RMU Information Sheet 9

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<th>Subject</th>
<th>Ephemeral Records</th>
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It is against the law to dispose of the University's records without the written approval of the State Archivist (see Information Sheet 4 for more information). However, the State Archivist has approved Disposal Authorisation 2158 (DA 2158), which permits the destruction of certain low value records known as ephemeral records as a normal administrative practice.

What is an ephemeral record?

Ephemeral records (a.k.a. short-term-value records) are records that are used to facilitate University business but that are of a trivial nature or used solely in the creation of more significant records. Ephemeral records do not need to be saved into a recordkeeping system.

These records are considered to be of such low or short-term value that they may be routinely destroyed without authorisation or the need to list them in a Register of Records Destroyed, unless they:

- were created before 1960;
- relate to an ongoing or imminent government investigation or inquiry;
- relate to an ongoing or imminent court case, Native Title claim or Right to Information request; or
- document links between indigenous peoples, families, communities and localities.

If any of these apply, contact the Records Management Unit for advice.

The destruction of ephemeral records is authorised in DA 2158: Short-Term-Value Records, which provides a full listing of the types of records that can be considered ephemeral, but here are the most common examples:

Rough notes and calculations

Working papers, background notes, audio recordings, reference materials, spreadsheets and calculations used solely in the preparation of other records such as correspondence, reports, budget documents, programs and tabulations.

External publications and advertising material

Records and publications from outside sources that are kept solely for reference, such as invitations to functions, copies of other university annual reports, unsolicited promotional literature for goods and services, catalogues and published documents.
Personal information

Documents containing personal information acquired by the university which are not required on a continuing basis to support the business transactions to which they relate, e.g. copies of birth certificates, drivers’ licences, marriage certificates, copies of references, copies of qualifications, change of address notices.

Appointment diaries and calendars

Appointment diaries and meeting schedules that do not record significant matters such as notes of discussions and meetings, case notes etc.

Trivial messages and emails

Transmittal messages and other trivial messages which do not record University business transactions or formal communications between staff members. These may include:

- informal transmission messages on ‘with compliments’ slips;
- email and facsimile cover notes;
- facsimile or telephone messages of a routine or trivial nature;
- letters of appreciation and greeting cards; and
- informal emails and instant messages.

If you are unsure whether a message is trivial or not, ask yourself whether it is evidence of a transaction, agreement, policy change/decision, formal advice or a directive; authorises an action; relates to a matter likely to be reviewed or audited; or contains information your successor would need if you were to leave your job tomorrow. If none of these apply, then the message may be considered trivial and may be destroyed under DA 2158.

Non-circulated drafts

Sometimes we need to track the development of a document over the course of time, capturing records of what the document looked like at key points in its development.

A draft or new version of a document must be captured as a record if it:

- was sent to others for comment or approval;
- provides evidence of approval/rejection in the form of annotations;
- contains significant information not contained in the final document;
- shows the context and/or content has changed significantly; or
- has ongoing value for business reasons, e.g. it provides a way to track and document a development or decision-making process.

Drafts that don't fall into any of the categories listed above are ephemeral records and can be freely destroyed, i.e. you don't need to keep every minor draft documenting formatting changes or fixing typos and spelling errors.

You only need to capture annotated drafts separately if they represent comments, feedback or instructions intended for someone other than the person making the annotations. Annotations in the form of personal notes are not considered significant enough to capture as a separate version, nor are minor annotations such as correcting spelling or grammar.
Duplicates and print-outs

The University only needs to keep one official 'master copy' of each record, with excess copies being considered ephemeral records that can be freely destroyed. These include duplicate copies of minutes, agendas, copies of internal circulars and publications, copies of financial records maintained for convenient reference and reference copies of film, video, microfilm or microfiche.

If there are multiple identical copies of a record, such as minutes of a meeting, one copy must be designated as the master copy and captured in a recordkeeping system. Ideally, the others should be explicitly marked as duplicates using a "COPY" stamp in the case of physical records, or using metadata and/or an electronic watermark in the case of electronic records.

Print-outs of information stored in an electronic recordkeeping system such as TechOne are also effectively duplicates. If you can establish that the master copy of a record is stored in a University recordkeeping system, then you may destroy any exact duplicates or print-outs of that record under DA 2158.

The master copies of certain records are centrally maintained by the business areas responsible for those functions and other University business areas may therefore dispose of any duplicates of those records they hold. A full listing of the types of records that fall into this category will be included in the planned Retention and Disposal Guide for Schools and Faculties, but in the meantime, staff are asked to confirm with the relevant business areas that the records in question are in fact duplicates of master copies held by the business area.

Key business areas currently holding the master copies of common records include Financial Services, Human Resources and the Student Centre.

Scanned records

Note that although print-outs of electronic records are considered to be ephemeral records, this does not mean that you can destroy paper records just because you have scanned them and now have an electronic version too. The electronic version is considered a duplicate and may be freely deleted, but the original paper record must be retained.

For the electronic reproduction to replace the paper original as the official record, you will need to properly scan and capture the record in an electronic recordkeeping system in accordance with the strict requirements of a formalised digitisation program. For more details on setting up a digitisation program, see Information Sheet 7 – Destroying Scanned Records and Information Sheet 10 – Scanning Specifications.

Further information

For more information, please visit our website at http://www.utas.edu.au/it/records. If you need help, please contact the Records Management Unit at RMU.Staff@utas.edu.au.

Related documents

- Disposal Authorisation 2158 – Short-term-value records
- Introduction to Records Management brochure
- Information Sheet 3 – Registers of Records Destroyed
- Information Sheet 4 – Disposal Schedules
- Information Sheet 7 – Destroying Scanned Records