

# **POLICY ON RECORDS MANAGEMENT IN THE BRITISH LIBRARY**

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## **1 Scope of the Policy**

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- 1.1 The British Library is dependent on its records in order to operate efficiently and effectively, and within the requirements of the law. This Records Management Policy defines a structure for the management of the Library's records to ensure that:
- the British Library retains only those records which are required for the conduct of business, or that are of historical importance
  - those records that are created are managed and controlled effectively and at the least cost, commensurate with legal, operational, and information needs.
- 1.2 At any time, the British Library may need to produce its records in an authentic, legally-admissible form in order to demonstrate that it has acted reasonably and has fulfilled its obligations fairly and lawfully. This Policy therefore covers all records, irrespective of format, that demonstrate evidence of corporate activity.
- 1.3 This policy covers the management of records relating to the administration and business functions of the British Library. It does not extend to records that catalogue the collections.

## 2 *Aims*

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- 2.1 To support the effective and efficient running of the British Library by ensuring that records necessary for the business of the Library are:
- available
  - accessible
  - accurate
  - authentic
  - secure
- 2.2 To enable the Library to satisfy its obligations in terms of:
- corporate accountability
  - statutory requirements
  - evidential admissibility
  - audit requirements
- 2.3 To ensure that information, as one of the major corporate resources of the British Library, is managed appropriately and successfully throughout the organisation
- 2.4 To introduce and implement sound management procedures that can be applied to all records whether in paper or electronic format.

### 3 Objectives

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- 3.1 To define a system for the management of records, irrespective of format, created by the Library in the course of its administrative work
- 3.2 To establish practices which enable Library staff to find with speed and efficiency the information they require for their work
- 3.3 To ensure that the British Library meets its statutory requirements in relation to the management of records and information
- 3.4 To allocate responsibility to all staff for ensuring that evidence of business activity within their own sphere of action is created and captured
- 3.5 To facilitate the management of office space by optimising the use of secondary storage areas for semi-current paper records, and retention schedules to ensure the timely destruction of records no longer needed
- 3.6 To move towards meeting the requirements of the *Modernising Government* agenda by laying the foundations for a greater, if not total, reliance on electronic records.

## **4 Responsibilities**

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- 4.1 All administrative records, irrespective of format, created or received by employees in the course of Library business are the official records of the British Library. None may be discarded, deleted, destroyed, donated, or otherwise disposed of except in accordance with the Library's Records Management Policy and associated procedures.
- 4.2 The head of the Finance and Corporate Resources Directorate has lead responsibility for records management and for overseeing policy and programme implementation.
- 4.3 Day-to-day responsibility for records management lies with the head of the Corporate Information Management Unit (CIMU).
- 4.4 All management decisions about the fate of electronic folders or paper files will be made jointly by the head of CIMU and the generating department in accordance with the British Library's Records Management Policy.
- 4.5 All staff are responsible for the contents of the records they create and must ensure that they are:
- accurate, at the time of writing
  - comprehensive
  - legible
  - dated
  - signed
  - relevant
  - as far as possible objective rather than subjective
  - non-offensive
- 4.6 All staff are responsible for ensuring that all records relating to the business of the Library are filed, and ephemeral records of no value to the business of the Library are deleted at the earliest opportunity.
- 4.7 The senior manager within each department of the Library is responsible for deciding the format in which the corporate records of their department are to be managed. This decision must be communicated to all staff within the department. If the department is to rely on an electronic format for the corporate record, the department must commit either to use of the electronic records management system adopted by the Library or, in the absence of such a system, to a policy of structured folders set up on shared drives. If the department is to rely on a traditional paper format a print and file policy must be adopted throughout the department for all records of value to the department's business.
- 4.8 As a public body, the records management procedures in place in the British Library are subject to inspection by The National Archives.

## 5 *Principles of filing*

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- 5.1 The information contained in electronic folders and paper files is a major corporate resource belonging to the Library, not to the individual members of staff who generate it. It must therefore be available for access by all staff unless there are legitimate reasons to restrict access.
- 5.2 The Library's filing, whatever format it exists in, is organised on a corporate basis by means of a file plan which incorporates all the work functions carried out by staff. The file plan consists of a number of hierarchical levels which refine strategic functions into specific activities. All electronic folders and paper files opened by Library staff will be attached to one of the specific activity levels.
- 5.3 As isolated records are of minimal value, records of continuing administrative use must be saved into shared electronic folders or paper files. Each record will therefore form part of a narrative and a greater insight into the particular business activity will be gained by reading the individual record in its wider context.
- 5.4 All decisions about the management of records will be made about folders and files, rather than individual records within folders or files.
- 5.5 The length of time for which each electronic folder or paper file is kept is dictated by corporate retention schedules.
- 5.6 Only one corporate copy of each record must be kept. Personal copies can be created, and stored, but must be destroyed at the earliest opportunity.
- 5.7 Ephemeral documents of no enduring value to the business of the Library, for example those of purely personal relevance, must be deleted or destroyed at the earliest opportunity.
- 5.8 Folders and files are managed according to the life-cycle principle which dictates that they will be in one of three stages during their working life:
- Current: when records may be added
  - Semi-current: when the folder or file has been closed but may be used for reference purposes
  - Archival: the file becomes archival if retained after its semi-current life, and selected for permanent retention in the BL Archive
- Folders and files are moved from one stage to another on a pre-determined basis.
- 5.9 At the point of creation each electronic folder or paper file must be given a clear, concise, title that adequately reflects its contents, is meaningful to all staff and accords with corporate standard naming conventions.

- 5.10 All paper files in use throughout the Library will be of a standard, corporate design and will be readily identifiable as Library files.
- 5.11 Metadata attached to each electronic folder and paper file must identify:
- The name of the creating department
  - The file plan path
  - The file title
  - The opening and closure dates
  - The retention period of the file/folder
  - The part number
- 5.12 Folders and files must be closed on a regular basis:
- Paper files must be closed after five years, although earlier closure will be required when:
    - The business to which the file refers is completed
    - The file becomes bulky and unwieldy
  - Where very little paperwork is generated paper files will be closed after a longer period than five years
  - Electronic folders must be closed at the end of each calendar year, irrespective of the number of records within the folder.
- 5.13 If the business to which the folder or file continues after it has been closed, a further part with the same title must be opened. Each folder or file must be identified with the relevant part number.
- 5.14 Where electronic folders and paper files are used together in a hybrid filing system, the metadata attached to each must be consistent.

## **6** *Principles of retention*

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- 6.1 For reasons of best business practice, legislative compliance, and economy, records must be kept for only as long as they are relevant to the current business of the Library, unless their historical significance suggests they should be retained permanently in the British Library Archive.
- 6.2 At the point of creation each electronic folder or paper file must be allocated a retention period based on corporate retention schedules. On expiry of the retention period it will either be destroyed automatically, or appraised by the British Library archivist in consultation, where appropriate with the head of the creating department and, either destroyed under controlled conditions as no longer of value to the Library, or transferred to the British Library Archive for permanent preservation.
- 6.3 On closure, each electronic folder and paper file will be made read-only and will be labelled as closed. Closed electronic folders will stay on the part of the network where they were created.
- 6.4 Each closed paper file may be held in office space while it is required for continual and immediate access. It must then be transferred to the Records Centre to be held until the expiry of the retention period attached to it. In the intervening period files can be retrieved from the Records Centre, but must be returned after use.

## **7** *Principles of destruction*

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- 7.1 Destruction of all electronic folders or paper files will be controlled and undertaken on a formal basis, in consultation with the creating department. Schedules of records to be destroyed will be agreed in every case with the creators and a permanent record kept of the metadata attached to each electronic folder or paper file.
- 7.2 Electronic folders and paper files will be reviewed on the basis of their title, rather than by examination of their contents, and either retained as a complete folder or file or destroyed as a complete folder or file.

## **8      *Implementation***

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- 8.1      A series of records management tools will be produced to aid the successful implementation of this Policy and will include:
- A corporate file plan
  - Records retention schedules covering all records generated by the Library's work
  - An analysis of security and access controls
  - Records management guidance and procedures
  - An analysis of the statutory and regulatory framework
- 8.2      Senior management of the Library will endorse the Policy by means of a summary to be communicated to all staff.
- 8.3      Appropriate training on records management will be provided periodically to enable staff to maintain their skills and to introduce new or revised procedures.
- 8.4      All newly-appointed staff, whether permanent or temporary, full-time or part-time, will be made sufficiently aware of the Policy during their induction so that they can immediately undertake their work in compliance with its requirements.
- 8.5      Compliance audits will be undertaken on a regular basis to ensure that the records management systems are being implemented according to this Policy and that required outcomes are being met.
- 8.6      These compliance audits will examine performance against procedures together with user satisfaction with the systems.

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