ISO 15489: A Practical Guide

Certification in ISO 15489, the International Standard for Records Management, is now available from the National Standards Authority of Ireland. This article aims to assist the Irish Public Sector to assess the benefits, both in terms of internal administration and public relations, that preparing for ISO 15489 will bring.

What are the benefits of ISO 15489 Certification?

ISO 15489 is for any organisations that need to ensure their records (both paper and electronic) are properly maintained, easily accessible and correctly documented from their creation right through to ultimate disposal, be that archiving, imaging or destruction. The standard also ensures that this disposal is carried out in a transparent manner according to pre-determined criteria. ISO 15489 is then particularly important for organisations that need to reassure customers and clients that they maintain accurate, detailed records according to a stated policy, for instance the Health, Financial Services and Public Sectors. Of course good Records Management procedures as laid down in the standard bring their own rewards for all businesses; recent statistics indicate that managers spend an average of 4 weeks a year searching for or waiting on misfiled, mislabelled, untracked, or 'lost' papers; Up to 70% more records than needed are retained by most offices; Between 1% and 5% of all records are misfiled and; Office workers in general can waste up to two hours a day looking for misplaced paperwork, a total of 500 hours (62.5 days) per year.

What form does the standard take?

The standard is divided into two parts, ISO 15489.1-2002, Records Management - Part 1: General provides a high level framework for recordkeeping and specifically addresses the benefits of records management, regulatory considerations affecting its operation and the importance of assigning of responsibilities for recordkeeping. ISO 15489.2-2002, Records Management - Part 2: Guidelines provides practical and more detailed guidance about how to implement the framework outlined in Part 1. Part 2 also provides practical guidance about the development of records processes and controls. It then discusses the use of these tools to capture, register, classify, store, provide access to and otherwise manage records. Part 2 also provides specific guidance about the establishment of monitoring, auditing and training programs to promote and effectively implement records management within an organisation.

What systems need to be in place to achieve certification?

There are broadly eight steps in implementing a Records Management programme that meets the ISO standard.

1. Initial Overview

The first step in implementing an ISO 15489 records management programme is examining the administrative requirements of your organisation. This should cover all current internal administrative procedures, as well as external aspects such as economic and legal imperatives.

2. Analysis of Internal Administrative Structures

The next step is to carry out an in-depth analysis of your organisation's structures, functions, processes and activities. This will allow a better understanding of your records and the way that they are created and used by staff.

3. Identifying Records Requirements

The background information gained in the previous steps provides a foundation for identifying what influencing factors affect the creation and maintenance of records in your organisation. Requirements can vary depending on the creating office/department and some may be determined by legislation.

4. Assessing Existing Systems

Most organisations have some, albeit informal, systems in place for tracking and maintaining records. An assessment of existing systems needs to consider older processes the company uses and how to blend them with the new systems being developed.

5. Identification of Records Strategies

Once all the requirements have been identified, a company-wide strategy needs to be formulated incorporating policies, standards and practices to cater for them all.

6. Design of Records Management System

Only once the steps above have been implemented it is possible to start in on designing a Records Management System that incorporates best practice and most importantly mirrors the requirements of your organisation in order to minimise interference with core activities during the period of its implementation.

7. Implementation of Records Management System

The system should be implemented in easy to manage stages, each with an appropriate consultation period to ensure that the system reflects the needs of its users as well as the requirements of the standard. Since the new Records Management System will impact directly on most staff it is essential that a comprehensive training programme be implemented at this stage.

8. Review

Ensure all systems are working as designed, all records are accounted for and that staff have an adequate understanding of the requirement for a Records Management System, as well as how the nuts and bolts of the system operate on a day-to-day basis.

Useful Links

Archives Ireland www.archives.ie Links, resources and information on all aspects of Archives and Records Management in Ireland, including links to consultants and other service providers.

About Martin Bradley

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