

Competencies, skills, and personal attributes in job advertisements for archivists and records managers in Finland

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to increase knowledge of archives and records management as a profession by examining which kinds of competencies, skills and personal attributes employers expect of and appreciate in archives and records-management professionals in Finland.

Design/methodology/approach – This work compiled and analysed advertisements (201 in total) of open archive and records-management positions in Finland, then subjected these to qualitative data-based content analysis with supplemental quantitative analysis. This paper illustrates the findings via tables, charts and excerpts from the advertisements.

Findings – Analysis revealed the public sector to be Finland's largest employer of archives and records-management professionals. This study indicates that employers value an academic degree with some additional archive-related and records-management education and strong practical experience of similar duties. Both knowledge of legislation and language skills are appreciated. The general skills most valued by employers are interaction and co-operation abilities and skills in information technology, in customer service and in the development of work methods. Personal attributes especially valued in prospective archive professionals and records managers are independence, accuracy, self-motivation and flexibility.

Originality/value – This study adds to knowledge of the archives and records-management profession of the 2020s. Findings from this work may be of particular value for curriculum development.

Keywords Records management, Archives, Profession, Qualifications, Skills, Labour market

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Archives and records management as a profession has faced extensive changes in the past few decades, and it still is amidst constant change. The digital data environment and other settings where archive professionals and records managers work today are different even from what they were just a few years ago. It appears that changes are still continuing apace.

To educate professionals to meet current occupational requirements, it is useful to know where the students may work after graduation, alongside which knowledge and what kinds of vital skills archivists and records managers must possess from employers' perspectives. Our



study probing these matters was motivated by reflecting on what the archives and records-management profession is today, in combination with what sorts of knowledge and skills students should possess when setting out to work in it, and by frequent discussions with students and professionals about new kinds of skill requirements that the digital environment brings to this field. The inspiration to conduct the study stemmed from a wish to gain a better understanding of the current state of the art for that field in Finland. Job advertisements provide a window to the employers' viewpoint. Our study regarded job advertisements in the same way [Gibbons and Douglas \(2020\)](#) saw them: as pieces of evidence pointing to how we understand and communicate the profession in society.

Definitions of competence and competencies vary, as do how scholars with an emphasis on behavioural or occupational approaches use and understand these concepts ([Delamare le Deist and Winterton, 2005](#)). For the purposes of our study, when referring to competencies, we mean abilities gained through education or previous work experience, relevant knowledge and professional skills needed to meet the demands of the employers. The study recognised that skills can be either profession-specific or generic. By "professional skills" we refer to skills that can be acquired through relevant education (e.g. knowledge of legislation). General skills, in contrast, are such skills as communication skills that are commonly useful in any work community, irrespective of the field of expertise (e.g. interaction skills). We also considered personal attributes and characteristics such as a person's flexibility.

With our study focusing on advertisements offering jobs for archives and records-management professionals, we aimed to obtain a better understanding of what this profession is in the 2020s. While a few studies centred on professional qualifications and skills desired of archivists and records managers in the job market have been conducted internationally (e.g. [Gibbons and Douglas, 2020](#); [Pember, 2003](#); [Schmerbauch, 2021](#)), employers' needs and what is required of archivists and records managers in Finland have not been a subject of any previous study. That is the main gap we addressed with our research, which applied qualitative content-analysis methods with additional rigour from quantitative methods. The results of the study indeed enhance understanding of the profession, and they should be of use in developing curricula.

Literature review

The archival profession, archivists' identity and changes in this professional field have inspired several studies (see, for instance, [Peltola, 2015](#); [Procter, 2010](#); [Punzalan, 2022](#)). The role and duties of an archivist have been pondered ever since the term came to our awareness through media attention ([Procter, 2010](#)). More than a decade ago already, [Procter \(2010\)](#) suggested that we should reinterpret the ambiguity surrounding archivists as flexibility and responsiveness in the profession. Internationally, concepts pertaining to records and archives have long varied, as have the roles of archivists and records managers ([Ketelaar, 2000](#)). Studies by [Kallberg \(2012a, 2012b, 2013\)](#) attest to a transformation and need for change in archivists' and records managers' work. The unavoidable changes in archivists' professional image and competence alike received particular attention from [Kallberg \(2012a\)](#). An inexorable shift from a paper-based to a digital work environment requires a holistic perspective on recordkeeping processes, with a strategic and proactive approach to working. Changes are emerging in relation to the status and role of the professionals and to professional identity. Archivists' temperament types too have been studied ([Craig, 2000](#); [Pederson, 2003](#)). Although these formed part of the picture we examined, detailed analysis of them is beyond the scope of this study.

[Ketelaar \(2000, p. 332\)](#) has rightly stated that "[t]eaching an archival student how to think as an archivist is more important than to teach practical knowledge, all the more so since that

practical knowledge will soon be outdated”; however, changes in the archival profession, in archivists’ and records managers’ duties and to their work environment have prompted rethinking of archival education (Eastwood, 2006; Uhde, 2006). One of the key aspects to recognise is the needs of the students’ future employers (Cox, 2000): the skills employers assume new professionals will have when entering the workforce are worthy of reflection (Eastwood, 2006). Among the crucial challenges faced in education in this regard has been the role of technology and the teaching of technical skills. Guaranteeing archives professionals solid skills in information technology (IT) has been under discussion in the literature for quite a while now (e.g. Eastwood, 2006; Garaba, 2015; Poole and Todd-Diaz, 2022) as the landscape keeps evolving.

Internationally, several studies have been conducted that probe archivists’ and records managers’ professional-skill requirements from recruiters’ point of view (Cox, 2000; Gibbons and Douglas, 2020; Pember, 2003; Schmerbauch, 2021). In a recent study, prior work experience outweighed qualifications in records management per the picture painted by job advertisements in Australia (Gibbons and Douglas, 2020). Likewise, a US-based study found that, experience, as an indicator of knowledge, was the element most sought, with an emphasis on areas such as computer application knowledge (Cox, 2000). On the other hand, a study of the archive profession’s labour market in Germany revealed that, while the features desired of applicants according to job advertisements often included professional experience, academic and training-linked qualifications were of more interest to employers (Schmerbauch, 2021). In a study focusing more broadly on the library and information science (LIS) profession, a trend of increasing demand for archives and records-management knowledge was evident. In parallel with records’ life-cycle management, understanding of information-related behaviour and processes received emphasis (Wise *et al.*, 2011). Research examining the professionals’ own views about the characteristics and skills important within the profession highlighted a perceived need to develop competence, with a special focus on permanent preservation of records, on legislation and on co-operation with IT professionals (Kallberg, 2012b).

In job advertisements seeking archives and records-management professionals, generalist skills are in greater demand than specialist skills, with the most important general skills being technological competence, communication abilities and task management (Gibbons and Douglas, 2020). This is consistent with a survey in which Pember (2003) found a high level of computer literacy listed as required in over half of the field’s advertisements, closely followed in prevalence by communication and interpersonal skills. Earlier work by Cox (2000) likewise pointed to an emphasis on organisational and communication skills. The study by Pember also showed that enthusiasm, motivation and analytical and problem-solving skills have been considered important personal attributes for archive professionals (Pember, 2003).

Finland ranks as one of the leading countries in digitalisation; accordingly, its public-sector services are largely digitally available (European Commission, 2022). An effective entirely digital work method requires abandoning parallel paper-based procedures. Several academic studies of archives and the records-management field demonstrate the necessity of investing in the human aspect of digital transformation (e.g. Gunnlaugsdottir, 2009; Shonhe and Grand, 2019). This represents, in part, a need for digitally competent employees in archives and records-management positions. In Germany, digitalisation and the changes it implies for the archives sector have led to a significant increase in the number of available vacancies, 70% of which were state- and local-government positions in 2019 (Schmerbauch, 2021). This is consistent with a pattern shown in a Western Australian study 20 years earlier, when most of the recordkeeping positions available were in state government, followed by

local government positions (Pember, 2003). When turning our attention to Finland's more advanced digital setting, we were unable to find any studies focused on the elements of "recordkeeping culture" discussed above.

The context and research setting

The context of records-management and archive professionals' activities varies from one country and culture to another. We refer to this facet of the context as recordkeeping culture. Education-linked factors and professional requirements are properly understood only when situated within that culture.

Finnish recordkeeping culture is pragmatic in nature, with theorising having a more peripheral role (Foscarini *et al.*, 2021; Kilkki, 2004). Archives and records management are traditionally seen as lying on a continuum – Finland considers the two professions in combination, seeing them as a single group composed of archivists and records managers instead of dividing them strictly into two separate professions (Lybeck, 2006). So far, they have shared a common education, set of professional associations and body of literature (Foscarini *et al.*, 2021). The European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and, in succession to it, the Finnish Act on Information Management in Public Administration (law 906/2019) may have started a change in tide by following the Anglo-Saxon tradition wherein archives and records management are separate functions (see Foscarini *et al.*, 2021). Any such turn might, however, end up manifesting itself only in conceptual changes to how language is applied in Finland (a matter not examined in our study). For the study, our approach to Finnish recordkeeping culture mirrored the traditional expression described above, involving a continuum. Hence, the data collection focused on job advertisements angled towards archives and records-management workers as a single group of professionals.

It is common practice in the Nordic countries for each state- or local-government organisation to employ a person with the title "Archivist", though in smaller agencies the duties tend to be looked after as work additional to the primary duties of another employee (Lybeck, 2003). Before 1997 saw the establishment of university-level archives and records-management education, education in this arena was organised by the National Archives of Finland. Some scholars conclude that this was a decisive development: Huotari and Valtonen (2003) found the convergence of education and research for archival science and records management, on the one hand, with information science and information management, on the other, to be crucial for the development of the Finnish information society. Today, Finland's university-level archives and records-management education is provided in the context of information studies, history or other humanities disciplines. While information did not form a pillar for our study, it is an important part of the historical backdrop against which the current educational requirements captured in the data took shape.

Finland has no statutory qualifications for members of the archives and records-management profession. There are only requirements of a certain standard of education that often apply to public-sector positions at large. In addition, when competent individuals do not apply, applicants not meeting the latter standards may be hired. On account of this grey area, looking at the stated educational requirements and the education desired of the field's professionals separately in detail is largely irrelevant. Therefore, we combine them into requirements/expectations/desires connected with education and competencies. Also noteworthy are the Act on the Knowledge of Languages Required of Personnel in Public Bodies (Finnish law 424/2003) and the Act on Public Officials in Central Government (law 750/1994), which set some requirements for such positions – e.g. for government officials' language proficiency (Finnish and Swedish) and for Finnish citizenship.

The research questions, data and methods

We sought answers to two questions in our research:

- Q1. Which sectors provide jobs for archives and records-management professionals in 2020s Finland?
- Q2. What kinds of competencies, skills and personal attributes demonstrated by archives and records-management professionals are valued by employers in the setting of 2020s Finland?

The data for the study come from 201 advertisements for archives and records-management positions. These job advertisements were captured in two batches, in 2022, from the beginning of August until the end of September, and from 1 January to 28 February 2023. Data were gathered from three major Finnish recruitment portals: one called “Valtiolle.fi” (at www.valtiolle.fi), which lists vacancies in Finland’s central government; “kuntarekry” (at www.kuntarekry.fi), listing open positions in the local government sector (inclusive of advertisements for well-being services at county level); and the “Open vacancies” search service of the employment and economic development authority (www.paikat.te-palvelut.fi/tpt/), which may list all open positions, regardless of the recruiter’s identity. Because the “Open vacancies” service publishes job advertisements from enterprises and communities in addition to public-sector ones, we did not consult commercial search services advertising vacancies when compiling the data set. Because the portals were not mutually exclusive – a job advertisement may be published both in the “Open vacancies” listings and via either Valtiolle.fi or kuntarekry – duplicates were removed. In cases of an advertisement seeking several employees, the advertisement was weighted for the number of open positions.

The services varied in their search features in the search services, so we arrived at workable queries by performing several exploratory searches. The following search criteria and filters for the results were used: area of responsibility “Information services, archiving” or “Library and Archives sector” (Search 1) and suitable search terms in Finnish and with truncation/stemming symbols to capture the profession/field, such as “archiv*” or “records manage*”, whether as such or as a search phrase (Search 2). Because archives and records-management professionals in Finland work with any of several titles (e.g. using the word “specialist”) and handle various combinations of archive-related and records-management tasks, it was necessary to use various search terms and to use the portals’ “Area of responsibility” field to set our search criteria, although the results then were overly expansive and required further filtering (e.g. they included positions in the library sector). All work types (full- and part-time) were allowed, and no geographical limits were set. We did not restrict the results in terms of any required level of education, by job title or with regard to the “level” of duties (managerial, specialist or assistive). Traineeships and summer jobs were excluded.

Next, we read through the search results to find out whether each advertisement really advertised an archives and records-management position. Many of the advertisements returned as search results were irrelevant for the study, in some cases because the search terms had been used in reference to the workplace, etc. and not to the position. Upon going through all the advertisements (i.e. every search “hit”), we arrived at the final set of data. Only job advertisements in which the main duties were clearly oriented towards archives and/or records-management tasks were retained. For example, various assistant’s jobs where duties such as archiving were just one small part of the tasks were filtered out.

Of the 201 advertisements included in the final data set, 89 came from the first data-gathering span (August–September 2022) and 112 from the second set of data (from January

to February 2023). When presenting illustrative excerpts below, we denote a particular job advertisement with a code (such as “A1”) that uses the letter “A” (for “advertisement”) and a numeric key for the advert (1–201).

We took a data-based approach in our application of qualitative content analysis, understood as a means of providing a data-reducing, systematic and flexible method (Schreier, 2014). After a thorough reading of the advertisements, we consolidated the essential content into an Excel spreadsheet arranged by categories aligned with the content of a typical job advertisement in Finland: “Employer”, “Job title”, “Description of the tasks”, “Qualification”, “Previous work experience and other skills” and “Generic skills and personal attributes”. Next, coding within the categories yielded sub-categories. For ascertaining what the data contained, we selected an inductive, data-based approach, approaching the data from a perspective drawn from the research questions presented above. The analysis employed quantification, the results from which we visualised in tables and simple charts. At that stage, the analysis loosely adhered to an enumerative version of content analysis by searching for category frequencies (Grbich, 2013). Each manifestation of a category represents a single identification in a job advertisement. These outputs afforded insight and further examination.

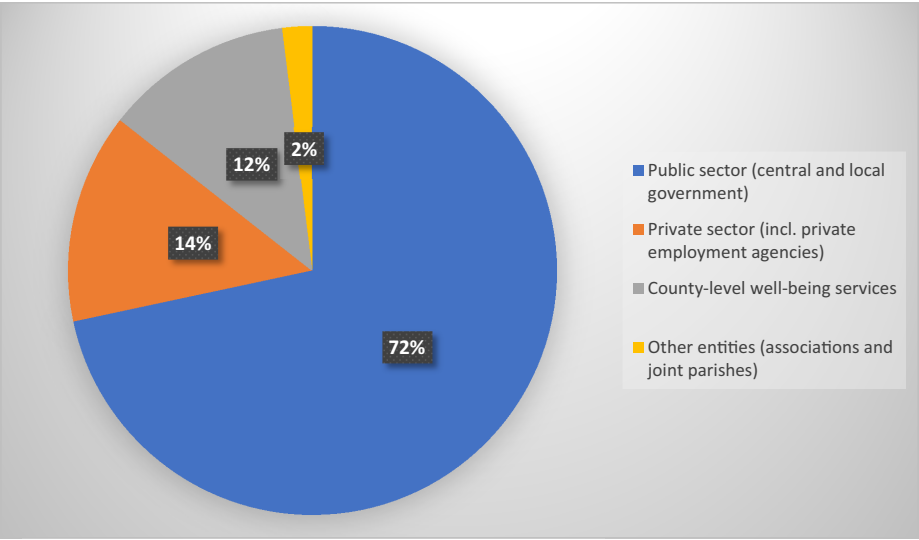
Findings

The findings from the study show that the public sector is the largest employer of archives and records-management professionals in Finland. Most of the open positions were in central government (76 advertisements) or local government (68 advertisements). The next largest employer was the private sector (with 15 advertisements), when listings from various private employment agencies (13 advertisements) are included. At this point, it must be acknowledged, however, that the job advertisements placed by private employment agencies did not always make clear where the candidate would eventually work. Well-being services for counties had 25 archives and records-management positions open during the spans of data collection. It might well be that the large number of open positions in that sector can be explained by the timing of the data collection: after reforms of health care, social welfare and rescue services in Finland, responsibility for organising these services was transferred from local government to county-level well-being services at the beginning of 2023. Finally, other employers were rare (with four advertisements in all). Table 1 provides a breakdown of the open positions by the employers’ sector, and Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of open vacancies in the data by the employer’s sector, in percentage terms.

Table 1. Open vacancies by the employers’ sector of activity

Employer’s sector	No. of open vacancies
Central government	76
The local government sector	68
The private sector	15
Private employment agency	13
County well-being services	25
Associations	3
Joint parishes	1
Total	201

Source: Authors’ own work



Source: Authors’ own work
Figure 1. The distribution of open vacancies by sector, in percentages

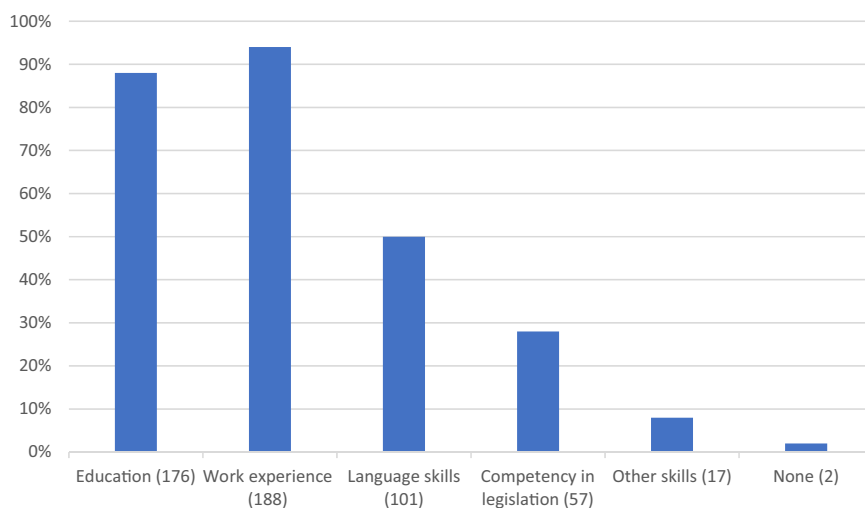
Competencies and professional skills

The following main categories of competencies and professional skills emerged from the job advertisements: education, work experience, competency in legislation and language skills. Mentions of other competencies were quite rare (these were categorised as “other skills”). [Figure 2](#) shows the number of occurrences of each competency category in the data as a percentage. The number in brackets after the category name denotes the number of advertisements wherein the area of competency in question was mentioned.

A typical job advertisement, including mentions of qualifications, previous work experience, competency related to legal and regulatory matters and language skills, is exemplified by the following excerpt, loosely translated from a listing seeking an information-management manager for a private-sector agency:

To succeed in this position, in addition to a master’s degree in a suitable discipline, you need suitable and strong previous work experience from demanding posts in records-management duties (including tasks in co-ordinating and developing records management). In addition, we expect you to be acquainted with information-governance legislation and its demands imposed on authorities. In addition to Finnish, you communicate fluently in English (A44).

In all, 176 job advertisements, or 88% of the sample, stated qualifications, expectations, or merely a wish for applicants to have an academic qualification, at some level. Tellingly, only 72 advertisements (41%) mentioned an education specifically in archives and records management as required or as beneficial to the applicant. Otherwise, one merely had to have a “suitable” degree to meet the requirements for the post. The level of the qualification required was dependent on the open post. Often, when education in archives and records



Source: Authors' own work

Figure 2. The distribution of job advertisements' mentions of specific competencies and elements of professional skills

management was mentioned, the listing identified a certain level of degree as required (e.g. an advanced academic degree/higher education) and additionally cited education in archives or records management as beneficial for the applicant.

Only around 10% of the advertisements clearly expressed that both a certain qualification level and education in archives and/or records management were needed for the post. A couple of them even cited a master's degree in archives and records management. Those advertisements that emphasised an education in archives and records management were mostly for managerial or specialist-level posts; apart from that, they did not exhibit any patterns in relation to the sector or the post.

The competency requirements or education expectations mentioned in the job advertisements were presented in connection with general qualifications for the position. In Finland, management and specialist-level posts typically require a master's degree or at least a bachelor's degree. The advertisements expressed this by stating a requirement for a "higher academic degree". Another expression used very frequently in the data was "a suitable education for the job", which encompasses a wide range of educational backgrounds that might fit the job. In relation to the higher level degree at issue, eight advertisements clarified what constitutes a suitable education: Half of them used the expression "suitable education in the archives and records-management field". Three of the others mentioned information studies, history, political sciences, administrative sciences, business, social science, technology, the humanities and jurisprudence as examples of suitable education. The final job advertisement used very broad language: "A suitable degree in business, social science, technology, humanist disciplines or jurisprudence" (A168). As for lower level clerical posts, such as registration or various assistance-level jobs, the situation appeared similar. Obviously, the level of degree required was not as high, but suitable education was still often

mentioned as required. Additionally, education in archives and records management was identified as beneficial for an applicant. There were 25 advertisements that did not mention any educational requirements whatsoever; these were mainly listings for temporary and/or assisting tasks.

Task-specific skills and knowledge gained through work experience were mentioned in nearly all of the job advertisements, 188 times in total (i.e. only 13 did not refer to previous work experience). In 22 advertisements, work experience was even elevated to an alternative to knowledge gained through education. The applicant could possess either a suitable education or the same level of knowledge gained through work experience from the relevant field of expertise. This is illustrated by the following loosely translated excerpt from an advertisement seeking an archivist for a position in local government:

Archives and records-management education, equivalent studies in the field, or knowledge of archives and records management gained through previous work experience is required (A112).

Often (in 79 cases), the job advertisement stated that experience from the specific employment sector involved (e.g. municipal or state administration or even the relevant branch of government) would be beneficial to the applicant. This accounts for 42% of all advertisements where prior work experience was mentioned. These listings even went into extensive detail on the types of know-how of the tasks appreciated in applicants for the position (e.g. registering, disposal procedures, project management and supervisory duties), skills of the sort that can be gained through work experience in similar posts. Even experience of work using specific records-management systems, as referred to in the following rough translation pertaining to the position of records-management co-ordinator for a national government agency, was mentioned as beneficial:

You have a suitable master's degree, qualifications, and excellent knowledge of archives and records management. You have worked for a couple of years with the same types of duties, preferably in the public sector. To succeed in the position, you need good knowledge of information-governance legislation [...]. Language skills needed: Excellent Finnish, at least satisfactory Swedish, and English skills suitable for data-collection purposes. We appreciate knowledge of centralised governance, of information-governance legislation, and of the VIRTARECORDKEEPING system. Experience in conducting SAPA transfers is considered to be to applicants' benefit (A153).

In half of the sample (101 job advertisements), some language skills requirements were set. Most of the language requirements were specifically for proficiency in both national languages of Finland, Finnish and Swedish, which are stipulated as obligatory for government officials under the Act on the Knowledge of Languages Required of Personnel in Public Bodies (law 424/2003). However, there were job advertisements that underlined other language skills also – mostly English, with mentions in 57 advertisements. Two languages received a mention in one listing: French and Spanish. The position was an assistant-level post at a research institute, and the advertisement did not explain why knowledge of those languages would be useful in the job. Otherwise, there was only a fairly non-committal note that, in addition to Finnish and Swedish, “other language skills” would be considered advantageous for the applicant, without any specific languages being identified.

As for other competencies, 57 job advertisements (28%) cited familiarity with legislation relevant for the archives and records-management field, as well as standards or instructions, as needed in the job. Key acts of law affecting the archives and records-management area were mentioned: the Archives Act, the Act on the Openness of Government Activities, the Information Management Act and privacy legislation. In addition, familiarity with the

Administrative Procedure Act and the Local Government Act were mentioned, each of them once.

Other specific skills were mentioned in 17 of the advertisements. Interestingly, in all cases, this consisted of the ability to drive a car. The relevant advertisements stated that a driver's licence or the possibility of using one's own car would benefit the applicant. For the most part, the importance of a driving licence was explained by the need for mobility across several offices and archives.

Two of the job advertisements did not pinpoint any particular competencies or work experience as needed. The job advertisements in question were associated with only simple and auxiliary tasks, however.

Generic skills and personal attributes

Alongside competencies and professional skills, other expectations for applicants and valued attributes were evident in the job advertisements. We found it helpful to separate these into two categories: generic skills and personal attributes.

As Table 2 attests, an archives and records-management professional is expected to show mastery of various general skills, the most sought-after being interaction and co-operation skills (cited in 128 advertisements), IT skills (mentioned in 105 adverts), customer service skills (with 62 mentions) and skills in the development of work methods (mentioned in 43 job advertisements). A wide range of additional generic skills were featured in the job advertisements, though to a lesser degree; these various other skills are all captured in the table. There were 10 job advertisements that did not make mention of any requirements or wishes related to either suitable generic skills or desired personal attributes.

Our data indicate that interaction and co-operation skills are highly valued in archives and records-management duties. More than half of the advertisements (128 in all) referred to these skills in one way or another. This category included various expressions denoting

Table 2. Job advertisements' references to general-level skills

Skill	No. of job advertisements
Interaction and co-operation skills	128
IT skills	105
Customer service skills	62
Skills in development of work methods	43
Communication skills	40
Teamwork skills	38
Organisational skills	33
Ability to learn	33
Problem-solving skills	19
Ability to see the big picture	17
Project skills	11
Solution-focusedness	11
Tolerance for routine work	8
Management skills	6
Ability to prioritise	6
Education skills	6
Ability to work in a fast-paced environment	6
Ability to work well with stake holders	6
Other skills	22

Source: Authors' own work

interaction, co-operation, social skills and ability to work in a network, as exemplified in the following excerpt:

You have good interaction skills and the ability to communicate clearly with various stakeholders and to work in networks (A123).

Additionally, teamwork skills stood out as a separate skill. These were mentioned in 38 job advertisements.

Today, nearly every archives and records-management professional is expected to have IT skills, and these indeed constitute the second most frequently mentioned class of general skills (cited in 105 job advertisements). It should be noted that the level of IT skills required varied across the data set: many of the advertisements (96) included only a general statement that the applicant was expected to possess IT skills, while a few of them (9 adverts) indicated that knowledge of some specific kind of software would be beneficial to the applicant. Although “IT skills” encompasses the use of standard office/productivity applications as well as the use of special software, one thing is quite clear: only very rarely is an archives and records-management professional not required to have IT skills of some sort. In today’s digital environment, this requirement appears self-evident.

The following excerpt exemplifies the generic skills required of an archives and records-management professional in today’s Finland:

You have versatile IT skills and good interaction and co-operation skills. You do not wish to be buried in the archives; rather, you like working with others and bringing out your expertise (A28).

In nearly a third of the job advertisements (62), customer service skills received a mention. This indicates that, for these duties, general interaction and co-operation skills are not enough on their own – special skills for engaging with customers are necessary. It should be noted that the requirement of “customer service orientation”, which has moderate prominence in the material, falls under this category.

Skill in developing the work methods further was the general skill featuring fourth most often in the data, making an appearance in 43 job advertisements. For example, one stated that the applicant must have “the ability to change and develop operating methods” (A60). Accordingly, the archives and records-management professional is expected to be competent to develop the work done – above all, the methods behind it – in the organisation. It also bears mentioning that willingness or ability to learn cropped up 33 times in the material. This too supports the conclusion that employers do not want an archives and records-management professional who “just works here” as if a passive part of a larger machine; rather, the professional is expected to be interested in developing his or her expertise in the field further.

Other skill categories found in the data were communication skills, organisation skills, good problem-solving, an ability to “see the big picture”, project-related skills, solution-focusedness, ability to tolerate routine/mundane work, management skills, ability to prioritise, education skills, ability to cope with a fast-paced work environment and skills in working with stakeholders. Skills receiving fewer than five mentions in the data were grouped into a residual category; our reading and the small number of mentions indicate that these were not perceived as significant.

In the data, clearly the personal attributes appreciated most were independence (with 86 mentions), accuracy (with 81), initiative (with 62) and flexibility (with 54). [Table 3](#) presents a breakdown of the traits found in the data by the number of job advertisements in which they were mentioned.

The first of these, independence, was by far the most desired personal attribute according to the data (cited in 86 job advertisements). In 80 cases, this was expressed by way of the employee being expected to have the ability to work independently, while the remaining six

Table 3. Personal attributes and the number of job advertisements mentioning them

Personality trait	No. of job advertisements
Independence	86
Accuracy	81
Self-motivation/taking initiative	62
Flexibility	54
Responsibility	27
Stress-tolerance	23
Activeness	23
Motivation	15
Effectiveness	14
Goal-orientation	10
Perseverance	8
Openness	8
A positive attitude	8
Physical ability	7
Commitment	5
Other attributes	6

Source: Authors' own work

advertisements pointed more specifically to needing the skill of independent judgement and decision-making. Consequently, it seems clear that a records-management professional is expected to be able to work independently, without constant guidance or support from a supervisor or colleague.

Accuracy appeared to be a valued personal attribute, with the data offering 81 examples of this. While 79 of the job advertisements expressed this in terms of a general requirement for accuracy, two advertisements stated specifically that the applicant was expected to have the ability to handle "repeated routines that require accuracy". Requirements for a cautious and careful approach, punctuality and systematicity fell under this category.

Taking the initiative was another oft-cited characteristic. The 62 job advertisements expressing this notion cover both the requirement of independence and, close in meaning, that of being self-motivated. For example, an advertisement might state that the person selected for the position is required to have the "ability to work independently and on his/her own initiative". This was visible in the data in, for example, the following phrasing:

The person we are looking for [...] shows initiative, is flexible, and is capable of independent work and decision-making. We appreciate skills for fluent oral and literate expression (A13).

Flexibility was mentioned as a valued personal attribute in 54 job advertisements. Often (in 47 of these advertisements), the mentions of flexibility were general in nature. However, the sample also (with seven mentions) pointed more specifically to, for example, flexibility in a changing operation environment, flexibility for different working hours, or flexibility in terms of the tasks.

Table 3 presents the fuller picture, where, in addition to the above-mentioned personal attributes emphasised in the data, the following attributes mentioned in the job advertisements are addressed: responsibility (27), tolerance of stress (23), activeness (23), motivation (15), effectiveness (14), goal-orientation (10), perseverance (8), openness (8), a positive attitude (8), physical abilities (7) and commitment (5). The residual category for other traits covers all attributes that had under five mentions in the data and hence were not considered significant.

Discussion and conclusions

We succeeded with our aim of increasing knowledge of archives and records management as a profession by analysing job advertisements to find out which sectors provide jobs for that field's professionals in Finland and, in combination with that, what kinds of competencies, skills and personal attributes those professionals' employers value with regard to the Finnish labour market.

The findings highlight the importance of the public sector (central government and local government) as the largest employer for these professionals in Finland. The analysis highlighted also that previous work experience, with similar duties or in the sector offering the position, is an advantage in the search for a job. Having a qualification (a certain level of degree) and some additional education in archives and records management is important too. The data revealed the utility of competency in the legislative domain and of having skills in the Finnish and Swedish language, with even skills in English conferring some benefit. The most prominent generic skills valued by employers proved to be interaction and co-operation skills, IT skills, customer service skills and skills in further development of the work methods. Finally, independence, accuracy, initiative and flexibility stood out as the personal attributes valued most by employers.

The findings from the study may not come as a surprise for the profession in Finland. The results suggest that practical work experience is slightly more valued than archives and records-management education, and the results show the importance of prior experience from the sector offering the vacancy, especially. This finding is consistent with the conclusion of [Gibbons and Douglas \(2020\)](#): experience outweighs formal qualifications. In spotlighting the importance of practical experience, the findings solidify the picture of archives and records management in Finland as a pragmatic profession in need of more theorising from several viewpoints ([Foscarini et al., 2021](#); [Kilkki, 2004](#); [Henttonen and Packalén, 2023](#)). It also points to the selection of traineeship posts for students as of considerable importance. Being a trainee presents an opportunity to gain the work experience that is so highly valued in the field and in the specific sector involved.

As for education, the expression "suitable education" found in many Finnish job advertisements (even though vacancies often require a degree and cite education in archives and records management as to the benefit of the applicant) is even more vague than the references to "information-related" university qualifications identified by [Gibbons and Douglas \(2020\)](#). There may be several reasons for the use of the expression "suitable education". Firstly, recruiters may not be familiar with the archives and records-management education provided in Finland today. Secondly, they may want to leave as wide a scope for the degree requirement as possible to expand the pool of applicants. Also, this might just be the fruit of templates, an expression commonly used in job advertisements. Job advertisements follow special patterns that might have an influence on the patterns a study finds.

The results highlighting interaction and co-operation skills are consistent with previous studies that found communication skills important (see [Cox, 2000](#); [Gibbons and Douglas, 2020](#); [Pember, 2003](#)). While communication is not exactly the same thing as interaction and co-operation, there are similarities in these neighbouring concepts. Perhaps more surprisingly, the results draw attention to customer service skills and customer orientation. Two factors might be at play here: these might be explained either by the content of the data analysed or simply by the nature of the profession. Firstly, the level of the open positions in the sample was not analysed. In cases involving several lower level positions (e.g. for registry officers), the need for customer service skills is evident. Secondly, archives and records management as a profession is an auxiliary activity for organisations, serving them and their employers, while co-operation with the organisation's (internal and external) customers is another substantial part of the work. From that perspective, archives and records-management professionals at any level in the

organisational hierarchy need a service-oriented attitude. In a similar vein, the notion of service orientation may be linked to a proactive approach to the work, for an impact on the recordkeeping processes even before others have identified corresponding needs and in goal-oriented attempts to make people aware of the services (Theimer, 2018). While focus on customers was evident at the time of Pember's work too (2000), the findings of our study indicate changes in archivists' and records managers' work (Kallberg, 2012a, 2012b, 2013) because of "digital transformation" that is still in progress and strongly evident. This is shown in the advertisements' attention to skills in the development of work methods, the fourth most highly valued generic skill in the data.

When considering the most valued personal attributes, we find that some purely practical factors may exist. The requirement of accuracy makes sense, especially when one thinks about, for example, the duties in a registry office or the strict metadata requirements for recordkeeping systems. The importance of independence and initiative could be understood in light of the fact that traditionally archives and records-management professionals work on their own in the given organisation, often without guidance or support from a supervisor or peers. Because this person cannot reasonably wait for a supervisor to advise on what to do, he or she is supposed to find out which measures would be appropriate in the work. Hence, these positions demand a resourceful, driven person capable of working proactively, without constantly being told what to do. That said, larger organisations do have entire information-management teams now. Another question not clarified by the data is why archives and records-management professionals need to demonstrate special flexibility. Perhaps statements that reference this trait are merely typical of job advertisements' formulation in general.

Because the needs of students' future employers and the skills expected of professionals entering the work force clearly merit consideration (see Cox, 2000; Eastwood, 2006), the study provides important information about the knowledge and skills valued from that angle. The findings help clarify the importance of IT skills, which has been subject to ongoing discussion in the literature for some time now (see, for example, Eastwood, 2006; Garaba, 2015; Poole and Todd-Diaz, 2022), while at the same time it should inspire practitioners to pay heed to education in and learning of interaction and co-operation skills. These are skills that could be explicitly acknowledged in the teaching methods (the methods themselves are left for the scope of other studies). Interaction and co-operation could be supported by traineeship opportunities as well.

Finally, the context must be acknowledged. Job advertisements are prepared for a specific use only. They do not represent the actual situation in the profession but provide a picture of an ideal employee for a post. Hence, the findings from the study illustrate the competencies and skills identified as desired amid recruitment of new employees from employers' point of view. Demands presented in an advertisement for a vacancy might even be out of step with reality, and the person ultimately hired might be far from the ideal described. Hence, a study such as ours cannot reveal what the actual competencies and skills of the professionals are. From a study focusing on recruitment practices in the records-management profession in Jamaica, Duffus (2017) concluded that the practitioners appointed to support and govern records-management services are insufficiently qualified for their roles and lack the skill sets and personality traits needed. That work illustrates how little is known and, therefore, the great potential benefit of studies focusing on curricula for archives and records management, on the real-world competencies and skills of the field's professionals, on how job advertisements are prepared and addressing the recruitment process – not least in the Finnish context. While our study points a way forward, it addresses the situation of only one recordkeeping culture, in Finland, and is not generalisable for the profession internationally.

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