

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

GUIDELINES FOR THE DISPOSAL OF RECORDS

1 INTRODUCTION

The retention of unnecessary paper and electronic records wastes staff time, space and equipment. It can also unnecessarily incur liability to answer information requests made under the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 and in some instances for the University to be in breach of such legislation. For example, the Data Protection Act requires personal data in records to be kept for *no longer than necessary*; and action can be taken against the University the institution can be sued for retaining unnecessary information in the event that this causes damage to someone.

In this context **disposal of records** refers to their appropriate **destruction** or their **transfer** to the University Archive when they have reached the end of their specified retention period. The appropriate retention periods and associated disposal actions are defined in the institutional **Records Retention Schedules**.

These guidelines do not cover the transfer of paper records to off-site storage for the duration of their retention period, or the transfer of electronic records to off-line storage. For guidance on storage requirements, contact the University Records Manager on 01224 273175.

Essentially, there are two ways of disposing of records:

- Destruction of records which no longer have value
- Records with an enduring value to the institution being transferred to the University Archive

2 MAINTAINING A RECORD OF DESTRUCTION

The Section 61 Code of Practice on Records Management (issued under the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002) requires that the University log the destruction of its records. This does not expect that the disposal of each and every document be included, but rather, the disposal of **distinct groups** or **series** of records should be recorded. For example, a record of the disposal of transitory material (e.g. a draft document or an e-mail of short-term significance) or convenience copies (i.e., copies made and kept for ease of reference) is not required.

Annex A provides a Disposal Template to record this activity where there are no other means of making and retaining a record.

3 HOW TO DISPOSE OF RECORDS

3.1 Destruction of Paper Records

To make the disposal of records a manageable process, sections should aim to have an office clearout on at least an annual basis.

Confidential waste bins are provided in offices around the campus, and should be used for the destruction of any paper documents containing information processed for University purposes. It should be noted that the confidential waste bins are intended purely for day-to-day use and not for large volumes of paper.

If an office clearance is likely to generate a substantial amount of waste paper, the Environment Office should be contacted (environment@abdn.ac.uk) who will make appropriate arrangements for secure destruction with the contractors.

3.2 Destruction of Electronic Records

As part of everyday computer use electronic records are “destroyed” by deleting them. However, this type of deletion does not eradicate the data which remains in a hidden form on a computer hard disk or server, and is normally inaccessible without specialist knowledge or equipment. Furthermore, this simple type of deletion does not deal with the copies of data that are held on backup tapes.

In order to ensure that business/project data on any University-owned storage device such as servers, laptops, desktops external hard drives and USB sticks, is disposed of appropriately, please contact the IT Service Desk. IT staff will raise a service desk call for the request and will provide an update when the data is destroyed as a written record of disposal. Where a contracted third party is used to destroy data, the University receives certificates of destruction (for batched and named hard disks).

4. TRANSFER OF RECORDS TO THE UNIVERSITY ARCHIVE

Records which have been identified as having long term or historical value or which require to be kept permanently, should, at present, be retained in the section which created them and advice sought from Special Collections (speclib@abdn.ac.uk).

Lorna Maguire, Records Manager
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Annex A: Template for recording disposal of records

Disposal of Records			
Section:	Name:	Date:	
Title of Record:			
Format:			
Reason for disposal:			
Method of disposal: (tick relevant box)	Destruction	<input type="checkbox"/>	Transferred to archive
If destroyed, method of destruction:			
Date of disposal:			
Authority:			
Not subject to current information request: (tick once checked)			