

## **The ICA Perspective on Electronic Records and Documents**

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### 1. What is ICA?

ICA is the professional organisation for the world archival community, and works for the promotion of the world's archival heritage. It brings together national archive administrations, professional associations of archivists, regional and local archives and archives of other organisations as well as individual archivists. With a global network of more than 1,400 institutional members in 190 countries, it is truly international. It also has over 200 archivists and records managers as individual members. As a non-governmental organisation, it is independent from the political process and its members include public and private archive institutions and individuals. ICA works closely with inter-governmental organisations such as UNESCO and ICCROM. It also has strong links with other non-governmental organisations.

The European branch, EURBICA, brings together members in different categories across the continent. There is also an EU archivists group, all of whom are members of ICA, but which is independent from it. ICA works with a number of international organisations, including the Council of Europe.

### 2. What has ICA done?

One of ICA's strengths is to share and exchange information across national boundaries and to produce practical, professional products. Its former committee on electronic records, which had members from 15 different countries, published a unique and valuable workbook earlier this year, which provides practical guidance for archives professionals. Building on the work of earlier committees, this approaches electronic records at the tactical, "how to" level. In a closely interlinked series of chapters it shows how to influence electronic records management practices from a strategic perspective and how to integrate recordkeeping functions into new or existing systems. It goes on to assess different options of preserving electronic records, and to examine how to provide access to such records in the short and long terms. The workbook is available in hard copy free to all ICA members, and to everyone via the ICA website [ica.org](http://ica.org)

### 3. What is ICA doing now?

At the Vienna Congress in 2004, ICA decided to change its structure and to make its programme more inclusive and target it even more closely with the needs of members. It set up four priority areas, one of which is electronic records and automation, which I chair. It also called for projects, and the call remains open. So far, we have approved four: the establishment of a clearing house on software, led by the Swiss archives, a technology watch, led by the National Archives in London, a forum for exchange of information on archiving websites, also led by TNA, and a project on small scale digitisation and electronic records management led by the archives of the Faroe Islands. We are in addition discussing potentially major projects with the Australian archives on functional requirements for records management software, and

with the Genealogical Society of Utah on a suite of software to manage cataloguing, image capture and resource location across international boundaries.

#### 4. What value can ICA add to projects?

ICA is not a funding body, nor does it have big staff resources, but it does provide:

- an international context to projects, as it represents archives and archivists across the globe, and its decision making bodies determine strategies for the profession worldwide.
- opportunities for peer review and validation from a professional perspective
- a network of professional contacts and potential partners
- expertise in developing and managing projects internationally
- an network for dissemination of products straight to senior managers in the profession
- the possibility of leveraging funds from national and international funding bodies

ICA is actively looking for project opportunities to which it can lend its expertise and name. It seeks projects whose products and outcomes will be of real and practical value to archivists and recordkeepers throughout the world, across different institutions and in different economic and technological climates.

ICA is also very interested in standards. It has observer status with relevant ISO committees, and its members have been heavily engaged in the development of standards in a variety of areas, including archival description and data exchange, and records management. It fully endorses the work done on MoReq, and supports the development and enhancement proposed.

#### 5. What are the challenges facing us?

There are at least three major challenges facing the recordkeeping profession and its administrative and technological partners. The first challenge comes from the records themselves. We are facing a massive increase in the amount of record material generated, which will shortly lead to a very real information tsunami. A recent prediction made by Tom Hawk of IBM in the journal *Technology Review* is that in next few years, the world will generate more information than in the previous thousand. This is largely due to the rapid spread of electronic record systems in both the public and private sectors. A recent report by Capgemini consultants for the European Directorate General for Information Society and Media indicated that 46% of public services were available on-line in the 15 EU countries. The world is now tipping towards the digital in record terms.

The second challenge is one of archival skills. What we must strive for is no less than mastery, intellectual mastery, over the records in all their forms. Only by achieving this can we manage the huge and growing bulk of information. Dealing with electronic records is not merely a matter of a technological fix, it is not simply a schema for metadata. It also requires the fundamental skills that archivists have developed, in appraising and selecting. These need to be deployed to determine what is important and has lasting value from what is unimportant and has only passing value. The ICA Workbook on Electronic Records suggests 4 sets of skills are needed.

First, archival skills, the traditional ability to select, to appraise, to advise on what is important and what needs to be kept. Second, electronic records skills, the ability to understand how the traditional skills can be applied to the new systems, for example, how to define record keeping requirements, what is an electronic record and how can its components be preserved? Third, technical skills, the ability to advise, for example, on software requirements. This may mean training systems staff in understanding record keeping, rather than archivists acquiring systems skills. Fourth, management and people skills, the ability to develop the vision, to communicate, to negotiate and to consult. These are typically not strong in archive organisations, but they are essential, and need to be acquired, if necessary from outside.

The third challenge is the customer. I use the word deliberately to reflect the new reality of relationships between archives organisations and the people who use our services. These people are more conscious of their rights as citizens and more prepared to exercise them. They are more conscious of their role as taxpayers, and more demanding of the public sector. They are more conscious of levels of service, constantly seeking more and better. With remote access, the customer base is also more diverse and dispersed than ever before. Against this changing background, we absolutely must pay close attention to the customer and their demands. This is difficult, because we don't know what customers will want to see, we don't know how they will want to search for it, and we don't know how they will want to access it. We don't know what the future will bring, but we do need to make predictions. We need to forecast what our customers are likely to want, and we need to be flexible in what we can provide, so that we can react quickly if our predictions are incorrect.

6. What should the European and international community be working for in the electronic records and documents field?

Our overall goal must be to work for the creation of authentic and reliable electronic records, to which we can provide access over time. That may mean, as one recent commentator puts it, using technological, organisational and institutional means of ensuring good records and continuing access. It means we need to work for solutions that are practical and can be implemented in a variety of environments. It means going for solutions that are based in what our customers want, rather than in what we as archivists want, or what our technologist partners want or advise. It means seeking solutions that work with the grain, that build upon our core recordkeeping skills, but also exploit the work of related professions, the librarian, the documentalist, and the information manager. Finally, it means working for solutions that involve all the stakeholders, as well as the customers. That means the archives, the records creators and above all the suppliers of systems, or in other words, the varied communities represented at this conference.

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