

Defining a record – guide for staff

A lot of information is generated as part of your day to day work, but most of it would not be classified as a record. It will help your workload if you understand how to recognize the difference between records and the kind of superfluous material which can be destroyed.

How to recognise a record

Records are the final products of your work, or the information that feeds into those final products. A record shows what happened or what was intended to happen, and traces decisions as well as the options which were available to inform those decisions.

A record can be paper or electronic, images or words. Examples include: minutes of meetings, committee papers, policies and procedures, reports, website pages and CCTV footage.

How to recognise School records

There are certain records that are vital to the running of the School. The following list outlines some of the key types of School records, but there will be others.

- Student records, or exams
- Staff records, including contracts and promotion details
- Records relating to the governance of the School. Committee minutes or papers are obvious examples here, but emails concerning the background to meetings might also be considered records if they include decisions
- Records which relate to the legal and financial position of the School, including contracts, financial records and property deeds
- Records which feed into the history of the School, including records about the origins of departments or research centres, statistics on students, and some personal academic papers

Emails

Emails are considered to be records under UK legislation, and may even constitute the personal information of a third party if the text includes biographical information about them. As with all other records, you should ask yourself whether and why you need to keep an email, and regularly dedicate a small amount of time to managing your Inbox to remove any superfluous information. You should save emails in an electronic filing system (e.g. a shared drive) or keep a printed copy in a relevant file.

It is often the case that an email exchange acts as a virtual meeting, resulting in a further, formal record of the decision, in the form of a letter or memorandum. In such cases the correspondence would be superfluous, and can be deleted.

How to recognise superfluous material

Some information has no significant operational, informational or evidential value, and so should be destroyed as soon as its use has passed. Such superfluous material will generally not have value once a particular time or event has passed, or will be duplicated or superseded by newer information.

Under the Data Protection Act, data processors, like the School, are required to keep personal data only as long as is necessary. An individual can gain access to all personal data, including emails and other correspondence, by making a subject access request under the Act. It is advisable to delete or destroy any personal data once it has become superfluous. You can read more about the Data Protection Act in the associated guidance.

Other examples of superfluous material are: meeting requests, and notifications of acceptance or apologies, duplicate documents, marketing materials, manuals, directories, forms, and other material produced for wide distribution.

Classification of records

The Records Manager is currently involved in a process of auditing the use of School's records on a departmental level. Rather than insisting upon a uniform approach from the centre, the aim of these audits is to work with the established local methods, while advising on examples of good practice.

When classifying records, it is important to ensure that everyone who uses the scheme knows how it works, to keep the scheme simple, and to maintain and modify it as necessary. Records should be regularly weeded within a scheme, with more important information sent to the School's archive.

If you have concerns or queries about the classification of records in your area, please contact the Records Manager for further guidance and advice.