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Records Management Guidance: Legacy Records

What are legacy records?

Legacy records are 'old' files or collections of records, created under filing schemes that are no longer used, or with no apparent organisation. They may be paper files in cabinets, cupboards or boxes. They also include electronic information held on shared drives, databases, USB pens, computer hard drives or other media/formats. Often these records may have been inherited from an old system, department, or former employee, and in many cases the inheriting staff may have little knowledge of their contents and importance.

Why bother to deal with legacy records?

The University of Liverpool keeps records for operational reasons (including legal and audit purposes), and/ or because the records have long-term historic value. Keeping records for any other reason is counterproductive, particularly if you don't know what is in the records, and can cause many problems. For example, it can:

- **Be difficult, costly and time consuming to retrieve information**. The more records you have, the more difficult it becomes to locate what you need. Under the Freedom of Information and Data Protection Acts if someone asks for information that is held in a legacy collection, all legacy files will have to be checked, even if there is no index.
- **Cause embarrassment for the University**, if information that should have been destroyed has to be released under freedom of information and data protection legislation.
- **Increase pressure on the IT network**, use up server space unnecessarily, cause longer IT back up and restoration time, and damage the environment.
- **Increase pressure on valuable office space**.

What are the aims when clearing out legacy records?

Aim to split the records into three categories and take action accordingly:

- Identify records still required and integrate them into current recordkeeping systems.
- Identify records of potential historic value, and alert Records Management.
- Dispose of records that are no longer required.

Who is responsible for clearing out legacy records?

- You are responsible for clearing out the legacy records that you hold in your filing cabinet/ cupboard, email account, on a personal or shared drive, on the computer hard drive, on CDs, floppy disks, USB pens etc.
- Unattributed records in filing cabinets, on shared drives, CDs etc., are the responsibility of the business area/ section where they are held.

How can legacy records be avoided in future?

- Ensure that employees put their records in order before they move to a new internal role, or leave the University. Follow the Staff Leaving Checklist.
- Review records regularly – consider having an "Office Detox Day".
- Work out records management systems for the future e.g. shared filing structure.
- Ensure that all staff are aware, of and receive training in the University of Liverpool Records Management policy.

What steps should be followed to deal with legacy records?

Before you start

Talk through the steps below with your line manager/ head of department to agree who should make the final decisions and draw up a timetable. You may also wish to consult with Records Management, particularly if there is a large amount of legacy records.

1. Find out as much as you can about the records (without doing detailed research).

- Speak to colleagues and look at any indexes, filing schemes etc.
- Try to find out who created the records, when they were created, why they were created (i.e. what function do/ did they support), and if they are still used.
- Try to find out about relationships with other sets of records e.g. do the records predate or continue a current record series? Are they closely related to/ used in conjunction with another set of records? Are they originals or duplicates?

2. Assemble relevant documentation for decision making

Make sure you can access and use the University of Liverpool Records Retention Schedule and the Records Retention Guide: How long to keep your records. Also check for other relevant policies and procedures relating to the records (e.g. specific requirements from research funders for research files). Remember that the Records Management Policy and the Retention Schedule apply to all hard copy and electronic records, regardless of format.

3. Sort and organise the records

(3a) Look through the records and identify "quick wins" where possible

Do not inspect the records in detail. If the file titles and reference numbers are reliable, look at these and consult the University of Liverpool Records Retention Schedule and Records Retention Guide: How long to keep your records to determine necessary actions. Sort the records into groups for action e.g. records to be retained and filed, records for destruction, duplicate records to be checked before destruction, records with possible historic interest to be referred to Records Management. If the latter, then keep a note of any information **about** the records (see points under step 1 above) as this will be of interest to the University Archives.

(3b) For records of mixed dates, make decisions based on the most recent date

Recommended retention periods are often expressed in terms of a number of years after a trigger event, e.g. 'review after current year + 6 years'. If there are batches of legacy records of the same type but with mixed dates, you may not need to examine each file individually. For example, if you know the date of the most recent file and work out the appropriate retention period says that it should have been destroyed, then you know the whole batch can be destroyed.

(3c) For records where it is unclear what actions should be taken, examine the contents

Speed read each file, looking for key papers and pieces of information to form an impression of file's nature and work out what its main function was. Only read the key papers in detail if necessary. Try not to spend too long looking at each file; otherwise the exercise will not be cost effective. Use the information you have gathered to determine which section(s) of the University of Liverpool Records Retention Schedule applies to the file.

4. Implement your decisions and record where appropriate

Refer to the Records Retention Guide and the Records Management website for detailed guidance on how to store, dispose of or transfer records to the University Archives. If you need to record how the records were dealt with and how that decision was made there is a template overleaf.

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Records Review Sheet

Business Unit:

Name:

Date:

File ref	Title/Description	First date	Last date	Decision	Reason