

## **Efficiency Report: Having every document to hand while greatly reducing the level of photocopying.**

Reports, minutes, policies – these documents are required regularly. The normal policy is for copies of the relevant documents to be made when needed – and for people to remember where they put them!

It only takes a moment's thought to realise that if all these documents were always available so that they could be consulted as and when needed by the manager wanting access, then the efficiency savings would be huge. If all such documents were on a website (protected of course by the usual security devices) then any manager who wanted a copy of a document could download it when needed. In such circumstances – when the user is responsible for downloading rather than handing the job over to the administrator – the amount of paper used and wasted will be greatly reduced.

Such a system of having reports, minutes and documents on-line and available for immediate download can be built up over time. Every time a manager wants a document that is not on the system it can be added to the website, so it is there once and for all. So there's a bit of extra work at the start, but after that every request for the document can be redirected to the website.

After a few weeks the first bonus from this system arises as it becomes clear what information is present and what is missing. One might think that this would be obvious all the time but, on systems where the information is kept on paper or is not all held in the same place, gaps are often not revealed until a particular document is asked for.

So far so good and the time savings will be obvious already. Yet it is possible to go much further.

One program that has done this particularly well is Ariadne from Softorque. This system does everything described above but in addition, every time a change is made to the system, the status of the "traffic light indicators" is immediately adjusted so that the leadership team and the contributors can see the results of their actions. Thus documents that have not been touched for some time or are obviously out-of-date can be seen at once from the traffic light signal at the front end of the program.

There's another sort of information that Ariadne provides which also helps with this picture. Each time a user downloads a file the action is

logged, so it's easy for the leadership team to see who has looked at what. Clearly, if people who are on a management committee are arriving at meetings without having consulted the minutes, there is a gross inefficiency in the system. One then either replaces the committee member or abandons the notion of having minutes!

Once a system like this has been set up policies on major issues such as child protection and health and safety can be added, and the clearance level for these can be changed so that all staff – or, in some cases, all parents too – can look at the reports. Once again, where it is important to know that all staff have looked at a document the system can advise on this. The leadership team can then make further requests just to those people who haven't bothered to look – and this selective approach prevents the team from annoying those people who have done as they were asked.

Managers can send out such requests themselves but even if (for some strange reason) they want the administrator to send out the reminder the process becomes incredibly simple.

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Scottish Freedom of Information Act 2002 have placed additional responsibility on schools to ensure that a substantial amount of information is made available to the public. In particular, policies need to be available and the school's website is a much more effective location for this than the sending out of emails or paper-based reports. However, this brings with it the responsibility for keeping the documents up-to-date - and websites are notorious for being full of old information and thereby falling into disuse.

The Ariadne system addresses this by providing a facility whereby the version of a report/document most recently published onto the website is automatically the only one available to view or download. So anyone viewing a document on-line can be assured that they are looking at the most recent version of this document.

### **School policies**

If we now turn to school policies, the efficiency benefits of a system such as this can be readily imagined. Many schools have over 30 policies in place, most of these being the responsibility of individual teachers and managers.

This can mean that when an inspection takes place hundreds or thousands of pages of policies have to be photocopied for the inspectors – and it is at this point that a school would first realise

that, for example, one policy is missing and several more are out-of-date. A reporting system such as that mentioned here saves on photocopying (the inspectors are normally more than happy to read the policies on-line) and allows the school to see well in advance what policies are in place and which ones are missing.

The SEA is most grateful to Softorque for their help and support in writing this article. Further information on the Ariadne programme is available from [Enquiries@softorque.com](mailto:Enquiries@softorque.com) or by phoning 01883 331138