverse: the archival profession and minority recruitment’. Neal sees the benefits of having more archivists of colour working in the sector as including improving ‘donor relations (for instance, how to approach and document members of growing communities of color most effectively)’ and ‘reference/access (determining how to improve services as user groups become increasingly diverse, or how to attract a more diverse pool of researchers if society’s changing demographics are not reflected).’<sup>18</sup> The survey, answered by thirty archivists of colour based in the US, explored career experiences including entry into the profession, career progression and what they have encountered in their work in the archive sector. The article proposed several structural reasons for people of colour not commonly becoming archivists including the public image of the profession, the information sector’s neglect of communities of colour, low graduation rates and economics. Neal’s respondents proposed a number of steps to broaden the profession, including scholarships, mentoring programmes, working in partnership with university courses (particularly non-traditional), speaking to schools to introduce archives as a career at an earlier age, establishment of networks for people of colour in the profession, and internships targeted at people of colour with associated funding.

In the UK, a number of schemes have been introduced to provide new entry routes into the sector. Between 2005 and 2008, the University College London and TNA ran a joint diversity internship scheme, combining a year of study with a year of work – an opportunity created specifically to help ethnic

13 Kathryn M. Neal, ‘The importance of being diverse: minority recruitment and the archival profession’, *Archival Issues*, 21 (2) (1996): 145–58 at 147.

14 SAA, ‘Archivists and Archives of Color Roundtable, 2012 Membership Directory’. See <https://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/2012%20AAC%20Directory.pdf> (accessed 29 Oct. 2017), p. 2.

15 SAA, ‘Native American Archives section’. See <https://www2.archivists.org/groups/native-american-archives-section> (accessed 26 Oct. 2017).

16 SAA, ‘Latin American and Caribbean Cultural Heritage Archives (LACCHA) section’. See <https://www2.archivists.org/groups/latin-american-and-caribbean-cultural-heritage-archives-laccha-section> (accessed 26 Oct. 2017).

17 SAA, ‘Mosaic scholarship’. See <https://www2.archivists.org/governance/handbook/section12-mosaic> (accessed 30 Oct. 2017).

18 Neal, ‘The importance of being diverse’, p. 146.

minority students enter the profession.<sup>19</sup> More recently, TNA, in partnership with other archive organisations, has delivered Opening Up Archives and Transforming Archives traineeships. According to the TNA website,<sup>20</sup> the Transforming Archives programme aims to:

- Diversify the archives workforce
- Address gaps in the skills available in the archives workforce
- Provide new routes into working in the sector

A successful example of an Opening Up Archives traineeship was hosted by Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives.<sup>21</sup> This traineeship engaged with the Bengali community in Tower Hamlets, who were underrepresented in collections and as users but constituted 36 per cent of the local population. As the case study states, it was particularly important for stakeholders in the community to be heavily involved in the traineeships in terms of the person recruited, the recruiting panel, mentoring roles throughout the placement, and all project outputs. The description of the role explicitly cited relevant knowledge and cultural experience as essential. As well as benefiting the project, this also 'ensured that applicants with a Bengali background could compete on a level playing field with the many applicants seeking paid work in archives who may typically have had a more extensive or traditional work experience background.'<sup>22</sup> By valuing cultural knowledge and background as much as other more traditional archival skill sets, the traineeship actively made the space for a person from a different cultural background (that is, in this example, someone who came from a Bengali background as opposed to a white person) to take up the post. This benefited both the organisation and collections (via the acquisitions the traineeship facilitated) and also the sector more widely by creating a route into it for more diverse applicants. Conditions like these don't seem to have been widely applied across all traineeships hosted under this scheme, and would benefit from being embedded into the structure of a diversity programme from the beginning.

Between 2013 and 2016, TNA funded a series of diversity education bursaries.<sup>23</sup> For each year in this period, the institution issued two bursaries designed to 'support candidates in gaining a qualification by providing financial support and helping to address the socioeconomic barrier that exists for some who are considering entering into the archives sector.'<sup>24</sup> Preference

19 The Archival Education and Research Institute (AERI) and Pluralizing the Archival Curriculum Group (PACG), 'Education for the archival multiverse', *The American Archivist*, 74 (1) (2011): 69–101 at 74.

20 See [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archives-sector/projects-and-programmes/transforming-archives/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archives-sector/projects-and-programmes/transforming-archives/) (accessed 25 Sep. 2017).

21 NA, 'Opening up archives: Tower Hamlets Archives and Local History Library' (2011). See [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archives-sector/case-studies-and-research-reports/case-studies/workforce-development/tower-hamlets/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archives-sector/case-studies-and-research-reports/case-studies/workforce-development/tower-hamlets/) (accessed 25 Sep. 2017).

22 Ibid.

23 'The National Archives diversity education bursary' (2013). See [www.nationalmuseums.org.uk/media/job-pdfs/job-3309.pdf](http://www.nationalmuseums.org.uk/media/job-pdfs/job-3309.pdf) (accessed 5 Oct. 2017).

24 Ibid.

was given to applicants who identified as BAME (black and minority ethnic) and/or disabled. These bursaries were awarded up to £10,000 and were available to applicants undertaking full-time study in archives and records management, information management or humanities computing courses. Whereas the bursaries were a positive step for the sector, the limiting terms (full-time courses only) and the lack of a maintenance grant discriminated against those unable to do full-time study (including disabled archive workers) or those without socioeconomic support.

As illustrated above, a number of small schemes have aimed to tackle the lack of diversity in the archive sector. However, they often have stipulations and conditions that can actively exclude the groups they are aiming to encourage. Issues with traineeships can include wages which are less than living wage salaries, short-term contracts, no forward career progression or commitment to supporting postgraduate fees or study after completion of a contract. Scholarships are often only available on a full-time basis or only cover fees, which makes them accessible to a much smaller subset of applicants than those with more flexible conditions. Awards and schemes that aim to diversify the workforce but exclude their target applicants through imposing conditions do not challenge the sector, but do make archive institutions appear as if they are taking positive action. Sara Ahmed refers to this process and diversity in institutions more widely as 'a technique for rearranging things so organisations can appear in a better or happier way ... Diversity is a way of rearranging a series that does not disrupt that series. This is why it is possible to talk about an image of diversity and everyone knows what you are referring to.'<sup>25</sup>

In her book, *Living a Feminist Life*, Ahmed explores this gap between words and action, and within the context of higher education and academia, writes about the idea of policy documentation as essentially meaningless unless accompanied by action:

The university gets judged as good because of this [policy] document. It is this very judgment about the document that blocks action, producing a kind of 'marshmallow feeling', a feeling that we are doing enough, or doing well enough, or even that there is nothing left to do ... writing policies becomes a substitute for action.<sup>26</sup>

The role of diversity work in this context is to connect words and action. Those employed in this area thus 'live in this gap between words and deeds, trying to make organizations catch up with the words they send out.'<sup>27</sup> The archive sector has policies that support diversity and limited opportunities and initiatives to facilitate change, but often those opportunities themselves are exclusive to those without privilege and support networks. In order to truly

25 Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, p. 98.

26 Ibid., p. 104.

27 Ibid., p. 107.

diversify the sector, the profession as a whole needs momentum to effect structural change led jointly by sector bodies and marginalised workers, not sporadic and ill-funded opportunities.

More work needs to be done to analyse where these schemes have succeeded and where they have not, and in particular on the background and later career progression of participants. In 2012, Rabia Gibbs, who – before her death – served on the SAA's diversity committee and the AACR, examined the developmental history of African American archives, and questioned how we as a profession might make our diversity 'initiatives' more 'authentic and meaningful'. She asked, 'whose diversity agenda are we following – our profession's or ethnic communities' self-determined criteria?', imploring us to avoid a narrowing of diversity objectives.<sup>28</sup> It is important for us to critically analyse the work that happens in our sector, to continually ask ourselves whether our policies and schemes are affecting positive change.

## Case studies

The following two case studies illustrate our own experiences of qualification as archivists and archive sector workers. Both of us accessed funding towards our postgraduate studies by means of diversity schemes and scholarships run by universities, and from the basis of our experiences in the profession, we wish to use this platform to speak candidly about what we have encountered when navigating access to funding and qualification as two marginalised people. Hannah's case study explores what she had to contend with when accessing a diversity education bursary from TNA, and Kirsty's explores her experience of scholarship funding at UCL. The precariousness of scholarship and bursary funding in the current financial climate means that often schemes exist in the short term, so it is impossible to monitor their successes and failures over a longer term. We hope these case studies will help to contribute the lived experiences of accessing these schemes to scholarship and reports on diversity schemes and funding opportunities, and the development of future similar schemes and funding.

### *1: Hannah's diversity education bursary from TNA*

At present I'm a distance-learning student at the University of Dundee, on the archives and records management programme. I've been volunteering and working at a number of heritage organisations since late 2011, while studying at the University of Aberdeen. I realised after starting my MLitt in early modern studies that I wanted to be an archivist, and I resolved to get whatever practical experience I could before applying for the Dundee diploma. My postgraduate degree actually had to be done part-time – I couldn't afford the full-time fees upfront, and I still needed to work multiple

28 Rabia Gibbs, 'The heart of the matter: the developmental history of African American archives', *The American Archivist*, 75 (1) (2012): 195–204 at 199.

jobs to pay my rent, my living costs, and my tuition. Finding jobs in the archives sector that could fit around my studies and my shift patterns, while also providing me with the professional experience required for the Dundee application, meant that I spent the majority of my master's juggling three jobs and two volunteering roles. I also have an autoimmune disease and a chronic pain condition, with varying severity of symptoms – when I first started to seriously consider a career in archives, I was often relying on the care of my partner, the use of walking aids, and would sometimes be housebound with fatigue or joint pain.

This was in fact the primary reason for wanting to get my archives qualification with the University of Dundee. Their distance-learning course meant that I could stay wherever my partner was based, have my care needs met, and not have such a conflicting schedule of work, classes and health management. Faced with the fact that I could barely afford my master's programme and my living costs in Aberdeen, not to mention coping with a disability that could threaten any semblance of financial stability, my archives diploma seemed like a pipe dream. It was either going to be something that I could never afford, or would have to spend several years saving up for. With everything I had learned about archiving through my volunteering roles, I wanted to know more, I wanted to understand more, and I needed to channel this passion into getting the qualification that would open more doors into the sector.

In January 2015, I discovered that TNA ran a diversity education bursary scheme – at the time, this afforded a funding opportunity for two new students from under-represented groups (with a particular focus on BAME and disabled applicants). However, having applied for the distance-learning programme at the University of Dundee, which takes between two-and-a-half and five years to complete, I was unable to meet the criteria of a one-year, full-time qualification. But I asked TNA if I could apply anyway, believing that it was most unlikely I would get anywhere – I argued that the distance-learning course would give me the opportunity to enter my dream profession, while recognising how my health required an alternative study model. And, given that the bursary board were keen for applications from disabled applicants, widening the scope of its criteria would acknowledge the kinds of flexibility we may need due to our disabilities, and be a positive step for disabled access into the sector.

## *2: Kirsty's qualification via Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) studentship*

In 2015 I wrote a blog post called 'The cost(s) of being an archivist'<sup>29</sup> which explored socioeconomic barriers to working in the archive sector. The piece was written from my own perspective, as a working-class woman, two years after I qualified as an archivist. To give some background to my career history,

29 In *The Museum Blog Book* (Museums Etc: Edinburgh and Boston, 2017).

I started as a digitisation officer for photography and film collections after studying photographic arts for my undergraduate degree. Initially, as a photographer, this was a logical job for me to take on but over the two years I spent working in this field I became much more interested in cataloguing, interpretation and access, and decided that I wanted to qualify as an archivist. As I come from a working-class background, I was unable to access any financial support towards my MA and had to pursue alternative routes to pay for my postgraduate qualification.

In the blog post and essay I created the following list of expenses, covering the cost of my education, periods of unemployment between contracts, and of moving across the country to take up new roles. I was interested in mapping out the financial commitment and opportunity cost required to access a professional role in the sector. The breakdown was as follows:

- 2005–8: Undergraduate degree, c.£24,000
- 2009–10: First entry-level job in archives, which paid £1k less than national minimum wage
- 2010–11: Cross-country move to take up a contract post, £1,500
- 2012: Cross-country move to start MA at UCL, £2,000
- 2012–13: MA qualification, c.£20,000 (funded by AHRC scholarship, fees + maintenance)
- 2009–14: Periods of no work due to contracts finishing, c.£6,400 (estimate based on equivalent benefits)

That's a total of £54,900. This was without having had to volunteer, unlike many of my peers, a factor that would undoubtedly push the total up significantly. Anyone qualifying now would pay substantially more in undergraduate fees as well, which were £1,100 when I went to university in 2005.

A UCL scholarship funded me through my MA in 2012–13. In order to access the scholarship and a place at the university, I had to pay an application fee and attend an interview at UCL. At the time, the application fee was £15, and as I was on unemployment benefits at the time it was hard to find this money and the funds to travel to London for interview. At the time of writing (2017), the application fee at UCL has increased to £75,<sup>30</sup> which is more than the weekly income I had at the point of application. At the interview I was warned that the scholarship was generally awarded to people with exceptional academic backgrounds (which mine was not), and that competition was really tough.

The scholarship I was later awarded, funded by the AHRC, covered fees and maintenance. Even as a scholarship recipient, the funding I accessed during my MA was barely enough to live on, and that was as a single person with no dependants. I had a monthly stipend of about £900 a month, which was less than minimum wage and was expected to cover my living costs in London, where rent was a minimum of £500 a month for the majority of my

30 See UCL 'Taught application guidelines' (2017) available at: [www.ucl.ac.uk/prospective-students/graduate/taught/application](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/prospective-students/graduate/taught/application) (accessed 25 Sep. 2017).



peers. The AHRC also made stipulations that you couldn't work more than six hours a week to up your income,<sup>31</sup> and I was warned at my interview that the scholarship would not cover my living costs, although I was not given any alternative options. The competitive and low-paid status of the scholarship and application process was demoralising and frustrating, and I am sure many people of a similar status would have given up at that point having failed to obtain funding or due to the restrictive application process.

The funding I accessed has since been taken away from UCL. To my knowledge there is no longer a scholarship in the UK to cover both fees and maintenance costs, which is a massive barrier to any other working-class archivists. Student loans for postgraduate study at MA level were announced recently, but these still only cover tuition fees, and not the accompanying living costs.<sup>32</sup> Without an alternative route into professional roles, workers without socioeconomic privilege cannot progress in their careers. This is not due to lack of skill or passion, but rather to a lack of access to funding the training costs which would enable academic study and qualification.

My journey to qualification was tough, and I lost count of the number of hoops I had to jump through in order to get my study paid for (because I couldn't do so myself). Alongside needing to fund every academic move I've made, I've also been unable to do volunteering and unpaid work (like many of my contemporaries) because I've needed to earn a wage to pay my bills. The assumption that we are all able to find spare time for volunteering to bolster our skill set and acceptability is unfair (especially if this has to be done alongside full-time paid work). This logic fosters the idea that working-class people should be capable and willing to 'go the extra mile' or apply themselves harder than their more affluent peers, in order to achieve goals and reach an equivalent point in their career. This is massively problematic, not to mention impossible, if you have reasons for being unable to work sixty-hour weeks juggling paid and unpaid work, scholarship applications, conferences and professional development, and sleeping! As it now stands, those able to pay their way through academic study access career progression much more easily than those without financial support, and the sector needs to acknowledge that this barrier prohibits it from becoming more diverse and inclusive.

## Conclusion

In both of our cases similar issues arose which indicate that funding bodies and archive sector organisations need to re-examine the structures in which they operate and the terms and conditions through which these schemes

31 AHRC, 'Studentship grants: terms and conditions and guidance' (2010). See [www.ahrc.ac.uk/documents/guides/studentship-grants-terms-conditions-and-guidance/](http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/documents/guides/studentship-grants-terms-conditions-and-guidance/) (accessed 25 Sep. 2017).

32 Government Digital Service, 'Funding for postgraduate study' (2017). See [www.gov.uk/postgraduate-loan](http://www.gov.uk/postgraduate-loan) (accessed 25 Sep. 2017).

are facilitated. When diversity schemes and funding opportunities contain conditions which exclude those the archive profession wants to encourage into its ranks, it cannot expect the workforce to diversify at any speed. To address these problems, these schemes need to be more critically examined, and those whom our profession is keen should take advantage of them need to be consulted.

As qualified professionals in institutions, we also need to re-examine the role that qualification via MA plays in our recruitment and profession. If we want to diversify in our sector then we need to make it possible for people from different backgrounds to enter it. It is not possible to do that and insist upon postgraduate qualification as the minimum entry requirement to professional roles. We need to de-centre academic knowledge as the only valid route to qualification, and reposition it as *one* of the routes to becoming an archivist. This does not devalue the knowledge gained in postgraduate study, but rather creates the necessary space and flexibility to open the profession to other modes of knowledge, particularly that which is gained through learning on the job itself.

Action can be taken through the following steps. The profession can change personal specifications so that the MA is not mandatory (by using a phrase like 'or equivalent professional experience'). We can change funding criteria for scholarships and traineeships to include support for part-time and distance-learning applicants, and ensure maintenance grants are included in all scholarships. We can provide more support after traineeships end, and/or adapt our traineeships to incorporate funding for study (alongside part-time work, perhaps). We can also use our qualification (if gained) to disperse knowledge and skills to those who need that support, particularly new professionals, para-professional workers, community archivists and those managing collections outside of archive institutions. If those interested in accessing such services don't have the time to do this, their institutions might allow them the space to provide to groups who can. As archive professionals, we have the capacity to make small changes to make our workplaces more accessible and open. These need to be supported and encouraged by sector bodies, universities and managers at higher levels in our organisations.

At the Radical Collections conference, we used our platform to launch the next stage of our research – an online survey titled 'Marginalised in the UK archive sector',<sup>33</sup> through which we have been gathering together qualitative data relating to the experiences of those working in the profession who identify as marginalised. The survey closed for responses in June 2017, and analysis from this data is now in progress. We hope the results will articulate the experiences across workplaces and identity intersections that we often share at conferences, in workplaces and study environments. The data will also be shared with sector bodies managing bursaries, scholarships and

33 Hannah Henthorn and Kirsty Fife, 'Marginalised in the UK archive sector' (2017) at <https://goo.gl/forms/7xpPaE7AHaiTkLed2> (accessed 25 Sep. 2017; now closed).

traineeship programmes. We hope our voices can influence the development of future strategy in these areas.

Sara Ahmed writes about job descriptions as brick walls,<sup>34</sup> barriers to progression, professional development and, in many cases for us and many others, barriers to entry into the archive workforce. The act of doing diversity work is 'the feeling of coming up against something that does move.'<sup>35</sup> Key strategic documents by institutions including the ARA and TNA present diversity and inclusion as core to our future direction as archivists and heritage specialists. However, the current structural barriers that exist in our sector workforce mean that many employees from marginalised backgrounds are unable to enter or progress within the profession. In order to achieve these strategic goals we need to examine the brick walls of our own construction, acknowledging our role in their creation, and find ways to rebuild our sector on more inclusive foundations.

34 Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, p. 96.

35 Ibid.

Do archivists 'curate' history? And to what extent are our librarians the gatekeepers of knowledge?

Libraries and archives have a long and rich history of compiling 'radical collections' – from Klanwatch Project in the States to the R. D. Laing Archive in Glasgow – but a re-examination of the information professions and all aspects of managing those collections is long overdue.

This book is the result of a critical conference held at Senate House Library in 2017. The conference provided a space to debate the issues and ethics of collection development, management and promotion.

This book brings together some key papers from those proceedings. It shines a light on pressing topical issues within library and information services (LIS) to encompass selection, appraisal and accession, through to organisation and classification, and including promotion and use. Will libraries survive as victims of neoliberal marketization? Do we have a responsibility to collect and document 'white hate' in the era of Trump? And how can a predominantly white (96.7%) LIS workforce effectively collect and tell POC histories?



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