<u>What to keep and why</u> - Help for private and third sector organisations to understand the records they hold and their value

The National Archives has produced this basic guidance to explain the principles behind keeping records and archives and to clarify the impact of the Data Protection Act on archives. There is a general understanding that organisations in the public sector need to keep records and archives but private companies, organisations in the voluntary sector and all kinds of other institutions also have a requirement to keep records and can gain considerable value from so doing.
This guidance is designed to be a first step for people considering these issues, so please follow the links for more detailed information and advice.

Why do organisations keep records?
Organisations keep records of their past activities – and their consequences – for a number of reasons including the legal requirement to retain certain records to comply with company law, for example. But good record-keeping also allows organisations to plan well for the future and demonstrate their accountability to staff, members, other stakeholders, and the wider public. Other records which no longer have a corporate value of this sort may still be useful to the organisation, from helping build a corporate identity to providing advertising or publicity material. They may also have a secondary purpose as archival resources. If they are not kept, researchers of the future will find gaps in the evidence they need to explore and understand the past.

So do I have to keep everything?
Definitely not! Generally the proportion of records kept (whether digital or paper) will decrease as the length of time they are kept increases. Keeping records unnecessarily can be expensive. It also makes it more difficult to find the information you actually need and to keep important, sensitive information secure.
This means it is essential to manage your records well. You should aim to have approved processes in place that ensure your organisation is aware what needs to be kept for now, what is useful for the medium term and what will have long-term value.

These processes typically are managed through a **Retention Schedule**. This is the name given to the document that sets out which records are retained, for how long and what happens to them if they cease to be actively used by the day-to-day running of the organisation.
The Retention Schedule should therefore be based on an agreed organisational policy. This will ensure that the records your organisation no longer needs are destroyed at the appropriate point in time. A strong policy also means that if questions are ever raised about how or why particular records have been destroyed you can point to a documented corporate decision to do so and an established process to dispose of confidential records securely. Otherwise, if you are involved in litigation, for example, courts may assume you have deliberately destroyed relevant evidence.

So it is important for your organisation's archives to be part of a corporate records management policy that clearly and transparently documents all the different journeys that the records produced by your organisation might take.

Find out more:
http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/information-management/rm-code-guide8.pdf
http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/information-management/manage-information/policy-process/disposal/

http://www.london.ac.uk/fileadmin/documents/about/Records_Management/ManagingInformationWhy.pdf
http://www.archivesandmuseums.org.uk/scam/infosheet5.htm
http://www.managingbusinessarchives.co.uk/getting_started/sustaining_the_archive/records_retention_schedules

What records are likely to have archival value?
These will be the records that reflect the core business of your organisation and which reveal the decisions, ethos and personalities which make this particular organisation unique.
Key documents (paper or digital) for each organisation will be the ones which show:

- How it started, its legal status and structure.
- Its main business activities.
- How it interacts with other organisations, the state, and the public.
- How it is run and managed.
- Its key policies and decisions.
- The important things it has published – including websites and social media.

In addition to the essential legal and financial records, staff records and minutes of key meetings, each organisation will keep records which are directly related to their core business. So, for example:
- This statement from the National Gallery clearly explains the ethos behind their records management strategy http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/records-management-risk-management-statement
- The University of Manchester's Retention Schedule focuses on maintaining a strong record of their teaching and research http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=6514

Find out more:
http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/information-management/rm-code-guide1.pdf
http://www.museuminfo-records.org.uk/toolkits/RecordsManagement.pdf
http://bcs.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/he/

But what about data protection?
Many organisations worry that keeping their core records beyond immediate business use might put them in breach of the Data Protection Act (DPA). This fear is felt particularly around keeping records which relate to individual people ('data subjects'), such as staff, students and patients.

However, the DPA is clear that potential future research is an entirely acceptable reason to keep these records, as long as they are stored and managed securely, and not used in ways that are likely to provoke objections from the people concerned.

It is therefore important that you look after these records with care and consider your responsibility to any living people who are mentioned in the documents, or descendants who may be affected by potentially sensitive information about people how have died. It may mean that you don't allow researchers to look at the records until the information they contain is old enough not to be sensitive, and that you take care not to digitise or publish items which contain personal information within certain time periods frames.

Find out more:
http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/information-management/dp-code-of-practice.pdf

https://ico.org.uk/for_organisations/data_protection/the_guide/the_principles

Depositing
Looking after records with archival value, and storing and managing them to the high standards expected is a significant responsibility and can be difficult for some organisations. If this is the case, you can discuss your records with a local or specialist archive and see if they are interested in holding these records in their repository.

 If you do deposit your records in an archive repository, the team there will be able to manage on your behalf the differing demands of privacy for data subjects and access for researchers.
Find out more:
Find a suitable archive http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archives-home

Other resources
http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/information-management/manage-information/planning/records-management-code/implementation-guides/ These guides have been written for the public sector but the general principles and much of the more detailed advice will also be of use to private and third sector organisations.