



Recordkeeping: Fundamentals

The aim of this guideline is to provide some outlines on basic records management practices. It also provides some detail about fundamental concepts that need to be understood in order to effectively implement a recordkeeping program in your area. It is important that these concepts, which may seem simple, like defining a University record, are clearly understood in order to provide consistent recordkeeping practices across the University.

What is a University Record?

The definition of a record from the State Records Act is remarkably broad. It states that:

A record is any document or other source of information compiled, recorded or stored in written form or on film, or by electronic process, or in any other manner or by any other means.

However, more specifically a **University record** can be defined as:

Any record in any format made or received by any person in the course of the exercise of official functions in the University.

Note that this includes records in any format such as: paper; electronic; film; photograph; audio or video recording; and publications.

Some examples of University records include:

- records of formal decisions taken by staff under delegation that are documented in memoranda, letters, file-notes, fax or email messages, etc;
- inwards communications from external persons and bodies;
- copies of outwards communications to external persons and bodies;
- meeting papers of formally established University boards and committees (including agendas, agenda papers, minutes, reports and decision pages);
- meeting papers of ad hoc committees and working parties (including agendas, agenda papers, minutes, reports and decision pages);
- completed forms – students and staff;
- students' academic transcripts held electronically or in hard copy format;

- financial transactions held electronically or in hard copy format;
- personnel transactions (ie letters of appointment, reports on performance and other dealings between staff and the University);
- course and unit outlines issued to students and the public;
- approved course and unit proposals and course accreditation documentation;
- research grant applications and records of application outcomes.

This is not an exhaustive list but at least gives an idea of the broad range of University records that are being created and which should be appropriately managed.

What documents should be saved on a file?

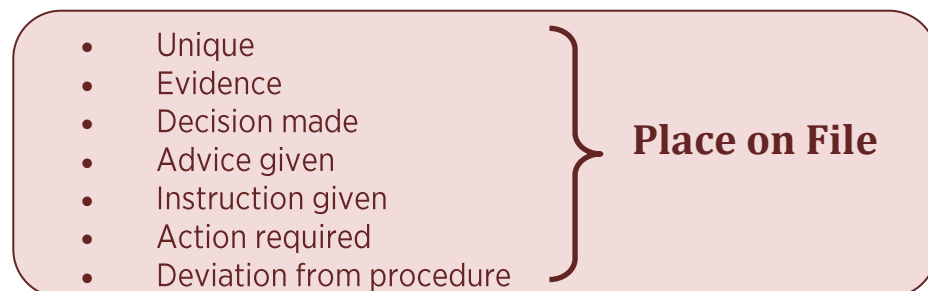
Not all records need to be placed on a file although care must still be taken that they are disposed of legally. Even though a record may fall within the definition of the State Records Act it is not always necessary for the document to be placed on file.

Generally speaking, records should be captured onto a file when they:

- approve or authorise actions
- constitute formal communications between staff eg. memos relating to official business
- signify a policy change or development
- relate to significant projects or activities being carried out
- contain advice or provide guidance
- constitute formal communication between staff and individuals outside the organisation, or
- have value in support of a project or activity being carried out by you or your section.

‘Official’ Records

Some rules of thumb to follow to determine if a record is an ‘official’ or ‘University’ record:



In most cases common sense will tell you whether a document should be placed on file. A file should contain a clear record of the matters it is documenting. It should be possible for another member of staff, from the information in the file, to pick up where a previous staff member has left off and understand what has gone on before. The file should provide sufficient information for that member of staff to then continue with the matter to which the file relates.

What NOT to put on a file

The following are practices you should **avoid**:

- Creating official files of **duplicate records** (such as your personal copy of papers of committees of which you are a member, the only official copy of committee records on TRIM should be that created by the committee secretary). You may place duplicates of documents on file that are held elsewhere in the University if necessary to support your work.
- Placing **post-it notes** on files as a form of permanent annotation (post-it notes lose their stickiness and fall off).
- Placing documents on file that have been printed on **thermal paper**, as thermal paper deteriorates rapidly – some fax machines still use thermal paper (these should be photocopied, the photocopy placed on the file and the thermal original destroyed).
- Using **plastic sleeves** – apart from the fact that these make it very easy to lose pages from documents they also need to be removed before a file can be destroyed as they are not recyclable.
- Using **plastic dividers** – these are not recyclable and would need to be removed prior to destroying the file, use cardboard dividers instead less work is involved in the long-term and they are more environmentally friendly.
- Placing **personal records** on file: at time, staff create documents that are of a personal nature such as some emails. Such documents should not be placed on TRIM. Please see the IT Acceptable Use of Resources Policy for further guidance.
- Placing **ephemeral records** on file: records that are ephemeral, facilitative or duplicate in nature (and not otherwise of continuing value to the University) usually do not need to be placed on an 'official' file and may be required for only a few hours or days. Such records also do not generally need further authorisation to destroy (contact RAMS).

When to Create Records

Records are not always created automatically as part of a business activity. The following are some situations where care needs to be taken to ensure appropriate records are created and managed. In most circumstances it comes

down to a judgement call for the individual member of staff to determine if it is appropriate or necessary to create a record.

Conversations

Make a record of significant business you conduct via the telephone or face-to-face. Significant business can include:

- providing advice, instructions or recommendations;
- giving permissions and consent; and
- making decisions, commitments or agreements.

This may include making a note of or, in exceptional circumstances, transcribing voicemail messages when necessary.

This does not include providing basic information. For example: if someone phones a student centre and asks for the opening hours this is merely the provision of basic information and a record does not need to be created to document the exchange.

However, if the phone call required the member of staff to assess a situation and make a judgement in order to provide specific advice to a client then a record should be created to document the transaction.

Correspondence

File or attach email, letters and faxes (sent or received) that relate to the work you do onto official files within TRIM (either electronically or in paper form). You should always capture a copy of any outgoing correspondence you have authored. In the case of email this may be included in the body of the final message in a string of emails.

Meetings

Make sure that someone has been delegated to make a record of the meeting, whether minutes or a simple summary of decisions. Decisions need to be clearly recorded.

Full & Accurate Records

The State Records Act requires that the University must “make and keep full and accurate records” of the activities of the University. There are some basic principles that can assist in understanding this requirement. These principles are explained in more detail in State Records’ Standard on Full & Accurate Records. However, put briefly these principles state that:

- *Recordkeeping should be compliant*
Recordkeeping should comply with legal and administrative requirements.
- *Recordkeeping should be reliable*
Recordkeeping systems, procedures and practices should work reliably to ensure that records are credible and authoritative.
- *Recordkeeping should be systematic*
Records should be made, maintained and managed systematically.

- *Recordkeeping should be managed*
Recordkeeping must be managed through an identifiable records management program.
- *Recordkeeping should be routine*
Recordkeeping systems should be used when transacting business.
- *Records should be made*
Records should be made to document and facilitate the transaction of business and captured into recordkeeping systems.
- *Records should be retained*
Records should be retained for as long as they are needed.
- *Records should be complete*
A record should contain not only the content, but also the structural and contextual information necessary to document a transaction. It should be possible to understand a record in the context of the organisational processes that produced it and of other, linked records.
- *Records should be comprehensive*
Records should document the whole of the business of the University.
- *Records should be adequate*
Records should be adequate for the purposes for which they are kept.
- *Records should be accurate*
Records should correctly reflect what was communicated, decided or done.
- *Records should be authentic*
Records should be what they purport to be.
- *Records should be useable*
Records should be identifiable, retrievable, accessible and available when needed.
- *Records should be inviolate*
Records should be securely maintained to prevent unauthorised access, destruction, alteration or removal.

The Life of a Record

Records pass through a number of 'stages' in their life's journey. This may start even before creation where planning on how they are to be managed may be determined. Records may also jump backwards and forwards between being active, semi-active and even inactive as old matters resurface. It is important that records are managed effectively at each of these stages.

Pre-creation

At the pre-creation stage planning can address such issues as:

- What records need to be created/captured?
- How long they need to be kept (ie sentence against a GDA)?
- Determine appropriate formats in which the records should be created:
 - with electronic records this may include planning for migration and accessibility issues (eg if a Word document needs to be kept for >5

years it will need to be migrated to the latest version of Word at some time(s); records may need to be made available in a format that does not allow editing such as pdf with appropriate security enabled)

- even in paper records this is important, for example ensuring Archival records are created on archival or 'permanent' paper)
- Address security/access issues
 - this may include establishing those staff who should have access to the record once created and creating appropriate record/security levels in TRIM

A Record is Born

The birth of a record is a fairly painless process so long as appropriate measures have been taken in the pre-creation phase. A record may be either created by the user or received from another source (either within the University or externally).

It is at this stage that the document, if necessary, should be placed on an appropriate file that has been created in TRIM.

Active

Active records are those that are in frequent use, regardless of their date of creation, required for current business relating to an official activity of the University. These records are usually maintained in the office space and kept close to hand.

Semi-Active

In this phase of a records life the need for access is far less frequent and rarely urgent. Such records no longer need to be kept in the office space and can be moved off-site (eg to RAMS storage).

A guide to whether records are ready for this is to consider that it may take 24-48 hours to retrieve the records from storage (unless urgently required) after sending a retrieval request to RAMS. If this would be happening so often that it would be a serious inconvenience then the records are probably not ready to be sent off-site yet.

If the matter to which the file relates becomes current again then the file will revert to the active phase.

Inactive

By this stage the records have come to the end of their usefulness. They are merely waiting for the completion of the mandatory retention period (as identified in a GDA) before they suffer their ultimate fate. For most records that fate is destruction by shredding and pulping but there are a chosen few who make it to the University Archives where they will live on forever bringing enlightenment to researchers throughout the ages.

It is worth noting that matters can crop up again during this period of waiting and the records may again become active. They then begin the cycle of life once more.

