

CHAPTER II

THE DEPARTMENTAL SURVEY AND FINDINGS

Nature and Extent of the Survey

16. It was evident from the outset that no simple statement of Departmental requirements would be possible, given the diversity and complexity of Departmental activities. It was also evident that while the use of records services was largely confined to desk officers there were also important needs to be met at higher levels.

17. During most of the period the Under-Secretarial Group was pre-occupied with coping with the special difficulties stemming from the absence of the Under-Secretary. Nevertheless, the Assistant Under-Secretary responsible for administration made himself available for a number of consultations and a full meeting, and another Assistant Under-Secretary devoted time to an extended interview. The Central Staff and the Policy Analysis Group also were closely involved in the study.

18. The survey coincided with the country programming process which precluded a meeting of the Directors-General. However, thirty-five Directors General and Directors were interviewed singly or in small groups. At the working level personal interviews were held with some forty-five to fifty desk officers in sessions sometimes extending to as much as two hours. A questionnaire was drawn up to provide some form and consistency for the discussions with desk officers. Annex II is a copy of the questionnaire showing the nature of the subject matter covered in the interviews. Twelve Divisions or sub-units were identified as having special requirements which were examined.

19. The current operations of the Records Management Division itself were of course looked at in some detail, as were those of Communications Division and the Library. Eight posts abroad (three in Brussels) were visited in conjunction with a look at a number of outside institutions having requirements for information storage and retrieval similar to that of External Affairs.

Categories of Information Use and Need

20. It was found that there was no entirely satisfactory way of drawing distinctions among the various activities and users of information in the Department. One useful division is that between so-called "substantive" activities and "housekeeping". The latter term has gained official currency, being employed by Treasury Board for a broad range of administrative, personnel and related functions. An immediate objection can be raised that, particularly at senior managerial levels, substantive and administrative questions can become closely intertwined. This is indeed becoming increasingly demonstrated in the country programming process. Another approach would be to classify uses according to the kind of records or information employed. Thus the consular and personnel "case" files could technically be treated in a similar way and complex political and economic material in another. Available technology and procedures would thus tend to determine how activities would be grouped. The matter of security classification, or absence of it, was another factor to be considered. Also to be taken into account was the fact that in certain areas programmes involving