

RECORDS MANAGEMENT

INFOKIT



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Records Management

What Is Records Management?

Records management is an established theory and methodology for ensuring the systematic management of all records and the information they contain throughout their lifecycle.

According to International Standard ISO 15489: 2001, records management is defined as:

The field of management responsible for the efficient and systematic control of the creation, receipt, maintenance, use and disposition of records, including the processes for capturing and maintaining evidence of and information about business activities and transactions in the form of records.

A detailed description of what constitutes a record will be explored further in the section [What is a record?](#). Traditionally records were held on paper, microfilm or microfiche, but are now predominantly created and held in electronic format or within electronic systems.

The core concept underpinning records management theory is that of the lifecycle, which sees records having a series of phases from creation to final disposition ultimately resulting either in their controlled destruction or being retained on a permanent basis as an archival record.

This infoKit is based around the well established concept of lifecycle management and how it should be specifically applied to the management of records. Further information about the general theory underpinning the information lifecycle, the main phases within it and the key concerns and issues to be addressed within each phase is available from the [Managing the Information Lifecycle](#) strand of this resource.

The principle reason for applying the lifecycle concept to records management is to ensure that the records being created and held by the institution are being managed and maintained in such a way that they:

- meet all internal business needs
- enable the defence of the rights and interests of the institution and its stakeholders
- enable the content of the record to be accessed, used and reused in a controlled and efficient manner
- is compliant with all regulatory and statutory requirements
- is capable of providing evidence of a transaction or business process which is admissible in a court of law
- is kept and maintained/stored in the most economical way consistent with the above objectives
- is disposed of in a way which is auditable, and meets all environmental and other requirements

According to International Standard ISO 15489: 2001 records management includes the following activities:

- *setting policies and standards*
- *assigning responsibilities and authorities*
- *establishing and promulgating procedures and guidelines*
- *providing a range of services relating to the management and use of records*
- *designing, implementing and administering specialized systems for managing records and*
- *integrating records management into business systems and processes*

Why Is Records Management Necessary?

All further and higher education institutions are large and complex organisations. They employ hundreds if not thousands of staff, undertake a varied range of functions and have complex administrative structures often straddling multiple geographical locations. In order to operate as modern, agile and efficient organisations able to sustain growth and manage change it is essential that they have effective control over the records they create and use. Historically the way in which internal records have been managed has developed in a piecemeal, organic fashion - often in response to local departmental requirements. It is now increasingly recognised that a more proactive, consistent and comprehensive approach is required for the institution to be able to cope with current and future demands.

All institutions and their staff are under pressure to do more for less. This might be as a direct result of an ever-increasing volume of students, or as universities are encouraged to branch out into new agendas such as business and community engagement. Creating accurate, reliable records; providing controlled, ready access to them and only retaining those worthy of preservation are all part of the essential infra-structure necessary to meet these challenges. This is especially true as it becomes less and less possible to rely on the knowledge and experience of individual members of staff. Increased staff turnover and regular organisational restructuring mean that the records an institution creates now represent its 'collective memory' to a far larger degree than ever before.

Institutions are also becoming increasingly aware of the potential value contained within the internal records they hold. This could be the lessons they contain from past experiences, allowing institutions to learn both from their successes and their failures. Alternatively as knowledge-rich, research-driven organisations it could be the competitive advantage or even commercial gain that can be acquired through the effective exploitation of their information assets.

As the evidence left behind from the activities we undertake, records are also an institution's best ally in terms of protecting its rights and interests. Effective records management ensures that the institution can call upon a body of reliable evidence if required to justify its actions, or defend its position. This may prove a critical strength as we move into an increasingly litigious society.

Institutions are also under ever-mounting pressure to proactively demonstrate their accountability and good standards of corporate governance. This may take the form of internal audit, submissions to funding bodies or public scrutiny through legislation such as the Freedom of Information Act, Environmental Information Regulations and Data Protection Act. Compliance with all of these is only possible if the appropriate body of records exists to prove what actions were taken, why they were taken and on whose authority, and what their outcomes were. This is only possible with effective records management.

Creation

Whilst all records are information, not all information is a record. In this section we will therefore analyse what are the unique properties that separate records from more generic sources of information or data and as a result what is required to produce good, reliable records.

The contents of this section build on and augment the information provided in the Information Lifecycle - Creation strand and should be considered in this light. What this section attempts to do is build on the general good practice guidance on information creation covered previously and look specifically at the additional requirements for creating good **records**.

As such it will be of use to those tasked with managing records within the institution, quality managers, auditors and those responsible for the design of new systems and processes.

The topics covered within this section include:

- What is a record?

- Creating authentic records
- Creating complete records
- Creating reliable records
- Fixity and declaring records

What Is A Record?

The ISO defines **records** as *"information created, received, and maintained as evidence and information by an organization or person, in pursuance of legal obligations or in the transaction of business"*.

Whilst useful in stressing the essential evidential quality of a record and of highlighting the vital role played by the record as the output of a transaction, it could be said that this definition of a record fails to adequately describe the properties which define a record.

The International Council on Archives (ICA) Committee on Electronic Records definition of a **record** as, *"recorded information produced or received in the initiation, conduct or completion of an institutional or individual activity and that comprises content, context and structure sufficient to provide evidence of the activity"*. The [International Council on Archives](#) goes some way to addressing these short-comings by stressing three key properties inherent in all records, that is that they must possess:

1. **Content** (i.e. information or data)
2. **Context** (i.e. it must be possible to ascertain how it relates to other records and to the organisation which created it)
3. **Structure** (i.e. there must be an inherent logic to the way in which the information it contains - and the metadata which is likely to define its context - are laid out and which is ultimately interpretable by the human eye)

The result of adhering to these properties should be to create records which contain the following qualities:

1. **Authenticity**. It should be possible to identify, and preferably prove, the process which created the record and who its authorised creator was.
2. **Completeness**. The record should contain all of the content required to act as evidence of the transaction it is documenting. This does not mean that one record must contain *everything* to which it relates; simply that it is complete in its own terms.
3. **Reliability**. It is important that the content of the record can be relied upon as an accurate representation of the transaction it is documenting.
4. **Fixity**. Once declared as a record its content should no longer be altered or changed in any way. It is in this way that its evidential value is preserved (by ensuring that the content of a record remains exactly as it was at creation).

Finally, it should be noted that all of the above properties and qualities can apply regardless of the record's format, whether it be a sheet of paper, email, photograph or database entry.

Such precise definitions and their theoretical underpinnings may seem complex and largely irrelevant to practitioners at the 'coal face' within institutions. However, as we shall see throughout the remainder of this strand of the infoKit they are relevant and do have a very real and practical application. It is largely this definition of what records are which separates them from other types of information or data, provides them with their added value and, as we shall see, defines the way in which they must be managed.

Creating Authentic Records

The concept of *provenance* is a key aspect of records and archival management theory. It describes proof of the origin or source of something (in this case a record) and the chain of custody regarding whose hands it has passed through since.

Why Is This Important?

Capturing a record's provenance provides proof as to who the actors were in any given transaction or process and demonstrates that they had the appropriate authority to undertake it. It should also provide guarantees regarding the reliability of the content due to the known position and authority of the creator. Controlling and recording the 'chain of custody' then perpetuates these assurances throughout the remainder of its life. This issue is explored in more detail during the [Active Use section](#) of this infoKit.

How To Create Authentic Records

Given the importance of provenance to creating authentic records, it is vital that the institution has clearly defined processes surrounding the transactions¹ it undertakes. This not only means knowing precisely how the transaction should be conducted, but also who should be involved within it and what their specific roles are. The JISC infoNet infoKit on [process review](#) should help institutions in this regard. As part of this exercise, it is important to identify what records will be created at which points in the process, thus closely associating each record to the process they are documenting.

It is often the case that systems which create structured data, such as relational databases, student record systems etc are better equipped to automatically control and capture record provenance. Access is usually via a password controlled login which validates the identity of the creator. Any records created or edited during that session will then be automatically associated to that particular user. The user's profile can also be used to determine what system rights they have access to and therefore what transactions they can undertake.

It can be more difficult to achieve this level of control with unstructured records such as text-based documents, spreadsheets etc. Measures to address this may include:

- Limiting access to particular areas of the record storage facility (i.e. particular folders or areas of the file plan) to specific identified users
- Creating official templates for use when creating specific record types (meeting minutes, project plans, annual review forms etc) and limiting access to them to certain identified users
- Ensuring the document properties are picking up the correct authors name from their log in and/or making manual completion of the author field mandatory on document creation
- Considering the use of biometric authentication systems to confirm the identity of the creator
- Ensuring the 'header' metadata documenting the transfer information is retained with any emails saved outside of the email client

Creating Complete Records

¹ It should be noted that when we refer to 'transactions' this does not necessarily mean financial transaction. The term transaction can be used to describe the completion of any process and could equally apply to a holding a meeting, agreeing a project plan, appraising a member of staff or disciplining a student

Creating records which contain all relevant content and contextual information not only ensures that the transaction in question has been fully and appropriately documented, but also that the record has value as a source of information to others.

Why Is This Important?

Any 'record' which has parts of its content missing, or is otherwise incomplete, will clearly not be reliable as a source of evidence and is likely to be disregarded as such. This could leave the institution unable to explain its actions and thus defend its legal interests.

Incomplete records not only reduce their informational value, they can also prove to be positively misleading and potentially dangerous. The user may not be aware of important additional information, amendments or clarifications which may fundamentally alter the meaning of the record. This may lead to well-meaning but incorrect decisions being made based on false assumptions.

Records that are incomplete will be reliant on the memory, knowledge or experience of the end user to 'fill in the blanks'. Where all staff are in possession of such skills, this may not be an issue in the short term. However, temporary contracts and high staff turnover mean that few areas of the institution will be in this situation. Furthermore, the longer after the point of creation that the record is accessed for information, the less likely it is that the memory of staff can be relied upon to 'fill in the gaps' - thus increasing the risk.

How To Create Complete Records

- When designing a new record-creating system, define exactly what information it is appropriate to capture (time/date, location, author, purpose, outcome etc) and where possible use system design to capture this information automatically as part of carrying out the transaction
- When designing document and form templates consider their design and specify which elements must or should be completed. Use document properties to enforce completion of all mandatory elements
- When archiving emails as records ensure that all component parts of the message are retained as a complete set (for example, content of message, transmission information and attachment(s)). Further information on management of emails as records is available from the Email Management strand of this infoKit
- Ensure any files containing OLE links to other associated files are managed consistently and that the links are retained. This may be especially important when moving files from one location within the file plan to another, or when deleting some files.

"OLE: Object Linking and Embedding (OLE) is a technology that allows embedding and linking to documents and other objects, developed by Microsoft. It is founded on the Component Object Model. For developers, it brought OLE custom controls (OCX), a way to develop and use custom user interface elements."²

- Consider the appropriate 'unit of management' for a record. For example, when managing web resources, does each webpage stand alone as a complete record, or is it more appropriate to consider the complete website as the record?

Creating Reliable Records

² Taken from the Wikipedia entry for Object Linking and Embedding on 09 July 2007
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Object_Linking_and_Embedding

Alongside authenticity and completeness, reliability is the third key quality common to all records worthy of the name. In many regards a record's overall reliability will, to a large extent, be determined by the degree to which these other two qualities are present but it also exists as an important quality in its own right. A record may have been created by the appropriate, authorised person and it may contain all of the elements that it should but these will count for little if that content is itself factually incorrect.

Why Is This Important?

The institution faces the same risks if creating unreliable records as it does if creating incomplete records, in terms of decisions being made based on inaccurate data. However, where content is present but incorrect that risk is increased. This is because the likelihood of it being accepted as the truth and acted upon as such is correspondingly higher. It is not difficult to imagine examples of where incorrect information stated in unreliable records could materially damage the interests of stakeholders. For example, incorrect grades associated to a student, the wrong salary paid into a member of staff's bank account or measurements mistakenly recorded in feet rather than metres on a plan.

It should also be remembered that when dealing with personal data it is a legal requirement to ensure that records containing personal data are [*accurate and where necessary up to date*](#).

Lastly, as the main source of the historical record charting the development and progress of the institution, it is clearly in its long term interests to ensure that the records it creates are as accurate and reliable as possible.

How To Create Reliable Records

- User training is often overlooked as a critical aspect for ensuring the creation of reliable records. With a few notable exceptions (for example minute taking training for secretaries) there is often little emphasis placed on training staff to accurately record the transactions they perform. IT training is a good example where staff will be trained on the details of how to use Microsoft Word to create a document, but seldom on what it is they should be using it to create.
- System design should reduce the amount of data fields requiring manual entry by relying on macros and formats which enable data exchange between systems (such as XML).
- Errors often occur when staff are pressed for time and attempting to deal with a range of processes at any one time. The institution should attempt to create a culture which acknowledges that time spent creating accurate, reliable records is equally as valuable as that spent performing the functions to which they relate.
- Good practice itself helps create a 'virtuous circle'. If users have access to accurate records when researching their work, the chances of them themselves creating accurate and reliable records is increased.

Fixity & Declaring Records

We now live in an age where we expect information to be fluid. Database content is continually changing, web pages are updated by the minute and our news programmes now come as constant 24 hour rolling broadcasts. Yet from the records management perspective it is vital that at set points in the process we draw a metaphorical line in the sand and fix the content of a record as it stands at that point. Once fixed it is equally important that it stays fixed - preserved as an accurate, unaltered record of the event in question.

Why Is This Important?

The importance of this concept of fixity stems again from the fact that records have an importance and purpose above and beyond simply the information they contain. In order to function as

evidence, it is vital that records are an accurate and contemporary record of how things were at the time of the record's creation. Obvious examples of when this might be important include the terms of a contract agreed with a 3rd party which must stand for the duration of the contract or procedures introduced to govern how research projects must be conducted. Without agreement as to when these key records have reached their final, approved state and subsequent assurances that their content has not been altered it is easy to predict the potential disputes and challenges which may arise.

Things do, of course, change over time and the records we created must reflect that. The concept of [Version Control](#) is covered in the next section of this infoKit. For now we are focusing on the initial point at which the content of the record is fixed, a process commonly known as *declaration*. All records will have a life before they are declared as a record and their contents fixed. They will be drafted, edited and redrafted as draft documents many times before their contents are agreed, finalised and ready for any formal sign-off procedure. It is at this point that the process of *declaration* should occur and a record be created.

How To Declare Records

- However, the act of declaration is achieved the result should be the same. That is that the contents of the record are frozen at this point and should remain un-editable from thereon. Also that any associated metadata is likewise fixed to reflect their state at the point of declaration. Particular attention may need to be paid to ensure dates do not alter (e.g. not updating the date last edited every time the record is subsequently viewed after declaration).
- It is important that the principles of provenance are also considered . For example, that the name of the creating department as stated in the metadata remains as it was at the time the record was created, even if subsequently changed during a re-structuring process.
- Care should be taken to consider the entirety of the record at the point of declaration. For example, ensuring that any OLE embedded files are also declared at the same time, or that external information on which that record is reliant (such as a page on the intranet) is also captured.
- For reasons relating to version control (which will be discussed in full later on -) it is useful to amend file names or other unique identifier codes to reflect the declared status of the record.
- Once declared it should still provide the user with the ability to create a new record based on that declared which will then be treated as a separate entity.

Active Use

The life of a record begins at the moment of its declaration . This means it is already information of some maturity by the time it enters its active use. For records then the active use phase may be characterised less by constant use and rapid change than for other, more informal types of information. Instead the emphasis remains on ensuring the maintenance of the specific qualities and properties of the record which give it its value throughout this first stage of its use.

All of the guidance contained in the general Information Lifecycle Management strand of this infokit for the active use phase remains relevant and the contents of this section is intended to build upon this work. What follows relates specifically to the management of **records** during the active use phase and should be read and considered in addition to this earlier guidance.

As such it will be of use to those tasked with managing records within the institution, quality managers, auditors and those responsible for the design of new systems and processes.

The topics covered within this section include:

- Managing version control

- Retaining the audit trail
- Managing the master copy
- Protecting vital records

Managing Version Control

Even once declared as a record it is still inevitable that updates will need to be made to a record over time. As we have seen in the previous section, thanks to the need to preserve the virtues of fixity and authenticity, changes should not be made to the content of the original record once it has been declared. Any further amendments, alterations or even corrections should be made and saved as a new version of the record - keeping the original as it was at the time of declaration. In this scenario it is now essential that we retain control over new versions of the record and are able to distinguish when subsequent drafts do themselves become newly declared records.

Why Is This Important?

The same requirement to be able to distinguish between draft documents and final records applies with regards to subsequent versions as discussed in the previous section with reference to their original creation and declaration.

When a record is being updated it is likely that the changes will be made over several sessions, perhaps involving multiple members of staff. Without clear co-ordination of this process and management of the various versions created chaos will soon reign with no clear picture of which is the most current version, and which should be declared as the next version of the record. This risks decisions being made according to out of date information which is believed to be current. It can also lead to potential embarrassment with content which was removed from a previous draft being mistakenly included within the final declared record.

Finally of course it leads to wasted time and considerable frustration both on the part of the author who spends time needlessly working on an old version and the reader who has read an obsolete document.

How To Maintain Version Control

- Agree and abide by a file naming and numbering schema which clearly separates and denotes both draft and final versions
- Ensure only one definitive copy of each record exists to prevent multiple, 'parallel' versions being created
- Include version information as part of standard document design
- Provide reference links to records stored in central shared locations, rather than attaching copies as email attachments
- Consider whether or not to retain drafts once a new version of a record has been created (see the next section - Retaining the audit trail - for further details)

Further details of all of the above are available from the [Managing Information to Make Life Easier: A Practical Guide for Administrators](#).

Retaining The Audit Trail

As we have seen, records represent our best, and often our only, link with the past - whether that be to satisfy our historical curiosity or to prove the legitimacy of our actions. Knowing what a record said at a particular point in time and being able to demonstrate how its content has evolved is key to preserving this link between the record and the process or event it describes.

Why Is This Important?

As well as acting as evidence of the transactions we undertake, many records actually define the boundaries within which these transactions must occur and dictate the way in which they are carried out. For example, the procurement policy which determines how a service or product must be acquired or the research ethics guidelines which provide the guiding principles to which a project must abide. Important decisions are taken against the contents of a these records as they exist at the time. It is therefore vital that it is possible to pin-point exactly what the record said at any given point in time in order to re-create these conditions and verify the validity of the decisions made.

It may also prove necessary to be able to demonstrate exactly who made what changes and when. This could be in order to provide proof of who was involved in a process and evidence of their authority to do so or simply to enable the author of a particular version of a record to be identified and contacted to provide clarification over a point of detail.

The audit trail can also help show how ideas developed over time and in response to specific events. All of which can be valuable from a 'lessons learnt' perspective.

How To Retain The Audit Trail

- It is impossible to be able to maintain and recreate a record's audit trail without effective version control using some or all of the measures outlined in the previous section.
- Careful thought should be given as to whether it is appropriate to retain previous drafts of a record once the final version has been declared. Doing so will obviously provide a fuller history of the development of the record which may be useful. However, it will also add significantly to the overall volume of information being held by the institution and may increase the risk of inaccurate information being inadvertently retained and brought back into circulation. Once declared as a record it should only be deleted in accordance with your retention management policy , even if superseded by more recent versions.
- Ensure you consider the most appropriate format for maintaining records. Some media may be excellent for allowing easy drafting and editing of content but this transience can make it difficult or impossible to accurately 'roll back' the content to a specific date or version.
- If you are going to use your website or intranet to store and publish the only copy of records such as your prospectus or operating procedures, ensure your content management system does retain a full date-stamped audit trail of changes made. Alternatively, you may need to introduce manual measures such as ensuring that a separate 'snap-shot' of the content is taken and preserved as the formal record of the content at any given time.

Managing The Master Copy

Thanks to the ease with which new records can be created, copied and circulated, it is inevitable that multiple copies of records will still exist - even if the creation and version control advice featured in previous sections is followed. For example, all members of a committee each receiving their own copies of the minutes and associated papers.

It is necessary to strike a balance between the need to extend appropriate management controls to all information held by the institution (as outlined in the [Managing the Information Lifecycle](#) strand of this infoKit and the separate need to identify and manage the master copy of a record as a prime concern.

Why Is This Important?

It may be that the master copy of a record has additional unique properties which give it added value and significance over any other copies which may exist, for example if it contains an official signature.

Alternatively, it may be that different management requirements exist for the master copy than for associated copies. For example, a record requiring long term preservation may need to be migrated to a more stable open format. This is an exercise you only wish to perform once on the definitive master copy and not repeat unnecessarily on further copies.

Lastly, as we shall explore in more detail in the section on retention management the master copy will usually have different retention requirements than will apply to other associated copies.

How To Manage The Master Copy

- Identify the agreed source of the master copy (for example the copy of the minutes signed by the committee chair, or the project sponsor's version of the Project Plan.
- Consider establishing procedures for ensuring the capture of master copy at the point defined as the end of its active use (end of project, year end etc). This will be linked to the steps outlined in the Information Lifecycle Management - semi-active use - Do you know [what information is being held and why?](#) Section.
- Issue an umbrella policy statement regarding whether the institution considers the paper or electronic version of records to be the master copy (where appropriate). This will need to consider the institution's ability to preserve digital records in the long term, plus the legal position regarding the use of electronic information as evidence.

Protecting Vital Records

Vital records can be defined as those categories of record which are required by the organisation to be able to carry out its essential core functions in a legally compliant manner. As such they make take many forms ranging from historic charters, through to estate records, insurance certificates, staff payroll information and emergency out-of-hours contact details for key staff.

Why Is This Important?

The quickest way to describe the importance of such records is to imagine the situation without them. The institution may have no legal mandate to provide education, may not be able to prove ownership of its built estate nor allow those few staff who are willing to work without payment to operate without appropriate insurance cover.

This may represent the most extreme, apocalyptic vision but even the 'milder' consequences resulting from the loss of vital records are certainly to be avoided at all costs. These include loss of intellectual assets and competitive advantage, inability to protect the interests of stakeholders (for example, providing proof of qualifications gained by former students) and of course severe damage to your reputation.

How To Protect Vital Records

- Clearly the first requirement is to be able to identify and locate those records which are deemed to qualify as vital. This process may prove easier if broad categories of types of vital record are first defined. Some example categories are included in Table 1. Identification of the master copy as outlined in the previous section will assist in this process.
- Additional management controls will be required for vital records. These are likely to include routine duplication together with off-site storage of back-ups, specific finding aids

which allow vital records to be found quickly and easily in the event of a disaster and ensuring that management of vital records is co-ordinated with other aspects of the institution's disaster recovery and business continuity planning measures.

- Measures put in place to manage vital records will need to cover both existing records, plus all new vital records created in the future. The information audit process described in a later section will prove invaluable for locating existing vital records. When it comes to preparing for future records it will prove useful to identify the processes which will create the records in question.

Table below - Example categories of vital records plus examples

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Legal | Charters, insurance certificates, deeds etc |
| Financial | Accounts, payroll, pensions etc |
| Operational | Timetables, exam papers, student records |
| Commercial | Contracts, memoranda of understanding etc |
| Intellectual capital | Research data |
| Disaster recovery | Out of hours staff contact details, estate plans, utility and emergency service contact details |

Semi-Active Use

As with all categories of information, the semi-active use phase of the lifecycle is often the most difficult to define and control when it comes to the management of records. This is particularly true for records as the longevity of their *evidential* value often far exceeds that of their *informational* value. As a consequence a significant volume of records often need to be retained which appear to the casual observer to be of little relevance or importance. The ability to separate the 'wheat' from the 'chaff' and manage them accordingly during this phase may play a pivotal role in protecting your institution's long term interests.

All of the guidance contained in the general Information Lifecycle Management strand of this infokit for the semi-active use phase remains relevant and the contents of this section is intended to build upon this work. What follows relates specifically to the management of **records** during the semi-active use phase and should be read and considered in addition to this earlier guidance.

As such it will be of use to those tasked with managing records within the institution, quality managers, auditors and those responsible for the design of new systems and processes.

The topics covered within this section include:

- Undertaking a record survey
- Retaining the audit trail
- Retention management

- Records appraisal

Undertaking A Record Survey

Undertaking a comprehensive audit of the records you hold, the processes which create them and the measures taken to manage them represents a significant task. However, its findings are a crucial weapon in helping you manage records throughout their semi-active use and through to their final state.

Why Is This Important?

The records survey provides an objective assessment of an institution's record-keeping practices, and the way in which that information is actually used. In many respects it is the first and most important step towards getting control of records and the information which they contain. It is a time-consuming and labour-intensive process, but is likely to produce insights into many other aspects of the way in which your organisation functions, in addition to its records management focus. For example:

- highlighting where there is unnecessary duplication of records
- indicating where business processes might be streamlined for more efficient administration
- demonstrating where records are being kept too long
- highlighting areas where user training and awareness of records management tasks needs to be increased
- identifying vital records
- uncovering where cost savings might be made through economies of scale etc
- determining preservation requirements

This is not a comprehensive list of objectives, merely an indication of the potential range of knowledge that can be obtained through such a survey and the benefits it may bring.

How To Undertake An Information Audit

Because of scale and complexity of undertaking a full record survey, a separate mini-guide to this process is included within this infoKit .

[Click for the Record Survey Guide](#)

Retention Management

A retention schedule is a list of records for which pre-determined destruction dates have been established. One of the principle aims of the records survey is to establish those categories of records for which there is a known disposal date.

The main objective of the retention schedule is to define how long records need to be retained in order to satisfy all operational, legal and regulatory purposes and to help co-ordinate their resulting maintenance, disposal or preservation.

Why Is This Important?

There is a careful balance which needs to be struck with regards to the retention of records. As we have covered in previous sections, it is important that records are kept for as long as their contents have operational value and for as long as they may be required as evidence of the transactions they document. However, there are often also compelling reasons not to retain such records for any longer than they are required relating to costs of storage, pressures on physical

space and the need to disclose all relevant information you hold in response to an FOI request or legal discovery exercise. When it comes to records containing personal data there are also legal requirements under Principle 5 of the [Data Protection Act](#) which require institutions to not retain personal data for longer than is necessary for the purpose(s) for which it was obtained.

There are also legal requirements governing how institutions and other public bodies should remove the records they wish to legitimately dispose of. According to the [s.46 Code of Practice](#) on the management of records which accompanies the Freedom of Information Act:

"Each authority should maintain a selection policy which states in broad terms the functions from which records are likely to be selected for permanent preservation and the periods for which other records should be retained".

A records retention schedule represents just such a selection policy.

How To Manage Retention

- Consider adopting and tailoring as required either the JISC infoNet HE and FE retention schedule .
- Ensure your retention schedule covers records held in all formats.
- Consider retention functionality when selecting or designing IT systems which will create or store records.
- Consider how retention issues will be handled if choosing to digitise large volumes of records.
- Ensure your retention management not only takes into consideration retention requirements based on the record's content, but also considers the specific format and media electronic records may be stored in.

Final Outcome

This final phase in the records lifecycle leads to two logical outcomes: either the record is destroyed, or it is retained as a permanent, archival record. The main objectives of this phase is to ensure that each record follows the correct path and that the decisions which decide this are made according to pre-determined rules and criteria. For those records which are retained, so new records may in turn be created which draws upon their content or the learning contained within them - thus perpetuating the lifecycle.

All of the guidance contained in the general Information Lifecycle Management strand of this infokit for the *final outcome* phase remains relevant and the contents of this section are intended to build upon this work. What follows relates specifically to the management of *records* during the *final outcome* phase and should be read and considered in addition to this earlier guidance.

As such it will be of use to those tasked with managing records within the institution, quality managers, auditors, archivists and those responsible for the design of new systems and processes.

The topics covered within this section include:

- Record appraisal & disposal
- Preservation & curation

Record Appraisal & Disposal

The act of disposing of a record is not one which should be carried out in an ad hoc or unmanaged manner, but according to pre-defined criteria and clearly articulated processes. This

will ensure that you can justify why the records in question were destroyed, as well as proving beyond refute that no trace of them remains.

Why is this important?

Even if carried out with completely innocent motives, the uncontrolled destruction of records without proper authorisation or due process can easily be interpreted as an attempt to avoid releasing damaging information and prevent the cause of justice. Notorious cases of deliberate unauthorised destruction of records such as at Enron have increased the need to be seen to exercise suitable control over this aspect of records management. The introduction of the Freedom of Information Act in the UK has also increased the importance associated with the need for transparency and accountability during the disposal process and the requirement for an institution to be able to defend its actions if challenged.

Finally, if carried out according to a clear and defined process, the chances of either valuable records being destroyed in error, or the wrong records retained, should be significantly reduced.

How to appraise & destroy records

- Have your records retention schedule officially approved by senior management, thus providing high-level authorisation for the activities carried out according to its content.
- Although your retention schedule will provide the basis for your selection and decision-making process, also be aware that the schedule only defines *minimum* retention periods. Be prepared to consider any special circumstances which may alter the situation for individual records (for example, any record which is the subject of an ongoing FOI request should not be destroyed, even if due for destruction according to the retention schedule).
- Turn the appraisal and destruction process into regularly scheduled business processes, rather than ad hoc events. Establishing a department-by-department timetable can help embed this into the institutional calendar. Likewise, specially organised 'black bag days' can be successful in ensuring scheduled retention actions are actually carried out within offices.
- Ensure *all* copies of records scheduled for destruction are destroyed (including those stored off-site, or electronic records stored on back-up tapes or servers).
- Ensure records are destroyed in a confidential and non-recoverable manner (i.e. incinerated or cross-shredded).
- Consider the level of approval required to destroy records and ensure a documentary audit trail is in place which records the process from selection through to confirmation of destruction.

Permanent Preservation & Curation

Both archival management and digital preservation are vast subjects in their own right. As a result, this section can be no more than a signpost to some of the main issues as viewed solely from the perspective of their implications for records management. In this light the primary challenges faced here chiefly relate to ensuring the ongoing security and safety of permanent records and guaranteeing continued access to them in perpetuity.

Why is this important?

Both the content and evidential value associated with some records may require them to be retained for such long periods of time that as far as any member of staff managing them today is concerned and for all practical purposes they can be assumed to require permanent preservation. For example, some records relating to radiation accidents need to be kept for 50 years, whilst some pension records are required for 75 years after the member of staff has left the institution.

The legal rights and interests of the institution and its stakeholders could be put at risk if such records are not preserved.

As well as the operational or legal value inherent in records, a small percentage will also have enduring historic value as archival records. Such records chart the history and development of the institution and act as its collective memory. They represent an important aspect of an institution's identity and heritage, as well as a potentially valuable marketing tool.

Without appropriate storage conditions physical archives are at risk of decay caused by environmental conditions, (damp, temperature fluctuations, insect infestation etc) and loss due to poor security or a lack of awareness of their intrinsic value.

These same risks apply for electronic records, but within vastly reduced timeframes and as only one of a number of considerable threats faced. The physical media on which electronic records are stored are often extremely sensitive to exposure to damaging environmental conditions and the consequences are likely to be immediate and total. Electronic records are also at risk of being irretrievable due to hardware obsolescence (for example, the decline of floppy disk drives) and the speed of software advances which may leave records created in one version inaccessible, or altered by their replacement.

How to preserve records

- Where possible allocate separate, fit for purpose physical storage facilities with adequate security and acceptable levels of stability in both temperature and humidity fluctuations (Note: cellars, basements and attics - the 'traditional' home of the archive are seldom suitable). See the [National Archives - Environmental Management](#).
- Monitor temperature and humidity levels and take preventative measures if they fluctuate outside acceptable ranges (i.e. install de-humidifiers, heaters etc).
- Ensure you create appropriate finding aids for archival records, which also include details of where the records have come from (their provenance) as well as what they are and where they can be found.
- Arrange and describe archival records according to established principles of archival description (i.e. by preserving their original order, describing them in a hierarchical order, and keeping a record of the administrative history of the department or unit which created them). See the [General International Standard Archival Description, Second edition](#).
- Conduct tests prior to migrating records to a new software version. Does the move to a new version introduce any changes to the content, structure or metadata of the record (e.g. changes to formatting, lost header or footer information etc)? If so you must consider whether such changes are acceptable, or whether they could invalidate the records evidential status and take measures accordingly.

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