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Auditor General calls on agencies to better protect information systems

Western Australia's Auditor General, Caroline Spencer, has urged senior government leaders to understand that information security and capability is a key business risk that has to be closely monitored and appropriately managed.

In her annual *Information Systems Audit Report*, tabled in Parliament today, the Auditor General looked at general computer controls across 47 government agencies, including an in-depth look at the use of passwords at 17 agencies, as well as controls around 5 key business applications.

Ms Spencer said ongoing common weaknesses, raised by her Office for over a decade, indicated agencies were not taking risks to information systems seriously enough.

'While I am aware some agencies have already taken action to address our most recent findings, this is an area that requires ongoing vigilance and high level oversight,' she said.

'Most of the issues raised can be easily addressed, however, it appears that risks are simply not properly understood and they are certainly not being effectively managed.'

While there was some improvement made across most areas of the general computer controls audits, information security and business continuity remained a concern with only half or less of agencies performing to the expected level.

Ms Spencer said the in-depth look at passwords showed that agency systems were vulnerable at the time of audit with weak passwords for over one quarter of the enabled network accounts.

'After repeatedly raising password risks with agencies, it is unacceptable that people are still using Password123 and abcd1234 to access critical agency systems and information.

'It is frustrating because my Office has demonstrated to agencies over many years how weak passwords and poor system controls can be taken advantage of to access information systems without detection.'

Ms Spencer said the 5 business applications assessed this year had control weaknesses relating to poor information security and related policies and procedures.

'In many cases, these applications are vital to delivering services to the community and agencies need to take the initiative and perform their own reviews to identify critical controls, inefficiencies and problems, as well as potential solutions,' she said.

'A pressing issue across the sector is that agencies' executive management must engage with information security risks, instead of regarding them as a matter for their IT departments.

'The consequences otherwise to state service delivery and community trust in the sector are too great.'

The Auditor General's report, *Information Systems Audit Report 2018* (Report 1 of 2018-19), is available on the Office of the Auditor General website at www.audit.wa.gov.au.

ENDS



Additional information

The top 20 weak passwords across our sample agencies were:

No.	Password used	Accounts
1	Password123	1,464
2	Project10	994
3	support	866
4	password1	813
5	October2017	226
6	Monday01	225
7	Spring17	198
8	Sunday01	188
9	password	184
10	abcd1234	176

No.	Password used	Accounts
11	Spring2017	155
12	password2	142
13	August2017	141
14	sunday1	132
15	Welcome1	132
16	Password01	118
17	Summer01	102
18	Logitech1	98
19	support1	96
20	Summer17	96

Many of these passwords comply with industry standards for password complexity and a length of at least 8 characters. This indicates that merely applying these parameters is insufficient to guard against inappropriate access to networks and systems.

Refer to page 7 of the report for further detail.