

A PROFESSIONAL CODE

At the General Assembly of the Association of Archivists of Catalonia in June 1998, the Professional Ethics Committee, which had been previously established at the AAC to take part in the process of drawing up the Professional Code of Ethics of the International Council on Archives, presented a proposal for the translation into Catalan of this international code. The need for profession to have a more specific code suited to the recordkeeping and social reality of Catalonia was manifested at the assembly and it was therefore agreed to postpone the approval of the Catalan translation of the international code until Catalan archivists had written their own professional code.

Some months later, a committee was set up at the AAC to write a code of professional ethics specifically for Catalan archivists. This committee was made up of the members Alfred García Puig, David Lobato Buil, Josep Matas Balaguer, Ramon Planes Albets, Jordi Serchs Serra and Susanna Vela Palomares.

The committee's initial work was focused on the compilation and analysis of the different ethical and deontological codes of professional archivists in other countries. This included the Professional Code of Ethics of the International Council on Archives and the codes of other professionals that had been developed in our discipline and nearby territorial environment. Alongside the work that was presented at the *Jornada d'Estudi i Debat sobre l'Ètica de l'Arxiver* (Symposium of Study and Debate on Recordkeeping Ethics) organised by the AAC in 1994 (*Lligall*, No. 8), which included the presentation of the work of the AAC's previous Professional Ethics Committee, they represented the foundations for reflection on the code to be written.

This analysis and reflection led to the idea to develop an educational type of professional code of ethics, based on general principles and specific duties. This would enable archivists to build a model of ethically correct professional conduct and would provide a support tool for decision-making in the exercise of the profession. From this point onwards, work focused on determining the structure of the principles of general and professional ethics that the code should include. It was done in such a way to make the development of the professional duties arising from these ethical principles comprehensible, thus making the application of the professional code of ethics easier.

As a result of this work, the Committee finished writing the draft text for the Professional Code of Ethics for Catalan archivists at the start of 2002 and sent it to all members so they could make their contributions. Finally, at the General Assembly of the Association of Archivists of Catalonia, the Professional Code of Ethics of Catalan archivists and the Catalan translation of the Professional Code of Ethics approved by International Council on Archives were definitively approved on 27 June 2002.

The Professional Code of Ethics has not only provided an explanation to society of the specific function performed by archivists who work in Catalonia, but, more importantly, is a guarantee of professional work truly geared to benefit society. Without this main objective the profession would be meaningless. This professional work must respond properly to society's needs and characteristics and may not, therefore, be exempt from a commitment to more democratic, fairer, freer and more equal social development. The Professional Code of Ethics is therefore the manifestation and guarantee of the ethical commitment of archivists to society.

In association with this aim to guarantee the professional's social commitment, another of the fundamental objectives of the Professional Code of Ethics is for excellence and quality in professional work. This work cannot simply be restricted to the correct use of professional skills (or, in other words, the correct application of theoretical and practical knowledge of applicable effective legislation), but must also act with social responsibility. Only with this necessary bond between skill and responsibility may professional work that responds to the characteristics and needs of society be truly appropriate.

The Code therefore is a necessary complement to the existing technical and legal regulations in Catalonia. The Code develops the profession's need for precise regulation of the most sensitive area of professional work, which is still not regulated. The approval of the Professional Code of Ethics has coincided in time with the approval of Law 10/2001, on archives and documents, and the creation of the Graduate School of Archival and Records Management. Approval of the Code provides a reference framework for necessary professional autonomy and independence, a true guarantee of work for the benefit of society. Likewise, the Code is thus the last fundamental item required for the formation of the professional identity of archivists.

The Code establishes standards that allow the creation of an ethically correct professional conduct model that enables conflicts of interests to be avoided and resolved and acts as an instrument to support decision-making in professional work. The Code is therefore organised into the different areas of social relations in which archivists interact professionally. This structural model does not only provide for better understanding and application of the Code, both by society and by archivists themselves, but is also an expression of the idea of social commitment that is inseparable from the exercise of the profession itself. It binds society and the profession and is meanwhile a true driving force for the development of our professional discipline.

Lastly, although no less important, we would like to show our gratitude for the enormous effort that all the people who took part on the professional ethics Committee have made in writing the Professional Code of Ethics.