

TARKA LEARNING PARTNERSHIP



# Records Management Policy

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Author/owner: Board of Trustees

Anticipated Review: Bi-ennial

**NB.** 'Trustees' means the Directors referred to in the Trust's Articles of Association.

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## 1. Introduction

1.2 The aim of this policy and the records retention schedule at Appendix A is to enable the Trust to comply with the commitments of the Data Protection Act and Freedom of Information Act and integrates consideration of these and other compliance issues.

1.3 Records are defined as all documents and materials, regardless of format, which facilitate the activities carried out by the Trust. These records may be created, received and maintained in hard copy or electronically (including emails).

## 2. Objectives

2.1. Records management is defined as a field of management responsible for the efficient and systematic control of the creation, receipt, maintenance, use, distribution, storage and disposal of records.

2.2. Records management helps to:

- a. ensure that the Trust conducts itself in an efficient and accountable manner;
- b. meet legislative and regulatory requirements;
- c. support and document policy formation and decision-making;
- d. facilitate the effective performance of activities and delivery of services throughout the Trust;
- e. provide continuity in the event of a disaster;
- f. protect the interests of the Trust in the event of litigation or otherwise;
- g. establish and maintain the Trust's cultural identity and institutional memory.

## 3. Responsibilities

3.1. The Trust has a corporate responsibility to maintain its records and records management systems in accordance with legislation.

3.2. The Trust's Data Protection Officer is responsible for providing guidance and advice on good records management practice. Such guidance is formulated within the context of existing Trust policies and guidelines, national legislation and sector-wide standards.

3.3. Each school within the Trust is individually responsible for the management of their records generated by its activities.

3.4. Individual members of staff should ensure that records, for which they are responsible, are maintained and disposed of in accordance with this policy.

## 4. Records Management Good Practice

4.1. When managing your records you must consider factors such as how your colleagues can access the files if necessary, how to ensure that records are kept for as long as necessary but not too long so as to be a burden on storage. Some general guidelines which may help to meet these and other aims are:

- a. avoid duplication - create records only where necessary;
- b. name files, electronic and paper, in a way that is meaningful to you and your colleagues;
- c. avoid long, complicated numbering or coding that may be easy to misfile;

- d. have a filing system that can be accessed by all that have a right to, while also balancing it with appropriate security arrangements, i.e. computer passwords, locked filing cabinets;
- e. store material appropriately;
- f. do not overfill boxes or cabinets;
- g. sort files regularly;
- h. dispose of records in a timely manner and use confidential waste collection or shredding facilities where available.

4.2 The length of time records should be kept can vary depending on the type of documentation and legal constraints, for more details on how long to keep specific records see the Trust's Disposal Schedule in Appendix A.

4.3 Records should be held in files – these may be paper based or held electronically in shared directories, databases or document management systems. The files should be organised in a structured way and have some indication as to their contents and relevance. Where there are confidentiality issues, files may be held in a secure storage area, on a computer or email box but bear in mind that colleagues should be able to access them in your absence.

4.4 Exactly what records you keep on file will vary according to the work you do, however reasons for keeping records include but are not exhausted to:

- a. there is a legal requirement to keep the information;
- b. the information is needed to carry out the Trust's everyday business;
- c. the information is for financial purposes;
- d. information explaining why and how a particular decision was made;
- e. the information is needed if a decision is challenged.

4.5 For most topics there should be one lead file – The 'Golden Copy'. This will be the file of the person or department who has the lead on the topic concerned, for example, a committee secretary's set of minutes and papers. Other members of staff may also have a file on the same subject but they should keep this only for so long as is needed for their personal reference.

4.6 If you create a folder on a shared drive or on your personal drive, you should take responsibility for maintaining the contents of that folder. Do not allow out-of-date material to accumulate in it. If a document is not accessed in the course of eighteen months, it should probably be deleted from the drive unless it is the master file copy then it should be archived.

4.7 Documents and folders should have file titles which are easily understood by all members of staff. Do not name them after yourself, as this will be meaningless to others if you leave. Likewise, only use commonly understood abbreviations. The title should clearly indicate what the document is.

4.8 Do not use your computer hard drive (c:// drive) to store information as this drive is not backed up. Use your personal drive only for information which is confidential or personal or does not need to be shared within the Trust.

4.9 Shared drives should be used for current work to which your colleagues may need access. Do not password protect material unless your colleagues know the password so that the information can be accessed in your absence. The shared drive can be set up with folder permissions to allow a restricted group of people to have access.

## 5. Sending attachments

5.1 Avoid sending documents as attachments. Instead send a link or tell people where the document

can be found. This ensures documents are less likely to get lost and everyone looks at the most up to date copy so there is no confusion over which version is the correct or latest one.

5.2 Egress Switch must be used when sending documents outside the Trust network.

## 6. Confidential Records

6.1 These records should be labelled as 'Confidential' or 'Commercial in Confidence' and be clear as to who within the organisation should be able to access and use these records. It is also good practice for the record to hold an intended publication date, as few records remain confidential for their entire life-span.

6.2 N.B. Labelling a record 'Confidential' does not exempt the record from being admissible under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Further information can be obtained from the Trust's Freedom of Information Policy.

6.3 Information being supplied in confidence should be stamped, marked, or include a statement that it is confidential or being supplied in confidence, and be treated in a consistent confidential manner.

6.4 The following guidelines should be followed for confidential records:

- a. store confidential records in secure filing cabinets;
- b. cabinets should always be kept locked when not in use, not located in a public area, and access to the confidential records should be restricted only to those employees that require the information;
- c. confidential records should never be left in a public open area such as an in-tray or on a desk. The record should be returned to the cabinet when not in use;
- d. confidential records must be destroyed by confidential waste disposal or shredding only;
- e. for electronic records, store confidential records in separate directories or files and restrict access to these directories or files;
- f. laptops that hold confidential information must be Trust owned and encrypted by IT Services; confidential information should not be copied to non-Trust equipment.

## 7. Emails

7.1 Emails may be disclosed in response to a freedom of information or data protection request and in legal cases. Electronic messages can be legally binding and we may be held liable for defamatory statements in emails. For these reasons, do not put anything in emails that you would not say in other forms of communication. If an email contains important information or an important decision, it should be added to the relevant file/folder either electronically or a hard copy. An email can be saved electronically using 'File – Save as - File'.

7.2 The majority of emails produced are trivial; it is therefore, a drain on Trust resources to store them on our system and can cause a delay in responding to a subject request because of the additional time caused in searching through them. Under the Data Protection Act we should keep information about people for no longer than necessary; this includes emails to and from or about people. You should delete emails as soon as possible and should not allow a backlog to accumulate as this then becomes difficult to manage. Emails should also be deleted from your deleted items folder and/or recycle bin.

7.3 Because email is a record you need to know that you can find it quickly and easily if you have to disclose it because of a Data Protection or Freedom of Information request.

- 7.4 Emails need to be treated just like other records you deal with. You wouldn't leave paper mail piled up permanently in your in tray so you should treat your inbox in the same way. When you receive an email act on it as soon as possible and then delete it. If it needs to be kept then file it.
- 7.5 Apart from the cost (environmental and financial) paper is easy to mislay. If the email is needed to record official business procedure, note that paper printouts of emails don't hold the same legal weight as emails filed electronically.

## 8. Archive and Disposal

- 8.1 Documents should be archived in accordance with the Retention Schedule in Appendix A.
- 8.2 You may wish to archive electronic files this should be done by creating an archive sub-folder on a Trust network drive. Within the archive sub-folder you can then create a folder named 'do not dispose' and numerous folders with the naming convention as the date of destruction. This will make it easier to dispose of the archived records when they reach their destruction date.
- 8.3 Before you begin to archive you will need to use items that are suitable for storing items long term such as archive cardboard boxes, paper files, plastic-ended treasury tags etc. as over time metal components may damage the files.
- 8.4 Documents and files need to be prepared prior to being put into the archive storage box. Files should be removed from lever arch files and placed into card wallets/files and all metal removed. The documentation should be reviewed to remove and destroy any paperwork that is not required to be stored, i.e. personal notes, duplicate items etc.
- 8.5 The first step to archiving your documents is to create an inventory. The best way to do this is by using a standard template detailing all the relevant information of the archive box contents.

## 9. Policy Circulation

- 9.1 This Policy will be published on the Trust's website and included in the Trust's Policy Monitoring Schedule.
- 9.2 This Policy will be circulated to staff by sending an email to the link on the Trust's website.