Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit - Inquiry into the Management and Integrity of Electronic Information in the Commonwealth

Submission by
The Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST)

The Department welcomes the inquiry and the opportunity to make a submission.

Background and Context:

DEST started in earnest in the year 2000 an initiative called DURIF (DEST Universal Records and Information Framework) Endeavour. The primary objective of DURIF is:

"To provide DEST with information management policies, practices and technology systems that are consistent with directions for "e-business" and records management. This will make a major contribution to sustainable management of DEST's knowledge"

The project involves the development of business guidelines, processes and tools the Department needs for improved information management. The aim is to enable users to capture and manage information from a range of internal and external sources, including Word documents, emails, spreadsheets, databases and web-based material. Users will be able to store and retrieve electronic information easily and logically and to search a corporate store for information relevant to their work. DURIF will establish a fully electronic record keeping system that complies with Government policies and regulations.

Current status

We have achieved the following important milestones:

- Developed a business case for the DURIF initiative.
- Streamlined the management of paper based records and files by implementing TRIM Captura as our electronic record management system.
- Developed an Information Management Framework. The Framework outlines the context and strategies to achieve effective information management in DEST. The Information Management Framework report is attached as part of the submission.
- Completed the Business Classification Scheme. This provides an important metadata schema to classify information for the Department.
- Developed a new draft Records Disposal Authority (RDA). The Department is currently liasing with the National Archives of Australia to finalise the RDA.
- Trialled Sharespace technology as a form of collaboration in the Department.
- Scoped and specified our electronic information management requirements. This resulted in the release of a public tender inviting the industry to submit responses for an electronic document management system (EDRMS), a personal portal and a collaborative workspace.
- Selected Alpha West Pty Ltd to assist the Department in the implementation of the IT solutions and products.

We are currently in the process of working with Alpha West to implement the EDRMS for the Department.

Issues/comments:

The issues that we have encountered during the DURIF Endeavour fall primarily into two main areas:

- Whole of government (WoG) issues.
- Internal project issues.

Whole of government issues

WoG issues are important and relevant to coordinate policy development and implementation across the areas of information management, security and privacy. Areas that have presented significant challenges include:

1.   The potential conflict between the cost of implementing an appropriate secure infrastructure to comply with DSD and similar requirements; the ability to satisfy the requirements under the Electronic Transactions Act, the E-Permanence policies and the ability to practically meet agency service delivery objectives should not be underestimated. While we can and have applied risk management principles to determine the need to upgrade IT infrastructure for electronic information management, we would advocate a more holistic WoG approach that caters for security/privacy requirements on one hand and client servicing and cost-efficiency considerations on the other.

2.   Determination of whether or not an electronic form of signature is valid for evidentiary purposes. Although the ETA supports its validity, there is still some concern about committing to this position. We understand that the only truly defendable signature on a contract in a court of law when prosecuting fraud is the original handwritten version. There is a need for guidance to agencies that clearly sets out policies in relation to electronic signatures and situations in which original paper copies need to be maintained.

3.   The need for guidance and support for agencies in developing and implementing information and knowledge management frameworks. We believe much can be gained from sharing lessons learned and good practice among APS agencies. We can see a need for information sharing on this topic through seminars, newsletters and workshops that promulgate strategic guidance, best practice, methodologies, and templates for information and knowledge management in the Commonwealth.

4.   Competing demands on the National Archives of Australia (NAA) which has responsibility for establishing and maintaining relationships with agencies so that it may effectively promulgate the E-Permanence policy settings, procedures and practices (including the DIRKS methodology) which are fundamental to good record keeping practice in the electronic age. The work done by NAA is commendable and should be supported.

Internal project issues

In addition, we have learnt some lessons during the DURIF initiative that may be of value to other agencies. They are:

1.   Develop a strong business case.
2.   If an agency wants to venture into Knowledge Management, approach it from the 'explicit' end; take people from what they know to what they are less comfortable with.
3.   Work hard to gain Executive endorsement- the Secretary's endorsement is critical.

4. Partner with the "tacit champions" – the Knowledge Management people.
5. Link this work to the strategic plans of the Agency and be able to communicate the linkage.
6. There must be a senior executive sponsor.
7. A senior credible, fulltime leader is essential.
8. Position 'records management' strategically by defining its place in 'information management'.
9. Establish a need for change.
10. Use the change management and communication disciplines to drive initiatives.
11. Know the target audiences and design strategies to engage them.
12. Design everything from the user perspective.
13. Apply strong project management techniques.
14. Be patient, persistent, creative and enthusiastic!

And

Communicate, communicate and communicate.

The department is available to elaborate on these and other related issues with the Committee.

(signed)
Dr Peter Shergold
Secretary
17 January 2003

Enquiries on this submission should be directed to:
Mr Tony Kwan, Chief Information Officer DEST 02 6240 5983.

Attachments:
DETYA Information Management Improvement Report August 2001
DETYA Information Management Framework August 2001