



## **HEI Records Retention Schedule**

### **User Guide**

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# 1 Introduction to the HEI Records Retention Schedule

## 1.1 What is a Records Retention Schedule?

A Records Retention Schedule is a document which sets out the periods of time for which an organisation's business records are to be retained.

The basic components of a Records Retention Schedule are:

- a description of each category of records which the organisation generates;
- a retention period for each category of records.

A more detailed Schedule may also contain information about:

- reasons for retention (e.g. legislative requirements);
- actions required at the end of retention periods (e.g. destruction);
- responsibilities for retaining records and for taking required actions at the end of retention periods.

## 1.2 Why develop a Records Retention Schedule?

A Records Retention Schedule is an essential component of an effective records management programme. 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 comprehensive Schedule, consistently implemented, protects the organisation's interests by ensuring that its business records are:

- **retained for as long as they are needed** to enable it to operate effectively, to comply with legislation and the requirements of regulators, and to demonstrate accountability to its stakeholders and to wider society;
- **retained for only as long as they are needed**, enabling efficient use of space and minimising the overall costs associated with maintaining records.

A Records Retention Schedule also provides the basis for decisions on what media/formats should be used for records, where and how records should be stored and how they should be destroyed when they are no longer needed.

## 1.3 What is the *HEI Records Retention Schedule*?

The *HEI Records Retention Schedule* (the *Schedule*) is a generic Records Retention Schedule for UK higher education institutions (HEIs). It provides high-level guidance on retention of records which HEIs generate in the course of their work. It has been developed to provide a framework which any institution can adapt and extend to produce a customised Records Retention Schedule.

The *Schedule* was developed through extensive research and consultation with a range of HEIs. It covers records which are generated by the business functions and

activities in the *HEI Business Classification Scheme*. However, it is not intended to be either prescriptive or exhaustive.

For more information about the *Schedule*, contact JISC infoNet.

## 2 Content of the *HEI Records Retention Schedule*

The *Schedule* contains:

- descriptions of **Record Groups** which are generated by HEI business activities
- and, for each Record Group,
- a **Retention Period** which may be a period prescribed by legislation or a recommended period;
  - details of the **Authority** for a retention period which is prescribed by legislation or recommended in standards or other guidance;
  - **Notes** which clarify a retention period or the rationale for it.

### 2.1 Record Groups

Record Groups are broad categories of records which are generated by the business activities in the *HEI Business Classification Scheme*. The structure of the *Schedule* is the same as that of the *Scheme*, i.e. Record Groups are listed under the *Scheme's* hierarchy of categories and subcategories representing the functions and activities of HEIs.

### 2.3 Retention Periods

Retention Periods consist of two elements:

1. a starting point, or 'trigger', for ...
2. a period of time

For example:

- Current tax year + 3 years
- Termination of contract + 6 years

Some retention periods are prescribed by legislation. These should be regarded as minimum periods.

Where there is no prescribed retention period, a minimum retention period is recommended. Recommended retention periods represent the professional judgement of the authors of the *Schedule*, based on:

- interpretation of relevant legislation, standards, codes of practice and other guidance;
- knowledge and experience of retention policies and practices in HEIs and other types of organisations;
- opinions and advice from professional advisers in the relevant fields.

Retention periods are intended to apply to all types of records in all media and formats (e.g. paper and electronic documents, databases, audio-visual materials, scientific materials, artefacts). However:

- they are intended to apply only to the official copy<sup>1</sup> of the records described; Duplicate copies of records can usually be retained for a shorter period. Institutions should determine which copy of any record is the official copy and should ensure that these copies are preserved and retained in accordance with their Records Retention Schedule. They should also establish separate retention periods for duplicate records to ensure that they, too, are retained for only as long as they are needed to conduct business, and certainly for no longer than the official copies.
- they are based on business needs only and do not reflect any assessment of archival value.

Institutions should make arrangements for **all** their records to be appraised for archival value by professional archivists. An institution which does not employ suitably-qualified staff may be able to obtain advice from an archivist employed by another HEI. If not, it should consult an independent professional archivist.

Best practice in archival appraisal is macro-appraisal, which assesses the importance of records in relation to the importance of the business functions and activities which generate them. The *Schedule*, which is based on the *HEI Business Classification Scheme*, provides a high-level framework for macro-appraisal. The *Guidance on Selecting Records For Institutional Archives* discusses appraisal principles, shows how functional appraisal can be applied to HEI functions and provides links to examples of institutional selection policies.

## 2.4 Authority

If a retention period is prescribed by legislation, the relevant statute or statutory instrument is cited. In the online version of the *Schedule*, the citations are linked to the full text of the legislation on the Office of Public Sector Information website (for Statutes from 1988 and Statutory Instruments from 1987) or in a separate document (for earlier legislation).

If a retention period is recommended in a standard or guidance document, the document is cited and, if it is available online, the citation is linked to it in the online version of the *Schedule*.

The form of citation is explained below.

### 2.4.1 Statutes (Acts of Parliament)

Acts of the UK Parliament are cited by year and chapter number. For example:

<b>Statute</b>	<b>Cited as</b>
Disability Discrimination Act 1995	1995 c.50

Acts of the Scottish Parliament are cited by year and chapter number. For example:

<b>Statute</b>	<b>Cited as</b>
Fire (Scotland) Act 2005	2005 asp 5

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<sup>1</sup> Sometimes referred to as the 'master copy', 'record copy' or 'golden copy'.

## 2.4.2 Statutory Instruments

UK Statutory Instruments are cited by year and serial number. For example:

<b>Statutory Instrument</b>	<b>Cited as</b>
Disability Discrimination (Public Authorities)(Statutory Duties) Regulations 2005	SI 2005/2966

Scottish Statutory Instruments are also cited by year and serial number. For example:

<b>Statutory Instrument</b>	<b>Cited as</b>
Disability Discrimination (Public Authorities)(Statutory Duties)(Scotland) Regulations 2005	SSI 2005/565

## 2.4.3 Other documents

Codes of practice and other guidance documents are cited by reference number, if applicable. For example:

<b>Document title</b>	<b>Cited as</b>
HM Revenue & Customs Notice 700/21 Keeping records and accounts	HMRC 700/21

Otherwise, the full title is given. For example:

<b>Document title</b>
Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, <i>Retention of personnel and other related records</i> , December 2006

## 2.5 Notes

Notes are provided to clarify the rationale for retention periods, to provide additional information or to highlight related issues.

### 3 Use of the *HEI Records Retention Schedule*

The *Schedule* has been developed to provide a framework which any HEI can adapt and extend to produce a customised Records Retention Schedule.

Using the *Schedule* in this way is a two-stage process which is described below. It requires staff with good research, analytical and communication skills as well as a sound knowledge of records management principles. An institution which does not employ suitably-qualified staff may be able to obtain advice from a professional records manager employed by another HEI. If this is not possible, it should consult an independent professional records manager.

For more detailed advice on using the *Schedule*, contact JISC infoNet.

#### 3.1 Stage 1: Adapting the *Schedule*

The first stage of the process is adapting the *Schedule* to produce a customised version which matches the upper levels of the institution's Business Classification Scheme.<sup>2</sup>

This involves:

- identifying sections of the *Schedule* which are not relevant to the institution, and removing them;
- identifying sections of the *Schedule* which are relevant but which are not represented in a way which reflects the institution's particular policies, practices or preferences, and making the necessary changes;

For example:

- adding, removing or redefining Record Groups;
- changing Retention Periods.
- identifying institutional functions and activities (from the institution's Business Classification Scheme) which are not covered by the *Schedule*, and adding new sections.

The output of this stage is a customised version of the *Schedule*, i.e. a high-level institutional Records Retention Schedule.

#### 3.2 Stage 2: Extending the *Schedule*

The second stage of the process is extending the customised version of the *Schedule* to produce a more detailed institutional Records Retention Schedule.

This involves:

- locating and identifying all the records which are held by the institution, and finding out why they are created or received and how they are used;
- determining how long the records should be kept;
- incorporating this detailed data into the framework of the high-level Schedule.

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<sup>2</sup> The guidance in this section assumes that an institution has developed a customised business classification scheme based on the *HEI Business Classification Scheme*, which is also the basis for the *Schedule*.

### 3.2.1 Identifying the records which are held by the institution

The first step is locating and identifying all the records which are held by the institution, and finding out why they are created or received and how they are used. This is done by conducting a records survey to compile a Records Inventory, i.e. a catalogue of all the record series<sup>3</sup> held in the institution.

Each record series identified by the records survey should be linked to a Record Group in the high-level Records Retention Schedule. These links should be documented in the Records Inventory.

### 3.2.2 Determining how long the records should be kept

The next step is determining how long each record series should be kept in order to meet:

- operational needs for information about, and evidence of, past or planned decisions and actions;
- legislative and other external requirements or recommendations to maintain or retain records;
- long-term research needs or wider societal expectations.

The retention periods for Record Groups set out in the *HEI Records Retention Schedule* can be used as a starting point for determining appropriate retention periods for individual record series.

Where there are no legislative requirements and no precise guidance from relevant professional bodies, determining appropriate retention periods is a matter of risk assessment. Institutions must assess the risks associated with:

- retaining records (e.g. having to disclose them in response to a request for information under Freedom of Information legislation);
- disposing of records (e.g. not having them available to defend the institution against legal actions);

and must balance these against the overall costs of keeping records, which can be substantial. It is important to make positive decisions on retention and to avoid keeping records 'just in case'.

Some records have only temporary value and do not need to be given specific retention periods. Records which are not official copies and which have no significant ongoing value after they have served their primary purpose are transitory records which should be routinely destroyed in the normal course of business<sup>4</sup> to keep offices, storage areas and servers clear of redundant material. It is important to provide guidance for staff to ensure a consistent approach to identifying and dealing with transitory records. *Guidance on Managing Transitory Records* provides examples of such records and outlines how they should be managed.

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<sup>3</sup> A record series is the basic unit for organising and controlling records. It is 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.

<sup>4</sup> There are two situations where transitory records should not be routinely destroyed. First, where they are relevant to a current request for information, e.g. under Freedom of Information legislation. Secondly, where they are relevant to a current or forthcoming legal action.

Determining retention periods is a complex process and one which must involve many different people in an institution, including:

- operational managers who can assess the value of records in terms of internal and external needs for information about, and evidence of, the institution's business activities;
- professional and technical advisers (e.g. lawyers, auditors, health and safety specialists) who can interpret legislative and other requirements to retain, or not to retain, records, and who can advise on the benefits and risks of having or not having specific records available;
- information specialists (e.g. information managers, archivists) who can assess the corporate value of records;
- academics who can advise on long-term research value of records and their significance from a wider cultural perspective.

To have 'policy' status, retention decisions must be formally approved by senior officers who have the authority to commit the institution to the potential consequences of the decisions, in terms of both the resources needed to implement them and the risks of doing so.

The output of the decision-making process is an agreed and approved retention period for each record series. These periods should be added to the data for each series in the Records Inventory.

### **3.2.3 Producing a detailed Records Retention Schedule**

The final step is compiling a detailed Records Retention Schedule by incorporating the details of individual record series, and their agreed retention periods, into the framework of the high-level Schedule.

This corporate-level Schedule can be customised to produce a Schedule for an individual business unit by extracting the sections which are relevant to the unit.