



An Chartlann Náisiúnta  
National Archives

# Guide to Records Management in the Civil Service

## Guidance Note



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# Document Control

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# 1. Key Definitions

## Records Management

The field of management responsible for the efficient and systematic control of the creation, receipt, maintenance, use and disposition of records, including processes for capturing and maintaining evidence of, and information about, business activities and transactions in the form of records.

## Records manager

An individual responsible for the administration of programmes for the efficient and economical handling, protecting and disposing of records throughout their life cycle.

## Records system

A set of rules governing record-making and recordkeeping, as controlled by the creator's records management function, and the tools and mechanisms used to implement these rules.

## Retention schedule

A comprehensive document that identifies and describes an organisation's records, usually at the series level, indicating the length of time each series should be retained and the point at which it should be permanently preserved as archives and transferred to the National Archives or disposed of in accordance with the provisions of section 7 of the National Archives Act, 1986.

**Department of State** is defined in section 1(2) of the National Archives Act, 1986 and includes all government departments, all courts and 61 bodies listed in the schedule to the Act and any future bodies added to the schedule.

**Departmental record** is defined in section 2(2) of the National Archives Act, 1986 as a record in any format, made or received and held in the course of its business, by a Department of State or any public body, which is a committee, commission or tribunal of enquiry appointed from time to time by the Government, a member of the Government or the Attorney General.

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## 2. Records Management Policy and Procedures

In order for departments to meet their obligations under legislation, including compliance with Article 30 of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) to actively manage their records, a Records Management Policy and Retention Schedule should be in place for all offices and units. Records management should be undertaken at a Departmental level, overseen by a designated Records Manager(s), ensuring a cohesive and unified records system.

The benefits of investing in active records management include:

- Compliance with legislative and regulatory provisions regarding the retention of records, including the National Archives Act, 1986, Data Protection Act, 2018 and Freedom of Information Act, 2014.
- Avoidance of unnecessary accumulation of records in both paper and digital formats.
- Controlled disposal of records in a managed and co-ordinated manner, in compliance with Section 7 of the National Archives Act, 1986.
- Financial savings with regard to the use of commercial storage companies for the unnecessary retention of paper records that do not warrant permanent preservation as archives.
- Informed management of records in digital format, including the allocation of ICT and information management resources required for the preservation of digital information over time.
- Efficient identification of records of archival value.

A **Records Management Policy** is a high-level document which defines your relevant obligations, records system, classification scheme, and establishes responsibilities for the management of records.

A **retention schedule** provides a detailed audit trail for the correct usage, storage, and management of all Departmental records from their creation to their disposal or permanent retention as archives. Please see National Archives guidance developed for generic classes of records at [Retention Schedule | The National Archives of Ireland](#).

Additional Departmental procedures should be developed or updated to ensure standardised practices in the creation, file naming, and saving of records, as well as in the management of specific record types such as emails and instant messaging.<sup>1</sup>

The drafting of any procedures should take account of international records management and data governance standards, including the International Standard for Records Management, ISO 15489-1:2016 and related standards. For further information on digital preservation please see the [Government Services](#) section of the National Archives website.

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1. See National Archives Guidance Notes

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## 3. Collaboration and Development

[‘Archiving by Design’](#) is a principle of European Information Governance developed under the European Commission to address the challenges of digital transformation. The definition of ‘Archiving by Design’ by the European Commission Archives Group states that ‘During the design or adjustment of information systems, the appropriate measures are taken to ensure that the information becomes, and stays, sustainably accessible’. In essence, it requires a collaborative approach by information and data specialists to define and future proof information systems and records series before they are created.

In line with this European Commission information governance principle, a multi-disciplinary standards-based approach to information management is required by Departments. In practice, this requires collaboration between ICT, records managers, Data Protection officers, FOI officers, archivists, security and privacy experts to ensure best practice standards are integrated into public record systems from their inception, thereby safeguarding their long-term digital preservation.

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## 4. Disposal and Transfer of Records

The destruction of departmental records is prohibited under section 7 of the National Archives Act, 1986, unless permission is granted by the Director of the National Archives, via a certificate authorising their destruction. For further information on the disposal of departmental records please see [Disposal of Records | The National Archives of Ireland](#).

Under the National Archives Act, 1986, Departments of State are obliged to transfer records more than 30 years old to the National Archives, with the exception of records that have been certified for destruction or have been certified to fall under the other exceptions in the Act. This is to facilitate public access and their permanent preservation as archives. For further information on the transfer of departmental records please see [Transfer of Records | The National Archives of Ireland](#).

**It is essential that Departments take a macro-level approach to managing their records to ensure legislative compliance, reduce off-site storage costs, and meet security and access requirements for safeguarding public records held on digital systems.**


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