



University Recordkeeping Manual

Part One

INTRODUCTION



The University of Sydney

Archives and Records Management Services
Revised September 2009

Part 1 – Introduction

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UNIVERSITY RECORDKEEPING MANUAL

Part 1 - Introduction

1. What is the University Recordkeeping Manual?

The Recordkeeping Manual has been produced to provide practical guidelines, aids and standards for all departments, schools, centres, faculties, foundations and administrative units in the University of Sydney.

This part of the Manual outlines the benefits of good records management, the University recordkeeping policy, specific responsibilities and the legislation relating to the University's records. In addition, an introduction to Archives and Records Management Services is given with a brief description of the unit's services, functions and responsibilities.

The separate parts of the Manual can be read in isolation from each other, or together form a comprehensive guide on the many aspects of University recordkeeping.

Topics covered in the different parts of the Manual are:

- Part 1 - Introduction
- Part 2 - What is a University Record?
- Part 3 - Student Records
- Part 4 - Staff Records
- Part 5 - University Archives
- Part 7 - Retention & Disposal
- Part 8 - Making Records of Meetings
- Part 9 - Freedom of Information
- Part 11 - Privacy
- Part 12 - Disaster Preparedness & Vital Records
- Glossary

While many offices will require the complete Manual, some members of staff will find their needs met by two or three parts of the Manual.

The Manual is intended to provide as much practical assistance in recordkeeping matters as possible. Feedback from users is encouraged to ensure the Manual remains relevant and useful.

2. What are records?

Before considering the benefits of good recordkeeping it is necessary to define what is meant by records. In the University environment, record means any document or other source of information compiled, recorded or stored in any form (written, on film, electronic etc) created or received and maintained by the University or its staff conducting University business .

3. What are University Records?

In the University, there are records of corporate value, and those of local importance. Part 2 of the Manual explains the distinctions between the two, and outlines the implications for University recordkeeping.

The University's records are one of its major assets. They represent the tangible product of the work of staff. To recreate them in the event of a total loss - assuming such a thing were possible - would cost many millions of dollars. Even within a small department, the loss of records would have a great impact on the department's ability to function properly. More importantly, the loss of University's records, or even a part of them, could destroy the evidence of students' achievements, staff entitlements and jeopardise the University's rights and interests. The continued functioning of the University relies on the records of thousands of transactions, instructions, authorisations and reports created every day. Like any University asset, the University's records must be managed to ensure the University remains an efficient, effective and accountable public institution.

The University's records include all communications on business matters with government agencies, members of the public, students (both current and prospective), graduates, private companies and staff. Records created by staff members in the course of their employment are also University records.

It is important to be aware that some records on campus are not University records. Communications between students using MyUni are not University records. Assignments, essays or other works created by students are generally not University records, the exception being the copies of higher degree theses required to be deposited in the University Library. Records held by staff relating to their outside professional (or personal) activities are not the property of the University either.

4. Why is good recordkeeping important?

Sound recordkeeping practices promote efficiency and economy within the University. Having comprehensive and timely access to the information contained in University records assists *everyone* in carrying out their duties. Knowledge of proper procedure, access to correct policy information and awareness of precedent all ensure the smooth and economical operation of the University.

Another significant driving force behind the need for good records management is the increasing amount of University business being conducted by electronic means. The speed of communication and the volume of

electronic documents created by information technologies makes it imperative that proper procedures are in place to capture, preserve and make available those records of corporate value. The nature of electronic documents is such that they must be captured into a system at the point of creation if they are to be of any value to the University as evidence of its functions and activities.

Good recordkeeping

- contributes to the smooth operation of the University by making information readily available when it is needed for decision-making and operational activities;
- provides precedent, background information and analytical material for new staff or colleagues working on similar projects;
- creates a complete record of official actions that will remain with the University for future use by others and may later be transferred to the University Archives as a historical record;
- ensures accountability;
- ensures that electronic records, especially those generated by desktop applications, will be available to all authorized personnel
- protects records from inappropriate and unauthorised access.

5. Recordkeeping Responsibilities

5.1 The University

The University operates in an environment which demands high levels of accountability and records provide a basis for this accountability. Compliance with the many demands made on the University is greatly simplified with good recordkeeping. Poor recordkeeping practices contribute to inefficiencies and poor or ill-informed decision-making. It may also result in crucial evidence being destroyed, or the records being inadequate to meet accountability requirements. Records are vital for ongoing business, the protection of rights and responsibilities and for internal and public accountability.

The NSW State Records Act 1998 requires public offices, which includes universities, to 'make and keep full and accurate records' of their activities and to 'establish and maintain a records management program' in conformity with standards and codes of best practice.

The University must apply best practice in records management as in any other aspect of management. The University can therefore expect its recordkeeping practices to be judged against nationally based standards.

The University has defined policies which support processes and systems that assist staff to create adequate records. The University needs to be able to demonstrate that recordkeeping responsibilities of all staff are documented and communicated.

The University articulates organisation-wide recordkeeping responsibilities in policy, guidelines, business rules and procedures, into design of jobs and in

position profiles and statement of duties. Staff are to be educated about their responsibilities.

5.2 Managers

Managers must ensure that University policy is implemented within their area of responsibility. This may be achieved by:

- maintaining awareness of current University policies and procedures in relation to recordkeeping, privacy and FOI;
- ensuring staff understand how the policies and procedures affect their work;
- providing staff with the relevant staff development opportunities;
- incorporating defined recordkeeping responsibilities into duty statements;
- ensuring the appropriate recordkeeping systems are used;
- seeking expert advice when in doubt.

5.3 All Staff

The following are requirements for recordkeeping that affect all staff:

- The State Records Act requires public officials to 'make and keep full and accurate records' of their business activities. This applies equally to the paper and electronic recordkeeping environment.
- The Ombudsman's *Good Conduct and Administrative Practice Guidelines for Public Authorities and Officials* states that public officials must make and create records to support accountability and corporate memory. It encourages recordkeeping to be seen as a normal and natural part of work by public officials.
- Simply stated, staff have a number of basic obligations regarding records:
 - (i) Make records to support the conduct of your University activities.
 - (ii) Create records that may not otherwise be created.

Activities that do not by themselves result in the creation of records should be documented. Examples include taking minutes of meetings, make file notes of telephone discussions, conferences, or other oral decisions. The documenting of decisions and their reasons builds up a record of precedents, which can be used by other staff when making similar decisions. The resultant records will also enable explanation or justification, and responsibility for decisions, events or transactions and for actions in relation to these events or transactions.

- Register records into either paper or electronic recordkeeping systems.

Ensure corporate records are placed on the relevant registered file. Documents and records attached to files provide evidence of business activity through an identifiable sequence of events. Failure to capture

records into recordkeeping systems can result in records being subject to arbitrary destruction or which cannot be located when required. Do not keep corporate records in private stores, outside the University's recordkeeping systems.

- Do not destroy University records without the authority to do so from the Manager, Archives and Records Management Services.

Failure to maintain records for the period of time necessary to meet accountability or recordkeeping requirements can contribute to loss of accountability and the University's corporate memory. Unauthorised destruction is breach of section 21 of the State Records Act.

- Do not lose University records.

Records are a corporate asset. They should not be removed from University custody. All movements of files between staff must be properly recorded.

- Protect the privacy of the personal information contained in University records.

Ensure that personal information is dealt with in accordance with the University's Privacy Policy. Guidance on the implementation of the Policy may be found in the University Privacy Management Plan.

- Ensure that all information contained in University records is objectively expressed, correct, up to date and not misleading.

Members of the public, staff and students have right of access to University records. Access to personal information may be sought under the Freedom of Information Act and the Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act. When writing about an individual, assume that they will read the document.

University records may also be accessed by external agencies, and so should reflect the highest standards of professional behaviour by all staff.

6. University Recordkeeping Policy

In January 2000, the Acting Vice-Chancellor approved the following policy.

6.1 Policy Statement

The University is committed to making and keeping full and accurate records of the business transactions of the institution and its official activities. To enable this to occur, the University will maintain a recordkeeping program in conformity with standards and codes of best practice and with legislative requirements.

This policy is intended to apply to all University records, regardless of format or media. There will be a consistent and coherent regime of management processes from the time of the creation of records (and before creation, in the design of recordkeeping systems), through to the preservation and use of records as archives. The University recognises that the creation of adequate evidence of business activity is essential, both to support efficient business operations and to ensure accountability.

The University expects all staff to comply with its recordkeeping policies, procedures and guidelines and will provide training and support to ensure this compliance.

6.2 Scope of the policy

University records include student files, staff files, correspondence and email on University business, administrative files, financial records and minutes of University committees and boards.

The policy will apply to the entire University. Colleges, faculties, departments, schools, most centres and research institutes¹, foundations, administrative divisions and units will manage the records they are responsible for in accordance with the policy.

While the University may have records from and about bodies established to serve the interests of students, the operational records of those bodies are not University records. Such bodies include:

- Child care centres
- Conservatorium Students Association
- Cumberland Student Guild
- Sydney College of the Arts Students Association
- Students' Representative Council
- Sydney University Postgraduate Representative Association
- Sydney University Sports Union

¹ Dependent upon contractual terms between the University and the external provider of research funds, and whether staff are employees of the University, and if not, whether the appointments are conjoint.

Sydney University Women's Sports Association
The residential colleges (with the exception of International House)
The Student Association Inc. (Orange)
The Students' Representative Council
The University of Sydney Union

7. State Records Act

As mentioned above, the University is subject to the NSW State Records Act 1998 (the Act). This Act regulates the creation, retention and disposal of records. It enables the State Records Authority to issue mandatory standards and policies for the management of State records. Three documents of particular significance are:

- Standard on Full and Accurate Records;
- Policy on digital records preservation;
- Policy on electronic messages as records;
- Policy on electronic recordkeeping.

Section 21(1) of the Act creates an offence for the unauthorised destruction of State records. Compliance with the Act is monitored by the NSW Auditor General.

All records created for University purposes are State records covered by the Act. This includes hardcopy and electronic records (including email). Examples include: minutes of meetings, student assessment records, communications with students and between colleagues, planning documents and course proposals, communications from bodies and individuals external to the University regarding a student's candidature.

8. Archives and Records Management Services

Archives and Records Management Services (ARMS) designs and administers recordkeeping systems for the University in accordance with international best practice and standards, including those issued under the NSW State Records Act 1998.

ARMS administers the University's corporate policy, administrative, staff and student files. The section is also responsible for:

- Providing and maintaining Records Online;
- developing and maintaining the business classification scheme;
- maintaining electronic registers of both current and archival records;
- providing access to information resources such as administrative, student and staff files;
- managing the storage and disposal of records;
- identifying and collecting archival material; and
- providing advice and training to the Faculties, departments and administrative units on the use of Records Online and a full range of recordkeeping issues and practices.

Freedom of Information activities of the University and management of privacy issues in accordance with the 1998 NSW Privacy and Personal Information and Protection Act 1998 and the Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002 are also ARMS responsibilities. The specific services offered to the University are as follows:

- Records Online
- Records management training;
- Privacy and FOI training;
- Repository management - for current, non-current & archival records;
- Records consultancies;
- Preventative conservation;
- Appraisal of non-current records;
- Recordkeeping systems design (non-IT).

9. Contacts

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