

Records Management

Guidance on the
Management of Records
of Temporary Bodies

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 This booklet sets out guidance on the management of records of temporary bodies. Its purpose is to assist officials responsible for the creation and maintenance of such records, and to advise departmental records staff on the appraisal and disposal of the records.
- 1.2 It covers all temporary bodies, a term which refers to any organisation which has been set up by the Government, by statute or otherwise, to investigate or provide advice or recommendations on a particular issue or event, and to report accordingly. Examples of recent temporary bodies:
 - Inquiry into Ladbroke Grove Rail Crash 2001
 - Bristol Royal Infirmary Inquiry 2001
 - Royal Commission on Civil Liability and Compensation for Personal Injury, 1972-1978
- 1.3 Temporary bodies are increasingly set up to work electronically from the outset, and records generated and received need to be managed electronically. Records may be received in other formats, for example files, videos, photographs, and exhibits, and these also need to be managed as records.
- 1.4 Good records management procedures within temporary bodies are necessary to:
 - make available to the temporary body accurate and reliable records to enable it to complete its brief or meet its terms of reference, including the provision of a final report
 - ensure that records can be readily retrieved when required
 - ensure accountability and provide an audit trail
 - meet statutory obligations of the Public Records Acts 1958 and 1967, the Data Protection Act 1998, the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and other legislation
 - keep records in a way which allows them to be identified for historical and research purposes
- 1.5 General advice and guidance on the setting up and running of inquiries (including commissions and tribunals) can be obtained from the Cabinet Office, Central Secretariat.

2 Roles and responsibilities

2.1 The role of the Public Record Office

2.1.1 The Public Record Office (PRO) has the responsibility to provide guidance and supervision on the management of current records, on selection of public records as defined by the Public Records Act 1958 (see Annex A), and on the preparation of selected records for transfer to an archive repository. These include the records of temporary bodies set up by the Government.

2.1.2 The PRO manages the public records system of the United Kingdom under the Public Records Acts 1958 and 1967, and in records management currently undertakes these major activities:

- developing the frameworks, policies, procedures, capabilities and infrastructure that will enable effective electronic records management in government
- improving the management and appraisal of and access to government records
- identifying the records management and archives implications of government information legislation and policy, and providing frameworks for implementation

2.2 The role of the Departmental Record Officer

2.2.1 Departmental Record Officers (DRO) and their staff in sponsoring departments are responsible for ensuring the effective and efficient operation of records management procedures, including the safe keeping and retention of records for as long as they are required (and no longer), the transfer to the PRO or approved place of deposit of those records selected for permanent preservation, and the timely destruction of records no longer required.

2.2.2 DROs and their staff are responsible for ensuring that public records are properly safeguarded during any changes in the machinery of government. In particular they must ensure:

- the safe keeping of records of temporary bodies for which their department is responsible
- that records of temporary bodies are appraised and disposed of in accordance with current legislation and guidance
- that the staff of temporary bodies receive adequate guidance on the management of records

2.3 *The role of secretaries of temporary bodies*

2.3.1 In addition to their responsibilities for the financial and other administration of their organisation, secretaries of temporary bodies should ensure that:

- the DRO of the temporary body's sponsoring department is informed of the appointment of the commission, inquiry, task force, etc or, where there is no such sponsoring department, the Head of the Records Management Department at the PRO is informed
- the way records are to be arranged and managed by the temporary body is agreed with the DRO of the sponsoring department at the outset. This needs to cover issues such as the design of the records management systems and processes, the body's policy on handling external correspondence and evidence etc; in the case of non-sponsored bodies these issues should be discussed and agreed with the Records Management Department of the PRO
- the records of the temporary body are maintained during its existence in such a way that the requirements in section 1.4 above are met
- staff of the temporary body are made fully aware of the need to safeguard and maintain adequate records of the temporary body's work
- early discussion on the temporary body's terms of reference is held with the DRO and/or PRO with a view to determining those records which are likely to have long term value
- a formal publication scheme within the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 is drawn up or, if the sponsoring department already has such a scheme, an amendment is inserted therein
- adequate notice is given to the DRO or the PRO on the winding up of the temporary body so that appropriate arrangements for its records can be made
- members are made fully aware that the records of the temporary body are official and must not be removed from its custody

3 Managing current records

3.1 *Policy framework*

A formal records policy framework will provide an authoritative statement on the principles which should apply to the management, appraisal and preservation of the temporary body's records. Policy statements from sponsoring departments will inform the framework, which should act as a mandate for supporting policies and procedures. In particular the policy needs to ensure that:

- the business processes, activities and transactions to be documented are set out
- the context for understanding individual records is maintained, for example by retaining related records within the records management system
- adequate systems are maintained so that records can be located and accessed as and when required
- records reliably represent the information used in or created by the temporary body's work, and their integrity and authenticity can be demonstrated
- records can be trusted, maintained and accessed for as long as they are required
- records are disposed of in accordance with agreed retention policies and procedures
- the roles and responsibilities of key players in the management of the records are assigned and maintained

3.2 *Capturing records*

3.2.1 Inquiries and other temporary bodies are increasingly relying on the capture and management of electronic information to ensure the body can both discharge its role effectively and to publicise the progress of the body on a web-site in advance of the publication of the final report

3.2.2 In some cases information only exists in electronic form and constitutes the primary record. Such records need to be tracked and managed in accordance with the various PRO guidance referenced in this booklet. Critically it is essential that an inventory of such record collections is developed and maintained. The same treatment should be extended to electronic copies of scanned paper records (such as submitted evidence) since scanned documents are increasingly being selected for permanent archiving in preference to the paper originals. The PRO publication *Guidance for an inventory of electronic record collections* lists the metadata elements required for an effective inventory.

3.2.3 Guidance on the management of records held on websites and intranets can be found in the PRO publication *Managing web resources: management of electronic records on websites and intranets*. Temporary bodies will also need to pay heed to the following central government guidelines:

- e-Government Interoperability Framework (v3), 2001
- Guidelines for UK Government websites (v2), 2001
- Metadata Framework, 2001

These publications are available on the Office of the e-Envoy website at www.e-envoy.gov.uk/publications

3.2.4 Where bodies use applications that generate real-time transcripts together with integrated annotation tools, which permit temporary body members to add unique comment to their own copy of a transcript, all such copies and annotations should be maintained and managed so their relationship and authorship is clear. Suppliers of such applications should be advised that it may be desirable for such annotations to be permanently archived and that additional copies would have to be provided where it is determined that these annotations are of permanent value.

3.2.5 Most temporary bodies produce some documents such as formal papers and minutes in word-processed form using products such as Microsoft Word. These should be retained together with draft versions of their evolving reports. Significant e-mails should also be captured into meaningful and relevant folders. Guidance on the organisation and naming of documents and e-mails can be found in the PRO toolkit *Good practice in managing electronic documents using Office 97 on a local area network*

3.2.6 The vast majority of electronic records created by temporary bodies consist of scanned images of paper evidence. It is normal practice for such bodies to contract out this work and the chosen supplier is then responsible for supplying both the images and a database with a browser to enable swift recovery of selected images. Care should be taken when entering into such agreements to ensure that the supplier will provide an archival copy for transfer to the PRO if that is required plus a copy of the database together with a browser which will enable the images to be recovered. The supplier should also undertake to provide another copy of the database in MS Access to simplify future archiving. Advice on formats can be obtained from the PRO.

3.3 *Storage and retrieval*

Classification Schemes

- 3.3.1 Records must be included in classification schemes so that they can be managed as a group, provide for easy storage and retrieval, enable complete recall of information relating to a particular sequence, subject or event, and ensure that the records are presented in a way which reflects the development of the activity to which they relate and the way in which they are available to creators and users. The organisation of records should reflect business needs and usage, provide a framework for adding new records, and enable management of the records at folder (electronic) or file (paper) levels or higher.
- 3.3.2 A pre-coordinated scheme with a controlled vocabulary will provide a predictable method of context navigation and position a set of records in relation to others. The scheme should be supported by an adequate indexing system that will give flexible access to record content, bringing together records of similar topics that have been separated by the primary filing scheme, and enable the temporary body to conduct its business more effectively. In an electronic environment documents can be indexed, sorted and retrieved according to many alternative arrangements. Indexing for keyword retrieval should follow government standards for metadata, as set out in e-GMS. See the website of the Office of the e-Envoy:
www.e-envoy.gov.uk/publications.
- 3.3.3 Classification procedure will also ensure accountability (by keeping a full record), appraisal in context, and systematic disposal of the records.
- 3.3.4 A classification scheme must be common to all the records of the temporary body, thus allowing for consistency in information access and retrieval. It should include both paper and electronic record collections, and where possible any links between the two should be properly documented and clearly apparent to users. Such a requirement is brought more sharply into focus as government policies on openness and freedom of information are being implemented.
- 3.3.5 Further information and guidance on record creation and classification can be found in the PRO publications:
- *Management, Appraisal and Preservation of Electronic Records* (2 vols, 1999)
 - *Developing an Electronic File Plan* (due for publication in 2002)
 - *Records Management Standards: File Creation* (1998)

Documenting Records Work

3.3.6 Compliance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 requires that records work is documented. The *Code of Practice on the Management of Records under Freedom of Information* provides the context for this requirement which includes:

- record classification schemes
- records appraisal and disposal
- operational selection policies
- transfer of records

Details of the requirements can be found in the PRO publications:

- *Management, Appraisal and Preservation of Electronic Records*, vol 2, section 6 (1999)
- *Records Management Standards: Documentation of Records Work* (2001)

3.3.7 Copyright of any electronic software also needs to be explicitly safeguarded, as there have been instances where temporary bodies have put this at risk by accepting supplier's conditions without appropriate safeguards. Copyright and ownership of such material needs to be clearly asserted to avoid demands for payments where additional copies are required for permanent archiving.

4 Retention and appraisal

4.1 *Appraisal*

4.1.1 Most administrative and housekeeping records can be destroyed in accordance with generic retention scheduling guidelines issued by the PRO. These cover the following types of records:

- Buildings
- Personnel
- Accounting
- Health and Safety
- Contractual
- Projects
- Complaints
- Press Office

Further publications will be added to this series.

4.1.2 When the temporary body is appointed the Secretary should agree with the DRO of the sponsoring department or the PRO Client Manager (see section 2.3.1) which of its records are likely to be selected for permanent preservation. These may include, in paper or electronic form:

- reports
- evidence (oral and written, photographs, plans and technical reports)
- transcripts of proceedings
- minutes of meetings
- correspondence between members
- research papers

4.1.3 Any remaining records of the temporary body can be divided into two categories, according to the organisation's business needs:

- for destruction without further examination after a stated period
- for final review after a stated period

These decisions should be made when the record has been closed or is of no further immediate use.

4.1.4 The majority of records of temporary bodies selected for permanent preservation will be transferred to the PRO. Some, however, may be more suited to deposit with another record office (an approved place of deposit under section 4 of the Public Records Act 1958). Advice can be sought from the PRO Client Manager.

4.1.5 Records identified for transfer to a record office should be stored and maintained in accordance with current best practice prior to their transfer to the PRO or an approved place of deposit.

4.1.6 Current best practice is described in the PRO publications:

- *Management, Appraisal and Preservation of Electronic Records* (2 vols, 1999)
- *Guidance for an inventory of electronic record collections* (2000)
- *Evaluating Information Assets: Appraising the inventory of electronic records* (2001)
- *Sustainable electronic records: strategies for the maintenance and preservation of electronic records and documents in the transition to 2004* (2001)
- *Records Management Standards: Storage of Semi-Current Records* (2000)

4.2 Sensitive records

4.2.1 Sensitive records include those which may be restricted or confidential or whose release would mean a breach of confidence. Records which may be sensitive should be treated in the same way as similar records generated by the sponsoring department; general advice should be sought from the DRO. Where there is no sponsoring department the PRO Client Manager will advise.

4.2.2 It is common practice for temporary bodies to release images of submitted evidence for public inspection via a web-site. However some material is often withheld as its release could compromise pledges of confidentiality or contains personal material of a distressing nature such as medical records or mortuary photographs. Such material needs to be clearly identified and where a redacted version is produced for public consumption (for example where a child's name or home address is withheld), a record of this instance has to be made so it is possible to track both the original version and the redacted copy. If such evidence is selected for permanent preservation it is critical that this information be maintained and passed to the PRO to inform subsequent release of the material (either immediately or at a later date) for public inspection.

4.3 *Departmental records*

- 4.3.1 Official records of government departments and agencies seen by temporary bodies in the course of their inquiries should be handled in the same way as other records in the departments and agencies. Unless PRO advice is to the contrary (for example, in the case of very high profile inquiries) they need not be specially retained because they have been so submitted. Copies of official records should be similarly treated.
- 4.3.2 Any duplicated records of temporary bodies that find their way on to departmental files or systems may be destroyed by departmental records staff. The temporary body's records will be regarded as the primary set of records for appraisal and possible preservation.

5 Preparation of records for transfer to PRO

The temporary body or its sponsoring department is responsible for preparing selected records for transfer to the PRO or place of deposit.

5.1 *Cataloguing*

5.1.1 The objective of cataloguing records which have been selected for permanent preservation is to produce descriptive data that is clear, accurate and enables information in the records to be found. Detailed guidance on cataloguing records should be sought from the PRO which can provide coaching in cataloguing methods for staff of the temporary body and copies of formal guidance.

5.1.2 The PRO's online catalogue (PROCAT) provides the main means of accessing information about the records preserved in the PRO. Records are arranged at the PRO by creating department or body. PROCAT is structured to provide information about both the creating bodies and the individual bodies. It also contains information about public rights of access to the records. PROCAT is available on the PRO website and is accompanied by explanatory materials.

5.2 *Physical preparation*

5.2.1 Electronic and paper records selected for permanent preservation must be prepared for transfer in such a way that any existing deterioration in their physical media will be halted and their continuing survival will be facilitated.

5.2.2 Guidance on the preparation of electronic datasets for transfer is included in notes published by the National Digital Archive of Datasets (NDAD) and on the preservation of electronic records in the PRO toolkit *Sustainable electronic records: strategies for the maintenance and preservation of electronic records and documents in the transition to 2004* (2001). Further work on the preservation of electronic records is currently being undertaken in the PRO.

5.2.3 Detailed guidance on packing and labelling selected records can be found in the PRO Guide *Packing, Labelling and Repairing Records*, due for publication in 2002. Individual guidance on the preparation of both electronic records and records in conventional media should be sought from the PRO.

6 Further information

6.1 Many temporary bodies are set up by administrative action or as a result of specific legislation. There are, however, some statutes which may be relevant to the general conduct of temporary bodies and the management of their records; these include:

- Statutory Declarations Act 1835
- Parliamentary Papers Act 1840
- Evidence Act 1851
- Witnesses (Public Inquiries) Protection Act 1892
- Tribunals of Inquiry (Evidence) Act 1921
- Public Records Act 1958
- Tribunals and Inquiries Act 1992
- Data Protection Act 1998
- Freedom of Information Act 2000¹

6.2 The Public Record Office produces several sets of records management standards and guidance which aim to promote good practice in the management of public records throughout all stages of their life cycle. Details about the publications can be found in *Records Management: Standards and Guidance: Introduction* (PRO, 2001). The following are likely to be relevant to the management of the records of temporary bodies:

6.2.1 *Records management*

- Management, Appraisal and Preservation of Electronic Records
- Functional requirements for electronic records management systems
- Developing a corporate policy on electronic records
- Good practice in managing electronic documents using Office 97 on a local area network
- Sustainable electronic records: strategies for the maintenance and preservation of electronic records and documents in the transition to 2004
- RMS 2.2 Documentation of Records Work
- RMS 3.2 Business Recovery Plans

6.2.2 *Appraisal and retention*

- Developing an inventory of electronic records collections
- Evaluating information assets: appraising the inventory of electronic records
- Acquisition and Disposition Policies
- RMS 5.1 Disposal Scheduling

¹ The main provisions of this Act come into effect in January 2005

- Retention Scheduling: 2. Personnel Records
- Retention Scheduling: 3. Accounting Records
- Retention Scheduling: 4. Health and Safety Records

6.2.3 Access

- Access to Public Records
- Data Protection Act 1998: A Guide for Records Managers and Archivists

6.2.4 Further information on these and other aspects of the management of public records can be obtained from:

Records Management Department
Public Record Office
Kew
Richmond
Surrey
TW9 4DU

tel: 020 8876 3444

fax: 020 8392 5283

e-mail: [records-management @pro.gov.uk](mailto:records-management@pro.gov.uk)

website: www.pro.gov.uk

Annex A

Definition of Terms

Appraisal. The process of evaluating an organisation's activities to determine which records should be kept, and for how long, to meet the needs of the organisation, the requirements of Government accountability, and the expectations of researchers and other users of the records.

Client Manager. An officer of the Public Record Office responsible for giving advice and guidance to a group of government departments and agencies, to provide for the timely and effective appraisal, documentation and accessioning of departmental records.

Departmental Record Officer. The person appointed by a government department or agency to be responsible for the management of the records of that organisation.

Disposal. The implementation of appraisal and review decisions. These comprise the destruction of records and the transfer of custody of records (including the transfer of selected records to an archival institution). They may also include the movement of records from one system to another (for example, paper to electronic).

Operational Selection Policy. Detailed statement of selection criteria as they apply to certain departments or to categories of records found in more than one department.

Place of Deposit. A record office which has been approved for the deposit of public records in accordance with section 4(1) of the Public Records Act 1958.

Public Records. Records of, or held in, any department of HM Government in the United Kingdom or records of any office, commission or other body or establishment whatsoever under HM's Government in the United Kingdom, as defined in paragraph 2 of the First Schedule to the Public Records Act 1958. Also records of organisations subsequently included in the table in the above schedule or of those whose records have since been determined as public records by the Public Record Office.

Record series. A collection of records having a common subject or theme usually identified by a specific lettercode or number.

Review. The examination of records to determine whether they should be destroyed, retained for a further period, transferred to an archival institution or presented to a third party.

Scheduling. The production of a schedule, or list of public records, for which pre-determined periods of retention have been agreed between the operational manager and the Departmental Record Officer of the government organisation concerned, and the Public Record Office.