



Press Release

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Government commits to finding a solution to preserving its digital information

Vital government information is becoming increasingly fragile and could be lost forever unless something is done to keep up with the rapid pace of technological change. That was the stark warning as the government announced plans this week to address the need for digital preservation – making sure that information remains accessible for as long as it is needed, even after the format in which it was created has become obsolete.

This issue affects all governments worldwide but Britain is one of the first countries to tackle it. A ground-breaking project led by The National Archives will look at options for setting up a shared service across government departments to take, migrate and preserve digital data on their behalf.

Last year's *Mind the Gap* report from the Digital Preservation Coalition revealed just how serious the risk is of digital information degrading or being lost. Most government information is now created in digital format but, unlike paper records which have lifespans of centuries, electronic records are inherently ephemeral and vulnerable. Many e-documents such as web pages can disappear within days of their creation; without active preservation those e-documents which do survive become obsolete, on average, within seven years. Yet departments need to be able to access information for much longer than this.

Data stored on floppy disks can often no longer be read. Databases operate on old and obsolete platforms which can stop functioning; and constant migration of platforms jeopardises key content on a daily basis.

"Making sure that information remains accessible despite the rapid pace of changes in technology is a significant issue for all government departments" said Natalie Ceeney, Chief Executive of The National Archives. "There is a real danger of losing critical knowledge vital for today's government business. Effective digital preservation is essential to ensure government's accountability, business continuity and efficiency."

Sir Gus O'Donnell, Cabinet Secretary, said: "It's vital that government seizes the challenges that digital information creates. This initiative from The National Archives is a good example of how we are taking the Transformational Government agenda forward and demonstrates how we can work in a proactive and joined-up manner across all government departments to address this important issue."

For further information, or to organise an interview, please contact **Séverine Gould**, 020 8392 5277 (severine.gould@nationalarchives.gov.uk)

Notes for editors

The National Archives, www.nationalarchives.gov.uk, is a government department; and also an executive agency of the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). The National Archives brings together the Public Record Office, Historical Manuscripts Commission, the Office of Public Sector Information and Her Majesty's Stationery Office. See also www.opsi.gov.uk

The National Archives is at the heart of information policy – setting standards and supporting innovation in information and records management across the UK, and providing a practical framework of best practice for opening up and encouraging the re-use of public sector information. This work helps inform today's decisions and ensure that they become tomorrow's permanent record.

The National Archives is also the UK government's official archive, containing 900 years of history from Domesday Book to the present, with records ranging from parchment and paper scrolls through to recently created digital files and archived websites. Increasingly, these records are being put online, making them universally accessible.

The vision of The National Archives is to:

- Lead and transform information management
- Guarantee the survival of today's information for tomorrow
- Bring history to life for everyone