

So what?

Demonstrating social and community value using outcomes and impacts to evaluate performance of recordkeeping programmes

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1. INTRODUCTION

My commencing proposition is that recordkeeping is heading for (or already in) rocky times.

We have grand aspirational statements associated with what we do, but can we actually prove that we meet them? How do we do that? What is a good recordkeeping service? How does it impact its clients and users? Is it sufficient to address compliance with an increasing range of industry best practice standards? Will this prove that we are achieving our stated outcomes? By what criteria can we measure our services delivery? In a time of budget tightening and economic rationalism, how do we prove assertions and defend (or refute) things like the importance of local service delivery and face to face services by a skilled archivist to a community?

Such questions are increasingly being asked of records and archives services. In particular our colleagues in the UK are being required to measure the effectiveness and impact of the services they provide, and to demonstrate continual improvement. While not the only work going on in this area, with impact analysis also the topic of research in Canada, and increasingly interest in the nexus of archives and social justice, in the UK there are practical and immediate requirements imposed by funding and governing bodies to address these issues.

How do we report on our activities now? Possibly we develop mission statements and align our services to those of our parent body. Optimistically, we then follow corporate planning processes and have some form of reporting against stated objectives. In 2008, the Victorian Auditor General¹ was quite scathing about the capacity of the records management practitioners to think strategically. I would guess that this same criticism could be aimed very fairly at many archives (perhaps with the exception of the major archival institutions). The CAARA Survey of Archives in 2007 stated 'there is little known about the Australian archival domain, its organisations and collections, its users and its impacts on society'². One of our prime evaluation tools is measuring. We create and collate statistics – partly because these are concrete and easy to compile. But exactly what do statistics on quantity of holdings actually show? What does it mean to have a certain number of visits? At present, our measures are not objective, robust, nor convincing.

In this paper I report on, and then muse about, the experience of working within the requirements imposed by a particular framework of assessment of quality of service delivery for records and archives, and advocate that the Australian recordkeeping community investigate a similar Framework for implementation locally.

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¹ Victorian Auditor General's Office: Records Management in the Victorian Public Sector, 2007-8:15
PO Box 638, Virginia, QLD, 4014, Australia.
http://www.audit.vic.gov.au/reports_publications/reports_by_year/2008/20080312_records.aspx

² CAARA Archives Survey, 2007 Appendix 1: Purpose, Objectives, Scope and Data Outputs/Indicators, CAARA / ASA Archival Domain Survey, Statement of Purpose and Scope
16 August 2006 <http://www.caara.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/Report-on-Archives-Survey-2007.pdf>

2. THE CONTEXT OF THE WORK

In 2009 we were commissioned to develop a Quality Framework and Key Performance Indicators for the Scottish Council on Archives, a not for profit, independent body formed in 2002, under the Scottish National Archives Policy, to co-ordinate national policy on archival and records management issues and represent and promote the interests of Scotland's broad archival community. The work was funded by the Scottish Government in 2008-9.

The UK, including Scotland, introduced a framework of reporting and assessment of government services which were deliberately outward looking. It is not enough to demonstrate that a particular services runs well, everything is to be evaluated against the outcomes it achieves and the impacts it can demonstrate. This is a national agenda in Scotland, with funding and governing bodies required to report against outcomes.

The model, and early exemplar in this area is 'How Good are our Schools', a self evaluation framework for schools first developed in 2002 within Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education, to provide a self assessment framework for schools themselves to use as a part of the larger external assessment undertaken in formal inspections to assess and report on the performance of schools across Scotland. This possibly may sound a little familiar to us as we are introduced to the notion of a National Curriculum and the formation of the Australian Curriculum Reporting and Assessment Authority, which is mandated 'to develop shared national targets, outcomes and policy directions that we need to achieve a world class school system serving the needs of every Australian student'³ and developed the public reporting system 'My School' with all its controversy. The situation is different in Scotland, while there are some elements of similarity. How Good is our School operates as one element of a larger 'Journey to Excellence' program of quality improvement.

The framework stresses self assessment, in the school education context explained:

Self-evaluation is not a bureaucratic or mechanistic process. It is a reflective professional process through which schools get to know themselves well and identify the best way forward for their pupils. It will, therefore, promote well-considered innovation. The framework of quality indicators will guide you in that process. The illustrations are not designed to be used as checklists or recipes. They are there to be used alongside other sources of guidance such as curriculum advice, research into learning and pedagogy, and studies of leadership styles and approaches. As thinking in relation to the curriculum and learning is constantly developing, so our application of the indicators also develops to help reinforce the dynamic nature of Scottish education.

Self-evaluation is forward looking. It is about change and improvement, whether gradual or transformational, and is based on professional reflection, challenge and support. It involves taking considered decisions about actions which result in clear benefits for young people.⁴

³ http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Gillard/Media/Speeches/Pages/Article_081107_162857.aspx

⁴ 'How Good is Our School', Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education, 2007
<http://www.hmie.gov.uk/Generic/HGIOS> (Accessed October 2010)

The success of this framework within the Schools sector has influenced other sectors in Scotland. And each sector is required to act within a cascade of outcomes and impacts defined for the whole of Scottish Government – things like ‘We have strong, resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibilities for their own actions and how they affect others’⁵.

In particular the local government sector has developed quality frameworks. Most archives and records services in Scotland are located within this sector, so the imperative to develop a framework to suit our profession within this sector became an increasingly important component to the work. Within the local government framework, culture was lumped with sport as the grouping appropriate for evaluation – already a problem for archives and records. A framework, ‘How Good is our Culture and Sport’⁶ (HGIOCS), was developed for use within the local government sector. For archives and records, this provided a potential problem as it was being measured by cultural standards not necessarily geared at services provided by our profession. Independently the library sector⁷ and the museums sector⁸ began working on quality frameworks to stand alone, on their own terms, while also further developing the cultural services defined within the HGIOCS framework, and the much broader Scottish National Outcomes themselves.

It is in this context that the archives and records quality framework needed development. Clearly, as always, if the recordkeeping community did not step up to the mark to define our own outcomes and impacts, the services were going to be measured by benchmarks developed for a different agenda with measures that were not relevant to our objectives. At the same time as needing to play immediately within the local government HGIOCS framework, the archives and records framework needed to be developed so that it could stand alone and be applicable to the whole gamut of archives and records services, beyond local government and to include private, collecting archives supported by public funding.

The brief, then, was explicitly to develop a Quality Framework that created a unified framework for archives and records services. It was to serve the profession first, and subsequently developed in the political reality of needing to work within this complex, cascading set of quality frameworks for local and national government.

⁵ Scottish National Outcomes <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/scotPerforms/outcomes> (Accessed October 2010)

⁶ ‘How Good is our Culture and Sport? A Quality Improvement Framework for culture and sports provision (draft)’ VOCAL and HM Inspectorate of Education, April 2009

<http://www.hmie.gov.uk/documents/publication/hgiocas.pdf> (Accessed October 2010)

⁷ ‘Building on Success: A Public Library Quality Improvement Matrix for Scotland’ Scottish Executive and Scottish Library and Information Council, 2007 <http://www.slainte.org.uk/files/pdf/slic/PLQIM/plqim.pdf> (Accessed October 2010)

⁸ ‘Quality Improvement System: Taking a Closer Look at our Museums and Galleries (draft)’ 2009 Museum Galleries Scotland. (The QIS framework has been piloted during 2010, and its current unavailability on the web leads to the conclusion that it is in revision. Information about QIS piloting can be accessed at <http://www.museumsgalleriesscotland.org.uk/the-programmes/quality-improvement-system/qis-pilot-toolkit/> (Accessed October 2010)

3. THE EXISTING RESOURCES

As you would expect, the first phase of the project was to conduct extensive research on the existing resources. And there are lots of them – but none really did the job. One of the key reasons that the existing resources didn't fit was this requirement for a coherent, connected archives and records framework. Where there were possible models, they considered records and archives as separate, discrete services. In general, however, there is very little available on impacts and outcomes for records and archives.

In the UK, MLA, now very sadly closing its doors next year, has undertaken the majority of the work available on outcomes and impacts. Given the nature of MLA, their work has a slant towards supporting independent archives services rather than integrated records and archives services - none the less, it was the most detailed literature on outcomes available. During 2009, Steve Bailey at JISC in the UK was developing a common framework for evaluating the impact of records management⁹. The JISC project developed 2 tools, the Records and Information Management Impact Calculator and a Records Management Maturity model. Both these products were produced after our SCA project was completed. Even had they been available, they would not have met the objective of a common framework for archives and records management programmes, which was the focus of the SCA project. These tools, particularly the impact calculator are focussed in very detailed level on the impact of records management intervention in specific business processes as a part of change initiatives – along with metrics to measure the specific impacts of records management intervention in business process redesign.

Similarly there are a number of studies on archival metrics, primarily run out of the US. The Archival Metrics Project¹⁰ is seeking to answer questions such as:

- How effectively does this repository support our users' research needs?
- Are we learning as an organization by using data collected about the use of our collections to drive program improvement?
- Can we demonstrate our effectiveness in support of our unit's goals?

The analyses include the Economic Impact Survey (EIS) of Government Archives administered on behalf of the National Historical Publications and Records Commission by the Archival Metrics Program. The Economic Impact Study produced findings of economic impact largely measured by cultural tourism, which for archives and records in the age of the internet, seems to be a fairly dangerous way of measuring economic impact.¹¹ The Archival Metrics Project also developed a suite of tools to assist archival programs administer a range of surveys of users of archives: surveys of teachers, researchers and students and of web pages and finding aids.

At the 2010 Conference of the Association of Canadian Archivists, Karen Suurtamm of Victoria University reported on her current project to assess the impact of archives on social

⁹ A common framework for evaluating records management programmes' JISC Records Management, cJuly 2010 <http://www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/records-management/measuring-impact> (Accessed October 2010)

¹⁰ Archival Metrics is a joint project of the University of Michigan, the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, and the University of Toronto <http://archivalmetrics.org/> (Accessed October 2010)

¹¹ 'Measuring the Economic Impact of Government Archives: A Nationwide Study' posted 29 October 2009, <http://archivalmetrics.org/>

justice.¹² She argues that there are two streams of impact assessment – one approaching the issue from the assessment of programs and users, and the other from the developing intersection between archives and social justice exemplified in the work of Verne Harris, Richard Cox and Randall Jimerson (and I would add Eric Ketelaar). While a work in progress, her preliminary conclusions are pointing to the limiting scope of simply studying impact on service users and advocating a broadening of scope to encompass impact of use. Her contention is that studying impact of users, and the emphasis on evaluating archives as cultural information resources fails to encompass the accountability aspects of archives which impact society as a whole, thus potentially misrepresenting the impact of archives and the archival sector. Her emerging framework of analysis also encompasses the notion of secondary use of archives, in publications, academic work, the classroom, journalism, policy, legislation, judicial proceedings and other public forums. It also enables assessment of impacts on non-users, such as may occur through formal public apologies (for example President Barack Obama's recent public apology to his counterpart in Guatemala for a US-led study conducted in the 1940s, in which hundreds of people in the Latin American state were deliberately infected with sexually-transmitted diseases¹³, or Kevin Rudd's Apologies to the Stolen Generation, and the Forgotten Australians). She concludes '....studies of archival impact fail to recognize some of the most important contributions that archives make to society because they are limited by their initial framework, their biases and their methodologies'. In theory at least, such a broadening of view of impact should also be able to accommodate negative impact – or the results felt by society when records and archives are not kept.

This research was not reported at the time the SCA work was undertaken, but I have dwelt on it at some length because it seems to be beginning to knit together the evidential and accountability aspects of records with external use in creative ways that suits a unified archives and records framework much better than any previous attempts. In particular, the possibility that it might be able to incorporate thinking about negative impacts is relevant to the Scottish situation, where renewed attention to recordkeeping and public records legislation was triggered by the Shaw Report on Historical Abuse Systemic Review: Residential Schools and Children's Homes in Scotland 1950 to 1995. Appendix 3 to the Shaw Report provided a detailed report on the inadequacies around recordkeeping for children in former residential 'care' settings reported on inconsistencies, inadequacies and neglect of recordkeeping.¹⁴

¹² 'Towards Assessing the Impact of Archives on Social Justice' Karen Emily Suurtamm, Victoria University Archives, Session 6c, Assessing Impact and Value. Association of Canadian Archivists, 2010 Conference, June 2010, podcast downloaded from https://www.members-archivists.ca/conference_proceedings.aspx#

¹³ 'Obama apologizes to Guatemala for US human experiments' Karin Zeitvogel, Sydney Morning Herald, October 2, 2010
<http://news.smh.com.au/breaking-news-world/obama-apologizes-to-guatemala-for-us-human-experiments-20101002-161kq.htm>

¹⁴ Nancy Bell, Appendix 3 Children's residential services: Learning through records, Historical Abuse Systemic Review: Residential Schools and Children's Homes in Scotland 1950 to 1995, November 2007, <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/11/20104729/0>

4. THE OUTCOMES

So, what did we come up with? For the archives and records management sector in Scotland, we devised a draft called 'Taking a closer look at Archives and Records Management Services (ARMS) A Quality Improvement Framework for Archives and Records Management Services in Scotland'. This document is available on the web from the Scottish Council on Archives website.¹⁵

The project identified 4 major outcomes and then linked 7 Quality Indicators to those 4 major outcomes. The outcomes are

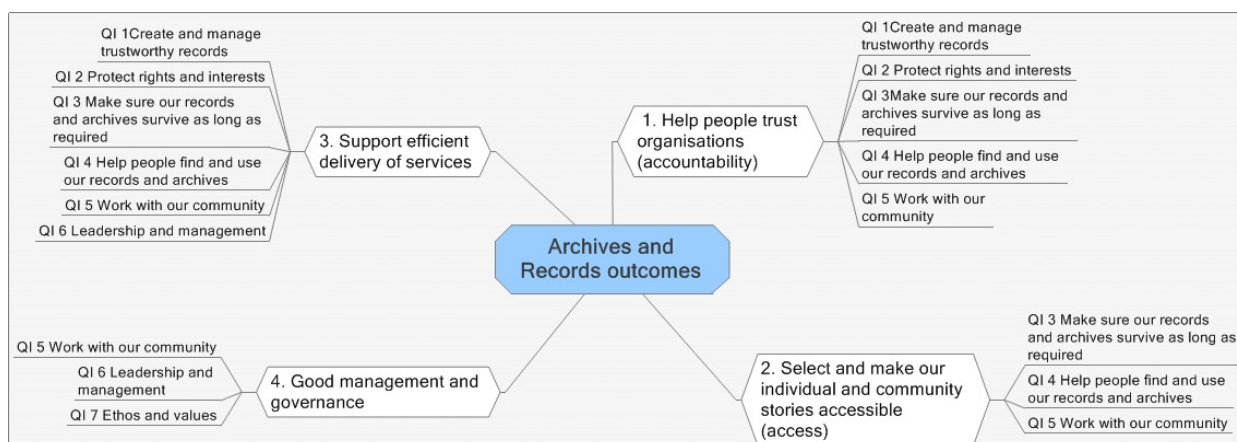


The 7 Quality Indicators are:

- Create and manage trustworthy records
- Protect rights and interests
- Make sure our records and archives survive as long as they are required
- Help people find and use our records and archives
- Work with our community
- Leadership and management
- Ethos and values

Linked together, the quality indicators inform the outcomes as follows (noting that a number of quality indicators link to multiple outcomes):

¹⁵ Scottish Council on Archives <http://www.scoarch.org.uk/notice-board/171>



Underneath each quality indicator, themes relevant to the area are identified, for example, for Quality Indicator 4, Help people find and use our records and archives, the themes encompassed are identified as

- Minimising unnecessary secrecy and restriction of archives and records
- Enabling access to archives and records by the public (in line with legislative requirements)
- Enable re-use and sharing of information from archives and records
- Providing support and assistance to diverse groups of users
- Presenting archives and records with sufficient contextual information to enable interpretation

An expansion on why these themes are important follows, with a statement of what should be encompassed in a records or archives service to meet the indicators, for example, continuing with the example of Quality Indicator 4:

- Ensure that a consistent access policy applies to all records and archives of the organization, regardless of where they are physically located, whether the functions are provided by third parties
- Employ appropriate mechanisms to protect from disclosure those records and archives that have continuing sensitivity
- Provide physical facilities to support public access (where appropriate)
- Support multiple channels to inform the public of the records and archives available
- Develop a range of materials and services to support particular user communities to access records and archives
- Provide multiple delivery channels for access to records and archives
- Continuously enrich records and archival documentation systems while ensuring records are always presented in context

These statements are then followed by a set of questions to ask in order to assess whether a service is meeting the requirements, with each one accompanied by statements of why they

are important and examples of possible evidence to support the assessment. For Quality Indicator 4, these questions are:

- How effective is the access and information security policy?
- How are access and information security restrictions determined and reviewed within the organization?
- How satisfactory do users find the facilities provided to support public access?
- How effective are the channels used to inform the public about the archives and records?
- How well are users supported in the multiple delivery channels available for dissemination of records and archives?
- In what ways are the archives documentation system continuously enhanced to assist users?
- In what ways are the records and archives documentation systems valued and enhanced by its users?

All up, the framework is 76 pages long.

5. WHERE IS THE FRAMEWORK NOW?

The Framework was submitted in November 2009. Initial rounds of responses were sought from the archives and records management communities in Scotland. The Framework, developed with the explicit brief for integrated records and archives services, was criticised for exactly that coverage, as many of the services in Scotland are not unified, but exist with records services operating independently of archives services. This caused some concern, more particularly within the archival community, that their services would be judged on functions that they were not responsible for and thus shouldn't be held accountable for. This is notwithstanding introductory commentary in the Framework identifying mechanisms to tailor the Framework to specific circumstances. As a records continuum proponent, my opinion is that there is no point in today's complex, distributed and digital world in developing separate frameworks for records and archives – they must be connected to ensure viability of the professional endeavour.

Notwithstanding the issues with the scope, the Framework was well generally well received, particularly its plain English style and the inclusion of potential sources of evidence. After initial consultation, the document's consideration lapsed somewhat with staffing changes, priorities of the Scottish Council on Archives being diverted onto other projects, and the GFC. Now the document is back on the agenda, with piloting of the framework intended to take place between October 2010 and March 2011.

6. SO WHAT? DOES THE FRAMEWORK ACTUALLY ASSESS IMPACT AND OUTCOMES?

Has this exercise succeeded in developing an appropriate Framework for Quality assessment using outcomes and impacts? It is too soon to know, but the exercise was a terrifically useful one for me personally. It twisted my brain around and revealed interesting holes in how we justify our services and programs. Self referential justification of programs – doing it because we’re archivists and archives are good things – is no longer any where near enough. And divorcing the evidential and accountability aspects from the cultural heritage aspects is equally problematic. As always, we need Frameworks that fit together. This document stands as a first draft. I can already pick holes in it, and the evidence being suggested to demonstrate adherence to the indicators are really pretty traditional. Perhaps I can assert that these act as a bridge between current and future practice.

We need to have far stronger evidence to support our programs than mere assertions. Professionally we don’t know that much about programs delivering archives and records services. And nor do funders (be they internal or external funders). Some rigour around assessment is definitely timely.

At present this document is a self assessment framework. It is intended to be used by services to evaluate their own status and development, with the aim of continuously improvement. But our Library and Museum colleagues have added external assessment by peers or professional programs to their uses of analogous frameworks. If we can extend the possible uses of such a framework to support external investigation of all kinds, the Framework becomes very powerful. It would be a way of evaluating which records and archives programs justify status quo, which might justify additional funding support and which are failing, and perhaps should be discontinued. Just because we’re in the archives business doesn’t make us unaccountable.

This work was undertaken within a specific context – that of the Scottish Government. But here in Australia we could adopt a similar type of framework to achieve robust and defensible records and archives services.