Where should records management sit in an organisation’s structure?

Notes from group discussion

All members of the group represented either the university or local authority sector, so it was useful to get a different perspective and overview from a consultant. There are various examples and experiences even within the same sector, so no consistent picture of what a records manager does or where they sit in the organisational structure.

Some of the themes:

The importance of having links to the top of the organisation, and not being “buried” within the organisational structure.
- There were examples of direct links that could be made outwith the normal line management structure for certain issues e.g. FOI, DP.
- But, also examples of why it was not useful of sitting so high level as to be remote from the rest of the organisation.

The importance of links to other information management functions within the organisation.
- Some organisations attempted to do this by bringing together different functions within the same team or organisational structure. It helps to have colleagues nearby to discuss things with.
- However, another way of doing this would be to link functions through an information strategy. This can work well.
- Doesn’t matter, so long as the organisation has a clear idea of what the different functions do, how they relate to each other, and recognises expertise?
- Some organisations talking about knowledge management, but not all have the same understanding of what it means. A concept too far for some organisations! Group considered it better to have the building blocks in place first, with a sound RM programme.

Different organisations have different drivers for RM, which impacts on the role and position of RM within the organisation.
- Compliance - FOI is a driver for most, but not all organisations. Some posts wouldn’t exist without FOI, but some records managers remain divorced from the FOI function.
- The need to make the most out of investment in new technology, especially within university sector.
- Office moves and new buildings.
- No one mentioned good governance, accountability, efficiency!

What does a Records Manager do?
- Only some operate paper storage services. One example of a Records Manager divorced from operational RM within their organisation, with no responsibility for the records store.
• Few have actual control of electronic records at present, although this should increase as EDRMS is implemented. Some do have role in implementation of EDRMS.
• Some have a key role in FOI/DP compliance, including responsibility for answering requests for information. Others have no direct link to FOI.
• Most have a strategic role in helping implement new records policies and procedures.

Where does a Records manager sit within the organisation
• Different structures, even within the same sector!
• Examples of Records Manager in: Archives (2), Library (1), Corporate (1), and Service specific (1)
• One example of a Records Manager for one department within a local authority – best solution for the authority because of its huge size and volume of records, although difficult to co-ordinate RM across the entire organisation.

Different resources, even within the same sector:
• Most people are “sole practitioners”
• 2 examples of larger teams (Records Manager, Assistant Records Manager + some clerical support) (Records Manager, Records Administrator, Records Trainee)
• But even these teams are very small when compared to the size of the organisation!
• Group considered that even a small team enabled records manager time to investigate strategic as well as operational issues

Various issues helping to change the role of the RM in the future:
• Outsourcing
• Devolved management
• FOI made a difference in 2004 – will it continue to have a delayed effect as different authorities are “hit” by difficult queries?
• Joint working and collaboration with other organisations – not just information sharing, but also joint provision of services. Local authorities have a Community Planning role. Universities may collaborate with other authorities or companies on different projects. There are already examples of records management on a contract by contract basis.
• Pressure to integrate and share “back office functions” between different authorities
• At a national level, the emphasis is increasingly on archives as “cultural” rather than “corporate” assets, divorcing RM from its traditional home in the organisational structure.