

Julie McLeod (1957 -)

Life

Julie McLeod was born in 1957 in West Yorkshire, England. After graduating from Newcastle University with a first class honors degree in Mathematics and Statistics in 1979 she undertook research into the application of cluster analysis in manufacturing contexts, which led to her PhD. This research ignited a desire to enter the information management profession. Having gained a Master of Science in Information Studies from Sheffield University she began her records and information management career in 1982 as an information manager in the private sector. Working for three international companies in the electronics, coatings and pharmaceutical sectors, she led the efficient delivery of information and library services in research and development contexts and developed strategic services through continuous improvement initiatives. Reliance on the tacit knowledge of long serving research scientists for the organization's corporate memory drove her to develop databases capturing internal proprietary information in research reports and led to her focus on managing records. She joined the pharmaceutical sector at the time of early implementations of electronic document management systems (EDMS) and worked with US colleagues implementing *Documentum*, an early EDMS. Whilst it was clear in the early 1990s that records management was vital for compliance purposes, it was also evident that it was significant for strategic business purposes, having an important role to play in supporting the drug discovery and development process and accelerating the speed to market of new drugs. McLeod was able to play an important role in aligning records management practices at the strategic level, which pushed new boundaries. Thus her work linked research and practice in an industry setting.

In 1994 she joined Northumbria University, UK, as a Senior Lecturer (Associate Professor). Working with her colleague Catherine Hare, McLeod developed and delivered a campus based Masters program in Information and Records Management and the first records management distance learning Masters program in Europe. Other programs within the UK at the time linked records management teaching to archival science, whereas McLeod and Hare's approach emphasized the significance of records management on its own merits. Significantly there was no visibility of records management research in the early 1990s in the UK. Thus, from 1994 McLeod has been a champion for the development of UK university-based records management research through ground-breaking, inter-disciplinary empirical projects using innovative methods, which have had significant impact across the Records Management (RM) community internationally. As part of her work she advocated for the role of RM as a discipline worthy of recognition and funding by the UK Research Councils, which, prior to 2003, had funded archival but not RM research. This shift in acceptances of RM research at a national level has been significant more widely.

McLeod has stated that she believes the role of records management is to be that of supporting the organisation in conducting its 'business' and adding value to such business by both enabling and protecting the business (McLeod, 2014). As such, the primary role of RM is not to ensure that there will be historical archives, though their capture is an element of this work, but to align with business strategy and operations. McLeod's research philosophy is to link principles and practice, investigating challenging and relevant contemporary issues (e.g., people aspects of managing digital records, economics of using the cloud for records storage), and involving both academics and practitioners in the delivery of evidence-based research and the

development of innovative thinking. McLeod has championed and challenged thinking and practice, adopting a global perspective. Her research has been in three phases, initially focusing on RM education and training (1995-2001), then RM tools (2002-2008) and finally RM practice in the digital context (2006 onwards). During these phases her key collaborators have been Sue Childs, Catherine Hare and Elizabeth Lomas.

McLeod has disseminated her work through a range of mechanisms in order to create global reach and impact. She has published four books (three co-authored with Catherine Hare) and over 30 articles, as well as providing information about research findings through other means, such as blogs and podcasts. She has spoken at conferences and events worldwide. In addition, she has organized events in a wide range of innovative formats. From 2006 she has brought international names from research and practice together in the UK, in a ground-breaking series of witness seminars whose style was intentionally different from standard conference formats, in order to enable audience participation and the capture of new perspectives. These have included focusing on the essence of RM (*Exploring the essence of records management: engaging with experts*, 2006), digital challenges such as the essence of e-communications (*Examining the issues and challenges of email and e-communications*, 2007) and the value of research (*AC⁺erm Project: Transforming information and records management through research and development*, 2010). This style was later adapted in conferences with colleagues Michael Moss and David Thomas on contemporary issues such as accountability in *Is there a democratic deficit in the way records are managed and selected for archives?* (2017) and access in *Threats to Openness in the Digital World* (2015).

Her professional leadership is exemplified further by her role as Editor of a world-class scholarly journal and as active contributor to the design and development of international

standards. From 1995-2015 she edited the *Records Management Journal*, steering its development from the only UK published peer-reviewed records management journal to the field's leading international journal. The reach of this journal grew to subscriptions from 700 organisations, 74 countries and four continents. In 2016 McLeod became the *Journal's* Consulting Editor. In addition, linking research with practice, since 1998 she has been actively involved in national/international standards committees contributing to the development of ISO 15489.

In 2007 McLeod was awarded the first Professorship in Europe that focused solely on records management and was key to establishing Northumbria University's international reputation as a leader in RM education and research. In 2013 she was awarded a Fellowship of the Information and Records Management Society in the UK, and in 2014 she was honored with the international Emmett Leahy Award, which recognizes those individuals whose leadership has delivered a major impact on the records and information management profession.

McLeod is a prominent academic with an international reputation for excellent RM education and research. In 2015 she spent a semester at the University of British Columbia as the Dodson Visiting Professor in Archival Studies sharing her passion and innovative thinking with students, faculty and practitioners. During her career she has educated and trained countless RM professionals who work across the globe. She has also sought funding and supervised PhD research to build research capacity in the academic field and world of practice. It is a testament to her dedication to the profession that some of this PhD funding came from her consultancy work. Having pioneered the academic development of RM, built academic and professional capacity and laid the foundations for RM evidence-based research in the UK, she continues to strive to contribute to the improvement of RM in the digital environment across the world.

Intellectual Contributions

The key concepts, methods and ideas reflected in McLeod's writings are linking research with practice to shape and define the RM profession, the challenges of managing electronic records including the human factors, and pushing innovative and multidisciplinary approaches to tackling records management challenges which have influenced research methods more widely.

Linking principles with practice to shape and define a profession

McLeod's career in industry has remained a significant influence throughout her academic career; it has continued to provide a grounding for all her work. As a result, she has advocated for the need to link research to the domain of practice. This has informed both her research and teaching. She has played a major role in building the pillars of a professional community, which require a community of practice with shared understanding, a University level education, a professional support network, and research. In growing the research agenda, McLeod played a key role in advocating for the place of RM as a discipline worthy of research funding enabling the discussion through case examples of her own research and research needs more generally (McLeod, 2008). While McLeod's teaching and research has taken account of the developments in the archival science domain she has focused her work on the 'front end' of the information delivery chain and the promotion of the RM profession and its research agendas.

In considering the role of RM she has questioned both principles and practice including tools (McLeod, Childs, and Heaford, 2007). As part of her work on the Records Management ISO Standards Committee, McLeod not only contributed to the framework and vocabulary within the standard but delivered an underpinning guide on *BIP 0025-2 Effective records*

management (McLeod, 2003). She also undertook work to assess the impact of the standard and has continued to contribute to its revision. This has included advocating for the place of appraisal within the standard, which in some countries had been the preserve of the archivist not the records manager. In 2016 appraisal was defined within the revision.

McLeod has seen RM opportunities in a range of information environments. For example, from 2010 to 2012 she worked with Childs and Lomas on two research projects to inform the better management of research data. This involved developing practical tools and training for research data management as well as publishing guidance in this domain (McLeod, Childs and Lomas, 2013).

McLeod's response to new challenges is to promote pragmatism and proportionate risk-based approaches (McLeod, 2012). She has been clear to consider how best RM principles can be embedded into practice and has continually reflected on the role and place of the RM professional not being scared to offer a critique. She has worked with others to 'hold a mirror up to the profession' which has at times shone a light on RM weaknesses as well as its strengths in order to make the profession more self-aware (McLeod, 2012). In 2017 she was awarded an international research network grant with Lomas that recognized a need to embed RM in and connect more meaningfully to other critical disciplines, from forensics to philosophy (RecordDNA).

The challenges of managing electronic records including the human factors

In particular, McLeod has focused on the impact of the transition from physical paradigms to the digital domain. Her text with Hare on electronic records became a seminal work (McLeod and Hare, 2005). Her work on *Accelerating positive Change in Electronic Records*

Management (AC⁺erm) provided an evidence base and tools related to records management in a digital age. It also resulted in her suggesting that viewing the management of electronic records as a ‘wicked problem’ offers a way forward for addressing the issues and professional challenges it poses (McLeod, 2014). AC⁺erm provides an example of McLeod’s approach to managing information, which places human needs at the center of the issues under scrutiny as well as considering the information content and the technical tools available. She has taken this work forward looking at information, technical and people challenges in a range of contexts. For example, with James Lappin and Gavin Siggers she considered the role of SharePoint in higher education providing case examples of its role and potential in a range of contexts. With Childs, Lomas and Glenda Cook she considered the legal and technical challenges of opening up research data taking into account conflicting needs of users and data subjects. With Brianna Gormly, in the context of the InterPARES Trust project, for which she was a co-investigator, she has also considered the economics of storing records in the cloud.

Innovative and multidisciplinary approaches to tackling records management challenges

While advocating for the value of RM research, McLeod has also promoted the delivery of research through innovative and multidisciplinary approaches. These methods gathered and analysed data in ways that have provided new professional perspectives. For example, to examine RM toolkits she used cognitive walk-throughs. In other work she undertook multiple methods approaches. This approach to challenging every aspect of the conduct of research and adopting a pragmatic methodology determined by the nature of the research questions is exemplified in the AC⁺erm project (2007-2010) (McLeod, Childs and Hardiman, 2011). The

work considered the aspects of managing records from the perspective of people, processes and technology. It produced case studies and analyzed the critical success factors.

This research was initiated with a systematic literature review, an approach promoted in the medical sciences, and increasingly used in the social sciences, but that had not been used in archival science and RM research. It provided an overview of the literature on managing electronic records of the previous decade highlighting its wide variety and the limited amount that was peer reviewed or research based.

The investigative phase of the research was conducted through Delphi studies and face-to-face colloquia. Again, these provided innovative ways to gain perspectives from experts and in particular to undertake horizon scanning (McLeod and Childs, 2007). The data was analysed through the Cynefin framework, which was also a bold approach (McLeod and Childs, 2013), and the findings were disseminated throughout the project via a blog and Twitter, which at this time was unusual for a UK Research Council funded project. Thus the research adopted a pragmatic methodology with each stage taking into account the nature of the research questions and the data sources. McLeod has encouraged others, such as Lomas, to be innovative and to take risks in conducting research. However, her central focus remains to always strive to deliver pragmatic and useable findings into the RM domain.

Elizabeth Lomas

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