



BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS ARCHIVES AND RECORDS MANAGEMENT REPORT 2006

1.1 Introduction

By the end of the year the eight-point priority goals of Work Plan 2006, were achieved to some extent. For example, while the Archives legislation was not enacted some serious sensitizing to the urgent need for legislation was done. The post of government Archivist was allowed in the 2007 budget. Significant strides were made in the area of training. Six Records Officers started the Records Management (RM) Certificate Course at UWI, Mona, Jamaica, three of them being from departments with crucial need for RM reform in their registries, i.e. the High Court Registry, the Civil Registry and the Public Work Department. Three records personnel were trained in Archives indexing locally by the regional consultants. A 'train-the-trainers' work shop to be conducted locally in collaboration with the University of the West Indies and the Training Division, is to take place in 2007. An in-service Retention Schedules Workshop was successfully conducted for Records Officers across the Service.

1.2 A skilled senior Records Officer from the Ministry of Finance was seconded to the Water & Sewerage Department and brought some organization to the ailing registry system there. The 'train-the-trainers' workshop will reinforce that trend.

1.3 The Archives Indexing Project and the consultants from the Association of Commonwealth Archivists and Records Managers (ACARM) generated much media coverage during the year. Press conferences; radio interviews, talks to

groups i.e. Rotary club, newspaper and journal articles all highlighted the value of archives and the need to preserve them.

2. Vision and Values

2.1 Short-term: To lay the foundation for establishing and developing an actively functioning National Archives institution which is a fundamental infrastructure for national development generally and specifically to support several of the Government's immediate objectives. To do this it is essential that: i) Legislation be enacted to legally establish the National Archives; ii) Appropriate staff be appointed; and iii) suitable accommodation, i.e. a National Archives and a Records Centre be made available.

2.2 Long-term: To act as custodian of the records of the BVI Government. The National Archives will promote awareness of the nation's official and private archives and preserve the nation's memory. It will advise on and promote the preservation and safekeeping, to the highest possible standards of all documents, in all formats. It will make known the location of records, whether public or private, and advise all sections of the community about how records can be used for research and learning.

3. Policy and Legislation

3.1 The general Archives /RM policy endorsed by the Executive Council in May 2005 is in force. The ad hoc Archives and Records Management (ARM) Committee's request for the Executive Council to instruct the Attorney General to draft the appropriate Archives legislation was communicated via an Executive Council paper in February 2006. At the end of the year the Deputy Governor who is also chairperson of the ad hoc ARM Committee, promised to pass the paper on to the Governor for processing.

3.2 On-line: The policy, functions and activities of the Unit are currently posted on the Deputy Governor's website at www.DGO.vg.org

4. Records Management

4.1 International Records Day was observed on 1st May, to encourage awareness for the protection of records against disaster. The Deputy Governor's radio address, press articles and in-house quizzes kept the theme in focus.

4.2 An Emergency Plan for Archives & Records was developed and circulated to stakeholders, i.e. Permanent Secretaries, Heads of Departments and Records Officers.

4.3 Approximately 38 Records Officers attended the in-house Records Management Workshop on Retention/Disposal Scheduling conducted in September/October. There was a high degree of interest and a request for similar Workshops to be conducted on a regular basis.

4.4 Mini Records Management workshops were also conducted in various Departments with special needs. .

4.5 The draft Records Management Procedures Manual for the Civil Service was circulated to Heads of Departments and other officers for comment and feedback before publication.

4.6 A "Friends of the Archives" was formed in June and a simple float promoting the value of Archives was entered in the August Monday Parade. A membership drive is currently underway.

5. Advisory and Consultation

5.1 Software package for Records Management (RM) functions.

After three years of trial, the Information Services Unit (ISU) has not been able to get the computerization of RM functions up and going in the Chief Minister's Office. The suggestion to look for an alternative software package was therefore taken up. Eloquent Software Inc., which is successfully used in several Caribbean countries including Belize, Jamaica and the Bahamas, was recommended by the International Records Management Trust (IRMT) and by the ACARM Bahamian consultants. Negotiations were made with the firm which was set to install the RM Software in January of 2007. However, the ISU still does not think that an alternative is necessary, although they have admitted that they need a 'better understanding and technical knowledge' of their Domino.com Software.

6. The Archives

6.1 The Indexing Project. The Association of Commonwealth Archivists and Records Managers (ACARM) consultants, Dr. Gail Saunders and Ms Elaine Toote, worked on the Archives Indexing Project for a total of five (5) months alternatively from 28th January to 30 June, 2006, under very challenging

situations: lack of space, cramped conditions, poor lighting, electricity cuts and fluctuating air-conditioning. However, they sorted, arranged, listed and re-boxed the following groups of records dating from 1753-1978, according (to International Standard for Archival Description): Records of the Presidency (1753-1938); Commissioner's Office (1872-1974); Chief Minister's Office (1947-1991); Ministry of Natural Resources and Public Health (1950-1984); and the Dept/Ministry of Agriculture, Lands & Social Services (1921-1978).

6.2 The Consultancy generated much media coverage and interest.

6.2 Saunders and Toote submitted a Report, which was forwarded to Executive Council for endorsement. The main recommendations are appended.

7. Research and Resources

7.1 Acquisitions

BVI research materials on Microfilm: Twenty-two volumes of Parliamentary Sessional papers dating back to 1792 were ordered from the National Archives, UK in October to be put on microfilm. Already acquired are: 4 reels of Slave Registers from 1818-1834 and Nominal Censuses of 1716. The microforms will provide a rich resource for researchers. It is hoped that additions from the many available sources will be made annually.

7.2 A priority listing of rare books to be acquired was drawn up

8. Research Queries

8.1 There were several local and international queries involving the use of the Archives. Those wanting to do research and study were disappointed that they were denied access to the archives because the Archives repository is closed due to lack of accommodation.

8.2 However, the ARM Unit was a popular resource for graduate students on the Executive Diploma and other Courses (at the HLSCC) with information technology content. The CRMO advised students on how to go about the research; they were also introduced to RM and other related documents.

9. Co-operative Schemes

9.1 Unfortunately, the US Virgin Islands microfilm specialist could not keep his promise to microfilm BVI newspapers from 1982 onwards because of their own heavy workload and staff shortages. The Specialist suggested that BVI should train assistants in micro- technology via regional attachments.

9.2 An acquisition policy between the Archives Unit and Public Library was adopted for acquiring BVI historical materials in order to maximise limited available financial resources.

10. Visits

10.1 The Chief Records Management Officer visited the National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago in July when she attended a Conference there, with relevant RM & Archives issues and themes. She also completed a programme in Project Management conducted by the School of Business and Computer Science Ltd. at the Caribbean Hall of Justice.

10.2 Visits to various sections of the National Archives of Trinidad & Tobago provided a panoramic yet in-depth view of all that goes on in an actively functioning Archives Repository in the Caribbean, fully supported by its Government. The first-hand contacts and several innovative ideas collected should serve well for future net-working etc, in developing the BVI Archives services.

10.3 Generally, the Conference papers were very informative, giving pertinent background knowledge relevant to the Chief Records Management Officer's role. Particularly applicable were the Lexis Nexis Workshop, Environmental Law in the Caribbean, Enhancing Service through Information Literacy; Essentials for Project Management, Strategic Planning, the Modern Judiciaries and Keeping Pace: Initiatives and Innovations.

11 Committees

11.1 The main ad hoc Archives and Records Management Committee met twice during the year. Some considerable time was spent seeking out appropriate accommodation for rental as a temporary measure, without success. At the end

of the year a letter was drafted to the Chief Minister requesting that a site for the National Archives be earmarked and a public announcement made to celebrate the fact.

11.2 The Sub-committee for Accommodation met several times. A delegation from that Sub-committee took their concerns in December to the Chief Minister who promised urgent action. Upon the advice of the Chief Minister, the delegation also assessed the feasibility of temporarily locating the Archives and RM Unit in the former Health Authority building opposite the Old Sugar Works Estate Buildings. The Sub-Committee also sought the advice of the in-house Consultants and together concluded that for several reasons the building in question was not suitable for the Archives. The report on their findings which was submitted to the Chief Minister, is attached.

11.3 Following the advice of the Sub-committee for Accommodation, a 'Friends of the Archives' group was formed in June. It would be the public relations and fundraising arm for the Archives. In September a delegation from the 'Friends' also raised the crucial need for accommodation, with the Chief Minister who again promised action.

12. Compliance with Government's Objectives

An Archives and Records Management unit is vital to the achievement of every aspect of the Government's goals and objectives. This Government emphasizes heritage and culture, identity, openness, accountability and national development. The ARM programme is essential to the efficient working of the Government and to the survival of the country's archives and national heritage which are the collective memory of the people. It is essential in ensuring good governance. Efficient records keeping provides information for decision-making, promotes accountability and ensures sustainability. Records and archives are the ingredients for national development. Each step of the accomplishments in 2006 was geared towards building an efficient proactive RM Service within the Government.

13. Conclusion

This report concurs with the Consultants Saunders and Toote's recommendations, which emphasized the need for adequate support staff including an Assistant Archivist and a Conservator; suitable accommodation, adequate archival legislation and the continuance of an integrated Archives and

Records Management programme. In addition, the crucial need for a site to be earmarked and funds allocated for the building of an Archives Repository in which the 'nation's heritage and culture could be recorded, understood and preserved 'is strongly reiterated.

14. Appendices

- a. BVI historical documents acquisition policy between ARM Unit & Pub. Library
- b. Gail Saunders and E. Toote - Report: Main recommendations, June, 2006
- c. Sub-Committee, Accommodation – Report on a Visit to the former Health Services Building, Road Town (to Hon. Chief Minister) May 30, 2006
- d. Ad hoc ARM Committee- Draft Letter to the Hon. Chief Minister, December 2006

Chief Records Management Officer
Deputy Governor's Office
January 2007

