School of Histories, Languages and Cultures

Master of Archives and Records Management (MARM)

FAQs for UK applicants

1. **Academic experience**

   1.1. **Is it essential to have achieved a 2:1 or above in my first degree?**
   MARM is an academic programme and we normally find that students with a lower classification for their first degree can struggle. Therefore although we do not automatically exclude such candidates, they need to provide evidence either that their degree classification does not represent their real academic ability or that they have something additional to bring to the profession.

   1.2. **What is a 'suitable subject' for a first degree?**
   Although many applicants do have a first degree in History, this is neither a requirement, nor necessarily desirable. We are delighted to receive applications from students in other disciplines, who can all bring new insights to the profession. Previous students have had backgrounds in subjects as various as engineering, law, sociology, forensic science, American studies... You will, however, need to be able to fulfil the academic requirements of the MARM programme, which include writing essays and reports, giving presentations and doing some more historical subjects, such as palaeography.

   1.3. **Do I need Latin in order to take (optional) Medieval Palaeography?**
   If you are starting Latin from scratch you can take a 30-credit module which combines language teaching with medieval palaeography. A 15-credit Medieval Palaeography module is available for students who already have some Latin.

2. **Work experience**

   2.1. **Do I need a year's work experience before coming onto the programme?**
   We do not stipulate a specific length of work experience, as we prefer to focus on quality and breadth of experience. The FARMER guidelines make suggestions of the types of processes and experiences we would hope that applicants would either have undertaken themselves or reached an appropriate understanding of by other means.

   2.2. **How do I get experience in the sector?**
   You may wish to approach suitable repositories in your local area or look for local projects involving volunteers. Placements, both paid and unpaid are often advertised via the Archives-NRA mailing list (subscribe at http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/ARCHIVES-NRA.html). The Association of Records and Archives (ARA) also maintains a list of repositories who employ one-year assistants or who may be looking for temporary staff (see http://www.archives.org.uk/careers/careers.html).

2.3. **What other experience is relevant?**
Records are everywhere and the record-keeper needs many skills, from written communication to customer service. Although we expect all applicants to have a personal *understanding* of what working in the sector involves – to be sure that it is an environment in which they want to pursue their career – you may find that working in other sectors can offer relevant experience (for example if you have an administrative role). We expect you to be able to reflect on your own portfolio of experience, identifying how you might apply it in a professional capacity.

2.4. **FARMER guidelines**
The FARMER guidelines (included as an **Appendix** to this document) have been drawn up by the UK postgraduate programmes in this discipline to suggest the type of experience applicants should be seeking to gain and what organisations offering volunteer or paid placements should try to offer. These will be helpful to you when you are thinking about the experience you have or should be looking for.

3. **Knowledge of the sector**

3.1. **How can I gain more knowledge of the sector?**
You may find it helpful to join the Archives and Records Association, or at least to look at their website. Websites of organisations such as the Information and Records Management Society, the International Council on Archives and the Business Archives Council may also be of interest. There is also a lot of useful material for professionals on The National Archives website (www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/information-management/).

You can talk to professionals in the sector – perhaps by visiting local repositories and finding out about their current priorities: archivists are usually very happy to talk to prospective applicants, but do make an appointment first.

You can experience services as a user – try being a 'mystery shopper' and reflecting on what you liked or didn't like, and why.

You can go to events in the sector, both those for professionals and those for users: these might include ARA meetings, family history fairs, and exhibitions using archival material.

You should keep an eye out for news stories relating to recordkeeping in the widest sense and reflect on what they may mean for practitioners.

3.2. **Are there any particular books I should read?**
We do not expect students to have read specific books before applying, although we can suggest some reading for successful applicants prior to starting the programme. Colleagues during your work experience may be able to suggest books that they think are useful, but do be aware that we are looking for an ability to analyse and reflect, rather than specific or factual knowledge.

4. Applying for the Programme

4.1. **Who should be my referees?**
Normally we would expect students to offer one professional and one academic referee. If, however, you are returning to education after many years, two professional referees would be appropriate. We would like at least one referee to be a professional within the sector, who can therefore comment on your suitability for work in the sector.

4.2. **What should I put in my personal statement?**
We do not have an 'ideal statement' in mind. This section of the application form should give us a better idea of your motivations for applying for the programme, the particular qualities you feel you would bring both to the programme and the profession, any interests you have which you think may be relevant and the level of understanding you already have about the area. You should be able to do this succinctly in the space provided.

4.3. **How is my application assessed?**
We assess applications by looking at your academic qualifications, your experience and your knowledge of the sector (as above). We understand the difficulties some candidates may have and will make reasonable allowance for particular circumstances, if we have been made aware of these. We hope to achieve a diverse student body and are therefore alert to applicants who may offer something different from the norm whether in terms of degree subject, academic record or working experience. **We interview all** candidates who appear to have potential to succeed on the programme and/or who have substantially met the FARMER guidelines.

Interviews are carried out by at least one academic and normally one professional. We use the interview to fill in any details missing from your application, to find out more about your potential in all the required areas and to try to ascertain your suitability both for Master's –level study and for professional practice.

Applicants should be aware that there is no fixed lower or upper limit for student numbers; offers are based on individuals' suitability for the programme (and thus for future professional employment) and our ability to maintain an optimal student experience (e.g. through reasonable staff-student ratios). Typically we have around 50-60 applications per year and offer places to around half of these, including overseas students.

Jan 2014

Guidance to those wishing apply for postgraduate training in archives and records management

Background and Purpose

At the end of 2002 the Society of Archivists' Education and Training Development Committee asked the Forum for Archives and Records Management Education and Research (FARMER) to supply guidelines for graduates planning to apply for any of the accredited courses in archives and records management in the UK. These guidelines (generally known as the FARMER guidelines) have been revised in line with current requirements and now exist in two versions, one for organisations and one for applicants.[1]

This guidance is relevant to all applicants and all programmes, although would-be applicants should also study guidance provided by individual programmes, which may have additional requirements.

Guidelines

Aim

To assist potential applicants in understanding the range of knowledge, skills and experience normally expected prior to undertaking postgraduate programmes in archives and records management.

Objectives

1. To supply broad outlines of the knowledge, skills and experience against which candidates will be assessed when applying for postgraduate programmes in archives and records management.
2. To help would be applicants to obtain the knowledge, skills and experience which will benefit them on the programmes and help them to obtain their first professional post
3. To assist applicants in assessing the value of potential 'pre-course experience' offered by record keeping organisations and to make active choices in building a portfolio of relevant experience

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[1] The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education subject benchmark statement for Librarianship and Information Management, which includes archives and records management, describes the required standards for the award of qualifications at undergraduate level and articulates the attributes and capabilities that those possessing such qualifications should attain. http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/SBS-librarianship-15.pdf

Requirements

Knowledge

On application to postgraduate programmes candidates should ensure that they understand and can discuss the following:

- The importance and purpose of records management and archives management for society and individuals
- Current profile of record-keeping within the public, higher education, commercial and specialist sectors
- Relationship of organisations with their users and other stakeholders
- Key archives/ records management organisations and associations
- Legislative and standards environments at a basic level
- Types of available employment in the domain
- Current professional issues and drivers

Experience

All courses expect applicants to have some pre-course record-keeping experience in an appropriate environment. Many applicants will have up to a year's such experience: however it is less the *length* of experience than its *quality,* and the use the student makes of it which is important. FARMER does not wish to be prescriptive about the time spent on pre-course placements and recognises that visits and short-term experience as well as work experience outside specifically record-keeping environments can be used to great advantage by would-be applicants. However applicants might find it useful to try to acquire the following experience within a record-keeping environment:

- Experience of working (either as an employee or as a volunteer or intern), whether in archives or records management
- Observation of how a particular service fulfils its mission on an annual and daily basis
- Participation in organisational/service functions (eg acquisition, preservation, access) and activities (eg filing, surveying, storage, retrieval, description, outreach)
- Interaction with client groups (external users, internal colleagues etc)
- Awareness of how a particular service publicises its activities
- Attendance at staff and user/client meetings (eg team meetings, Friends' or user-group meetings, outreach activities)
- Attendance at professional meetings or training events

General transferable skills

The Diploma which is the minimum professional qualification is taught as part of a Master's course and therefore applicants will be expected to have both the attributes required for Master's level education and for subsequent professional practice. These include the capacity to:

- Undertake a Master's level degree (requires an undergraduate degree, usually at 2:1 level or above)
- Use basic computing skills (word processing, e-mail, spreadsheets, internet)
- Recognise the links between theory, practice and work experience
- Reflect critically on their own learning and experience
- Communicate in a clear, systematic and concise way both orally and in writing
- Structure an argument based on appropriate evidence
- Interact effectively with colleagues, users and other stakeholders
- Work in groups or teams as team member or leader