



Records Management Policy

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Contents

1. INTRODUCTION.....	5
2. SCOPE AND DEFINITIONS.....	5
3. KEY POLICY OBJECTIVES.....	6
4. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES.....	7
5. LEGAL OBLIGATIONS	8
6. RISK MANAGEMENT	10
7. TYPES OF RECORDS	11

1. Introduction

Belfast Metropolitan College's ('Belfast Met') compliance with the Data Protection Act (1998) and the Freedom of Information Act (2000) can only be efficient if there is an investment of time and resources in creating an organised and agreed Records Management system.

Good records management allows the College to satisfy the needs of corporate accountability, statutory obligations and audit requirements.

An approved records management system reduces the risk of records being lost, damaged or accessed by unauthorised personnel.

In addition, effective records management is an efficient management of resources, helping to reduce costs, avoid wastage and improve retrieval rates in response to Subject Access and Freedom of Information requests.

Belfast Met is committed to ensuring that the records it produces are managed effectively from the point of creation to their ultimate destruction or transfer to permanent preservation. This policy statement sets out in broad terms how that commitment will be put into practice.

The Belfast Metropolitan College depends upon the reliability, integrity and accessibility of its records for the efficient and effective discharge of its responsibilities. Records created in the course of College business belong to the College, rather than the individuals that create or use them. However, everyone within the College has defined and shared responsibilities for managing records. This policy defines a structure for the management of the College's records. It aims to:

- ensure that the College retains, and increasingly creates, only those records which it requires to conduct and document its business and to comply with its legal and regulatory obligations
- save time and money by promoting the use of simple, cost effective and easily manageable records and information retrieval systems throughout the College.

2. SCOPE AND DEFINITIONS

This policy applies to all records created, received and maintained by College employees in the course of College business.

A **Record** is a document in any format that has been generated or received by the College in the course of its activities and has been, or may be, used by the College as evidence of its actions and decisions, or because of its information content.

Records management is a series of integrated and embedded systems related to the core processes of the College by which the College seeks to control the creation, distribution, filing, retrieval, storage and disposal of those records created or received by the College in the course of its business.

Archives are records selected for permanent preservation as part of the College's corporate memory and as a resource for research.

A record is any information created or received and maintained as evidence of business by a person or organisation. These records can be paper-based or electronic. Some records are essential for on-going work, such as a student electronic Individual Student Learning Agreement or Electronic Personal Training Plan. Some records are required to be archived for a statutory period, such as financial records. As a public authority, the College also has a duty to keep some records simply as evidence of what was done and why. This policy has been implemented for:

- Records for permanent preservation and the periods for which other records should be retained.
- Records retention/disposal schedules for each School, Department and Section.
- Appraisal and destruction of time-expired records, including a permanent record of why records were destroyed, when and on whose authority.
- Registration and tracking systems for records.
- Advice on current records systems, options for streamlining shared filing to save space, time and money, business classification filing schemes, information retrieval, setting security and access levels, meeting Data Protection, Freedom of Information and audit needs, when to close files.
- Identifying and protecting vital and restricted access records and making provision for these in the College's contingency and business continuity plan.
- Storage and destruction of non-current records.
- Strategy to preserve, document and provide long term access to electronic records to be kept permanently as archives.
- Publishing a records management user guide, supported by training delivered in collaboration with the Staff Learning and Development Unit

3. KEY POLICY OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the Records Management Policy are to ensure:

- College records systems are authentic, reliable, protected against unauthorised alteration, comply with regulatory and other business needs and remain accessible to those that need to use them for as long as they are required.
- The information they contain can be retrieved accurately and quickly to aid decision-making and increase management effectiveness.

- College records are managed cost effectively, avoid unnecessary duplication and are retained only as long as required.
- All files are held securely in a manner commensurate with their value and retention period, in the medium most appropriate for the task they perform.
- All files vital to the survival of the College are identified and protected.
- Files no longer current are stored cheaply, retrieved promptly, reviewed and disposed of only in accordance with a defined process.
- Files worthy of permanent preservation as archives are identified as early as possible and preserved in line with the College archiving procedures. This can be found on the intranet via:

Strategic Planning-Records Management.

4. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Effective records management is a shared responsibility.

Corporate Compliance Officer

- The Corporate Compliance Officer of the College has responsibility for promoting and supporting compliance with the Policy.
- The Corporate Compliance Officer has responsibility for developing and maintaining systems to ensure that records will remain authentic, reliable and usable throughout any system change including format conversion, migration between hardware and operating systems or specific software applications, for the entire period of their retention.
- To ensure the College is aware of changes in legislation which impact on how we manage our records.
- To update relevant Belfast Met policies and procedure to reflect changes in legislation.
- To develop, co-ordinate and deliver a College wide training and awareness programme on DPA, FOI and Records Management and communicate staff responsibilities applicable to regarding compliance.
- To be the contact point for all Freedom of Information and Subject Access Requests, liaise with all responsible owners and issue a response in compliance with the relevant Act(s) of legislation.

All Staff, (including Senior Management and designated LIM's)

- The College Management is responsible for approving and promoting compliance with the Filing and Retrieval Policy and Procedures throughout the College.
- All staff are responsible for creating and maintaining records in compliance with relevant College policies and procedures (if unsure please contact your designated LIM, the Corporate Compliance Officer will be able to advise who the designated LIM's are)
- To establish, monitor and review a College Record Management system to ensure the correct classification, storage, security, destruction, archiving and retrieval of information

5. LEGAL OBLIGATIONS

As a public authority Belfast Met must manage its records in accordance with Acts of legislation. The Information Commissioners Office (ICO) regulates the application of these Acts and will take action where a breach occurs. Lord Chancellor's Code of Practice on the management of records issued under section 46 of the Freedom of Information Act (2000) states that the Lord Chancellor will issue "a Code of Practice providing guidance to relevant authorities as to the practice which it would, in his opinion, be desirable for them to follow in connection with the keeping, management and destruction of their records."

The Public Records Act (NI), 1923

The Public Records Act (1923) established The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) as the place of deposit for public records, created the roles of Keeper and Deputy Keeper of the records as well as defining what public records actually are.

Freedom of Information Act (2000)

The Freedom of Information (FOI) Act 2000 covers any recorded information i.e. printed documents, computer files, letters, emails, photographs, sound and video recordings held by the College. The main principle behind the FOI legislation is that the general public have a right to know about the activities of public authorities unless there is a good reason for them not to. Information may only be withheld if there is an absolute exemption or the public interest test considers that the public interest in maintaining a qualified exemption outweighs disclosure.

The College has a legal obligation to provide information through an approved publication scheme and in response to requests. The College must respond to a request within 20 working days.

Disposal of Records Order (1925)

The Disposal of Records Order (1925) sets out how PRONI and government departments should deal with the disposal of public records once their business need comes to an end. Records management is ultimately a matter of risk management, and the College must control the risks associated with the retention and disposal of records. The ICO and PRONI require the College to develop an NI Assembly approved Retention Schedule which identifies the classes of

information held, how long the record should be archived and retained and what the final action will be e.g destroy, transfer to permanent archive. A Retention Schedule is a list of record types or 'classes' with the following information:

- Functionality
 - The general category of information
- Record Type
 - What the record contains information on and how it is used
- Retention period
 - How long to keep the records for
- Statutory authority or guidelines
 - Is there a legal or departmental requirement to retain the information
- Final Action
 - What we do when the record reaches its 'disposal date'

The majority of records created by the College do not have sufficient importance to warrant permanent retention and should be destroyed at specified times according to the agreed Retention Schedule. The destruction of any record produced by the College in the course of its activities should only be carried out after it has been assessed for legal, administration or archival retention requirements. Confidential records must be disposed of securely and safely and an audit trail must be kept of such decisions.

Data Protection Act (1998)

Under the Data Protection Act (1998) the College is a registered data controller. The College is required to process and safeguard all personal data in accordance with the eight Data Protection principles set out in the Act.

The College recognises the importance of protecting its information assets and, in particular, the information relating to its staff, students and other individuals in whatever form that information is held.

The College functions require us to obtain, process and manage certain information about individuals/organisations to enable us to provide a high level of service being requested, for example:

- course programme administration
- providing education and training
- obtaining results for courses and examinations
- administration of student awards and fees
- staff recruitment, salaries and travel allowances paid, annual leave calculation, membership to pension schemes arranged
- facilities provided
- legal obligations to funding bodies and legislation complied with
- Returns to Department of Learning

The College is required by the Department for the Economy to ask for the following information for statistical purposes: marital status, racial group, religion, employment sector, and employment status.

All data, whether held electronically or manually, must be kept securely and not disclosed unlawfully.

Environmental Information Regulations (2004)

The Environmental Information Regulations (2004) require public authorities to take reasonable steps to organise and keep up to date the environmental information which it holds and which is relevant to the public authorities function. It gives members of the public the right to access 'environmental information' held by public authorities. The College must respond to a request within 20 working days.

6. RISK MANAGEMENT

Records Management should be included in the corporate risk management framework. Information and records are a corporate asset, the loss of which could cause disruption to business. The level of risk will vary according to the strategic and operational value of the asset to the authority and risk management should reflect the predicted extent of disruption and resulting damage.

Risk Management is about identifying what could go wrong and ensuring that appropriate procedures are in place to prevent these risks from occurring. There are risks around records such as loss, damage or unauthorised access which need to be managed effectively.

Staff should ensure that all records, paper or electronic, are stored safely and securely. These provisions should be appropriate to the nature of the data or information held in the record, which can include:

Personal and sensitive data

The Data Protection Act requires the College to ensure 'appropriate technical measures' are in place around personal information. There are greater risks around 'sensitive' personal information, which includes information about matters such as an individual's health, political allegiance or ethnicity therefore additional security measures will be taken.

Financial or commercially sensitive data

Mishandling of this information could have serious implications for the commercial performance and financial health of the College. Storage risks include:

- Loss
The loss of records through unauthorised destruction or accidental deletion or - more seriously- the loss of records which can result in unauthorised access (see below)
- Unauthorised access

Records being viewed by unauthorised members of staff or the public resulting from accidental loss, user error (such as emailing or posting to the wrong recipient) or through malicious attacks to College's ICT systems.

- **Unnecessary retention**
Records can be kept longer than they are required, leaving the College exposed to complaints of breaching the Data Protection Act
- **Damage**
Paper and electronic records can be damaged or destroyed if storage locations are damaged by flooding or fire.
- **Obsolete format**
Electronic formats can, by virtue of changes in software and technology, quickly become obsolete

Steps to mitigate these risks should be put in place around their records by all Units and Schools. The procurement and implementation of new ICT systems holding information should include an assessment of how records will be stored.

If the system is replacing another it should also provide a solution for the records held on the obsolete system.

Effective records management requires regular risk management activities including risk assessments on storage, security, retention of records. The College will require each School and Unit responsible for creation and storage of records to conduct annual risk assessments to ensure that records are kept secure and are retained for period of time detailed in the Retention and Disposal Schedule.

7. TYPES OF RECORDS

Records which may be kept by the College for the following purposes:

Administrative value

Records which provide evidence of the actions, activities and decisions as a College;

Financial value

Evidence of the way in which money was obtained, allocated, controlled and spent;

Legal value

Which will provide the source of the authority for actions taken by the College or individuals and show evidence of title, contractual obligations, duties and privileges;

Historical/archival value

Records which supply the corporate memory of the College and its legacy colleges. This will include records created for the purposes highlighted above, retained for historical reasons.

Records are stored in a variety of location and formats:

Paper files

Paper records stored in offices or transferred to the College archive or third parties for storage;

Shared drives, personal drives and emails

Records produced day-to-day by staff at their computers and stored in network drives and email accounts provided by the College;

IT systems

Systems dedicated to holding information and data to support a specific business process, such as accounts payable, the library catalogue or student registration.

A record may be considered to be confidential or non-confidential.

Confidential

Information held by a public authority is subject to the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The Act includes various exemptions to the disclosure of certain types of information, which may include confidential information as defined in this document.

Likely to be confidential

Records or information which contains personal information about a living individual e.g. Questionnaire or other data collected under a guarantee of confidentiality.

- Correspondence or other documents which reveal the contact details or any financial details of a named living person, unless permission has been given to circulate the details.
- Correspondence or other documents which reveal personal details or pass comments on a named living person.
- Staff personnel records
- Discipline records
- Student records
- Funding applications
- Job applications
- Interview notes
- Admissions records
- Redundancy records
- Sick pay records
- Maternity pay records
- Income tax and National Insurance returns
- Wages and salary records
- Accident and incident reports
- Health records
- Medical records

Information which, if made public before a certain period, may breach commercial confidentiality e.g.

- Contracts
- Tenders
- Purchasing records
- Maintenance records
- Insurance records
- Unpublished accounting records

Records which may breach intellectual property rights e.g

- Unpublished research material, drafts and manuscripts.

Unlikely to be confidential

Records or information thereof which is already in the public domain e.g.

- Mission statements
- College Development Plans
- Instruments and Articles of Governance
- Regulations
- Published directories
- Internet websites
- Published minutes
- Published reports
- Press releases
- Prospectuses
- Timetables
- Presentation materials
- Course guides and outlines
- Publicity material
- Blank examination papers (post exam)
- Data which has been anonymised
- Published surveys
- Student and staff Magazines (Staff Express and Student Express)
- Published circulars