

**UNIVERSITY OF LONDON
RECORDS MANAGEMENT MANUAL:
BEST PRACTICE PROCEDURE No. 1**

**MANAGING INFORMATION -
WHY RECORDS MANAGEMENT IS NECESSARY**

1. Managing information

1.1 All organisations need to manage the information they create and accumulate in the course of their activities.

1.2 Without good information management no institution can function efficiently, since legal, financial and administrative transactions must be documented and the reference needs and research requirements of the institution serviced.

1.3 Poor information management means that organisations may lose part or all of their corporate memory; records documenting the development of functions and data on research carried out may be destroyed or misplaced.

1.4 Surviving material may be without order and control, thus losing its evidential value and resulting in over-dependence on individual memory.

1.5 Such lack of control results in loss of accountability for an organisation's actions.

1.6 This in turn can raise questions of corruption or mismanagement in addition to the usual problems of time and cost caused by inefficiency.

2. Accountability and management

2.1 Evidence of past actions is the basis of all forms of accountability; that evidence is captured as records.

2.2 For records to retain their value as evidence they need to be preserved and managed. This information management needs to cover the whole life cycle of the records produced, irrespective of format.

2.3 There are three stages of the life of every record: it is created as a current record; it is maintained as a semi-current record with continued value for the business of the organisation; and it is disposed of when it becomes a non-current record of no further business use.

2.4 Records management is the area of professional work which is concerned with achieving economy and efficiency in the creation, maintenance, business use and disposal of records.

2.5 Archival administration is that which becomes concerned at the disposal stage with the preservation and research use of those records which have been selected as archives.

3. The value of records and information management

3.1 Good records and information management is always advantageous, both financially and administratively, to an institution. Costs will decrease and efficiency increase as a result of the following actions:

- Records of ephemeral quality will be identified which can be immediately destroyed.
- The development and use of records retention schedules earmarking material for permanent retention, review or destruction within a specified period, will mean that *ad hoc*, uninformed decisions will no longer have to be made about how to dispose of records.
- Sorting and listing of older records will mean that files needed by staff (such as students' files) can always be found.
- A secure, managed semi-current records store will release office space. Proper identification and listing of semi-current records will again ensure efficient retrieval when necessary.
- If required, the University Records Manager can advise on the most useful filing systems, file classifications and retrieval systems, including advice on electronic information management in relation to the needs of the organisation for long-term preservation of records.

4. The value of archives

4.1 Good information management cannot exist without archives. They comprise the final stage in the life cycle of every record of permanent value.

4.2 Archives are:

- the non-current records of an organisation or an individual, which are selected for preservation because of their continuing value;
- the repository or building (or part thereof) where archival material is stored (note: this should not be confused with the semi-current record store);
- the agency responsible for the selection, preservation, documentation and making available of archival material.

4.3 There are four main reasons for preserving specific records:

- **Administrative value**

In the conduct of their business, organisations need to refer back to records of former activities and decisions to provide background information, establish the existence of a precedent or to substantiate or refute claims or allegations.

- **Financial value**

An organisation needs long-term evidence of the way in which monies were obtained, allocated, controlled and expended. This includes budget records which provide evidence of planned income and expenditure and accounting records which document financial transactions.

- **Legal value**

Legal records provide evidence of contractual obligations, duties and privileges agreed upon by governments, organisations or individuals. They provide a record of such matters as charters, property titles, charitable status and other legal and civil rights. They constitute evidence of the decisions of governments, courts and other bodies and provide authority for specific actions.

- **Archival value**

Archives are recognised as the primary source materials for research. They form a unique and indispensable record for researchers, so valued as they formed an intrinsic part of the activity which brought them into existence.

4.4 The majority of records (at least 95%) created by an institution do not have sufficient importance to warrant permanent retention and should be destroyed at specified times according to an agreed Records Retention Schedule.

4.5 Records and information managers and archivists will, in conjunction with the relevant divisional staff, appraise, select or weed out material of value by looking at the life-cycle of a record. This considers long-term corporate and research requirements.

4.6 A record produced for one specific function may have research value (and, quite possibly, further administrative reference use) in areas not apparent to its creator.

4.7 Records retained permanently in the University Archives are so due to their capturing of decisions made and the associated processes. Other historically significant information such as maps, plans, films and photographs, will also be retained.

5. Electronic information management

5.1 All records, especially electronic, suffer from deterioration over time; loss of control, accessibility and doubts about authenticity are all prevalent.

5.2 A record is a document of a transaction, irrespective of format; a CD-Rom or shared drive, like a paper file, is only a container for information. Strategic decisions should be made on how to create, record and preserve electronic transactions, whether by printing out or retention in electronic format.

5.3 What this means is that electronic transactions which should be recorded, whether to document legal, financial, administrative transactions or for reference or research requirements.

5.4 One of the great advantages of electronic records is the low cost of storage (although these are increasing exponentially due to use). Despite this, information must not simply be stored arbitrarily; thought must always be taken as to what should be retained and for how long, as per the guidance set out in a retention schedule. An organisation must also recognise the problems inherent to the speed of technological change; hardware and software systems becoming quickly obsolete, often making recorded objects unreadable.

5.5 Any plan for design, redesign or substantial enhancement of any systems that use electronic data processing or optical imaging technologies to retain records must therefore incorporate records retention requirements, so that information of long term value will be saved and converted onto new systems as they are set up.

University of London Records Manager & Freedom of Information Officer

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