

What is required of the information profession in the UK  
Government? Views from the profession.

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A dissertation submitted to Aberystwyth University in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of MSc under Alternative Regulations

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Aberystwyth University

2014

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## **Abbreviations**

|      |  |
|------|--|
| DPA  | Data Protection Act                      |
| FOIA | Freedom of Information Act               |
| IM   | Information management                   |
| IP   | Information profession                   |
| ICT  | Information and communication technology |
| IT   | Information technology                   |
| KIM  | Knowledge and information management     |
| KM   | Knowledge management                     |
| PRA  | Public Records Acts                      |
| RM   | Records management                       |

### Civil service grade structure in ascending order

|         |                                  |
|---------|----------------------------------|
| AA      | Administrative assistant         |
| AO      | Administrative officer           |
| EO      | Executive officer                |
| HEO     | Higher executive officer         |
| SEO     | Senior executive officer         |
| G7      | Grade 7                          |
| G6      | Grade 6                          |
| SCS PB1 | Senior civil servant, pay band 1 |
| SCS PB2 | Senior civil servant, pay band 2 |

## **Abstract**

This dissertation considered what was required of the information profession in the UK Government, from the perspective of professionals themselves. It surveyed published work on the information-management profession from academic and business sources. The literature suggested three overarching areas meriting investigation: responding to the changing environment; the relationship with the rest of the organisation; and skills and continuing professional development.

A self-completion questionnaire, issued to information professionals in Government, addressed these areas and related sub-topics. 88 responses offered thought-provoking findings. As well as establishing a profile of the respondents, such as their job-role, grade and so on, the questionnaire solicited their opinions on where information-management functions should be located in departments; whether demands on the profession had changed; skills and attributes that were important to the profession; and its biggest challenges and how to respond.

Solutions often focused on better service provision, rather than promoting the profession in and for itself. A significant consensus emerged around the need to communicate the benefits of information management.

Social-media skills were rated as unimportant by respondents but highlighted as the opposite by some literature. This merits further research. Another area of interest is professional bodies: establishing if they are valued as little by the profession as responses to the questionnaire would suggest.

Finally, qualifications, learning, and continuing professional development require further consideration since the findings of this dissertation were somewhat contradictory in these areas. In response to some questions they did not appear strongly valued but they were presented by many as potential solutions to the challenges facing the profession. In particular, more work should identify whether the emphasis is best placed on the professionals themselves or enhancing the general information-management skills needed by colleagues across organisations.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank those information professionals who contributed to this dissertation by completing questionnaires.

# **What is required of the information profession in the UK Government? Views from the profession.**

## **Chapter 1 - Introduction**

This chapter will make the case for research into the information-management profession in the UK Government. It will also define key terms used throughout the research and outline its scope.

### **1.1 The case for this research**

Capgemini (2008) suggests that poor utilisation of information assets equates to an annual £21 billion in administrative costs across the public sector. Yet research, commissioned by Financial Times Corporate and the Special Libraries Association, published in 2013, finds that information professionals overestimate the value they provide compared to the perceptions of senior managers.<sup>1</sup> These contentions make the case for a consideration of what is required of the information-management profession. This research will look specifically at the profession in the UK Government, given that the current, coalition Government saw deficit reduction and securing economic recovery as ‘the most urgent issue facing Britain’ upon election (HM Government, 2010, p. 15).<sup>2</sup>

### **1.2 Definitions and scope**

‘Information professional’ can have different meanings in different sectors, and even to individuals or professional groups within a sector. In this research the ‘information professional’ is a worker in the UK Government, who is a specialist in information management (IM). While all staff are required, to manage information to some extent, this research looks at those whose main role is to supply information to others, or to give guidance or otherwise support colleagues in managing information properly and lawfully, and protecting it. In the UK Government, this includes librarians, records managers and those who

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<sup>1</sup> This research contrasts online-survey and interview responses from information professionals with those of executives, from organisations across sectors with dedicated information departments: 882 people were surveyed, 83% of whom were information professionals. It is relevant to this research that only 8% of responses were described as from ‘government/politics’.

<sup>2</sup> Deficit is the negative difference between a nation’s income (primarily taxation) and expenditure (for example on healthcare or education).



advise on managing other information effectively and securely.<sup>3</sup> This dissertation therefore covers non-technical specialists: out of scope are information technology (IT) experts, such as information architects, who would tend to identify more with the Government's IT profession.

Before looking at definitions of IM, it is helpful to understand the information managed by organisations. TFPL (n.d.) illustrates its potential range by describing information as including 'internally generated and external sourced information, published and proprietary information, evidential, transactional structured and unstructured information' (p. 4). TFPL offers recruitment, training and consulting for the information industry. As such its publications constitute marketing. However, this remains a reasonable definition of the range of information possible.

Wiggins (2012) describes structured and unstructured data: 'structured – data, facts, and figures in some organized form; those that are alike are grouped together and have defined format and length; similar ones have formal relationships to one another; unstructured – data that can be of any type and does not necessarily follow any defined format, sequence or rules. It can be considered as the direct product of human communication' (p. 1). Wiggins (2012) gives examples, data held in businesses' computerized systems such as finance systems, contrasting this with unstructured emails. This dissertation will adopt a broad approach, akin to that of TFPL, to cover information generated, and acquired, by government departments; structured or unstructured.

Conversely, it will be beyond the scope of this dissertation to look at knowledge management (KM). KM and IM are related but knowledge is more tacit and rooted in human experience. Many theorists see knowledge, information, and data as different points on a continuum, with the latter having been exposed to the least human input and the former to the most. Rowley and Hartley (2008) give an overview of seminal works on the relationship between

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<sup>3</sup> Records are evidence of activity and decisions that should therefore be preserved and protected from alteration. The international standard defines records management (ISO 15489) as the 'field of management responsible for the efficient and systematic control of the creation, receipt, maintenance, use and disposition of records'. Wright (2013, p. 18) sees it as controlling records 'to document business processes, decision-making and transactions'. See also Shepherd and Yeo (2003).

data, information and knowledge such as Ackoff's 'From Data to Wisdom' (1989) and **Appendix A** contains the UK Government's definitions of data, information and knowledge. While this research acknowledges that IM and KM are related, it would be unrealistic to attempt to do both justice in this dissertation: it is preferable to focus in sufficient detail on one. Consequently, despite KM's value to an organisation, this research will not cover those staff whose role is to promote or support KM.

TFPL (n.d., p. 1) defines IM as follows:

IM is the process which ensures that information:

- is created and managed efficiently as part of everyday work processes to create value
- flows effectively and reliably into, out from, and around the organisation
- is used ethically and legally
- is valued, maintained and protected.

**Table 1 - TFPL's definition of IM**

This approach reaffirms a definition of information professionals as those whose role it is to support their organisations in managing information efficiently, effectively, securely and legally. IM seeks to safeguard an organisational perspective on information even when there is pressure on time and other resources, and despite the human tendency to focus on one's immediate needs. IM is about:

- managing information for business need to be located efficiently
- supporting informed decision-making
- avoiding 'reinventing the wheel'
- preserving records to secure corporate memory
- in the case of the Government, preserving national memory
- complying with relevant legislation.

Certain legislation requires all UK organisations to manage information and records in specific ways: examples are employment, health and safety, and data-protection legislation. The introductory text to the Data Protection Act (1998) (DPA) defines it as making 'new provision for the regulation of the

processing of information relating to individuals, including the obtaining, holding, use or disclosure of such information'. Beyond legislation applying to all organisations, the Government is subject to the Freedom of Information (2000, FOIA) and Public Records (1958 and 1967, PRAs) Acts. FOIA's introductory text defines it as making 'provision for the disclosure of information held by public authorities or by persons providing services for them and to amend the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Public Records Act 1958; and for connected purposes'. The PRAs shape how public records are managed in the national interest.

### **1.3 The government information-management context**

The UK Government experienced a data loss from HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) in 2007.<sup>4</sup> Aside from the Poynter Review into this incident, the then Prime Minister commissioned a review of how departments stored and used data more generally. In his foreword to the resulting report, *Data Handling Procedures in Government: Final Report*, published in June 2008, the Cabinet Secretary stated that 'effective use of information is absolutely central to the challenges facing the Government today - whether in improving health, tackling child poverty, or protecting the public from crime and terrorism' (HM Government, 2008a, p. 3). This stresses how important government IM is to public services. Here IM goes beyond the connection it has to 'the bottom line' in industry, to touch upon individuals' lives directly:

Better use of information can improve public services. It can make access more convenient, ensure people get all the services to which they are entitled, or allow services to be personalised. It helps to protect the public and fight crime. (p. 5).

'Government is improving the framework within which Departments manage information', the then Prime Minister stated (HM Government, 2008a, p. 3). Coming, as it did, after a significant data loss, it is to be expected that the Report's emphasis is very much on the protection of information especially personal data: 'people want improved services, but they also want their privacy protected' (HM Government, 2008a, p. 5). It refers to action 'to enhance consistency of protection, to get the right working culture in place, and to

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<sup>4</sup> See Wintour (2007) "Lost in the post - 25 million at risk after data discs go missing".

improve accountability and scrutiny of performance' (HM Government, 2008a, p. 3). The Burton Review into the loss of data relating to Ministry of Defence personnel was also published in 2008, as was a review of data sharing, co-authored by the then Information Commissioner (Thomas and Walport).<sup>5</sup>

Again in 2008, the UK Government published a strategy for knowledge and information management (KIM), *Information matters: Building government's capability in managing knowledge and information* (2008b). While maintaining the emphasis, driven by events, on risk and security, and protecting personal data, it also covers the wider question of how best to share and exploit information. The reason the strategy gives for better IM again reinforces potential benefits to the public: 'effectively managing and sharing public sector information has the power to improve individuals' lives and society as a whole, and even to drive economic growth' (HM Government, 2008b, p. 1).

This is arguably the point at which the information profession became more widely recognised in Government. The strategy itself refers to a greater degree of professionalism: 'knowledge and information management has now been formally recognised as a function of government, in the same way that finance, IT and communications are' (HM Government, 2008b, p. 2).<sup>6</sup> *Information Matters* (HM Government, 2008b) usefully delineates the role of the information professional compared to other staff, reinforcing the distinction made above and that will apply throughout this research: 'knowledge and information professionals have a responsibility to develop and implement appropriate policies, procedures, standards training and tools. And individual staff have a responsibility as the creators, custodians, and users of knowledge and information' (p. 3).

*Information Matters* (HM Government, 2008b) seeks to provide 'an overall framework of principles and capabilities needed to help embed a

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<sup>5</sup> The Information Commissioner's Office is 'the UK's independent authority set up to uphold information rights in the public interest, promoting openness by public bodies and data privacy for individuals'. See [http://ico.org.uk/about\\_us](http://ico.org.uk/about_us).

<sup>6</sup> Broady-Preston has referred in a number of articles to attention on the professions, especially in relation to librarians: Broady-Preston (2006, 2009, and 2010), and Broady-Preston and Cossham (2011). Feather (2009, p. 4) describes the essential elements of a profession as 'the application of knowledge, the prolonged training and the formal qualification', referring to professions fulfilling others' spiritual, physical or intellectual needs.

stronger knowledge and information management culture' (p. 5). As a strategy, rather than a detailed action plan, apart from implying that information professionals should support this IM culture and help to implement the high-level actions documented, there is little definition of what, more specifically, is required of them. There is reference (HM Government, 2008b, p. 16) to building recognition of information professionals who support success in their organisation, and to developing a more comprehensive skills and competency framework, but there is understandably as much emphasis on what is required of all other staff, especially leaders in government departments, to ensure comprehensive IM. It is therefore worth considering what, precisely, is required of the IM profession.

#### **1.4 Relevance and aims of this research**

Like other parts of the public sector, the government IM profession needs to deliver more for fewer resources in order to reduce the deficit. The research commissioned by Financial Times Corporate and the Special Libraries Association (2013) states that 'organisations are cutting costs and more and more information management professionals are battling to demonstrate their value' (p. 6) and that 'many information professionals feel hampered by budget constraints and absorbing greater costs' (p. 8). Hare (2013) refers specifically to records management, seeing personnel as 'battling budget cuts and staff redundancies' and 'still being asked to do more and more often with less and less' (p.9).

Despite scarce resources, the UK Government has emphasised the role of professions in the civil service as part of its reform agenda, in the *Civil Service Reform* and *Capabilities* plans (HM Government, 2012 and 2013a).<sup>7</sup> It is thus particularly timely to consider what specifically is required of the IM profession in Government. Beyond this pertinence, the author's interest in this subject is as a senior manager of KIM professionals in a large central government department. She considers the subject from the perspective of those professionals for a number of reasons. First, the emphasis in *Information*

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<sup>7</sup> In its second annual review of progress against reform plans, published in October 2014, the Government reiterated its commitment to a civil service that is 'more skilled, less bureaucratic and hierarchical, and more unified' (HM Government, 2014, p. ii).

*Matters* (HM Government 2008b) on culture change: it is arguably IM professionals who act as catalysts for change. Second, a theme of relevant literature, considered in more detail in the review that follows, is that information professionals need to demonstrate their worth to organisations.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> It is notable that much scholarship on IM is produced by members of the profession; frequently indicated by a use of the first person plural, for example Cahill (2008), Dale (2011), and McLeod (2012). Quality is often, but not always, maintained through peer review and editing.

## Chapter 2 - Literature review

This chapter sets out the results of a review of academic and management commentary on the information profession. It situates this dissertation within existing literature.

### 2.1 'Information is a crucial business asset'

Woolf's (2010) quotation, in the heading to this section, points to the wealth of literature - both scholarly and managerial - setting out the value of information to an organisation. The Lord Chancellor's Code of Practice on the management of records, under Section 46 of the Freedom of Information Act, states that 'records and information are the lifeblood of any organisation. They are the basis on which decisions are made, services provided and policies developed and communicated'. This review will not dwell on the value of IM; arguably received wisdom. Instead it will briefly cite examples of corporate and academic reflections on the benefits of IM, as well as its challenges, to give a flavour of relevant commentary, but then move on to a more detailed analysis of literature focused on the profession.

Financial Times Corporate and the Special Libraries Association (2013) contend that 'whether in the form of increased profits or decreased risk, good information is a strategic business advantage' (p.10). Capgemini's report (2008) suggests that 'by general agreement, exploiting information is a critical driver, or determinant, of business performance' (p. 7).<sup>9</sup> Its first chapter includes references to how exploiting information has become 'a critical driver for world class performance' and the wider report contends that organisations see business effectiveness, cost reduction, customer expectations and risk reduction all as drivers for improving the exploitation of information.

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<sup>9</sup> Based on a survey of 125 senior executives from FTSE 350 companies and public sector organisations.

However, IM is not straightforward. Capgemini's summary of the challenge is worth citing, since it points to three themes common to much literature (2008):

- an organisation's information is one of its key assets and is crucial to its performance
- the volume of information to be managed by organisations has grown exponentially and faster than ever before largely due to developments in technology, and this will continue
- despite it being a valuable asset, volume means that most organisations are struggling to manage and exploit information properly.

**Table 2 - The three key themes of literature on IM**

Roberts and Pakkiri (2013, p. 34) give a succinct summary of the developments in processing power to which Capgemini alludes: for example, hard drives once lifted by cranes having less processing power than contemporary digital cameras. They also eloquently summarise the resulting change in volume: 'paper facts were scarce, digital facts are abundant, and becoming superabundant' (Roberts and Pakkiri, 2013, p. 34). Records managers and other information professionals are presented in much literature as having to adapt techniques first adopted to manage paper to this electronic environment, and to educate their colleagues across the wider organisation accordingly: "the cloud" is our information and records future; "the basement" our information and records legacy. Both need to be managed' states McLeod (2012, p. 186).

Cumming and Findlay (2010) reflect on electronic record-keeping based on their experiences in New South Wales, explaining how important this is to government:<sup>10</sup>

Government business is reliant on digital records. The e-mails, databases, web sites and other forms of digital information made, kept and received by government organisations not only support and enable business operation, but also form an important part of government's collective memory. But digital records are

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<sup>10</sup> New South Wales has contributed significantly to record-keeping practice. Its guidance formed the basis of the ISO standard, cited in footnote 3, and New South Wales devised the seminal record-keeping "Manual for designing and implementing recordkeeping systems" (DIRKS), which shaped practice in the field.



vulnerable. To be relied on for business, legal and other purposes digital records need to be meaningful and trustworthy. They must be fixed, inviolate representations of business activity, preserved in context and protected from loss or alteration. (p.265)

Like Cumming and Findlay (2010), Pember and Cowan (2009), Abram (2008), TFPL (n.d.), Feldman (2004), and Financial Times Corporate and the Special Libraries Association (2013) all refer to an 'information overload' and its impact on organisations' productivity. Several of these commentators supply information services or represent those who do, and thus have a vested interest in stressing this point. However, few would argue against the view that information is now more abundant in the workplace. The term 'information overload' features in a wealth literature to signal that. It is also a useful shorthand for the second and, to some extent, third challenges defined by Capgemini in **Table 2**, above.

Financial Times Corporate and the Special Libraries Association (2013), and Feather (2009) refer to the contemporary 'knowledge economy', which contrasts with the industrialised economy of the past. 'Knowledge economy' is again helpful shorthand used extensively in literature on IM and arguably reflects the first observation made by Capgemini, above: information and its effective use are vital to organisations' performance.

As indicated in the **Introduction**, much literature, especially since 2008 - the year of the global financial crash - makes the point that pressure on resources, both budgets and staff, has affected IM. Some commentators suggest that IM is a corporate function that has been disproportionately affected. This includes Financial Times Corporate and the Special Libraries Association (2013, p.7), although only 8% of its survey respondents stated that they were from government or politics. Their research picks up another theme common to much reflection on IM and to which this review will return; that these influences provide opportunities as well as challenges:

In a knowledge economy swirling with bewildering amounts of data - of varying quality - and with ever more powerful data systems and tools developing every year, now is the time for the information profession to reach for new heights. (2013, p. 4)

Academic reflection on IM tends to make similar points about its importance to an organisation's efficiency and success as Capgemini, and Financial Times Corporate and the Special Libraries Association. Karim and Hussein (2008) see IM as supporting decision-making 'through efficient access to accurate and relevant information' (p. 116). Cullen (2008b) states that 'information management services are about making sure that business gets the correct, relevant, impartially produced information at the correct time to enable it to compete in its market and understand its environment' (p. 56).

Other scholarly research echoes the point that information is more voluminous than ever before and observes that it is also more accessible to all colleagues than previously. This includes Feather (2009), who refers to a 'golden age for information access' but, unlike Financial Times Corporate and the Special Libraries Association who point to opportunities, Feather questions if the same adjective could be applied to this age for information professionals (p. 7). It is in this context of a surfeit of information in organisations coupled with a questioning of what that means for information professionals, that this dissertation will need to reflect on what is required of the latter in government departments.

Roberts and Pakkiri (2013) refer to the need for decisions to be informed as being self-evident since 'the opposite of informed is unknowing, naïve, ignorant, unwitting or clueless, none of which sound like robust strategies for arriving at the best possible outcome' (p. 77). Yet, this contradicts much management theory that, according to Roberts and Pakkiri (2013), fixates on the charismatic leader, who makes decisions based on gut instinct. Despite that tendency of many texts on leadership and management, and the fact that, as Feldman (2004) notes, there is no metric to compare the value of a good decision to a bad one, for the purposes of this dissertation it will be assumed that good IM is an end worth pursuing.<sup>11</sup> This is the conclusion of both relevant academic and business literature, as well as published reflections from the UK Government itself.

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<sup>11</sup> Like Capgemini, Feldman (2004) sets out to address this gap. Feldman attempts to quantify the potential impact of not finding information on a model enterprise.

## 2.2 'Google is challenging us'

Cahill (2008) accompanies the observation cited in the heading to this section with the statement that Google is 'forcing us to re-evaluate what we do, who we serve, and what being an information professional really means' (p. 75). This reflects another major theme of literature on the IM profession since 2008 and alluded to above in the reference to Feather (2009): the impact of the internet. Herring's 2008 article has as its subtitle 'Why the internet is no substitute for a library' and the slightly less flattering 'Fool's gold' as the main heading. The ubiquitous Google features heavily in such reflections. For many, it is posited as a threat to the information professional, especially the librarian; for others, at least, a prompt to reshape the role.

Financial Times Corporate and the Special Libraries Association (2013, p. 3) found that information professionals were worrying about colleagues bypassing them to access information, who then risk using weak, outdated or false data. Their research refers to 'the vast gulf between amateur internet searching and the services of a trained information professional equipped with quality tools' (p. 10). The same report also states that:

Big data and smarter technology can make today's information professional more influential than ever, but the free availability of information is sometimes a threat. No longer data gatekeepers, information professionals must work hard to demonstrate their value in new ways. (p. 3)

For Dale (2011), the information professional, his- or herself, might even suffer from information overload. Far from 'data gatekeepers', Dale (2011) presents these as challenging times for information professionals, who:

Need to be able to work smarter, acquiring and developing the skills to identify the key signals from the information 'noise' that pervades our senses. We need to be able to create our own personal information filters and lenses to ensure we are able to find and interpret the right information at the right time in order to make the right decisions. (p. 30)

For the rest of this article, Dale (2011) describes five basic steps to filter and improve the relevance of information received. This feels quite narrow and almost insulting to information professionals, as it portrays them as little more

than passive recipients of information feeds and little better equipped than non-specialists. Others are more positive about the contribution still to be made by the information professional.

Back in 2002, Choo contended that 'growth in end-user searching is accompanied by a growth in demand for information professionals to tackle the difficult questions that users cannot handle themselves' (p. 270). However, both Cahill (2008) and Herring (2008) point to how it remains the responsibility of the individual to assess the relevance and authority of search results; and perhaps service users have moved on considerably since the situation Choo described in 2002.

Despite stating that the abundance of information and easy searches can 'make anyone think they're an information expert', Cahill (2008) situates Google as 'an opportunity, not a crisis' for the information professional (p.69). Cahill (2008) sees professionals as having a role educating users about authority and optimising searches, and new ways of processing and sharing information; enlightening them as to when 'Google is not the be-all and end-all' (p. 72). Financial Times Corporate and the Special Libraries Association (2013) contend that information professionals need to show their value even to those colleagues who go straight to Google: to prove what is possible and to show they can find better material, including that not publicly available (pp. 9-10).

While the Financial Times supplies subscription services and is therefore not without bias, this remains a valid point. Abram (2008) reinforces it, albeit in the Special Libraries Association online periodical *Information Outlook*, which might equally be seen to have bias. Abram (2008) gives the ways in which librarians, in particular, can help organisations avoid information overload, including knowing how to access quality information, not just what is available openly on the web:

- determining authoritativeness, credibility, and trustworthiness
- assessing how current it is
- separating fact from opinion
- understanding bias

- appreciating the effect of search engine optimization on results.

Cahill (2008) sees a specific reason to be optimistic about the effect of an abundance of information on those who are not information specialists. Knowing that they can publish an unsubstantiated opinion as part of a blog makes them more discerning when reading others' blogs and so on. Cahill (2008) contends that 'we do many of our users a grave disservice when we assume that they're so swamped by information that they can't figure out the fact from the fiction' (p. 74).

Cullen (2008b, p.56) also looks specifically at librarians and echoes Cahill's (2008) views on their role educating users. For Cullen (2008b), their purpose is to transform the student into an independent learner and - with more relevance to this research - the uninformed worker in an organisation into a knowledge professional, alongside converting the organisation itself into a learning organisation.<sup>12</sup> Cullen (2008b, p.57) suggests this 'new generation of service consumers' will not accept the authority of information professionals - specifically librarians - without question, implying that they are discerning users and echoing the user 'savviness' that Cahill moots. Furthermore, Cullen (2008b, p.54) remarks that, while librarians and academics want to teach students the skills to be critical, the latter already know more about how social networking works. This reflection on social media is not dissimilar to Cahill's (2008) earlier point about blogs and brings this survey onto the impact of Web 2.0 on the information profession.

### **2.3 'An information world that increasingly values the input of the user'**

Web 2.0 features prominently in studies of the information profession. Cullen (2008b, p. 55) defines Web 2.0 as 'a collection of various technologies and applications that spans the entire range of social networking'. In an online journal article, Maness (2006) refers to it as widely defined and interpreted, but states that it was 'reportedly first conceptualized and made popular by Tim O'Reilly and Dale Dougherty of O'Reilly Media in 2004 to describe the trends

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<sup>12</sup> Senge's *The fifth discipline* (2006) is a seminal work on learning organisations. Originally published in 1990, it described them as organisations 'where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together'.

and business models that survived the technology sector market crash of the 1990s'. A further reference by Maness (2006) to O'Reilly is helpful, since it brings to life the changes with some examples: personal web-pages were evolving into blogs, encyclopaedias into Wikipedia, text-based tutorials into streaming media applications, taxonomies into 'folksonomies', and question-answer/email customer support infrastructures into instant messaging.

Maness rightly notes that at the time he is writing, 2006, this phenomenon was only just beginning. It is since clear, as Cullen (2008b) explains only two years later, that there has been a shift from ICT 'communicating information from source to receiver' to a generation who 'seem to be using it to co-create and negotiate reality in an information world that increasingly values the input of the user' (p. 54): 'the next generation has a greater expectation around being participants in, rather than recipients of, knowledge sharing' (p.53) and 'entirely different expectations about information delivery and access' (p. 55). Cullen (2008b) also notes that librarians being trained at the time he wrote, and subsequently of course, will themselves have grown up in Web 2.0 age.

Partridge, Lee, and Munro (2010) carried out research involving focus groups with 81 members of the Australian library and information services profession.<sup>13</sup> Eight key issues emerged around what is needed from librarians in the Web 2.0 age. Among these eight:

- technology is seen a means to an end, rather than an end in itself
- librarians are presented as needing to be interested and willing to engage in lifelong learning
- librarians' practice should be research- or evidence-based
- librarians are required to be proactive and able to communicate, to collaborate, and to work as a team, as well as to have a user focus.

To some extent, Partridge, Lee and Munro (2010) also conclude that librarians have always required these traits but that pace is now faster. They are not alone in pointing to the importance of information professionals' more

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<sup>13</sup> Funded by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council.

'traditional' skills. Chowdhury (2010), whose focus is information retrieval, asserts that information professionals should not overlook 'the theory, techniques and tools that constitute the traditional approaches to the organization and processing of information', much of which remains relevant 'in digital library environments' (back cover).

For McLeod (2012) 'traditional principles and methods are a good starting point for managing e-records' as well, 'but need to be reviewed, re-assessed, adjusted and developed for the electronic environment' (p.189).<sup>14</sup> Currall and Moss (2008), who write specifically of archivists and records managers, see the important question as the extent to which this represents an 'epistemological shift or is simply an extension of existing practices in a new order' (p. 69).

Apparently more radically, Pember and Cowan (2009, p. 2 and p. 4) ask if records managers should be questioning if the concept of a record remains relevant in the Web 2.0 world. However, they conclude that 'the concept of "the record" as evidence supporting business needs by reporting what was communicated or decided or what action was taken is as valid in the Web 2.0 world as it was in the mid 1990s' (Pember and Cowan, 2009, p.12). Their discussion reflects a considerable body of theory on records management in the digital age, which debates how significant a shift there has been and what response is therefore required of the information profession.

In commenting on this subject, Pember and Cowan (2009) also illustrate the complexity of electronic records: 'today we can reformat, remix and "mashup" information, and create composite information objects containing numerous different formats, such as video clips, text, and static images. These may result in the creation of a complex record' (p. 2). In the Web 2.0 environment, records managers need to be able to capture records generated by the array of social media tools available to the organisation, many of which feel informal, in contrast to the rigour of records management. Equally, colleagues work on the move, using mobile technology. Records management can feel rigid compared to this flexibility.

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<sup>14</sup> Based on the findings of a three-year project, at Northumbria University.

McLeod (2012), perhaps controversially, refers to some of the participants in the research project she documents as recognising that professionals may be as much a part of the problem, as the solution. She refers to them as seeking perfection and being unrealistic; pressing for a consideration of whether it is necessary to seek a 'gold standard' and pointing out that records were also managed imperfectly in the paper world (pp.190-192). McLeod (2012) calls for a risk-based and proportionate response:

Should we, can we, always accept less than perfect 'recordkeeping systems'? By default we already do! But can we deliberately say 'perfection' is not always necessary? No. Adopting a proportionate approach therefore implies a risk-based approach founded on sound analysis and risk assessment. This may prove challenging in organisational, societal and cultural contexts that are risk averse and may prove challenging in practice for information and records professionals. But risk assessment is not a new concept for the profession; it has been practised in the context of records retention management for some time. (p.192)

In comparison, Currall and Moss (2008) still appear rooted in the past: they take the concept of the lack of a trusted physical repository, with an information professional as its custodian, to an extreme that seems so implausible as to cast doubt on assertions they make elsewhere. They argue that the absence of a 'trusted repository' prompts staff to hoard paper copies for fear that they will not be able to access them long-term (Currall and Moss, 2008, p. 71). Perhaps this was the case in 2008 and it is noteworthy that one aim of President Obama's 2011 memorandum, "Managing government records", was to reduce printing and associated costs, but a proliferation of multiple electronic versions is also, if not more of, a risk. 'More and more records are in digital form and it is so easy to create records and so difficult to track and preserve those which are important', notes Hare (2013, p. 10). Similarly, in 2010 Cumming and Findlay observe that:

While the paperless office will never exist, it is perhaps fair to say that the days of the paper-based business process are numbered. [...] Digital records and digital record types are proliferating. [...] Informal discussions with a number of [New South Wales] public offices have revealed that little or no disposal is occurring in digital recordkeeping systems. (pp. 271-272)



Currall and Moss (2008) contend that 'the public expects government to accept a much greater degree of risk than the private sector' and 'checks on government are not as robust as in the private sector', as they have no shareholder and price mechanisms to reflect their value (p. 69). However, legislation such as the Freedom of Information and Public Records Acts, which apply only to the public sector, as well as government-wide mandated standards for information assurance, supplement legislation that applies across sectors - data protection, health and safety, employment law and so on - to suggest a more rigorous standard for the UK Government than Currall and Moss (2008) imply.<sup>15</sup> Such a sweeping statement with little to support it, and significant evidence to the contrary, somewhat undermines much of the thrust of their article.

Marfleet (2008), who refers to 'information intermediaries' rather than professionals, sees them as playing a key role in identifying how social media can aid the business. This ranges from support squarely in the domain of information management, such as reducing time wasted looking for information and educating others on setting up information-sharing tools, to KM such as supporting communities of practice.<sup>16</sup> Marfleet (2008) also suggests that it is in the interests of information professionals to gain a reputation for trying and championing new technology. Six years after it was written, Marfleet's work (2008) does feel somewhat unambitious. Information professionals have more to offer than supporting pilots of social media and working closely with IT colleagues. This research will explore what that might be for those in the UK Government.

Especially relevant to IM in the UK Government is, however, Marfleet's acknowledgement that where any colleague can create content using social media, there exist risks. She refers to this as being particularly the case in highly-regulated industries, but sees information intermediaries' role here as providing guidance for colleagues. It has already been noted that records

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<sup>15</sup> See Wright (2013, p. 15 and p. 18) on regulation and accountability of government organisations, and scrutiny of private business.

<sup>16</sup> Denning (2006) describes communities of practice as 'typically based on the affinity created by common interests or experience, where practitioners face a common set of problems in a particular knowledge area, and have an interest in finding, or improving the effectiveness of solutions to those problems' (p. 14).

managers face the challenge of capturing records created using social media tools. State Records, New South Wales (n.d.), acknowledge this and remark that to be able to do this, record professionals must develop relationships with many different areas of their organisations; a theme that will be developed further later in this **Literature review**. Similarly, Cullen (2008b, p.54-5) refers to information professionals bringing order to the information-sharing wikis of other professionals groups.

#### **2.4 'Traditional professional boundaries are challenged'**

In the source of the quotation heading up this section, Broady-Preston (2009b, p. 173) observes 'widespread evidence of technological developments, such as social networking tools, driving not only the acquisition of differing skills within the IP [information profession], but also causing professional boundaries to become blurred or more diffuse'. Pember and Cowan (2009) question if records managers are in danger of being marginalised; a phenomenon to which Cumming and Findlay (2010) also refer.

The boundaries of the records management profession are becoming blurry and there are many competing for control over what records managers have traditionally regarded as their ground. Again, strong anecdotal evidence is showing that the increasing strategic importance of information coupled with the ubiquity of technology has meant that there are many more players and influences in what has traditionally been the records manager's domain. (p. 272)

Broady-Preston (2009b, p. 172) contends that 'it is not merely subject domain boundaries which are blurring within the IP [information profession], but also the transitional "hard" boundaries between professional level skills and what are often termed "paraprofessional" skills'. Referring primarily to librarians, Orme (2008, p. 621) writes of 'delegation of tasks to paraprofessionals'. Interestingly, TFPL (2011) points to how skills within the IM profession are merging: 'there are clear signs that core KIM disciplines such as information management, records management, library and information services, business analysis, and knowledge management are coming together and in some cases merging' (p. 5).

The same study concludes that ‘in the majority of organisations KIM is clearly associated with KIM specialists and there is little recognition of KIM responsibilities in other roles’ (p.5).<sup>17</sup> However, for others, information professionals are increasingly requiring more generic skills. This will be looked at in more detail in the next section, **2.5**, but here it is worth noting that Broady-Preston (2009b) observes that ‘the adoption of more generic competency based frameworks for vocational education and training’ (pp. 173-174) affects the profession.

Training and continuing professional development (CPD) feature in a significant amount of academic literature on the information profession. Cossham and Fields (2007) analyse the differing views between librarians and their managers in New Zealand, about their learning needs. Choo (2002, p. 270) refers to the importance of professionals investing ‘the time and energy to update their skills and knowledge, and to network with peers in their own profession’. Jaeger and Bertot (2011) write of the new skills and training required by government information librarians in the digital age.

Broady-Preston has written extensively on IM education and CPD, as well as professional bodies. In “Professional Education, Development and Training in a Web 2.0 Environment: A Case Study of the UK” (2009a), she explores these concepts in the context of a changing information landscape. With Cossham (2010), Broady-Preston looks at mandatory CPD and professional re-validation schemes in motivating information professionals, in the UK and New Zealand.

Orme (2008, p. 620) sees as ‘an obvious, but not exclusive, identifier of the library and information professional’ the possession of a relevant qualification. Feather (2009, p. 9) contends, however, that information professionals need to focus less on qualifications and more on application of professional knowledge. Given their prominence in literature on IM, it will therefore be useful to establish, through this research, how government information professionals perceive qualifications, professional development, and membership of professional bodies.

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<sup>17</sup> Based on 220 replies to an online survey in 2011.

## 2.5 'The demands of the sector are diverse'

A number of theorists have produced studies that list the skills required of the information professional. Orme (2008) studied 180 job advertisements from the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professional's Library + Information Gazette in 2006-2007. Others to review job advertisements include Gerolimos and Konsta (2008), who generated a list of skills required by the information professional, and Payne (2009) who looked at course curricula alongside job advertisements.

Echoing the views of those other commentators who, it was noted above, see information professionals requiring more and more generic skills, Orme (2008) - the source of the citation heading this section (p. 630) - concludes that the generic skills were the most frequently sought (p. 626). As noted in the **Introduction**, there exists a government KIM skills framework, launched in *Information Matters*, and refreshed in 2013, but a framework of more general competencies is also available to managers to combine skills from the two, as appropriate.

Since several commentators write of the diversity of skills required by the IM professional, it is worth considering this in some detail. TFPL (2011, p. 5) summarises this by referring to employers as requiring 'something special'. In another publication, TFPL (n.d) contends that 'the IM teams of tomorrow will have knowledge and information expertise, ICT [information and communication technology] understanding and skills, excellent project and change management skills, process design and business skills, facilitation and negotiation skills' (p. 10). Again, this points to an IM professional with a wider set of business-applicable skills than those typically associated, in the past, with supplying, managing, or supporting others in managing information.

Cullen (2008a) observes that librarians in the Web 2.0 world should operate beyond the library or information service: 'they work at the organizational level and challenge assumptions about what the business thinks it knows' (p. 256). By referring to IM professionals challenging assumptions and creating value by helping colleagues understand what they need to know, Cullen's depiction of the profession feels proactive; although it is worth

remarking that Cullen's description at times feels more aligned to KM than to IM.

Olander (2010) also refers to the need for broader skills such as the ability to work in teams, to communicate well with users and to have strong IM and IT skills; as well as openness to change and strategic competence or, in other words, the ability to understand the organisation's goals (pp. 33-34). This requirement to understand the wider organisation features heavily in a lot of commentary. McLeod (2012) argues, specifically of records managers, that the role should be 'strategic and enabling, horizon-scanning and focused on our role in solving "big challenges"' (p. 191). She compares this with the way that the role of the librarian has changed, mentioned earlier in this **Literature review**, and also suggests that this will require training and education not only on the part of records managers themselves but other colleagues, who are the creators and users of information and records (McLeod, 2012, p. 191).

The research commissioned by Financial Times Corporate and the Special Libraries Association (2013) concludes that there exist what they term 'five essential attributes' (p. 4) for modern information professionals:<sup>18</sup>

| <b>Five essential attributes</b>     | <b>Explanation of attribute</b>   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Communicating their value            | Using communication to demonstrate the value of information services and help the business to understand the information function.  |
| Understanding the drivers            | Knowing what the organisation does; understanding why certain colleagues want certain types of information, and how best to capture and provide it.   |
| Managing the process                 | Using project management techniques to respond to the need to deliver more, faster and more cheaply.  |
| Keeping up on technical skills       | Technical skills remain an important baseline not to be neglected as broader skills are developed.  |
| Providing decision-ready information | Responding to executives' perception of a lack of up-to-date, relevant, decision-ready information, delivered quickly enough to use and without having to sift through irrelevant material. |

**Table 3 - Five essential attributes of information professionals**

Again, the ability to understand the overall aims of the organisation, in which the information professional sits, is seen as essential. The information profession is presented here as, to some extent, projected into unfamiliar territory; as needing a new model for IM (p. 11):

|   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• multi-skilled</li> <li>• outward-looking and proactive</li> <li>• distilling and validating</li> <li>• coach others to self-serve better</li> <li>• integrated within the organisation</li> <li>• clear metrics linked to strategy</li> <li>• out of information providers' 'comfort zone'.</li> </ul> |
|---|

**Table 4 - A new model for IM**

<sup>18</sup> Each of these attributes is outlined in more detail in the second half of their report, which sets out 12 key tasks that it claims enable the information professional to develop the attributes. See Financial Times Corporate and the Special Libraries Association (2013) p. 31.

If this need for a new model is accepted, this is another reason to establish the attributes required of information professionals in the UK Government. This is even more justified by the contention, as a consequence of the research, from Financial Times Corporate and the Special Libraries Association (2013, p. 13), that those attributes rated as most important - communication, understanding and decision-ready information - are among the areas 'with the largest shortfalls in performance ratings between users and providers'. It should, however, be recalled that this research, which involved a survey of, and interviews with, information professionals and executives, only had 8% of survey respondents declare themselves as working in government or politics. One cannot, therefore, assume this necessarily applies to the UK Government but, given this general conclusion, it is worth investigating further.

## **2.6 'Communicate constantly with the rest of the organisation'**

As remarked previously, several analyses include references to the relationship between information professionals and the rest of the organisation: to skills in the areas of strategic awareness, communications and teamwork.<sup>19</sup> It will be taken as a given that information professionals need to understand the legal requirements of their organisations, in areas such as data protection, freedom of information, health and safety, employment, and public records. This research will focus on what theorists suggest beyond these basics.

For many, as already observed, interpersonal skills are essential. For Marfleet (2008) 'it's vital that information intermediaries develop and apply the soft, consultative skills that will enable them to help their organizations leverage their internal information and to make those all important internal connections': he or she should understand changes taking place and facilitate the communication of these to a wider audience (p. 156). The relationship with ICT colleagues is presented by several commentators as particularly important; for example, Currall and Moss (2008, p. 69), and Cumming and Findlay (2010, p. 270).

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<sup>19</sup> A body of research exists around relationship management, be it relationships with customers, between businesses or within organisations, including industrial relations between managers and staff. Information technology at the disposal of organisations to support relationship management has also been the subject of much research.

Marfleet's (2008) reflection on wider relationships across an organisation feels somewhat amorphous with its emphasis on developing communities, facilitating communication and enabling networks: professionals act as 'the nodal point of a number of different networks and facilitate the connections between them' (pp. 255-256). Like Financial Times Corporate and the Special Libraries Association (2013), Marfleet (2008) contrasts this with traditional library, research and information skills. The former's description of this more wide-ranging skills base is the source of the heading to this section and worth citing at length. It not only highlights a need to retain existing technical skills, while developing competencies and tendencies posited as new, but also reflects on where the information profession is situated in organisations:

The core skills and capabilities required by information professionals are changing. In the past, this was a discipline that was often hived off from the wider organisation. Today, however, information professionals are expected to communicate constantly with the rest of the organisation, integrate themselves into new areas, build key and productive relationships, and proactively demonstrate their value to senior colleagues. At the same time, they must retain their core technical capabilities, which remain indispensable across many disciplines. The result is a need for information professionals to possess a much broader set of skills and a trend for the profession to attract recruits from ever more diverse backgrounds. (Financial Times Corporate and the Special Libraries Association, 2013, p. 6)

However, Cullen (2008b) presents today's 'user-centred' librarianship as a continuation of, rather than a radical departure from, old ways of working: 'we have long been advocates for developing user-centric services' (p.57). St Clair and Stanley (2008) refer to librarians' need to understand the parent organisation. With a more precise focus on the traditional realms of IM than Financial Times Corporate and the Special Libraries Association (2013), and than St Clair and Stanley (2008), Karim and Hussein (2008) still highlight the profession's need to align itself with the wider business: 'perhaps the most critical issue facing information managers is [...] aligning the focus of the information systems with the mission of the enterprise' (p. 116). The Financial Times Corporate and the Special Libraries Association report (2013) compares its conclusions with a similar survey by the latter from 2008:



A fundamental shift has occurred. The most important aspects today involve greater integration with the business and a move from just making information available to ensuring that it is immediately usable. Having a deep understanding of why information is needed, how it will be used and how the business works is now key, as is the ability to engage and communicate with other parts of the business. Technical skills, while still important, are now a baseline prerequisite onto which information professionals must now build teamwork, initiative and more strategic thinking. (p. 14)

Choo (2002) notes that information professionals are contributing more and more as part of project teams, or consultants and trainers sometimes in ways that are well integrated with users' activities (p. 269). Similarly, but more recently, Financial Times Corporate and the Special Libraries Association (2013, p. 10) refer to the importance of becoming 'embedded' as integral members of the team or department; shifting from 'isolated, technical expert to multi-skilled team member [...] proactively integrating into the organisation' (p. 3). Information departments shrink or disappear, and organisational barriers are dismantled: 'rather than being siloed in libraries, information professionals will become team members within departments that were once internal customers' (p. 5). Similarly, 'the days of large centralized information departments are over and are very unlikely to come back', contends Marfleet (2008, p. 156), while TFPL (2011) refers to 'a dispersed model with central support so while there is a dispersal of KIM practitioners throughout organisations, centralised KIM teams still have a place (p. 5). This research will therefore consider where government KIM professionals are located in their departments.

## **2.7 'This know-how is invisible to the organization'**

The research commissioned by Financial Times Corporate and the Special Libraries Association (2013) points to an onus on the information profession to explain the value of information: 'the most important priority for executives is to understand the deeper value to the organisation of strong information. [...] It is largely up to information professionals to demonstrate this value' (p. 10). They also contend that there are now many alternatives to the service that IM professionals offer and that 'it is the responsibility of information providers to solidify themselves as the best solution to their organisation's information needs and reinforce the value they provide' (2013, p. 2).

Other literature focuses on marketing the profession. Hare (2013, p. 12) suggests records managers liaising with colleagues on specific work, like retention schedules, can improve understanding of their role and expertise. Feather (2009) sees the challenge for the information profession as 'going beyond its own recognition of its knowledge, skills and insights' instead 'to persuade others of the contribution it (and they) can make' (p. 3). Choo (2002, p. 269) contends that 'most of the time, information professionals' know-how is invisible to the organization or submerged beneath the surface of day-to-day work'. For Marfleet (2008):

Now, more than ever, information intermediaries need to be proactive and really market their roles. [...] Unless information intermediaries recognize that the landscape in which they operate has shifted and continues to shift, they risk being left behind, and potentially becoming obsolete. (p. 156)

Of course, the risk is not just to the information professional but run by the whole business. KM World describes itself as 'the leading publisher, conference organizer, and information provider serving the knowledge management, content management, and document management markets'. In an article written for KM World by Feldman, in 2004, this risk is stressed: 'there are all kinds of disasters. Some are caused by wrong information. Some are caused by outdated information'. While she uses extreme and well-known examples to reinforce this point and writes on behalf of an organisation with a vested interest in stressing the problems to be solved, Feldman's suggestion that missing or incomplete information plagues many projects is far from unreasonable. Pember and Cowan (2009) echo this point, referring to records not available for fast retrieval being 'useless, one might even postulate dangerous': 'organisations may stand or fall on the ability to provide the required information or evidential record when the need arises' (p. 2). This takes this **Literature review** full circle: back to the case for good IM in any organisation.

In addition to this overriding message about the value of IM, and the threat of search engines leading everyone in an organisation to assume they have the right information, potentially putting effective decision-making at risk, other themes have emerged from the **Introduction** and **Literature review**. The

impact of social media on the information profession is one. Another is the blurring of boundaries between the profession, and other colleagues and professions, as well as paraprofessionals.

In turn, information professionals are, according to relevant academic and business literature, expected to demonstrate a wider range of skills than previously. These can be summarised as an ability to understand the overarching aims of the organisation, in order that IM supports its objectives; and to communicate well with colleagues, including promoting the value of IM and their own worth. This survey of relevant academic and business literature therefore revealed a number of topics relating to IM that warranted further research in the context of the profession in the UK Government. The next chapter will explain how this research approached these subjects.

## Chapter 3 - Methodology

This chapter explains the approach taken to the search for the above review of relevant literature from the fields of management and academia. It synthesises the questions that the review generated and sets out the methodology used to respond to them.

### 3.1 Literature search

The literature search (conducted from 11 September 2013 to 31 January 2014) used Google and Google Scholar and the following exact-word terms, centring on the period from 2008 to 2014.<sup>20</sup>

- “information profession”
- “information professional”
- “knowledge and information profession”
- “information profession” + government
- “information professional” + government
- “information services” + government
- “knowledge and information profession” + government
- “record manage” + profession + government

**Table 5 - Literature search terms**

“Knowledge and information profession” was a term that was chosen deliberately, despite this dissertation focusing on IM, not KM. This was because the UK Government tends to refer to the knowledge and information management (KIM) profession and, although unlikely, this was a means to avoid overlooking anything relevant that might not have been picked up by the other searches.

Conversely, unlike ‘record manage’ (to capture ‘managers and management’), ‘librarian’ and ‘library’ were not employed as search terms. This was because much of the material generated by the search terms towards the start of the list focused on librarianship meaning it was sufficiently covered. To go further, could potentially have been at the cost of looking in sufficient depth at records managers and those who give guidance on IM to others. Where there was a particular emphasis on librarians or records managers, and not to do so might have given a somewhat distorted impression of the wider information

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<sup>20</sup> 2008 to 2013 was used for searching conducted before the end of 2013.

profession, the **Literature review** made a given theorist's focus on librarianship explicit.

Each source that the search terms generated was considered for relevance. Those with a link to the research question were read in greater depth. This included the consideration of sources they cited and other references in their bibliographies. These secondary works were then reviewed for relevance to the research question, and the full book or article read in depth, as required. Similarly, the bibliographies and citation material of each of these second-stage sources were reviewed, where they too appeared relevant to the research question and so on, until a solid overview of pertinent material was established. The author also attended an 'information summit' hosted by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, on 31 October 2013, where the research commissioned by Financial Times Corporate and the Special Libraries Association (2013) was mentioned. The American Psychological Association style has been used to cite all of these sources.

The period 2008 to 2014 was chosen for two reasons. First, as indicated above, KIM in the UK Government really began to take shape with the publication of its strategy for information and knowledge in 2008: *Information Matters*. Second, because of the pace of technological change, IM has evolved rapidly over the last few years: to go back further than 2008 would have been likely to generate material already out of date. However, a review of relevant literature from 2008 onwards would reveal through citations any works that predated that period but remained highly relevant.<sup>21</sup> The most significant work before 2008 was not, therefore, overlooked entirely because of the time parameters employed.

Both Google and Google Scholar were chosen as the search engines, rather than academic databases, because much literature on IM comes from the corporate world, especially third-party organisations that supply IM support, services and consultancy to other organisations. It was considered important not to omit this, in favour of exclusively academic sources; Google and Google

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<sup>21</sup> For example, Detlor (2010) cites Choo (2002).

Scholar tending to search broad resource bases including academic works as well. Any relevant licensed content was then accessed via academic databases.

Literature from companies offering the sort of IM services described above was read with the potential in mind for bias or other shortcomings. For instance, it might not have been subject to as rigorous a quality-assurance process as articles in peer-reviewed academic journals. Moreover, it is clearly in the interests of a business looking to generate profit from supplying IM services to exaggerate the problems it claims to solve, to secure revenue. Consequently, some of the material should be understood as, at least in part, a marketing tool and where relevant this was made clear in the **Literature review** itself.<sup>22</sup> While it should be read with that bias in mind, it nevertheless gives an insight into IM in the corporate world including the sort of opinions to which managers might be exposed, from other managers, publications and marketing; or perhaps themselves espouse on the basis of their experience.

### **3.2. Themes to emerge**

The **Literature review** suggested a number of areas for exploration in order to address the overarching question of what was required of the information profession in the UK Government. The subjects to emerge could be clustered under three headings: response to the changing environment; relationship with the rest of the organisation; and skills and continuing professional development. These were not discrete but overlapped. An obvious example is that one of the skills identified was the need to be able to build relationships with colleagues across the organisation.

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<sup>22</sup> The report from Financial Times Corporate and the Special Libraries Association (2013) advertises subscriptions to information provided by the former.

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Response to changing environment</b>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Response to budget &amp; headcount restraints</li> <li>• Impact of the proliferation of electronic information, including colleagues being able to search for information themselves via the internet</li> <li>• Impact of ICT developments, in particular Web 2.0</li> </ul> |
| <b>Relationship with the rest of the organisation</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customers' expectations</li> <li>• Boundaries with other colleagues, other professions and paraprofessionals</li> <li>• Relationship with the wider organisation, including where IM is in its structure</li> <li>• Communications and marketing services</li> </ul>          |
| <b>Skills and CPD</b>                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role of qualifications</li> <li>• Continuing professional development</li> <li>• Membership of professional bodies</li> <li>• Skills or attributes required: IM and generic</li> </ul>  |

**Table 6 - Summary of themes to emerge from the Literature review**

## **3.2 Approach and sample**

### **3.2.1 Self-completion questionnaire**

Bryman (2012, pp. 233-234) sets out the advantages of a self-completion questionnaire compared to structured interviews for gathering research data. These include the absence of interviewer effects, also highlighted by Phellas, Bloch and Seale (2012, p. 182). This is highly relevant to this dissertation: as a senior manager in the area being researched, the author could have had an influence over responses from colleagues, especially from her own department, simply by being present. Answers may have corresponded to responses that subjects felt were desired or expected by the author, rather than authentic views.

Convenience for participants is another advantage (Bryman, 2012). Stopher (2012, p. 385) points to how participants can select when they complete surveys. It was desirable to disrupt the sample group as little as possible and thus a web-based questionnaire was used.<sup>23</sup> Other advantages of

<sup>23</sup> Stopher (2012, p. 385) notes that 'the response rates to internet surveys are reported by several researchers as being lower than that of postal surveys', but that will largely refer to

self-completion questionnaires compared to interviews include the potential to have far more participants; to benefit from as wide a group of views as possible. Indeed using that approach meant the sample group could be the entire government information profession, as explained in detail in **3.2.2 Sample**.

To send a questionnaire to such a large group not all known to her, required the author to rely on senior leaders in other departments to cascade it to their teams. Not being able to send the survey directly to individuals gave the author less control, especially not limiting participants to one response and not being able to send reminders to individuals. However, that was off-set by potentially reaching a large sample group and by being able to ask leaders to cascade the survey to their staff who worked all or part of their time on information, rather than on knowledge management. The author nevertheless included a question on what role a respondent performed and those who declared knowledge management would automatically be prevented from completing it.

In the covering text sent to leaders to cascade to their teams with a link to the survey, participation was encouraged in two ways. First, an enticing subject-heading as recommended by Sue and Ritter, (2012, p. 111): 'What you think the information profession should look like'. Second, by explaining that the results would be made available to the head of the KIM profession in Government and contributions therefore potentially put to practical use. This was reiterated on the questionnaire's 'welcome page' (see **Appendix B**). Participants were invited to indicate, separately from their answers, which they were assured would be anonymous, if they wanted to receive a summary of the overall findings.

This was also intended to counteract a disadvantage of surveys, highlighted by Phellas, Bloch and Seale (2012, p. 182): that respondents can find it a 'chore [...] filling in a form for some anonymous researcher'. Here the researcher was not anonymous but a colleague from their discipline, expressing an intention to use the results to benefit the profession. As Phell, Bloch and

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samples comprising participants from the public at large. This is less likely to be the case with a questionnaire for a specific sector's KIM professionals from a colleague, intended to inform their profession in the future.



Seale (2012, p. 185) suggest, 'response rates in self-completion surveys tend to be maximised when respondents have an interest in the subject of the research and are therefore motivated to complete the survey'.

Arguably receiving a questionnaire from one of their senior managers could again have influenced participants to respond in the way that they felt was expected rather than completely candidly, but this was less of a risk given that responses would be anonymous. What is more, this was the only means to reach all information professionals in the sector; and having a senior manager's endorsement in this way, could potentially have been a further means of encouraging colleagues to participate and generating a better response rate.

The self-completion questionnaire also compares favourably with focus groups in ways relevant to this dissertation. Focus groups can be likened to interviews and thus the above comparisons apply, such as the influence of the author. It would not have been reasonable to have the author's own staff taking part in focused groups run by her, which would have meant omitting a large cadre of government IM staff and a missed opportunity.

Where focus groups and interviews differ is that the former involve more participants at any one time: they generate interaction - consensus and disagreement - among a group discussing a given topic, thereby eliciting representative views rather than individual perceptions (see Barbour, 2009, p. 85). As many of those in the government KIM profession would work together; would previously have worked together; or, at the very least, would have known each other, the results of focus groups could have been especially prone to a few dominant voices influencing overall outcomes; for example, more senior grades influencing the comments from, or provoking silence in, junior colleagues. In any case, Barbour (2009. p. 129) suggests that focus groups tend to overemphasise consensus and by compiling the results of questionnaires completed independently, the author potentially reached more genuinely representative views.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Bryman (2012, p. 239) also cites diaries as a source of research material. They were ruled out as they would simply illustrate the status quo for Government's IM professionals. Another option ruled out for the same reason - that it would simply reflect the status quo rather than what

While all of these factors pointed to the relevance of using a self-completion questionnaire, it was also worth considering possible pitfalls. Bryman (2012, pp. 234-235) lists the disadvantages compared to structured interviews. Of course, one is the potential for a low return rate. However, as suggested above, this risk was mitigated by the means in which it was circulated to participants, via a senior manager in each department, and its subject being likely to interest members of the sample group, especially given the potential to influence change.

Phellas, Bloch and Seale (2012, p. 182) note that an interviewer can explain questions that a respondent has not understood and ask for further elaboration of replies, if required. However, as the sample group in this research were professionals in the field, there was arguably less likelihood of misunderstanding both on their parts, of the questions, and for the researcher, of their answers. Again, this does not suggest a compelling case for interviews over a self-completion questionnaire, and certainly not one that outweighed the risk of interviewer influence in this instance.

Another limitation is that a questionnaire should not include too many open questions, which could deter participants from completing it. However, there was much data that was relevant to this research that could be captured by closed questions, such as qualifications held and membership of professional bodies (see full text of the questionnaire at **Appendix B**). The **Literature review** also revealed some areas that could be probed using closed questions; for example, the key skills and attributes required by the profession's members. So it was possible to limit the questionnaire to only two open questions and still get valuable material to analyse, thus mitigating another shortcoming of the self-completion questionnaire.

### **3.2.2 Sample**

The **Literature review** of published material, both academic and managerial, suggested that different characteristics and considerations emerge

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is required - was observation of those in the profession. This was also likely to be subject to the Hawthorne effect, whereby subjects change their behaviour under observation. This was especially likely as the author is a manager within their profession, which could clearly have skewed the results.

for the three main professional groups: librarians, records managers, and those who advise others on how to manage information effectively and in the interests of the overall organisation. For instance, it may be less of a concern to a records manager what search skills a colleague uses to access information online, if that same colleague is aware of, and knows how to, manage records produced in the course of day-to-day activities. Conversely, a librarian may be less troubled than an information manager about how information is stored, once it has been located and used.

Issuing a self-completion questionnaire to all members of the government profession meant that the various sub-groups were proportionately represented in the sample. Defining government KIM is complex, as some colleagues do this for part of their time or feel allied to the profession rather than squarely within it. However, a survey of government KIM leaders in 2012 indicated that the profession was around 1,100 members albeit that this included KM too. One limitation of this means of approaching the sample group was that the author relied on KIM leaders to follow the request in her cover email to omit those who specialised in KM. However, the focus on IM, not KM, was reiterated in the opening text to the questionnaire for participants and, as indicated above, the author included a question on respondents' roles meaning KM specialists could be prevented from completing it.

### **3.2.3 Questionnaire text**

The questionnaire drew on the themes summarised in **Table 6**, which emerged from the **Literature review**. It included personal factual questions about factors such as the respondents' grade or professional role, so that any trends within groups could be identified. The questionnaire text is set out in full at **Appendix B**. As well as open and closed questions, and personal factual questions, it included informant factual questions about attitudes and beliefs.<sup>25</sup>

The questionnaire was administered using Smart Survey<sup>TM</sup>. It enables respondents to track their progress and pause part-way. The questionnaire was

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<sup>25</sup> Bryman (2012, pp. 237-252) provides definitions for these categories of questions. The question on the number of days of learning and development completed in the previous 12 months was centred on five days. This is because, as part of Civil Service Reform, mentioned above, all civil servants are entitled to five days of learning and development per year.

set up so that no answers were pre-completed, which could make errors more likely if respondents simply did not change them. A mixture of drop down menus, matrices to rate factors according to their perceived importance (using the same scale, for consistency and respondents' ease, in both questions like this), checklists and open-text boxes were used, according to the question posed and to give the user variety when completing the questionnaire.

According to Sue and Ritter (2012, p. 64), using a scale without a mid-point has been shown to result in a positive skew in results, as it prevents users from expressing genuine indecision. Both questions with scales (13 and 14) therefore had mid-points.

Sue and Ritter (2012, p. 62) also state that 'research evidence indicates that forcing respondents to choose one answer from a list is preferable to "check all that apply"'. Stopher (2012, p. 193) refers to the potential for the latter to produce a 'primacy effect': participants tick several that could be relevant at the start of a list until they feel they have highlighted the number expected. They then cease without reading the rest. No questions involved ticking all that applied. Questions 13 and 14, where multiple answers were possible, involved a matrix. Respondents were required to rate them on a scale of importance. The survey tool randomised the order in which the criteria, for participants to rate, appeared.<sup>26</sup>

Questions 7 and 8 centred on demands of the profession: the volume and complexity of requests and enquiries. Response options again appeared in a random order: the same option did not always appear at the start of the list. This avoided the primacy effect whereby statements towards the top of the list tend to be rated most highly (questions 13 and 14) or selected the most frequently (questions 7 and 8). Care was also taken not to pose leading questions but to keep them as neutral as possible.

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<sup>26</sup> Ritter and Sue (2012, p. 86) draw on Dillman, Smyth, and Christian (2009) to cite four shortcomings of matrices. They focus on the complexity and level of difficulty, for example of working across both rows and columns. However, given that the sample are professionals accustomed to working with, and managing, information, the author concluded that they would be well-placed to complete matrix-style questions.

Beyond keeping questions clear and jargon-free, and ensuring the questionnaire appears in a format that would not seem unfamiliar, advice on designing questionnaires tends also to cover the welcome screen; for example Sue & Ritter (2012) and Stopher (2013). A screen shot at **Appendix C** illustrates that it was kept simple. Except for the two open questions about opinions of the challenges faced by the profession and how it should react - which were clearly closely related and where respondents would benefit from being able to refer back to question 11 when completing 12 - all other questions appeared on a page on their own. This was intended to make the survey as straightforward as possible to complete.

### **3.2.4 Pretesting**

The self-completion questionnaire was tested on six civil servants of various grades, who were not IM professionals, between 30 June and 4 July 2014. They would thus not be part of the sample group. However, they worked in areas with strong links to IM, so would understand the terms used and be able to complete the questionnaire for the purposes of giving feedback to shape the final version. See **Appendix D** for the cover text sent to that group.

To assist the pilot group in giving feedback, they were asked to respond to the following prompts as well as make general observations:

- How long the survey took to complete.
- Whether the opening text was clear.
- If the opening text could better encourage respondents to complete it.
- The clarity of the questions and any areas of ambiguity.
- Overall appearance on the screen.
- Any spelling mistakes.

Several members of the pilot group responded positively to various parts of the survey. Suggestions for improvements were as follows.

| Observations  | Follow-up action   |
|---|--|
| 1. The design chosen from the survey tool included a picture on the front page. Some of the title text ran over that graphic and one person found it difficult to read as a consequence.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Different design chosen. The title could have been shortened but there was no feedback on that and it had been chosen to be upbeat and positive, to encourage responses. Although the author felt a picture of office workers made the questionnaire more appealing, it was omitted as clarity of the text was more important.</li> </ul> |
| 2. Comments on the appearance of the opening text: it was not distinct enough from the background.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The author had noticed this and sought to amend it manually by choosing a different colour before the pilot. Changing the design selected for the final version (see 1, above) addressed this fully.</li> </ul>   |
| 3. Suggestions for simplifying the opening text.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The author reviewed each and made some of the changes suggested.</li> </ul>   |
| 4. Suggestions for changing the opening text to make recipients more likely to complete it.   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The author made changes to focus more on potential outcomes, without making commitments she was unable to honour.</li> </ul>  |
| 5. Suggestions relating to the text of specific questions.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The author reviewed each and made some of the changes suggested.</li> </ul>   |
| 6. Individual observations about the questions inviting free-text responses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• boxes too large and intimidating</li> <li>• pleased to see enough space to respond fully</li> <li>• requiring an answer to these questions might put people off.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As there were conflicting views, the box sizes were left the same size.</li> <li>• The requirement to respond was removed: respondents could skip those questions if they wished.</li> </ul>  |

**Table 7 - Feedback from the pilot study and associated changes**

Three people indicated how long the survey had taken to complete: one between 10 and 15 minutes, another 13 minutes, and the third five minutes. The longer time, of 15 minutes, was cited in the cover text alongside an indication that it should require no more than that.

On 7 July 2014, the questionnaire was 'soft-launched': it was sent to part of the sample group: the author's own teams, who would have easy access to her to report any problems. During the 'soft-launch' the author screened the data daily to establish if changes or data cleansing were needed. No problems were reported. The only feedback was that one respondent was repeatedly excluded from the survey. However this was because that person worked on KM and the survey therefore functioned correctly in preventing him from completing it.

After one week and 13 completions, the questionnaire was sent, on 14 July, to other KIM leaders to cascade to their teams, with a closing date of 15 August. A reminder was forwarded to KIM leaders to send to their teams on 5 August.

### **3.2.5 Coding and analysis**

A codebook is not required for quantitative replies to web-based tools, as the data is compiled as respondents complete questionnaires.<sup>27</sup> However, coding, through the breaking down of responses into their key concepts to enable their thematic content analysis as a group, was required for qualitative responses.<sup>28</sup> Themes emerge from responses' similarities and patterns. Not considering coding and analysis in advance of administering a questionnaire runs the risk, however, of the data generated not answering the research questions posed. This was addressed as follows.

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<sup>27</sup> The few recipients who reported technical problems received a Word version of the survey, where this was brought to the attention of the author. To maintain their anonymity, they were given the opportunity to return it in hard copy, if they wished. Of course, these respondents could skip any question. In keeping with the research topic, any responses in Word that indicated they were from KM specialists were omitted.

<sup>28</sup> For a description of thematic content analysis, see Rivas (2012, p.367). Rivas (2012, p. 381) sees member validation of themes selected as having merit. This was not carried out for two reasons. First responses were anonymous and sample members therefore unknown. Second, with a group of specialists, there would have been a risk that they would have projected their own views onto the themes. So, even if possible, member validation was not desirable.

This dissertation set out to consider what was required of the information profession in the UK Government, from the perspective of the profession itself. A review of relevant literature pointed to three broad, and overlapping, areas meriting further research: that 1) the profession needed to respond to a changing environment; and that 2) the relationship with the rest of the organisation is important to the profession; as are 3) skills and professional development.

The author carried out a review of the questionnaire before administering it, to ensure these areas were adequately covered. Substantive questions covered these three broad areas, as indicated in **Table 8**. The numbers in the first column refer to the three areas above. While personal, factual questions - captured in the top row - meant these areas could be examined according to the characteristics of respondents, such as grade or job role.



|   | 1. By grade               | 2. By role                | 3. Qualified or not       | 4. Member of prof body or not | 5. CPD days               | 6. Length of experience <sup>29</sup> | 9. Actual position of IM in organisation |
|---|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| 10. Preferred position of IM in organisation <b>(2)</b>                         | Several options           | Several options           | Several options           | Several options               | Several options           | Several options                       | Several options – same as existing?      |
| 7. Changes in customer expectations: enquiries' volume <b>(1) &amp; (2)</b>     | More, fewer or same       | More, fewer or same       | More, fewer or same       | More, fewer or same           | More, fewer or same       | More, fewer or same                   | More, fewer or same                      |
| 8. Changes in customer expectations: enquiries' complexity <b>(1) &amp; (2)</b> | More, less or same        | More, less or same        | More, less or same        | More, less or same            | More, less or same        | More, less or same                    | More, less or same                       |
| 11. Biggest challenge <b>(1) &amp;/or (2) &amp;/or (3)</b>                      | Free text – any patterns? | Free text – any patterns? | Free text – any patterns? | Free text – any patterns?     | Free text – any patterns? | Free text – any patterns?             | Free text – any patterns?                |
| 12. Response to biggest challenge <b>(1) &amp;/or (2) &amp;/or (3)</b>          | Free text – any patterns? | Free text – any patterns? | Free text – any patterns? | Free text – any patterns?     | Free text – any patterns? | Free text – any patterns?             | Free text – any patterns?                |
| 13. Skills – importance <b>(3), possibly also (1) &amp; (2)</b>                 | Ratings                   | Ratings                   | Ratings                   | Ratings                       | Ratings                   | Ratings                               | Ratings                                  |
| 14. Attributes – importance <b>(3), possibly also (1) &amp; (2)</b>             | Ratings                   | Ratings                   | Ratings                   | Ratings                       | Ratings                   | Ratings                               | Ratings                                  |

**Table 8 - Possible ways of analysing the data**

<sup>29</sup> Shaded boxes indicate analyses that may not be possible in all cases: participants with less than two years' experience were not asked the two questions about how demands on the profession had changed as the start of 2013 was used as the precise reference point for those questions.

## Chapter 4 - Discussion of results

This chapter presents results from the self-completion questionnaires. This includes the quantitative results, for example the number of respondents with relevant qualifications, and qualitative responses, such as what respondents saw as the biggest challenge facing the information profession in the UK Government.

### 4.1. Profile of respondents

The self-completion questionnaire received 88 valid responses. Of these, nine were incomplete but had sufficient data to merit including; for example, some answered all but the open-text questions on the challenges faced and how the profession should respond (questions 11 and 12), others did not complete the matrix questions rating desirable skills and attributes (questions 13 and 14). Where the sample for certain questions is smaller because of this and that is relevant to the analysis, this is made clear. As the focus of this dissertation is IM rather than KM, 23 responses from specialists in knowledge management were excluded, as planned.<sup>30</sup>

The size of the KIM profession and its grade and job-role profiles are not determined centrally: it is the responsibility of each department or agency to ascertain the appropriate number and profile of KIM professionals it requires, according to its size and objectives. On the assumption that, at the time this self-completion questionnaire was administered, the overall number of KIM professionals remained broadly similar to 2012 - 1,100 members - the response rate equated to 8% of the entire KIM population. As there were no figures for the breakdown of overall KIM profession between KM and IM, it was not possible to establish what percentage of those working specifically on IM completed the survey, although it was clearly greater than the 8% of the entire KIM population.<sup>31</sup> Although the volume of responses represents a reasonable proportion of the overall KIM profession in Government, the results were clearly not statistically robust. The data presented below are offered with that caveat.

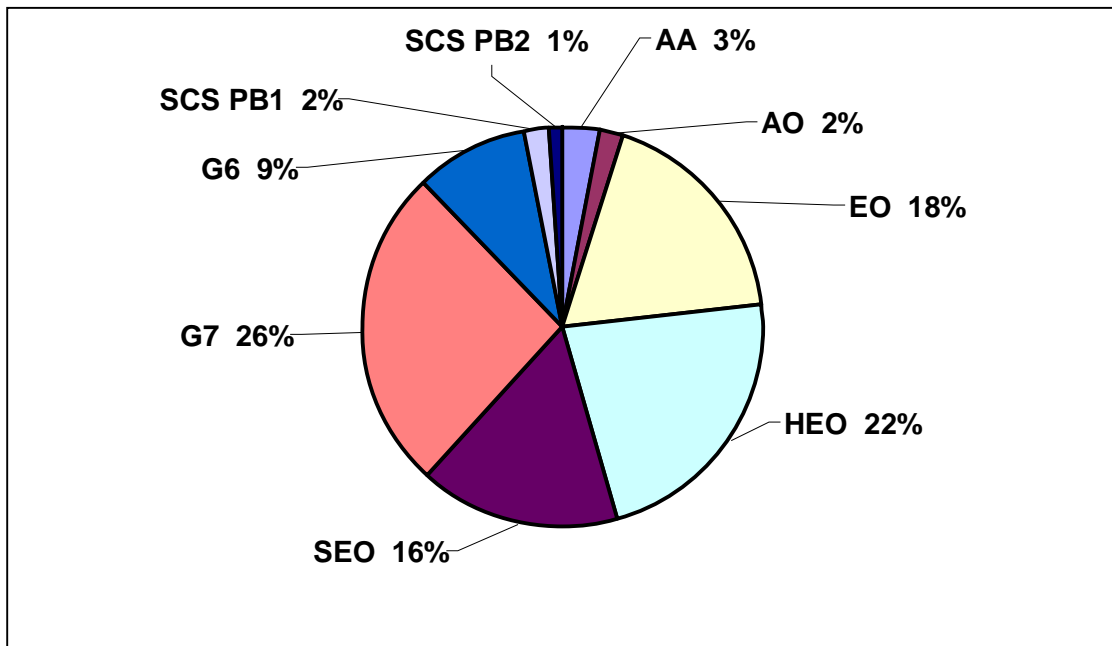
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<sup>30</sup> It is reasonable to assume that this did not equate to 23 separate *respondents*. The job-role question came after the respondent's grade and it is noticeable, looking at the web-based survey tool, that on occasion the same grade and the KM job function have been entered several times, in quick succession. This suggests a small number of participants had not read the instruction about the focus being IM rather than KM and had tried repeatedly to complete the survey. This is consistent with the feedback given during the 'soft launch' from one participant.

<sup>31</sup> This is further complicated by the possibility that some staff could work on both KM and IM.

#### 4.1.1 Grade and professional group

Respondents' grade profile was as follows.<sup>32</sup>



**Figure 1 - Grade of respondents**

Responses were mostly from junior and middle managers: executive offices, higher executive officers, senior executive officers and grade 7s. There were fewer responses from administrative staff or senior managers. This is logical given the majority of KIM staff will be in these grades. Junior staff tend to take on a more general range of administrative duties not specifically KIM. Fewer senior managers oversee large teams, performing a number of functions.

Responses were primarily from those who gave advice to colleagues on how to manage information: 47%. This included respondents who had selected 'other' but given a job title, which clearly fell into that category. 11% of responses came from those identifying themselves as records managers and 16% from librarians.

Many gave individual job titles that neither fell into these categories nor could be compiled into a significant enough other group. Indeed many roles were given by one respondent only; such as 'management report writer' and

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<sup>32</sup> Decimals ending in .5 or greater were rounded up, meaning that some of the percentages shown in this dissertation do not add up to 100, as here.

'internal consultant on information, knowledge, culture and behaviour'. Such responses comprise the 13% labelled 'other'. Another 5% fulfilled information-assurance or security roles. 6% came from respondents who led KIM teams, referring to themselves as team leaders or heads. Only 3% declared more than one role from records manager, advisor on information management, and librarian. It was not possible to ascertain if this was representative of the profession as a whole in Government.

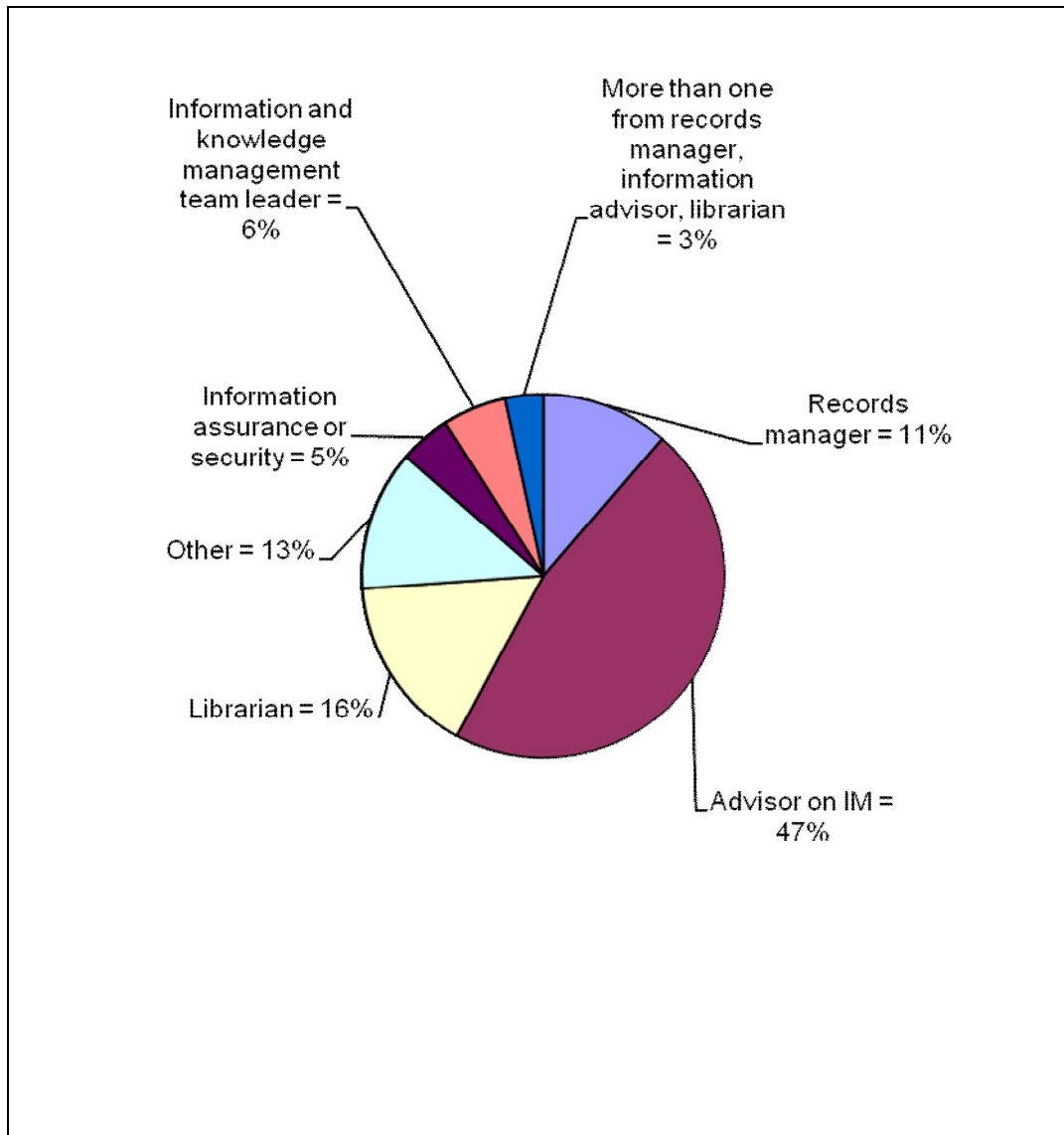


Figure 2 - Respondents' professional group

## Summary

Responses mainly came from junior and middle managers.

77% were from staff with 'traditional' IM job roles: one or more from records manager, advisor on information management and librarian. 13% were from staff who had unique job titles that were not easily categorised and 5% from those working on information security roles. 6% referred to themselves as managing KIM teams.

### 4.1.2 Professional development

The three questions on professional development were binary in nature: either the respondent had qualifications relevant to their role or they did not; belonged to a professional body or not; had completed five days of CPD in the previous 12 months or not.<sup>33</sup> Interestingly responses to all three were very balanced. For each, just over half answered positively:

- 50% declared a professional qualification relevant to their role<sup>34</sup>
- 56% were affiliated to a professional body at the time of the survey
- 55% had completed five days or more of CPD in the previous 12 months.

Such a balance arguably reveals little about the perceived desirability of each.

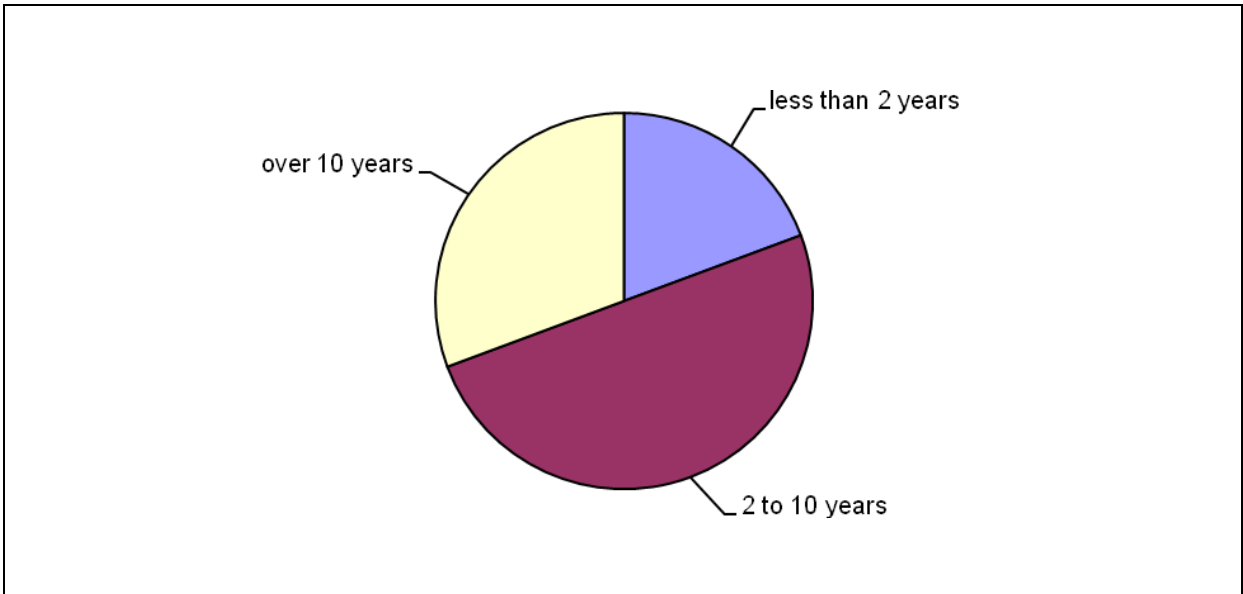
It was, however, note-worthy that 15% of respondents gave a negative response to all three: no professional qualifications, no accreditation from a professional body and fewer than five days of CPD in the previous 12 months. Conversely, 20% responded positively to all three and 35% to two of the three.

The question on length of time working on IM in Government allowed three answers and broke down as illustrated by the following pie chart. Half of the respondents had worked in IM for between two and 10 years, and a further 31% for over 10 years, suggesting a wealth of experience upon which to draw.

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<sup>33</sup> As noted earlier, civil servants are encouraged to take part in at least five days of learning and development a year.

<sup>34</sup> This included all 14 librarians.



**Figure 3 - Length of IM service in Government of respondents**

Unsurprisingly, the longer respondents had worked on IM in Government, the more likely they were to have an associated qualification:

- 29% of those who had worked on IM in Government for less than two years had a relevant qualification
- 43% of those with two to 10 years' experience
- 74% of those with over 10 years.

However, the reasons for this are unclear. Possible explanations are clearly having had the time to do it; perhaps more of a tendency, in the past, to encourage staff to acquire qualifications; or a possible approach to recruitment that prioritised applicants with qualifications previously. Indeed, it could be attributable to more than one reason and vary by department, none of which was elucidated by this survey.

The results were more balanced when it came to whether or not staff had completed five days or more of CPD.

- 48% of those with over 10 years of experience stated that they had completed five days of CPD or more
- 64% of those with between two and 10 years
- 41% of those with under two years of experience.

Somewhat surprisingly only 59% of staff who declared a link to a professional body had completed at least five days of CPD, compared to 49% of those not affiliated to a body. One might expect a larger proportion of those associated with a professional body to have completed at least five days of CPD in the previous 12 months.

### **Summary**

Responses to the three questions about possessing professional qualifications; belonging to a professional body and having carried out at least five days of CPD in the previous 12 months were balanced: for each just over half of respondents answered positively.

Half of respondents had worked on IM in Government for between two and 10 years, with around a third for over 10 years. This suggests much experience upon which to draw. The longer the experience, the more likely the respondent had a relevant qualification.

However, this was not the case for the completion of five days of CPD, where the picture was more mixed. Similarly, being affiliated to a professional body did not appear to have a significant influence on the likelihood of someone having completed five days of CPD.

## **4.2 Location of information management in organisations**

The most common response to the question of where IM was located in the respondent's organisation was a dedicated knowledge and information unit: 40 selected this. The next most popular answers were with the organisation's communications (12) or IT/digital (11) functions, and IM colleagues being dispersed across the organisation (12). Of the remaining possibilities listed in the question, only one or two respondents selected each; for example, estates or security. Among those who chose 'other', no additional explanations were given by more than one or two respondents, apart from four, who referred to a hybrid model of a core, central team with some IM staff dispersed across the organisation.<sup>35</sup>

Interestingly that was the second most popular option for the optimum position of IM in the organisation, although only 10 people selected a central

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<sup>35</sup> These single responses included one that was unclear.

core with some IM colleagues dispersed. By far the most popular model was a dedicated KIM unit or directorate: 58 respondents choose that.

These results contrast with Marfleet's view that 'the days of large centralized information departments are over and are very unlikely to come back' (2008, p. 156). Of course, it is easily conceivable that different models work for different organisations according to factors such as size and remit. 41 respondents - nearly half - selected the same option for both questions, indicating that they thought their organisation had IM located in the correct place.<sup>36</sup>

### **Summary**

By far the most common response to the question about where IM was located in respondents' organisations was a dedicated KIM unit. A dedicated KIM unit was also the most popular optimum location of IM.

41 respondents selected the same option for both questions, indicating that they thought their organisation had IM located in the correct place.

## **4.3 Opinions of respondents**

### **4.3.1 Demands of the information management profession**

Reflections on the optimum location of IM in the organisation takes this dissertation from the profile of respondents into an analysis of their views. Only those respondents who had worked on IM in Government for at least two years were asked their view on whether customers' demands had changed, using before and after the start of 2013 as a specific comparison point. This meant only 71 respondents were asked this question.

- 75% declared that volumes of enquiries and requests for advice had increased
- 22% that they remained the same
- 2% that they had decreased.

On the complexity of customer enquiries and requests for advice, percentages were broadly similar but not identical. Not all respondents selected

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<sup>36</sup> Most of these respondents selected a dedicated KIM unit or directorate for both answers: 31.



the same trend for volume and complexity. The percentage indicating a decrease remained low in both cases, however.

- 63% stated that the complexity of customer enquiries had increased
- 33% that they remained of similar complexity
- 3% that they had decreased.

The following table shows how respondents answered both of these questions in more detail.

|                  | volume: more | volume: same | volume: less |
|------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| complexity: more | 38 (54%)     | 6 (8%)       | 1 (1%)       |
| complexity: same | 13 (18%)     | 10 (14%)     | 1 (1%)       |
| complexity: less | 2 (3%)       | 0 (0)        | 0 (0)        |

**Table 9 - Comparison of responses to the questions on customer demands**

Of course this is not an objective measure of the volume and complexity of enquiries, but gives an insight into what some members of the profession feel about demands on them and their colleagues:

- the majority indicated that volumes had gone up
- 38 of the 71 respondents to this question, or 54%, stated both that there were more enquiries and that they had become more complex
- no one thought that both volumes had decreased and enquiries become simpler.

Of those who stated that volumes were the same or had decreased (18), eight were providers of support on IM, three were records managers and two librarians, with six coming from other professional groups, including three (of the four respondents) working on information assurance or security. The profile of those who stated that volumes were the same or had decreased did not differ significantly from the sample as a whole, except for those working on information assurance or security. For the 71 respondents, who answered this

question, the proportion of all the other professional sub-groups differed by no more than 2% from its percentage of the overall sample.

The grade profile was also mixed but those suggesting that volumes were similar or lower included a larger number of relatively senior grades compared to the whole sample: four grade 6s and three grade 7s. That noted, all the other respondents, in this category were from more junior grades - with administrative officers, executive officers, higher executive officers, and senior executive officers all featuring - but none from the senior civil service.<sup>37</sup>

26 respondents stated that the complexity of enquiries was around the same or less than in the past. Interestingly, the two respondents who said they were less complex were both higher executive officers, who advised colleagues on how to manage information. The 24 respondents who said complexity remained the same were again a mix of grades but did not include senior civil servants: five executive officers, six higher executive officers, seven senior executive officers, four grade 7s and two grade 6s. The job roles of these 26, rating complexity lower or the same, included 15 advisors on IM, four librarians and five records managers.

### **Summary**

Only those respondents who had worked on IM in Government for at least two years were asked their view on whether customers' demands had changed: 71 people.

75% of them thought volumes had increased and only 2% that they had decreased. 63% thought that customer enquiries were more complex and only 3% that they were simpler.

54% stated both that there were more enquiries and that they had become more complex. No one thought that both volumes had decreased and enquiries become simpler.

This is clearly not an objective measure but gives a sense of the perception of professionals. There were no obvious trends among professional roles or grades.

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<sup>37</sup> All three senior civil servants, in the sample group, had worked more than two years in IM in Government and did therefore answer this question.

### 4.3.2 Skills and attributes

In the **Literature review** it was taken as a given that information professionals in Government needed to understand the legal context for how their organisations handle information; such as the Public Records, Data Protection, and Freedom of Information Acts. It was not, therefore, the intention of this research to look in detail at competence in that area. The self-completion questionnaire therefore focused on what skills and attributes were required other than understanding the legal context.<sup>38</sup>

Six respondents did not complete this question but among the remaining 82, the three skills that were most frequently rated highest by respondents, as 5, each received this score 52 times. They were:

- *Communication skills*
- *Helping customers to manage information themselves*
- *Ability to produce clear guidance for colleagues.*

The overall ratings for all skills were as presented in the following table. Only four skills were marked by any respondent as a 1 (least important). Only nine respondents used a '1' and, of these nine, five allocated it to the *ability to use social media*. This is intriguing when set against the **Literature review**; for example, Marfleet's (2008) view that information professionals have a key role to play in identifying how social media can aid the business and piloting its use. Overall responses suggested this was the least important skill for information professionals in Government. However, the four respondents who rated it 5, were all fairly senior: three at grade 7 and one senior civil servant (PB1). As leaders in IM, their prioritisation of social media skills may mean that they are recognised by the wider profession as more significant in the future.

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<sup>38</sup> Unsurprisingly, adhering to relevant legislation was covered by some respondents in free-text answers but these responses were not considered in the analysis that follows.

|  | 1                       | 2           | 3           | 4           | 5                         |
|--|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|---------------------------|
| facilitation and/or training                               |                         | 4<br>(5%)   | 16<br>(20%) | 31<br>(38%) | 31<br>(38%)               |
| helping customers to manage information themselves         |                         | 2<br>(2%)   | 3<br>(4%)   | 25<br>(30%) | <b>52</b><br><b>(63%)</b> |
| ability to use social media                                | <b>5</b><br><b>(6%)</b> | 13<br>(16%) | 39<br>(48%) | 21<br>(26%) | 4<br>(5%)                 |
| communication skills                                       |                         | 1<br>(1%)   | 4<br>(5%)   | 25<br>(30%) | <b>52</b><br><b>(63%)</b> |
| project and change management                              |                         | 8<br>(10%)  | 25<br>(30%) | 36<br>(44%) | 13<br>(16%)               |
| negotiation  | <b>2</b><br>(2%)        | 4<br>(5%)   | 19<br>(23%) | 41<br>(50%) | 16<br>(20%)               |
| equipping customers to search for trust-worthy information |                         | 2<br>(2%)   | 12<br>(15%) | 36<br>(44%) | 32<br>(39%)               |
| ability to produce clear guidance for colleagues           |                         | 1<br>(1%)   | 3<br>(4%)   | 26<br>(32%) | <b>52</b><br><b>(63%)</b> |
| information technology (IT) skills                         | <b>1</b><br>(1%)        | 2<br>(2%)   | 19<br>(23%) | 32<br>(39%) | 28<br>(34%)               |
| research skills  |                         | 7<br>(9%)   | 21<br>(26%) | 31<br>(38%) | 23<br>(28%)               |
| working to deadlines                                       | <b>1</b><br>(1%)        | 2<br>(2%)   | 10<br>(12%) | 46<br>(56%) | 23<br>(28%)               |

**Table 10 - Ratings for the importance of various skills**

To take into account all the ratings - not simply the extremes of 1 and 5 - responses were also weighted. Multiplying the score by the number of respondents who selected it meant the skills could be ranked in the order of importance shown in **Table 11**. (For example, *facilitation and/or training* scored  $(1 \times 0) + (2 \times 4) + (3 \times 16) + (4 \times 31) + (5 \times 31) = 335$ .)

|  | overall score |
|--|---------------|
| <b>ability to produce clear guidance for colleagues</b>    | <b>375</b>    |
| <b>communication skills</b>                                | <b>374</b>    |
| <b>helping customers to manage information themselves</b>  | <b>373</b>    |
| equipping customers to search for trust-worthy information | 344           |
| facilitation and/or training                               | 335           |
| working to deadlines                                       | 334           |
| information technology (IT) skills                         | 330           |
| research skills  | 316           |
| <b>negotiation</b>   | <b>311</b>    |
| <b>project and change management</b>                       | <b>300</b>    |
| <b>ability to use social media</b>                         | <b>252</b>    |

**Table 11 - Weighted ratings for the importance of various skills**

The same three skills remained the most important, albeit now ranked in the following order:

1. *Ability to produce clear guidance for colleagues*
2. *Communication skills*
3. *Helping customers to manage information themselves.*

It is noticeable that respondents did not always score skills along what might be deemed 'job-role lines'. For example, the 14 librarians completed this question but only six scored *equipping customers to search for trust-worthy information* a 5, which contributed to it falling outside the top three skills. As many librarians - six - gave *helping customers to manage information themselves*, perhaps more typically associated with advisors on information management and even records managers, a 5. Conversely, a respondent, who stated that his/her job role was administering an electronic document and

record management system, scored *equipping colleagues to search for trustworthy information* a 5, but did not score *helping customers to manage information themselves* - a task very much associated with his/her job role - as highly.

The high scores given to the more generic *communication skills* and the *ability to produce clear guidance for colleagues* appear to echo much of the **Literature review**: demands on the profession are indeed diverse, as Orme (2008) and other commentators observe. Yet, *social-media* skills, posited by theorists as an emerging need, remained the least important by a significant margin, even when weighted.

Conversely, not all skills that scored at least one 1 featured at the bottom of the table of weighted scores: only *negotiation* remained in the bottom three, despite being a priority identified by TFPL (n.d.). After weighting, *project and change management* performed poorly too. Again this contrasts with the conclusions of TFPL (n.d, p. 10) who refers specifically to 'the IM teams of tomorrow' needing 'excellent project and change management skills'.

Seven respondents (the six who did not complete the question on skills and one other) did not rate the attributes. *Communicating the value of information to customers* was the attribute that stood out as most frequently rated 5 (49 respondents). *Ability to understand the organisation's goals and how information contributes to them* had the next highest number of 5s but was some way behind with 38; closely followed, with 37, by *relationship-building and networking*.

Interestingly, all but *seeing information from the perspective of the customer* and *strategic thinking* received at least one 1. The three attributes that received more than one 1 were: *motivated to carry out continuing professional development*; *professionally qualified*; and *having membership of, or accreditation from, a professional body*; all focusing, interestingly, on an individual's learning and development.

It was again useful to look at the overall ratings and to weight them.

|  | 1         | 2           | 3           | 4           | 5           |
|--|-----------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| motivated to carry out continuing professional development                     | 2<br>(2%) | 3<br>(4%)   | 16<br>(20%) | 43<br>(53%) | 17<br>(21%) |
| being proactive and showing initiative   | 1<br>(1%) |             | 10<br>(12%) | 39<br>(48%) | 31<br>(38%) |
| professionally qualified   | 4<br>(5%) | 12<br>(15%) | 29<br>(34%) | 24<br>(30%) | 12<br>(15%) |
| membership of, or accreditation from, a professional body                      | 5<br>(6%) | 18<br>(22%) | 31<br>(38%) | 20<br>(25%) | 7<br>(9%)   |
| confidence to challenge the business about how it works with information       | 1<br>(1%) |             | 11<br>(14%) | 34<br>(42%) | 35<br>(43%) |
| able to collaborate and to work as part of a team                              | 1<br>(1%) |             | 7<br>(9%)   | 39<br>(48%) | 34<br>(42%) |
| ability to understand the organisation's goals and how information contributes | 1<br>(1%) |             | 12<br>(15%) | 30<br>(37%) | 38<br>(47%) |
| communicating the value of information to customers                            | 1<br>(1%) |             | 3<br>(4%)   | 28<br>(35%) | 49<br>(60%) |
| relationship-building and networking   | 1<br>(1%) |             | 11<br>(14%) | 32<br>(40%) | 37<br>(46%) |
| strategic-thinking   |           | 5<br>(6%)   | 24<br>(30%) | 30<br>(37%) | 22<br>(27%) |
| competent at marketing information services                                    | 1<br>(1%) | 5<br>(6%)   | 38<br>(47%) | 24<br>(30%) | 13<br>(16%) |
| seeing information from the perspective of the customer                        |           | 2<br>(2%)   | 8<br>(10%)  | 36<br>(44%) | 35<br>(43%) |

**Table 12 - Ratings for the importance of various attributes**

Compared to skills, weighting the attributes had a bigger impact: the *ability to collaborate and to work as part of a team* received mostly 4s, but had the second highest score when weighted. This was also true of *seeing information from the perspective of the customer*. It scored mostly 4s but featured in a group of three attributes with 347 overall, alongside the *ability to understand the organisation's goals and how information contributes*, and *relationship-building and networking*:

|  | overall score |
|--|---------------|
| <b>communicating the value of information to customers</b>                     | <b>367</b>    |
| able to collaborate and to work as part of a team                              | 348           |
| ability to understand the organisation's goals and how information contributes | 347           |
| seeing information from the perspective of the customer                        | 347           |
| relationship-building and networking   | 347           |
| confidence to challenge the business about how it works with information       | 345           |
| being proactive and showing initiative   | 342           |
| motivated to carry out continuing professional development                     | 313           |
| strategic-thinking   | 312           |
| competent at marketing information services                                    | 286           |
| professionally qualified   | 271           |
| <b>membership of, or accreditation from, a professional body</b>               | <b>249</b>    |

**Table 13 - Weighted ratings for the importance of various attributes**

Orme (2008, p. 620) stated that 'an obvious, but not exclusive, identifier of the library and information professional' is the possession of a relevant qualification. However, being *professionally qualified*, and having *membership of, or accreditation from, a professional body* remained low priorities, even when scores were weighted. Both were joined by *competence at marketing information services* in a group with under 300 points.

This is striking because of the proportion of the 81 respondents to this question who themselves had qualifications and were affiliated to a professional body: 54% and 58% respectively, with 32 people declaring both.<sup>39</sup> (For more detailed analysis of these attributes according to whether respondents were themselves professionally qualified, and/or had membership of, or accreditation

<sup>39</sup> Of the seven respondents who did not rate the attributes, none declared qualifications relevant to their role and two stated that they were a member of, or accredited by, a professional body.



from, a professional body, see **Appendix E**). Curiously, as the next section, **4.3.3**, shows, despite these attributes not scoring highly, *qualifications* and *marketing services* did feature in several responses to the free-text questions on the biggest challenge facing the information profession in Government and what to do about it.

### Summary

The three skills rated as most important included two that were rather generic:

- *communication skills*
- *helping customers to manage information themselves*
- *the ability to produce clear guidance for colleagues.*

This echoed the conclusions of the **Literature review**, which suggested that information professionals need a wide range of skills, beyond those typically associated with the profession.

The least important was the *ability to use social media*, despite this emerging from the **Literature review** as a potential requirement of information professionals. When scores were weighted, *project and change management* also performed poorly.

Respondents did not always score skills along what might be seen as the lines that would be expected of staff in their job roles.

The attribute that stood out as the most important was *communicating the value of information to customers*. Being *professionally qualified*, and having *membership of, or accreditation from, a professional body* were not highly valued. Neither was *competency at marketing information services*, which contrasted with the relevant literature.

### 4.3.3 Challenges facing the information profession in Government

As indicated above, the self-completion questionnaire involved two open-text questions. They read as follows:

- What do you think is the biggest challenge facing the information profession in Government?
- What do you think the information profession should be doing about that challenge?

79 respondents answered the first and 76 the second. **Appendix F** sets out the coding scheme generated by the qualitative responses and used to analyse

them. Part or all of a small number of responses was either unclear or ambiguous. For instance, one saw changing expectations among the public as a challenge but did not explain whether this was a question of information access, privacy or, indeed, a different area. In such cases, the responses were omitted from the following analysis and, for the second question, the analysis focussed on actual solutions proposed, rather than any further general observations made.

A significant theme to emerge from the first question was the profile of IM; both its value and how to engage others in it. Five people referred to the need for more visibility; three to the need for 'recognition'; and another to the requirement to demonstrate IM's relevance. Three called for a greater awareness or understanding of IM. Other responses included the question of how to make IM feel more of a priority, and how to prevent it seeming bureaucratic or inconvenient. One respondent thought information needed to be perceived as a resource like finance: to be managed with the same care. For several others, this challenge centred on how to educate colleagues in the importance of IM in an environment where everyone's time is precious.

Five respondents saw having the 'recognition', 'ear', or 'buy in' of senior managers as essential. Naturally, some assumed that securing senior sponsorship would mean staff across the business would follow. Financial Times Corporate and the Special Libraries Association (2013) stated that information professionals overestimate the value they provide, compared to the perceptions of senior managers. Perhaps these responses are a symptom of that phenomenon.

As well as valuing information or IM, many respondents called for the profession itself to be better recognised. Five mentioned pay, with two linking it to recruitment and retention, and another respondent wrote of restrictions on recruitment in the Civil Service (also part of deficit reduction).

Two responses echoed points that emerged from the literature about the boundaries of the profession becoming amorphous as others, including paraprofessionals, took on IM work. Conversely, one respondent presented him/herself as an IM professional frustrated at only doing such work for part of

his/her time. The profession was seen by some of its members as difficult to define: 'the information profession hasn't worked out its USP', suggested one.

A reason given for the difficulty in defining the profession was its relationship with others, especially ICT. Another response called for the profession to be more inclusive and accepting of a wider range of IM-related disciplines. For many, it was for the professionals themselves to promote the IM profession and explain their value and skills to customers; an activity that information professionals could look to do more in the future.

Five respondents saw technology as a threat to the profession, with Google, named by some: 'everyone thinks they can do "information" as its (sic) only looking stuff up on Google/Wikipedia!', stated one person, with another referring to colleagues believing technology can fix all problems.

Five other responses focused on ensuring information professionals had the correct knowledge, skills, training and/or qualifications. Of those, for one this was about developing IT literacy, while retaining the identity of the profession separate from ICT counterparts. Some respondents mentioned the need to ensure that non-specialists across the business - not just the IM professionals - had the right skills to execute the level of information management required of them.

Unsurprisingly, pressure on budgets featured heavily in response to this question about the biggest challenge facing the profession. Terms used included 'cuts', 'austerity', 'saving money', 'decreasing financial resources', 'budgetary constraints', 'budget cuts', 'more for less', 'cost cutting' and 'cut backs', reflecting the reality of the Government's deficit reduction.

Linked to financial pressures, managing with fewer staff and old IT featured. Two views emerged on IT. For some, it was about making sure that information professionals had up-to-date technology or even that their wider organisations had the latest technology. For one, this would support colleagues' efforts, across the business, to manage information, not just those of information professionals. For others, it was about information professionals keeping pace with the changes in technology happening around them, some of

which would not automatically support good IM according to one respondent. 'People get hooked up on software and hardware, forgetting that it's the content that matters and needs active management' read one response. Only one respondent referred in explicit terms to digital continuity.<sup>40</sup>

Technological trends cited as potentially posing challenges to IM included providing more public services digitally; 'bringing your own device', 'data sharing/cloud technology', and 'privacy and big data'.<sup>41</sup> One respondent posed the question of how to maintain the public's confidence in the handling of their data as the volumes processed increase. This links back to the *Data Handling Procedures in Government: Final Report (2008a)*, mentioned at the start of this dissertation.

As well as technological change, responses referred to change more generally, particularly its pace. Some respondents associated this with understanding the wider organisation and, for two, staying abreast of changes was associated with avoiding IM being seen as a barrier to progress.

Unsurprisingly, a final significant theme to emerge in response to this question was the sheer volume of information to be managed. Comments included 'the unstructured information bloat'; 'how to cope with the increasing number of digital records'; 'managing digital records'; 'managing e-resources'; 'volume of information and records'; and 'the volume of information in the digital age'. This is very much in line with conclusions from the **Literature review**, for example Capgemini (2008), and Roberts and Pakkiri (2013), with its emphasis on 'information overload'. This was summarised by one respondent as follows:

I think the volume of information being created in the digital world is such, that our profession will not be able to provide the answers as to how it should be managed (created, stored, weeded, re-used, deleted and/or preserved). Information will become unmanageable!

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<sup>40</sup> Digital continuity involves storing information in such a way that it can be accessed when required even if the original software, format or storage system is obsolete.

<sup>41</sup> CESG (2014, p. 3) defines 'bring your own device' in its alpha guidance on the subject: 'with the rapid increase in the use of mobile devices - and the growth of remote & flexible working - staff now expect to use their own laptops, phones and tablets to conduct business.' (CESG is the UK's National Technical Authority for Information Assurance.) Mayer-Schönberger and Cukier (2013, p. 2) describe big data as 'the ability of society to harness information in novel ways to produce useful insights or goods and services of significant value'. Cloud technology involves processing and storing data remotely on networked servers, rather than locally.

## Summary

When asked what the main challenge was facing the information profession in Government, responses emerged under these themes:

- the profile of information and IM: visibility and recognition, especially among senior managers, and how to engage other colleagues in it
- the profile of the profession
- technology
- finances and staff resources
- change, specifically technological but also wider changes in organisations; keeping pace and not being perceived as a barrier to progress
- the volume of information to manage, especially the proliferation of electronic information.

Given the range of challenges identified and the rather bleak conclusion, above, that information will become unmanageable, it was essential to consider solutions offered in response to the second open-text question: 'what do you think the information profession should be doing about that challenge?' Securing support from, and raising the profile of IM with, senior managers was significant. 12 respondents presented this as a solution. Of these, three referred to support; three to leadership; one to commitment; one to buy-in; two to recognition; one to understanding 'our true value and worth'; and three to advocacy. For some, once secured, senior support should then filter down through the organisation; for others, it was a means of ensuring resources were allocated to IM. Two respondents called for more KIM professionals among senior managers.

One person saw strong leadership combined with marketing as a solution to the challenges facing the profession. Another referred to a corporate communications drive. Increasing visibility and awareness featured in many responses. This covered both the profession and the discipline of IM. Phrases included being 'more vocal'; influencing; demonstrating and showing its worth or value; explaining the importance; promoting; educating; selling itself; gaining attention and stimulating interest; raising awareness or profile; and communicating. Often these were cited alongside words such as supporting colleagues and highlighting the services provided, reinforcing how the profession serves the rest of the organisation. Replies tended to focus, in other

words, on what the profession was there to achieve, rather than simply promoting itself for its own sake.

Another theme to emerge from some answers focused on promoting the function was to position it as an enabler rather than a barrier, captured by one person as 'showing we're an asset rather than an encumbrance'. 'It is important to re-invent the service to suit changes in the wider workplace', wrote another. It is noticeable that this point emerged in various ways throughout other responses to the survey as well. Describing IM as seen by others as 'a lowly administrative task', one person implied that the image of IM and the profession needed revamping, reinforcing findings from the **Literature review**.

Specific suggestions for how to achieve this included building relationships and exploiting incidents related to information, covered in the press, to remind colleagues of IM's importance. The UK Government Policy Profession's *Twelve actions to professionalise policy making* (2013) include an action to review and learn from knowledge-management practices during 2014. One person saw this as an opportunity to promote KIM.

Identifying and communicating case studies involving IM and explaining its business benefits were posited as means of promoting it in four answers to question 12. They tended to be presented using fairly direct language, such as 'mapping out the cold hard benefits'; 'clear evidence based case studies'; and 'promulgate simple messages with benefits'. The fourth person summarised this combination of good communications and case studies as follows, which acts as a succinct summary of comments made by several respondents on this subject: 'raising its profile, implementing practical solutions. Showcasing examples of good practice. Getting better at PR'. Again, the emphasis tended to be on what IM could achieve, rather than promoting it for its own sake.

Several respondents associated raising awareness of IM with running training sessions. Two referred to using learning and development to ensure all colleagues understood IM, and six others made statements that could all come under the heading of training colleagues in information skills. Another stated 'education, education, education', and again referred to the need to position the profession and its work as enablers rather than blockers. The same respondent

also wrote about the skills of IM professionals themselves, a theme picked up by a several respondents: 'anything that the profession can do to improve our skills [...] has to help'. At times, it was not clear whether responses on the subject of learning and development were directed at the profession or towards all colleagues. For example, 'continuing to emphasise learning and development for staff' and 'increase multi functionality of staff'. This is an area that could, therefore, warrant further research among professionals, and perhaps their customers in the business, in future.

The type of training and development that was specifically suggested for IM professionals varied. One person referred to 'digital skills' and three others made more general points such as 'adequate mandatory training for all going into information management'; ensuring 'that a minimum level of CPD is carried out'. Further work could be done to consider what form training and CPD should take.

Recruiting the right people was raised by several respondents. Comments included using IM, rather than generic, competencies to fill IM posts; that KIM was a specialist function that required significant experience before someone could operate effectively; employing more fixed-term IM professionals in response to specific business needs; and ensuring only information professionals carried out information roles.<sup>42</sup> It was not always clear whether these answers meant people should be qualified before taking up post or qualify in post, but some answers were explicit in recommending qualifications be attained by, or available to, those already in post.

The number of replies focusing specifically on qualifications was relatively small, compared to those commenting on learning and development more generally. This accords with the scoring that *being professionally qualified* received as an attribute: not one of the most important. *Being motivated to carry out continuing professional development* only scored moderately as an attribute (question 14) but did feature in many responses to this open-text question about how the profession should respond to its challenges (question 12). This is

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<sup>42</sup> As noted earlier, civil servants have a general competency framework, as well as specific KIM competencies to be drawn on as required.

perhaps, then, another area that would merit further research given the apparent contradiction between what professionals appeared to value, across these two questions.

Communicating the value of IM to senior managers and all other staff, and teaching them IM skills have already been shown as popular solutions proposed. Other wider, desirable skills were mentioned alongside specific IM experience by two respondents. One of these responses acts as a good summary of the thrust of many comments made around information skills and qualifications, wider competence, and recruitment:

Recruit people either with information management qualifications, or put them on a route to gain them while working. Employ smart qualified information professionals with good interpersonal skills.

It is unsurprising, given the results of the **Literature review**, that generic business skills featured so heavily: Orme (2008), TFPL (2011), Olander (2010) and McLeod (2012) all reflect on the desirability of what might be deemed more generic business skills.

Only two answers to question 12 mentioned encouraging fellow professionals to join professional bodies. This is a low proportion but in keeping with the value placed on professional-body affiliation, in response to question 14 on attributes. Five respondents felt there needed to be more joining up of IM professionals across Government. This ranged from a proposal for short-term secondments to understand other roles and support career development, to a call to broaden out the profession to welcome more job roles 'into the fold'. One of these four went as far as to suggest a dedicated IM service at the centre of Government, operating either as a centre of excellence or a shared service. Another recommended a strategy across Government on structured and unstructured information. For one respondent, making connections with professionals outside Government was seen as a way to garner new solutions.

Building relationships with related professions was a popular recommendation. Seven people mentioned the need to work closely with ICT and digital professionals. Relationships were suggested with other professions



as well: security, policy-makers, analysts and researchers all featured at least once.

Relationships with the wider organisation were prioritised by some. This ranged from developing relationships with individuals and teams, to know their business better in order to provide a better service (four respondents), to comments around understanding the overall aims of the organisation or wider Government (four responses). Specific ideas included 'getting out to the business as much as possible - developing stronger networks'; and information units' annual business plans including an 'outreach' objective.

A final theme to emerge was unsurprising: resources. This would be likely to feature in any similar research at any time, but particularly given the Government's deficit-reduction programme. Four people referred to pressing for more funding or at least working to prevent it being cut; and one to having more staff working on IM.

### **Summary**

When asked how to respond to the biggest challenge facing the information profession in Government, responses emerged around these themes:

- securing support from senior managers
- promoting IM and the profession to other colleagues
- training and supporting colleagues around IM
- learning and development provision for professionals themselves, and the wider organisation
- skills for information professionals including more generic ones such as good interpersonal skills
- limited reference to membership of professional bodies
- understanding the overall aims of the organisation and keeping up with change
- joining up across Government, and outside of it, with other IM professionals
- collaborating with members of other professions
- more resources: funding, staff and information technology.

Some suggestions for solutions in response to this question seemed to contradict the results of questions 13 and 14 by drawing on skills and attributes that were not rated as particularly important.

General, business skills were alluded to in many of the recommendations; for example, being able to influence senior managers, communicate well with colleagues and so on. This was in line with responses to the questions 13 and 14, and conclusions from the **Literature review**.

## Chapter 5 – Conclusion

This chapter briefly reiterates the research question and the methodology used to approach it; before drawing conclusions and making recommendations for future activity, including further research.

### 6.1 Research question

This dissertation set out to consider what was required of the IM profession in the UK Government in the context of the Civil Service Reform agenda, with its emphasis on professions, and given the pressure put on resources by deficit reduction, since research suggests good IM saves organisations money. Its focus was on those whose main role it was to support good IM in their departments, rather than on how all staff manage the information they work with. It set out to consider this question from the perspective of those professionals on the assumption that they were the best placed to support their departments to continue changes described in the **Introduction** and started in 2008.

### 6.2 Approach

#### 6.2.1 Themes to emerge from the review of literature

The rationale for the approach taken to the **Literature review** was set out in detail. The literature itself suggested a number of areas to explore to address the overarching question of what was required of the information profession in the UK Government. They were interrelated but could be clustered under three headings: response to the changing environment; relationship with the rest of the organisation; and skills and continuing professional development. Responding to the changing environment covered:

- how to respond to budget and headcount restraints
- the proliferation of information and colleagues searching for information themselves via the internet
- the impact of ICT developments, in particular Web 2.0 and social media.

The relationship with the rest of the organisation included:

- customers' expectations

- boundaries with other colleagues, other professions and paraprofessionals
- relationship with the wider organisation, including where IM is in its structure
- communications and marketing services.

Lastly, skills and CPD involved:

- role of qualifications
- continuing professional development
- membership of professional bodies.

The survey of relevant academic and business literature therefore revealed a number of topics relating to IM that warranted further research.

### **6.2.2 Methodology**

This dissertation used a self-completion questionnaire to gather data to explore these topics. This method was chosen mainly because it was anonymous and would avoid the author, a senior manager in the profession, influencing answers, as could have been the case with interviews or focus groups. Second, it was more convenient and less disruptive for the participants, who could decide when to complete the survey. Third, it enabled the author to seek the views of a large sample group, uninfluenced by others. Involving more people across a number of departments offered this dissertation the potential to be more widely relevant. It focused entirely on IM, rather than KM as well, in order to cover the subject in sufficient depth.

Potential disadvantages of self-completion questionnaires were mitigated. The risk of a low-return rate was addressed by circulating the survey via senior managers in each department, for example. 88 responses were received. This is not statistically robust but responses offered some thought-provoking findings.

### **6.3 Conclusions**

The profile of respondents was covered in detail in the **Chapter 4 - Discussion of results**. In summary, the grade profile was unsurprising. 77% of responses were from staff with 'traditional' IM job titles: records manager,

advisor on information management and librarian. Around 80% had worked on IM in Government for at least two years, suggesting considerable experience upon which to draw. Just over half of respondents had professional qualifications; belonged to a professional body; and/or had carried out at least five days of CPD in the previous year – not necessarily the same people, of course: 20% replied positively to all three.

Most respondents stated that they worked in a dedicated KIM unit in their organisation and this was also the most popular answer to the question of where KIM should be located. Only those respondents who had worked on IM in Government for at least two years were asked their view on whether customers' demands had changed, using the start of 2013 as a comparison point.

- 75% felt the volume of enquiries had increased
- 63% were of the opinion that their complexity had increased
- 54% stated that both had increased
- Very few respondents suggested that either had decreased
- No one suggested that this was the case for both volumes and complexity.

While this is not an objective measure, it does reflect perceptions.

It is perhaps no surprise, then, that resources and, especially, budget pressures were seen as a significant challenge for the profession. Others were the sheer volume of information to be managed by organisations, and keeping pace with changes, especially technological. Other significant challenges centred on the profile and visibility of information management and the profession. Proposed solutions were:

- securing support from senior managers
- ways of promoting IM and the profession to other colleagues
- training and supporting colleagues.

Solutions often focused on better service provision, rather than promoting the profession in and for itself. Learning and development for professionals were the subject of many of the recommendations for how to respond to the

challenges faced by the profession. This included recruiting staff with qualifications and experience, or ensuring that those in post attained qualifications; with limited reference to membership of professionals bodies.

This was quite surprising given how being *professionally qualified*, and having *membership of, or accreditation from, a professional body* scored as part of the question on desirable attributes for IM professionals: they were not highly valued. Instead, *communicating the value of information to customers* stood out as the most highly rated by respondents. This echoed one emphasis of relevant literature: information professionals needed to demonstrate wider business skills. The three skills rated by respondents as most important were *communications*, *helping customers to manage information themselves*; and the *ability to produce clear guidance for colleagues*.

Similarly many of the recommendations for how to respond to the challenges facing the profession reinforced this point: although general, business skills did not tend to be mentioned overtly, they were alluded to in very many answers. Where the results contradicted the **Literature review** was, however, on social media. This was markedly assessed as the least important skill, despite it being a theme of relevant scholarship.

#### **6.4 Recommendations**

These conclusions suggest that further research or work in several areas might be beneficial. The most obvious area for further research is social media. The question of whether the findings of this dissertation reflect how they are seen generally by information professionals in Government could be probed in more depth, as could the question of how useful they may or may not be to them. This further work might benefit from distinguishing between using social-media tools within the organisation and their use with external audiences; a distinction this dissertation did not make.

This is particularly valid as *communicating the value of information to customers* - who are generally colleagues for government KIM staff - stood out as the most highly-rated skill. Furthermore, many of the challenges described, and solutions proposed, centred on raising the profile of IM and those who specialised in it. Social media are clearly one means of achieving that but it

would also seem sensible to carry out a far wider programme of work to promote IM.

Ways to approach this might include looking at what has already been done in some departments, and reusing successful approaches and materials. Another method could be to review how other sectors or organisations have raised the profile of IM and to learn from them or, indeed, other countries. Some respondents saw merit in linking up across Government more and networking with professionals outside of it. Learning in this area could be a benefit of such relationships. What is clear, is that promoting IM was the area upon which there was the most consensus in the profession, according to the findings of this dissertation. Moreover responses included no shortage of ideas for how to begin to conduct such a communications and education campaign, building on the work since 2008.

Financial Times Corporate and the Special Libraries Association (2013) maintain that information professionals overestimate their value compared to the views of senior managers. Several respondents suggested that more needed to be done to raise the profile of IM specifically with senior managers. If a communications campaign, along the lines suggested above, were undertaken, it might first be useful to look into whether the findings of Financial Times Corporate and the Special Libraries Association hold true for the UK Government, not least because their survey involved a very small sample declaring themselves to be from government or politics. The results could help to shape the campaign so that time and attention were allocated appropriately to the different audiences.

Another potential area for further research is around professional bodies. This should start by testing whether the findings here are representative. If so, it could then consider ways in which bodies could make themselves more relevant to Government's information professionals.

Qualifications, learning and development, and CPD are a related area potentially meriting further inquiry since the findings of this dissertation were somewhat contradictory. On the one hand, *being motivated to carry out continuing professional development* only scored moderately as an attribute

(question 14). On the other, qualified and capable staff were seen by many as a solution to the challenges faced by the profession (question 12). At times it was not clear whether the emphasis should be on the professionals themselves, or their colleagues and customers managing their own, or their team's, information across the organisation. Further research could establish where the learning and development effort might best be spent.

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<sup>43</sup> CESG is the UK's National Technical Authority for Information Assurance.

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## Appendix A - UK Government definition of data, information, and knowledge

*Information Matters* (HM Government, 2008b) distinguishes between data, information, and knowledge using definitions from a report by the Audit Commission (2007, p. 3). These definitions echo those of many theorists.

| <b>Term</b>        | <b>Definition</b>  |
|--------------------|--|
| <i>Data</i>        | Data are numbers, words or images that have yet to be organised or analysed to answer a specific question.   |
| <i>Information</i> | Produced through processing, manipulating and organising data to answer questions, adding to the knowledge of the receiver.                                      |
| <i>Knowledge</i>   | What is known by a person or persons. Involves interpreting information received, adding relevance and context to clarify the insights the information contains. |

## **Appendix B - Self-completion questionnaire text**

Email subject: 'What you think the information profession should look like'

Message to KIM Leaders:

*'What you think the information profession should look like'*

Dear GKIM Leader

I am completing a Masters in Information Governance and Assurance and would be very grateful for your assistance. I attach a link to a short questionnaire – it should take no longer than 15 minutes – on the subject of the information profession in Government. It would be very helpful if you would take the time, before 15 August, to complete this and if you would cascade it to your staff, who work on information management (but not to those who work exclusively on knowledge management please), asking them to complete it too.

<http://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/informationprofession>

I deliberately chose this subject as I wanted the results to be of use to the GKIM profession, once I have completed my analysis. I will be sharing it with Jennifer, as Government Head of Profession, and my colleagues on the Knowledge Council and fellow departmental profession heads. I am looking at the profession from the perspective of its members and I would be very happy to share my conclusions with anyone else in GKIM. The questionnaire is anonymous. So anyone with an interest in seeing the analysis should email me separately to arrange this, please.

Samantha

Text at the start of the survey:

What is required of the information profession in Government?

You have received this self-completion questionnaire as you work on information (but not knowledge management) in Government. *Please only complete it, if you work on information in Government.*

I will use the results to complete a dissertation for a Masters in Information



Governance and Assurance, but I deliberately chose a topic of practical use to the wider Government Knowledge and Information Management Profession.

Its focus is what Government needs from those staff working on information, and I will be sharing my analysis of the results with the Government Head of Profession, Knowledge Council, and departments' heads of profession, so that it can be put to practical use.

Thank you for taking the time to complete the questionnaire: it should require no more than 15 minutes. The results will be anonymous.

Dr Samantha Milton

| About you  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. What is your grade? <sup>44</sup> *   | <input type="checkbox"/> Administrative assistant<br><input type="checkbox"/> Administrative officer<br><input type="checkbox"/> Executive officer<br><input type="checkbox"/> Higher executive officer<br><input type="checkbox"/> Senior executive officer<br><input type="checkbox"/> Grade 7<br><input type="checkbox"/> Grade 6<br><input type="checkbox"/> SCS PB 1<br><input type="checkbox"/> SCS PB 2 |
| 2. How would you describe your role in the profession? *                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Records manager<br><input type="checkbox"/> Provider of advice and support to colleagues on how to manage information<br><input type="checkbox"/> Librarian<br><input type="checkbox"/> Specialist in knowledge management <sup>45</sup><br><input type="checkbox"/> Other.....please specify   |
| 3. Do you have any formal qualifications relevant to your role? *              | <input type="checkbox"/> yes<br><input type="checkbox"/> no  |
| 4. Are you a member of, or accredited by, a KIM professional body currently? * | <input type="checkbox"/> yes<br><input type="checkbox"/> no  |

<sup>44</sup> Questions marked with an asterisk require an answer.

<sup>45</sup> If a respondent selected specialist in knowledge management, the survey ceased at this point.

|   |  |
|---|--|
| 5. How many days of continuing professional development or learning & development <sup>46</sup> have you completed in the last 12 months? * | <input type="checkbox"/> less than 5 days<br><input type="checkbox"/> 5 days or more   |
| 6. How long have you worked in information management in Government? *  | <input type="checkbox"/> less than 2 years [ <i>if this is ticked, skip to question 9</i> ]<br><input type="checkbox"/> 2 to 10 years<br><input type="checkbox"/> over 10 years  |
| <b>About information in your organisation</b>   |  |
| 7. Please select the phrase that best describes customers' expectations of the information profession. *                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> We now receive more enquiries and requests for advice than we did before the start of 2013.<br><input type="checkbox"/> We now receive about the same number of enquiries and requests for advice as we did before the start of 2013.<br><input type="checkbox"/> We now receive fewer enquiries and requests for advice than we did before the start of 2013.  |
| 8. Please select the phrase that best describes customers' expectations of the information profession. *                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Customer enquiries and requests are less complex than before the start of 2013.<br><input type="checkbox"/> Customer enquiries and requests are of the same degree of complexity as they were before the start of 2013.<br><input type="checkbox"/> Customer enquiries and requests are more complex than before the start of 2013.   |
| 9. Which best describes where the information function sits in your organisation? *   | <input type="checkbox"/> We have a dedicated knowledge and information unit or directorate<br><input type="checkbox"/> Information sits with IT/Technology/Digital<br><input type="checkbox"/> Information sits with Communications<br><input type="checkbox"/> Information sits with Estates<br><input type="checkbox"/> Information sits with Security<br><input type="checkbox"/> Information is part of an overarching corporate service<br><input type="checkbox"/> Information is dispersed with |

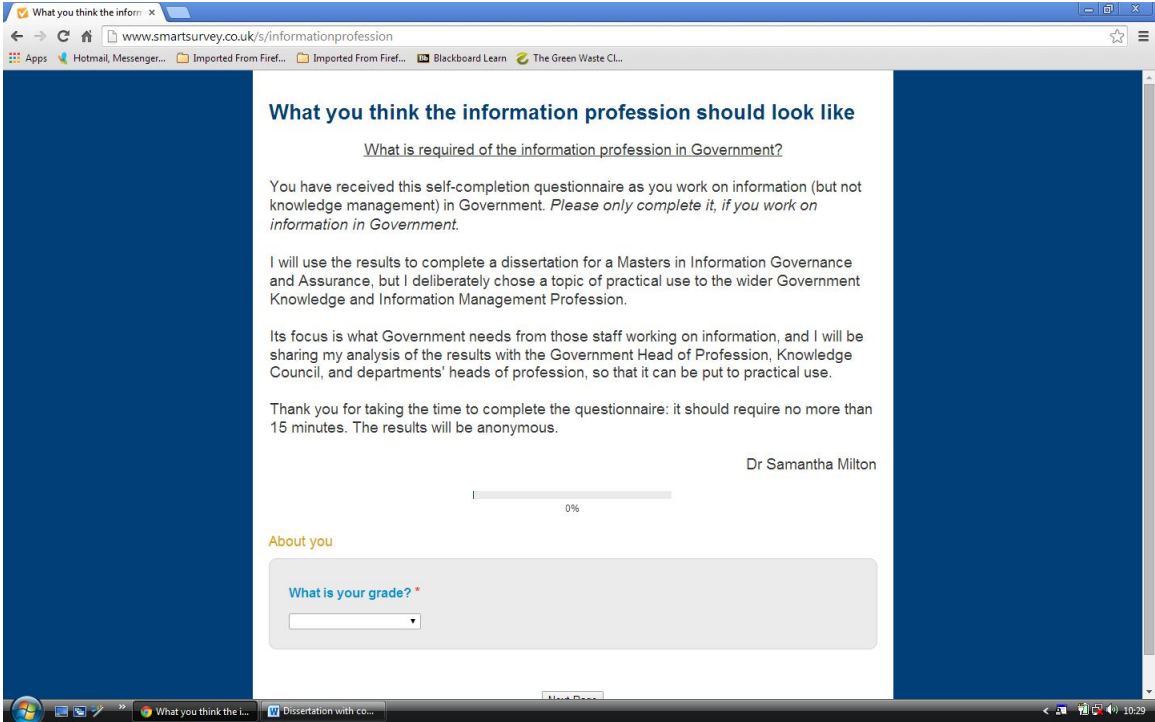
<sup>46</sup> 'Continuing professional development' and 'learning & development' were both listed, as different organisations and individuals prefer different terms. The former appeared regularly in the **Literature review** but the latter is also widely used in Government.

|   |   |
|---|---|
|   | <p>individual information colleagues embedded in project or business-as-usual teams</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other... please specify</p>   |
| <p>10. Where do you think would be the optimum location for the information function in your organisation? *</p>  | <p><input type="checkbox"/> a dedicated knowledge and information unit or directorate</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> with IT/Technology/Digital</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> with Communications</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> with Estates</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> part of an overarching corporate service</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> dispersed with individual information colleagues embedded in project or business-as-usual teams</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other... please specify</p>  |
| <p><b>KIM in Government</b></p>   |   |
| <p>11. What do you think is the biggest challenge facing the information profession in Government?</p>  |   |
| <p>12. What do you think the information profession should be doing about that challenge?</p>   |   |
| <p>13. Please rate these skills according to their importance to the information profession in Government.*</p> <p>1 is 'not at all important' and 5 is 'very important'.</p> | <p><i>[presented online as a matrix]</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> facilitation and/or training skills</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> helping customers to manage information themselves</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> ability to use social media</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> communication skills</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> project and change management</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> negotiation</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> equipping customers to search for trust-worthy information</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> ability to produce clear guidance for colleagues</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> information technology (IT) skills</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> research skills</p> |

|   |   |
|---|---|
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> working to deadlines   |
| <p>14. Please rate these attributes according to their importance to the information profession in Government.*</p> <p>1 is 'not at all important' and 5 is 'very important'.</p> | <p>[presented online as a matrix]</p> <input type="checkbox"/> professionally qualified<br><input type="checkbox"/> motivated to carry out continuing professional development<br><input type="checkbox"/> membership of, or accreditation from, a professional body<br><input type="checkbox"/> strategic-thinking<br><input type="checkbox"/> able to collaborate and to work as part of a team<br><input type="checkbox"/> seeing information from the perspective of the customer<br><input type="checkbox"/> communicating the value of information to customers<br><input type="checkbox"/> confidence to challenge the business about how it works with information<br><input type="checkbox"/> being proactive and showing initiative<br><input type="checkbox"/> ability to understand the organisation's goals and how information contributes to them<br><input type="checkbox"/> competent at marketing information services<br><input type="checkbox"/> relationship-building and networking |

Participants were presented with a thank-you page at the end, which then directed them to the knowledge and information management pages on the Gov.uk website.

# Appendix C - Screen shot of self-completion questionnaire welcome page



## Appendix D - Pilot study

### Polite request

I am using the dissertation that I need to complete for my MSc to produce what I hope will be useful results for the information profession in Government. My intention is to establish what professionals feel is required in Government, sharing the results with the Head of Profession.

I will be using a self-completion questionnaire to gather data from colleagues from the information profession. I would be very grateful if you would help me test the questionnaire. I have chosen you as a colleague who knows about, but is not part of, the profession. You will not, therefore, be part of the final sample group and your answers will not be included in my analysis. However, you know enough about the profession to be able to give the questionnaire a good test run.

I would be particularly interested in feedback on the following, please:

- How long the survey took to complete.
- Opening text: is it clear and is there any way in which it could be more encouraging of respondents to complete the survey?
- Clarity of the questions and any areas of ambiguity.
- Overall appearance on the screen.
- Any spelling mistakes.

If you have any other comments, I would welcome those as well.

I would be very grateful if you are able to complete this test run by the end of this week. If this is problematic, do please let me know. Here is the link: <http://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/informationprofession>.

Many thanks.

## Appendix E - Profile of respondents to attributes question

|                                  |    |     |
|----------------------------------|----|-----|
| Affiliation to professional body | No | Yes |
| Relevant qualifications          |    |     |
| No                               | 22 | 15  |
| Yes                              | 12 | 32  |

How these different groups rated these attributes:

|   | No relevant qualifications and no professional body affiliation |                 | No relevant qualifications but professional body affiliation   |                 |
|---|---|-----------------|--|-----------------|
|   | Qualifications  | Profess'al Body | Qualifications   | Profess'al Body |
| 1 | 9% (2)  | 5% (1)          | 0  | 0               |
| 2 | 27% (6)   | 36% (8)         | 0  | 7% (1)          |
| 3 | 36% (8)   | 41% (9)         | 53% (8)  | 53% (8)         |
| 4 | 14% (3)   | 5% (1)          | 27% (4)  | 33% (5)         |
| 5 | 14% (3)   | 14% (3)         | 20% (3)  | 7% (1)          |
|   | Relevant qualifications but no professional body affiliation    |                 | Both relevant qualifications and professional body affiliation |                 |
|   | Qualifications  | Profess'al Body | Qualifications   | Profess'al Body |
| 1 | 8% (1)  | 8% (1)          | 3% (1)   | 9% (3)          |
| 2 | 25% (3)   | 25% (3)         | 9% (3)   | 19% (6)         |
| 3 | 42% (5)   | 50% (6)         | 25% (8)  | 22% (7)         |
| 4 | 17% (2)   | 17% (2)         | 44% (14)   | 38% (12)        |
| 5 | 8% (1)  | 0               | 19% (6)  | 13% (4)         |

## Appendix F - Coding for qualitative, open-text responses

Coding for the two open questions in the self-completion questionnaire:

| 11 What do you think is the biggest challenge facing the information profession in Government? |  |
|--|--|
| Number   | Theme  |
| 1  | Engaging colleagues in IM  |
| 2  | Managing the volume of information   |
| 3  | Lack of resources  |
| 4  | Lack of recognition for profession   |
| 5  | Understanding the big picture organisation and keeping up with change      |
| 6  | New technology   |
| 7  | Buy-in from senior managers and leadership                                 |
| 8  | Google   |
| 9  | Maintaining public confidence that personal data are handled appropriately |
| 10   | Qualifications/training of IM staff  |
| 11   | Demands of customers   |

| 12 What do you think the information profession should be doing about that challenge? |  |
|---|--|
| Number  | Theme  |
| 1   | Increase visibility and awareness of IM                                      |
| 2   | Link up better across different roles into one profession                    |
| 3   | Training and support for colleagues/customers                                |
| 4   | Better learning/development for IM professionals; qualified IM professionals |
| 5   | Map the benefits of IM – make the business case                              |
| 6   | Combine into one central profession across Government                        |
| 7   | Link up with ICT and Digital, and other related professions                  |
| 8   | Better understanding/support among senior managers                           |
| 9   | Better technology  |
| 10  | Lobby for more resources   |
| 11  | Understanding the business, including keeping up with change                 |
| 12  | Leadership   |
| 13  | Make partnerships outside Government   |