

University Records Retention Schedule - Introduction

What is a Records Retention Schedule?

A records retention schedule is a control document that lists the main types of records that the University creates, receives or maintains as part of its business activities specifying how long the records should be retained for and why.

Why do we need a Records Retention Schedule?

- A records retention schedule is an essential component of an efficient and effective records management system. It sets out an organisation's policy on retention of its business records. This provides a basis for consistent action across the entire organisation and eliminates the need for individual employees to make decisions about the retention of the records which they produce or receive in the course of their work.

- A consistently implemented records retention schedule will protect the interests of the University and its stakeholders by ensuring that business records are retained for as long as they are needed:-
 - to meet operational needs,
 - to comply with legal and regulatory requirements, particularly the Freedom of Information and Data Protection Acts,
 - to demonstrate accountability to its stakeholders and to wider society.

- Retaining records for only as long as they are needed enables efficient use to be made of space and the overall costs associated with maintaining records to be minimised.

- A records retention schedule will assist in identifying records of historic value to be preserved permanently.

Content

This records retention schedule is based upon a generic model drawn up for Higher Education Institutions by the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC). The schedule follows a functional approach rather than an organisational structure approach. This means that under some functions records will be created and maintained by more than one Department/Faculty.

The schedule covers records in all formats, and must be applied to electronic records including e-mails as well as to paper records, databases, audio-visual materials and artefacts.

The schedule refers to the official copy, or the master copy only, and any duplicates and convenience copies including backup copies in alternative media must be disposed of once reference use has concluded. Separate retention periods should be established for duplicate records to ensure that they too are only retained for as long as necessary and not kept for longer than the retention of the master copy specified in the schedule.

Some records have no significant operational, informational or evidential value and can be destroyed as soon as they have served their primary purpose. These records must be disposed of promptly, and further guidance on this is given in [How to manage ephemeral records](#).

Explanation of terms used in the Records Retention Schedule

The schedule contains a description of the main functions and then lists the different activities that arise under these functions. These functions and activities represent the first two levels in the University file plan. Under each function and activity description is a table divided into eight columns.

Ref no - reference

Record Groups – lists the records groups - the broad categories of records which are generated by the business activities in the University file plan.

Record Series– more detailed listing of individual record series – a group of records kept together (either physically or intellectually) because they relate to a particular subject or function, result from the same activity, document a specific type of transaction, take a particular physical form or have some other relationship arising out of their creation, receipt, maintenance or use (JISC), e.g. invoices, applications for jobs, set of minutes for a particular team or project.

It is normal practice in records management to group records together into record series and the records retention schedule evaluates the record series rather than individual records.

Ownership – the name of the Department or Faculty that is responsible for creating or holding the record, and is therefore responsible for maintaining the official or master copy in order to comply with the schedule. If more than one copy of the record exists, then a decision should be made on who should hold the master copy and this should be noted in this column. Under some functions, records will be created and maintained by most Departments and Faculties, and this will be noted by a general ownership of Departments/Faculties.

Retention period – consists of two elements – a starting point or ‘trigger’ and a period of time. The trigger is the activity or event that takes place to which the retention period should be tied, e.g. current year, superseded, and the period of time is the number of years the records should be retained for.

Disposal Action – at the end of the retention period, there will be three possible disposal actions:-

Destroy – records must be deleted or disposed of according to the procedures on Disposing of confidential waste. The Compliance Team will be responsible for disposing of records held in centrally managed stores. Departments and Faculties

will be responsible for disposing of records held outside centrally managed stores according to the format of the records.

Archive – records that have been identified as being of historic interest must be transferred to the archives to be kept permanently. Very few of the University's records will be of historic interest, and these will mainly be official records or records that document significant decisions and events. Records held in central stores marked as archive will automatically be kept permanently. The Compliance Team must be contacted for records held by Departments and Faculties marked in the records retention schedule as being of archival value.

Review – records that need to be reviewed at a later stage to decide if they need to be appraised for their archival value. As above, records held in central stores marked as review will automatically be reviewed. The Compliance Team must be contacted for records held by Departments and Faculties marked in the records retention schedule as review.

If the Departments or Faculties know that records contain information that has been requested under the Freedom of Information Act or the Data Protection Act, or if they are subject to an investigation by the police or related to a legal dispute, then all destruction procedures must cease immediately. Managers must make any staff aware of issues that might affect disposal decisions.

Retention authority – this is the authority upon which the retention period is based. Citations are given for key Acts of Parliament, Statutory Instruments and regulations which are relevant to determining the retention period for a group of records. All other retention periods are based on the JISC model or internal guidance.

Notes – includes any additional comments to clarify the rationale for retention periods, to provide additional information or to highlight related issues.

See also [How to implement the Records Retention Schedule](#)

Responsibility for the Records Retention Schedule

The Compliance Team is responsible for drawing up the records retention schedule in consultation with relevant members of staff. This will be agreed by the Heads of Departments/Deans or their representatives and will then be subject to the formal approval of the relevant committee responsible for records and compliance issues in order to establish this as University policy.

It is intended that the records retention schedule will be a dynamic document updated on a regular basis as changes in legislation occur or new functions, activities or record series are created due to changes in University processes. Staff will use the [Records amendment form](#) to add new records series or to suggest new retention periods giving reasons for changing the existing retention period. This form will be sent to the Compliance Team who will then liaise with a relevant Senior Manager

from the Department/Faculty. The overall records retention schedule will be reviewed and approved annually by the relevant committee responsible for records and compliance issues.