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Auditor General calls on public sector entities to review their information system security controls

Western Australia's Auditor General, Ms Caroline Spencer, has presented the eleventh annual _Information Systems Audit Report_ to Parliament which reviews the general computer and application controls at 50 public sector entities.

The report contains important lessons for all entities and makes recommendations to address common IT system weaknesses that can seriously affect the operations of the WA Government.

Ms Spencer has called on executive management across the WA public sector to implement good IT security practices and to test them regularly, to provide the community with assurances entities can effectively manage the confidentiality, integrity and availability of information they hold.

'There are findings in this report that can potentially compromise sensitive information held by public sector entities, such as confidential information about the public or businesses who deal with government,' she said.

The first section of the _Information Systems Audit Report_ contains results from audits into key business applications at 4 public sector entities. The audits found that all 4 entities had information system control weaknesses - the most concerning being poor information security, policies and procedures, and contract management.

Most of the issues identified in these audits are relatively simple to fix. 'Raising staff awareness at all levels about information and cyber security issues is a proven way to introduce good IT practices and security hygiene into everyday operations,' Ms Spencer said.

The second part of the report details audits into 6 general computer control categories at 47 public sector entities. The computer control categories we assessed were:

- information security
- business continuity
- management of IT risks
- IT operations
- change control
- physical security.

These audits identified 4 public sector entities who have consistently demonstrated good practices over the past 3 years or more.

'This year, I was pleased to find that 3 more public sector entities were assessed as having mature general computer control environments across the 6 computer control categories we looked at,' said Ms Spencer.

Despite a slight increase in the number of public sector entities having mature business continuity controls from last year, half of the entities reviewed still do not manage this area well.

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The report also revealed that little progress was made across the sector in 2018 in general computer controls, with:

- 547 control issues identified in 2018, compared to 539 issues in 2017
- 13 entities met our expectations, compared to 10 entities in 2017
- minor improvement shown in information security and business continuity over the past 11 years.

The report makes a range of recommendations that all public sector entities should consider where relevant to their functions.

'In addition to our recommendations, the newly funded Office of Digital Government also has an important role in supporting public sector entities to address any control weaknesses and with improving their capability and cyber resilience,' Ms Spencer said.

The Office of the Auditor General has also included better practice principles to assist public sector agencies who are deciding if they should move to the cloud. The Software as a Service principles can help entities when choosing an IT provider and with ongoing contract management. Download a copy of the principles below.

Information Systems Audit Report 2019 is available on the Office of the Auditor General website at www.audit.wa.gov.au.

ENDS

Report resources for public sector entities

All public sector entities are encouraged to promote and share these resources within your organisation.

- *Information Systems Audit Report 2019* - PDF version
- *Information Systems Audit Report 2019* - summary video
- Software as a Service better practice principles

Previous information system audit reports

- *Information Systems Audit Report 2018*
- *Information Systems Audit Report 2017*