



Archives & Records
Association
UK & Ireland

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Direction



Statement

Despite many well-intentioned initiatives over several decades, the diversity of the record-keeping sector in terms of workforce, audiences, collections and outreach has not changed significantly.

During this period our society both locally and globally has substantially altered and it is clear that people working in our sector and those who wish to join it want to see a commitment to a better, faster pace of change and practical steps to a more diverse, equal and inclusive profession.

As a sector leader, the Archives and Records Association (ARA) makes that commitment.

What do we mean by Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

It is difficult to give these terms an effective definition that is succinct and meaningful and we must keep our terminology and changing definitions under review: as record-keepers we understand the importance and power of language.

A widely accepted definition is:

- **Equity*** means making sure everyone can access the same opportunities and has an equal chance of success. This has strong links to **accessibility**.

- **Diversity** means valuing and embracing the differences between people.
- **Inclusion** means ensuring everyone feels safe, welcome and able to be themselves.

These require ongoing commitment from everyone at ARA in order to make them a reality.

*Many of our communications and documents use 'equality' instead of 'equity'. This is not wrong, but we want to use 'equity' to stress that we intend to focus our activities and resources where they are most needed in order to ensure equal opportunities for all. Equality can be understood as 'treating everyone the same'; 'equity' recognises that we need to understand differences if we are to achieve a level playing field.

This document uses 'EDI' to mean Equity, Diversity and Inclusion.



Background

ARA's Vision for Inclusion from Strategic Plan 2021-2025

INCLUSION AND EQUALITY Our organisation is changing. Our sector is changing.

Our commitment to inclusion and equality is a thread that runs throughout our entire organisation and our activities.

ARA's [Glasgow Manifesto](#) 2018 stated our intention to:

- Be an agent for change in reflecting the variety and diversity of the communities we serve in the records we manage, preserve and keep.
- Open up opportunities to work in the record-keeping profession to all.
- Support record-keepers and conservators in the many challenges they face working in the sector.

Tola Dabiri's [Diversity Report 2019](#) built on the evidence gathered in [A Study of the Information Workforce](#) produced in 2015 for archives and other information management professions. The workforce survey demonstrated that the sector is not diverse or reflective of wider society, regarding ethnicity and socio-economic background. The Diversity Report identified three main approaches to diversity work:

- hand wringing – 'something must be done'
- hand washing – 'this is what we have tried'
- DIY – 'this is how you can do it'

The report noted that none of these address systemic failings or make structural change and hence have had minimal impact. Of particular concern was the failure to engage with diverse communities when planning activities: 'Done to us not by us' and 'at us not with us'.

The recommendations were:

1. Sustained systemic change to end the low impact approach
2. Use of the UK Archive Service Accreditation Scheme to end the optional approach to diversity work
3. Widening entry routes to diversify the profession

As well as the pandemic, 2020 also saw the murder of George Floyd and Black Lives Matter protests across the globe. In the UK we saw the tearing down of statues of former slave traders and more services critically examining their collections with a view to 'decolonising' and inclusivity. At the same time, the tone and content of archive discussion boards indicated that positions were polarised, with some denying that a problem existed and decrying 'wokeness'.

It was also clear there was a great deal of fear and misunderstandings about the changed narrative and, especially around correct terminology. The fear of



doing the wrong thing led many to do nothing and this is where ARA could and should take the lead.

Diversity Allies

The Diversity Allies group was set up in 2020 by ARA, intended to act as critical friends and to help deliver strategic aims by providing expertise, assisting with commissioning or directly working on particular initiatives. The DAs are resourced by ARA, and include members and non-members of the organisation. They are run by a leadership committee and liaise with the board via the diversity lead. The Diversity Allies have undertaken work to develop resources on approaching marginalised communities, recruitment and inclusive cataloguing, with more work in the pipeline. They are a valued and important part of our work on equalities, diversity and inclusion.

ARA's Nations, Regions and Sections

Various parts of ARA have taken the initiative and organised training and awareness-raising events. These efforts need to be encouraged and supported as well as underpinned by a strategic direction which will influence our sector in a positive way.

Survey of ARA Members 2022

A survey of member benefits conducted in 2022 and completed by 500 people indicated a high demand for training and resources on EDI. Many people want to address the issues, but do not know where to start, have a fear of getting it wrong or using incorrect terminology. Some do not know how to advocate for this work within their organisations.

Our aims

Considering this body of evidence and resources, ARA's aims are:

- To be the calm and confident leader the sector needs.
- To develop a plan in which equity, diversity and inclusion can be seen in all our activities and throughout our nations, regions and sections.
- To use our resources to encourage an inclusive, welcoming and diverse sector in which everyone can be themselves and achieve their potential.
- To empower and resource individual members, and our nations, regions and sections to undertake practical steps towards making this a reality.
- To review our aims and this plan on an ongoing basis.

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How will we do this?

Diversity Allies

We will continue to resource, support and develop the Diversity Allies, helping them to be an active and productive group that drives forward equalities, diversity and inclusion.

This will help to ensure that we are tackling diversity by engaging and listening to the people with lived experience of the issues.

We will continue to develop our strategic planning with the Diversity Allies group, taking into account their views and suggestions.

The ARA board and staff will work with the Diversity Allies on producing and disseminating existing and new material.

Training

Access to training and learning opportunities is a major benefit of membership and one that is important to continue and develop. ARA is also aware that reduced budgets and the rising cost of living means that training can be unaffordable for many; and there are other barriers such as geographical location or the timing of events. ARA will offer sector-specific training, seeking to ensure this is accessible so that as many people as possible can participate and benefit. It will do this by listening to what members want and need, exploring partnerships and allocating resources.

Conference

The conference is our flagship event and valued by members as a way, not just of obtaining knowledge, but connecting with others, making friends and expanding horizons.

The format of the conference in terms of duration, venues, content planning via a call for papers, delivery and social events has not altered radically for some years. In the post-Covid landscape and commitment to diversity and inclusion, it is appropriate to review all aspects of our conference.

Publications

We publish ARC Magazine bi-monthly and a peer-reviewed journal three times a year. In addition, we produce ARA Today, best practice guides and other ad hoc publications. These are appreciated and viewed as a member benefit.

We will review our publications for accessibility to ensure they can be read easily by everyone. We will also examine content and aim to ensure it reflects all sectors of the record-keeping profession, uses appropriate and inclusive language and inspires, informs and challenges the reader.

Membership and Professional Development

This is one of the reasons people join ARA and is considered important for many reasons: achievement of milestones and developing skills is vital for the sector, but also in demonstrating these to employers.

ARA has made great strides in establishing different levels of membership, with progression relying more on experience than academic qualifications. It has also made good progress in supporting apprenticeships.



Entry Routes and Career Progression

Whilst ARA is not a trade union or pressure group, it is the voice of the sector for members and non-members.

In recent years there has been great concern about the difficulties faced by people trying to obtain paid work at the appropriate level. This may be the requirement for pre-qualification work experience, which can often only be obtained by working in a voluntary capacity, to the lack of job opportunities post-qualification. Low pay is also a concern, and the work of the ARA Pay Review Group is greatly valued as setting a benchmark for appropriate remuneration across the sector.

Although there are societal and economic issues ARA cannot control or influence, it is committed to addressing barriers to access and career progression in the sector. Such barriers enshrine privilege and limit progress on equity, diversity and inclusion, they sap the morale of those facing them and harm our profession immeasurably.

Administration and Policies

These are a statement of our values and approach. For this reason we must ensure that our policies, procedures and forms reflect our stated aims and are fair, inclusive and non-discriminatory.

Our internal policies and procedures should also support those who work for us well as ensuring our contractors reflect our values.

ARA relies on its volunteer base and aims to support and train members who undertake voluntary roles in all our nations, regions, groups and activities. We aim to enable everyone to play an active role in shaping and supporting our organisation.

Advocacy

ARA has a vital role to play in representing the sector at all levels, from lobbying governments to helping individual members.

As a voice for the sector, ARA must provide leadership in the issues that matter to our members and non-members and to be clear and confident in its communications.

We must be responsive to issues, but ensure that we are listening as well as talking.

Productive Partnerships

We will work with and learn from other sectors including individuals and organisations. These may be in allied sectors such as other heritage and information professions or good practice in the wider world.

As well as looking at our organisation, we will be open-minded and outward-looking.

Our Priorities

This is a long term and ongoing strategy: we can't do everything at once, so we will establish priorities that are based on discussions with members, feedback from meetings and the sector.

