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Information Commissioner speaks ‘on the record’ at Northumbria University

The UK Information Commissioner is to speak in the North East for the first time as the keynote speaker at a Northumbria conference looking at how records and archives are managed.

Appointed in July last year, Elizabeth Denham’s role is to uphold information rights in the public interest, promote openness by public bodies and champion data privacy for individuals. She is one of a number of high-profile speakers taking part in a two-day event being held at the University’s city campus this week.

The Archival Accountability Gap conference aims to address whether there are democratic flaws in the way records are managed and selected for archives and will cover topics such as record keeping in relation to tragedies such as Hillsborough and improving the well-being of dementia patients. The event is being run with support from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and in association with the British Records Association.

Julie McLeod, Professor in Records Management at Northumbria, is one of the event organisers. She said: “We will be hearing from a range of speakers who will describe how having access to archives can make a huge difference to our lives, whether for investigating tragedies or child abuse, fighting corruption or improving health.

“We will also be hearing from The Cabinet Office about the latest government thinking on archives and I am particularly delighted that Elizabeth Denham, who has experience as an archivist and is now the UK Information Commissioner, is able to be with us for her first speech in Newcastle.”

During her talk, the Information Commissioner will discuss the critical roles archives and information management play in government accountability. She will reflect on her experiences during her former roles as a professional archivist and regulator of access and privacy rights in Canada. She will then set out her views on the importance of archives and records to the future of British democracy.

The conference will explore issues raised during Northumbria’s 2015 *Threats to Openness in the Digital World* conference, during which Professor Arthur Lucas posed questions about how records in the UK are released, created, selected and disposed of.

The conference will begin with a discussion around new research into how the rising generation of ‘digital natives’ access information and about archive users. A Cabinet Office representative will discuss what the government is proposing to do about managing records and the way that record keeping has made it possible to investigate tragedies.

It will go on to look at the huge importance of having good records to fight corruption and improve health in Africa and how exploring new ideas about the way records and archives are kept can help improve the lives of people suffering from dementia.

The conference will end with a discussion about the nature of the gap in archives and what can be done to address it.

In total there are 13 speakers taking part, discussing a variety of topics. They include Sarah Tyacke, former Keeper of Records at the Public Record Office and a member of the Hillsborough Independent Panel, who will discuss how tragedies could lead to new ideas about managing records.

Also speaking is Alison Diamond of National Records of Scotland, who will discuss using archives with teachers and pupils, and William Merrin of the University of Swansea, who will discuss archiving social media.

The Archival Accountability Gap takes place on Tuesday 24 and Wednesday 25 January at The Great Hall in Northumbria University's Sutherland Building. Follow the event on Twitter - @archivalgap or using the hashtag #arcgap

For more information please visit

<https://archivalaccountabilitygap.wordpress.com/>

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