

Standardisation: an attempt to limit the chaos

The appearance of the first international records and archives management standards – ISAD (G), ISAAR(CPF) and ISO 15489 – evoked a slight initial apprehension in the profession, followed by an almost unanimous feeling of: “It was about time”. The unanimity of the response to the current proliferation of new standards is about the same, even if the feeling is different: “Another one?” Certainly, we find ourselves in a new era of abundance: standards, directives, recommendations, initiatives and pioneer projects... It is logical then that as professionals we feel overwhelmed and tempted to believe that when a standard becomes compulsory, they will let us know. This attitude is certainly understandable but it is also extremely dangerous because it leaves the debate, opinion forming and decision making on our professional environment in the hands of others.

What is going on? To put it simply, archives and, above all, records management have been swept from the periphery into the eye of the storm of organisation management, even though the profession is still far from receiving the desired recognition and visibility. Therefore, all of these initiatives are most welcome. The ISO standards are perhaps those that have the greatest weight at a strategic level, given that they form an important bridge between the public and private sectors. It was with this premise that ISO (which means *equal* in Greek) was officially founded on 23 February 1947 by 25 countries aiming to facilitate the international coordination and unification of standards for products, services, processes, etc. ISO currently has 157 member countries, 200 technical committees, more than 3,000 technical bodies and more than 17,000 standards and standard documents.

Records and archives management is specifically handled by TC 46/SC 11 *Archives/records management*, that is, by Subcommittee 11 of technical committee TC 46, which has information and documentation as its working area. This subcommittee has been responsible for the publication of six international standards: ISO 15489-1:2001 and 15489-2:2001 on records management, ISO 23081-1:2006 and 23081-2:2007 on records management metadata, ISO 22310:2006 with guidelines for drafters of records management standards and ISO 26122:2008 on work process analysis for records management.

In addition to this specific area, relationships with other working groups are necessary, above all TC 171, which handles records management applications, and in particular with the subcommittee TC 171/SC 2, which has produced different standards on digitisation and the well-known ISO 19005-1:2005 on PDF/A, and later standards on different versions of this same format.

In Spain, the ISO-equivalent body is AENOR. Through its technical committee CTN 50, for information and documentation and specifically, subcommittee CTN 50/SC 1, it acts as a mirror in regard to records and archives management and also of the applications supporting it. This technical committee is made up of representatives of different professional organisations, government agencies, and also enterprises and the private sector in general. The AAC has been participating in this committee for two years with two appointed representatives, until now Joaquim Borràs and Lluís-Esteve Casellas.

The objective of CTN 50 /SC 1 is to participate internationally in the preparation or review, as appropriate, of the standards TC 46/SC 11 and TC 171/SC 2 and also to be responsible for their translation into Spanish. Examples are the translations of ISO 15489-1 and -2 and 23081-1 and -2. The desire to reflect the work done internationally has determined the structuring of this subcommittee in different working groups. There are currently six of these (metadata, electronic documents, terminology, results assessment, records management and digitisation) and a new one will soon be formed for electronic evidence.

As one can imagine, there is a wide range of work being undertaken on a great variety of subjects. For example, the revision of the Spanish translations of ISO 15801:2004 *Electronic Imaging – Information stored electronically – Recommendations for trustworthiness and reliability*, and of ISO 18492 *Long-term preservation of electronic document-based information*; As well as the final preparations for publication of ISO 19005 *Document management* —

Electronic document file format for long-term preservation (PDF/A), and also *ISO 26122 Information and documentation — Work process analysis for records*. Furthermore, a first draft of the very long *ISO 5127 on vocabulary* has been prepared and the approval of *ISO 26102.4 Information and documentation — Requirements for long term preservation of electronic records* will be reviewed again due to a lack of international consensus.

And standard *ISO 15489* is currently under review. Carlota Bustelo, head of the Spanish international office, has proposed and laid the groundwork for this standard to become a Management System Standard (MSS). What does this mean? Well it basically means playing in the premier league of international standards. That is, with the systems for quality management (*ISO 9000*) environmental management (*ISO 14000*) and IT security (*ISO 27000*) and, therefore, enabling the establishment of a structure of related ISO standards.

Naturally we are at the beginning of this process, which is to be completed in 2010, but obviously the consolidation of this project involves putting records management where it belongs: at the foundation of the management of all organisations. This will also imply the adoption of a quality management methodology in the application (PDCA, improvement cycles, etc.) of the system and it will necessarily have to be compatible with the other MSSs. Other consequences will be the possibility of paving the way for certification (even partial) of systems, the adaptation of the vocabulary employed for addressing the standard in directives, the later clarification of definitions in a broader sense and finally the fact that it will also cease to be a standard that is exclusive to a professional sector.

Thus we find ourselves witnessing a technological, organisational and standards explosion and even though standards are not the solution, we can view them as a basic tool for the proper management of our organisations in terms of their being a reference for best practices. Therefore, the AAC is promoting the development and consolidation of these standards, even though we know that the human capacity for initiative will always overcome any attempt to standardise completely. After all, could you imagine a world where telephone communications technologies or the sizes of credit cards were not standardised?