Society of Archivists Data Standards Group

A Guide to Archival and Related Standards
Standards applicable to archives; for the digital delivery of repository guides, finding-aids, and images of material from collections.

Title
ISO 15489:2001 Information and documentation – Records management

Name of Standards Developing Organisation
International Organization for Standardization

Current version
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Replaces

Abstract
ISO 15489:2001 Information and documentation – Records management provides high-level best practice and procedures to ensure that all records are managed appropriately and that the information they contain is retrievable.

Description
ISO 15489:2001 is a standard applicable to records created in public and private organisations, and to paper and digital records. The standard comprises two parts. ISO 15489-1:2001 Part 1: General, is a best practice framework for managing records to ensure that adequate records are created and captured in to a records management system, and managed effectively. It provides a general overview of the characteristics of a good records management system and is aimed at all members of an organisation. ISO 15489-2:2001, Part 2: Guidelines is aimed specifically at records management professionals within an organisation and builds on the above framework, providing more detailed recommendations for managing records. It includes guidance on the design and implementation of a records management system (based on the DIRKS 8 step methodology) and identifies 8 processes which cover all aspects of the management of records from the point at which they are created and captured in to the records management system, to the point at they are no longer required for the activity for which they were created. These are:

- capture
- registration
The standard does not include archives management.

As well as identifying the processes of a good records management system, it also identifies the characteristics required of both the records management system and the record in order for the record to be authoritative and reliable.

**Record characteristics**

To be authoritative, records must prove to be:

- **Authentic** —
  - what the record purports to be
  - to have been created or sent by the purported person
  - to have been created or sent at the purported time
  - to be reliable — trusted contents which accurately reflect the business transaction documented
  - to have integrity — complete and unaltered
  - to be useable — can be located, retrieved, presented and interpreted

**Records system characteristics**

- reliability of complete, organised, accessible and protected records
- integrity is protected by authority control systems
- compliant with appropriate business requirements
- comprehensive range of appropriate business activities reflected
- systematic creation, curation and management of records

*ISO 15489:2001* emphasises the importance of policies and procedures for records management and recommends having the following documentation.

- classification system – to classify the records within a type framework
- controlled vocabulary – for controlled subject access
- dispositions — record retention schedules, to provide details of what records should be created and how long they should be retained
- classification scheme – for access rights and restrictions

The standard recognises that although records management best practice principles should be implemented in every organisation, the way in which they are carried out will vary. For example, the standard details the types of information which should be captured about the record, but does not prescribe metadata, in the same way that it emphasises the need for a classification scheme and records retention schedule but does not provide one. Each organisation needs to establish what will suit their organisation while still adhering to best practice principles.
The standard discusses issues which will impact upon decisions made when setting up and reviewing records management systems, such as storage and media, and also has a section of training which highlights the need for all staff in an organisation to be aware of their responsibilities.

The standard is complemented by three publications by The British Standards Institute entitled *Effective records management*. They provide practical advice on using the standard for management, implementation, and performance management.

A related standard is *ISO 23081-1:2006 Information and documentation — Records management processes - Metadata for records - Part 1: Principles*. This standard does not define a metadata set for records management. Rather it provides a framework for the creation, management and use of metadata for managing records within the framework of *ISO 15489*. It reviews the use of metadata to support business processes and the relationship with other existing metadata sets for *ISO 15489* implementation. *ISO 23081-2:2009* establishes a framework for defining metadata elements consistent with the principles and implementation considerations outlined in *ISO 23081-1:2006*.

**References**

Digital Curation Centre Standards Watch Paper *ISO 15489: Information and Documentation — Records Management*  
<http://www.dcc.ac.uk/resource/standards-watch/iso-15489/>

Assessing the Impact of ISO 15489 Project  
<http://www.northumbria.ac.uk/sd/academic/ceis/re/isrc/themes/rmarea/iso/>

**Next month**

Next month we will look at *ISO 23081 Information and documentation — Records management processes - Metadata for records* which covers the principles that underpin and govern records management metadata.

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