

Archives sends bureaucrats back-to-school to preserve digital records

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By Paul Hemsley

The National Archives of Australia (NAA) has said it will school government agencies about how to best manage and preserve valuable digital records to eliminate risks involved with potentially vanishing electronic documents.

The official record keeper has launched a new e-learning training module Introduction to digital records to teach personnel in agencies how to manage and store important emails, text messages, Facebook pages, spreadsheets, digital maps and photographs.

The move follows warnings by Archives' director-general David Fricker about the urgent need to preserve digital records created by government agencies in September 2012 that book-ended a deadline of late 2015 for agencies to stop sending paper records.

Mr Fricker's big concern is that digital archives could potentially become inaccessible in the future if the technology that is used to store them is not properly upgraded.

The e-records introduction course is a similar scheme to the New South Wales State Records training program Managing Digital Records: An Introduction, which was designed to help state agencies understand the minimum compliance requirements for NSW public offices.

These requirements for NSW State Records are for defining their digital records, digital recordkeeping system functionality and the creation and management of recordkeeping metadata for digital records.

A key element of the NAA's new online Flash module will be what the NAA dubs as "Sam", which is an avatar in HTML or PDF that will help government agency employees understand what records are, identify the most important, recognise the difference between "born-digital" and converted records.

Mr Fricker said rapid advances in technology mean the Australian Government agencies face technical challenges in creating, using and storing information in a wide variety of digital formats.

"However, there are many benefits to be gained from moving to digital information and records management.

"They include better informed decision-making, more efficient use of staff time, more information sharing, lower compliance costs, and reduced storage costs. The Government's Digital Transition Policy is a result of the recognition of these benefits," Mr Fricker said.