

Guidance on the retention and destruction of business records

This guidance is about the retention and ultimate destruction of the business records of the organisation. This is the decision-making, policy, legal, administrative and financial information held by the organisation. It is **not** about clinical records. For advice on clinical records, contact your local medical/health records officers.

What are records?

Records are any recorded information of any kind created or received in the course of the organisation's activities. Records are not just paper files. They can equally be microfiche, films, pictures, tape recordings, computer print outs or computer based electronic systems including databases, spreadsheet and saved documents and e-mails. Increasingly organisations are developing bespoke electronic records management systems which may include arrangements for recording the retention and destruction of electronic records. Whilst the organisation is moving more and more toward the scanning of paper records and retention as electronic versions, there is still a high volume of material that is not kept electronically. For electronic records please refer to the relevant data processing guidance.

Why Keep Records?

As an organisation we need to keep records which provide evidence of:-

- decision making and policy formulation within the organisation (and all its varied component parts);
- policy making (and the reasons for this) ;
- interactions between the authority and the individuals, businesses and organisations with which we deal;
- any legal obligations we enter into;
- clinical procedures we follow and guidance upon which individuals may rely now or in the future;
- the principal administrative processes of the organisation;
- day to day business transactions (for so long as they may need to be referred to) – either as a point of reference or for future verification.

By law, we are to keep certain records for defined periods.

As a public body our internal processes and procedures are open to external scrutiny. We also have an obligation to respond to requests for information under the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002.

We must show that we have reasonable decision-making procedures to determine how long we keep records. We cannot keep all records indefinitely as this is costly and may not be necessary for our business purposes. If records are not disposed of in a controlled way they may be lost forever when others may need to see them.

Process for Disposal

Those business records deserving of permanent retention (e.g. because they are of long-term value for legal, epidemiological or historical purposes) should be offered for deposit with the Health Board's Archive Service. Not all records are suitable for retention in this way and the Archivist will provide guidance on the suitability of material for permanent retention. If you believe a record should be transferred to the Health Board Archive you should consult the Archivist, Alistair Tough who may be contacted at:-

Glasgow City Archives,
Mitchell Library,
201 North Street,
Glasgow
G3 7DN
or via e-mail at Alistair.Tough@glasgow.ac.uk

If records are not to be retained permanently then an informed decision has to be taken on how long the records should be retained and whether they should be retained on site for future reference or placed with an external records store. The commercial cost of storage can be high (particularly where records are frequently recalled) and a balance needs to be struck between retention (and the cost this entails) and disposal.

Whenever any paper or physical records are identified for disposal, we should ensure that any confidential material is shredded by a reputable contractor. Those who comply with BS EN 15713:2009 show that they meet certain standards in the vetting of staff; the security of premises; the standard of shredding and the security of premises and waste in transit. Procurement can advise on current contractors.

A permanent record must be maintained of all records which have been destroyed so that we can show in the future that the record no longer exists.

Where material is placed in remote storage it is wise to assess the destruction date in advance and to arrange with the storage contractor for the items to be destroyed on the pre-set date.

When listing records either for retention or destruction it is necessary to give sufficient detail to allow the records to be clearly identified. Where there are multiple small files on the same subject, consider categorising these together and set common retention dates for them to avoid listing each item.

Current Guidance

Guidance on retention periods for NHS records can be found in the [Scottish Government Records Management NHS Code of Practice \(Scotland\) Version 2.1 January 2012](#)

A summary of the main provisions in this document is attached as an Annexe to this Guidance.

The Recommended Retention Periods

These are expressed as minimum periods and are divided into the following categories:-

1. General
2. Financial
3. Estates &
Facilities
4. Personnel
5. Procurement
6. Health Board
(corporate/legal)
7. Planning/Activity

If in doubt about destruction dates seek advice from professional records officers within the organisation.

E-mails and Electronic Documents

All staff should take personal responsibility for managing their mail boxes and should not retain e-mails unless there is a business need for retention. E-mail systems should not be used as filing systems. Important e-mails which are critical to recording the business of the organisation should be saved on structured shared drives. In general the same rules as apply to paper documents apply to electronic business documents.

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General Records

Record Type	Minimum Retention Period	Notes
Accident forms		See Litigation dossiers – Section 6
Accident register (RIDDOR)	3 years	
Agendas		See Meeting papers – Section 6
Board papers – master copies		See Meetings papers – Section 6
Complaints		See Litigation dossiers and Patient complaints – Section 6
Conferences - lectures given by staff at other conferences	permanent	
Conferences: organised by Boards - conference proceedings	permanent	
Conferences: organised by Boards - routine paperwork	destroy after conference	
Conferences: other conferences attended by staff	2 years	
Copies of out-letters (“flimsies”)	1 year	
Diaries - office	1 year after completion	
Meeting papers - master copies	permanent	Main committees and sub-committees of NHS Boards and special Health Boards
Meeting papers - duplicate copies	1 year	
Minutes - duplicate copies	1 year	
Receipt for registered and recorded delivery mail	2 years	
Record of custody and transfer of keys	2 years	
Time sheets		See Establishment records – minor – Section 4
Travelling and subsistence expenses		See Accounts – minor – Section 2

2. Financial Records

The Scottish Executive policy on retention of financial records is set out in the Scottish Public Finance Manual, which can be accessed at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/finance/spfm/spf-00.asp>

Financial records are required to be maintained for 3 years after the end of the financial year in question. Records relating to VAT however require to be kept for 6 years and in practice it may be difficult to differentiate VAT records from other financial records.

Record Type	Minimum Retention Period	Notes
Accounts – final annual master copies	permanent	
Accounts - cost	3 years	
Accounts - working papers	3 years	
Accounts - minor records (pass books, paying-in slips, cheque counterfoils, cancelled/discharged cheques, petty cash expenditure, travelling and subsistence accounts, minor vouchers, duplicate receipt books, income records, and laundry lists)	3 years after completion of the audit	See Receipts for cheques bearing printed receipts
Accounts - statutory final	permanent	
Audit records - original documents	3 years after formal clearance by statutory auditor	A longer period may be required for investigative purposes
Audit reports (including Management letters, VFM reports and system/final accounts memorandum)	2 years after formal clearance by statutory auditor	A longer period may be required for investigative purposes
Bank statements	3 years after completion of audit	
Benefactions – endowments, legacies gifts etc.	permanent	
Bills and receipts	6 years	
Budget monitoring reports	3 years	
Budgets	2 years after completion of audit	
Capital paid invoices	3 years	See Invoices
Cash books and sheets	6 years	
Cost accounts		See Accounts
Creditor payments	3 years	
Debtors' records - cleared	2 years from completion of audit	
Debtors' records - uncleared	6 years	
Endowments		See Benefactions
Expenses claims		See Accounts - minor
Financial plans, estimates recovery plans	6 years	
Funding data	6 years	
General ledgers	6 years	

Income and expenditure sheets and journals	6 years	
Inquiries involving fraud/other irregularities.	10 years	Where action is in prospect or has been commenced, consult with legal representatives and NHS Counter Fraud Services and keep in accordance with advice provided
Invoices payable (creditors)	6 years	
Invoices receivable (debtors)	6 years	
Ledgers	6 years	See also General ledgers
Legacies		See Benefactions
Mortgage documents - acquisition, transfer and disposal	permanent	
Non-exchequer funds records		See Income and expenditure journals
PAYE records	6 years	
Receipts	6 years	Includes cheques bearing printed receipts
Salaries		See Wages
Superannuation - accounts and registers	10 years	
Superannuation - forms	10 years	
Tax forms	6 years	
VAT records	6 years	In some instances a shorter period may be allowed, but agreement must be obtained from Customs & Excise
Wages/salary records	10 years	For superannuation purposes authorities may wish to retain such records until the subject reaches benefit age

3. Estates & Facilities Records

Record Type	Minimum Retention Period	Notes
Agreements		See Contracts
Bills of quantity		See Building and engineering works
Building and engineering works - key records (final accounts, surveys, site plans,	permanent	Inclusive of major projects abandoned or deferred

bills of quantities) - town and country planning matters and all formal contract documents (executed agreements, conditions of contract, specifications, "as built" record drawings and documents on the appointment and conditions of engagement of private buildings and engineering consultants)		
Buildings - papers relating to occupation	3 years after occupation ceases	Does not include Health & Safety information
Capital charges data	2 years after completion of audit	
Contracts - non sealed (property) on termination	6 years	
Contracts - non sealed (other) on termination	6 years	
Contracts – GP practices and others to deliver core NHS services	permanent	
Contracts – sealed	permanent	Including associated records
Drawings		See Building and engineering works
Engineering works		See Building and engineering works
Equipment		See Products - liability
Estimates: including supporting calculations and statistics	3 years	
Health and safety – asbestos register	permanent	
Health and safety – audit forms, COSHH documentation, safety risk data sheets, risk assessments and control measures etc.	10 years	
Inspection Reports - e.g. boilers, lifts etc.	2 years after operational lifetime of installation / plant	Should be retained indefinitely if there is any measurable risk of a liability
Inventories (non-current) of items having an operational lifetime of less than 5 years	2 years	
Land purchase and sale - deeds, leases, maps, surveys, registers etc	permanent	
Land purchase and sale -negotiations not completed	6 years	
Land surveys		See Land purchase and sale
Land registers		See Land purchase and sale

Laundry lists		See Accounts - minor
Manuals - operating		See Inspection reports
Leases	permanent	
Maintenance contracts		See Contracts
Maintenance request book	2 years after financial year referred to	
Maps	consider for permanent preservation	
Plans		See Building and engineering works
Project files (under £250,000)	6 years after completion / abandonment of project	
Project team files (£250,000 and over)	3 years	
Project team files (under £250,000)	3 years	
Property - acquisitions dossiers	Permanent	
Property – building records		See Buildings and engineering works
Property - cleaning and maintenance (contracts less than £100,000)	6 years	
Property - disposal dossiers	Permanent	
Property - minor contracts	6 years	
Property - purchases	Permanent	
Property - title deeds		See Deeds of title – Section 6
Property - leases		See Leases -
Site files		See Building and engineering works
Specifications for work tendered	6 years	
Surveys - building and engineering works		See Building and engineering works
Tenders (successful)		See Contracts
Tenders (unsuccessful)	6 years	
Title deeds		See Deeds of title – Section 6
Town & country planning		See Building and engineering works

4. Personnel Records

Record Type	Minimum Retention Period	Notes
CVs for non-executive directors (successful)	5 years following term of office	
CVs for non-executive directors (unsuccessful applicants)	2 years	
Disciplinary inquiry dossiers	10 years	Where action is in prospect or has been commenced, consult with legal representatives and keep in accordance with advice provided
Establishment records - major (e.g. Personal files, letters of application and appointment, confirmation of qualifications, contracts, disciplinary reviews, joining forms, pre-employment checks, references & related correspondence, SCRO/ Disclosure Scotland reports, termination forms)	6 years after leaving service or until subject's 70th birthday, whichever is later.	Only the summary needs to be kept to age 70; remainder of file can be destroyed 6 years after subject leaves service.
Establishment records - minor (e.g. attendance books, annual leave records, duty rosters, clock cards, timesheets)	2 years	
Establishment records -unsuccessful applicants	1 year after completion of recruitment procedure	Relates to applications
Human resources		See Establishment records
Industrial relations (not routine)	permanent	
Job advertisements	1 year	
Job applications	3 years after termination of employment	Relates to successful applicants
Job descriptions	3 years after termination of employment	
Leavers' dossiers		See Establishment records – major
Letters of appointment		See Establishment records – major
Nurses - training records	40 years	
Personnel files		See Establishment records
Staff Records		See Establishment records
Study leave applications	2 years	

5. Procurement Records

Record Type	Minimum Retention Period	Notes
Approval files - contracts	permanent	
Approved suppliers lists	11 years	
Delivery notes	2 years	
Indents	2 years after financial year referred to	
Medical equipment specifications - major items purchased	permanent	
Medical Equipment - operating manuals	operational lifetime of equipment	
Procurement documentation	7 years	One copy of each supplier response from short listed to tender and the contract itself.
Products - liability	11 years	
Purchase orders	3 years after financial year referred to	
Requisitions	2 years	
Stock control reports	2 years	
Stores - major (ledgers etc.)	6 years	
Stores - minor (requisitions, issue notes, transfer vouchers, goods received books etc.)	2 years	
Supplier correspondence	6 years after termination of agreement	
Supplies records - minor (e.g. invitations to tender and inadmissible tenders, routine papers relating to catering and demands for furniture, equipment, stationery and other supplies)	2 years	

6. NHS Board Records

Record Type	Minimum Retention Period	Notes
Advance letters	6 years	
Corporate & public affairs documents	6 years	
Corporate policies	permanent	
Deeds of title	permanent	
Health promotion – core papers and visual materials relating to major initiatives	consider permanent preservation	

History of Boards or their predecessor organisations	permanent	
History of hospitals	permanent	
Hospital services files	consider permanent preservation	
Legal actions (adult)	7 years after case settled or dropped	
Legal actions (child)	until child is 18 or 7 years after case settled or dropped, whichever is later	
Litigation dossiers -complaints including accident reports	10 years	Where a legal action has commenced see Legal actions
Meeting papers - master copies	permanent	Main committees and sub-committees of NHS Boards and special Health Boards
Meeting papers - duplicate copies	1 year	
Minutes - signed master copies	permanent	Main committees and sub-committees of NHS Boards and special Health Boards
Minutes - duplicate copies	1 year	
NHS circulars - master copies	permanent	
Nursing home - registration documents and building plans	permanent	
Nursing home - inspection reports and general correspondence	5 years	
Option appraisals	6 years after end of agreement	
Patient complaints without litigation -adults	7 years	
Patient complaints without litigation – children and young adults	until child is 16 or 7 years, whichever is later	
Photographs	consider for permanent preservation	
Press cuttings	consider for permanent preservation	
Public affairs strategy, public involvement documents		See Corporate & Public Affairs documents
Register of seals	permanent	
Reports - major	permanent	
Scottish Executive, SFR returns etc.	10 years	
Serious incident files	permanent	
Service development reports	6 years	

Service level agreements	6 years	
Strategic plans		See Meeting papers
Trusts legally administered by NHS organisations - documents describing terms of	permanent	
Trusts legally administered by NHS organisations - other documents	6 years	

7. Planning Records

Record Type	Minimum Retention Period	Notes
Area health plans	permanent	
Activity monitoring reports	6 years after end of agreement	
Databases - demographic and epidemiological based on data supplied by NHS National Service Scotland, Information Services		In accordance with general policies of NHS National Service Scotland, Information Services, and any specific terms and conditions imposed by them in relation to particular data sets
Databases - demographic and epidemiological based on survey data		May be retained indefinitely if data quality and potential for future re-use justifies cost of migration / regeneration to new formats and platforms
Patient activity data	3 years	
Project files (£250,000 and over)	Permanent	Including abandoned or deferred projects
Summary bed statistics	Permanent	
Waiting list monitoring reports	6 years	
Winter business plans	6 years	