



An Chartlann Náisiúnta
National Archives

Disposal of Instant Messages on an ongoing basis as a category of records under section 7 of the National Archives Act, 1986

Guidance Note

Contents

Document Control	4
1. Definition of Instant Messaging (IM)	5
2. The use of IM	6
3. Recommendations	7
4. IM Disposal Certificate	8
Appendix 1	9
National Archives Appraisal Request: Application for Disposal of Instant Messaging Records	9

Document Control

Document title	Guidance note on disposal of Instant Messages on an ongoing basis as a category of records under section 7 of the National Archives Act, 1986
Reference number	Guidance Note 01/2025
Version	1.0
Date	April 2025
Status	Approved
Contributors to this version	Keepers and Senior Archivists, Digital Management Division and Archives and Government Services Division
Document objectives	To provide guidance on the disposal of Instant Messages
Intended recipients for final document	Departments and agencies subject to the National Archives Act, 1986
Approving body for final document	National Archives
Date approved	May 2025
Date of issue	May 2025
Review date	Ongoing
Contact for review	Keepers and Senior Archivists, Digital Management Division and Archives and Government Services Division

1. Definition of Instant Messaging (IM)

Instant Messaging ('chat') is an electronic messaging service that allows users to determine whether a certain party is connected to the messaging system at the same time. IM allows users to exchange text messages with connected parties in real time. To use the service, users must have IM client software installed on their workstations. The client software logs into a central server to create connections with other clients logged in at that same time. Users create and exchange messages through their local client application. In addition to sending messages, users may have the ability to attach and exchange electronic files such as images, audio, video, and textual documents.¹ Examples of commercial IM applications are MS Teams, Starleaf and Skype².

Instant messages fall within the definition of a departmental record as set out in section 2 (2) of the National Archives Act, 1986, as a record 'made or received, and held in the course of its business, by a Department of State'. As such, these records are subject to legislation governing public records, including the National Archives Act, 1986, the Freedom of Information Act, 2014, the Access to Information on the Environment Regulations (2007-2018), and the Data Protection Act, 2018.

-
1. [Frequently Asked Questions about Instant Messaging | National Archives](#) (US National Archives and Records Administration)
 2. As of the 5th May 2025 Microsoft has retired Skype to streamline its services and prioritise Teams.

2. The use of IM

The use of IM has grown as a communication tool for staff working remotely and replacing interactions which would have previously occurred face to face. It could be argued that while email has replaced traditional paper correspondence, IM is being used in place of phone calls and brief in person interactions. As such, the contents of these interactions would not generally fall into the category of records required for ongoing business use or future retention. They are routine interactions regarding work practices such as setting deadlines, sharing document links, agreeing meeting dates and coordinating office attendance.

A distinction should be drawn between routine IM communications between two or more colleagues, and chat channels for project specific groups used for collaboration on a defined topic. As the latter are more focused project specific discussions, a longer retention period may be required for business use.

A formal Instant Messaging Usage and Retention Policy is recommended to provide guidance on the correct use of IM.

IM should not be used as an official record for substantive business purposes.

3. Recommendations

Rationale for permitting the destruction of IM as a class or category of departmental records are as follows:

- The creation of IM records is not a core function of a Department of State. It is a peripheral activity that does not create any significant new records of that Department's functions, structures or activities.
- These records are routine and operational in nature and unlikely to contain once-off records of evidential value.

It is recommended that authorisation should be given to Departments of State for the disposal of instant messages shared on all IM platforms in current or future use by the Department.

A survey of IM in the Department of Transport undertaken by the National Archives viewed a range of accounts and grades, and all were found to contain low-grade administrative content not worthy of permanent preservation as archives. In addition, given the often informal and occasionally personal nature of IM 'chats', these records would not fall within derogations for retention beyond business use in article 5(e) of GDPR for archiving purposes in the public interest, historical, scientific or statistical research in accordance with article 89 of GDPR. The continued retention of such data by the Department may constitute a breach of GDPR and the Data Protection Act, 2018.

We recommend that Departments of State formalise their policies and procedures providing guidance on the correct usage of IMs. It is important to reinforce that IM is not an appropriate medium for substantive business purposes. Any task requiring further discussion should be escalated to email and other types of records which will be saved appropriately following records management procedures for the retention of records. Sensitive or personal information should not be shared on these platforms as they are public records subject to Freedom of Information requests and created as part of an employee's professional activities.

IM records which are not routine text message exchanges, such as digital recordings, transcriptions and AI (artificial intelligence) generated content, are outside the scope of this guidance note.

4. IM Disposal Certificate

In order to comply with the National Archives Act, 1986, a signed disposal certificate for IM records must be obtained.

The following steps are required:

1. Complete the IM Disposal Request Form (Appendix 1).
2. Email the completed form to query@nationalarchives.ie with your request for the attention of the Head of Current Records.
3. Your request will be processed and a draft certificate will be sent to you for signature by the relevant [certifying officer](#).
4. The signed certificate will be returned to the National Archives for counter-signature by the Director to complete the formal authorisation process.

The following conditions of disposal will be attached to the certificate:

1. Authorisation applies to instant messages, including chat channels, shared on all Instant Messaging (IM) platforms, on an ongoing basis in **digital format only**.
2. Authorisation **is contingent** on the taking of appropriate measures by the Department of State to ensure that substantive business messages are exported to an accessible format until such time as they are appraised by the National Archives to determine their archival value.
3. Authorisation **does not apply** to digital recordings, transcriptions, AI (artificial intelligence) generated content, or records outside routine text message exchanges captured through IM platforms.
4. Authorisation **is contingent** on compliance with all other statutory or regulatory requirements in relation to the retention of records, including internal rules and procedures and administrative requirements.

Appendix 1

National Archives Appraisal Request: Application for Disposal of Instant Messaging Records

[Please download and complete a Word version of the form here.](#)

Please complete the questionnaire to provide the National Archives with as much information as possible to support your application for a records disposal certificate.

Please refer to the Instant Messaging Guidance Note.

IM should not be used as an official record for substantive business purposes.

Part 1: General information	
Contact details:	
Name of department/office/body:	
Division/section/unit:	
Name and grade of applicant:	
Name and contact email of Certifying Officer :	

Part 2: Overview of disposal application	
Record series:	
IM platform (e.g. MS Teams, Starleaf, Skype):	
Date:	
Please indicate earliest date of records for which disposal authorisation is being sought. This disposal application is for ongoing disposal.	
From (yyyy):	

Part 3: Format and content of records
Formats:
Which formats are the Instant Messages stored in?
☐ IM platform formats only (please specify)
☐ Exported elsewhere (please specify)
Details:
Contents:
Please confirm that IM is not used as an official record for substantive business purposes. ☐

Part 4: Extent and storage of records	
Series volume (paper and electronic):	
What is the volume of the series?	
Estimate of extent (MB, GB):	
Storage location:	
Where are the electronic records stored?	☐ External servers ☐ Local servers ☐ Cloud storage ☐ Other
Please give details of storage providers and back-up services:	

The National Archives
Bishop Street, Dublin 8,
D08 DF85, Ireland

www.nationalarchives.ie

Phone: +353 (0)1 407 2300
Lo Call: +353 1890 252424
Email: query@nationalarchives.ie

 [@narireland](https://www.instagram.com/narireland)

 [@NARIreland](https://twitter.com/NARIreland)

 [nai-national-archives-ireland](https://www.linkedin.com/company/nai-national-archives-ireland)



An Chartlann Náisiúnta
National Archives