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During the 2019/2020 Autumn & Spring terms, we held an Institute of Coding funded trial at Birkbeck, University of London, of a new one-year part-time Master's level Postgraduate Certificate framework in computing aimed at information professionals working in the cultural heritage sector.

From deploying simple scripts for everyday tasks, to developing tools for analysing collections data, the British Library and The National Archives are exploring different ways to meet demand for such skills, arising particularly from colleagues in curatorial and collections based roles.

This trial explored a model whereby cultural heritage professionals could gain crucial computational skills, immediately relevant to their roles, while earning a formal qualification in computer science, with the express support of their institution.

The trial

A cohort of 20 staff from British Library (12) and The National Archives in the UK (8), were selected through a formal application process at each institution (a total of 26 and 10 applications received respectively). Students undertook two newly designed modules at Birkbeck University:

- Demystifying Computing with Python
- Work-based project: Digital project design and development

A final module, [Analytic Tools for Information Professionals](#), is currently under development and will be launched as part of the full [Applied Data Science Postgraduate Certificate](#).

Outcomes

- Final student projects and coursework have been submitted, with results expected end of June 2020.
- A full evaluation of the trial is currently in progress, and will be published alongside the framework in a project report due early 2021.
- Birkbeck University of London has moved ahead with the launch of [Applied Data Science Postgraduate Certificate](#) this Autumn 2020/2021, leveraging the same framework developed in the trial while expanding it to include information professionals from a range of domains.

Acknowledgments

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Demystifying Computing with Python

Two 3hr lecture/lab sessions were held one day a week 9:00-16:00, over the course of five weeks at Birkbeck University. Managers were asked to consider attendance of their staff at these lectures to be part of a normal working day, rather than taken as special leave or holiday.

In this module, the lecturer aimed to incorporate datasets and contextual references from the cultural heritage sector where possible into the general python computing lessons and lectures.

Work-based project module

Students completed this module over 10 weeks working independently at their institution. Each student developed their project proposal with the input and approval of their manager, the aim being for projects to directly benefit the individual's current role and/or needs of the home institution. This also allowed for time to be negotiated on an individual basis for projects to be completed during work hours.

Details of projects undertaken will be included, with student permission, in the final report, as well as on the [project website](#). The following two examples give a good sense of the type of projects undertaken with the opportunity:

- [Automated text extraction from colonial-era maps of eastern Africa](#)
- [Distant reading descriptions and grouping topics from General Board of Health and Home Office, Local Government Act Office: Correspondence](#)