

4. It would be quite unrealistic to imagine that the growth in the flow of communications to and from Departmental headquarters and internally can be significantly curbed. As the capacity of the communications system is augmented the pressure on the means to store and retrieve information can only become greater. Failure to cope adequately with these developments would soon lead to progressive deterioration of the quality of performance of Departmental programmes, despite the best efforts to overcome the constraints of the system. The inadequate support for Departmental programmes could perhaps be tolerated a little longer because the internal shortcomings would not necessarily become evident in any dramatic way. However, the Department must now measure up to a challenge with respect to its important coordination function. This has been spelled out quite explicitly as Government policy in the decision on the conduct of Canadian relations with the United States, the most important of all our international relationships. While improved internal efficiency is an obvious general objective, it is equally clear that there is much scope and indeed need for innovation in the handling of information if an adequate performance is to be maintained in the coordination role which by its nature extends outside the Department.

5. Traditionally, the Department has handled the storage and retrieval of information through the standard Registry or Records Management Division. The results of past efforts to develop procedures to respond to the pressures and demands with which this operation has increasingly been faced have reinforced the belief that solutions may well lie along radical lines.

History of Records Management in the Department

6. Records management has, at several periods, attracted considerable development effort but has continued to be viewed by most working-level officers as an area of less than satisfactory performance. One explanation for the admitted failings has been that historically those responsible for operating the registry system have had to cope with a succession of difficulties mostly originating outside the system itself. Annex I describes how no less than seven studies (including sections in the Glassco Commission and Urwick-Currie Reports) have been devoted over the years since 1950 to the question of improving records management in the Department.

7. In the early post-World War II years a centralized filing system was located in the East Block and worked reasonably well for a time but the service deteriorated progressively with the very rapid expansion of the Department, both at home and abroad, accompanied at the same time by a rising flow of communications of all kinds which reflected the quickening pace of Canadian involvement in international affairs. Faced with pressing world-wide Departmental needs the Personnel Division in the late 1950's was perennially unable to provide sufficient staff to fill the accepted establishment, and those assigned to the Registry were almost always one or more grades below their designated levels. It also became evident that the "1940 Series" file classification system had become wholly inadequate to meet current international conditions. In response to this latter situation the massive task of introducing a completely new Records Classification Guide was embarked upon in the early 1960's.