ARMS
Archives & Records
Management Services

# University Recordkeeping Manual

# Part Two

# What is a University Record?

Archives and Records Management Services
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# Part 2 – What is a University Record?

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## 1. What is a University record?

The Australian Standard AS ISO 15489 Records Management defines records as "information created, received and maintained as evidence and information by an organisation or person, in pursuance of legal obligations or in the transactions of business." Records can be in any form. The key terms to consider in determining what records should be maintained are "transaction" and "evidence".

Transactions can take place at the lowest level of business activity and small transaction can contribute to a larger one. *For example*, a person may submit a short agenda item to a local committee or a sub-committee which may end up on the agenda of one of the governing committees of the University, the Academic Board or Senate. The result may be a policy change, the creation of a new degree or course, or a new or altered By-law. A record should be maintained of these transactions so that it is evident what has occurred, what processes took place and what research had been undertaken. In short, the decision-making processes are supported by evidence.

University records are those which have value beyond the local or immediate. Usually this means all records which go beyond the boundaries of the office routine, which need to be seen by another or others apart from the creator of the record, and which inform on or contribute to a discussion, debate, enquiry, procedure, or progress of an event.

## 2. Who manages the University's official records?

The University's official records are managed by Records Management Services (RMS), one of the units within Archives and Records Management Services. Amongst its other responsibilities, RMS administers the University's corporate, policy, administrative, staff and student files, both in hardcopy and electronic form. RMS may be contacted by email at recordsonline@usyd.edu.au.

## 3. When to create an RMS file

It is not always apparent when the first records are created that the 'issue' will receive a larger audience rather than a purely local one. That it will be important. If in doubt it is always safer and more efficient to place documents on a file. Not only does a file keep related documents together, and thus provide a complete record of events, it also allows for other interested parties to access the documents and for the file to be tracked through the records management system.

University business records are any records created in the course of conducting University business or carrying out the functions of the University. If you are uncertain as to whether you should create a record of a transaction and place it on an official University (RMS) file, apply the following tests:

(a) Is the record of interest or importance to others outside of your immediate working environment?
(b) Does the ‘transaction’ have to be approved by a more senior officer, committee or specialist unit?
(c) Has a decision been made which needs or may need supporting evidence or a record of the decision-making processes?
(d) Has a decision been made which will have an impact on another individual, office or the University as a whole?
(e) Has a decision been made which sets a precedent?
(f) Will the record document a change to policy, procedure or methodology?
(g) Are there financial or legal implications which may come under scrutiny to ensure accountability, (by the NSW Auditor-General or the NSW Ombudsman, for example)?
(h) Do you require the record so as to be able to report to internal or external bodies?
(i) Is there a statutory requirement to make or keep particular records?
(j) Does the transaction fall within the Recordkeeping guidelines of the State Records Authority?

## 4. Examples of University Records

As the University has a wide and diverse range of functions, below are listed some examples of University corporate records. Please note that this list is not exhaustive.

***Committee Records***
These include records of:
- setting up a committee;
- terms of reference;
- meetings;
- minutes and agendas;
- attachments or tabled papers;
- membership information, including selection and election procedures.

***Contracts/Agreements***
All documentation relating to the drawing up, terms and conditions, and signing of agreements. Agreements which should be retained on an official file may relate to: purchase of major equipment and stores; intellectual property; joint or collaborative ventures; consultancies;

research; and licensing agreements, eg. for software. Most of these agreement files would be vital records.

***Policy Files***
Policy files should **always** have a copy of the final approved policy in all its versions. The files might also hold documents relating to the development of the policy. Do not place procedural documents, working papers (unless they relate directly to policy development and document decision-making processes), or papers concerning individuals onto policy files. Remember that policy files are accessible to all members of the University and possibly the wider community and should not contain personal information.

***Procedures***
Any records documenting procedures which have an impact wider than the purely local should be captured into the official system. An example of purely local would be where there is an intra-office procedure that anyone taking stores from the stationery cupboard record that action in the book. That is, the records have no 'corporate' value and are simply made for the convenience of office routine.

***Property Management***
Any records relating to the function of managing land and buildings. Includes: acquisition; construction; fit-outs; space allocation; management; maintenance; protection (security) and disposal of property. Also includes removal of pollutants and waste. Most records relating to property management will be referred to and therefore should be retained on an official file to allow for easy access.

***Strategic Management***
Records relating to this function include: those documenting the activities involved with the development, monitoring and reviewing of business plans, strategic plans, work plans, corporate plans, quotas and cut-offs, courses and degrees, EEO plans and other long-term strategies. These records will document progress and development and will permit regulated reporting, to DETYA for example. They will also demonstrate precedents and provide a basis for sound decision-making.

***Legal Matters***
These records include: the interpretation and provision of advice to the organisation regarding legal matters; the negotiation and drawing up of legal agreements and the handling of legal action and disputes.

***Establishment***
Documents related to this term include those recording the establishment of and changes to the organisational structure through establishing and reviewing positions. Also includes documents relating to the classification and grading of positions.

***Personnel Management***
Policies and procedures and supporting documentation relating to: leave; salaries; superannuation; working hours and conditions; staff development

and training; occupational health and safety; EEO; and industrial relations. Also case management files such as those relating to discipline and grievance matters, or compensation/ rehabilitation matters.

***Financial Management***
Records relating to the function of establishing, operating and maintaining accounting systems, controls and procedures, financial planning, framing budgets and budget submissions, obtaining grants, and managing funds and revenue from charging, consultancies and investments. Also asset management and auditing.

***Community Relations***
Records relating to the function of establishing rapport with the community (both national and international) and raising and maintaining the organisation's broad public profile. Includes marketing, advertising, media liaison, exhibitions, celebrations, ceremonies (including graduations), speeches, official representation at functions and participation in community activities. Also includes relationships with professional bodies and industry, especially other tertiary institutions, the management of services to students and other clients, for example, Open Days and Orientation Week, handling reactions to those services, customer consultation and feedback.

***Purchasing***
Records relating to the purchase, lease or hire of significant stores and equipment should be placed on an official file. Any purchase where a tender process has been entered into or where there has been a call for quotations should be carefully recorded and the records placed on an official file. Local records can be kept for routine purchases, such as for stationery. There is no need to place copies of records on official files where the transaction has been recorded electronically into the University's financial system, and where records are created or held by Financial Services, or where there is a clear audit trail.

***Research***
Records relating to applications for research grants, design of research projects, research data (in some cases) and application for and granting of ethics approval.

***Development/Community Relations***
Records of celebrations and functions, from the planning stages to after the event. Promotional material, press releases, photographic records, lists of attendees, and addresses given.

***Student Records***
Records pertaining to candidature of students (see Part 3 of the Manual).

***Staff Files***
Records pertaining to employment of staff with the University (see Part 4).

## 5. Recordkeeping Principles

All “business records” or “corporate records” of the University should be maintained on an official RMS file registered into the University’s official records management system. This applies to both hardcopy files in an official file cover and electronic documents attached to a virtual file or attached virtually to a hardcopy file. Access to electronic documents is available through Records Online (http://recordsonline.usyd.edu.au/).

As well as business or corporate records, every office or department will also create ‘local records’. These records have only ephemeral or routine value and can be managed and disposed of locally. Although these records may only have short term value, they must still be managed in a way that makes them accessible to those with authority to see and use them, and which makes it possible to dispose of them in a systematic and orderly manner.

## 6. Current and Non-current records

There are statutory obligations for organisations to retain certain records for certain lengths of time (see Part 7 – Disposal). These retention periods start after the record has become non-current (or inactive), not from the date the record was created.

A record becomes non-current when:

- the activity to which it relates ceases (e.g. projects, programs);
- an accounting period is finished (e.g. financial year);
- employment ceases (e.g. contracts and personal records);
- a student’s candidature is completed;
- it is no longer needed;
- it is no longer wanted.

Although you are required to keep records in an accessible format for the length of the statutory retention period, you may keep particular records for a longer period according to need. An exception to this rule relates to personal (including health) information which, under the NSW Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act and the NSW Health Records and Information Privacy Act, must not be kept longer than necessary – usually understood as the retention period set by documents known as Disposal Authorities. See Part 7 for further information. If you unsure of the retention requirements, contact Archives and Records Management Services.