

Most records created during the day-to-day work that takes place in the public and private sector are now created electronically. Increasingly, they will also be distributed and accessed electronically. In the UK, the recent white paper, Modernising Government ([see note](#)) aims to have all newly created public records electronically stored and retrieved by 2004 and a strategy has now been developed to achieve this aim (

[see note](#)

). Combined with recent legislation on Data Protection and Freedom of Information (

[see note](#)

), this makes efficient and effective management of electronic records of pressing concern.

Records management is a key aspect of the Freedom of Information Bill and a code of practice to be issued by the Lord Chancellor will underpin the Act (

[PRO 2000](#)

). In order to fulfil their legal and accountability responsibilities, organisations in the UK will need to ensure they plan for efficient and effective electronic records management (ERM). There are also organisational implications (See also

[Preservation Issues](#)

and

[Organisational Activities](#)

for more discussion of these issues).

Three major sources of guidance have been consulted for this section. They are:

- Electronic Records Management: Framework for Information Age Government. March 2000.

<http://www.e-envoy.gov.uk/assetRoot/04/00/22/94/04002294.rtf>

Update 26 Nov 2004

Electronic Records Management: Framework for Information Age Government. April 2000.

<http://e-government.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/assetRoot/04/00/22/94/04002294.rtf>

Update 12 Mar 2007

Replaced with link to PDF

[http://archive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/e-envoy/resources-pdfs/\\$file/erm.pdf](http://archive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/e-envoy/resources-pdfs/$file/erm.pdf)

- DLM Forum. (1997). Guidelines on the Best Practices for Using Electronic Information.

<http://europa.eu.int/ISPO/dlm/documents/gdlines.pdf>

Update 19 March 2008

No longer available - information at

<http://ec.europa.eu/archives/ISPO/dlm/>

- Public Record Office. (1999). Guidelines on the Management, Appraisal and Preservation of Electronic Records. Volumes 1 (Principles) and 2 (Procedures). Kew: Public Record Office.

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/electronicrecords/advice/guidelines.htm>

There is a commonality of themes in these three sources and the following checklist draws heavily on all three.

Formal corporate policies.

"It needs to be clearly understood across the department that everyone is responsible in some way for records and that responsible behaviour is implanted throughout all relevant operational activities. Establishment of a defining framework of formal corporate policies on electronic records is one principal means of helping to achieve this goal." ([PRO 1999](#))

As in the previous section on digitising analogue collections, it is difficult to overemphasise the importance of corporate policies promulgated throughout the organisation and re-visited at regular intervals to ensure continuing relevance in a rapidly changing environment. The Public Record Office Guidelines also reinforce the need to ensure that the policy does more than pay "lip service" to accountability requirements:

"Most important of all, a corporate policy must be agreed to. Writing the words of a policy statement is much less difficult than the process of gaining agreement to them ...a policy which is ignored is worse than no policy at all." ([PRO 1999](#))

The policy should address issues such as:

- The status of electronic records within the organisation and broad definitions of what they constitute.
- Broad definition of records which constitute permanent records worthy of long-term preservation.
- Whether long-term management will be undertaken by a third party service provider or in-house.
- Roles and responsibilities within the organisation.

Corporate strategies

The best way to optimise the management of electronic information is to define a coherent global strategy from the outset, ensuring that everyone concerned is involved. One solution is to set up a multidisciplinary team to define and monitor the strategy ([DLM Forum 1997](#)).

The suggestion above recognises the fact that there needs to be a mechanism which will bring together the range of expertise necessary to develop effective strategies. The implicit assumption in monitoring the strategy is also that there will be clearly defined timeframes with achievable targets to monitor.

The following issues should be addressed in corporate strategies and may well require other supporting documents setting out in more details how the strategies can be achieved:

- Authenticity - What organisational and technical strategies will ensure that the electronic record is reliable and legally admissible?
- Appraisal and retention periods - How will they be developed and applied?
- Migrating records worthy of permanent preservation to new systems - How will they remain accessible and usable for as long as they are needed?
- Selection of media and formats - What standards should be used for various categories of electronic documents across the organisation?
- Metadata - How will essential metadata be defined and how can it be ensured that it will remain linked to the corporate record?
- Training and awareness raising for staff - What ongoing training requirements and supporting guidelines are required to support good records management practice?
- Compliance with the corporate policy - How will compliance with the corporate policy be monitored?

Corporate procedures

Procedures developed by the Records and IT Manager need to define:

- The design of the recordkeeping system.
- The types of electronic records which need to be captured by the system.
- What documents need to be captured as records.
- What naming conventions should be used.
- What metadata needs to be kept with the records.

Training and guidance

"New record keeping skills are required in a fully electronic environment of end-users as creators and users of records. They will have more responsibility for correctly identifying and dealing with electronic records at the point of creation, and these shifts imply significant cultural change in attitudes and behaviour towards record-making and use." ([see note](#))

Most organisations will need to undergo a cultural shift which places more responsibility on the creators of records than has previously been the case. Staff will need to be aware of the following, through guidelines and training:

- At what point does the document they are working on become a formal record and therefore managed as part of the Electronic Records Management of the organisation?
- What metadata should they provide?
- What naming conventions should they use?

[See Exemplars and Further Reading](#)