

# Main findings and opinions of the National Audit Office

## Promotion of electronic archiving

The operating environment of archiving and case management has changed significantly in the past 20 years. Administrative processes have been extensively developed and converted into electronic form. The introduction of information systems has influenced the working practices of archiving and case management. The development of electronic archiving and case management, along with the introduction of new working practices, has been expected to make public administration more efficient and increase productivity.

The aim of the audit was to determine whether the administration has been successful in introducing electronic archiving. The audit also examined case management, which is an essential component of electronic archiving. The focus of the audit was on the target setting and steering of electronic archiving and case management. It was also assessed whether electronic archiving and case management, as well as the working practices required by them, have been developed successfully as a whole.

The audit covered the key parties steering the archives service: the National Archives Service of Finland in its capacity as the implementing body and the authority steering the administration, the Ministry of Education and Culture in its capacity as the ministry steering the National Archives Service of Finland, and the Ministry of Finance in its capacity as the ministry developing and steering general data management and information systems.

The audit also covered the case management systems that are used by different administrative sectors and that play an important role in the implementation of electronic archiving. The following systems were examined in the audit: SALAMA, which is used in the administrative sector of the Ministry of Education and Culture, ASDO, which is used by the Ministry of the Interior and the Internal Affairs Administration, as well as MAHTI, which is used by the Ministry of Finance.

It emerged that the electronic archiving of documentation records created in the administration had not properly gained momentum despite the many development measures. Considering the fact that most central government documents have been in digital format for as long as a quarter of a century, there is cause for concern.

## Increase of paper archives must be curbed

At the moment, the work of the National Archives Service mainly involves keeping and processing of paper-form archive material. The National Archives Service will continue to receive large amounts of written documents for several decades to come. Storing this ever-increasing paper documentation requires archive-quality premises both in the National Archives Service and in the public administration as a whole. The current archive-quality premises are insufficient: the growing paper archives continuously require new investments in archive premises. The information services work pertaining to paper archives is based on manual work. Information services for electronic archives can be arranged in a significantly more efficient manner. The resources at the National Archives Service are partially used to convert paper material into an electronic format in order to facilitate the availability and usability of the material.

The central government currently prints out material that is generated and processed electronically in order to transfer it to the National Archives Service on paper decades later. This electronically generated but paper-archived material may, at a later date, be redigitised into an electronic format in order to facilitate its availability and usability. The National Archives Service,

the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Finance must pay more attention to the rapidly increasing amount of paper material received and start finding ways to increase the electronic archiving of electronically generated material in order to curb the growth of paper archives.

At present, the National Archives Service maintains its electronic archiving service and the reception and storage service (the VAPA service) intended for implementing it with approximately two person years. This constitutes less than one per cent of the entire personnel resources of the National Archives Service. As the resources of the National Archives Service continue their rapid decline, a trend that has been going on for a number of years, there is a risk that under the current operating model it will have less resources for the promotion of electronic archiving.

The National Audit Office is of the view that the Ministry of Education and Culture must, together with the National Archives Service, find a way for the National Archives Service to continue to promote electronic archiving, despite decreasing resources.

## Promotion of electronic archiving requires a common view on goals and measures

The National Archives Service, the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Finance steer the promotion of electronic archiving and case management. On general level, the parties have similar goals but each of them focuses on different matters and the methods they use also differ from each other. The goals are based on each party's own premises. The different goals are also due to outdated legislation resulting from changes in the operating environment and obscure concepts. On practical level, there is a lack of common will to promote electronic archiving.

The objective of the Ministry of Education and Culture, which steers the National Archives Service, is to ensure the preservation of national cultural heritage. This is manifested in the ministry's strong focus on the National Digital Library (KDK, Kansallinen digitaalinen kirjasto) project under which a centralised long-term preservation solution is being developed for the cultural heritage of the memory organisations (libraries, museums, archives) of the administrative sector. The general objective of the Ministry of Finance, which steers the overall development of data management, is to improve the interoperability of information systems and joint services and to promote their use. As regards the promotion of electronic archiving, the goals of the Ministry of Finance are still to be specified. The emphasis in the objectives of the National Archives Service is on securing the lifetime preservability and usability of documentation that belongs to the national cultural heritage and that should be stored permanently, regardless of the storage format.

The different parties have engaged in formal cooperation by participating in various expert working groups discussing electronic archiving and case management. Compared with the time spent on concept definition and interpretation, there have been few results. The expert-level working groups have not produced decisions covering the entire central government. The lack of concrete decisions shows that the Government and individual ministries have not been sufficiently committed to promoting electronic archiving.

## Responsibilities and division of labour must be agreed upon

Steering by the authorities has been ineffective when it comes to promoting electronic archiving and case management. Therefore, the main actors responsible for steering electronic archiving should together determine the duties and responsibilities that are not clearly laid out in the new Archives Act, the work on which is currently in progress. They should also speed up the transition to electronic archiving by preparing an implementation plan for the next few years that is binding on all actors.

The vague steering responsibilities regarding electronic archiving and case management have also helped to make steering more ineffective. The National Archives Service has taken initiative in the steering of records life cycle management. It has issued detailed orders (such as the SÄHKE orders and the permit procedure for electronic storage) as well as implemented the VAPA service for archiving electronic records. The National Archives Service has an established status as the steering body for records life cycle management, but its position is open to interpretation in terms of competence. The National Archives Service is of the view that it has operated within the limits of its competence, while the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Finance are of the opinion that the National Archives Service has exceeded its mandate as the steering body for electronic records management.

The problems of the steering relationship between the Ministry of Education and Culture and the National Archives Service are particularly visible in the VAPA service. Initially, the Ministry of Education and Culture supported the National Archives Service in its aspirations to develop electronic archiving by steering life cycle management. Life cycle management refers to steering involving a document's entire life cycle, from creation to disposal or permanent storage. When the solutions developed by the National Archives Service for electronic archiving started to take concrete form as the VAPA service, the Ministry of Education and Culture clarified its view on the competence of the National Archives Service and limited it to the archiving of permanently stored documents. For its own part, the National Archives Service launched the VAPA procurement without certainty of maintenance financing for the system. Changes were made to the system requirement specification during the procurement process and these changes led to considerable limitations in the scope of the service.

The Ministry of Finance has not specified its steering role in case management and electronic archiving. The Ministry of Finance has not yet expressed its clear position on whether the joint government ICT services should cover case management and electronic archiving solutions.

Since agencies also need solutions for managing and archiving documents stored for a limited period, as well as material generated outside the case management systems, the National Audit Office is of the view that electronic archiving and case management should be developed as an integral whole. Material transferred to the National Archives Service for permanent storage is only one part of this entity.

## Implementation of case management systems enabling electronic storage has been slow

In their case management systems, central government organisations have aimed to put into effect the orders concerning the processing and archiving of electronic documents issued by the National Archives Service. The invitations to bid regarding the procurement of all systems covered by the audit included the requirement of compliance with the SÄHKE order by the National Archives Service and the possibility to transfer documents to the VAPA service.

In the mid-2000s, there were still no case management systems available on the software market that would have met the national requirements. At that time, the implementation of the requirements stipulated by the National Archives Service for electronic archiving in firmware was still in its infancy. Case management system projects have been lengthy and they have required considerable inputs from both the client and the supplier. Several years have passed between preliminary studies and the electronic storage of permanently stored material.

The development of case management systems covered by the audit has mainly been the responsibility of information management, information services and records management. The information and records management-oriented approach has apparently been one reason why the operating processes have not been updated in conjunction with the development of case management systems. Instead, measures have only been taken to improve the efficiency of paper-related processes by introducing electronic processing. Furthermore, the perspective of end

users and use in general has not been adequately considered in the development work. Therefore, the potential benefits of information and communication technology remain partially unattained.

Even though electronic storage was a central goal in all system projects, the workability of case processing phases have been the top priority in system development and maintenance. When problems related to case processing are first on the troubleshooting list, addressing questions related to electronic storage are delayed and this sets back the transition to electronic archiving.

## Continuity of electronic archiving services must be secured regardless of the technical solutions applied

The status of the VAPA reception and service system for electronic records is unclear and its future remains uncertain. The audit findings indicate that the current operating and maintenance model of VAPA is impractical.

In its present form, VAPA does not meet its original goals and specifications. The functional goals and requirement specifications of VAPA were narrowed within a short period of time at the end of 2009. The decisions made at that time have later been interpreted as permanent principles laid down by the Ministry of Education and Culture regarding the implementation of VAPA.

The narrowing of the original goals and requirement specifications has significantly affected the use rate of VAPA. The use rate of VAPA has been very low. This is, however, understandable as the electronic storage of permanently stored records is only at its preliminary phase. Organisations need time to make their own systems compatible with the requirements of VAPA transfers. There are still few documents that meet the transfer conditions. On the other hand, in the development of the system, more consideration should have been given to the chances and willingness of material producing organisations to become VAPA users. Instead of rapidly making substantial changes to the VAPA specifications, the VAPA procurement should have been discontinued, and only relaunched after careful planning.

The investments required by VAPA are substantial, considering its low use rate. It has been considered important to increase the use rate of VAPA, but only few measures have been taken and they have had little impact. The National Archives Service has made several development proposals for increasing the use rate of VAPA, but none of them have been implemented.

The Ministry of Education and Culture considers centralised long-term storage solutions important. According to the ministry, VAPA should be developed and maintained with the National Archives Service's own resources. The resources of the Ministry of Education and Culture are mainly focused on the PAS long-term storage solution developed in the National Digital Library project and intended for digital cultural heritage material of the memory organisations in the administrative sector. PAS will not replace these memory organisations' own systems, which also include the VAPA system of the National Archives Service, as the material will be accessible using the memory organisations' own systems. Instead, PAS complements them, since the long-term storage functions, such as migrations, are carried out in the PAS system.

The administration has implemented its case management systems with the assumption that the National Archives Service will be able to receive and store materials electronically. Organisations have spent time and other resources on making preparations for transferring documents into the VAPA service once the permit requirements for electronic storing are met and the organisations know with certainty how the information service will be organised after VAPA transfers.

The administration has had bad experiences with joint case management services and, more widely, joint electronic services offered by the Ministry of Finance. The VALDA service, intended for case and records management, was discontinued in 2012 after being in limited use for only two years. Similarly, a decision was made in 2008 to discontinue the development of an

online service that was to be designed on the Lomake.fi platform, as the service was deemed redundant due to the VALDA project.

As regards the arrangement and steering by the Ministry of Finance and the archives service, the Ministry of Education and Culture must restore the trust of the administration in joint electronic case management, case management system and archiving services. The best way to achieve this goal is by securing the continuity of the already introduced services or equivalent services and by ensuring that the joint services set out in various group-level policies are actually implemented and maintained.

Compared with the annual maintenance costs of VAPA, increasing its use rate with the currently applied implementation principles and operating models would be too slow. Restoring trust in joint solutions and services will be jeopardised if the National Archives Service gives up the VAPA service before there is a concrete replacement available. If it is impossible for the National Archives Service to improve the use rate of VAPA and to maintain and develop it, even if this means changes in the operating model and priorities, the responsible parties must together find a comprehensive and economic solution.

### **Lack of comprehensive approach in development also results in lack of overall economic perspective**

There has been no comprehensive approach in the development of case management and electronic archiving. The development has been based on the premises and needs of the different parties. There has not been enough attention to formulating joint goals or coordinating measures.

Furthermore, the audit results also suggest that an overall economic perspective has not been given sufficient weight in the development work. The different parties have mainly assessed the costs and benefits resulting from the development of electronic archiving and case management work from their own perspective. Especially the assessment of the benefits has been on a narrow basis and no attention has been paid to the follow-up of the materialisation of the benefits.

When the investment costs of electronic archiving are analysed, consideration must be given to the amount of euros spent on the centralised electronic storage solutions and the working hours spent on the development work by public servants. Furthermore, the requirements for electronic archiving incorporated by the public administration in their own information systems must be acknowledged both in euros and in person-hour investments. There is a danger that the financial inputs made in electronic archiving will remain underused as, under the current operating model, the resources of the National Archives Service are insufficient for developing electronic archiving and offering the VAPA service. Moreover, the benefits that the electrification of the administration operating processes are expected to bring will not be fully achieved if the final phases of the process, i.e. data archiving, are not carried out electronically.

In addition to the costs resulting from the development and maintenance of electronic archiving, it is also necessary to assess the costs arising from the failure to curb the increase in the generation of paper-form archive material. As regards paper-form archiving, it should also be noted that printing out electronically generated material and transferring it to the archive in paper format and finally redigitising it into an electronic format results in the same work being done several times and negatively impacts the availability and usability of the material.

Cooperation between the Ministry of Education and Culture, the National Archives Service and the Ministry of Finance is important in the promotion of electronic archiving. Electronic archiving must be perceived as a wide concept – not only from the perspective of permanently stored central government material (processed in case management systems). According to analyses, keeping to paper-form archiving is many times more expensive in the long run than a centralised electronic archive service.

## Recommendations of the National Audit Office

1. The major decisions concerning the promotion of electronic archiving are permanent authority duties that transcend election periods and they must therefore be made by civil servants at sufficiently high level. The meeting of permanent secretaries would be a suitable forum for coordinating this decision-making.
2. The Ministry of Finance must take action to establish a comprehensive approach to electronic archiving. The goals, indicators and follow-up practices for the progress of the archiving should be specified. Furthermore, measures should be specified for producing a comprehensive and economic electronic archiving solution so that the trust of the public administration in joint electronic archiving services will not be negatively affected.
3. The top management of each agency must assume overall responsibility for the development of case management and archiving in their own organisation, while also taking into account the measures specified by the Ministry of Finance for the promotion of electronic archiving. At present, this responsibility mainly lies with the records and information management personnel of the agencies.
4. The National Archives Service should take action to lower the threshold for transferring electronic material into a centralised archive service.
5. The Ministry of Education and Culture should ensure that the responsibilities and obligations of the National Archives Service and other actors are specified clearly as part of the updating of the Archives Act. The aim should be to ensure that National Archives Service, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Education and Culture as well as the administration authorities, in their capacity as creators of records, are able to promote the transition to electronic archiving. The Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Finance must jointly eliminate the practical discrepancies between archive legislation and the Information Management Act.