

# Handling of information

## Telecommunications

The Department's secure telegraphic-communications network, which serves the majority of posts abroad, provides what is, in effect, the central nervous system essential to the conduct of Canada's international relations. Telegraphic traffic during 1977 exceeded two million messages, of which more than 50 per cent were carried for departments other than External Affairs. The improved performance achieved through the computerized message-switch installed in 1976 became evident throughout the world-wide network as unusual new requirements for the timely transmission of information placed continuous pressure on telecommunications facilities. Circuit changes permitted the withdrawal of some communicators from the Paris relay centre and, through direct links with headquarters, many posts gained more rapid service. Contracts to acquire a higher-capacity message-switch in 1978 were let with a view to achieving greater efficiency and further substantial cost and staff reductions at home and abroad. New cryptographic devices and ancillary terminals were tested and made ready for installation to begin early in 1978. Exploratory work continued on several systems for future application in the network.

In parallel with measures to achieve greater technical efficiency, a vigorous program of telegram reform was launched to increase the effectiveness of the actual communications passed between departmental headquarters and the posts abroad. The full import and the benefits of this new program are expected to become apparent in the coming year.

## Records-management and information systems

In the area of records-management, progress towards the implementation of the automated information-storage and -retrieval system continued through 1977. Contracts were awarded for the computer, the computer program and the terminals to be placed in the decentralized information-control offices. These steps on the technical side have carried the Department well along the way towards establishing a comprehensive and more accessible information-base for the substantive aspects of international affairs. To provide personnel support, a competition was held to recruit Information-Control Officers, and arrangements were made for training to begin in 1978 in preparation for the assignments of the successful candidates. The bilingual thesaurus to be used for "on-line" indexing and retrieval was completed and the difficult process of refining the terms and phrases was started. The responsibilities and duties of the Central Information-Management Office, which is to monitor and direct the operation of the system, were defined.

The plan to decentralize the information and records systems in order to provide more responsive service to client divisions of the Department required some bureaux to be relocated to provide adequate accommodation for the new sub-units.

The implementation of the information system called for complementary changes in the present Records Management Division, looking to its merger with the Information Systems Division in 1978. In anticipation of this step, the Records Management Division carried out a number of organizational changes in the operation of the complex mail-handling system and pursued an active file-improvement program in preparation for converting a considerable amount of material to microfiche.