

AC⁺erm Project

Transforming Information &
Records Management through
Research & Development?

*Proceedings of the 3rd Northumbria
International Witness Seminar Conference*

4 March 2010, Newcastle upon Tyne

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Transforming Information & Records Management through Research & Development?

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Proceedings

Edited by:
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Arts & Humanities
Research Council



Funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC)

Grant Number: AH/D001935/1

Sponsored by Emerald Group Publishing Ltd

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A note on the text of these Proceedings

The full Proceedings comprise the text of the witness statements submitted in advance of the conference; audio recordings of the witness statements as delivered (which in some cases differed considerably from the written text); the transcription of the open discussions; and both text and audio recordings of the opening and closing remarks. The audio recordings are available at

http://www.northumbria.ac.uk/sd/academic/ceis/re/isrc/themes/rmarea/erm/diss/coll_diss/.

The AC⁺erm Project – Accelerating positive change in electronic records management' – is a research project carried out by the School of Computing, Engineering and Information Sciences in Northumbria University from 2007 to 2010. It aimed to investigate and critically explore issues and practical strategies to support accelerating the pace of positive change in managing electronic records.

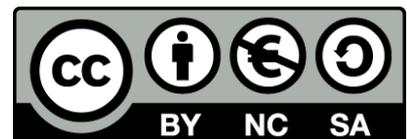
The project focused on designing an organisation-centred architecture from three perspectives: (i) people, including vision, awareness, culture, drivers and barriers; (ii) working practices including processes, procedures, policies and standards; and (iii) technology in terms of the design principles for delivering effective recordkeeping.

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Published in 2010

ISBN 978-1-86135-371-9

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Transforming Information & Records Management Through Research & Development?

Foreword

Professor Julie McLeod

Professor in Records Management, School of Computing, Engineering & Information Sciences, Northumbria University

These proceedings capture the content of the third Witness Seminar hosted by Northumbria University's School of Computing, Engineering and Information Sciences. Entitled '*Transforming Information and Records Management through Research and Development?*', the event took place on 4 March 2010 in the University's Great Hall, Sutherland Building, Newcastle upon Tyne. It built on the success of our two previous witness seminars,ⁱ in terms of its format and style, but was also different in some important ways.

Firstly, it represented the final event of a 3-year Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded research project – Accelerating positive change in e-records management (AC⁺erm); secondly, the seminars took a series of questions, rather than articles, as their starting point; and thirdly, it was much shorter, lasting only half a day. Although it was the final AC⁺erm project event, and therefore show cased some of the project's outputs, the sessions and discussions were deliberately designed to revolve around the *broader context* of research and development in records *and* information management. It provided a rare opportunity for anyone interested and/or involved in research and development and/or improving their organisation's management of information and records to listen to, learn from, actively discuss and network with the speakers and with fellow delegates. It attracted a group of around 50 academics and practitioners in the fields of information management, records management, archives and information systems, from the UK, Australia and Canada, who engaged in a critical examination of research and development for the information management professions. They openly shared their knowledge, experience, views and desires in the discussion and debate.

The first two sessions considered the transforming capacity of research & development from the academic and the practitioner perspective. The academic witnesses, deliberately chaired by a practitioner, began by giving statements on the value, impact and challenges of doing information and records management research and development, citing examples in support. Then the practitioner witnesses, this time deliberately chaired by a former academic, gave statements on the value and impact of research and development in this field, considering whether provided solutions or helped make improvements and if/why practitioners do/would engage in R&D. The final session was an open floor discussion on the future for research and development, facilitated by Professor Michael Moss. Delegates were asked their views on what the research agenda should be; who should do the research and where; how we can integrate research and practice; and whether we can assess the value and impact of research. The day ended with a reception sponsored by Emerald Publishing Ltd as part of the 20th Anniversary celebrations of the *Records Management Journal* during which many delegates continued to discuss the topics, make new contacts and catch up with existing ones.

As with our previous witness style seminars, the semi-structured, discursive format, free of PowerPoint presentations and slides but inclusive of a video of John McDonald's statement, engendered a relaxed, informal atmosphere, which encouraged participation. Judging by delegates' comments both during and after the event, the experience was as rich, enjoyable and stimulating as before.

During the day we critically discussed R&D. The witnesses presented their perspectives with passion and based on their experience. Ideas, insight and real examples of what works and what is needed to influence the direction and value of future R&D were debated.

Research and development has always been part of my working life; from my first post as a Research Associate, through my career in industry supporting R&D scientists to my current university post. Today research is part of many people's lives and on the agendas of many organisations.

For example, in the political arena the main UK political parties have voiced their views on R&D in the context of the economic situation and the future. In late 2009 the messages from the Conservative party were mixed, their influential Think Tank seeming to want to scrap R&D tax credits for large businesses yet their leader seemingly very positive about the role of R&D in growing the economy. Whilst Lord Mandelson, Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, announced the Government's new strategic framework for higher education, *Higher Ambitions*, which makes clear their view that research needs to be more closely aligned to business and have economic impact, as well as their plans for future concentration of funding on 'centres of excellence' and on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).ⁱⁱ

In the academic sector the next assessment of the quality of research in UK higher education institutions, the REF (Research Excellence Framework) will explicitly assess the *impact* of researchⁱⁱⁱ. For very scholarly, fundamental, theoretical domains this will be challenging, and even those which have a practical focus may not find it easy, for, as the quote used to announce this event highlighted, “*It turns out it take 30 years for a new idea to seep into culture*”^{iv}. Impact and value were discussed a lot during the day; measuring or assessing was not the only challenge, actually recognising it, knowing what had made an impact or what was valuable was perhaps more fundamental in some instances.^v

And in some parts of the private sector, such as pharmaceuticals, investment in R&D is vital for product innovation and development leading to competitive advantage.

Likewise, in practice professional associations have always included ‘development’ in their conference programmes, show casing the latest systems, services and technologies. More recently some have explicitly included research^{vi}. I noticed in the headline of a recent advert for an Archive Specialist at OPEC that the vacancy was for someone who would use “the latest trends in the science of Records Management and Archiving”^{vii} is clear indication surely of the desire to utilise R&D. Practitioners do small scale R&D but don’t always label it as such; in fact this emerged in the day’s discussion and was referred to as ‘problem solving’.^{viii}

All of this suggests that research and development is valuable to a wide range of people; it is necessary, it is natural. The challenge is to *maximise* its value and not constrain its focus or purpose. With that in mind the day generated some ideas for action which are shared here.

Whilst there was a general consensus that research and development is valuable and necessary, there were some strong and different views about access to it, because of traditional academic publishing practices; about the type of research and development that is undertaken (by academics and in practitioners) and what is needed; about the difficulty of assessing its value and impact and about funding models.

With the participants’ consent the event was audio recorded. The ‘proceedings’ therefore comprise the text of the pre-conference witness statements, the audio of the witnesses on the day, which in some cases was much different; the transcription of the discussions and both the text and audio of the opening and closing remarks. The proceedings will doubtless remind those of us who were there of how the afternoon developed; what we heard, how we debated and challenged ourselves and our colleagues. For those who were not present, I hope that this form of capture gives you a better sense of the atmosphere, the views, ideas, issues and concerns that is richer and more enjoyable, albeit one step removed.

Prior to the event the AC⁺erm project team had decided to make the outputs from the day freely available on the Web under a Creative Commons Licence – this proved to be a positive decision given the debate about the often restricted access to publications outside of the academic environment! We have shared key themes on our project blog and in short news articles in the profession and are planning to write other items on some of the burning issues that emerged from the day. We hope that all of this will encourage engagement and action and interest in participating in our next witness seminar event.

Julie McLeod
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Northumbria University
March 2010

ⁱ School of Computing, Engineering & Information Sciences, Northumbria University. *Exploring the essence of records management: Engaging with experts*. 4–5th May 2006, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK. Edited by: Susan Childs, Susan Heaford & Julie McLeod, 2006; and *Examining the issues & challenges of email and e-communications: exploring strategies with experts*. 24–25th October 2007, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK. Edited by: Susan Childs, Rachel Hardiman, Naomi Hay-Gibson, Elizabeth Lomas & Julie McLeod.

ⁱⁱ See: Hood, L. Tories weighing up tax credit revamp. Cover story. *Research Fortnight* 2 December 2009 www.researchprofessional.com; Gibney, E. Research concentration is back in higher education framework. *Research Fortnight*, 18 Nov 2009. “Research funding should be increasingly concentrated in the best universities, the government has said in its higher education framework, outlined by universities secretary Peter Mandelson on 3 November.” And quoting Department for BIS spokeswoman as saying future funding would need to take “care to support STEM subjects and research that covers more than one discipline.” Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. *Higher Ambitions: the future of universities in a knowledge economy*. November 2009. “In a more challenging climate for research, with tighter fiscal constraints and increased competition from other countries, we will need to carefully protect the excellence of our research base. This will require a greater focus on world-class research and greater recognition of the potential benefits of research concentration in key areas.” (p58) <http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/corporate/docs/h/09-1447-higher-ambitions.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ The REF “will focus on three elements, which together reflect the key characteristics of research excellence. These are: Outputs: The primary focus of the REF will be to identify excellent research of all kinds. This will be assessed through a process of expert review, informed by citation information in subjects where robust data are available (for example, in medicine and science). Impact: Significant additional recognition will be given where researchers build on excellent research to deliver demonstrable benefits to the economy, society, public policy, culture and quality of life. Impacts will be assessed through a case-study approach that will be tested in a pilot exercise. Environment :The REF will take account of the quality of the research environment in supporting a continuing flow of excellent research and its effective dissemination and application.”

<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/Research/ref/>

^{iv} “It turns out it take 30 years for a new idea to seep into culture. Technology does not drive change. Technology does not drive change. It is our collective response to the options and opportunities presented by technology that drives change.” *Design World*, 1992. See Paul Saffo’s site

<http://www.saffo.com/aboutps/interviews/Pauldesignworld1992.pdf>

^v See the open floor discussion, in particular Stuart Orr’s point about the value of research as “a catalyst to things happening” but not necessarily appreciating that or, presumably, recognising it.

^{vi} See for example the Society of American Archivists’ 3rd Annual Research Forum 2009

<http://www.archivists.org/conference/austin2009/researchforum.asp>

^{vii} Society of Archivists. *ARC recruitment*, December 2009.

^{viii} See discussion following Session 2 – The practitioner perspective, particularly comments by Shona Robertson, Parliamentary Archives and Caroline Williams, Academic and Practitioner.

OPENING SESSION

12:45–13:10

Formal Opening [Edited transcript of actual speech]

Professor Alistair Sambell

Dean of the School of Computing, Engineering & Information Sciences, Northumbria University

On behalf of the School and University I am delighted to welcome you here today to this 3rd Witness Seminar in records management run by Julie. Today's seminar looks at the place of research in transforming practice in records management; the value and nature of research from academic and practitioner perspectives.

Northumbria University became a university in 1992, but we have been delivering higher education here in the centre of Newcastle for over 100 years. We're a relatively large University – one of the six largest HE providers in the UK (35,000 students) and one of the 10 largest postgraduate providers in the UK. We have two campuses; the main one, based here in the City Centre, has recently undergone major redevelopment, including the new "East" Campus and sports building. I hope you get chance to see the city and this campus – including St James' Park (as we're currently top of the league!!)

This building, Sutherland Building, itself has an interesting history having been owned since it was built in 1887 by Durham University, Newcastle University and ourselves. In that time it has been used for medical and dental Schools, and is now used for conference/meeting space as well as many of the service departments in the University. The design was to allow lots of natural light for dissection and the story goes that the basement is haunted I presume from the medical school days rather than former VCs trapped in this academic in-between world!

Our School, CEIS, brings together technology and information – across programmes in Mechanical Engineering, Electrical Engineering, Computing (hardware and software), Maths, Information Systems and Information and Records Management. This includes undergraduate programmes in Information and Communication Management and Librarianship, as well as postgraduate distance learning programmes in Information and Library Management and Records Management. The School has around 3,400 students enrolled; around 25% of our students are international, 400 are postgraduates and 80 are PhD students.

Northumbria, along with all other UK Universities, entered the 2008 RAE [Research Assessment Exercise] and was very successful, certainly in our terms, with all 12 areas in which we entered demonstrating internationally excellent or world leading research. Our new (two years ago) Vice Chancellor has set a vision clearly based upon research, with major investment in research staff and commitment to doubling research activity by 2013 (for the Research Excellence Framework – REF).

So why invest in research? As a "new" University, it has been suggested that we should focus on teaching, and especially as pressure for resources increases the argument to focus research within an "elite" increases. We (Northumbria University) liked the RAE 2008 as the new graded profiles gave the opportunity to demonstrate world-class research, judged on a par with others. The outcome being research quality was much more visible, even where the volume is lower.

As academics we love research – we have a passion for our subjects, finding out more about our subjects and telling other people about it. Teaching and research are ideal!

But of course, research costs money – in times, salaries etc – and increasingly we are asked to justify ourselves. The academic value of knowledge for its own sake is no longer enough (if it ever was).

Research informs teaching and the curriculum, attracts high calibre staff, drives student recruitment, especially internationally, where students can select any institution (not simply the local market). It also directly drives reputation and league tables – which again affects recruitment etc.

I would argue that without research we are not universities, but how do we demonstrate impact – and hence value – of research? Impact is explicitly requested in the new REF.

How do we translate research into professional practice? There is the indirect – via teaching, the curriculum etc. – but the expectation now is of very direct links to practitioners. From the government perspective, economic impact is critical.

These sorts of discussions are very real within all universities, especially a university such as ours where we are looking to build on pockets of excellent research and make a major increase in research profile at a time when resources are increasingly stretched. To make it work we have to be able to justify and demonstrate the value in research. Hence the topic of today's seminar is very relevant

I'm delighted to have you here today; special thanks to our speakers who are willing to be witnesses. Also thank you to Emerald Publishing who are sponsoring the reception at the end of the day.

Introduction – The aims of the event and the ‘witness seminar’ format [Written text provided in advance]

Professor Julie McLeod

Professor in Records Management, School of Computing, Engineering & Information Sciences, Northumbria University

Welcome to Northumbria University and the 3rd witness seminar hosted by the School of Computing, Engineering & Information Sciences, in the recently refurbished Great Hall, Sutherland Building.

This witness seminar is slightly different to our previous ones in that, rather than focusing on a topic, it is very much linked to a research project we've been conducting over the past 3 years – AC⁺erm (Accelerating positive change in e-records management) – funded by the AHRC. In fact it's the final event marking the end of the project. But it's not just about that project. The project team – Sue Childs, Rachel Hardiman and myself – decided that rather than focus solely on the AC⁺erm project we would broaden the scope to research and development and not just in records management but *information* and records management. We thought it would have wider appeal and would attract people from the wider information management spectrum. And it's good to see that it has! It also fits the focus of our other sponsor today – Emerald Publishing Ltd – whose ethos is *Research you can use*.

We felt it would be valuable to consider the value and impact of our particular project in the wider context of the *value* and *impact* of research and development (R&D) for the information management profession by asking the question

To set the context, a little background about R&D and about the AC⁺erm project.

The seven UK Research Councils have invested around £2.8 billion annually in university research across the full spectrum of academic disciplines. What's their return on investment? What value is it for professionals? What is its economic, social, public policy and cultural impact, given their money is public money? These are questions that are being asked by the Councils and others.

Well one could argue that without public/government funding there would be no WorldWideWeb, no genetic technologies built upon the structure of DNA, less knowledge of our history/heritage. With these things we can communicate and collaborate globally in real time, find new ways to combat disease and improve the quality of life, enrich our lives by learning about our past and shaping our future.

But what is the value, potential and realised, of research for information and records management? Where is research happening? How and where is it being used? Who are the researchers? What partnerships are needed? What other research is needed? How can and should we conduct it, particularly in our current economic climate? Indeed can it help us rise up and out of these economic doldrums?

Well perhaps I can briefly consider some of these questions in relation to the AC⁺erm Project.

In 2005, when I wrote the project bid, with vital input from my colleague Sue Childs, there had never been such a large records management project funded by a UK Research Council; in fact there hadn't been a UK *electronic* records management project before, although a lot of important digital preservation work was ongoing. *The* electronic records management project that records professionals knew about was InterPARES, at the University of British Columbia, Canada. And the project that academics knew about was the University of Pittsburgh's on functional requirements for electronic records. So, to bid for the *first UK* ERM project, to make it not one but three years long, to aim to involve between 200–250 people (worldwide!), to adopt some quite different methods for our discipline *and* to include a PhD student was quite ambitious. [In fact I know my project team colleagues have thought I was either mad or foolish on a number of occasions during its lifetime! But I don't hold it against them – in my defence I say that it's fine to make a mistake but not to repeat the same one!] Despite or in spite of that, our bid to the AHRC was successful and we know the evaluation process is rigorous and highly competitive. So, a group of peers must have felt it was worth

the investment and any risks they saw in it. I just hope they feel it has been. I know we do, even though I know we feel some things could have been better.

So, what did we set out to achieve and what have we achieved? Very briefly, we wanted to try to *understand issues and develop practical strategies to accelerate the pace of positive change in managing e-records* given that ERM has been a significant issue for organisations for some time and that, despite various guidelines, standards and software systems, in the words of John McDonald, the pace of change had been relatively slow.¹ We wanted to:

- investigate the issues and problems of ERM
- develop a contemporary critical view of the state of ERM globally at both the research and practical levels
- challenge existing recordkeeping paradigms, and
- develop and share examples of ERM strategies, tactics and practice.

Not a lot for 1.8 FTEs!

The project included a systematic review of the literature and investigations into three aspects facets of ERM which engaged professionals and academics from different disciplines and stakeholder groups in the UK and internationally; and we opted for a major dissemination activity running throughout the project to regularly share ongoing findings via website and blog. I won't say more about what we did and how we did it as *AC⁺erm – the movie* will be premiered in the tea break.

But I will share a few statistics:

- our project has involved **56 active** Delphi participants and **156** colloquium attendees (excluding the 50 others who agreed to participate or registered but either withdrew or didn't attend)
- we have posted **87 ongoing findings** to our website (e.g. reviews of literature; analyses of e-Delphi studies; lists of ERM resources)
- **94 blog posts** and had **31 comments** with **3 followers**, over 6000 unique visitors and 1604 returning visitors from over 30 countries
- **67 tweets, 56 followers, 11 lists** (or recommendations from other Twitterers as being a useful Twitter account)
- the **84 visits to the project website** in the first year (2007) have **tripled** year on year and are a good indication of continued connectivity; and...
- we have had **2,573 queries** for our custom **Google search engine**.

We have yet to publish peer reviewed articles on the project methodology or synthesised 'headline' findings.

We have documented case examples, critical success factors, drivers and barriers to change (in the ongoing findings) and we have developed a series of vignettes or tools that distil some of the challenges and problems and present possible solutions. These take different forms and are on display today (the movie being one of them). They have been reviewed by our participants and refined and are aimed at different stakeholders. And we have made many presentations, some by invitation, at conferences and meetings in the UK and overseas.

The project has had a sufficiently significant life to build the all-important stakeholder relationships and trans-disciplinary engagement, to build capacity and depth of understanding, to raise awareness, to observe and reflect on changes and developments.

Have we been successful?

Have we influenced the development of policy, practice or service provision for you/your organisations? Have we shaped behaviours of RM professionals or other stakeholders?

What have we/will we contribute to our understanding of ERM issues and their relative priority/importance, about solutions that work and solutions to avoid?

Have we helped to reframe debates about what records management principles are appropriate for ERM and what technology approaches are desirable, feasible and likely to happen in organisations? Have we helped to change mindsets about ERM, about research and development?

¹ McDonald, J. (2005). The wild frontier ten years on. In: McLeod, J and Hare, CE (Eds). *Managing electronic records*. Facet. pp.1–17.

We *know* we have built capacity and developed our own technical/professional skills; we *know* we have engaged many people (over 200) willing to exchange knowledge and validate our findings and we *have* helped (dare we suggest driven or pioneered?) the development of what was a nascent ERM research activity in the UK.

But has AC⁺erm been valuable? Has it had impact and if so how and what? You and others can tell us.

Back to today's event. The focus is the transforming capacity of research & development from two perspectives – the academic and the practitioner. Among the questions we'll be asking are what is the value of doing information and records management research? What's the impact? Does it provide solutions? Does it help make improvements? What are the challenges? Why engage in R&D in our field?

The aim of our first witness conference was “to organise a “thinking” event; something to ... encourage reflection”². The second witness conference built on our success and attempted to be a little more ambitious, identifying topics and opportunities for research and development. So it's perhaps fitting that our third seminar is devoted to R&D.

I know some of you have been at our previous witness seminars but, for those who haven't, I thought it would be useful to say something about their style. They offer an opportunity to discuss and explore an event with experts and leading names in a particular field and they are rooted in oral history³. They gather key people together to discuss a chosen event and capture their testimony of it. The discussion is usually chaired by a leading person, recorded and transcribed to form a record that complements existing written records. So a full account of the event is preserved for future *research* – quite apposite given today's topic.

Our witness seminars are a modification of this format. Their purpose isn't to recollect and document contemporary history (i.e. an event) but to explore a **topic** of current and future significance to our profession. Today our topic is **the transforming capacity of research and development**, and our **key people** – our invited witnesses and chairs – are academics **and** practitioners from the broader **information** and records management discipline. They work in different sectors and come from different countries⁴ as do you, our delegates. It will be interesting to see how different or similar our perspectives are.

The aim is to engage in a critical examination of research and development by sharing our knowledge, experience, views and desires in discussion and debate to influence the direction of future research and development in the information management professions.

The two seminars will be semi-structured taking as their starting point a series of questions around the transforming capacity of R&D. The Chairperson will ask each witness to present their views and their position. He/she will then facilitate discussion and debate between the witnesses and open up the discussion to everyone; they will end their seminar with a short summary. The final session, facilitated by Professor Michael Moss, will be an open floor discussion picking up on issues raised and new ones that anyone wishes to debate.

I hope you find the style of the event an interesting and valuable one if it is new to you. Its success rests not just with the invited expert witnesses and chairs, but with all of us. It is meant to be interactive. So, please do join in the discussion; do be provocative and challenging, and, at the same time, do respect the opinions of others. Most of all, do enjoy the experience.

With that, I would now like to introduce the first seminar – *The academic perspective* – and invite Adrian Cunningham of the National Archives of Australia, and member of the AC⁺erm project Expert Panel, to come forward with his witnesses and introduce the first seminar.

Thank you.

² School of Computing, Engineering & Information Sciences, Northumbria University. Exploring the essence of records management: Engaging with experts. 4–5th May 2006, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK. Edited by: Susan Childs, Susan Heaford & Julie McLeod, 2006.

³ In the UK witness seminars have been pioneered by the Centre for Contemporary British History and the Wellcome Trust. See <http://icbh.ac.uk/icbh/witness/welcome.html> and www.ucl.ac.uk/histmed/publications/wellcome-witnesses/index.html for further information on witness seminars.

⁴The UK, Australia & Canada

SEMINAR 1 - THE TRANSFORMING CAPACITY OF RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT: ACADEMIC PERSPECTIVES

13:10–14:40

Chair's Introduction [Edited Transcript]

Adrian Cunningham

National Archives of Australia

This, as Julie said, is a group of witness statements from the academic perspective, those of you who know me will know I am not an academic, I am a practitioner and Julie [McLeod] tells me that that was no accident. She wanted there to be a bit of ying and yang in the session; I'm the ying, they're the yang or vice versa. So, I am the practitioner who is here to keep the academics honest as it were!

The batting order for this afternoon will be slightly different to what you have on your programme. We will go with the three academics from Northumbria University first, in the order that they are listed and then we will finish with Steve Bailey coming up behind. I should also explain that we have apologies from one of the witnesses, Elizabeth Lomas, who is not able to be with us, so Heather Jack has very kindly volunteered to channel Elizabeth's spirit and presence and deliver Elizabeth's witness statement on her behalf.

If I can just crave your indulgence to set the scene a little bit, forgive me if it is a practitioner's perspective that I start off with. I have spent quite a bit of time over the years reflecting on this issue of practitioners and practitioner organisations collaborating with universities and research projects of one kind or another. When I first started working at the National Archives of Australia (NAA) back in the 1990s practitioners around the world were really scratching their heads about what to do with this problem of electronic records and it all seemed just too difficult and we didn't really know where to start. Actually doing research, conducting research projects, seemed like the obvious way forward. So in those days, as Julie [McLeod] has mentioned, the two big electronic research projects were coming out of the University of British Columbia in Canada and the University of Pittsburgh, and it was entirely natural for practitioners with an interest in electronic records to take an extremely close interest in the work of those two landmark research projects.

So, the practitioner/researcher dialogue back in those days was something that groups, on both sides I think, felt strongly compelled to pursue. My first direct exposure with that world was that I attended a week-long workshop (I'd guess you would call it) in Pittsburgh called 'An Electronic Records Research Seminar', which brought together all of the leading electronic records researchers in the world at that time and a lot of practitioners as well, representatives from many of the major national archives around the world. That was an interesting experience, and one of the things that was particularly novel about it was that it was probably the only occasion where Luciana Duranti and David Bearman were publicly civil to each other. [laughter] And I found this a bit disconcerting because it wasn't what I was expecting. Then I realised, the penny dropped after a while because the unstated reason for this seminar was to convince the National Historical Publications and Research Commission to continue to fund electronic records research and so Luciana and company had to be on their very best behaviour to impress the funders.

What was also interesting about that event was that those of us who were there from practitioner organisations, at least some of us, started to feel after a few days of this meeting, that we were just there as patsies. Clearly if the idea is to convince the funding bodies to put more funding into research... and I can remember Steve Stuckey from the National Archives of Australia at the concluding session getting up and getting stuck into the researchers and saying 'listen guys, we are your customers and you are not listening enough to us because it seems to me that some of the research that you are willing to do is for its own end' etc. So that caused a frisson in the room at the time. In fact there were back-room conversations of practitioners from different National Archives getting together saying 'well, the sorts of needs we have are clearly not going to be satisfied by these damned researchers so maybe we had better set up our own collaborative research infrastructures', and that was actually done for a few years. There was something called the G4, I think it was, which brought together representatives from each of the National Archives in Canada, the US, the UK and Australia. So that was an interesting exposure to research from a practitioner's perspective.

Since then I've been involved in two Monash University metadata research projects which have produced two glowing PhDs in recordkeeping metadata – Kate Cumming and Joanne Evans. Having a PhD in metadata is something to grapple with! [laughter] I've also been involved in this project, as

Julie says, and also in the Digital Curation Curriculum Project coming out of the University of North Carolina.

What I would observe in the course of all those years is that there has been a bit of a shift from the sort of collaborative research that practitioner organisations seek to get involved in. Initially it was a lot about theoretical and conceptual frameworks but more recently the focus has been very much on 'well, it is nice to have theoretical and conceptual frameworks but how on earth do we get them implemented?' And, indeed, that is the focus of the AC⁺erm (Accelerating Positive Change in Electronic Records Management) project. Why is the world being so slow at implementing a lot of these standards and frameworks that we have developed through our collaborative research? Also I would observe that over time there has been a growing ambivalence about collaborative research from the practitioner organisations and in some ways, as a person who has been heavily involved with R&D work at the National Archives of Australia, I've felt increasingly like I've been swimming against the tide a bit in terms of convincing my colleagues that this kind of collaborative activity is worth giving priority to and putting resources into.

So in that context, purely by coincidence in fact, a couple of weeks ago, a policy statement that I've drafted for the National Archives of Australia has been signed off by our leadership team. It is a set of policies and procedures for participating in collaborative research projects. Previously we were a policy-free zone in this area but we now have a policy, I am pleased to say, which has a section which is entitled 'Rationale for NAA Participation in Collaborative Research Projects'. Because I didn't want the rationale for getting involved in collaborative research to be folklore, or something that only I understood in the organisation, I wanted it to be a formally signed off policy statement. I would like to thank Caroline Williams, who I know is in the room, for helping me come up with this product; it took a few years to gestate but some years ago Caroline emailed me out-of-the-blue and asked me whether the NAA had a policy on collaborative research, and I had to reply saying 'no we don't'. So I had to try and make up what the rationale was on the spot. That email which I then wrote to Caroline, I have actually quoted huge slabs of it, almost verbatim, in this policy document. And Caroline, it does include the phrase 'pioneer practitioners' which is something that the National Archives claims to be and I know that that phrase has been picked up in a similar policy and strategies statement that the NAA now has.

So, that is setting the scene a little from the practitioner's perspective and I would now like to hand over to our first witness.

Witness Statements [Written Text]

A Personal Research Journey

Sue Childs

Research Fellow, School of Computing, Engineering and Information Sciences, Northumbria University

I've been involved in research in various ways for most of my career (dare I say it, about 35 years). I thought I would take you through my personal research journey. I'll not cover every job I've done, but just select the ones that illustrate issues about building and sustaining research capacity (personal, organisational, and disciplinary) and about impact.

But before I do that I should note two things: First, I am a scientist and information manager by background, not a records manager; and secondly, my career is rather an *ad hoc* one, not the standard progression of an academic.

I studied biology for my first degree. It was there I was introduced to the research literature by lecturers who were active in research themselves. I was encouraged (even required) to look at original research papers and I undertook mini-research activities linked to the research the lecturers were doing. I was particularly interested in genetics so I remember nights and weekends checking fruit flies and harvesting bacterial cultures. An early introduction to the 'drudgery' of research!

Though I could have gone on to research in the genetics field, I chose to get a job as an information scientist in a drug company. I then undertook a Masters in Information Studies. The long dissertation I did as part of the Masters was my first real taste of independent research. When outside people asked for copies of my dissertation there was a real sense of achievement.

These two examples raise the issue of the importance of the link between research and teaching. If you are to inspire the researchers of the future, then students need to be taught by active researchers and to undertake their own 'research' as part of their studies.

The next stage in my research journey was when I became one of the clinical librarians at Guy's Hospital London in a research project evaluating the clinical librarianship concept in the UK setting. Clinical librarians offer an outreach service to support healthcare staff, which in our case involved attendance on ward rounds and at clinical meetings. The concept was first developed in Canada and the US. Though I was one of two 'guinea pigs' being evaluated by the project researcher, she encouraged us to write up our own experiences as part of the project outputs and to feel that we were co-researchers, not passive subjects. She generously gave of her experience and by 'sitting with Nelly' I learnt an incredible amount about research techniques (as well as research politics!).

This raises two issues.

First, the importance of the mentoring role. Research is a practical activity that is best learnt by doing it under the guidance of an experienced researcher.

Secondly, impact. This research was carried out from 1978 to 1980. Clinical librarianship became taken up as a service in the UK at the beginning of the 2000s, over 20 years later. It became a feasible service because of changes in the workplace – technological (PCs and the Web) and policy (evidence-based medicine). This shows the long time lag of impact of research, and that other factors are involved in the uptake of research ideas into practice. And how can we measure whether our research contributed to the implementation of the idea, how it contributed and to what extent? For various reasons, including concerns about the viability of the activity and personal ones, the project researcher and project director did not actively promote the idea.

I then had a number of research and librarianship jobs in the UK and Australia. Working as an information management practitioner keeps your research skills honed between research jobs – keeping up with the research literature, carrying out literature reviews, classifying, cataloguing and indexing (which underpins qualitative analysis).

In the late 1980s I moved to the North East [of England] and carried out a number of research projects both as an independent consultant and as an employee of Durham University and of Information North (a development agency for libraries in the North East). These projects included: evaluating Newcastle Polytechnic Library's services to NHS [National Health Service] staff; developing a Health Information Plan for the North East; surveying nursing libraries in the North East; determining library requirements for an NHS trust.

This raises two issues.

The first is about research impact. In contrast to the clinical librarianship example above, all these activities had very immediate impact; they were commissioned to deal with a current problem or issue. Impact was local/national in scope, driving policy and service change. But they were of the moment – though the published work might still contain some interesting information for current activities. So you would need to immediately document the impact; in a few years in a rapidly changing environment (particularly the NHS!) reorganisation might have removed all traces of the policy / service impacted upon.

The second is about mode of publication. The findings from these projects were disseminated by research reports placed in the public domain and often also by journal articles. Research reports are vastly underrated. They provide the full details of the findings - the methodology and data – plus the necessary context to fully understand them. These details and context also enable practitioners to implement and apply the research in practice, i.e. they enable research impact. With the Web it is now very easy to put these reports into the public domain and make them fully and easily accessible. However, the [UK] RAE/REF¹ process weights reports very lowly, and you are required to produce peer-reviewed articles for the most highly rated academic journals.

In 2000, I became a researcher in the Information Management Research Institute (IMRI) in the School of Information Studies at Northumbria University – our current Information Management Innovation Research Group is a lineal descendent of IMRI, via a series of institutional reorganisations.

IMRI was a very active research group involving academic lecturers as well as employing a number of contract researchers. We undertook externally funded research projects in a wide range of information management topics. Projects I was involved in covered health information: e.g. partnership working between HE [Higher Education] and NHS libraries, library and information strategies for NHS trusts, judging the quality of web-based information by health consumers. But I also started working with Julie McLeod on records management projects, e.g. managing research records, assessing the impact of ISO 15489, evaluating RM toolkits, and now Ac⁺erm.

¹ RAE: Research Assessment Exercise; REF: Research Excellence Framework.

This raises the issue of building research capacity.

IMRI was the result of many factors: the development of a research culture with the School of Information Studies over many years, with experienced academics very well thought of in their area of expertise; a VC who invested in research by funding research institutes (choice of schools to have an institute was by competitive tender), and funding from previous RAE submissions. I also think that the level of granularity in the University structure helped. We were a School that had one disciplinary focus. IMRI was very successful and with its body of work built up a solid national, even international, reputation.

However research capacity can be difficult to sustain in a changing environment, and any approach must be flexible. The School of Information Studies was merged into the School of Informatics and then into the current School of Computing, Engineering and Information Sciences. The University also changed its approach to supporting research and research institutes ceased to exist in that form. Wider factors also have an effect, particularly the ever-changing RAE/REF activity. RAE/REF drives a view that research councils are a preferred source of research funding. However, as IMRI we had received funding from specialised funding sources such as the British Library, Re:Source and JISC, which were interested in information management / records management. Some of these sources either no longer fund research or have widened their activities to include other areas of work.

At Northumbria University, our subject is now a small section within a School with a wide-ranging group of disciplines. Information management / records management is a cross-cutting discipline. We have lost some of the disciplinary focus of our smaller, one-discipline school. On the other hand, we have opened up possibilities for cross-disciplinary collaboration. Our current research group also includes staff interested in information systems research. Within the current research group, records management research is flourishing. 'Small but perfectly formed'.

Thank you.

Dr Alison Pickard

Head of Information and Communication Management, School of Computing, Engineering and Information Sciences, Northumbria University

There is for me no doubt in the value of research output from Research Council UK funded research, examples of this value are included in your colloquium briefing. For me the question isn't around the value of that research in terms of discovery, it's the value in terms of measured impact.

Until very recently most of my research over the past six years has focussed on small-scale, local research done on behalf of public-sector information and library services and schools. Much of this research has been done by me in my own or in the university's time using Research allowance in time granted by the university. The reasons for this are twofold – very often this research is needed at a time when there may not be an appropriate call for funded research from the various councils and the practitioners who approach me want results relatively quickly. One example is research into the information needs of refugees and asylum seekers done on behalf of the 'Welcome to your Library' project – there was no budget allocation for research in this national project, the funding focussed on practical provision but before that could be done the Tyne and Wear consortium wanted to establish what users needed. We carried out that investigation on their behalf.

Personally, I have two main reasons for engaging in this type of research;

- I am really interested in what is going on in the public sector and this keeps me very much up to date with developments and initiatives and it allows for practitioner input into the research activity
- Reports feed directly back into service delivery plans – impact can be seen relatively soon after the research findings have been shared.

You may have noticed how this event was described in the final programme you were sent, now I will have to quote...

"It provides a rare opportunity for *anyone* interested and/or involved in research and development and improving their organisation's management of information and records..."

What does this imply?

This highlights one of my points today – opportunities like this are RARE, but why?

Research excellent has traditionally been measured by output but output focussed in a particular direction: that direction is recognised academic journals – journals that practitioners rarely, if ever, have access to.

In an ideal world we would do both, as is the case today with this rare witness seminar that is free to all. The reality is that when we are faced with the usual pressures of teaching, research and management, we are encouraged to go for the primary goal – publication in recognised academic journals.

Research funded by Research Councils has had and will continue to have a huge impact on both professional practice and the growing body of knowledge in our discipline. For this to be encouraged we need to seriously consider how we measure research excellence and what is regarded as the most important output of research activity. The other issue I have is that research funded by Research Councils UK has already been funded by public money, yet expectation is that we publish in relatively expensive academic journals that are rarely (if ever) seen by practitioners. Are we paying twice for the same knowledge? – 2.8 billion per year is a lot of money, is the way forward more events like this?

Why aren't these events recognised for the real value they have and difference they can make to a discipline.

Research and/or Practice – or just plain active thinking?

[Statement delivered by Heather Jack in the absence of the author]

Elizabeth Lomas

PhD Student, School of Computing, Engineering and Information Sciences, Northumbria University

This statement is a narrative stream of reflections. I am indebted in my research endeavours to my Supervisors Prof. Julie McLeod and Dr David Wainwright and my fellow co-researchers in the Continued Communication Group.

The spirit of a witness statement is that it should contain personal reflection on the subject at hand, which in the context of this particular Panel is the research perspective. In this context my reflections are somewhat limited as in fact although I have been engaged in PhD research for the last two and half years, for the 15 years preceding my transition into the research arena I was a practitioner (albeit within contexts often with strong research frameworks). This experience shapes the way in which I have conducted my research and my perspective on the distinctions between research and practice. It is my belief that there need to be far closer links between research and practice within the records and information management arena whilst understanding and respecting where valuable differences may be mapped and preserved in the case of particular research projects.

Why did I step away? Stepping away is to be recommended for new perspectives, insight and experience. Everyone should be forced to have a role change at least every 15 years – the same exchange might be productively suggested to academics who teach in practice-based areas. It is a personal perspective but those I encounter across Universities who have had more varied experiences, do function and collaborate in a different way (and yes, my Supervisor Prof McLeod had a successful career in practice before also stepping in a different direction!). Personally I have found a PhD is a challenging, rewarding and life-changing experience that develops the time for new thinking, learning and personal development. I have made new networks and stepped up to a higher level in some contexts whilst having the valuable opportunity to be humbled by starting at the bottom of the research ladder.

At the end of my contract I may well step back into full time practice with some additional skills and experience to deliver into this arena. So I do not see research and practice as mutually exclusive. What I do see is that currently stepping between the two is not common and that the transition is not always straightforward. In academia, research pressures make secondments and career breaks difficult. In practice, outside the consultancy arena, PhDs in the UK are not always valued (some other countries do have a deeper level of understanding and respect for PhDs). However, as the government is increasing the emphasis on knowledge transfer, I hope that this may increase the opportunities to navigate between the two arenas.

Following the academic career route, whilst practical expertise enables me to teach, I must understandably obtain a PhD to progress and develop research skills. I would not wish to see that research path diluted but this can be tough to achieve without either years of juggling work and a PhD or a severe salary drop to undertake a full-time PhD. Different funding models for mature PhD students might be helpfully developed. If we want to be able to develop a stronger research profile within the records and information management we do need a wider pool of expertise. The route into

the profession is often a long road and people are unlikely to progress to a PhD in records management straight from an undergraduate course. Consideration for other candidates needs to be fostered. I would like to learn more about the concepts of work-based PhDs, although I am yet to be convinced that these would work. My concern in this context is that they might not be respected by academics, thus making disciplines that adopt them seem second rate.

So, in the context of this Panel, what does research deliver that cannot be gained from practice alone – new perspective, insight, testing and innovation. It is not practical to expect the majority of employers to constantly innovate in records and information management (which may not be the core business). In fact the TNA's² push in 1999 for government to use, at that stage fairly new, EDRM [Electronic Document and Records Management] technologies across government departments with limited testing in terms of the time and cultural change requirements, resulted in many costly failures (there were some success stories) which have left an unfortunate records management legacy in some government quarters. To my knowledge, none of the key research institutes conducted tests for the government in this area or were consulted. However, research is the area in which we can afford to 'fail' (or test) and learn. David Snowden refers to this as 'safe fail' and believes that it is the key to evolving answers to complex situations. Complicated solutions can be managed by experts but complex situations require probing to develop responses and this is the domain of research (Snowden, 2001).

Research is also the area in which we can innovate and make leaps forward. The Internet comes in part from research innovations. However it must be noted that the nature of innovation is that we cannot always predict where success and change will be developed and impact – for that reason it is important to have projects with potentially unpredictable outcomes. As demonstrable 'impact' increasingly forms part of the UK government's research agenda, some of the most innovative research may not occur in the UK. Funding agendas are critical to the research that is delivered. Public-sector funding for research not only enables research without direct application but it is essential that research can take place clearly separated from commercial bias and for that reason some research, whilst testing practice, must be conducted without influence or funding from the commercial sectors or those with any agenda to bias the findings.

However some research also fails to deliver because it is never transferred into practice (the next step). JISC are currently taking forward their research by fostering practical tests and this is to be commended to deliver the value of research (JISC InfoNet, 2009). However, often practice-based research, even by organisations with a strong research ethos, is conducted with limited reference to expert research knowledge. I have had the privilege of spending two years under the rigorous watch of Professor Laurence Moseley (a leading quantitative researcher) who has checked my surveys, rejected and then refined them. I have also spent two years discussing qualitative research with the Ac⁺erm team (Sue Childs, Rachel Hardiman and Julie McLeod). Sue Child's (Ac⁺erm's Senior Research Fellow) coding, analysis and rigour is a research exemplar. But too many practitioners think that they can step into the research arena and that it is easy to construct a survey or carry out interviews. The results of these initiatives are often at best poor or inconclusive and at worst biased and damaging to the reputation of research. I have been really impressed with the seriousness with which research teaching for the records management MSc students is taken at Northumbria University – who complete a whole module on research methods as well as delivering a dissertation. Many have commented to me at a later date how valuable they have found this training; equal in essence to the records and information management skills they have gained.

One link that we have not mentioned, which in essence forms a continual exchange between the requirements of research and practice, is teaching. University faculties and interests are driven increasingly by research targets and student numbers. To cite a case in point, the fall in student demand for modern language courses has impacted upon the number of staff in faculties across the country and thus the research conducted in these areas. Where one's discipline is even more closely connected to vocational courses, as is the case for records and information management, then the link between practice and teaching is inevitable. If the job market no longer wished to employ records and information managers, student numbers would fall and faculties decline. So as a member of Northumbria's teaching team, I confess, that we want to see a buoyant market for records management employment.

The profession is undergoing a paradigm shift as information is now born digitally potentially in a Web 2.0 application beyond an organisation's boundaries, perhaps in another legislative jurisdiction. So we must ensure that research addresses these shifts and that the universities' teaching keeps students at

² TNA: The National Archives (UK).

the cutting edge of changes and skilled for the current and future job market shifts. Born-digital data can be stored overseas and the management outsourced. It is the management and migration costs that are expensive not the storage so we need to ascertain where we add value within the context of new economic information models. These questions cross international boundaries and a range of disciplines and my own research is seeking to deal with some of these questions.

I have set up the framework for a co-operative inquiry (Continued Communication) of which my PhD in fact forms a very small part. I am working as a co-researcher with 80 international co-researchers from research and practice, with multidisciplinary expertise (archivists, communication experts, designers, engineers, linguists, psychologists etc). The Continued Communication Group is investigating communications in the 21st century using a range of tools to support both the research aspects of the project and the practical outputs that are being evolved. Many of those taking part have 'day jobs' but they have been able to bring to the project different ideas and experience which have evolved through research and practice.

From this work I learnt that I was biased by UK perspectives and that the agenda, drivers and professional status of records and information managers across the world differs greatly. However from outside the professional limitations I have learnt a huge amount from those working in other disciplines, e.g. engineers, linguists, psychologists. One of the great challenges of the project has been building common understanding across disciplines and languages. This has been a real eye-opener as we need common language that all can understand. The value of the term 'records', which does not exist in many languages, is a real stumbling block for the profession and we must embrace the term 'information' into our professional domain whilst retaining the valuable elements of records management. The Continued Communication group's comments on this in respect of the international records management standard ISO 15489 will be available soon on the Group's website at www.continuedcommunication.org. Also on the site will be a holistic approach to communications delivered through a Communication Architecture Toolkit. This will be an approach that crosses disciplines and boundaries and tries to take records management out of its 'box'.

If records and information managers want to shape their professional futures and remain relevant and valid then research plays a potentially important part. The challenge for many is finding the time and so I would suggest that the co-operative model that the Continued Communication project has established could be a valuable way of developing further research, practice and CPD across a small professional sector which could interlink into other relevant professions. Psychologists accept that human behaviour influences every aspect of our world and duly research in diverse domains. Information and its management now permeate across every aspect of society and so records and information management could play a wider role in research and practice.

One comment on the benefits of the project has been articulated by Jon Shepherd, a practitioner studying at Dundee University, who has suggested that his participation in the project has been the most valuable commitment he has made for his professional development. As a member of the group he is an equal co-researcher but the Group has encouraged and supported him to work and develop new thinking on dynamic applications. He has suggested that the model could be used as a basis for CPD. It is a way of fostering group action and outputs on targeted concerns and has the capacity to bring together disciplines from across the world. It is my contention that just as the Society of Archivists funded a post to provide Heritage Lottery Advice, a post should be set up supported from across professional organisations, to source funding and put together bids for a range of projects. This would build a stronger research strategy. Potentially some of these projects could be modelled to evolve CPD across research and practice communities through cooperative inquiry models. So I leave you with that idea as one way of promoting the growth of research and practice.

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Steve Bailey
JISC InfoNet

I'm hoping I'm amongst friends here today as, I'm afraid, I have a confession to make. I'm not an academic. So, as a consequence, feel bit of a fraud standing here acting as a witness in the academic strand of this event and rather undeserving of my place at this table alongside my more distinguished and learned peers.

But then, I'm not altogether sure that I qualify as a practitioner either, it being the best part of a decade since I last held what most would describe as a 'proper job' in records management: A job at the chalk face, or maybe that should be the printer face, dealing daily with a myriad practical problems relating to the management of paper or electronic records.

But before I am politely ushered from the room and driven back to the airport as an imposter perhaps I might explain what I have I being doing with my time these past few years and how, hopefully, this qualifies me to act as a 'witness' at this event. I guess you could say that I have been inhabiting a sort of records management netherworld, somewhere halfway between the ivory towers of academia and the inevitable basements of professional practice. If I had to describe where my role in JISC fits into the researcher/practitioner model that underpins today's event I would have to say that I hopefully span both in a way that can, perhaps, be best described as 'applied research' and it is the value of this function (and not, I hasten to add, my own tenure of it) that I wish to take this opportunity to champion today.

Let me begin with a true anecdote. One which is especially apposite today, given that it took place during the drinks reception for the previous Northumbria Witness Seminar event a couple of years ago. I was standing, nibbling a canapé and sipping from a glass of something with two fellow participants: one a renowned, highly experienced academic; the other an equally experienced records management consultant of several decades standing. The conversation went something along the following lines:

Academic: of course you'll be aware of the wonderful work that McKenzie is doing in South Africa at the moment taking a neo-classical post-modernist structuralist interpretation of taxonomy

Consultant: (after a brief pause) er. No. I'm afraid not. I'm currently working on a file plan for a London borough council.

Academic: (undeterred) But of course, we shouldn't overlook the work of Barker and her team in Canada either, I do have some sympathy for her view on positive constructionism and its contribution to the formation of a valid natural language syntax. Do you?

At this point the consultant suddenly discovered his glass was empty and with great reluctance politely withdrew from the conversation to get a refill. Never to be seen again...

Now I may have exaggerated the content of the conversation slightly, but in truth, not much. Here were two experienced, articulate members of the same profession: one from its research arm and one from its practitioner unable to find enough common ground to sustain a conversation over a prawn vol-au-vent. This, surely, cannot be healthy? Especially when you consider that some of the work that the academic was trying to talk about may well have had some relevance to the consultant's file plan work if we could but find some way of extracting it, synthesizing it and making it more palatable.

Make no mistake about it. There is a very real need for empirical evidence, challenging new thinking and innovative solutions within the practitioner community. Yes of course this doesn't have to come from academic research and as a practitioner body we are admirably good at sharing good practice and learning from each other but this is not the same as having a constant injection of new thoughts, ideas and inspiration from those who are specifically trained and experienced at providing them.

For when it comes to the practitioner community I fear we must admit that ours is not a profession which operates from a particularly robust evidence base; nor is it one that regularly shows itself to be agile, fleet of foot and capable of rapidly responding to a changing operating environment. In relation to the need for a stronger evidence-base I would like to offer you an 'Exhibit A' in the form of the Coopers & Lybrand study that just about every claim made for the efficacy of records management over the past 15 years seems to be based upon. But of course, I can't offer it as evidence because it does not and never has existed. I could rest my case there, but for a more in depth look at the paucity of evidence supporting many of the claims made by the records management community I would refer you to the literature review we at JISC infoNet published in November 2009.

So hopefully we can agree that there is a need in our profession for the kind of 'intellectual leadership' that a vibrant research agenda should provide. The question is, why is the research community not providing it? Things are certainly better than they were. There are an increasing – though still small – number of PhDs in the field and, there are many leading academics engaged in high quality research around the world. Funding streams are available and various publication outlets, from *Archivaria* to the *RMJ* exist. My little pastiche of the academics conversation earlier was not meant to be a disparaging one. I don't doubt that the work of which he spoke was important. Perhaps it was even ground breaking and had the potential to reshape how we should all describe records. The trouble is that the vast majority of us will never know. Why? Because no one outside a small clique of fellow academics and researchers will ever hear of it, know of it or have access to it. Sure it may well have influenced other academics, perhaps even provoked them to rapture or fury but as such responses will also no doubt be confined to the pages of the very same journals and conference proceedings it is impossible to say.

This then, is the void, which I believe currently exists in our profession between its research and practitioner communities and which that conversation I alluded to earlier seemed to encapsulate. The question, of course, is what we can possibly do to fill it? We should also recognise that this is not a problem unique to the world of records management and is, I suspect, felt to greater or lesser degrees in all sorts of walks of life. Interestingly I was having a similar conversation the other month with my wife's boss, the founder and owner of a small group of veterinary practices. He has no time – nor frankly inclination – to wade through the veterinary research literature (which it must be said dwarfs our own) but still needs to keep abreast of the most important current thinking and developments. His approach? To wait for the drug reps to visit and to quiz them on the latest data and how they are incorporating it into their products. This on the basis that these reps are themselves specifically paid to keep abreast of the research literature and who work for companies that make a profit by turning theoretical research into actual and saleable commodities. Why not let them to all the hard work?

Maybe we should do likewise and leave it to the vendors to do our analysis and interpretation for us? Personally, however, this is a route I am wary of taking. Vendors are an important part of our professional community but we should never lose sight of the fact that their interests are not, necessarily the same as ours nor, indeed, the organisations that we work for. It may be an extreme example but I can't help but bring to mind Frank McKenna's piece in the September 2008 edition of the *RMS Bulletin* which was entitled: *Technology as a tool: where is record and document management heading?* It was a piece which describes the range of cutting-edge technology which is pushing boundaries and re-shaping our world: including everything from RFID and Web3.0, to ubiquitous and implanted computing and even cyborgs. But, heroically, throughout this depiction of a *Blade Runner*-style future where everything is possible, the author did his best to describe what each development may mean for your EDRMS, which apparently will still carry on regardless. It was a bit like a futurologist being encouraged to explore the boundless potential of space exploration but at every point considering the implications for your horse and cart. Frank McKenna's job? CEO of a company which resells and helps implement EDRM systems.

Ditto the various other papers and articles which indicate that the only way to manage email is to buy new email archiving software, or imply that the first step when conducting an information audit must be to secure the services of a consultant. There are clearly dangers in relying solely on commercial organisations to interpret and apply research outcomes on our behalf.

Instead, my suggestion would be to form one or more small, independent, research units; maybe attached to a university, maybe to a national institution. The team needn't be large, but it must be carefully constituted and include not only professional records management *and* archive input, but also expert software design and web service skills combined with business process and administration experience and perhaps a little workplace psychology and general research skills thrown in. A team that is plugged into and constantly scanning the outputs emerging from academic research, perhaps even working with the research community to consider how best those outputs can be formed and disseminated. But a team that is also constantly monitoring technical and organisational developments and assessing both the challenges they may pose to the management of records but also exploring their potential to aid it.

But most critically of all it would always be looking to deliver answers to problems. To turn all this intellectual endeavour into innovative tools and techniques for others to adapt and adopt. Moreover, it mustn't be constrained by the need to succeed every time. The emphasis should be on trial and error, taking risks and being as open about its failures as it is its successes. Release early and release often and keep the pipeline constantly running. That way we at least stand half a chance of keeping pace with developments. The way it operates should be rigorous and, again, open but not necessarily

conducted to commonly accepted standards of academic practice. Combine this research agenda with a training and consultancy arm and, perhaps the selling of some value added products and services and it could even be largely self-funding.

To the best of my knowledge nothing like this exists at the moment and maybe this is what we are lacking. Something that can leverage and build upon the undoubted knowledge and intellectual capital that exists in academia but which currently remains tantalisingly out of reach for many. Not only would this be to the lasting benefit of the practitioner community but it may also be a timely development for our academic colleagues at a time when the government and research councils are placing ever more emphasis on ensuring that publicly funded research results in demonstrable and measurable benefits.

If I'm wrong and something like this does already exist, and especially if its currently recruiting, I'd be grateful if you could you do me a favour and let me know where to find it. Alternatively if you are in a position to help form such a unit, see me after and I'll give you my card....

Thank you

Open Discussion

Adrian Cunningham

Thank you very much to all of our witnesses. They're done a splendid job of setting the scene. We have a little over half an hour for questions. I have a lot but I'm looking for hands, so who would like to be brave and take the first question?

David Bowen

Audata Ltd

Two questions really for Steve's last comment. The sort of research unit you describe, I think to be effective, would be much larger than the combined staff of all the records management departments in the UK and one question is, is that in any way practical? The other question is, if this research unit is going to compete commercially in order to fund itself, how is it going to retain any kind of impartiality and what kind of relationship is it going to have with the rest of us who are vendors or consultants in the field?

Steve Bailey

JISC InfoNet

I am not sure I agree about the size one. I admit I haven't exactly formulated a business plan, I think there is a lot of merit in the 'small is, if not beautiful, then certainly agile'. I'd like to see, even if just as an experiment, a unit that is set up covering those sorts of bases; I think that is the important thing, the range of skills it involves rather than the size or the number. And just give it five years and see what it is able to contribute in that time. I agree there are some interesting issues in terms of the commercial versus public ethos but I think it is also one that the country as a whole is being increasingly encouraged to grapple [with], under the current administration anyway, in terms of making best use of business community engagement within institutions, reuse of public sector information etc. So I think, not to dismiss the challenge, but I think there are bigger drivers which may mean that it is possible if not difficult.

Adrian Cunningham

To follow up on that, you said you haven't written a business case obviously, but if the proposal you are making was to have legs, someone would need to [do that] because you will have to find the money from somewhere. Do you have any thoughts as to where the money would come from and what the pitch would be in terms of the business model?

Steve Bailey

It would certainly need some seed funding and it's not a completely hypothetical idea; it does stem in part from an initiative I became aware of a little while ago, but in that particular instance didn't lead to anything for a whole bunch of reasons, and that was coming from a University who saw it as an interesting research/business community engagement kind of activity to be in. So yes, it would certainly need seed funding, that's why there was the packaging of some of the other bits that would basically generate some income, so it would give it a start and it should, well be self funding. The impetus needs to come from one of the bodies that can make it happen basically...

Adrian Cunningham

...might JISC³ itself be a source for this seed funding do you think?

Steve Bailey

...not in the current climate [laughter]. I think it needs to be broader than that. I think the problem with JISC (and its strength) is that it has to limit its scope to the UK Further and Higher Education sectors and I think to really achieve the sort of vision I was trying to articulate, so far as it has been formed, is it would need to have a broader reach than that. So being based in a University but not with all of its funding coming from JISC would at least enable it to move beyond the walls of academia and into other areas of business; ditto if it was The National Archives or one of the National Libraries or whatever. So I think JISC is too constrained in its scope to really make that happen across the board, but hopefully there are bits of it that we can pick up on, in terms of doing stuff for the sector and, because we make it freely available afterwards, by extension, everyone else.

Adrian Cunningham

It could be a catalytic role then that JISC could play.

Andrew Snowdon

Fujitsu Services

Building on the point that Steve was making about the gap between the academic and the practitioner consultant – what do the academic researchers feel about how research filters its way into commercial products? In the electronic records field most people are constrained by working with commercial off-the-shelf products. Is it two separate, not even parallel, universes, or do you see the ideas filtering through?

Adrian Cunningham

Who would like to answer that one?

Julie McLeod

Northumbria University

I guess as Director of this project [AC⁺erm] I ought to at least try and respond to Andrew's question. I think in terms of feeding in, it is probably a long-term feed in, or has been. I think one of the things we tried very hard to do in this project, and I think it has probably not been as successful as we would have liked it to have been, is to involve a range of stakeholders. I think if the kinds of things you are talking about are to happen more readily in the future, then we need people like the people who are going to build the systems etc. to be part of the projects. Of course, inevitably, that brings in the 'Oh are you doing the research for them? is it being funded? are you partisan?' etc. so it is very difficult. But I do think if you get a range of people in there, then we can see that in the future. From my perspective and our project, it hasn't fed in yet.

I don't know if that is enough of a response to Andrew's comment but I would quite like to come back to the issue of the idea of Steve's central independent unit kicking off and doing research beyond the academic sector. He has been grilled with a couple of hard questions over a very good idea, which I had the pleasure of reading a little bit earlier than you, so I'd quite like to kick that back to my academic colleagues, former or current ones, because I kept thinking this is a really neat idea but will it work? The people we have to look at are our own universities; we are going to be judged as individual universities in the research assessment exercises, the REF (Research Excellence Framework) as it is going to be known.

So, what likelihood is there? Yes we are all members of Farmer,⁴ and in the library management world there is membership of BAILER⁵, in other words, collegiate groups, but at the end of the day we are fighting for the same money and we have to come together. So, I 'd quite like to turn it around. I might individually be willing [to collaborate]. I would need to get the OK from my Dean, and he would ask

³ JISC: Joint Information Services Committee. JISC supports further and higher education and research in the UK by providing leadership in the use of ICT to support of learning, teaching, research and administration.

⁴ FARMER: The Forum for Archives and Records Management Education and Research. Formed in 1999 for teaching and research staff in the area of archives and records management in universities in the UK and Ireland. Membership includes representatives of the postgraduate programmes which have been formally recognized by the Society of Archivists as providing primary professional qualifications for entrants to the archives and records management profession (Aberystwyth, , Dundee, Glasgow, Liverpool, Northumbria, UCD and , UCL). See: http://www.liv.ac.uk/lucas/FARMER/farmer_homepage.htm

⁵ BAILER: The British Association for Information and Library Education and Research. Membership includes all teaching and research staff in information and library schools/departments in universities in the UK and Ireland. BAILER acts as a national forum for matters in this field. See: <http://www.bailer.org.uk/>

what's in it for us as a group; but I would quite like to hear what some of the other academics in the room think about the likelihood and the desire to make Steve's idea work.

Michael Moss

Glasgow University

I make two points: one in response to Julie, that the new ESRC⁶ recognition competition, which we have all been taking part in, is driving in exactly the opposite direction from the REF; we are encouraged to collaborate, we're encouraged to work across institutions, to create both research ... well certainly teaching groups, teaching both at Masters and PhD level, so there is a crumb of comfort.

I think the other interesting thing is if you have any contact with any work in Management Schools, and I used to work at Cranfield, a lot of records and information management is taught, but it is not taught by records and information managers. It is taught by business management practitioners, often at a pretty advanced level. When I've worked, both in the private and the public sectors, at the top end they are quite comfortable with some pretty clever stuff. You will find senior managers, for example in the Foreign Office my friend Robert Cooper, who has just given up being Research Director in the Foreign Office, is a very well known post-modernist. So don't be frightened of the theory because they are quite happy with it.

Adrian Cunningham

Any more comments?

Geoff Hare

Self-Employed

I'm not a records management or Information Management academic; I'm retired now, but from an Arts Faculty in Languages. I'm here because my wife told me about it [laughter] and I often do translation in records management. In terms of the relations and links between research and practitioners, in the case of records management, it seems to me, first of all, I guess there must be basic research as well as applied research as there is in many areas. The body which funds both language research, literature research, history, law indeed, to my surprise, visual arts, the Arts and Humanities Research Council [AHRC], has within it obviously, in Panel C⁷ has various things including cultural geography, classics and also library, information and museum studies, which half the people here who seem to be academics, will be aware of.

Looked at from the outside that seems to be an unusual place for research on records management to be funded from, although law is in the same council. This is an historical accident of course because it started off with librarianship, which is linked to textual issues, but it could just as easily be in science and engineering couldn't it, and maybe should be. I don't know how much research done in records and information management can be called 'basic' or how much could be called 'applied'. The issue that Steve [Bailey] brought up regarding the inability of the 'basic' researcher, if I can put it that way, and the practitioner couldn't communicate about makes me want to quote you the definition offered by the Arts and Humanities Research Council when talking about research grant schemes of what they call on the one hand the speculative route in research and secondly the practice led or applied route.

I think probably what I mean by 'basic' research is obviously the speculative route and they quite happily want to encourage and fund speculative, experimental or exploratory work, meaning that outcomes or results are uncertain and cannot be guaranteed, researchers seeking to achieve significant breakthroughs in knowledge and understanding in this speculative area will be challenging existing models, perceptions, research methods or modes of thought.

The research, through [the] practice-led and through [the] applied route, will be undertaken with a specific view to generating outputs and outcomes with a defined application beyond the education sector; for example, new or improved systems or designs, products, processes, materials, devices, services or policy guidance. All of that is actually, not for me, unlike what I would like to see, or perhaps what you would like to see within information and records management research, but what I am unsure of is, again, how much the speculative route does actually apply in practice to what is being done in this area in terms of... would it be redefining about what we understand to be 'the record'? Is it about improving on models of the lifecycle of 'the record'? Certainly, at the other end, Alison [Pickard] gave a very good description of what might be a relatively specific type of research to improve a particular problem in a given bit of the public service. I think I have said enough...

⁶ UK Economic and Social Research Council

⁷ Editorial note: AHRC no longer has these panels

Adrian Cunningham

There was another comment...

Babis Theodoulidis

Manchester Business School

I am a senior lecturer and I'm trying to do some research on information management but I don't really come from a records management background and we don't really understand records. It is essentially two different communities, they don't talk to each other as far as I am concerned. So I came here today to hear about perhaps problems that practitioners have and would like researchers to address. Up to now I haven't heard any such problems so I will wait for the next session [laughter]. My second point is, as an academic, how my research is measured, and to be honest, it is measured with some quality indicators, one of them is journal publications, and if we don't publish in a high ranking journal our research doesn't count. So for example if we publish in the *Records Management Journal*, this is not considered to be a very good publication, yeah? Did you know that? So, we should publish in journals that have three or four [star] ranking rather than one or two, so the *Records Management Journal* is not one of the good journals. So for me, we should identify places to publish for our research to be of high impact – journals.

The second is, in terms of the impact factors and citations our research is also measured on these. So, for example, if we have a report, the number of downloads, the number of citations will be a good criteria to assess the impact, so that is another quality criteria for our research.

Alison Pickard

Northumbria University

Really, both of those criteria assess impact but citations as impact is one definition of impact; it goes back to the idea of how you measure it. Is impact not actually something to do with the difference it makes on the ground, the difference it actually makes to people actually doing the job when they are doing it? There is a rift here between what the REF would see as impact, which is how many times have you been cited, dare I say by another academic, or how many times has what you have done actually made a difference to practitioners who are doing this on a daily basis.

Steve Bailey

Impact is a separate criterion in REF to citation...

Alison Pickard

...it is, but again, they are still unsure about how impact is going to be measured and there is still debate and discussion about how that is going to happen...

Steve Bailey

...but they are two different [measures]...

Alison Pickard

...they are, but what the questioner was actually saying was that issue about citation being an impact measure; and I'm not convinced it is, in a different sense to the way it was always measured in the past.

Sue Childs

Northumbria University

The impact they are talking about is how you can impact on the economic and social and cultural life of our society and I don't think they have a very good idea precisely how that can be measured yet. They talk about the idea that you can construct stories and case studies that demonstrate that this particular piece of research has had an impact on economics, an impact on social life, change of behaviour, change of servers, systems, ideas or whatever, but it is all very much up in the air at the moment. We are all struggling to understand how this can be achieved.

Adrian Cunningham

If I could just leap to the defence of the *Records Management Journal* as well, before we move on. [laughter] The audience may not be aware of this. In Australia we had to go through quite a laborious exercise with the Australian Research Council (ARC) to have the various journals in our field rated; and the results of that rating were that the journals were either off the scale, i.e. not good enough to be considered, or they were slotted into one of four categories. A couple of the journals in our field were rated by the ARC as being in the very top category, i.e. can't get any better and that was *Archivaria* and *Archival Science*; and then the next category down is where the *Records Management Journal*

sits along with the journal from my country *Archives and Manuscripts*. And that was not done by archivists and records managers, that was done by the independent assessors on the Australian Research Council. So they thought that the *Records Management Journal* was pretty darned good actually, so that is some reassurance for you. [light applause].

Steve Bailey

I think there may have been some confusion possibly between the *Records Management Journal* and the *Records Management Society Bulletin* and I wonder whether Babis [Theodoulidis] was thinking about the *Bulletin*, which I am not disparaging, but is not an academic journal; it's very much a practitioner magazine rather than a journal. I wonder if that was the reason for the confusion.

Adrian Cunningham

Stuart...

Stuart Orr

European Central Bank

Just a brief point on this ranking system of journals. There was someone I know, a British researcher, who published what I thought was an extremely interesting, to practitioners, bit of work; but published it in an American journal because of this ranking system They wanted one mark, so even more unlikely that a European practitioner would read it. I think this is part of the problem; I think we should be addressing this whole incestuous thing of academics and how they measure themselves... and publish something in some sort of journal 1–4 and sink back exhausted leaving we poor practitioners to wallow in the tub!

Adrian Cunningham

Any of our witnesses wanted to respond?

Steve Bailey

I think Margaret is going to explode! [laughter]

Margaret Procter

University of Liverpool

As is obviously the purpose of many of these Witness Seminars, I think a good explosion is on the cards really! [laughter] I am a lecturer in Records and Information Management at the University of Liverpool; I have also been a practitioner for 15 years so I sit on all sorts of fences and hedges, sometimes both at once. Several issues: first, on the impact issue, firstly it looks likely that 20% of our panels', in REF terms, excellence rating will be based on impact, which is nothing to do with citations and is a lot to do with community engagement and with knowledge exchange.

Secondly, on the specific issue that has been raised about journal rankings, our panel is also very...well ... referring back to what Dr Pickard was saying, it is the quality of the article, not the ranking of the journal; and that has been explicitly stated. In terms of availability of research going into academic journals; so for example there is the *Records Management Journal*, a splendid journal, also available as an e-journal; and this has made accessibility really problematic in that the majority of institutions which are not academic institutions do not have access to electronic journals, that is a serious problem that has been recognised by the research community which, as it has been stated, is funded publicly.

Most Research Councils now make it a condition of grant funding that material must be made freely available. That means, in practice, I don't know how that works at the moment, that anyone with Internet access will be able to get access to electronic versions of an article in its pre-print form. In other words, the final, final version, before it actually goes into this [published] version. I don't need to explain to this audience the implications of copyright; the copyright is in the way the journal article is laid out, not in the content. So the institutional repositories that universities are building are now the main way in, or will be the main way in, for practitioners without academic access to get all this material.

May I now say what I was going to ask, which is changing the subject slightly, but it is based on the final question on the seminar page, which is 'What are the Challenges?' I think the main challenges, and all the academics involved in RIM [Records and Information Management] education have been saying this for five/ten years, that the problem is *capacity*. There are so few of us that it is actually difficult for us to do everything that we would like to do in practical terms. Very specifically, and I am hoping that this audience can respond in some way to my particular dilemma, which I think illustrates a problem.

Just before Christmas my department advertised a post in records and archives for a new full time lectureship in Records and Archives Management. We got six applications, only two of whom were even remotely appointable, and we decided not to convene a recruitment panel. We are going to advertise again in about three weeks. Why did I not get more than six applications? Why did I not get more than two viable applications for that academic post? That is half a rhetorical question; the sort of answers are that there are not enough people with PhDs and the PhD is now, in effect, the basic professional requirement for an academic. So, there is a real clash of institutional missions. As RIM educators we spend our lives telling our students that when they go out into the big bad world that they are going to have to align themselves with the institutional mission. This is what we are doing as academics; there is a real dichotomy here.

The other problem of course, is salaries. If we want somebody who is a really experienced practitioner they are by default, fairly senior. As Elizabeth Lomas's paper made clear, it is sometimes a real sacrifice to go back again into academia to do a PhD. How do we get round that? The maximum salary for my post £35,000. How many senior practitioners here would be a) willing to work for that and b) if they don't already have a PhD, be required to engage in a PhD part-time, at the same time as taking up full time work? There are a lot of structural problems here, I think. So watch out for the ad, tell your friends please, it will go on the various lists.

Secondly, or thirdly, or probably fourthly by now, could I just bring to the attention of people in 'charge' of institutions about the possibility of engaging in collaborative doctoral programmes with institutions. I know for example the TNA [The National Archives] and University College London have created collaborative programmes, and I think Northumbria...? [Julie McLeod indicated not yet] But we would probably like to...? Yes. This is where somebody is funded by a Research Council but works primarily in an institution in a half practitioner/half research role. Certainly if any institutions here would like to discuss the possibility of engaging... I am sure with Julie or with Michael Moss from Glasgow and I think anyone else who is here, all requests gratefully received really... Thank you.

Adrian Cunningham

Witness response?

Margaret Procter

I'm not sure I even require a response but I'm quite happy to have one [laughter].

Steve Bailey

Can I make a response, not specifically to Margaret's point, but the question of papers and journals and ranking and all the rest of it that has been mentioned. With hindsight, the one bit of my witness statement that didn't come over strongly enough is, I think, the need for synthesis and repurposing of what is in those papers; that is the bit we are missing. Take a step back, and take it out of the records management context in a way, that's what we as an advisory service for JISC do. JISC fund all manner of great research; it all goes on — applied, practitioner, all sorts of research — and they come up with very long, very dry, very tedious reports. They have got some great stuff in them but you have got to be pretty dedicated to sit down and wade through a 60-page pdf to get those nuggets of learning and then to decide what to do with it.

What the team does that I work with, of which I only play an extremely small part, is actually taking those outputs and related outputs across an entire programme, maybe 10 projects doing different bits of the same thing, extracting the nuggets and getting the best bits out and finding innovative, creative new media ways, whatever it may be, of actually getting people to engage with that content actively. So for me (and this is probably heresy to academics), I don't care what journal it's in, if you like, the problem is with them being dead and stuck in a passive format and not out there and doing stuff; and that's the bit that my theoretical organisation would be trying to do, to scan that and do something active with it.

Heather Jack

HJSB Ltd

Can I interject there, not as an academic, but as a practitioner. Actually as we were talking about that, we were talking about different audiences and different approaches to the output of those. I had a concept of Film 2010, so like RM 2010, where you had with some vehicle, over the web or whatever, little snapshots that in a way that would actually get out beyond, I don't know, even beyond records management practitioners actually, to Social Work Directors, to the Financial Directors and the people developing, I don't know, Wave Renewable Energy. So let's get beyond our own brick walls between ourselves and get out there to the people we are here to help and to help a great deal.

Alison Pickard

Can I just say, going back to that point about capacity, academics are juggling a lot of things at the same time. There's teaching, there's research, there's management responsibilities and whilst the measurement is that academic journal that it needs to get in, we don't always have time to do all of the additional stuff that we would love to do. I made a point of highlighting some of the small-scale projects that I do deliberately, because the vehicle for me to get that out is already there. The practitioners came to *me* and the vehicle was set up. They want to see the results, they don't want the methodology, they don't want the literature review, they don't want the dry bits, they want the output. 'What can I do?', that's what they want. And I am in a position to give it to them when it is that type of research. When, at the minute it's a JISC project that I am on, I have the choice, do I spend a lot of time writing the publications for the journals or do I spend a lot of time developing the output in a way that can be reached by everybody? There isn't actually... it's a no-brainer. I know what I have to do in order for that to make a difference and be significant for me.

Adrian Cunningham

Correct me if I am wrong, but what I am hearing here is that there is an issue with the research funding model, that the funding models reward those that publish in refereed highly ranked journals. When the project comes to an end and you reach the point of 'well let's do some more synthesis and some dissemination', well you can't do that because you have run out of money and you have to move on to the next thing. I think the issue here is, how do we as a diverse group of researchers and practitioners, put pressure on the funding agencies to change their funding models to explicitly recognise that yes, results and outcomes of research need to be disseminated in an accessible and timely manner and that's not necessarily going to be through refereed journals. Julie asked me to come up with an action agenda toward the end of this session, and it sounds as though there is an action point there somewhere, that 'we call on the funding bodies to dot dot dot'. We can craft the words later but I don't get the sense that anyone here would dissent from that position. Michael...

Michael Moss

Just another observation – that isn't entirely true because the knowledge transfer schemes which are run by all the Research Councils allow for just that. They are more about impact of the transfer... I think knowledge exchange is better. I am an assessor for quite a few of them and there is a big mismatch, it seems to me, between practitioner needs and what the academics think the practitioner needs. There is a lot of work that needs to be done in that area, but there is funding and very easily got funding because it is part of the government agenda that we should be doing just this. So the notion that it all has to be in peer reviewed journals isn't true. The measure that you want from knowledge transfer is that it has made an impact on whoever the target of the knowledge transfer happens to be.

Adrian Cunningham

We probably have time for one or two last comments before break.

Catherine Smith

RTC North:

Can I address a question to Ali [Alison Pickard]? There's a couple of questions actually from the lady from the department over there [Margaret Procter]. My daughter's just completed a PhD and this country does nothing to keep them; she's now gone to Penn State University. So that is one of your answers; this country really does not value its PhDs and they destroy them virtually from the minute they get them, and she only got hers in December. But can I just address a question to Ali [Alison Pickard] on the comments you made, bearing in mind what you are doing at the moment. You talked, in the research, about *want* and *need*. Can I just ask, that is totally different 'a *want*' and 'a *need*', and how you address the problem of not biasing the research, particularly in the public sector, which then impacts on the practitioners?

Alison Pickard

Are we talking about the difference between the want and...

Catherine Smith

Well, with my experience, when we are working, people think they know what they *want* and it's not what they *need*. So when you go out in the research and people say 'this is what I *want*' but in actual fact, if you have a service to deliver, it's not what they *need*. How do you actually get over that problem in the research to make sure it impacts on the practitioner or whatever research report you are developing actually achieves something in the end that is valuable rather than a biased academic

report? And we could take the Andrew Wakefield incident with all the MMR stuff and that has taken ten years to work through.

Alison Pickard

I think it goes back to the premise of how you engage in the research to begin with, it's what you do when you get out there. If I was to ask you what you *needed* or what you *wanted* you would give me your idea of that. 'This is what I *need*, this is what I *want*', but you can only give me that response based on your prior knowledge. If you want to go back to that example when I was talking about *want* and *need*, I was talking to refugees and asylum seekers who had not long arrived in this country and the concept of a public library to them was far out with their own sphere of knowledge and understanding. The fact that they could go into this building and get a load of stuff, for nothing. That in itself is beyond any *want* or *need* that they could have personally identified.

So if I was to then sit there and ask them what else they needed from this service that they didn't even know existed there would have been no level on which they could have responded because they just didn't know. They were absolutely amazed that they had what they had. So it's not about asking people about what their *needs* are, it's about asking people what they do and then deciding what it is they actually *need* in order to do that better, or more efficiently, easier, more comfortably, whatever that is...

Catherine Smith:

...but in that case it's being careful with the terminology of *need* and *want* isn't it?

Alison Pickard:

Yes, it is that, but a *want* is non-contestable, a want is a want. If you *want* something, you do, and nobody can argue with that, you definitely do. A *need* however is slightly more contestable, you can say 'do I need it?' 'Am I starving to death? No I'm not, I don't need food' but I *want* some [laughter]. So yes, you have got to be very careful, but that goes back to the basics of how you would conduct empirical research and elements of bias and how you address them. And it is quite difficult having focus groups in four different languages at the same time [laughter].

Adrian Cunningham

One final question.

Penny Feltham

Stockport MBC

I'm a practitioner. I was thinking earlier that the problems faced by Margaret [Procter] in terms of trying to get somebody with a PhD and the problem of transferring analysis research through to practitioner understandable and applicable work could easily be met, as Michael [Moss] said earlier, through a knowledge transfer partnership. And I'm wondering how many universities have pursued that for information management and records management; and living with somebody who went through a year of doing a PhD under a Knowledge Transfer Partnership, only to discover that he was a slave labourer, how do you make sure the employer keeps up their side of the bargain?

Steve Bailey

In terms of how many, I mentioned earlier on, business and community engagement is a huge area that government are pushing HE into and JISC have been looking into it. Knowledge transfer is one of the four areas of business and community engagement activities that are currently being looked at. So I think there is an opportunity now basically, to say 'hey guys this is what Records and Information Management within an institution could actually benefit local community, local business, local voluntary organisations', whatever they might be. But there is probably a window of opportunity there that if we don't grab will close fairly quickly.

Adrian Cunningham

Well thank you very much ladies and gentlemen. To sum up some of the key issues and themes that have grabbed my attention over the last hour or so which hopefully we will get chance to explore further after our break. Clearly a key one is this issue of *modes of dissemination of findings* and how to change the mindsets of funding bodies in order to provide enough support for timely and accessible dissemination. The value of cross-disciplinary research; one of the areas of cross-disciplinary research I'd like to see us do a lot more of is with economists in terms of putting some kind of rigorous values on returns on investment. There are lots of claims on how you really need good records management and this will save you money but not a lot of solid evidence to support that, that would satisfy a qualified economist for example.

Lack of capacity in the field that Margaret [Procter] identified. The gulf, I think that's a risk there, between the worlds of research and practice; and how I think it behoves groups on both sides of that divide to do their level best to make sure that that gulf is as narrow as possible and that there is as much cross over and interaction as possible, for mutual benefit. I was taken by the notion of should research methods units be a compulsory part of every information management qualification. It may well be in this country, and it certainly was many years ago when I was at library school, the one unit where most people fail was in fact the research methods unit, but I don't know whether that is a universal thing, I think it should be [a compulsory unit]. I think there was a really good suggestion about involving professional associations in research.

The two metadata research projects that I've been involved in with Monash University over the years, both of them have had the Australian Society of Archivists as an industry partner and I think that's been a tremendously important thing. I don't know whether that's at all common in the UK but if it's not I would commend that as a useful thing to do. I would endorse Steve's [Bailey] comments that in this field there is a lot of loose assertions that get made and a lot of folklore that kind of just becomes received wisdom and if you dig into it, most of it doesn't have a solid evidence base. We really need that solid evidence base because we are not going to get too far with those hard-nosed b***s that hold the purse strings [laughter] with just a bunch of assertions. I got the impression we could have continued talking for hours but we will call a halt now and come back later with our practitioners' statements. Thank you.

[applause]

SEMINAR 2 - THE TRANSFORMING CAPACITY OF RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT: PRACTITIONER PERSPECTIVES

15:00–16:30

Chair's Introduction [Edited Transcript]

Catherine Hare
Consultant

I'm delighted to have the opportunity of chairing the second seminar of today's colloquium. We're going to be focusing, as Julie has hinted, on the practitioners' perspective of the Transforming Capacity of Research and Development.

I'm not quite sure if I'm a proper practitioner or not, but I've noticed this is something that other people have referred to, so it's a bit of a common theme. We have multiple roles, or multiple perspectives, and I think that's perhaps revealing about the discipline of information and records management, which has emerged more recently than some of the other academic and professional disciplines. And I think that brings with it its own challenge because I think we're being asked to compress into a small period – or we're anxious as record management practitioners and academics to get more quickly to a point where we're recognised both as part of an academic discipline but also part of a professional discipline. So that's something that has crystallised with me as I listened to the first seminar.

Anyway, down to business. It's a fascinating topic, this one. I've thought about it a lot from different perspectives as my career has progressed and I've obviously revisited it for this seminar. So I just want very quickly to look at it from my own point of view.

I started out as an academic librarian so I was very aware of the way in which the library was a requirement for researchers and was supporting academics doing their research. I then became an academic myself where it was a requirement of the job. And I was very interested to hear the Dean speaking about how he relishes his research activity. He seemed to have a very clear view about what he wanted to research and he was anxious to get on with that research. I just want to remind Julie of a meeting we once had with our then Head of Department, when we were both confirmed as working in the field of records management; that was going to be our prime focus because we both came to it from a wider perspective. And we were told we were going to have to do research in records management. I can remember thinking that's a big topic; it's like being asked to do research in physics. On the one hand that's great because there hadn't been much done before, but where do you start? Now that was a little while ago and obviously we've moved on since then.

I then stepped away, as Elizabeth said – I really liked the expression – it was 14 years so I was in the right timeframe. Then I took a practitioner job with a small company who were actually selling information about research opportunities, so not doing research but I was still in the research field. I then worked for an international organisation where there was respect for research, there was capacity for research and there were resources to do the research; but also there was a desire within this organisation to provide leadership in terms of developing best practice, based on research or other international organisations. And I now sit somewhere in the middle as a consultant. So research has been something which has been part of my mindset, as someone engaged in records management, all of that time.

I began to think, as I was preparing this short introduction, what if I'd spent my whole career as a practitioner? Would I know where to go to find out about the research? I've been fortunate enough to remain with connections where I can get to published research. Would I think of getting involved? I'm not sure about that. But we have a number of very interesting practitioners, and I've seen their witness statement so I know what I'm talking about, who are going to talk to you about their ideas, present their witness statements.

I just want to remind you of some the questions we asked them to address, which were: What's the value of research? Does it provide solutions? Does it help to make improvements? What's its impact? (And we've had a little discussion about that at the end of the first seminar). Why would practitioners do it? We've heard about the possibility of collaborative projects, about working together across academia and the practitioner world.

So, as I say, we're very fortunate to have an excellent and varied group of witnesses to present their statements. We actually have five here in the flesh, including a double-act from Chris and David, or perhaps that should be two for the price of one, both from the same research group which I think

Elizabeth [Lomas] would say she's leading, called the Continued Communication Group. Then we have a virtual presence, in the person of John McDonald. Certainly those of us who were at the last witness seminar would have had the opportunity to see John in the flesh. This time he's appearing on video from Ottawa.

Since my primary task as Chair is to keep to time I'm going to stop now and hand over to the first witness from the practitioner perspective, Maria Luisa Di Biagio from the European Central Bank.

Witness Statements [Written text]

Maria Luisa Di Biagio *European Central Bank*

I would like to contribute to this discussion with some thoughts on the research experience of the records managers of the European Central Bank.

In 2005 the ECB decided to introduce formal records management. As part of this it recruited six people from among existing staff and offered them formal university training alongside on-the-job training in order to form a group of six records management specialists. I am one of these six.

The university training, a BSc (Hons) in Information and Records Management carried out by the Northumbria University, culminated in a research-based project covering one area of records management of choice and linked to the workplace.

The six projects covered very different areas – records retention, user behaviour in organising information, version management, information sharing, vital records, and the impact of sound recordkeeping on the value of artworks. All of these topics had in common a very practical relevance; addressing real needs of the ECB.

We were highly motivated and embarked on our research adventures with the willingness and conviction to improve something; to fill knowledge gaps; and to bring benefits to the bank.

My preparation for this seminar has been a valuable opportunity to reflect on this research activity after two years.

What have been the benefits for us as researchers and for the ECB in undertaking our research projects?

In the first place we have enlarged our knowledge on specific areas and on specific business realities which we would not have done during the course of normal work. We had the opportunity:

- To reflect and specialise on a specific topic;
- To keep abreast of the latest developments; and
- To collect experts' views and experience from outside.

All this has already proved to be very valuable in a number of instances.

There have been immediate practical effects. For example, the research carried out on the definition of retention periods for statistical records has been reflected in a revision of the previously defined periods of the ECB retention plan. The same research has also shown how important it is to deeply involve end-users in the definition of retention periods and has defined a methodology to be potentially applied to other classes of records.

The outcome of the research on the users' behaviour in organising information has been taken into consideration in the development of folder structures and in the decision to introduce 'virtual folders' during our EDRMS implementation.

The research on managing versions has been used recently in updating and improving our internal guidance.

The knowledge gained with the research on attitudes towards information sharing at the ECB has helped us better scope our change management endeavours in this respect.

The recommendations coming from the research on the role of records to assess the value of artefacts have been applied to design secure vaults for the new ECB premises for artefacts of exceptional value. Furthermore the required set of records to support the authenticity of the artefacts has been established in a field where defined standards are absent.

Other long-term benefits may come from the research on the identification of vital records, which has defined a methodology to be potentially applied to the whole ECB.

I am convinced both of the value of the research we undertook and that the time we devoted to it hasn't only been an academic exercise but has brought or will bring concrete benefits in the form of specialised knowledge in a number of areas and in applying research methodologies in approaching problems.

On the other hand, the transferability and external validity of our research experiences may have been somehow limited.

Like any work-based research the strong influence of the organisational culture makes them in fact not easily transferable to other environments. Moreover, being part of the organisational culture has probably also been a limitation to the objectivity of our research. This bias was however offset by previous knowledge of the working realities, which has certainly helped, and by real-world experience in doing the research, an aspect particularly valuable to the practitioner.

I would like to make a few additional considerations.

Research provides a better understanding of a given situation supported by solid evidence. It can confirm or deny intuitions and help measure the extent of a phenomenon and its underlying reasons, or logic, in order to design strategies to address it. In a discipline where human behaviour and change management issues are so crucial, research can be a useful tool to steer the practitioner's action.

Research can have immediate results, other benefits may come at a later stage, and I believe one should not be too ambitious and impatient and be content with gradual improvements to get closer to the ideal solution provided in the research outcomes. Quoting Alison Pickard, "research is not about changing the world", but making discoveries that "inform others in some way" (Pickard, 2007, p. xiv).

Records management research, in particular in the Anglo-Saxon world, has a highly practical component. This is particularly appreciated by the practitioners since research is conveyed in terms which are familiar to us, which makes it particularly accessible and transferable to our working environments.

Consulting others' research allows us to look at the outside world and enlarge our knowledge and understanding on certain issues to get inspiration and ideas, particularly on new areas which are not covered in traditional books and manuals.

Even if research findings might not be immediately applicable in our specific working realities, often the methods used by others can open up minds to solve our own issues and give us food for thought. It is also particularly important and useful how the research findings are designed and presented. In general contributions based on formal research provide more practical benefits to the practitioner than single opinion pieces normally contained in articles.

We should not however underestimate the value of more theoretical, less obviously applicable research, which is often useful to help us remind or rethink the purpose and value of our profession and of the activities we conduct. It also helps us not fall into complacency and can positively contribute to a fine-tuning of our actions and strategies.

Sharing with the records management community the knowledge acquired while doing research is a precious way to make other colleagues aware of research initiatives and contribute to the growth of our discipline.

Of course doing research or consulting others' research should ideally not be limited to the stimulating years of the academic studies.

Unfortunately the reality is often different. It is in fact not always easy to step back from our daily duties and tight deadlines and find the time to consult specialised resources or pieces of research. Unless we decide to explore a certain field of knowledge for a specific purpose, the benefits of reading research are more intangible than other, and we naturally tend to relegate them at the end of our duty list. The result of all this is that often we have no other choice than using our private time for that.

This is unfortunate since reading others' research is a very rewarding intellectual activity which generates additional knowledge, stimulates further research and, more importantly, makes us feel part of the global records management community, experiencing the same sort of problems and sharing the efforts to overcome them.

One never finds time, one makes time. The knowledge contained in specialised publications or practical on-line resources like webinars or podcasts – the Northumbria University "Records

Management Today” is a very good example – is an asset with a huge potential for the practitioner. Attending external seminars and conferences provides fresh ideas and impetus and offers a golden opportunity to fully concentrate on records management issues out of the pressure of our daily tasks.

Of course new thoughts collect dust if they are put on a shelf and never used. So again, putting into practice the acquired knowledge remains key.

References

Pickard, A.J. (2007) *Research methods in information*. London: Facet.

Andrew Snowden *Fujitsu Services*

Firstly to set the context of my ‘Practitioner’ status: I studied information Studies at Masters level and have subsequently worked in IT with a longstanding interest and involvement in office systems, search and what became EDRM. My experience in recent years as an Information Management consultant has been predominantly in central government and public sector. My experience has been as implementer and consultant exploring requirements, building business cases and working to help organisations exploit solutions. Not a ‘proper’ practitioner but someone with much experience of using IT to assist with IM challenges. Because we have been engaged with some clients over a number of years we do get ample feedback about how design assumptions and expectations have aligned with reality!

How can research help practitioners? And has it been doing so? From my perspective, research in a broad sense can help with:-

- Ideas to address existing issues
- Ideas to respond to the changing environment (business and technology)
- Technology developments to assist with usability
- Ideas and technology to address ‘non-traditional’ documents

How quickly can the findings of research find their way into the commonplace working environment? When I was studying for my Masters I took a strong interest in search and categorisation. It took a long time for such functionality to be seen in common COTS (commercial off-the-shelf) software, needing computer power to become more affordable and for users to start asking for, and exploiting such features. It is interesting that many search companies have spun-off from research projects. I cannot think of an EDRM product having such a direct link to research.

Not all research to market is so slow. The uptake of new technology can be very rapid (and disruptive). The arrival of the PC in business was rapid and its impact has been significant.

I have now been involved in the implementation of a number of EDRM systems – different clients and different products, and I have had the opportunity to get feedback about the success of their adoption. There are typically various issues, but getting users involved in governance is one of the serious challenges. Short of re-engineering humans, we need to address how to make solutions work for typical workers. Finding the blend of usability, and meeting good governance is a major challenge.

This challenge is increasingly being considered alongside affordability. The existence of cheaper products such as SharePoint, that provide much, but not all of what Information Managers might want, has certainly led many organisations to challenge what records managers really do need and to ask if the organisation can make less expensive solutions work for them?

Such debates can be very interesting but have the records management staff been able to articulate their minimum requirements? Often procurements rely on TNA2 and MOREQ 2 specifications – examples of ‘research best practice’. Indeed the TNA activity stimulated much EDRM market activity. However such procurements often opt to select just about every piece of functionality and hence drive the cost up. Clearer best practice on how to use best practice would help records managers who get involved in such discussions.

Similarly best practice for formats other than Microsoft Office is important. As well as the more recent communication formats eMail still presents a challenge for Information Managers – and it often continues to sit in separate silos. The traditional approach is manual declaration of records and/or to rely on eMail archiving which really was installed to address IT infrastructure issues by the IT department. Both approaches are rather flawed from an IM perspective with the reliance on the human prompted ‘magic moment’ of records declaration or leaving valuable content in an eMail silo.

The development of technology both helps information management and presents challenges. The challenges come in the form of change and responding to new opportunities so that information governance is considered along with enhanced information access. The benefits come from facilities to help users do what information managers want them to – file in a textbook manner and declare records as they say they should!

All of the EDRM implementations I have worked on have been challenged by this human nature aspect. The EDRM specifications meet the needs of governance informed by research but do not address the ‘make it easy’ requirement. I am currently helping some clients review how to use rules engines and categorisation technology to help with the process of filing items well with appropriate metadata, in the fileplan as records. Such technology is not perfect – but it really does seem to offer significant help. However even this exposes issues – such technology can push up costs and it also requires that the rules can be specified in the first place. It also may not fit the ideal approach that some records managers want – but is it good enough to make a significant contribution to governance by making it more likely that process will be followed?

So has research influenced and helped the Information Manager and Records Manager? – yes without doubt, but there are still many issues that need working through and there is a need for well-considered guidance.

Chris Campbell

Continued Communication Research Group

I work within a multinational pharmaceutical company. My reason for being employed by this firm is to facilitate compliance with regulatory requirements surrounding the retention of records. Therefore my role is chiefly a compliance role.

My position is that I feel that research and also the academic community that supports and fosters it is essential for Records and Information Professionals (RIPs). However I do feel that much of the focus from the academic environment is too centred upon the ‘wrong’ subjects, for example, “Web2” and other new technologies – about which RIPs can in reality do very little to influence. I also think that much of the output is only relevant to the public sector.

There is a need however for RIPs to define a clear set of principles, roles and responsibilities for themselves. There is a lot of diversity in what RIPs actually do when they are at work and it seems to me a role is defined more by where he or she works than by some kind of professional standard. The risk with this is that the RIP role may be seen as so diluted that employers will be tempted to think that anyone could do it.

Dr David Bowen

Audata Ltd

My background is in chemical and pharmaceutical research, and I have been concerned with managing and sharing information for about 40 years, and with computers for nearly as long. About 20 years ago I managed two projects to build electronic archives, and for the past 15 years I have been a "professional information manager".

My concerns about research in Records and Information Management arise as a bystander, not a participant; though the Continued Communications Project has brought me closer to an active role.

What is wrong with RIM Research at present?

- It is underfunded, so it can't explore real issues (large, international, multilingual document sets; retention reviews within an EDRMS; most EDRMS issues; managing records in shared drives and non-EDRMS systems; ...)
- It is done in short small bits – often just a part of an MSc or MA course, but with little coordination to get added value
- It is secretive – IM users and practitioners in industry, in government, and in academe, suppliers, and researchers rarely share data or research results effectively.
- It is remote from the real world
- It is trivial – often projects get reported at National Meetings that are really just surveys of 20 people or so from a single environment; a survey needs 100s of people from varied environments to have meaning.

Why does the CC project represent hope? Most of the problems I mention can be ameliorated or solved by larger collaborations. If this includes real co-operation among academic workers and

practitioners, then real research can be done (for example on the Training or Development datasets in real systems) to solve some of our pressing problems.

In that respect, the work on Web 2.0 done by Elizabeth Lomas and the CC team is an important example of research that could be useful and applied.

Paul Dodgson

Driving Standards Agency

The Question:

What's the value, worth? Does it provide solutions? Does it help make improvements? What's the impact? Why would practitioners engage in/do R&D?

Sub questions

- a. Is R and D worthwhile in our field?
- b. Is some research more valuable than others?

Background

I am a "Professional Records Manager" and want to share experiences whilst learning to be able to make the aforementioned statement and also experiences post professionalisation (a new word!).

More questions

1. What is Records Management to Practitioners?
2. Why engage in Records Management?
3. What benefits can it derive?
 - a. For Business
 - b. For Practitioners

When I was asked to speak I had no hesitation. When I started to write my submission I hesitated.

Merely asking me to provide a witness statement forced me to, as objectively as possible, challenge my opinions in this regard – perhaps a legacy of my studies, never accept face value without confidence.

So what is the value of R and D in the records management field. Let me first take a liberty and extend the question slightly. In my opinion, "our field" is information management.

So let's consider value

Value comes in different packages

There is personal value – learning for its own sake

There is the business value – in change for the business

There is the academic value –extending the boundaries or challenging the existing ones

Personal Value

When I decided to undertake my MSc in Records Management via distance learning via Northumbria University, I wanted to challenge my skill set against an assessed benchmark. Did I know enough to prove to myself I am a good records manager. Could I prove to my peers that this was the case by achieving an award such as the MSc. I did and this objective was achieved. Partially because of the MSc I was more confident, a more capable researcher, I understood and used the research techniques I had learned. These new skills were added to my skill set and were used to develop my career. My work role now extend beyond Records Management into various other information management discipline. However, the Records Management field winds its way around my role at all points.

Business value

No business will invest in education for its staff unless value is derived, particularly in today's economic climate. The business value was about using the learning to progress the aims of the business.

As a direct result of studying, and before its completion, I had developed thinking about presenting information through discovery. I discovered, through research and by that I mean the study, extending knowledge in other RM areas and the Dissertation, a new way to present information to customers. In doing so I combined Oracle Customer Relationship Management with Cintra searchlight (a taxonomy

management tool) supported by controlled taxonomies of preferred and non-preferred terms (ESD Toolkit), wisdom 6.4 EDRMS and Google maps with locally prepared Geographical Information layers (Street Lights, Gritting routes etc).

This new integrated tool-set was born out of my learning, of that I have no doubt. The business wanted a tool which displayed advice to call handlers alongside FAQs and a mapping interface which was largely automated, all displayed to the handler within three seconds of the metadata query being entered. What I call a true knowledge base.

Of records management, I once said it's all about metadata and classification. I now say it's all about discovery, the principle purpose of records management.

In addition, we had a huge paper storage problem. When I left my last employers, my strategy was already in place which supported a wider business objective of moving from 53 locations to around 21. Sadly I did not remain to see it through, but no regrets, I was proud of the legacy I left with them.

What about when practitioners stop researching in an academic environment?

A vitally important question. Students/Researchers complete two, or more, years of learning. Out of this appears a significant piece of research that the student considers important and adds value to the profession. Two problems occur to me:-

The student is left in a void, engaged in discovery and then suddenly cut-off from the resources necessary to either conclude the discovery process or pass on the learning. Perhaps these people are the next lecturers? Perhaps they remain frustrated?

The dissertation is confined to a dark room under the bowels of the academic institution, un-indexed and inaccessible to the masses, is this supporting standing on the shoulders of giants?

Has the message from the research been shared? The great danger is that the answer is no.

Do they care?

Who are they? Who needs to care? The university? The student? The business?

My dissertation was read by, I suspect, no more than 5/6 people. I am already experiencing the value from the business perspective and from one or more of those 5/6 people who see what I see and have encouraged me to write a chapter for a book, I look to Elizabeth Lomas as the lead in this regard.

What next?

Unanswered questions need thought provoking argument – the ultimate purpose of my submission as a practitioner and addresses the principle question and the two sub-questions – supported by my submission and opened for debate.

Is R and D worthwhile in our field? Surely it must if it exposes value, not if it decomposes in a dusty basement. Value in scientific terms includes failure as well as success. Failure provides value if a proposition or argument is recorded and the output recognises that the proposition does not stand up to scrutiny, at least it should stand as a challenge and provide value to anyone re-visiting that proposition or argument.

Is some research more valuable than others? No, in my opinion all research is valuable, as it either opens up a path or it closes a path

The impact is a developing, changing, maturing or emerging profession supporting the delivery of the only Constant – Change

In conclusion I submit to you that for the reasons outlined in the past eight minutes or so, research and development has value, worth, supports solution delivery and personal value, helps to make improvement (knowledge base) and thus has impact as others seek to learn from the solutions and deploy them elsewhere – or even improve upon them, although I respectfully submit I am not a giant, well not in longitudinal terms!

John McDonald [Statement delivered *in absentia* through pre-recorded video]
Information Management and Consulting

During the course of my 35–40 year career, I've had the opportunity to be involved in, exposed to, and/or benefit from a wide variety of e-records research projects reflecting a range of research 'types' from the pure or theoretical to the applied – with lots of variation in between.¹ In reflecting on the value of these projects I found it striking that regardless of their type or research objective, and without the benefit of any grand plan, they had a way of informing one another and, as a consequence, of informing the direction that should be taken in e-records management.

During my time in the 1970s with the Machine Readable Archives Division of the then National Archives of Canada and without the benefit of any real e-records research, we used the procedures developed by the social science data community to preserve valuable 'archival' data sets. In the 80s we shifted gears as personal computers (PCs) and networked PCs began to have an impact on the 'record'. Research and development work leading to the initial functional requirements for recordkeeping systems couldn't have happened without the benefit of theoretical research such as that underway at the time at the universities of British Columbia (UBC) and Pittsburgh. In fact the UBC and Pittsburgh projects were very important because they gave us a much clearer understanding of the purposes, attributes and characteristics of records – an understanding that was critical if we were to develop tools and strategies that would be relevant to records creating organizations and archives. This understanding was further enriched by research undertaken in Australia through the 90s and the development of models based on continuum thinking. Meanwhile the results of InterPARES² reinforced our understanding of records and recordkeeping in diverse records creating environments.

The results of this largely theoretical research were infused in the development work (or applied research) that led to early e-records scheduling guidelines and the emergence of tools such as functional requirements for electronic document and records management systems (EDRMS), capacity checklists, national and international standards for records management and metadata, and a host of other products. In turn, the experience gained in applying these tools helped to guide subsequent research as well as the development of training and education programs. Over the past two years AC⁺erm has been building on this legacy of research and experience to explore both the theoretical and practical aspects of e-records management in the increasingly complex records creating environments supported in modern organizations.

For myself as a practitioner all of this research was extremely valuable at two levels. First it contributed to standards and methods that could be introduced to at least begin dealing with the management of e-records (recognizing that we were still scratching the surface, especially in the area of digital preservation).

Second, and most important from my perspective, the enriched view of what records are, why they are important, what is necessary to ensure their effective management, etc. gave me the confidence I needed to walk into boardrooms and talk about records and recordkeeping in business terms. That's a far cry from the days when we talked about inventorying tapes and reviewing paper-based records schedules to find out if any records were in electronic form. Walking into boardrooms in those days was not fun because, in all honesty we really didn't know what we were talking about. Now we do and we have that rich legacy of theoretical and applied research to thank for it.

But as we move into an increasingly sophisticated environment, I think there are at least five things e-records research will need to address if it is to continue to have practical value in the future.

First e-records research should focus much more substantially on exploring not just the impact of new records-creating technologies (e.g. web 2.0) but the impact of the innovative application of these technologies on society and organizations and the means by which information is communicated. AC⁺erm has scratched the surface on this but I think we have yet to really understand how the functions, processes, and governance structures of organizations have changed through time and how the ways in which information is exchanged and shared across organizations and, more broadly across society have evolved.

Within organizations, for instance, drivers such as globalization, competitiveness, partnership building, client service, security, transparency, and yes technology are having a major impact on the business

¹ Actually, few projects reflect purely theoretical or purely applied/developmental approaches. Most reflect a blend of both with some giving emphasis to one over the other.

² InterPARES: International Research on Permanent Authentic Records in Electronic Systems, a long-running project on the long-term preservation of authentic digital records, now in its third phase.

landscapes of organizations. This in turn is having an impact on the records-creating landscape and beginning to challenge some fundamental assumptions about records and recordkeeping (especially with respect to their purpose). It is also demonstrating that no one size of recordkeeping will fit all.

Achieving an understanding of this complex records creating landscape would help to set the stage for research into what would constitute a vision (or perhaps series of visions) of the records-creating 'organization' and, building on this vision(s), a vision(s) of what the functions, processes and governance structures of organizations would look like if records management was successful. While some may complain that such research is too theoretical and therefore not of much value from the perspective of the practitioner looking for practical tools and techniques I would argue that it's essential if the tools and techniques (not to mention our fundamental concepts and assumptions) are to continue to be relevant.

Second, research is required into what it means (and what it takes) to develop effective and comprehensive e-records strategies – strategies that would result in viable and implementable e-records programs that are aligned with and, ideally, integrated with business, IT and other organization-based strategies (not to mention broader strategies addressing societal issues such as privacy, identity, culture, etc.). While much research has led to standards and tools such as EDRMS, capacity checks, etc., managing e-records requires a comprehensive infrastructure comprising laws and policies, standards and practices, enabling technologies, and qualified/trained people supported by an effective accountability framework and governance structure all of which are dedicated to supporting the functions, activities, and processes of organizations in a given societal context.

Achieving such a comprehensive, asset-management based infrastructure requires strategies that are themselves comprehensive and asset-management based. The AC⁺erm research project has been valuable in that regard because it didn't focus unduly on one dimension of the infrastructure (e.g. technology) over the other. Three important and distinct infrastructure-related themes – technology, process, people – were addressed equally. Nevertheless, while the broad, theme-based approach was useful, additional research is required to explore the relationships among the three themes and, more broadly, how the results of this exploration can help to inform the development of comprehensive, relevant, and implementable e-records strategies.

Third, research is needed into the kinds of research methods that will be most effective in conducting e-records research in the future. As the e-records landscape becomes more complex it follows that the methods required to conduct e-records research will need to become more sophisticated and robust. The research experience over the past 35–40 years offers us an excellent opportunity to see what worked well and what didn't. In fact one of the greatest benefits of AC⁺erm was the opportunity to assess the use and value of a wide variety of research methods. Few other e-research initiatives have explored the use of multiple research methods to such an extent and even fewer have taken the steps required to assess their adequacy. In many respects, the experience gained from employing these research methods will be as valuable as the AC⁺erm research results themselves.

Fourth, in spite of a few examples and some valiant efforts by some research initiatives, e-records research has yet to benefit from truly inter-disciplinary approaches. AC⁺erm made a valiant effort in this respect and much can be learned from what went well and what didn't go so well in terms of including other disciplines in the AC⁺erm research process. In moving forward, however, and building on this experience, it would be useful to step back and understand more clearly the nature of increasingly complex records-creating organizations (i.e. functions, processes, governance structures, etc.) situated within the context of increasingly sophisticated societies, and then use this understanding to find out with whom we should be partnering. For instance, much has been said about partnering with business managers, IT, Legal, and other information disciplines beyond records management. However, achieving a greater understanding of the records-creating environment might lead us to consider reaching out to others involved in fields such as organizational change, social behaviour, business process design, strategic planning, communications, etc.

Finally, a 'research of the research' initiative should be established to explore the connections among current and emerging e-records initiatives (including AC⁺erm). Such an initiative would identify where and how the research orientation of e-records research initiatives (theoretical, applied, etc.) could be brought together to be mutually supportive (i.e. the whole becoming greater than the sum of the parts) and how their value and relevance could be maximized to support a wide range of requirements – from new knowledge and concepts to practical tools and solutions.

Over the past number of decades the inter-play among the various types of e-records research initiatives, while unplanned, fostered positive change in the way in which e-records were managed. Hopefully, establishing a planned and deliberate 'research of the research' initiative (in addition to

addressing the other suggestions described in this witness statement) will help, in the future, to accelerate the kind of positive change AC⁺erm originally envisioned for electronic records management.

Open Discussion [Transcript]

Catherine Hare

Chair

I'd seen that before [John McDonald's video statement] but it certainly benefits from a second viewing and I suspect more than a second viewing. John leads us into the final session, when we're going to be looking at the future of research and development, but before we move to that I'd like to invite comments and give you and the witnesses the opportunity to ask questions.

Shona Robertson

Parliamentary Archives

I suppose it is more common than anything, but one of the questions on the list was 'Why would practitioners engage in R&D?' I don't think any of us disagree with why we would want to or the value it adds, but I wonder if the question was actually 'Why aren't we more actively engaged? And of course one of the key things with this project was reaching out to all those different communities. I don't know what your success levels were against what you had hoped for and with the different audiences, but I wonder from my perspective as a practitioner (I don't know about everyone else) but are they experiencing 'project creep' in terms of what we do professionally?

I overheard a conversation earlier someone was saying 'How much time do I spend on records management? Not very much'. Actually, traditional activities [like] information compliance, Freedom of Information, Data Protection, I am trying to get in on information systems development and SharePoint stuff, [means] records management is almost bottom of my list of priorities. And I am trying to keep up in my levels of knowledge and all these new things and educate myself and looking to gaining other related qualifications, gaining audit experience.

Something mentioned earlier was that IT people don't know what 'records' are, that is a key thing in my organisation. I want to teach those people so I need to learn their language first. So, I am trying to keep up on that, I haven't got enough time to do that alone and I don't know what to focus on research wise. I would love to be more involved in research but until I've got my confidence up on my professional levels of knowledge and all those things, I don't think there is actually that much I can contribute, I don't know. Like I say this isn't a question, more of a commentary...

Catherine Hare

I think it's a *very* important practitioner perspective of what it is like for many of you/us in day-to-day experience. Yes, I was having a conversation earlier; I was saying that when I first started out the idea of information governance certainly hadn't been labelled. I'm sure it did exist but it hadn't been packaged. You also mention confidence, which is something that Paul Dodgson mentioned and John [McDonald].

Caroline Williams

Practitioner and Academic

We have framed the debate here around/in relation to academic research, for obvious reasons, and that has been really useful. Practitioners here have also talked about the research they've done perhaps in academic terms, although what they are doing on the ground is hugely important. But I have a view that practitioners actually *do* research; and you are probably doing research, but you are probably thinking of it as problem-solving.

There is an awful lot that goes on, on the ground that never sees the light of day because the research mindset as we see it isn't there. If you you've got a problem you solve it; if it goes wrong, you don't do what some of the companies obviously do and learn from that, you just think that it went wrong and then you don't disseminate what you've done. My experience at The National Archives was [like] this. Someone mentioned all the work that is done there, particularly in the days of EDRM and all that sort of commercial connection, doing a huge amount of problem solving, generating a huge amount of information that would be useful elsewhere, but it doesn't actually get there.

I don't think that research solely derives from the academic; I think it is up to us all, as practitioners, to identify problems, solve them, or try to solve them, and share with others who have an interest in doing that.

Shona Robertson

Additionally I can't disseminate that research, I think everyone has problem.

Catherine Hare

Can I address that to you David [Bowen] because you made the distinction between commercial research and academic research and you felt the important thing was the role for commercial research. I just wondered if you had any comments.

David Bowen

I was really meaning research with a commercial effect, so that could still be done by academic people; but yes, research is also done by commercial organisations and I don't see the amount of interaction in information management that I did in other areas like pharmaceuticals or chemistry. We seem to be going in parallel paths, not talking. I completely agree with what has been said, about research masquerading as problem solving and people not having time to disclose what they had done, but we wish we did and we wish [the results] they were disclosed because they would be useful. I think the CC [Continued Communication] project has some models for how that could be improved.³

Chris Campbell

Continued Communication Group

I think one of the other... maybe there is a barrier between the commercial side of things and the academic, or the more public facing, because a lot of what the commercial organisations do they want to keep things for themselves. Apart from the confidentiality, there are other issues over whether the stuff can be shared. In the pharmaceutical world, sharing information about how you look after records is slightly precarious. You can get subpoenaed for that kind of thing...

Catherine Hare

...because you think you are handing over market intelligence and losing market advantage?

Chris Campbell

Yes. Whereas when I worked in the public sector it was much easier to talk about what I was doing, it was much more open. So, I think there is an intrinsic barrier to sharing that.

Catherine Hare

Any other questions or comments?

Lawrence Serewicz

Durham County Council

I was struck by that latest conversation around dissemination of knowledge and information and the way that organisations wrestle with this because it gets back to what Mr [John] McDonald was saying on the video of understanding the organisational culture and how records management relates to it. I think that is an area that is still untapped and unexplored because I always pose the question 'What is *good* records management?' We know what *bad* records management is, but what is *good* records management? But I don't leave it at that, [I ask] 'how does good records management reflect into corporate management?'

If we talk about organisations that have bad records management but are still supposedly successful organisations, and this goes back to what Paul Dodgson was saying about if you don't manage your records you are going to have a catastrophic failure eventually; but there are organisations that *do* manage to get by, they stumble through it. However they do, they do it; they get through and they survive and they are often claimed to be excellent organisations, although beneath it there is poor records management.

I think within research, within records management, within an organisation like the public sector where I work, I think the dissemination occurs, but it is not in the way we think of in academia, in terms of dissemination. It is often... you find a good piece of work such as benchmarking, or what other people are doing, and you tweak it up to how it would fit in your organisational culture, then you disseminate it. So you've added your value, your research capacity, and that's what you are disseminating and whether your extended management team, every staff member, whomever, reads it, that's when you start and have your dissemination. It's not going to be a clear-cut criteria of communities that you touch.

Now, if you have a very advanced organisation, we have a learning culture, where there are some organisations like that, the Harvard Business Review talks about these types of things, that's where

³ Continued Communication Group, based on the PhD study of Elizabeth Lomas, Northumbria University

you are moving towards. But public-sector organisations aren't structured to be (and this isn't a criticism) but they are not structured to be learning organisations *in that way*, because they are in a service that is slightly different. So, there is a key question here as well as to the ethos. The records management ethos of a library is going to be hugely different to the records management ethos of a pharmaceutical company and a public sector organisation. They will all do records management in a sense and there is a commonality there, but there are important distinctions within that that create issues around this that we are wrestling with now.

Catherine Hare

Just to come back to you on that, John McDonald talked about an asset management approach to records management and suggested that there were potential models in financial management and HR management and others. Do you think information management is so significantly different in those different types of organisation as you outline, whereas in financial management [it] wouldn't be?

Lawrence Serewicz

What I was thinking of in that regard, is that in the pharmaceutical industry for example, its highest assets won't be records; they will be the patents, the cutting edge research. In my organisation, the most highly valued asset isn't going to records, it is going to be something else, just as in a library, it's going to be something else. Records will support that, but that relationship will be different. It is not a criticism of my organisation as such, but if you said 'where are records in your asset management strategy and your prioritization?' it wouldn't register.

David Bowen

I just want to say quickly, I think it will be an interesting idea to look at the asset management approach but I think *a priori* records management is going to find its way ahead. HR for example has, so far as I know, continued to fail, comprehensively, at any ability to develop registers of skills and of what people are used for, in other words, multi-purpose approaches. Whereas we routinely have multi-purpose approaches to records and when we index them we routinely index them so that they can be used for different purposes by different people. Again, physical asset management is very well structured, in terms of repair reviews and so on, in some organisations, but almost always with a single purpose. So, I think we should look at those, but I think we should expect to teach them more than we learn from them.

Catherine Hare

Thank you David, I am now going to hand over to Professor Michael Moss who is going to look at the future of research and development within information and records management.

OPEN FLOOR DISCUSSION: THE FUTURE FOR RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

16:30–16:55

Discussion [Transcription]

Michael Moss

Glasgow University (Chair)

No, I am not going to do that because you have heard the witnesses and now it is time for an exam! You will notice on the tables you have all got a number for the table and I want each table to answer one of the questions that Julie has set us. And you will have two minutes to do it in! Question 1 will be answered by tables 3, 6 and 9. Question 2 will be answered by tables 4 and 8. Question 3 will be answered by 2, 5 and 7 and question 4 by tables 1 and 10....

[A 2 minute discussion at the tables ensued...]

Michael Moss

Can we begin with question 1 with table 3 – ‘What should the research agenda be?’ Come on, we want some research agenda, don’t be shy! Nobody willing to say something? There’s no research agenda! What are the questions you would like answered? Has anyone from tables 6 and 9 got an answer to question 1? Has anyone got an answer, we only have two minutes...?

Sue Childs, Northumbria University

Can I give an answer to that question?

Michael Moss

Yes. Who is willing to give an answer?

Sue Childs

I was going to say I think from what most people have been saying, that the research agenda should be focussed on practical and pragmatic topics and be ones that practitioners feel need to be addressed.

Michael Moss:

Well that’s another question, so can we have an answer from this table? Have you got an answer?

Susan Em

NHS Business Services Authority

This is entirely personal. I think the research agenda ought definitely to include that which is *not* practical, because practitioners don’t just need solutions to specific problems. They are not necessarily going to academia to say ‘how are we going to solve our email archiving solution?’ What we also need is a very flexible intellectual landscape so I think it is very, very valid to have non-practical discussions going on in academia because God knows we don’t have time to do it in practice.

Michael Moss:

Good. You were table 6 were you? What about table 9, do you have some reflections?

Lawrence Serewicz

Durham County Council

One thing that struck us was the way that the future agenda would be shaped by the emerging Web 2.0 but also of Gov 3.0 and how deep web searching and semantic web searching might influence how records are organised and structured within organisations that are subject to disclosure, such as public sector organisations.

Michael Moss

I think that is a very valid point. I think it is not Web 3.0, it is the semantic web. I think the semantic web has huge potential. Anybody else have anything else to reflect about the research agenda?

Shona Robertson

Houses of Parliament

We were talking a little bit earlier about how there is probably a multi-tiered approach to the research agenda, so there are the big questions, there are the small detailed questions, and there is this whole

rolling back from what the researchers who have got funding and do it the whole time think we want and what we as practitioners think we need and actually what is the root problem? What are we actually aiming for? Have we lost sight of that?

Michael Moss

Can you develop that a bit?

Shona Robertson

I'm afraid that is as far as we got.

Michael Moss

Two more points and Catherine and then we move on to question...

Margaret Procter

University of Liverpool

On the subject of research, I am, and this is something that comes from different fora again. It's also the responsibility of professional bodies to set a research agenda because they, in effect, are the bodies often that are intermediaries between practitioners and academic research.

Michael Moss

Good. One more...

Rachel Hardiman

Northumbria University

I think as well as that we do need, not necessarily just a practical focus, we need a mediation into practice. But I also think we need to look at some of the wider issues. I know John McDonald mentioned this and various other people, to look at issues to do with the psychology of information and recordkeeping, of working within organisations, those sorts of aspects. But also even more, like the philosophy. What do records mean? What do we mean, what are we as information beings? There is a philosophy of information, there ought to be a philosophy of records and a psychology of records, and these things need to be then mediated into practical effect, because often things... you can set up a road-map or a guide book or a tool-kit but that comes a cropper when you try and put it in practice because you haven't taken this into account.

Michael Moss

We are back to Plato. Catherine.

Catherine Hare

Consultant

Just to concur with what Rachel [Hardiman] has said, I think we really do need a research base otherwise we are going to be operating on shifting sands. Every other academic discipline that I know of has a research base and from that research base you can then move into applied research, you need the basic plus the applied.

Michael Moss

That takes us to question 2, table 4. 'Who should do the research and where?'

Geoff Hare

Self-Employed

Whoever will pay for it, I think. At the moment, there is some money available via universities or in universities from research councils, so that is one place where it is going to take place.

Sarah Graham

Newcastle City Council

We were agreeing that it depends on the context and that clearly there is room for academic input and there is room for practical and practitioner input as well. It should probably be a collaboration of both, if possible. I think Dr Hare made a good point, that it does depend on funding because, speaking personally, I am from a public sector authority and clearly funding is very, very tight at the moment, so getting funding for a research project on records management would be very difficult in the current climate.

Michael Moss

But when we reflect that the government agenda is to use the 'e', to leverage the back office and yet you can't do the research. Table 8, anything to reflect?

Michael Rogers

The National Archives

We have been talking this afternoon about having collaborative organised groups so we probably need to... if we are going to look at who should do the research it should be that group and it should involve key stakeholders. And if we are looking at transforming information management it should be those key stakeholders, which from my perspective, leading [are] IT and ICT companies, professional bodies, universities (in terms of academics and consultants); and if we are looking at in terms of the government, we need to include bodies like the Information Commissioner's Office, the [UK] Cabinet Office and I would put [The] National Archives up there as well.

Michael Moss

Can I ask a general question... How many people here who work, not in universities, but out in the public and private sector, is information discussed at board level, at audit and risk management committee level? [looks for a show of hands – a large proportion] That is good, that's interesting. How many of you have information owners throughout the organisation? [looks for a show of hands – also a large proportion] Good, interesting. There's an area that there are obvious people who should be participating. Anybody got reflections on who should do the research and where? [silence] We have a sort of consensus, which I think is encouraging. Now can we move on to question 3 – 'How can we integrate research and practice?' Tough one... table 2... Zoe is going to reflect [laughter]

Zoe Smyth

Northern Ireland Office

Well, from a practitioner's perspective I think research needs to reflect the business objectives in organisations and also the way people work, which came out in some of the witness statements. It needs to be practical. So, to integrate the research into a working public-sector organisation; we do a lot of projects and then 'lessons learned' reports, information about the pilots, what went well, what didn't go well. If you can disseminate that by publishing any reports or just your reflections on those projects, it will then help other practitioners. So from that point of view, I think applied research is actually very useful. If, it is very real, and you provide real detail about what actually did go wrong and how you did learn from it.

Michael Moss

That fits into Margaret's point about the professional bodies doesn't it? Table 5, have you got any reflections? David is ready and willing [laughter].

David Bowen

Audata Ltd

Integrating research and practice: we need to bring the intellectual foundation that Rachel [Hardiman] and others have spoken about, and take it to IT people, to law departments, to business management and Business Schools and Social Sciences; because a lot of our practice is not determined by us. It is determined by people outside 'us'. We need to do research that is relevant to current concerns and current problems. We need to be doing research on Web 2.0. We need to be doing research on very large collections of information and multi-national research on multi-national corporations, corporations whose information is crossing national boundaries all the time. We need joint projects with vendors, practitioners and academics. Vendors, again, are often determining practice with no reference to academic research and we need to fix that.

Michael Moss

Table 7?... Sorry...

Babis Theodoulidis

Can I add just one more point? Coming from the academic world I think the digression [sic] should take into consideration both parties. So, there should be value to both parties, both from the academic side and the research side and the practice side. There should be value. There should be value proposition for both parties.

Michael Moss

Thank you. Table 7...

Steve Bailey

I just want to reiterate the idea of finding innovative ways of synthesizing, repurposing and disseminating research outputs, rather than seeing research papers as the end, actually seeing them as the beginning; and seeing where they lead us from there.

Michael Moss

That leads directly on to this very difficult question of impact, which we are struggling for within the REF. I would like to hear what Stuart [Orr] has to say about this... [laughter] Well, you are the person who is going to be impacted!

Stuart Orr

I was thinking more about value, which is a difficult one. Impact is difficult to assess but I think it's similar to value. As a practitioner, you are always looking backwards and how long that period is; what was the impact? You don't think about it at the time, you are too busy doing it, which is sometimes the problem with records. Businesses are so busy doing business that they are not thinking about managing their information. And the same with assessing the value. Sometimes you... again, it's [research] a catalyst, the value... a tremendous value as a catalyst to things happening, but you don't necessarily appreciate it. Or you do appreciate it and you want to steal the idea and not acknowledge the germ in the research.

Michael Moss

That raises really serious issues about the case studies that Alison [Pickard] referred to because much of it appears to be predicated, but if you are not going to say or you haven't got time to write it down that creates a problem. Anyone else? Julie is going to reflect on impact...

Julie McLeod

I'll just say a few words. I gave you a list of statistics at the beginning, they're not really 'impact' but they are a hard measure of interest in the research that we have been doing. The fact that the numbers have gone up, and there are repeat visitors [to the website], suggests that it is still of interest. We know that is not 'impact' in terms of changing policy, of changing practice etc but it *is* an indicator. We have heard today, and I was going to say, that sometimes impact takes 20 or 30 years to see, and actually, you can't always pin-point that it was *that* that actually caused *that*. We had some very good examples from the ECB [European Central Bank] but it is going to be difficult to find all of those things. We have had *ad hoc* emails, which we have kept because, sorry, we have to play the game of REF etc. so, it is really difficult to measure impact and assess value.

Michael Moss

Anyone from table 10 going to reflect?

Alison Pickard

This really is an interesting discussion and I did raise a few issues earlier because they are very, very close to my heart. It is lovely to hear that there is so much faith in the Research Excellence Framework [REF] and the fact that they will be measuring impact. I think, a few people may be aware, that there has been a little bit of backtracking on that in the last two weeks, so we shall see. I am holding my breath in anticipation to see how we are going to measure this impact in community engagement. There have been some universities who are actually, quite staunchly, against this move... [member of the audience comments 'The Russell Group I think..']

This is a hard one. Value... What's valuable and *when* is it valuable? The issue that Julie [McLeod] raised there about how can we measure impact? Impact is something that can take a long time. It is not reactive, it is not here, it's not now, and it's not a reaction to something within, say, two weeks of it coming out. Impact is something that we can sometimes not assess until we're a year, three years, five years into the future, and by the time we get there, what caused the impact? This is not about cause and effect. This is about incremental change; and the value and the impact can come from lots of areas over a long period of time. I'm not even sure there is a need to measure value and impact. There is a need to see change, there is a need to see movement.

I think I have gone far enough now in stirring it up a bit haven't I? [laughter] I don't know, how do we measure it? There is a conference that Northumbria has hosted for a number of years now, that looks at performance measures in libraries and information services, impact and value, we are still struggling with the answers twelve years on.

Michael Moss

It's like trying to correct construct KPIs that aren't just idiotic numbers.

Alison Pickard

I do agree with Julie [McLeod] in terms of these hard measures of interest and I think they are a very, very useful thing for us to keep and look at, because if nobody is interested and nobody cares why are we doing it?

Heather Jack

HJBS Ltd

I think the big problem with this is, value, impact and measures are all about numerical, quantitative, meaningless spurious things, and I am sorry to be kind of controversial, but in terms of hit rates and sites and all the rest of it, what does it actually tell you in terms of what value anyone got from that? Did they come back, did they get what they wanted? A brilliant guy (whose name escapes me now, Jerry somebody or other) does lots of great stuff about internet sites and he says 'who wants to have people coming back again and again? Is that because they can't find what they are looking for? Is it not about how quick your experience is and what you are getting?' So, I think we have to put this thing on its head and take a big step back. It also goes to the stuff that JISC are doing on measuring the value of records management and that whole laughable whachamacallit [sic] report, that never actually existed, that is so tedious.

Adrian Cunningham

There is probably another research project in this, but I tend to view research as 'you throw a stone in a pool and the ripples continue flowing out', quite often for many years after. I think it would be really interesting to do a study of the state of records management practice today and to what extent it is being influenced by research projects going back however many years. I would look at, for example a lot of the standards and guidelines that the National Archives of Australia has produced; we can trace back a lineage to the Pittsburgh project and the Record Continuum Research Group etc. etc. In turn, our stuff has been picked up by Auditors General and by Ombudsmen who are doing work; it's been picked up by people like the International Records Management Trust, they have picked up some of the stuff and run with it. And so now, some of the ripples I'm finding coming back to me.

Like a couple of days ago, someone in Papua New Guinea sent me this wonderful training package that they had developed on records management and that they are going to be rolling out in the provinces in Papua New Guinea. I could look at that training and trace back the lineage of it to some of the research projects that I know about. But the people who are delivering and receiving the training will be completely unaware of that. It would then be interesting to then reflect on to what extent the research findings had mutated or been distorted as it has travelled through this dissemination process. I think we have got a very poor understanding of how practice on the ground, whether it be in Sierra Leone or Papua New Guinea or London or Canberra or wherever, is being influenced and is continuing to be influenced by research projects and then, in turn, how that practice and how that practical experience can feed back into the loop of influencing future research projects.

Michael Moss

Catherine is going to have the last word.

Catherine Hare

Just to pick up on what Adrian [Cunningham] was saying; it is all about 'what works?' isn't it, and this process of evolution. We are not in the world of revolution, I don't think we want to be in the world of revolution; revolution is uncomfortable. Evolution is what we are seeing and I suppose underneath the evolution, there is the impact, but it's the moving forward that is important. I don't know how we facilitate the moving forward, but the good comes to the top.

Michael Moss

Thank you very much. Julie is now going to tell us whether we have passed our exam [laughter]...

CLOSING REMARKS

16:55–17:00

Professor Julie McLeod

School of Computing, Engineering and Information Sciences, Northumbria University

I would just like to quickly wrap up our day. It has been short, but I think it has been sweet and stimulating and I know we have had a few food analogies along the way, but there is the last one. I think this has just been so incredibly invaluable. I've been making notes during the afternoon; I haven't got all of the themes but just some of the themes that have come through to me today have been....

- The link between research and teaching and the link between research and practice. I deliberately used research and development (R&D) in this event, and that does include the work that you do as a practitioner. As Caroline Williams was saying, it is that long spectrum, from very short pieces, say half a day to solve a problem. That to me is part of that R&D spectrum. So, there is clear links there and it seems to me, there is clear value for research in those contexts.
- One of the themes that came up and has been quite contentious, and I think very valuable in terms of discussion, is about 'if we can share, and how we can share, the outcomes of our research and development?' Do we publish it, and where do we publish it and in what forms? I think it is all about packaging. I think it is interesting that we are moving away from just focusing (if that is the right word) on peer-reviewed articles to other things; and I would just say that when we wrote this bid, nearly five years ago now, I think we stuck our heads above the parapet. We went to a UK Research Council and we said, 'we are *not* planning to produce any-peer reviewed articles until the very end of this project' and how many? One! And we will have one published and one in process.

We said instead, that we would disseminate as we went through. Well yes, we have a large number of things on our website and perhaps it is too much, and we will distil that, but we said we would publish as we went along. And the only reason I felt confident enough to try that was because electronic records management will [sic] change so fast we can't afford to wait for three years. Had it been another project I am not sure we would have done that. So, publishing is a very important theme.

- Stepping away and moving out, moving out of academia into practice, back again. If 15 years is the trigger I am a year overdue! Thank you Chris Campbell for the two suggestions, one is to go to the Law School and the other is marketing – going to an advertising agency or buying one! So, I think I am doomed for not moving out in either of those areas.
- How do we take the research agenda forward? Steve Bailey made a really good suggestion about an institution, Luisa Di Biagio gave us some examples of how it is happening in an organisation as did Paul Dodgson. Chris and David Bowen sang the praises of the collaborative research model that Elizabeth Lomas is using in her PhD; and it is a real shame she is not here, she would have really enjoyed being here. But it is all about partnerships.

So, I guess we go back to the question in the title of the event which was 'Are we transforming information and records management through R&D?' I think we have heard some concrete examples of how we *are* and it is interesting it was about change, and not revolution and overnight change. Unsurprisingly I think, the transformation *isn't* all encompassing.

I won't say any more, I had planned to say other things; but given the time, if you will allow me to do what I really feel is a pleasure and an honour and that is to make some thank-yous.

First of all, to all those people that made this happen – the people in admin, the marketing department, IT, my research colleagues and students at the university, one of whom has been behind the scenes all afternoon to record this event so we can share it. To the AHRC for funding this event, or most of it, as part of the project and to our other sponsor Emerald Publishing. In particular to Lizzie Scott and Sarah Baxter (who is here today) for all of their support.

My second thanks go to our witnesses, for accepting the invitation to offer your views and put your heads above the parapets. Your views didn't just start the debate; they stimulated it, under the expert chairmanship of Adrian [Cunningham] Catherine [Hare] and Michael [Moss]. So thank you all very much indeed. A particular thanks to Heather Jack for stepping in at short notice to read Elizabeth's [Lomas] statement. And of course the debate wouldn't have been sustained, it wouldn't have been

scintillating, without you – everyone in the audience. The event may have been free of charge but there is no such thing as a free lunch is there? So the fact that you are all here must say something about the importance or your interest in R&D. The fact that you have engaged in the discussion and debate suggests, I hope, that the experience has been worthwhile.

My final thanks goes to two people without whom, not only would this event not have happened but the AC⁺erm project wouldn't have been conducted as well as it has been. I may well be risking embarrassing them here, but I would like to say here, in a public forum, a huge and personal thanks to my colleagues Sue Childs and Rachel Hardiman for all of their very hard work over the last two and a half and three years – thank you. [applause]

Now, the event is almost but not quite ended. Emerald Publishing Ltd have very generously sponsored access to materials, and a drinks reception so you can relax and have further conversation and you can network. This is all part of the 20th Anniversary celebrations of the *Records Management Journal* [RMJ] which Emerald publish, and which I have the honour to be the Editor of; Catherine [Hare] and Steve Bailey and Elizabeth [Lomas] are members of the editorial advisor board. The 20th Anniversary volume will comprise issues that look back, that look at where we are now, and also look to the future. So thanks Sarah [Baxter] for the generosity of the publisher and my thanks to Lizzie [Scott].

The other final thing on the publishing front is that Emerald have a very interesting way of sharing research by repackaging it (which is something that has come up today) for other audiences. They have a publication called *Management First* and that is something we'll definitely look at in the RMJ [*Records Management Journal*] to try and take some of the things that appear in our journal and repackage them, repurpose them, rewrite them so that we can get at those other stakeholder groups, [including] senior management. I know that some of you have to leave fairly promptly and won't be able stay very long at all. If you can't, I wish you a safe journey home and if you can, then please join us and have a drink before you do that.

[Applause]

Appendix I: Speaker Biographies

Speaker Profiles – Chairs

Adrian Cunningham, National Archives of Australia. Adrian is Director of Strategic Relations for the National Archives of Australia (NAA) where he oversees the Archives' collaborations with government, industry, professional and international partners, particularly on matters associated with digital recordkeeping and other modern recordkeeping initiatives. Before joining the NAA in 1998, he worked at the Office for Government Information Technology and for many years as a private records archivist/librarian at the National Library of Australia, the Pacific Manuscripts Bureau and the State Library of New South Wales. Past President of the Australian Society of Archivists (ASA) (1992-2000 and 2002-2004), he was also Secretary of the International Council on Archives (ICA) Committee on Descriptive Standards. In 2004, he received the ASA's prestigious Mander Jones award for work published in the Archives and Indigenous Peoples theme issue of the International Council on Archives journal, *Comma*. He is Convenor of the ASA Descriptive Standards Committee, Chair of the AGLS Metadata Working Group and a member of the Standards Australia Committee IT/21, Records Management.



Catherine Hare, Consultant. Catherine is by training a records and information specialist with over 30 years' experience of working in information management in the UK and abroad. For 13 years she was Senior Lecturer in Information and Records Management at Northumbria University in the UK. She has undertaken consultancy and training contracts and helped to develop a Lifelong Learning Award for information and archives staff in the BBC and a Masters in Records Management by distance learning. She was joint editor of the *Records Management Journal* from 1994 to 2004 and Chair of the Records Management Society of Great Britain from 1998 to 2000. After a short period as Manager of the UK Office of the Community of Science, an American-based company that provides research funding and expertise services for universities and other organisations across the world, she was employed as Chief of the Records Information Systems Unit at the United Nations in New York. She now works as an independent consultant.



Prof. Julie McLeod, Northumbria University. Julie is Professor in Records Management in the School of Computing, Engineering & Information Sciences and also Programme Leader of the MSc Records Management (distance learning) course, the first of its kind in the UK. She has conducted funded research projects into the management of research records, the impact of ISO 15489 in the UK and the evaluation of records management toolkits. She is currently a member of the committee responsible for the development of ISO 15489 and of the Arts & Humanities Research Council Panel 6 which supports research and vocational education in records management, archives and librarianship. Prior to joining Northumbria University Julie had a long career in industry in records and information management.



Prof. Michael Moss, Glasgow University. Michael Moss was born in Yorkshire and educated at Bath and Oxford. He trained as an archivist at the Bodleian Library and was archivist at the University of Glasgow from 1974 until 2001. Since then he has been research professor in archive studies in the Humanities Advanced Technology and Information Institute (HATII). He has published widely on many subjects.



Speaker Profiles – Witnesses

Steve Bailey, JISC infoNet. Steve currently acts as senior advisor on records management issues for JISC infoNet, an advisory service for managers within the HE and FE sectors. He is responsible for preparing and disseminating a range of guidance material and tools to help support the development of records management within the sector and is a well known speaker and writer on records management issues. Prior to moving to JISC infoNet in February 2007 Steve spent five years leading JISC's own internal records & information management activities and its successful programme of innovative records management and information governance development projects. Since obtaining his Masters with Distinction in Archives and Records Management from UCL in 1997, Steve has worked as Assistant Records Manager for the global pharmaceutical company Pfizer and Team Leader (Archives and Records Management) for the University of Gloucestershire. Steve's blog on the future of records management can be found at <http://rmfuturewatch.blogspot.com/>



Dr David V Bowen, Audata Ltd. After school in Andover, Massachusetts, David studied analytical chemistry at Cambridge and London. During the 1970s and 1980s he was increasingly involved with the computers which collected, analysed and distributed analytical data. This led him to build Pfizer's Central Electronic Archive and their physical data archive in the early 1990s. David is Managing Director of Audata Ltd and since 1998 has worked in information management, performing strategic studies and projects, configuring and implementing document and records management systems, working in digital preservation, and managing projects in these areas for government, local authorities and private industry.



Chris Campbell, Continued Communication Research Group. Chris has worked in the archives and records management field since the mid 1990s. He is currently employed by GlaxoSmithKline where he is in an internal consultancy role with a focus on records retention. Previously Chris worked at the British Council where he was responsible for developing and introducing an ERM system and also responsible for the introduction of the FOI Act to the British Council. His primary interest in records management is how to engage employees and foster a behavioural shift with regard to information management.



Sue Childs, Northumbria University. Sue is a Research Fellow in the Information Management Innovation Research Group of the School of Computing, Engineering and Information Sciences. She has 29 years' experience on information and records management projects funded by AHRC, JISC, NHS etc. and has worked as an independent information consultant. Her research interest are: records management; health information; evidence-based practice particularly systematic literature reviews; user information needs; electronic provision of information; ICT, information and critical / evaluative skills. Sue is currently working on the AHRC funded project 'Accelerating positive change in electronic records. Understanding issues and developing practical approaches'. In addition to her research activities, she teaches on a number of modules. These have included Records Management; Research Methods; Information in Society; Nursing Informatics.



Maria Luisa Di Biagio, European Central Bank. Born in Italy, Luisa, after her language studies started to work at the Italian Central Bank before moving to Frankfurt a.M. in 1995 to join the European Monetary Institute and later the European Central Bank (ECB), where since July 2005 she has been working as a Records Management Specialist (RMS). Upon appointment to this position she completed a BSc (Hons) in Records and Information Management at Northumbria University. Together with a team of other five colleagues she is responsible for the management of the current records of the ECB. She has also been involved in the implementation of the ECB EDRM system.



Paul Dodgson, Driving Standards Agency. Paul is currently Head of Information Assurance at the Driving Standards Agency, an Executive Agency of the Department for Transport. Responsibilities include; Information Security, Records Management, Compliance, Cryptography, Information Management and Knowledge Management. Prior to joining the DSA Paul was Information Management Business Partner at Leicestershire County Council, during which time Paul successfully completed his MSc in Records Management through distance learning from Northumbria University. Whilst at Leicestershire Paul was responsible for delivering EDRMS in association with an innovative information discovery tool, combining Oracle CRM with EDRMS and Cintra searchlight taxonomy manager, to deliver a high quality information retrieval system for use by call centre operatives. Paul is specifically interested in managing records to facilitate high quality discovery. Paul has had various articles published by a variety of publishers including Ark Group, the Records Management Society and the British Computer Society. Paul also contributed to the recently revised Freedom of Information Act 2000 Section 46 Code of Practice relating to Records Management.



Elizabeth Lomas, Northumbria University. Elizabeth Lomas completed a BA Hons. in History and a Diploma and MA in Archive Studies and Records Management at UCL, part of the University of London. In addition she is IRCA qualified as a lead auditor for the information security standard ISO27001 and an Associate Member of the Museums' Association. She worked for over 15 years in the public and private sectors, most recently establishing the Royal Household's records management, legal compliance and information security programmes. She is currently a doctoral student in Records Management and module tutor at Northumbria University concentrating on the challenges of successful communication and communication management within a range of organisations. She holds a number of professional society posts, is a member of ARMA International's Risk Committee and a member of the Records Management Journal's Editorial Board.



[Elizabeth's statement was delivered by Heather Jack]

John McDonald, Independent Consultant. John specializes in information management. During a career of over 25 years with the National Archives of Canada he held a number of positions that were responsible for facilitating the management of records across the Government. A particular focus was the management of electronic records. In 2000, he led an initiative jointly sponsored by the Treasury Board Secretariat and National Archives that that led to the report, "Information Management in the Government of Canada – A Situation Analysis". He has authored or contributed to government-wide guides and standards on the management of government information and has published numerous articles in leading information management journals. He is a Past-President and Fellow of the Society of Canadian Office Automation Professionals, Past Chair of the Committee on Electronic Records of the International Council on Archives and founder and Past Chair of the Canadian Federal Government's Information Management Forum.



Dr Alison Pickard, Northumbria University. Alison is Head of the Information and Communication Management Subject Team in the School of Computing, Engineering and Information Sciences. She is responsible for teaching research methods to undergraduate and postgraduate students. She has a strong research track record having successfully managed a JISC funded project on User Behaviour in Information Seeking: Longitudinal evaluation of EIS (JUBILEE). She is a journal editor, member of a conference editorial board, author of a research methods text book, now used on LIS programmes internationally, articles, and a strong record of 'impact' research with practitioners in HE, FE Secondary Education and the Public Library sector. Alison is currently directing a CETL funded project 'Information PALs: embedding information literacy in the curriculum using peer assisted learning and is a partner on the National Lottery Heritage funded project 'Taking liberties in Newcastle' along with Newcastle City Library and the British Library.



Andrew Snowden, Fujitsu. Andrew is a consultant with extensive experience of information management projects including the application of electronic document and records management solutions along with search and categorisation technologies. He is the lead consultant for information architecture and information strategy. This experience has included working with a number of software packages and has emphasised the application of technology and its exploitation as an integral element of the organisation's knowledge and information management initiatives. Andrew's experience includes operational experience as well as consultancy in both the private and public sectors. His background emphasises the strong interest in the business benefits and implementation issues along with the technologies.



Appendix II: Gallery of Photographs

Introductions & Seminar 1



Seminar 2 & Discussion



Reception

