

The Royal Bank of Scotland's 'Archive Taster Weeks'

Like all archive services, corporate archives seek to play a role in providing experience and training to both archive users and early career archivists. Not only do many potential researchers not understand the relevance, or availability, of business archives, but with today's students planning their careers in a difficult climate tailored, worthwhile work experience is really in demand.

During the summer of 2012 The Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) launched a new initiative called 'Archive Taster Weeks' which was conceived both to meet this need and to support the five-year National Strategy for Business Archives in Scotland which seeks to encourage archivists to share skills and build greater understanding and use of business collections.

RBS had long offered work placements to those seeking experience prior to, or during, postgraduate archive studies courses, but these had been limited opportunities largely taken up by those with the know-how and courage to approach the bank. So in spring 2012 RBS instead issued an open invitation to students at Edinburgh University to take part in week-long work experience placements in its archive. What was novel about this offer was the inclusion in the week of a series of formal, taught sessions on such topics as palaeography, the principles of information management and archival preservation - the idea was to couple hands on experience of cataloguing a large collection of seventeenth and eighteenth century banknotes, bills and receipts with insight into archival theory and the wider archival world.

With interest shown by over 50 students, an open day was held at the RBS archives to provide clarity about what the weeks would involve and the benefits that might accrue to participants. Subsequently, five Taster Weeks were offered between June and October on a first-come-first-served basis, with six places available on each week.

A total of 150 days of experience were provided in all. Feedback collected at the end of each week allowed the experience to be improved for each new group of students and RBS Group Archives' social media presence was used to report on the progress of the project creating a real sense of achievement for the students who took part.

The feedback from the students was universally positive, and included comment that the 'skills learnt would be treasured' and that 'this type of experience is extremely helpful'. A couple of the students are now seriously considering a career in archives or in depth research on a business archive collection. Several want to repeat the experience in the future.

In autumn 2012 the 'Archive Taster Weeks' project was recognised as an 'Archive Pace Setter' by the professional body for archivists in the UK, the Archives & Records Association, not least for its creative approach to outreach and skills sharing.

 www.rbs.com



 www.archives.org.uk/campaigns/archive-pace-setter-scheme.html

