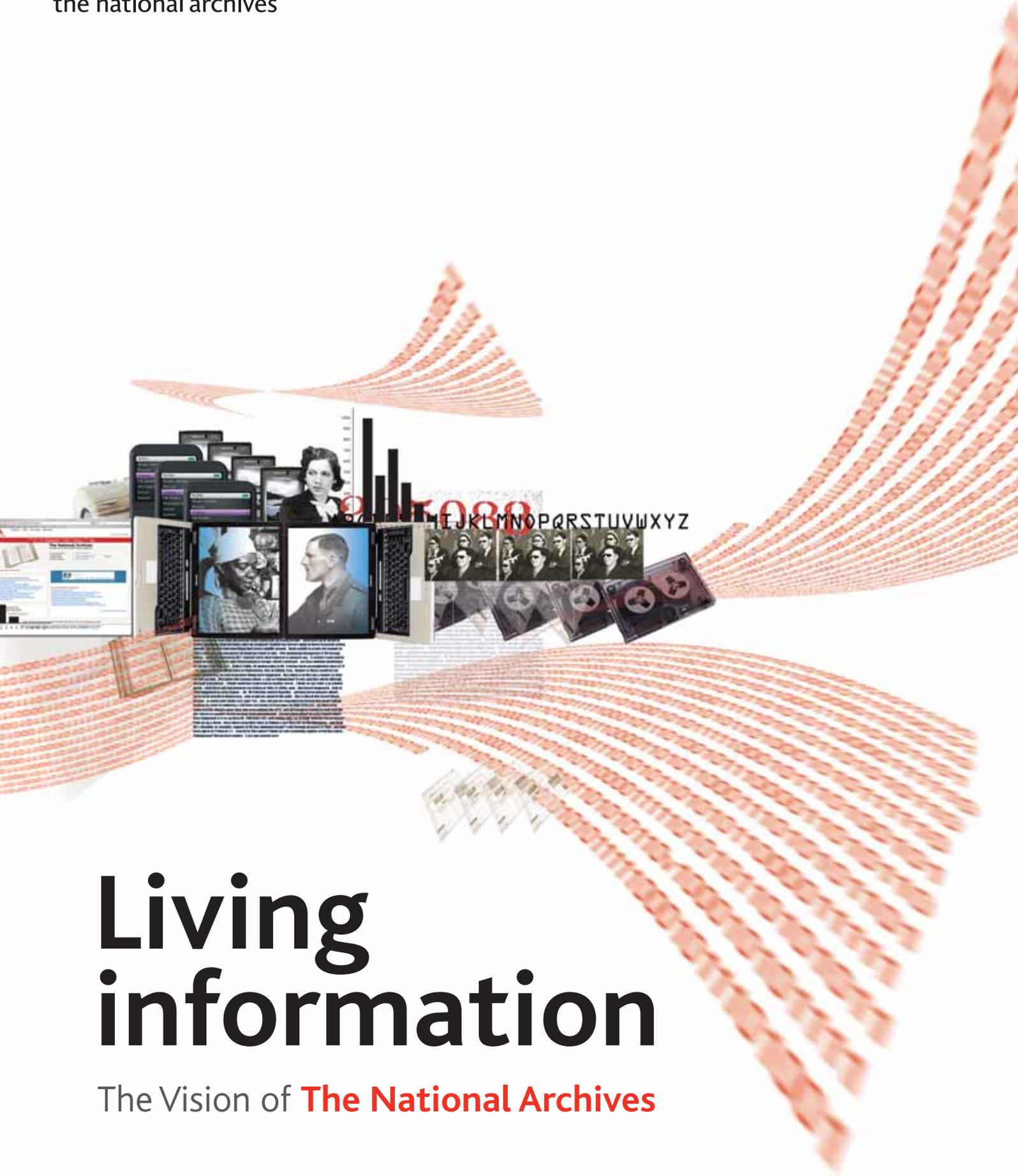




the national archives



# Living information

The Vision of **The National Archives**

“Digital information about nearly every aspect of our lives is being created at an astonishing rate. Locked within all of this data is the key to knowledge about how to cure diseases, create business value, and govern our world more effectively.”

## Sir Timothy Berners-Lee

Founder of the World Wide Web, March 2007

The National Archives is a government department and executive agency of the Ministry of Justice. It brings together the Public Record Office, Historical Manuscripts Commission, the Office of Public Sector Information and Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

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July 2007



# Meeting the information challenge

The digital revolution is fundamentally changing how we live and work. The business of government is now driven by email and electronic documents rather than by paper. Increasingly, citizens access government services online, and the information we provide is stored electronically.

This changing information landscape presents great opportunities – and challenges. How can we capture, store, preserve and make accessible the information we need to drive government business forward and provide an audit trail? Can we realise the asset value from the information we've created? And can we use information positively to transform government effectiveness?

The refocused National Archives, strengthened by its merger in 2006 with the Office of Public Sector Information, is in an excellent position to support government in this agenda. We're more than a government archive: we deal with today's and tomorrow's information too. **Leading and transforming information management** and **Guaranteeing the survival of today's information for tomorrow** are two of the challenges we've set ourselves. The National Archives now has a strong information management and regulation role across government and the wider public sector.

Increasingly, government records are digital. We're very concerned about the long-term vulnerability of digital storage formats: we have expertise to offer in this area and in electronic records management. We also want to ensure that this digital data created by the public sector is exploited as an asset in its own right. This will enable the development of innovative third-party services and create more value for the UK's economy.

You know us for storing and releasing government records – and **Bringing history to life for everyone** is the third challenge. Archives connect people to the past. We're committed to providing people worldwide with access to the records we hold and to helping everyone to use them to excite and enrich their lives.

The business of government cuts across organisational structures. So The National Archives is working with other government departments to develop a shared approach to knowledge and information management that realises its business benefits.

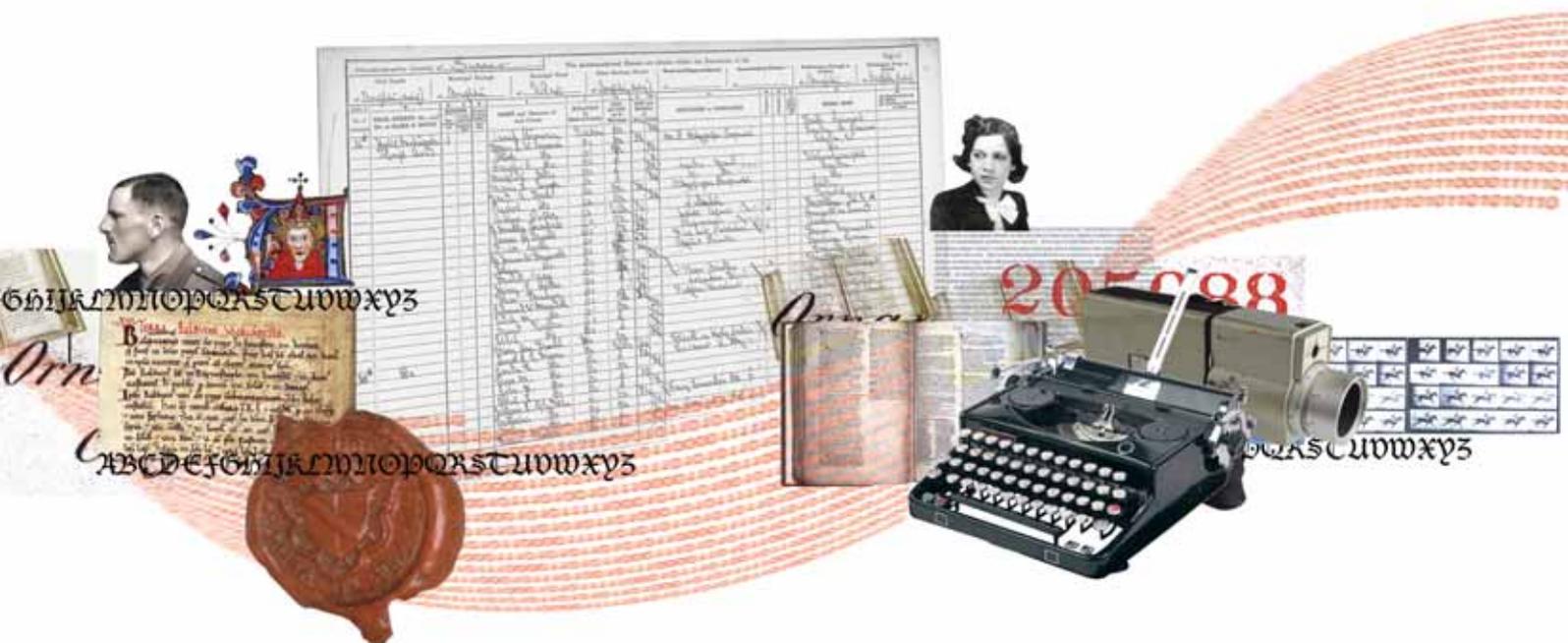
Information and records management is recognised as a core function of every business process in the public sector. The challenges, and the benefits, of information management – locating, using, sharing and re-using information across government – are enormous. Are you ready to work with us in meeting these challenges?

**Natalie Ceeney**

Chief Executive

# Our Vision

Our Vision recognises the importance of information for re-use, for business accountability and for the nation's memory. By working closely with government, the wider public sector and the archival community, we will solve the complex challenges we face.



“Information management is a vitally important tool for the transformation of service delivery across government. Enabling government to realise the full potential of electronic service delivery, including making services more accessible to the public, is reliant upon the effective management of information assets.”

**Sir Gus O' Donnell**

Cabinet Secretary and Head of the Cabinet Office

The National Archives' Vision is to:

- **Lead and transform information management**

Government and the wider public sector need better information management in order to deliver effective services, to strengthen accountability and to release the potential of their assets. We are shaping policy on information from its creation to re-use, showing leadership across the public sector and helping to develop a common infrastructure of services and guidance that will enable all of us to realise the benefits of good information management.

- **Guarantee the survival of today's information for tomorrow**

As well as preserving the nation's existing paper records, we will rise to the challenge of ensuring the survival of digital information for future generations. We are working across government and the wider public sector so that digital information can continue to be accessed for both today's business and tomorrow's history.



- **Bring history to life for everyone**

Archives make a positive difference to people's lives by connecting them to the past. Increasingly, people expect to find, use and learn from information online. Our Vision recognises our commitment to providing people worldwide with access to our records, and to helping everyone use them to excite and enrich their lives.

**The three strands of our Vision combine to help the public sector realise the potential of its information assets and preserve them for future generations.**

# Leading and transforming information management

**We all want to deliver effective and integrated services that are responsive and trusted and meet public demand.**

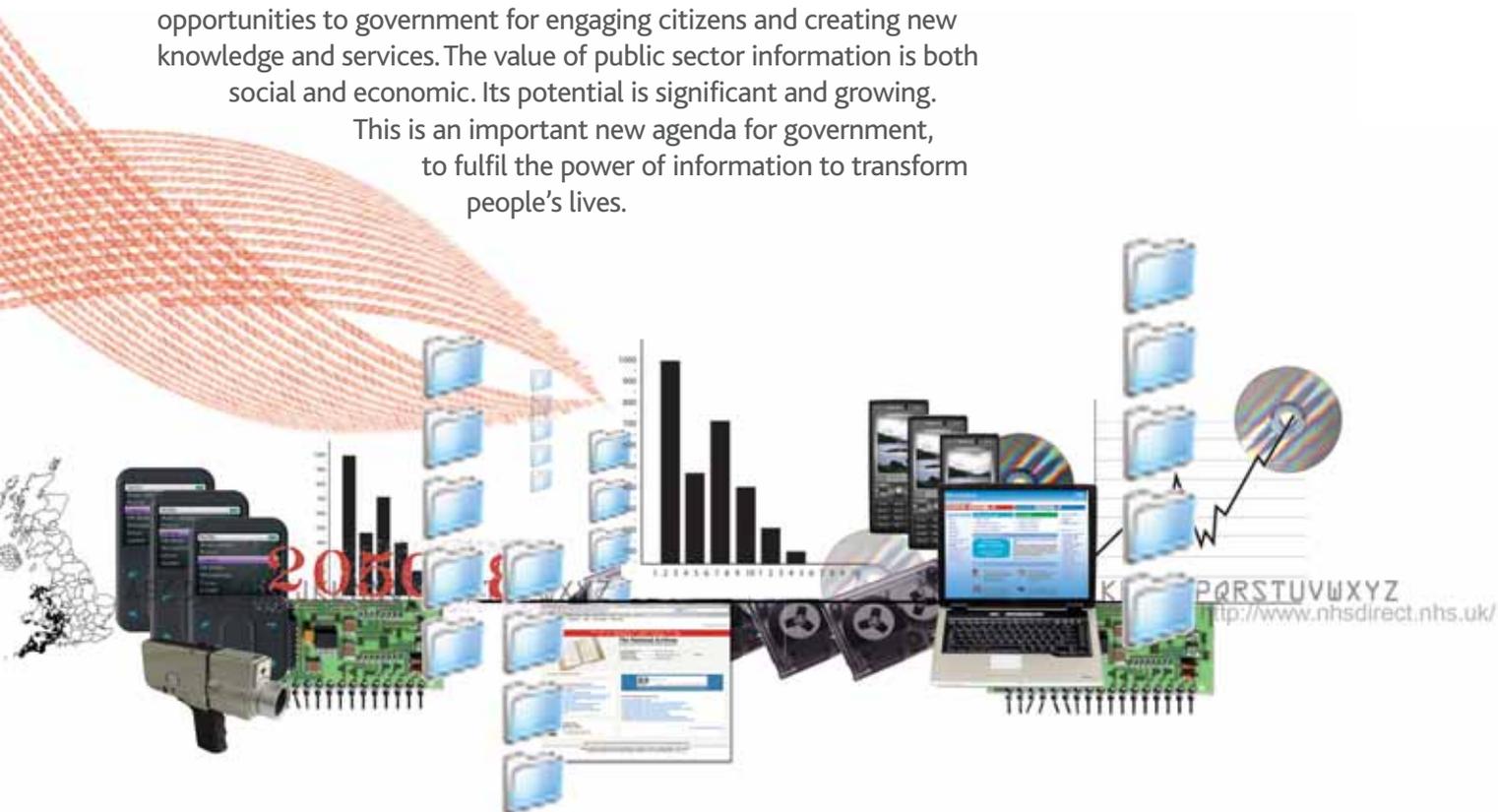
Keeping pace with the transient nature of information is critical to government, as well as to society as a whole. User expectations are increasing exponentially in this information age, and opportunities to develop new and improved services rely heavily upon information assets.

Government and the wider information sector need better information management to strengthen accountability and release the potential of their assets.

This means creating and preserving information to ensure that activities and processes are documented, and that information demanded by law is kept for long-term accountability. If public bodies are not able to manage information, they cannot properly account for their actions and their reputation may also be at risk.

Re-use of public sector information presents significant new opportunities to government for engaging citizens and creating new knowledge and services. The value of public sector information is both social and economic. Its potential is significant and growing.

This is an important new agenda for government, to fulfil the power of information to transform people's lives.





Joined-up leadership is essential. The merger of The National Archives and the Office of Public Sector Information has created an organisation that is uniquely well positioned as a policy leader, adviser and facilitator in this field, with a wider remit to support good information management. We will join up approaches across different strands of the information agenda, lead new thinking in the field and support government and the wider public sector through guidance and services.

The National Archives actively supported the creation of a new Knowledge Council for government, and provides its secretariat. The Council will provide a strategic focus for all aspects of

information management. Working with the Knowledge Council we will develop tools and guidance to deal with digital information, including approaches to managing, storing and accessing electronic records.

We will encourage wider re-use of public sector information through the Information Fair Trader Scheme and provide practical support through tools such as Click-Use Licences for easy online licensing.

The National Archives will also play an assessment and regulation role. We will support and develop information management capability across the public sector, offer information management assessments and regulate under the Government's re-use regulations.

And, of course, The National Archives will support departments as they assess which information needs to be kept for future policy work, for long-term accountability and for the benefit of history.

**“When enough people can collect, re-use and distribute public sector information, people organise around it in new ways, creating new enterprises and new communities.”**

**Ed Mayo** and  
**Tom Steinberg**

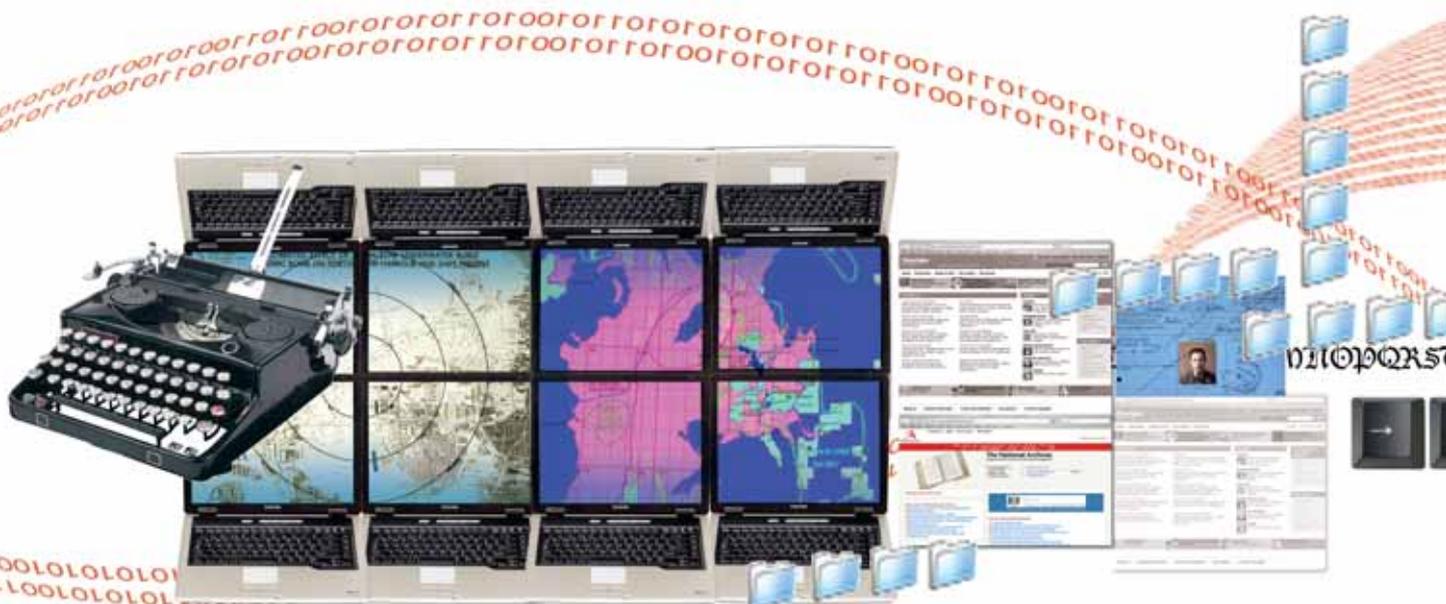
*The Power of Information:  
an independent review (June 2007)*

# Guaranteeing the survival of today's information for tomorrow

**We need to rise to the new challenge of ensuring the survival of digital information for future generations, in addition to preserving the nation's existing paper records.**

Electronic records are inherently ephemeral and vulnerable, unlike paper and parchment records, which have life spans of centuries. Web pages can disappear within days of their creation; data stored on floppy disks can often no longer be read; databases on old and obsolete platforms can stop functioning; and the constant migration of platforms jeopardises essential content on a daily basis. Without active preservation, those e-documents that do survive become obsolete, on average, within seven years.

Our Vision recognises the real danger, faced by governments internationally and the whole information and archive sector, of losing critical knowledge vital for both today's business and tomorrow's history.



The National Archives has proved to be a responsible guardian for paper government records and we are already responding to the challenge that digital preservation presents. Our priority remains unchanged – we are here to preserve significant information of historical importance. We are working to seamlessly transfer e-information into our digital archive to ensure it lasts for hundreds of years alongside the paper legacy.

Government departments also need to keep key records for business use and to continue to have access to them beyond the average lifespan of an e-document. Over the next five years, we aim to support the preservation of those central government records required for current business use by developing a digital preservation service to be shared across government.

While electronic records are of enormous concern to us, The National Archives will continue, through preservation and conservation, to care for the government’s legacy of paper-based documents. Our collection currently totals over 175 kilometres in length – and there are another 30 years’ worth of paper files yet to be transferred to The National Archives from government departments.

Our Vision also recognises our role as guardian of public records distributed throughout the UK, along with encouraging care for, and access to, private records. We will continue to work proactively across both government and the wider archive sector to manage Britain’s written heritage effectively – both paper and digital.

“ In 2006, an estimated 161 billion gigabytes of digital content was produced, equivalent to 1.6 billion PCs or laptops – all with their hard disks full. We face major challenges in ensuring it will be available and accessible in 10, 20 or 50 years time. ”

## Gordon Frazer

Managing Director, Microsoft UK, July 2007



# Bringing history to life for everyone

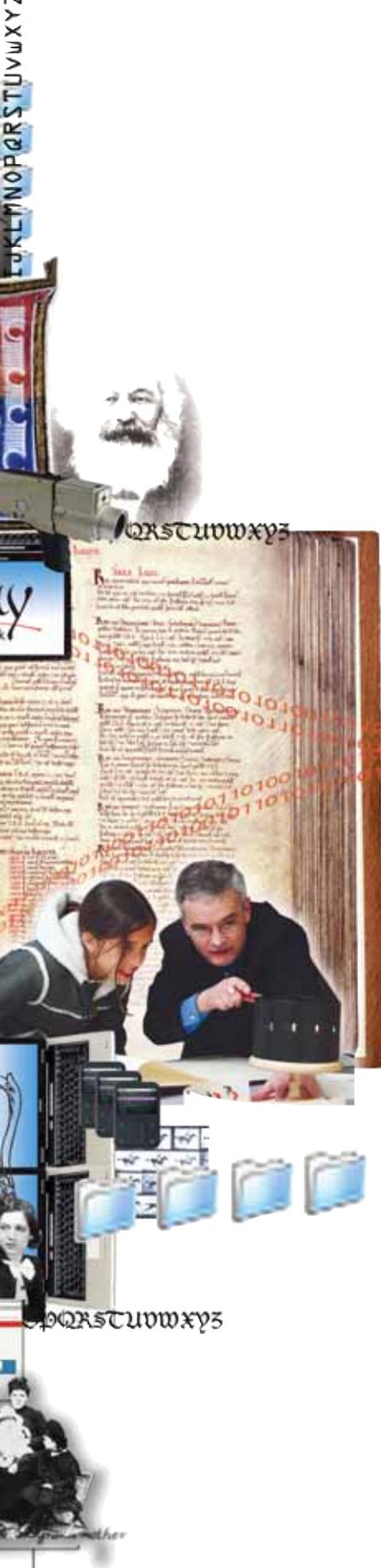
**Increasingly, people expect to find, use and learn from information online. They expect it to be personalised and connected to their wider lives. They expect to have it immediately.**

The National Archives has built up a strong reputation for delivering services that are highly responsive to customer needs. We supplied more than 66 million documents in 2006–07, with over 23 million people visiting our website. For every document delivered in person in our reading rooms, we now deliver 100 online.

Over time, we expect to become a predominantly online service delivery organisation. We will continue to provide an onsite service – bringing all our services together at Kew – for those who need to consult original records or would benefit from specific expertise.

Expertise is central to the success of our Vision. Archives are not always easy to use and to realise their potential they need cataloguing and interpretation. We will continue to offer expert help and advice to make it easier for the public to use our collections and those of other archives, and will extend what we offer to customers online. We will also encourage historians and other experts to use our services.





“The National Archives is an invaluable resource for British history. I am enthused by its efforts to continue to capture and preserve government information for future generations.”

## Peter Hennessy FBA

Attlee Professor of Contemporary British History, Queen Mary, University of London, June 2007

We want to harness the expertise of our customers, and create virtual communities, reflecting current trends in how online researchers shape and use information. The wiki pages on our website – Your Archives – will create a growing repository of information about the content and interpretation of our records.

Archives are generating huge new interest and demand across the UK and overseas. Six million viewers tuned into the 2006 series of the BBC TV programme *Who Do You Think You Are?*

Projects such as *Moving Here* and *Your Caribbean Heritage* have addressed challenging issues of British identity such as migration, immigration and slavery. In addition, we will continue working with educational specialists to develop teaching resources online.

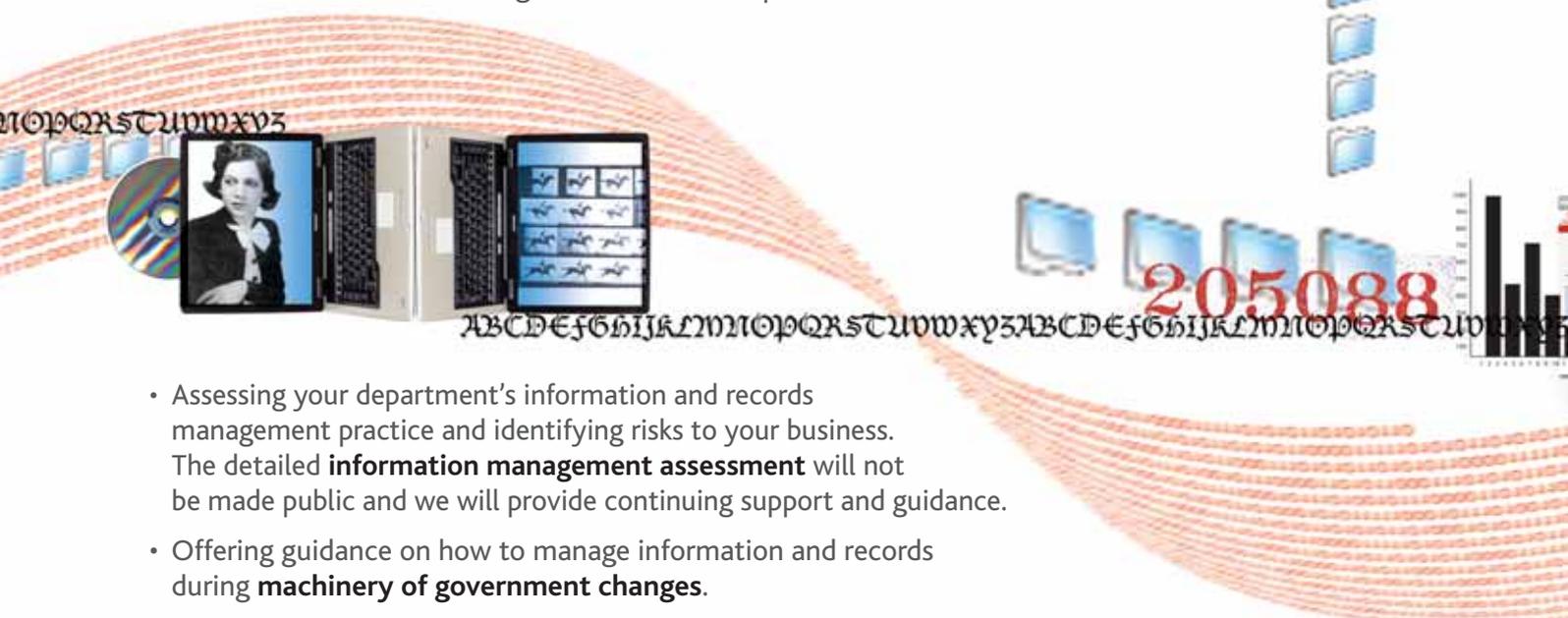
For the UK's archives, from local record offices to private and specialist archives, the importance of preserving our history for future generations has never been more significant. We will continue to provide support, and to engage and link with other archives to promote the best possible continuing access to the nation's memory.

# How we can work together

The challenges we all face will only be met through working together.

The National Archives can offer you advice and support in a number of ways:

- Advising you on **re-using your public sector information** to inform the development of your own departmental policies and how making your own information available for re-use can take forward the Government's agenda for reform of public services.



- Assessing your department's information and records management practice and identifying risks to your business. The detailed **information management assessment** will not be made public and we will provide continuing support and guidance.
- Offering guidance on how to manage information and records during **machinery of government changes**.
- Exploring how best to set up a shared service to take in, migrate and **preserve digital data** for government departments, including live data.
- Providing specialist advice on **electronic records management (ERM) and digital preservation** issues as well as supporting you on managing key issues relating to **paper records** and hybrid records.
- Supporting and offering guidance to local authorities and the wider public sector on **information and records management**.
- Setting national standards for the **care and management of archives** and undertaking assessments of local authorities against those standards.
- Promoting your key management information via the **London, Edinburgh, and Belfast Gazettes**.

For more information, visit our website:  
[nationalarchives.gov.uk/vision](http://nationalarchives.gov.uk/vision)

or contact us at: [vision@nationalarchives.gov.uk](mailto:vision@nationalarchives.gov.uk)