

Editorial

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It is now 13 years since ISO 15489 International Standard on Records Management was issued by both the International Organization for Standardization and Standards Australia. To what extent has the existence of records management standards, such as ISO 15489, been effective in promoting best practice recordkeeping?

The failure to adhere to such standards has emerged as an issue in the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. This is the case even though, as Viviane Hessami points out in the opening article of this issue, attention has been given to these standards when developing recordkeeping systems that aim to support the creation of full and accurate records. As she observes, the main factor here is the lack of adequate resources in the residential care sector. How can staff who are ‘overworked, stressed and under constant pressure’ (p. 161) be expected to produce full and accurate records, particularly in an environment with high staff turnover and the casualisation of labour? In workplaces where crises and more urgent matters are the daily norm, how is it possible to create a culture of assiduous recordkeeping? Part of the answer, no doubt, is what Hessami advocates, that staff in this sector be given adequate training and resources to fulfill the mandates of best practice records standards, and that professional records management organisations redouble their efforts in providing this training, advocacy and sector leadership.

Gillian Oliver and Fiorella Foscarini’s article in this issue, ‘The value of international standards for records management: perspectives from education and training’, poses the more fundamental question as to what kind of impact these standards have had in training and education. In view of the considerable resources that have been consumed in developing these standards, have they been useful in influencing practice through the conduits of education and training? While the results of the survey data and its assessment indicate that recordkeeping standards are being used in undergraduate and postgraduate education, in addition to vocational training, a number of significant obstacles have been identified that prevent their more widespread implementation and usage. Among these barriers are the prohibitive cost of accessing copies of the standards themselves, the lack of practical guidance and case studies in how to implement the standards, and the inability to cover standards in sufficient depth within the parameters of a standard course unit. Interestingly, among the comments received in the survey was the observation that ISO 15489 ‘is losing its credibility in an electronic world’ (p. 190).

A third article in this issue undertakes a conceptual analysis of what ISO 15489 has to say about authenticity. Julia Kastenhofer does this by testing the traits the standard posits for an ideal record on a variety of forgeries that have turned up in archives over the years. As she argues, using the definition of authenticity as proposed in the standard, ‘the difference between an authentic and reliable record and a forgery is not at all obvious’ (p. 167). Instead of trying to fix authenticity, Kastenhofer suggests that ‘more thought should be spared on users’ and archivists’ attitudes towards forgeries and how inauthentic records should be handled in an archive’ (p. 167).

Among the reviews in this issue, Kylie Moloney praises *From Dust to Digital: Ten Years of the Endangered Archives Programme* for providing an insight into the range of collections that have been supported under the programme that will inspire readers to delve further. Moloney's one criticism 'is the lack of any Australasian or Pacific content in the book' (p. 198), and observes that more Australasian and Pacific archives should be preserved and made accessible under the programme. The full book, consisting of over 650 pages, 230 colour illustrations and 28 audio files, can be accessed for free online, downloaded as free chapter PDFs for offline reading, or purchased.