

Guidance for Departmental Record

Destroying Records

This guidance covers the disposal of SOAS records in any format (it may be paper, electronic/e-mail).¹

Why do we need to destroy records in a structured way?

- To comply with general statutory and regulatory requirements and avoid any penalties associated with non-compliance
- To increase efficiency by saving time, money and space
- To protect our reputation by avoiding having to provide under the Freedom of Information Act, obsolete or inaccurate data that should have already been destroyed. On the other hand, we are also able to avoid allegations of covering up by being able to prove that information was destroyed in a legal and compliant way
- Improve the process of answering information requests by being able to quickly find out whether records have been destroyed
- Comply with the Data Protection Act by being able to show that we are not keeping personal data longer than is necessary

Who should do the work?

As outlined in the Records Management Policy which has been approved by Executive Board, the responsibilities are as follows:

- The Corporate Records Manager and Archivist (CRMA) is responsible for providing guidance on records disposal and for providing any necessary training
- The Information Compliance and Records Management Group (ICRM) members are responsible for communicating this guidance to their Directorate or faculty
- All SOAS staff are responsible for managing and disposing of SOAS records in accordance with this guidance
- The Director of Estates and Facilities is responsible for providing disposal services which follow confidential waste disposal methods for physical records

For more information, visit the [Records Management Policy](#)

¹ A record is recorded information, in any form, created or received by SOAS or individual members of staff to support and show evidence of SOAS activities. It is important to differentiate between a record and a document. All records are documents, but not all documents are records. In effect, a document becomes a record when it forms part of a business activity. For example, you may have a letter template used to confirm a student's attendance at SOAS for council tax purposes. The template is not a record because it has not been involved in a business activity. However, if this template is completed and sent to the council, it becomes a record because it has been involved in a business process.

When should we do the work?

- It is useful to have regular clear outs of redundant documents such as drafts, duplicates and superseded versions when it is not required to retain them in line with the retention schedule
- It is useful to set time aside at least once a year to review records. If the department has a regular time of year when they are less busy, then this is an ideal opportunity to review records
- If possible the best way to apply retention periods to records is at their creation. For example, if you have a database of files retained by the department, it would be useful to have a column for review date so that any records coming up for review can be easily highlighted

How to Destroy Records

It is important to destroy records in the correct way to ensure that we preserve the confidentiality of any information that records contain.

- Paper records must be disposed of using the red confidential waste bags or in the confidential waste bins. If you require more bags, please request confidential waste bags through the Estates job request system
- For electronic records, when you are in the relevant folder, right click on the record that you would like to delete and select delete
- For electronic hardware such as CDs, USBs and hard drives, please contact the IT Helpdesk

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Why do we need to destroy records in a structured way?

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How to Destroy Records

It is important to destroy records in the correct way to ensure that we preserve the confidentiality of any information that records contain.

- Paper records which contain sensitive, personal or confidential information must be disposed of using the red confidential waste bags or in the confidential waste bins. If you require more bags, please request confidential waste bags through the Estates job request system. All other paper records can be disposed of in the green recycling or general waste bins.
- For electronic records, when you are in the relevant folder, right click on the record that you would like to delete and select delete
- For electronic hardware such as CDs, USBs and hard drives, please contact the IT Helpdesk

How do I know when to destroy documents?

Retention and disposal requirements for main records held by the School are available on the [Corporate Retention Schedule](#)

If you cannot find the record type you are looking for on the list, please contact the Corporate Records Manager and Archivist: records-management@soas.ac.uk. Alternatively, check to see if the document falls under one of the categories below. The following is a list of documents that are for operational use only so they can be

destroyed when you no longer require them for your work, there is no requirement to keep them for a set period of time:

Paper

- Printouts of electronically generated documents such as emails or working copies of draft documents etc. If you have printed them for personal reference/convenience you can dispose of them as soon as they are no longer needed
- External Publications used for reference, such as HEFCE guides. These are not SOAS corporate records and as such, can be disposed of when no longer required for reference
- Information copies of materials such as reports and committee papers. You can check on the retention schedule to find out which department is the primary record owner. If it is not your department, then you can destroy these once you no longer need them for reference. If you are unsure, please contact the Corporate Records Manager and Archivist (ap68@soas.ac.uk)
- Unless otherwise stated on the retention schedule, drafts can be destroyed when no longer needed

Electronic

- Regularly delete drafts, obsolete versions and unwanted reference material from your mailbox, shared drive and personal drive when no longer needed. You may want to consider keeping some major versions (those with important changes) for reference.
- Regularly delete redundant messages which do not need to be retained in line with the retention schedule, for example emails arranging meetings

Off-site records

- There are separate procedures for records stored off site. For more information about the destruction of off-site records, please see the guidance on [records transfers](#).