

# **INFS 332**

# **Introduction to Archives Administration**

## **Session 12 – Managing The Reference Area (Search Room)**

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# Session Overview

There are processes carried out by archivists such as initial and exit interview of users, educating users on how to use material, providing general information to users and helping researchers in the search room carry out their research and outside the search room as well. Session 12 covers the processes carried out by archivists in the search room, reference area or reading room as it is variously known. This session looks at the activities that must be carried out before users come to the archival institution. It explains procedures and regulations that help staff in carrying out their duties and also educate users on the dos and don'ts in the search room.

# Session Objectives

After completing this Session, the student should :

- Be able to define a search room/reference area/reading room
- Be able to identify some of the functions of reference staff
- Be able to outline some of the facilities that should be in search room
- Be able to comment on the relevance of the search room to the archival institution.

# Session Outline

The key topics to be covered in the session are as follows:

- Topic one : What is a Reference Area
- Topic two : Reference Area Facilities
- Topic three : Assistance to Researchers
- Topic Four : Documenting Reference Services

# Reading List

- *Millar, L. A., (2010) Archives: Principles and Practices. Indiana University: New Schuman Publishers.*
- *Roper, M. and Millar, L. (1999). Managing Archives. International Records Management Trust. IRMT: London. Pages 117 - 184*

## Reference Services

Topic One

# WHAT IS A REFERENCE SERVICE

# Managing the Reference Area (Search Room)

## Definition

- The reference area, also known as the search room is the main avenue through which users or researchers have contact with an archival institution and its records.
- The reference area is also called the reading room because it is a room or place purposefully set aside for users or researchers to read archival materials.

# Managing the Reference Area (Search Room) Cont..

- Making the materials in a repository available to users is an interactive process. What this means is that it is an interaction between the staff and users.



# Managing the Reference Area (Search Room) Cont..

- Archivists carry out initial interviews to provide both sides information to ensure effective reference services.
- For the researcher, the initial interview provides essential information relating to the archives such as access to the archival facilities and archival materials, opening hours, rules and regulations guiding the use of materials, the types of finding aids and how they are arranged as well as other archival materials that may be of further assistance to the researcher.

# Managing the Reference Area (Search Room) Cont..

- The interview will inform the archivist as to whether the researcher is a one-time visitor or someone who will be there for several days.

Topic two



# REFERENCE AREA FACILITIES

# Reference Area Facilities

- It is recommended that a well planned, separate, purpose – built search room (reference area or reading room) is provided for researchers to consult archival materials.
- It is necessary to have the search room close to the repository where the materials are preserved. The proximity issue ensures that the transporting of materials from the search room to the repository and vice versa does not take too long.

# Reference Area Facilities Cont..

- The search room should be user – friendly, that is the search room should be such that researchers will feel comfortable working there.
- The search room should be easy to find and this means sign boards directing users should be well sited.

# Reference Area Facilities Cont..

- Tables and chairs should be arranged in such a way that the staff can walk through the isles without disturbing users.
- It should be properly lighted, sited away from noise and passers-by and have adequate heating (in temperate countries) or good, soundless air-conditioning in hot countries like Ghana.



Topic Three

# ASSISTANCE TO RESEARCHERS

# Assistance to Researchers Cont..

- Continued interaction between archivists and users is often needed after the initial interview.
- It helps the reference staff in receiving users to the search room and makes the users feel welcomed.
- Greeting and treating researchers with enthusiasm will make them feel that they are respected and recognized.



# Assistance to Researchers Cont..

## Exit Interview

- Conducting an exit interview is a good practice, except that it is not always practicable because users may not inform staff of their departure.
- Ideally, the reference interaction should end with an exit interview but because of the problems enumerated above, this is usually not achieved.

# Assistance to Researchers Cont..

## Exit Interview

- The best approach is to schedule or request for an exit interview when conducting the initial interview with users. In this way the users will already be aware of the exit interview in advance and make provision for it.

# Assistance to Researchers Cont..

## Mail and Telephone Enquiries

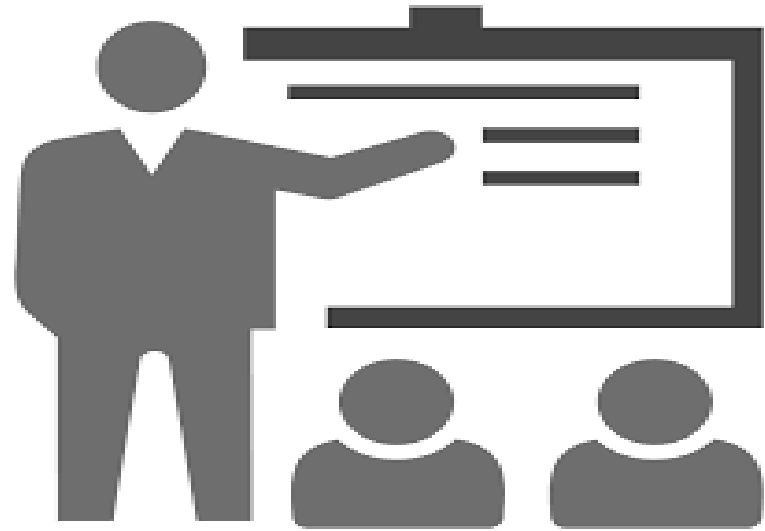
- Mail and telephone enquiries are often made by potential users who cannot personally come to the search room.
- There are other cases where those who make the enquiries are actually not new but rather continuing users who having previously consulted materials may need further clarification or an entirely new information.

# Assistance to Researchers Cont..

## Mail and Telephone Enquiries

- Most often, archivists encourage users who are far to either call or write before visiting the search room.
- This initial contact helps the staff to check and see if they can be of assistance to the user, if there are materials relevant to the topic in the repository.

Topic Four



# DOCUMENTING REFERENCE SERVICES

# Documenting Reference Services

- One of the important duties of an archives staff is writing reports on activities monthly quarterly or annually.
- It is therefore important for an archivist especially those providing reference services to document their activities.

# Documenting Reference Services Cont..

- Documenting services provide the archivists with data to plan effectively, to allocate resources and to report accurately to management on the work of the archives.
- Some of the elements that should be captured in such a documentation are the registration of researchers and their topics.

# Summary

In this session you learned that :

- The reference area is also called the reading room because it is a room or place purposefully set aside for users or researchers to read archival materials.
- The search room should be user – friendly, that is the search room should be such that researchers will feel comfortable working there.
- Continued interaction between archivists and users is often needed after the initial interview.
- Ideally, the reference interaction should end with an exit interview
- One of the important duties of an archives staff is writing reports on activities monthly quarterly or annually. This is therefore important for an archivist especially those providing reference services to document their activities.





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