

## What to Keep Desk Guide for Defra Information

This Desk Guide provides clear advice on what information should be kept, where it should be saved and for how long. It applies to electronic information saved in shared drives and Team Sites as well as paper information on registered paper files. Business emails should not be saved in [Vault](#) (it is a temporary store e-mails for personal reference only), personal drives or .pst folders. Evidential e-mails that form part of the corporate record must be stored in shared repositories such as a shared drive or a Team Site).

This will help to clarify what needs to be kept for business, legislative or historical reasons. Conversely if we keep information too long then there is a risk of failing to meet legal responsibilities. The Desk Guide should be used in conjunction with any additional specialised instructions that may have been issued for information in your business area by Knowledge Services. If you have any doubt about how long to keep your information then you should contact [Knowledge Services](#).

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## Definition of Short, Medium and Long retention lifecycles

We define the **lifecycle** of a piece of information as either Short, Medium or Long:

- **Short lifecycle:** to be deleted at or before three years from the date it is saved. This is limited lifespan information such as drafts, copies, minor enquiries, local management issues and information that has been published in full in paper (has an ISBN number) or on the Defra website. It includes information stored in Team Sites.
- **Medium lifecycle:** to be stored for seven years from the date it is saved and then deleted. This includes most routine business correspondence, financial information, some legal cases, and routine information produced by policy units (but not policy decisions). This is the standard lifecycle applied to registered paper files.
- **Long lifecycle:** has a business life of longer than seven years or is of potential historical value and must be included in the Defra Appraisal programme. Do not delete or destroy this information. It includes evidence of principal policy decisions, key research, information from major Defra-led committees, significant organisational changes affecting the way Defra works, details of high profile events such as a disease outbreak and precedent cases.

## Keeping information secure

Information that is classified as higher than Restricted must not be saved in team sites or servers. Printed documents that are classified as Restricted or higher must be placed on a registered file that has the appropriate classification and stored in a locked cabinet. Note the Government Protective Marking Scheme is due to change in 2013 where this rule will apply only to Secret and Top Secret information; see [Security](#) of information.

## Pre-2001 electronic information

The value of electronic information placed on MAFF/Defra servers prior to 2001 has been evaluated by Knowledge Services and The National Archives (TNA). Analysis showed that this older information is increasingly unreliable to access and use as IT has developed over the years. Defra has agreed with TNA that it is acceptable to delete this information from servers, as prior to 2001 Defra policy was to print key business information and place it on registered files. Documents with value as public records will therefore be picked up in the Information Appraisal programme. If you are not sure about older electronic information contact [Knowledge Services](#).

## What not to keep

The cost of paper and electronic storage for Defra is significant; removing unsuitable items or not filing them in the first place makes it easier to find the information you really need. You can improve value for money by not saving personal, low value and junk mail items on registered files, Team Sites, Accredited Shared drives, shared or personal drives. Other information that should not be saved includes:

<b>Personal documents</b>
<b>Image, sound and video files</b> take up an enormous amount of storage space and <u>must not</u> be stored unless there are genuine business reasons to do so. Space hungry formats include .avi .gif, .jpg, .jpeg, .mpg, .mp3, .mp4, .mov, .tiff, .wma, .wmv.  If you have photo images that must be retained for valid work purposes use a SLIM title (specific, logical, informative, meaningful).
<b>Facebook, Twitter and other social networking options:</b> wikis, blogs and social networks of any kind must not be used for official record keeping purposes. Staff must follow the Defra <a href="#">Information Management Policy</a> and the guidance on appropriate use of <a href="#">social media</a> .
<b>PowerPoint</b> slideshows, photographs and presentations that are no longer relevant
<b>Draft</b> articles for in-house magazines and newsletters
<b>Duplicates</b> – remember it is the authors responsibility to save, or main recipient if it is an external communication.
<b>Invitations</b>
Routine low-level drafts, preparation and supply of circulars, leaflets, forms, brochures
Routine low-level enquiries and acknowledgements
Routine visit and meeting arrangements
Reports, statistics, research etc that is <u>formally published in full</u> (as a paper publication using an ISBN number, or published on the Defra or GOV.UK public websites). <b>Note</b> - any background and supporting unpublished data/research etc should be retained using the Long lifecycle. If in doubt contact <a href="#">Knowledge Services</a> .

## Personal career/performance/attendance related information used by all Defra staff

What to keep?	Where to keep it?	Who should save it?	When should it be saved?	How long should it be kept?
<p><b>Note that Defra SSD keep relevant information relating to payroll, pension and medical reports for all former and current Defra staff so there is no need for others to duplicate it.</b></p>				
<p><i>Short term personnel information kept by individuals including:</i></p> <p>Annual leave records and flexi sheets</p> <p>Job applications</p> <p>Disciplinary records</p> <p>Draft Personal Management Reports (PMRs) and feedback forms/evidence</p>	<p>Every member of staff should keep their own career related information within their mysite (with restricted access permissions)</p>	<p>Every individual</p>	<p>Immediately</p>	<p>Short lifecycle</p> <p>Destroy before 3 years</p>
<p><i>Medium lifecycle term personnel information kept by individuals including:</i></p> <p>Learning, development and training records</p> <p>Pay and grading</p> <p>Agreed Personal Management Reports (PMRs)</p> <p>Bonus nominations</p> <p>Pay advance applications</p>	<p>Every member of staff should keep their own career related information within their mysite (with restricted access permissions)</p>	<p>Every individual</p>	<p>Immediately</p> <p><i>Note that PMRs should be saved as pdf docs once signed off at end of appraisal year</i></p>	<p>Medium lifecycle</p> <p>Destroy at 7 years</p>

## Corporate Services/Administration

What to keep?	Where to keep it?	Who should save it?	When should it be saved?	How Long should it be kept?
Complaints	Appropriate folder in Team Site, Accredited Shared Drive or shared drive	Lead official	Immediately	Short lifecycle Destroy at or before 3 years
Business Continuity Plans (BCPs)	Appropriate folder in Team Site, Accredited Shared Drive or shared drive	Lead official	Immediately	Short lifecycle Destroy at or before 3 years
Vital records i.e. information essential for preserving, continuing or recovering a business area's critical business activities (vital records that are logged in BCPs)	Appropriate folder in Team Site, Accredited Shared Drive or shared drive <b>and</b> noted in the appropriate BCP	Lead official	Immediately	Short lifecycle Destroy at or before 3 years
Desk instructions	Appropriate folder in Team Site, Accredited Shared Drive or shared drive	Lead official	Immediately	Short lifecycle or delete when superseded
Routine, low-level team meetings: agendas, minutes, notes, instructions etc	Appropriate folder in Team Site, Accredited Shared Drive or shared drive	Lead official	Immediately	Short lifecycle Destroy at or before 3 years
Audit – all information	Appropriate folder in Team Site, Accredited Shared Drive or shared drive	Lead official	Immediately	Medium lifecycle Destroy at 7 years

What to keep?	Where to keep it?	Who should save it?	When should it be saved?	How long should it be kept?
Health and Safety general information ( <i>note special instructions will apply to some cases e.g. exposure to harmful substances</i> )	Appropriate folder in Team Site, Accredited Shared Drive or shared drive	Lead official	Immediately	Medium lifecycle Destroy at 7 years
Internal services management	Appropriate folder in Team Site, Accredited Shared Drive or shared drive	Lead official	Immediately	Medium lifecycle Destroy at 7 years
Machinery and equipment including IT – supply, programming, maintenance, stocktaking	Appropriate folder in Team Site, Accredited Shared Drive or shared drive	Lead official	Immediately	Medium lifecycle Destroy at 7 years
Press and Public Relations	Appropriate folder in Team Site, Accredited Shared Drive or shared drive	Lead official	Immediately	Medium lifecycle Destroy at 7 years
All information relating to: Framework documents Management Board reviews Privatisation and mergers Review of Agency status	Appropriate folder in Team Site, Accredited Shared Drive or shared drive - <i>If using an unaccredited shared drive, print &amp; place significant documents on to appropriate registered file</i>	Lead official	Immediately	Long lifecycle Keep for more than 7 years Do not destroy
Buildings and estates – legal information eg leases, deeds, maps, plans, surveys, asbestos reports, project information, maintenance. Records of the sale and acquisition of land and properties.	Appropriate folder in Team Site, Accredited Shared Drive or shared drive - <i>If using an unaccredited shared drive, print &amp; place significant documents on to appropriate registered file</i>	Lead official	Immediately	Long lifecycle Keep for more than 7 years Do not destroy

## Finance, Accounting and Contracts

What to keep?	Where to keep it?	Who should save it?	When should it be saved?	How long should it be kept?
Monitoring of spending including travel and subsistence	Appropriate folder in Team Site, Accredited Shared Drive or shared drive	Lead official	Immediately	Short lifecycle Destroy at or before 3 years
Routine, low-level finance meetings; minutes, notes etc	Appropriate folder in Team Site, Accredited Shared Drive or shared drive	Lead official	Immediately	Short lifecycle Destroy at or before 3 years
Casework on bids	Appropriate folder in Team Site, Accredited Shared Drive or shared drive	Lead official	Immediately	Medium lifecycle Destroy at 7 years
Financial/accounting transactions ie invoices, receipts, loan repayments, grant applications	Appropriate folder in Team Site, Accredited Shared Drive or shared drive	Lead official	Immediately	Medium lifecycle Destroy at 7 years
Funding decisions, budget management & monitoring, asset management	Appropriate folder in Team Site, Accredited Shared Drive or shared drive	Lead official	When decision is made	Medium lifecycle Destroy at 7 years
Minor cases of fraud, misappropriation, write-off, recovery or overpayments	Appropriate folder in Team Site, Accredited Shared Drive or shared drive	Lead official	Immediately	Medium lifecycle Destroy at 7 years

What to keep?	Where to keep it?	Who should save it?	When should it be saved?	How long should it be kept?
Contract management – signed contracts and tendering process documents must be kept.	Signed contracts & tendering process documents must be printed & placed on to the appropriate registered file.	Contract manager	Immediately	Long lifecycle Keep for 6 years after the expiry of the contract Do not destroy
Direct Defra involvement in public expenditure and select committees	Appropriate folder in Team Site, Accredited  <i>If using an unaccredited shared drive, print &amp; place significant documents on to appropriate registered file</i>	Lead official	Immediately	Long lifecycle Keep for more than 7 years Do not destroy
Original strategy and policy decisions on Defra national accounts	Appropriate folder in Team Site, Accredited Shared Drive or shared drive  <i>If using an unaccredited shared drive, print &amp; place significant documents on to appropriate registered file</i>	Lead official	Immediately	Long lifecycle Keep for more than 7 years Do not destroy



## Information Rights

What to keep?	Where to keep it?	Who should save it?	When should it be saved?	How long should it be kept?
Routine FoI or EIR requests/cases and Subject access requests (Data Protection Act).  Internal reviews	Appropriate folder in Team Site, Accredited Shared Drive or shared drive	Lead official in business area	Immediately	Short lifecycle  Destroy at or before 3 years
Public interest disclosure (whistle blowing investigations) – investigation and resolution of an allegation made by a member of the public under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998	Appropriate folder in Team Site, Accredited Shared Drive or shared drive	Lead official	Immediately	Medium lifecycle  Destroy at 7 years
Information requested under the Freedom of Information (FoI) Act or Environmental Information Regulations (EIR)  Non-routine case records leading to a precedent	Appropriate folder in Team Site, Accredited Shared Drive or shared drive  <i>If using an unaccredited shared drive, print &amp; place significant documents on to appropriate registered file</i>	Lead official in business area	Immediately	Long lifecycle  Keep for more than 7 years  Do not destroy

## Liaison with Legal Services

What to keep?	Where to keep it?	Who should save it?	When should it be saved?	How long should it be kept?
Routine information concerning legal issues including standard/routine casework	Appropriate folder in Team Site, Accredited Shared Drive or shared drive	Lead official in business area	Immediately	Medium lifecycle Destroy at 7 years
EC Legislation:  Direct involvement in proposals for new or amended EC legislation High profile casework Policy to implement EC legislation Significant contributions to draft legislation	Appropriate folder in Team Site, Accredited Shared Drive or shared drive. <i>If using an unaccredited shared drive, print &amp; place significant documents on to appropriate registered file</i>	Lead official in business area	Immediately	Long lifecycle  Keep for more than 7 years  Do not destroy
National Legislation:  Application of legislation Contributions to <u>Defra-led</u> legislation, proposals for new legislation, amendments and revisions to existing law including deregulation Statutory Instrument material recording controversial or high profile issues	Appropriate folder in Team Site, Accredited Shared Drive or shared drive. <i>If using an unaccredited shared drive, print &amp; place significant documents on to appropriate registered file</i>	Lead official in business area	Immediately	Long lifecycle  Keep for more than 7 years  Do not destroy
Non standard/non-routine Casework:  High profile or precedent prosecution cases Instructions to Defra Legal from the business area Specific legal advice, opinions, rulings and interpretations of legislation affecting Defra's legal framework, governance, responsibilities or operations.	Appropriate folder in Team Site, Accredited Shared Drive or shared drive. <i>If using an unaccredited shared drive, print &amp; place significant documents on to appropriate registered file</i>	Lead official in business area	Immediately	Long lifecycle  Keep for more than 7 years  Do not destroy

## Ministerial Business

What to keep?	Where to keep it?	Who should save it?	When should it be saved?	How long should it be kept?
Advice on and briefings for Ministerial visits/visitors	Appropriate folder in Team Site, Accredited Shared Drive or shared drive	Lead official	Immediately	Short lifecycle  Destroy at or before 3 years
Parliamentary Questions (PQs), Ministers' and Dealt With Officially (DWO) correspondence, Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), petitions	Appropriate folder in Team Site, Accredited Shared Drive or shared drive	Drafting officer	Immediately	Short lifecycle  Destroy at or before 3 years
Ministers' official diaries (electronic and paper) – these are public records.  The final version of each day's engagements must be preserved by the relevant Private Office either in electronic or paper form and passed to the Departmental Records Officer (DRO) for safe keeping at agreed intervals.	Appropriate folder in Team Site, Accredited Shared Drive or shared drive. <i>If using an unaccredited shared drive, print &amp; place significant documents on to appropriate registered file</i>	Private Office	Immediately	Send to DRO each month and again at the end of the minister's tenure in office.  Do not destroy
Submissions requiring: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A funding decision and the funding decision taken</li> <li>A policy decision and the policy decision taken</li> </ul>	Appropriate folder in Team Site, Accredited Shared Drive or shared drive. <i>If using an unaccredited shared drive, print &amp; place significant documents on to appropriate registered file</i>	Lead official	Immediately	Long lifecycle  Keep for more than 7 years  Do not destroy

## Policy and Legislation Development

What to keep?	Where to keep it?	Who should save it?	When should it be saved?	How long should it be kept?
Early and minor drafts	Appropriate folder in Team Site, Accredited Shared Drive or shared drive	Originator	Immediately	Short lifecycle Destroy at or before 3 years
Minutes and information of bodies not directly concerned with the business area or where Defra is consulted in an advisory capacity	Appropriate folder in Team Site, Accredited Shared Drive or shared drive	Lead official	Immediately	Short lifecycle Destroy at or before 3 years
Boards, committees, commissions and councils led by Defra and directly concerned with the work of the business area – constitution, minutes, and committees of enquiry. Keep constitution, briefings, agendas and minutes	Appropriate folder in Team Site, Accredited Shared Drive or shared drive. <i>If using an unaccredited shared drive, print &amp; place significant documents on to appropriate registered file</i>	Lead official	Immediately	Long lifecycle Keep for more than 7 years Do not destroy
Consultations with trade & industry and public consultations; keep <u>only</u> : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When Defra is the lead Department on the policy or legislation; and</li> <li>• key information not captured elsewhere; and</li> <li>• information gathered during the consultation that has a clear impact or sets a precedent in the development of policy or legislation</li> </ul>	Appropriate folder in Team Site, Accredited Shared Drive or shared drive. <i>If using an unaccredited shared drive, print &amp; place significant documents on to appropriate registered file</i>	Lead official	Immediately	Long lifecycle Keep for more than 7 years Do not destroy

What to keep?	Where to keep it?	Who should save it?	When should it be saved?	How long should it be kept?
Drafts reflecting <u>significant</u> changes in approach relating to the principal policies , and the formulation, development and implementation of national and EC legislation	Appropriate folder in Team Site, Accredited Shared Drive or shared drive. <i>If using an unaccredited shared drive, print &amp; place significant documents on to appropriate registered file</i>	Originator	When superseded	Long lifecycle Keep for more than 7 years Do not destroy
Final versions of principle policy information concerning the structure, objectives and functions of Defra	Appropriate folder in Team Site, Accredited Shared Drive or shared drive. <i>If using an unaccredited shared drive, print &amp; place significant documents on to appropriate registered file</i>	Originator	When approved	Long lifecycle Keep for more than 7 years Do not destroy

### Projects, Research and Reviews

What to keep?	Where to keep it?	Who should save it?	When should it be saved?	How long should it be kept?
Published reports, research and statistics – <i>published material may be kept for a short period for reference, but as data is in copyright libraries, it does not need a Long lifecycle.</i>	Appropriate folder in Team Site, Accredited Shared Drive or shared drive	Lead official	Immediately	Short lifecycle Destroy at or before 3 years
Working parties, project areas, study areas	Appropriate folder in Team Site, Accredited Shared Drive or shared drive	Lead official	Immediately	Short lifecycle Destroy at or before 3 years

What to keep?	Where to keep it?	Who should save it?	When should it be saved?	How long should it be kept?
Routine projects or study/steering areas	Appropriate folder in Team Site, Accredited Shared Drive or shared drive	Lead official	Immediately	Medium lifecycle Destroy at 7 years
Routine research and statistical data including that routinely reported to the EC	Appropriate folder in Team Site, Accredited Shared Drive or shared drive	Lead official	Immediately	Medium lifecycle Destroy at 7 years
High profile or innovative projects concerning changes in Defra-wide policy, implementation, high level functions, response to a significant event such as disease outbreak etc:  PIDs, interim and final evaluation reports Project proposals, research, feasibility studies, plans, specifications ToR, minutes, agendas, briefings and reports for high level project boards and steering areas	Appropriate folder in Team Site, Accredited Shared Drive or shared drive. <i>If using an unaccredited shared drive, print &amp; place significant documents on to appropriate registered file</i>	Lead official	Immediately	Long lifecycle Keep for more than 7 years Do not destroy
High profile or unique research including interim, summary and final reports, expert advice and specialised statistical data	Appropriate folder in Team Site, Accredited Shared Drive or shared drive. <i>If using an unaccredited shared drive, print &amp; place significant documents on to appropriate registered file</i>	Lead official	Immediately	Long lifecycle Keep for more than 7 years Do not destroy