

Butlletí 102

Informatiu de l'Associació d'Arxivers-Gestors de Documents de Catalunya

Professional Certification

Our profession is immersed in a period of constant transformation, a very common phenomenon among the majority of today's professions. To that must also be added the new horizons and new opportunities resulting from the proliferation of and changes to technical regulations. All this makes it necessary to have a well-defined and regulated professional framework, while at the same time standardising access to the profession in a way similar to that of the majority of countries in our area, in particular Anglo-Saxon countries. The tool with which to make this standardisation possible is professional certification, a practice that other professions have been using for some time now.

The certification of professionals is a public, formal and temporal recognition of the ability of a worker to do a job, issued based on the assessment of skills and without necessarily having to have completed a process of education. This method also allows the professional skills acquired to be regulated and standardised through a non-standardised process, such as that of on-the-job experience.

The certification of professionals provides a series of benefits, for both organisations and professionals. Therefore, certification aids organisations in the planning, selection and assessment of staff and enables the training offered to employees to be adapted and improved.

In addition, certification can serve to guarantee equal opportunities in terms of accessing and keeping employment when it is connected to the professional career and possible promotions in job category.

It also represents added value for archival science and records management professionals, as it signifies public recognition that grants professional status, both inside and out of organisations where the activity is carried out. The result: an increase in the level of professionalisation of archivists and records managers as well as service improvement.

All certification processes must first evaluate professional training. Three classes of information are valued: basic training, that is, the minimum level of training required to access the profession; specific training, which encompasses specialised knowledge of the profession; and continuous training, received throughout one's professional career. This last one may deal with the development of professional skills, the professional career or personal development.

The second step, no less important, in the certification process is the assessment of job experience.

This is where abilities, skills and knowledge acquired on the job are evaluated.

The fundamental characteristic of the certification process must be its validity, that is, certification bodies must act within a recognised and legitimate institutional framework. The certification responsibilities of these bodies must be established by a representative organisation, and these bodies must be able to carry out said responsibilities, as this condition is what guarantees the

legitimacy and credibility of the process. Transparency is also an important characteristic. The certification protocol must be defined in a public document that describes the steps of the procedure and the skills to be certified.

This ensures the creation of a process that is open and visible to all interested parties. The fact that certification is not a definitive process must not be forgotten; professional contexts are in constant flux, and, therefore, the review mechanisms must also be public and previously established.

The creation of a register of certified professionals is the final step in the certification process. This register must serve to control, update and publicise information on professionals who have achieved certification. By doing so, the register will become a fundamental element in the social recognition of a profession, as it will make the functions of archivists-records managers and the type of professional profile they hold public. In addition, the job market will have a group of professionals with the publicly proven skills and abilities necessary to successfully meet the challenges posed by the profession's transformation.

In Catalonia, it is necessary to embark on a process to establish professional certification and therefore standardise the profession. In terms of the profession, certification would allow the assessment of skills for different calls for open archivist positions and the training that different generations of professionals have received over the last twenty years to be systemised and standardised. It would also regulate the skills of those professionals that have a long professional career but no formal academic training. In terms of society, certification would aid in clearing up relations between related professions or those working in similar fields.

The process is a long one, due to the fact that the professional collective and society have to define and adopt a series of fundamental aspects so that certification can be a useful tool that the different levels affected (job market, government, universities and professionals) adopt and view it as a valid tool.

First of all, the certification process must be defined, that is, how the professional skills are evaluated and which mechanisms are to be established to validate the different types of training and professional experience. Secondly, the body, understood as a group of organisms gathered under one council or committee, with the authority to carry out certification, must be identified. And lastly, the body responsible for managing the professional certificate register must be established.

In the Anglo-Saxon world, there are professional associations, such as ARMA, or entities related to professional associations, such as the Academy of Certified Archivists or the Institute of Certified Records Managers, that may certify professionals.

These certifications are even valid in other countries. In our case, in order to achieve maximum recognition, the Archivists-Records Managers Association of Catalonia wants to take a close look at the partnerships and alliances that would be necessary, with both the training/educational sphere—Graduate School of Archival Science and Records Management—and the corresponding area of government, to jump start this process and promote itself as the body capable of certifying archival science and records management professionals. We at the AAC feel that with this backing, the task of creating a certification process would be widely accepted by society as a whole.

