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Everything, Everywhere, All at Once

Challenges facing records managers in making records accessible to the future

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LUSTRE/GLOW
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Ronald Reagan's Emails



- US District Court Ruling in 1993
- Recognised the importance of digital context and format specific metadata as important parts of the record;
- Initiated a debate about what a record is, which continues to this day with continued implications for what enters our archives and what government records eventually find themselves in the public domain.

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The Question of Email



“The question of how to manage electronic mail as a record is one that will confront management in every contemporary organisation within the next few years.”

- *David Bearman, Managing Electronic Mail [1994]*

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The Question of Email



“The question of how to manage digital information as a record is one that will confront management in every organisation forever.”

- David Canning [2025]

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Inflection Points



“Proper records management is the backbone of open government.”



“The transition from paper-based working to email and electronic documents undermined the rigour of information management across much of government.”



(There has been) “a collective and systemic ... failure”

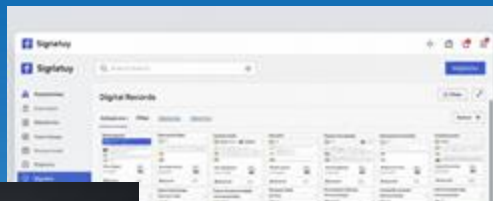
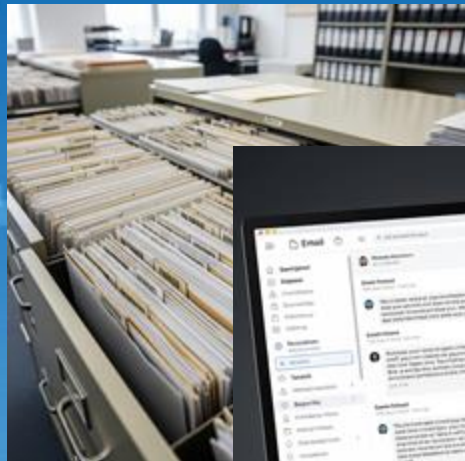
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What is a Record?



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What is a Record?

Defining what an official government record is, is not solely the professional preserve of records managers, nor the responsibility of government, or even the courts, but is a right owned by society as a whole, as an expectation in a transparent democracy

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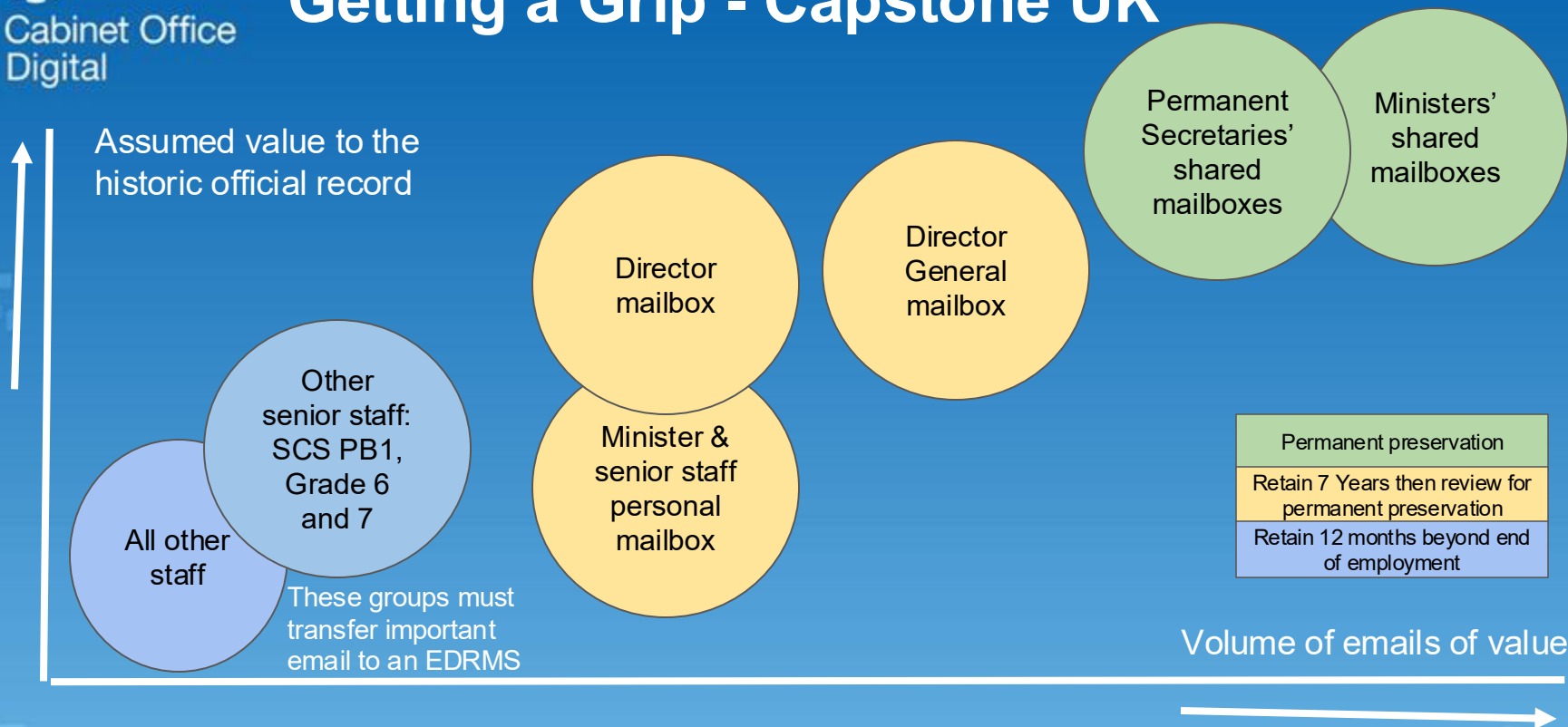
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Getting a Grip - Capstone UK



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The Ongoing Challenge

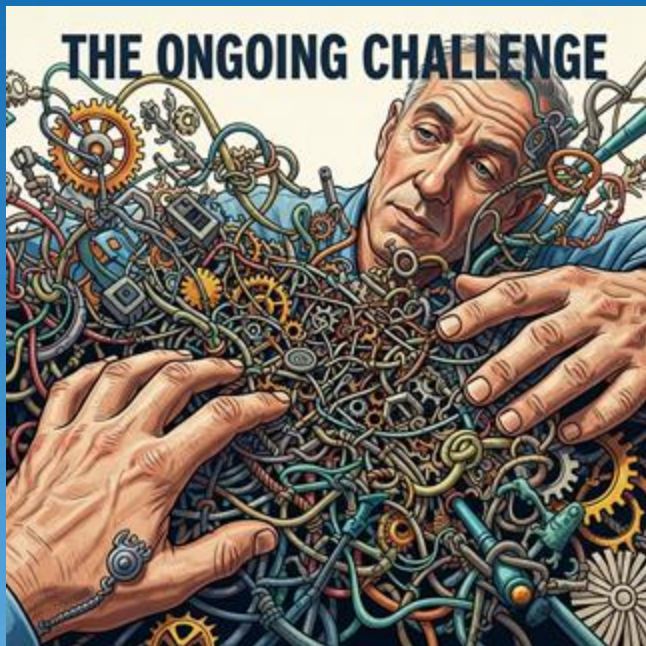


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- The volume of email in a mailbox can be huge
- The proportion of material retained of significant historic interest may be tiny, large or anywhere in between;
- The 'record' may be spread across several connected mailboxes
- The mail may include personal, ephemeral and other information that should not be published via The National Archives
- How on earth do we sort this?

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Email Records Review Project



University of
Salford
MANCHESTER

- Develop a proof-of-concept email ranking and classification system with graphical user interface.
- Implement a parsing approach for whole mailboxes to extract all required information and convert to a suitable format.
- Implement a multi-factor ranking approach based on sender/recipient, keyword/phrase lists, attachments, and content.
- Create LLM-based prototype(s) for:
 - Topic / theme of work identification
 - Content analysis / language patterns

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Final Thoughts

- Records managers and archivists need a third eye - look backwards and forwards all at once;
- Acknowledge that technology will continue to confront us with challenges and be prepared to embrace them;
- Understand that defining an official government record is a societal process



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