Transforming Information & Records Management through Research & Development?

AC*erm Witness Seminar
4 March 2010

School of Computing, Engineering & Information Sciences, Northumbria University
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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 ED RMS 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.
Introduction – The aims of the event and the ‘witness seminar’ format

Prof. Julie McLeod (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 electronic 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?

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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.


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
**Witness Statement**

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 can we 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
Witness Statement: A Personal Research Journey

Sue Childs (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 & 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 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 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 RAE/REF 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 and NHS libraries, library & 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.

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.
Witness Statement: Research and/or Practice – or just plain active thinking?

Elizabeth Lomas (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 this 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’s push in 1999 for government to use, at that stage fairly new, EDRM 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 (JISCInfonet, 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 Acerm team (Sue Childs, Rachel Hardiman and Julie McLeod). Sue Child's (Acerm’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 and information 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 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 cooperative 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.


Note: The following is the written statement provided to the seminar chair prior to the event. When delivering their statements, witnesses were free to depart from the text to include further thoughts or take up points made by previous speakers.

Witness Statement
Dr Alison Pickard (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 6 years has focused 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.
Note: The following is the written statement provided to the seminar chair prior to the event. When delivering their statements, witnesses were free to depart from the text to include further thoughts or take up points made by previous speakers.

Witness Statement
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 cooperation 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.
Witness Statement: Records and Information Professionals – RIP?

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.
Witness Statement

María 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 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
Note: The following is the written statement provided to the seminar chair prior to the event. When delivering their statements, witnesses were free to depart from the text to include further thoughts or take up points made by previous speakers.

Witness Statement
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.

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 3 seconds of the metadata query being entered. What I call a true knowledge base.

Of records management I once said Its all about metadata and classification. I now say its 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 form 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 8 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!
**Note:** The following is the written statement provided to the seminar chair prior to the event. When delivering their statements, witnesses were free to depart from the text to include further thoughts or take up points made by previous speakers.

**Witness Statement**

John McDonald (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 1970’s 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 80's we shifted gears as personal computers (PC's) and networked PC's 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 90's and the development of models based on continuum thinking. Meanwhile the results of Interpares 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

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.
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 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.
Witness Statement
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 are 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 theory says 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.
Introductions & Seminar 1

Seminar 2 & Discussion