



Carrying out government policy

Freedom of Information

Over the past year, we have continued to play a major role in implementing the Freedom of Information Act 2000. We have started discussions with the Office of the Information Commissioner on how we will work together to promote good records management in government.

We contribute to cross-government work through the Freedom of Information (FoI) ministerial advisory and practitioners' groups. This includes the project to remove or amend the statutory bars preventing us from providing access to certain records.

The Code of Practice on Records Management under section 46 of the Act was issued formally in November 2002. We have continued our programme of preparing model action plans for different parts of the public sector. These have been published for central and local government, higher education, police forces and NHS authorities and we are currently working on one for schools.

Our staff have also provided training under the auspices of the Society of Archivists, aimed at preparing public authorities for the implementation of Freedom of Information legislation.

Government

The National Archives (PRO) oversees how government manages its records and selects which to release to the public – now and for future generations.

Our work for central government centres around three main activities:

- Carrying out government policy
- Promoting good practice in the way records are managed to support the business of government
- Helping government select records for permanent preservation.

This work also benefits local authorities and other public bodies, who draw on our best practice to guide their own operations.

We have initiated an Order in Council to add three bodies to the list of those whose records are public records: the British Council, the Disability Rights Commission and the Simpler Trade Procedures Board.

We are also working towards our own implementation of FOI. We were one of the central government bodies to pioneer pilot publication schemes and were pleased to receive the Information Commissioner's approval of our final scheme. It can be seen on our website at www.pro.gov.uk/about/foi/pub_scheme.asp

We have revised our guidance to members of the public on how to make a request for information under the Open Government Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. This is now on our website at www.pro.gov.uk/about/code_you.htm

Archives legislation

Last year we reported on the start of a review of the effectiveness of the Public Records Act 1958. This was prompted by a suggestion in the 1999 *Government Policy on Archives* (Cm 4516), published by the Lord Chancellor, that the legislative framework for archives might need to be reviewed.

The review is being undertaken by a cross-Government Working Group led by the Keeper, who has been charged by the Lord Chancellor with taking it forward. It is due to be completed during 2003.

Electronic records management

Government departments and agencies are making public services available through electronic channels. This increased use of electronic information produces electronic records which need to be properly managed.

Government organisations also have to be able to comply with information policy legislation, including the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Data Protection Act 1998.

To do this, they need to be able to store their electronic records efficiently – know what they have and where to find them – and have clear rules for their retention and disposal.

We are helping government to deliver these substantial changes. The National Archives oversees achievement of the target for putting in place, by 2004, the capability to manage electronic records. We provide leadership for this work, monitor progress, and offer advice and guidance to help departments in their efforts.

Over the last year we have:

- Updated standards for requirements for electronic records management systems, to incorporate new developments in e-government and information policy legislation
- Worked with the Office of the e-Envoy to establish common standards for describing and exchanging records in electronic records management systems

- Worked with the software industry to develop the market place and encourage innovation and competition
- Advised government departments on practical steps, and enabled the sharing of expertise and lessons learned
- Set out to tackle longer-term issues on the sustainability of electronic records
- Continued to publish, on our website, further guidance on electronic records management which is widely used and respected by records managers across the public sector. Our evaluation scheme for electronic records management software has achieved an international reputation, in Europe and the wider world, and our published generic requirements set the standard for the next generation of electronic records management software.

Promoting good practice in records management

Records management in government conference

This year the theme of our annual conference for government records and information managers was *Government and the citizen – records management beyond 2004*.

The highpoint of the conference, attended by over 250 delegates, was an address by the then Lord



Lord Irvine

Chancellor, Lord Irvine of Lairg, who spoke about the role of effective records management in helping government to deliver better policies and services.

"Full of excellent ideas, help and networking opportunities"

"The conference material was excellent as usual"

"Well worth the time and effort"

"Conference organisation and liaison by PRO staff was excellent"

Delegate comments on our Records Management in Government conference

Training and consultancy

The demands on our records management and consultancy service have increased significantly over the last 12 months.

Many public authorities are increasingly concerned about improving their record keeping systems so that they are well prepared for the implementation of Freedom of Information legislation in 2005. Central government departments have

also been focusing on records management principles and procedures as part of their drive to achieve targets on electronic records management.

Our consultancy service has provided expert advice and guidance on these issues, and also training for over 400 central government staff – mainly on the Freedom of Information Act 2000 but also on the public

records system generally. Staff have also provided training and advice aimed at the local government sector and the National Health Service.

Demand for the introductory course on the public records system, aimed at new staff in government departments, continues to be high. There were nine such courses during the year.



We continued to work with the University of Liverpool and the University of Northumbria to support the rm3 programme to provide professional training in records and information management.

Eleven government records managers were awarded the diploma in records and

information management, and five were awarded the certificate.

The successful candidates – seen here with the Keeper of Public Records, Sarah Tyacke – were presented with their awards at the annual Records Management in Government conference.

Selection of records

Operational Selection Policies

Operational Selection Policies (OSPs) govern which public records are selected and whether they should be transferred to The National Archives or other places of deposit.

In developing OSPs, we work in close consultation with government departments and stakeholders. All OSPs are circulated in draft to academics and specialist interest groups for comment. The draft OSP is also placed on our website for general public consultation.

The OSP covering records of registration of births, deaths and marriages of UK citizens occurring overseas generated over 400 responses. Discussions are underway with appropriate genealogical societies (such as the Society of Genealogists and the Federation of Family History Societies) to reach an outcome which is satisfactory to all parties.

Modernising the appraisal process

The National Archives has recently appointed an Appraisal Policy Project Manager to consider how the system for selection, instituted by the Grigg Committee on Departmental Records 1954, can be modernised. The project will take account

of electronic records and the increase in paper records from the 1970s onwards and develop a new appraisal methodology.

There are currently four main strands to the work:

- 1 **Pilot projects** in four government departments to test new methods of appraisal
- 2 **Studies of case files and datasets** – which represent a challenge for appraisal because they create considerable storage pressures and yet contain significant economic, social or scientific data
- 3 **Research on the success of macro-appraisal methods** used in Canada, Australia and many other countries. We are considering the feasibility of testing these methods in selected government departments
- 4 **Taking forward our work on electronic records** to provide guidance to departments on the appraisal of electronic records and the development of fileplans for electronic records management systems.

The involvement of stakeholders is an integral part of the project, which is overseen by a Management Board with representatives from a government department and the Institute of Contemporary British History.

It is expected that a draft paper on Appraisal Policy will be circulated for public consultation in February 2004 with the policy finally approved in June 2004.

To date 22 OSPs have been produced, covering the following subject areas:

- OSP 1: The Department of the Environment 1970-1979
- OSP 2: The Crown Estate 1975-1985
- OSP 3: Industrial Policy 1974-1979
- OSP 4: The Use and Conservation of the Countryside for Recreational Purposes 1974-1983
- OSP 5: The Administration of Social Security 1979-1991
- OSP 6: Records Created by and Relating to Coroners 1970-2000
- OSP 7: The Welsh Office 1979-1997
- OSP 8: The Security Service
- OSP 9: Fiscal Policy 1971-1979
- OSP 10: Nature Conservation in Great Britain 1973-1991
- OSP 11: Nuclear Weapons Policy 1967-1998
- OSP 12: Central Direction and Oversight of Policy 1970-2000
- OSP 13: Britain's Diplomatic Relations 1973-1996
- OSP 14: Home Defence and Emergency Planning 1972-2001
- OSP 15: Control of Central Government Expenditure 1969-1997
- OSP 16: Probation Records 1965-2001
- OSP 17: Preservation of the Built Environment 1970-1999
- OSP 18: Records of Registration of Births, Deaths and Marriages of UK Citizens Occurring Overseas
- OSP 19: School Age Education (3 -16 year olds) 1974-1988
- OSP 20: Records of the Central Office of Information
- OSP 21: Records of the Criminal Case Review Commission (CCRC)
- OSP 22: Records of the Royal Mint 1975-2002