COMPUTERISATION

Computers are increasingly being used by government ministries and departments throughout the world. While the extent of computerisation differs markedly from one country to the next, the problems being faced in relation to the management of electronic records are fairly similar.

Records management interfaces with computers in two respects. In the first instance, units that have computerised are already generating electronic records. Like other records these must be managed through the life cycle from the point of creation, through usage, retention, appraisal, scheduling and disposal or archiving. During creation, data is captured and stored. Unique identifying information must be assigned and there must be procedures to support authentication and version control. During storage and use, mechanisms are required to facilitate search and retrieval and to track the information. Appraisal criteria must be developed for the electronic records and the records scheduled for retention or disposal.

A number of other key issues must be addressed in respect of electronic records.

- What is the raw data for each computer application?
- Where is the electronic data stored?
- Is the storage of the data controlled?
- Can users change data on the storage media?
- Is there a record of the change?

Secondly, computers can be used to automate the records management system itself. There are a number of registry activities that can be computerised, including:

- File and Document Management
  - recording of details of all files and documents;
  - storing and retrieving of a wide range of information including file number, title, current location, retention/disposal information, date received, date reply due.

- File and Document Tracking
  - tracking the movement of files from the registry to the officers, and from office to office.

- Searching and Retrieval
  - automatic indexing of file titles and file descriptions;
  - provision of instant access to information about the file or document.

- File Scheduling, Retention and Disposal
  - management of retention schedule;
  - provision of storage details for semi-current and non-current records;
  - disposal bring-up.

- Reports
  - generation of various reports as required.

- Security
  - protection of access to certain categories of information.

The computer can thus be used essentially to facilitate the processing, distribution, usage, storage, disposal and retention of information. It is important to note, however, that unless the registry computer is linked in a network to the other computers in the ministry or department, or unless there is an imaging system, the computerised registry system is a system which gives information about the existence and whereabouts of other information. The actual information itself will continue to be manually held in the physical files within the filing cabinets.

If it is decided to computerise the registry, the following represents the basic configuration that could be aimed at.

HARDWARE

586 desktop computer
- 100 MH^2 processor
- 16 MB RAM, expandable
- I GB HDD (or higher)
- 3.5" floppy disk drive (1.44)
- 14" SVGA colour monitor (.28)
- 102 keyboard and mouse

Printer
- 4 MB RAM
- High print quality/resolution
- parallel and serial interface ports
- surge protector and UPS

SOFTWARE

Systems Software (Pre-loaded)
- MS – Dos 6.22 (or later)
- Windows 3.1/Windows 95 or higher

Application Software
- Virus Guard (Pre-loaded)
- Selected Records Management Software

The computers should be located and installed in the Registry and should service exclusively the records management function.