

2014-15 Recordkeeping Survey – Summary Report

About the survey

Every two years Queensland State Archives (QSA) undertakes a survey of Queensland Government agencies to determine the current state of recordkeeping across the Queensland public sector. These surveys have been designed to collect recordkeeping data and measure compliance against the minimum requirements of the two recordkeeping information standards issued under the *Public Records Act 2002*:

- *Information Standard 40: Recordkeeping (IS40)*
- *Information Standard 31: Retention and Disposal of Public Records (IS31).*

Survey respondents have also been requested to provide answers to topical questions relating to:

- *Digital Continuity*
- *Transfer and storage volumes.*

This is the fourth recordkeeping survey since 2009 and was conducted during the period November 2014 to April 2015. Only agencies that managed their own records were required to complete it. Of the 245 agencies invited to participate in the survey, 193 completed it, producing an overall response rate of 79%.

Survey results have always been published online in the [Survey Report](#). However, for the 2014-15 Survey we also:

- developed this summary report and supporting [infographic](#)
- provided each participating agency with a confidential individual scorecard based on their responses to the survey questions
- released de-identified survey data (subject to agency approval) through the Queensland Government's Open Data portal.

Survey findings

Improvements

Overall, the 2014-15 Survey results indicate progress is continuing to be made in public authorities to improve their levels of recordkeeping maturity. There was a slight improvement in:

- monitoring and auditing
- assignment of recordkeeping activities/responsibilities
- proportion of agencies with a fully developed and implemented Retention and Disposal Schedule covering core-business records.

Key challenges

While the survey results indicate that many agencies are continuing to work towards improving their recordkeeping practices, they also highlight a number of key challenges, particularly in relation to the management, preservation and disposal of digital information.

1. Need to improve digital continuity maturity in agencies

Globally, organisations are increasingly transitioning their business operations into a digital environment and business processes are being performed in digital systems. Records are now created and stored in a multitude of business systems and applications, often outside the control of, and integration with, corporate recordkeeping systems. Recordkeeping has not necessarily kept pace with these changes, and is often based on traditional models for the storage of paper and files.

While many Queensland Government agencies are aware of their recordkeeping requirements for managing hard copy records, this level of proficiency is not always reflected in the digital world. Our government clients have frequently advised us of the problems they encounter when trying to develop effective recordkeeping systems to support digital records.

The first section of the 2014-15 Survey included a series of questions relating to the long-term accessibility of digital records. *Digital Continuity* questions were first introduced into the survey in 2013 to inform QSA's digital archives program. The results from the 2013 Survey indicated that many agencies were struggling with the challenges of ensuring the long-term useability and accessibility of digital records. The results from the 2014-15 Survey suggest that there has been very little change since the last survey, and agencies are still grappling with recordkeeping in a digital environment.

In both surveys, agencies were asked questions about the future accessibility of their digital information. In the 2014-15 Survey, only 46% of agencies reported that they were confident all their digital information would remain accessible for its entire retention period. This is slightly down from the 2013 figure of 47%. Another 14% of respondents to the current survey indicated they were confident about the accessibility of their digital information for all critical business information but other information is at risk, while 30% were confident of some, but not all, information remaining accessible. The remaining 10% were either not confident that their digital information would remain accessible (4%), not confident and therefore rely on paper records (4%) or unsure (2%).

While confidence levels about future accessibility of digital information in local government and other public authorities changed only slightly, positive responses from government departments decreased from 50% to 38% in 2014-15.

For the first time in the 2014-15 survey, agencies were also asked if they had any permanent value digital records no longer required for current business use that they could potentially transfer to QSA. Nineteen per cent of respondents said yes, 46% said no and a further 35% were unsure.

2. Need to increase coverage of records retention and disposal schedules across the public sector

In the 2014-15 Survey, Queensland Government agencies demonstrated an increase in records retention and disposal coverage, with 44% of agencies indicating that they had an approved and fully implemented retention and disposal schedule in place. This compares to 40% in 2013, 38% in 2011 and 33% in 2009. A further 40% of respondents indicated plans to develop or revise a core schedule within the next two years. Although the survey responses indicate some improvement in this area, the level of coverage is still unsatisfactory given the requirement for agencies to have schedule coverage has been in place for a number of years. There is a need for further development of schedules dealing with core business records to enable the timely and efficient disposal of public records.

Having said that, survey responses and transfer data show that having an approved retention and disposal schedule does not always translate to agencies implementing a regular disposal program. Through our interactions with our government clients, we know that agencies struggle with sentencing and disposal activities. Reasons cited include the difficulty in interpreting and implementing schedules, and the complexity of the authorisation process. Often disposal activities are undertaken on an ad hoc basis, where space or storage cost issues arise. As a result, the volume of hard copy records continues to rise and become increasingly difficult to manage.

3. Need to support agencies to identify and transfer permanent records to the custody to QSA

In the 2014-15 Survey we introduced new questions about the quantities of permanent paper records held by agencies, and the quantities of those records intended for transfer to QSA within the next two years. Only 39% of respondents were able to estimate the quantity of permanent paper records they hold.

When agencies were asked to estimate the quantity of permanent paper records intended for transfer to QSA in the next two years, only 14% could provide estimates. Another 38% don't intend to transfer any records during that time, and 48% could not provide an estimate.

We didn't ask agencies the reasons why they were unable to specify the volume of permanent paper records in their custody. However, some possible explanations could include:

- large volumes of records due to an inactive sentencing and disposal program
- lack of an approved retention and disposal schedule for core business records
- lack of an agency-wide approach to/ single oversight of business related records and information repositories.

The significant number of agencies unable to provide an accurate estimate would indicate some agencies are struggling to manage their existing paper holdings.

QSA has developed a Transfers Outreach Program to assist agencies arranging to send their permanent paper records to us. Further work will need to be done in this area to assist agencies to identify and transfer their permanent paper records to our custody in the future.

Future directions

The 2014-15 Survey results indicate that many Queensland Government agencies are facing a number of challenges to their recordkeeping program, particularly in the area of managing records in a digital environment.

It is clear that QSA will need to do further work with agencies to seek strategies to resolve these challenges.

Program of work

While there are a wide range of issues that need to be addressed, QSA's program of work will focus on:

- commissioning a review of the *Public Records Act 2002* to improve and modernise the legislative framework for records and information management in the Queensland Government for a digital age
- designing and implementing a functioning digital archive to enable agencies to transfer their permanent digital records to the custody of QSA
- providing agencies with practical advice tailored to address specific digital recordkeeping challenges

- assisting agencies in the development of core retention and disposal schedules and sector schedules
- promoting a range of engagement activities to enable agencies to collaborate and share information
- assisting agencies to identify and transfer permanent physical records to the custody of QSA.

Review of recordkeeping survey

The first *Recordkeeping Survey of Queensland Public Authorities* was undertaken in 2009, with follow-up surveys undertaken in 2011, 2013 and most recently in 2014-15. These surveys have delivered a rich collection of recordkeeping data to QSA, which has been instrumental in assessing the current state of recordkeeping in Queensland Government agencies. The Survey has also been beneficial for developing advice and guidance to promote continuous improvement of recordkeeping practices in Queensland government agencies. Furthermore, conducting a survey every two years has enabled QSA to assess the effectiveness of our responses to the challenges identified in each survey.

However, for the survey results to remain accurate, useful and meaningful, the questions should be reviewed to ensure they continue to be reliable and valid. The current survey questionnaire was developed in 2009, with the focus on the compliance obligations of IS40 & IS31. While meeting legislative obligations continues to be important, QSA acknowledges there are a wide range of challenges facing Queensland Government agencies. Many of these challenges are not always reflected in the current questionnaire and, may not provide us with a definitive assessment of recordkeeping across agencies or establish baseline and changes in capability and effectiveness of agency recordkeeping investments.

With this in mind, QSA is planning to review the survey to determine if using this methodology remains the best mechanism for assessing the current state of recordkeeping in Queensland Government agencies. As part of the review, we will be consulting with key stakeholders, including representatives from core agencies, to determine the best approach for the future.