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AUTHENTICITY OF ELECTRONIC RECORDS:
A REPORT PREPARED FOR UNESCO AND THE
INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON ARCHIVES

AUTHOR:
LAURA MILLAR, REPRESENTING THE
INTERNATIONAL RECORDS MANAGEMENT TRUST

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Authenticity of Electronic Records: A Report Prepared for UNESCO and the International Council on Archives (ICA Study 13-2)

This report, prepared for UNESCO and the International Council on Archives (ICA), extends the analysis and recommendations of the 2002 ICA report to UNESCO on the authenticity of electronic records, especially with regard to developing countries. To enable wider access to its findings, ICA has decided to publish this report as an ICA Study.

Study prepared by:

Ms Laura MILLAR, representing the International Records Management Trust, 21 John Street, London WC1N 2EB - United Kingdom.

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AUTHENTICITY OF ELECTRONIC RECORDS: A REPORT PREPARED FOR UNESCO AND THE INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON ARCHIVES (ICA STUDY 13-2)

*Report prepared for the International Council on Archives and UNESCO
by Dr. Laura Millar, representing the International Records Management Trust*

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1. Introduction

This report has been requested by the International Council on Archives (ICA), to address the global status of the authenticity of electronic records, with particular attention to developing countries. For the purposes of this report, the author accepts the ICA's definition of an authentic record, as one that can be proven

- a. to be what it purports to be,
- b. to have been created or sent by the person purported to have created or sent it, and
- c. to have been created or sent at the time purported.¹

As will be shown below, there is widespread agreement that the authenticity of electronic records is at great risk world wide, and especially in developing countries, for a number of reasons. These reasons include the low profile of and limited support for records and archives work; the absence or weakness of legislative and policy frameworks for electronic records management; the absence of, and difficulty in applying, technical and operational standards for the creation, management, and preservation of electronic records; the lack of adequate training and education in information technologies (IT) and electronic records management; and, in particular, the need for a strategic approach to capacity building world wide, in order to make best use of limited resources.

The central question addressed by this report is: what measures are necessary for records and archives professionals, especially in developing countries, to ensure the authenticity of electronic records and so ensure the preservation of, and continued access to, society's documentary memory? To address this question, the author of this report offers a series of recommendations for strategic priorities and actions by UNESCO, the archives/records profession, and the ICA.

In this document, the author builds on the findings of four consultative exercises conducted with the international records and archives community in 2002 and 2003. These are: a report to UNESCO by the ICA's Committee on Legal Matters, completed in November 2002; the findings of the World Bank/International Records Management Trust (IRMT) Evidence-Based Governance project, September 2002 to April 2003; the ICA's strategic planning survey, July-August 2003; and the World Bank/IRMT Electronic Discussion on E-Records Readiness, November-December 2003. Each of these activities and the central conclusions reached in each case are outlined below.

¹ See International Council on Archives (ICA), Committee on Archival Legal Matters, *Authenticity of Electronic Records: A Report Prepared for UNESCO (ICA Study 13-1)* (November 2002), pp. 2-3. The report is accessible electronically at www.ica.org.

2. UNESCO Report on Electronic Records, November 2002

In November 2002, the ICA Committee on Archival Legal Matters published a report addressing the authenticity of electronic records. In this report, the committee concluded that the preservation of authentic electronic records should be of the highest priority for the archives/records profession. The committee argued that archivists must preserve electronic records, or the essential information contained in them, so that they serve as authentic evidence of business processes and remain accessible and secure over time. As the committee noted, archival institutions have a fundamental responsibility to provide guidance on the creation and management of electronic records and then to capture and preserve those records and make them publicly accessible, as “authentic records for now and the centuries to come.”²

In its report, the ICA committee offered six recommendations to protect archives as evidence and to preserve an “authentic digital heritage”: (1) the delivery of education, training, and awareness raising programmes on electronic records management; (2) additional study into the status of electronic records; (3) the consistent application of terminology for archival functions; (4) the development of concrete guidelines on preservation; (5) the organisation of a world forum on the preservation of digital cultural heritage; and (6) the improvement of resources and coordination for the preservation of digital cultural heritage.³ The author of the present report supports these recommendations and builds on them as appropriate in this document.

3. The Evidence-Based Governance Project, September 2002 – April 2003

In September 2002, a three-week working session was held in Johannesburg, South Africa, bringing together archival educators and national archivists from 38 English-speaking countries, to plan strategies to meet the challenges of the changing information environment. This meeting was part of a five-year project, initiated by the World Bank in partnership with the International Records Management Trust, to address *Evidence-Based Governance in the Electronic Age*.⁴ The Johannesburg discussions focused on the significance of changing requirements for record keeping in the electronic age, and particularly on the issues of good governance, electronic government, transparency and accountability, and access to information and human rights. A total of 54 participants attended the sessions, from 38 Commonwealth countries.

At the end of the meeting, the delegates produced a statement of resolutions for action addressing the challenge of electronic records management. In this statement, the participants confirmed their professional responsibility “to safeguard recorded information and indigenous knowledge in any medium” and their belief that “reliable and authentic records are the essential evidence of government activities and obligations, and the rights and entitlements of citizens.” They then affirmed that (1) national archivists need to reposition themselves to become more relevant to the needs of good governance and the needs of citizens in a knowledge-based society; (2) that archivists and records managers need to adopt an interdisciplinary approach to electronic records management; and (3) that the role of the archivist and records manager is constantly changing. To address these critical issues, the participants issued a series of resolutions, calling for greater involvement by record keepers in information technology initiatives; the strengthening of records-related legislation; increased funding for records work; collaborative approaches to records and information technology projects; improved

² Ibid., p. 9.

³ Ibid., pp. 9-10.

⁴ The *Evidence-Based Governance* project aims to coordinate a global network of institutions to define strategies for improving records systems so that they provide complete and trustworthy information, particularly in electronic environments. This work includes building awareness among records professionals, government officials, and donors and lenders; creating capacity building tools mapped to the International Standard on Records Management (ISO 15489), to measure the strength of records systems against public sector requirements; and preparing training materials to meet global needs. Ultimately, the aim is to “mainstream” records management on the global development agenda. For more on the project, go to <http://www.irmt.org/evidence/index.html>. The reports, recommendations, and findings of the Johannesburg meetings, the electronic discussions, and the video conferences, as well as related documents and additional information, can be seen at the International Records Management Trust’s (IRMT) website at <http://www.irmt.org/evidence/wbforum.html>.

education and training in records and information technology; and the continued development and implementation of standards for electronic records management.⁵

Following the face-to-face meetings, four electronic discussions were held between January and March 2003, involving a total of 773 participants from the 38 participating countries, including the 54 records professionals as facilitators and key contributors. The purpose of the discussions was to explore the challenges and opportunities of electronic information management, to share experiences, and to consider ideas for future action. The ultimate goal was to create a dialogue between public sector managers responsible for the administration and reform of government and professional record keepers responsible for managing and protecting official records.

The electronic discussions were followed by a series of nine regional video conferences, where the representatives of the participating countries discussed the importance of records as the basis for accountability and the protection of citizens' rights. They also examined the significance of records for electronic government and considered the way forward in strengthening records systems. The video conferences brought together senior officials responsible for a range of functions, including public sector management, financial management, human resource management, records management, the implementation of anti-corruption programmes, and the development of information technologies. A total of 292 people participated in the nine video conferences.⁶

In each of these discussions, the same key themes emerged repeatedly:

- the low profile of and limited support for records professionals as key players in information and records management, particularly in an electronic age
- the absence of legislation and policies for the management of information technologies and electronic records
- the lack of standards and systems for the management and preservation of information technology products and electronic records
- the lack of adequate training of, and human resource development for, records personnel
- the need for increased funding – and the need for a more appropriate application of funds – for records and archives work, not just for technology-oriented approaches to records creation and management.⁷

4. ICA Strategic Planning Survey, July-August 2003

In July-August 2003, the ICA conducted a survey of member institutions and individuals actively involved in the ICA's current activities. The survey asked respondents to identify their three highest priorities for ICA's programmes from 2004 to 2006. The highest priority identified by respondents, by a significant margin, was the need to reposition archives to manage electronic records and deal effectively with archival automation. As noted in the report, "respondents called for a strong focus on electronic records management and preservation, with at least five returns stating *only* electronic records as a priority."⁸ The other top priorities for the ICA were

- developing and supporting the profession
- supporting preservation and protection of archives

⁵ See the IRMT project report, *Evidence-Based Governance in the Electronic Age, Building Awareness and Capacity: January to September 2002* (October 2002), esp. pp. 54-56. The report is available electronically at <http://www.irmt.org/>.

⁶ Note that the 54 records and archives professionals participated in most of the electronic discussions and at least one of each of the video conferences and so represent a portion of the registrants in all cases.

⁷ For more information on the electronic discussions and video conferences, and a complete description of the issues identified, see *Evidence-Based Governance in the Electronic Age, Global Forum on Building Awareness and Capacity: October 2002 to April 2003* (June 2003). The document is available electronically at <http://www.irmt.org/>.

⁸ Survey data supplied to the author by the ICA, 9 December 2003.

- improving ICA's structure, scope, and methods
- developing archival capacity and fostering cooperation
- networking between archivists
- standards and best practices
- advocacy on archives issues.

From this survey and other consultative exercises, the ICA has concluded that its top strategic priorities for the next four years include

- improving the role of the ICA as an advocate of records and archives management internationally
- helping to position archives to exercise leadership in the management of records and archives for good governance and transparency, especially in the face of changing technologies and increased automation
- helping prepare archives to preserve, protect, and make available society's archival and cultural heritage, regardless of medium
- supporting education, training, professional development, and networking for archivists, to help them fulfill their responsibilities as key records professionals.

5. Electronic Discussion on E-Records Readiness, November-December 2003

In November-December 2003, the International Records Management Trust and the World Bank hosted a world-wide electronic discussion, funded by the Commonwealth Secretariat, focusing on "e-records readiness": the capacity to create, manage, share, and use electronic records to support good governance. The three-week discussion, which attracted 313 registrants from over 70 countries, examined "local issues and local solutions" to the challenges of creating, managing, sharing, and using electronic records to support good governance.⁹

At the end of the discussion, the participants had agreed on five key objectives that records and archives professionals must address in order to ensure the management of electronic records and the protection of essential evidence. These objectives are

1. to encourage records-oriented approaches, not just IT-oriented strategies, to records and information management issues, including the implementation of standards, practices, and guidelines for the management of IT products and electronic records
2. to strengthen legislation, organisational frameworks, and policies to create, manage, protect, and preserve electronic records and the products of information technologies
3. to accommodate to the complex and changing technical realities of electronic records to ensure their management and preservation
4. to develop and maintain training and education initiatives (at both professional and general levels) to ensure success in the management of electronic records
5. to develop strategic initiatives, partnerships, and collaborative approaches to promote "e-records readiness" and raise awareness of and support for records and information management.

⁹ Information on the electronic discussion, including the summary of issues raised and the summary of objectives and strategies identified, can be found at <http://www.irmt.org/evidence/wbediscussion.html>.

6. The Challenges to Authenticity

As can be seen, a number of international initiatives have been undertaken in 2002 and 2003 to gather information about the state of records and archives management, and particularly about the state of electronic records care. These initiatives have also led to the identification of key actions necessary to improve the quality of electronic records management and, ultimately, to ensure the authenticity of electronic records as evidence of the actions and transactions of governments, businesses, and organisations world wide.

As noted throughout these consultative exercises, it is the firm belief of record keepers around the world, and of the author of this report, that archivists and records managers are the key professionals responsible for protecting society's documentary memory. As the participants of the September 2002 Johannesburg meetings resolved,

As national archivists and records managers with statutory responsibility for the management of official records, we have a mandate to safeguard recorded information and indigenous knowledge in any medium. We affirm that reliable and authentic records are the essential evidence of government activities and obligations, and the rights and entitlements of citizens. Good record keeping underpins transparency and accountability. Transparency and accountability are in turn directly related to improvements in the quality of life.¹⁰

It is abundantly clear from the consultations with the international records and archives community, however, that records professionals believe the authenticity of electronic records as evidence, and as part of the documentary memory of society, is at great risk. There are challenges around the world to the protection of electronic records but they are particularly acute in developing countries. These challenges include

1. the low profile of records and record keeping and the consequent lack of involvement of records professionals, and excessive focus on IT-oriented approaches, to the creation, management, and preservation of electronic records and information
2. the weakness of existing legislative, organisational, and policy frameworks for the management of electronic records
3. the absence of, or inability to apply, technical and operational standards for the management of electronic records
4. the absence of sustained educational and training initiatives that adequately address the management of electronic records
5. the need for a strategic approach to capacity building in records and archives management world wide, particularly in developing countries, in order to make best use of limited resources.

As one ICA survey respondent noted, the issues reach across the globe but are particularly severe in the developing world, where the disparity in resources and capacity is most acute. As this respondent argued, "a special ICA effort with regard to the needs of developing countries is justified and necessary. This is probably the most important political challenge the ICA is facing, and we need to elaborate a determined and coherent strategy."¹¹ Below is a discussion of the five challenges identified above, with particular emphasis on the consequences for developing countries.

¹⁰ *Evidence-Based Governance in the Electronic Age, Building Awareness and Capacity: January to September 2002*, p. 54.

¹¹ Unless otherwise noted, quotations are drawn from the reports and findings of the four different consultative exercises discussed earlier in this report.

6.1 The Lack of Recognition of Records and Archives as Evidence

It is widely acknowledged among the record keeping community that there is inadequate support in both the public and private sectors for quality records and archives management, not just in developing countries but world wide. There is a general lack of recognition of the importance of records as evidence, and senior officials often tend not to recognise the need for or value of effective records programmes.

In many parts of the world, and particularly in developing countries, governments perceive of archives as relics of the past: ephemeral materials kept for their historical value, as keepsakes or memorials but not as evidence of the rights and obligations of governments or citizens. As a consequence, there is often limited financial and organisational support for records programmes, particularly for the care of current records and electronic records. National archives in many developing countries are marginalised, with insufficient resources, deficient physical facilities, and inadequate infrastructures.

As public sector reform initiatives have emerged in the developing world, the dichotomy between the traditional view of archives as history and the modern view of archives as evidence has grown wider. As one participant in the 2002 Global Forum noted, “public sector reform is almost a global phenomenon. The sad reality, however, is that reforms cannot succeed without proper, reliable, and readily available records, and this fact is not recognised, at least in many developing countries.” Commenting on inadequate records systems in the judiciary, another contributor noted that “there is no point in having a system that is incapable of giving justice, unable to produce the real evidence, [and which practices] unsafe record keeping and causes dissatisfaction to the parties involved.”

The other challenge to the traditional view of records and archives is the growing use of information technologies. Governments everywhere are seeking to computerise their core functions and to use information technologies to streamline their operations. But rarely are they consulting with record keepers about how to ensure that the process of automation protects the essential evidence – the records – underlying the actions and transactions being documented. As one Global Forum participant noted, national archives need to be at the forefront, moving from archives to records and from records to systems, from non-active to proactive, and from the back room to the front line. They need to “get out of the basement and into the boardroom,” as many people suggested. As one participant noted, technology alone will not solve information issues. Governments need to take a common sense approach to records, information, and knowledge management, as part of transparency and accountability in public sector administration. They need realistic solutions to realistic problems, not short-term actions that cannot be sustained over time.

The conversion of record keeping or administrative activities to an electronic environment will not work if the underlying processes are not structured in an efficient and effective fashion. Further, it is not logical to replace traditional systems, based on indigenous knowledge and familiar to the population, with new technologies without ensuring the public is able to make the transition. To do so is simply to increase the already growing “digital divide” between those sectors of society able to access information technologies and those without the resources or infrastructure to do so. Yet governments around the world are “jumping on the IT bandwagon,” often without incorporating good record keeping strategies or consulting with the key record keeping professionals – the records managers and archivists – about best approaches to the transition from a paper to electronic information environment.

It was widely acknowledged by participants in the various forums described in this report that until governments recognise the importance of managing records effectively – not just implementing IT-oriented information systems – the critical task of protecting records as evidence will not be fulfilled. Records and archives professionals are and ought to be major players in the development of information technology solutions to the creation, management, and preservation of recorded information. Until they are, evidence of the rights and obligations of governments and citizens will continue to be at risk.

It was also acknowledged that record keeping was only part of the problem, and solution, to the preservation of society’s documentary memory. Archivists are not alone in their responsibility for

protecting the evidence of their governments, but they play a key role that has long gone unrecognised and unsupported.

The conclusions and recommendations at the end of this report offer some suggestions for enhancing the perception of records and records professionals, particularly in developing countries, in order to secure the authenticity of electronic records as evidence.

6.2 The Weakness of Legislative and Organisational Infrastructures

Closely related to the problem of the low profile of records and archives is the chronic weakness of records-related legislation, organisational frameworks, and policies. As one electronic discussion participant noted, a stringent legal and regulatory framework is critical to the effective management of both paper and electronic records, both of which will need to be maintained in governments around the world for years to come. But participants in the various discussion forums and surveys have argued that relevant, realistic, and enforceable legislation is not in place in many parts of the world. As the authors of the November 2002 ICA report noted, there is a “patchwork of national laws” in place but “they do not provide a coherent records keeping regime.”¹²

In many developing countries, archives legislation regulates the management of “archival” records – identified as non-current and historical. Often the legislation does not allow the national archives to participate in the care of current records or in the development of record keeping systems. But in the electronic age, there is limited chance of protecting any records if the archivist waits for a requisite 25 or 30 years or more before participating in their care. Further, the archivist may even not be involved with the care of current paper-based records or the development of records management systems. If paper-based systems are collapsing, there is little chance the government can develop effective and reliable electronic information systems.

Strong, effective legislation is needed to ensure that records are well managed from the time of creation through their use in the organisation to their ultimate retention as evidence of actions and decisions. As stated by one participant in the November-December 2003 electronic discussion, “the enforcement of laws is essential if you are to have any readiness at all regarding e-records.” Modern laws dealing with records and information in all media, coupled with effective guidelines and formal enforcement procedures, are critical to ensure quality record keeping standards are met and everything possible is done to protect the public record.

These laws include not only records or archives acts but also records-related legislation such as laws on access to information, privacy, copyright, evidence, financial administration, official secrets, statistics, electronic documents, “cyber-communications,” and so on. The suite of laws affecting and affected by record keeping can be vast. Further, it was recognised by those involved in the various forums that there are different kinds of accountability, not just narrow legal accountability. Government agencies need to be accountable to parliaments and to their administrative and political superiors, to auditors and the judiciary, and to citizens and the public at large.

The development of access legislation in particular has highlighted weaknesses in records legislation in many developing countries. Strong access legislation is seen as a great asset to government. As one participant argued, “if information is deemed public then one must provide the information to whoever requests it.” Yet the lack of coordination between access legislation and records operations weakens the record keeping environment. As one Global Forum participant noted,

without an access policy, the construction of digital archives and the networking of archives are meaningless We need an access policy in power to ask government to give civil rights back to people for transparency and democracy, for freedom of information. We need the policy to measure our accountability for society.

¹² ICA, *Authenticity of Electronic Records: ICA Study 13-1*, p. 6.

As another e-discussion participant noted, effective and enforceable legislation is critical to accountable record keeping: “to create a false public record is worse than creating none. This danger is of course highlighted when the creating of a false e-record is so much easier.” Fraud and corruption in many parts of the world are realities that can best be tackled with the help of strong, enforceable laws that required honest, accountable, transparent, and effective record keeping.

It was recognised as well that simply passing legislation is not sufficient to ensure effective records care, especially when technology is involved. As is noted below, the implementation of standards of practice must go hand in hand with the development and enforcement of legislation in order to achieve success in records care.

The conclusions and recommendations at the end of this report offer some suggestions for strengthening the legislative, organisational, and policy framework for record keeping, particularly in developing countries, in order to secure the authenticity of electronic records as evidence.

6.3 The Absence of Technical and Operational Standards and Guidelines

Legislative infrastructures are not meaningful if professionals do not have clear direction on what measures to take to implement high-quality record keeping programmes. The speed with which information technologies and electronic records have been adopted around the world, and particularly in developing countries, has left little opportunity to develop and institute internationally or nationally accepted standards of practice.

In the various surveys and discussions described in this report, the development, implementation, and maintenance of technical and operational standards and guidelines were seen as essential priorities for the success of electronic records management. These standards and guidelines need to address records and information in a holistic, outcome-oriented fashion, not simply as technical requirements for the installation of computer equipment. Further, standards must be linked at an institutional level to legislation and policies, so that they can be applied and enforced effectively. Guidelines must be clearly directed to the specific needs of the institution, country, or region, so that they are usable and realistic.

Standards are needed for a range of records-related tasks. Examples include selecting an information technology infrastructure; ensuring the security of records; validating data and records; controlling the integrity of records; copying, migrating, and emulating records; authenticating electronic signatures; and systematising work processes and the resulting products, such as electronic mail communications, databases, and financial records.

It was also noted that the developers of hardware and software should be encouraged to recognise more fully the need for record keeping standards. If the creators of technology appreciated more fully the consequences of inadequate technology, perhaps they would seek improvements to their products that enhanced record keeping.

As noted in the November 2002 ICA report, many studies are underway around the world on the topic of electronic records management, including research into technical and organisational requirements for record keeping. From these various studies have come a number of national and international standards, including ISO 15489, the International Standards Organization’s records management standard, and MoReq: Model Requirements for the Management of Electronic Records.¹³

Unfortunately, as noted in the ICA 2002 report, there has been limited cooperation between those conducting research into electronic records and the creators and managers of electronic records. The ICA committee has called for a “transfer of knowledge” from the researcher to the record keeper and has argued that standards and guidelines should not just be developed but, more importantly, be interpreted and disseminated for worldwide use. The ICA report makes specific reference to the need

¹³ For more information on the ISO standard, go to the ISO’s web page at www.iso.org. For more on the MoReq standard, see the web page for Cornwell Consultants, developers of the standard, at <http://www.cornwell.co.uk/moreq>.

for guidelines on preserving authentic electronic records, to assist record keepers with the application of standards.¹⁴

Of particular concern for developing countries is the need for these guidelines to be realistic, clear, and achievable. Their implementation must also be supported at the highest levels of government. Given the limited resources, poor legislative infrastructures, and low profile of archival institutions in developing countries, any attempt to implement standards must be well planned and systematic; to try to achieve too much all at once could lead to failure and further diminishment of the role of the archives in the eyes of senior management.

The conclusions and recommendations at the end of this report offer some suggestions for disseminating standards and guidelines and in encouraging their adoption and use around the world, and particularly in developing countries, in order to secure the authenticity of electronic records as evidence.

6.4 Limitations on Education and Training

The implementation of record keeping standards, just like the strengthening of legislation or the development of records programmes, requires well-trained and capable professional staff. Especially in developing countries, “capacity building” is critical to organisational success. Capacity building includes the need for improved education and training of records and archives personnel.

In the July-August 2003 survey, the ICA membership called for enhanced professionalism of the archival field, specifically by supporting professional education and practical training for archivists. There was also a call for the ICA to serve as a clearinghouse for professional information. This need was emphasised in particular by respondents outside of Europe, who also called for workshops, seminars, and training courses on records and archives issues.

There was also a call for the ICA to form regional committees to accredit educational programmes or to form an international committee to certify archivists as professionals. There was a strong feeling that increased recognition of the profession within countries would only come if international agencies adopted standards for a professional designation in the field.

Participants in the various consultations also called for improved educational opportunities. In particular, they argued for flexible training programmes for staff members who need upgrading but cannot leave their positions for extended periods. As many participants said, “this issue cannot be overemphasised.” As one noted, no reform can be fully effective without effective and continuous training for key personnel. Continuous training and upgrading is especially important given the constant changes in information technologies and computer systems.

It was also argued repeatedly that the lack of adequate training is closely related to the lack of appreciation for and awareness of the importance of records management. In order to ensure records are well protected, governments must recognise their value and support the training of records personnel at all levels. They also need to acknowledge the importance of raising awareness among their information technology staff of the need to incorporate record keeping standards in their computer systems. At present, however, many governments do not value record keeping and so do not provide adequate resources for the task. As one contributor argued, “records managers/store clerks are typically the lowest cadre of staff with minimal pay and little appreciation of the importance of their task. If we were to professionalise the role, then there is more chance that reforms would be effective.” It could

¹⁴ The International Records Management Trust is presently developing a “Records Management Capacity Framework,” a tool that governments and public sector institutions around the world can use to evaluate their records and information needs, determine their existing capacity to support these needs, and identify tools and actions to increase their capacity. The framework is being designed as an Internet-based interactive tool, based on the ISO and MoReq standards and also linked to Canadian information management standards. Users can input data about their present level of capacity and determine the best course of action and the various tools available to help them move forward. It is hoped that a version of this tool will be publicly accessible in mid 2004. More information on the capacity tool can be obtained from the International Records Management Trust at info@irmt.org.

also be argued that if record keepers had a higher profile, their voices would be heard more readily by their information technology colleagues.

Survey respondents and forum participants argued that overseas attachments, short workshops, distance learning, and other creative and flexible approaches to training should all be considered. They also believed that joint training with allied professionals – such as information technology staff, finance officers, or members of the judiciary – would allow representatives of different fields to share knowledge and information. Education and training for record keepers is critical, but so is awareness raising for senior officials, members of public interest groups, and citizens. All members of society need to understand the role of records in the delivery of accountable, efficient, and effective government.

A number of priorities were identified for training, including basic records and archives skills, electronic records management, and the preservation and security of electronic records. It was argued that there is a need for institutional, regional, national, and international initiatives in education and training in records and information management (at both professional and general levels) to ensure success in the management of all records, including electronic and paper based.

The conclusions and recommendations at the end of this report offer some suggestions for developing sustainable education and training initiatives, particularly for developing countries, in order to secure the authenticity of electronic records as evidence.

6.5 The Need for a Strategic Approach

All participants in all the forums identified in this report noted the challenge of limited resources and the need to use those resources effectively. As the delegates at the Johannesburg meetings in September 2002 noted:

We see ourselves in a key role as effective and dynamic managers of an integrated records management system, and as protectors and custodians of recorded information of all areas of government. We should remain responsive to changes in our social and technological environment and seek to preserve and make available information in all its formats, including electronic. Developing countries are investing in the management of electronic records, and if this issue is not addressed in the developing world, the digital divide will only widen. To achieve our goal, we must ensure that adequate resources are mobilised for the effective realisation of our activities.

In the face of limited resources, participants called for strategic alliances, partnerships, and collaborative approaches to promote electronic records management and raise awareness of and support for quality records and information management. They agreed that action had to take place at the institutional, national, and regional levels, but they also argued that international initiatives were critical to raising awareness of the importance of records and archives.

In the July-August 2003 survey, for example, the ICA membership felt that regional branches and sections should be strengthened to improve networks among record keepers. Members also felt the ICA had a clear role to play internationally to advocate for archives causes and to lobby for improved recognition of and support for records and archives.

The ICA's strategic planning exercise is certainly a step in the direction of identifying short-, medium-, and long-term goals for the profession. Members also felt that regions, nations, and institutions needed to determine their own directions in a strategic fashion. As one survey respondent noted,

Meetings such as [regional branch] conferences allow us to exchange experiences and find out what our particular needs and problems are. This is very important as a consultant from overseas with other conditions at home may not understand and impose non-applicable solutions. We need to be able to set our priorities ourselves.

Many participants argued that closer ties also needed to be made with allied professions, particularly with colleagues in the information technology field, in order to share knowledge and develop collaborative approaches to electronic records care.

Many participants also believed that donor agencies need to restructure their funding programmes so that money is not allocated simply to information technology solutions without clear requirements for quality records management. As long as international aid agencies continue to support the purchase and installation of computer systems without considering compatibility, sustainability, or records issues, for example, the chances of implementing effective electronic record keeping strategies are severely limited.

Further, participants argued that donor agencies need to recognise the critical role of the archival institution, especially the national archives, in record keeping and provide specific support to upgrade that facility. As one e-discussion participant noted, many archivists in developing countries are rendered “dumb” in an information age. They lack support for even the acquisition of computer equipment for everyday tasks, let alone the resources to develop electronic records management programs. Donor organisations such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank need to emphasise good record keeping practices in their dealings with developing countries. As one respondent noted, “good record keeping is an important aspect in encouraging transparency of activities.”

Participants also agreed that it was important to move from externally supported programmes to internally sustained systems. They do not necessarily always want more funds for their initiatives, but they certainly want a better application of funds, with recognition of the central importance of records and archives, so that they can protect society’s documentary memory and ensure the protection of essential evidence in the move to an electronic age.

The conclusions and recommendations at the end of this report offer some suggestions for encouraging strategic approaches to promote improved record keeping, in order to secure the authenticity of electronic records as evidence.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

Records and archives form the documentary memory of a society. Their value cannot be measured solely in terms of their historical relevance or informational content. They are the evidence that governments, businesses, organisations, and citizens exercised their rights and fulfilled their obligations. Authentic, reliable records are the underpinnings of a transparent, accountable, democratic society.

In the digital age, more and more records are being created using information technologies, yet adequate measures are not being established to protect those records as evidence, especially in developing countries. The lack of awareness of the importance of creating and preserving quality records has led to a largely ad hoc approach to record keeping in many parts of the world. Legislative and organisational frameworks are weak, standards and guidelines are not in place or are not enforced, and relevant, sustainable, and accessible education and training programmes have not been implemented. Ultimately, a strategic approach to record keeping is needed, in order to make best use of limited resources; encourage capacity building particularly in developing countries; and seek to elevate the quality and status of records care around the world.

The time has come to draw on the extensive theoretical and applied research that has already been done into electronic records care. This research, including projects identified by the authors of the November 2002 ICA report, must be converted into usable, meaningful, and practical tools, applicable to real-life situations and available not just as theoretical constructs. This author agrees with the authors of the 2002 ICA report that “it would be a wasteful redundancy to embark on yet another study on how to preserve authentic electronic records.”¹⁵ Rather, what is needed now is a coordinated, strategic

¹⁵ ICA, *Authenticity of Electronic Records: ICA Study 13-1*, p. 9.

approach to capacity building in electronic records management. This approach must accommodate the different levels of capacity presently in place around the world. It must work to bring the least developed countries up to an acceptable minimum standard for records care, and then to encourage them and others to improve their programmes to provide consistent management of all records, whether electronic or paper. Further, any approach to capacity building must also recognise the importance of addressing and accommodating to the diversity of cultures, ethnic groups, and languages present across the world, a value UNESCO upholds in its own policies on multilingualism and multiculturalism.

The responsibility for records care ultimately lies with each nation and its governments and citizens. Further, as many participants noted, the problem is not that record keepers do not know what to do. The problem is how to get it done: how to receive the political, governmental, financial, and other support required to undertake the tasks all record keepers know they must tackle. The international records and archives community, and UNESCO, can support the preservation of the world's documentary memory by helping to enable national archives and record keeping agencies to serve an active, central role in the preservation of their country's recorded evidence. International agencies can play a particular role in raising the awareness of governments around the world of the critical importance to society of accountable, transparent record keeping.

In consultation with the record keeping community, this author has developed a series of 11 specific recommendations for action for the records/archives profession, the ICA, and UNESCO. The recommendations are structured according to the following vision:

The record keeping profession will develop and articulate a strategic plan of action for the redefinition of the profession to position it at the centre of records care, as part of the larger goal of protecting society's documentary memory.

That plan of action will incorporate specific actions for formal and informal education, awareness raising, networking, and cooperation within the profession and with colleagues in other fields.

The plan will be supported by the creation, dissemination, and continued production of realistic, practical, and accessible educational, informational, and capacity building tools and the creation of and implementation of quality standards for record care.

The profession will be supported by the highest levels of government and by the international community, which will help provide strengthen legislative and organizational frameworks, increase funding for records work, support and participate in awareness raising activities, and support ongoing discussions, collaboration, and cooperation, in order to use resources strategically to achieve sustainable change.

Below, then, are the 11 recommendations offered for consideration.

1. The ICA branches should develop strategic plans, including the identification of specific targets for capacity building, infrastructure development, and training and education, so that all members within the region have clear guidance on priorities for institutional and regional work in the short, medium, and long term.
2. The ICA should continue the identification and development of strategic outcomes, priority areas, and specific activities for the organization as a whole, including the regional branches, sections, committees, and other key groups, in an ongoing effort to build capacity in record keeping around the world and remain current with changes in the information technology environment.
3. The records/archives profession, through its institutions and national and regional professional associations, including but not limited to ICA branches, should increase efforts to raise

awareness of the value of records and archives and should freely share the tools and resources created as part of any awareness raising campaign.

4. The ICA, through its central office and its regional branches, committees, and sections, should increase its efforts to raise awareness world wide of the value of records and archives to society as evidence of the rights and obligations of governments, businesses, organisations, and citizens.
5. The ICA should continue its work to consolidate guidelines and tools on legislation and policies – including concrete and practical examples from professional practice, along with sample laws, policies, and related resources – as well as other professional resources such as awareness raising tools and make these freely available through the ICA's website.
6. The records/archives profession should work institutionally, nationally, regionally, and internationally to support and encourage efforts to strengthen legislative, organizational, and policy frameworks for quality record keeping.
7. UNESCO should support the acquisition and implementation of record keeping standards around the world and the creation of interpretive tools to assist records and archives professionals build capacity for electronic records care in their institutions.
8. UNESCO should support the development and continued maintenance of concrete, practical, and accessible guidelines for the management of electronic records, based on existing theoretical and applied research in the field and on existing and new standards of practice.
9. The ICA should investigate the potential for international certification of record keepers, or other formal qualification based on accepted criteria for education or experience, in order to enhance the professional status of the profession and thus improve institutional, national, and international capacity for record keeping.
10. UNESCO should support the development and delivery of relevant, practical, accessible, and well-focused education and training programmes for developing countries, including training for trainers programmes, that address the challenge of creating, managing, preserving, and making available electronic records and support the strengthening of educational opportunities relevant to regional and local realities.
11. UNESCO should support the delivery of a series of collaborative interdisciplinary seminars or conferences on electronic records and electronic government, particularly involving information management and information technology professionals, to increase information sharing, cooperation, and awareness raising.