

Making the Case for Records Management Training

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Training Programmes are all too often ignored in the world of records and archives. Is it because record keeping is perceived as an essentially common sense, administrative activity that can be learnt 'on the job'? Or is it that, at the more senior level, archival endeavour is seen as a professional activity and thus only appropriate for academic study? Or is it simply because when limited training budgets are being fought over, Records Management suffers in competition with other, higher profile activities?

In this article by looking at two examples, one from the UK and the other from Ethiopia, we demonstrate how the case can be made for records management training and that it directly makes a significant contribution to the ultimate effectiveness of the organisation

Metropolitan Police Service

The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) used the introduction of the UK Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) as a chance to review how it manages the vast amount of information it holds and as a catalyst for the development of specialised information management training.

Given the nature of their work and the issues they deal with, UK police services expected to be the focus of much attention under the FOIA – and as the largest police force in Britain (approximately 47,000 officers and support staff, with 1,300 buildings serving a population of 7.5 million people) the MPS expected substantial national and international demand for the information it holds.

A key part of the MPS response was to integrate FOIA and information

management expertise into the normal business processes of each MPS unit, with the creation of a new Information Manager (IM) role. The aim was to provide a sustainable capability for improvement in all aspects of information management, including the handling of statutory requests under the FOIA.

In preparation, over 75 Information Managers covering all business units in the MPS - police stations and specialist units - received training in effective information management practice. The MPS worked with In-Form Consult, in collaboration with Eunoia, to deliver a programme of workshops and discussion groups. These were scheduled over a six-month period covering records management administrative functions, file plan development, compliance topics and sessions on developing personal and wider professional skills.

The programme also assisted the MPS development of a web-based IM learning centre. This contained related articles, reports and an area for discussion groups.

The table below outlines some of the core modules of the MPS IM training programme.

Core Programme Modules
Review of Current Information Management/Records Management Practices and Standards
Skills Audit
MPS RM 1- Record Management Basics
MPS RM 2 - FOI Programme Guidelines
Skills Gap Development
MPS RM 3 - Information Management
Information Management Learning Resource

Programme Module Outlines

1. Principles and Concepts – MP004

Title:	Managing MPS Information: Principles and Concepts
Learning Objectives:	To introduce participants to the fundamental principles of information and records management, as a foundation for their work as IMs
Duration:	One day
Illustrative Topics:	What is a record? General terminology and definitions Information as an organisational resource
Format:	Group work and facilitated discussion

2. MP007 IM Methodologies

Title:	Managing MPS Information: IM Methodologies
Learning Objectives:	To introduce participants to the key elements of a records and information management system and to relate these to the work of the MPS
Duration:	One day
Illustrative Topics:	The lifecycle and continuum approaches to managing information Information capture, storage, retrieval and disposal Legal and organisational requirements
Format:	Group work and facilitated discussion

After six months experience of working with FOI, these trained IMs are playing a key role in ensuring MPS compliance, and

are providing long-term benefits to the organisation by helping to deliver overall improvements in information management.

Ethiopia Courts Services

Sometimes it is possible to demonstrate that the benefits accruing from the training will outweigh the cost involved: That efficiency gains as a result of the training will result in quicker, cheaper or better service delivery. This was argued successfully to gain funding for a Court Record Management Capacity Building programme in Ethiopia.

Ethiopia is one of the largest countries in Africa and one of the poorest in the world. It's Judiciary, like every other agency of the state, faces many challenges and suffers from a severe lack of resources. Many of its 750 courts lack basic material, including furniture and accommodation. Court personnel are largely untrained and poorly paid.

Work on Court Records was supported because a Stakeholder's Seminar argued successfully that a significant number of people were being held on remand unnecessarily because their records could not be found to allow their cases to be heard. This not only represented an abuse of their human rights but also wasted court time and unnecessarily consumed limited resources. As part of a process to develop simple, sustainable records systems for each court, approx 120 trainers were empowered to teach their colleagues how to implement the new system.

The Ethiopia example illustrates two other important lessons: Firstly, that it is often best to build Records Management training programmes incrementally, starting small and expanding on successes to go on to the next stage. Piloting new approaches helps to build confidence in managers and funders, allows experimentation and creates momentum for change and development. Secondly, that effective evaluation of impact can act as a powerful incentive for further investment. In this regard, Records

Management training has a major advantage over other administrative

Perhaps this brief look at two very different organisations and records

management compliance drivers offers a final lesson. Comparison with similar organisations elsewhere not only allows

Fig 1 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS: Ethiopia Court Records Project Pilot Implementation. Tigray Regional Supreme Court

Indicator	Baseline Result Jan 2002	Subsequent Result Mar 2002	% Improvement
File retrieval time (randomly select five files from the register and time how long it takes to retrieve each. (Calculate the average time)	10 Minutes	1 Minute 15 Seconds	88%
Misfiled cases (review five shelves and count the number of files in the wrong location. List the total of misfiled cases as the result).	15	0	100%
Folio numbering (review 10 files to determine if pages numbers have been assigned accurately to each document. Rate the result as All , Some or None).	None	All	100%
Missing documents (review 10 files and determine if any documents are missing, either because of missing folio number or because the judges' orders indicate which documents should be there. Rate the result as Many , Some or Few).	Some	None	100%
Time to retrieve a file by name (randomly select five plaintiffs or defendants and request their files. Calculate the average retrieval time).	18 Minutes	1 Minute 20 Seconds	93%
Accuracy of file location register (select five files in the location register and check if they are in the stated location. Rate the correct result out of five).	0	5	100%

activities in that its results are visible and measurable. Of all the documents produced in the Ethiopia example, none had so much impact as the measurement of performance indicators in Fig 1.

Use of performance indicators which are easy to understand and apply and a pre-change baseline measure to compare against provide dramatic arguments to support further work.

us to learn from others, but can also be a strong argument for investment in training. How often have we heard

managers asking how organisation X or country Y is handling something? And when the answer is that the subject of the comparison is giving greater priority to records management training, this too can be a compelling incentive to invest more.

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