

Disposal Scheduling

1. Scope

- 1.1. This standard is a best practice benchmark for all organizations creating or holding public records.
- 1.2. It provides advice and guidance on the scheduling of public records for disposal, whether this is by destruction or by transfer to the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland for permanent preservation.
- 1.3. It applies to all records – paper, microform, film, videotape, sound recordings, etc, – except electronic records, which are the subject of a separate standard.

2. Responsibilities

- 2.1. The preparation of Disposal Schedules is authorized by the Public Records Act (NI) 1923 and by the Disposal of Records Order (S.R. & O. 1925 No. 167). This Act and Order sets out the records management responsibilities of every Public Body in Northern Ireland.
- 2.2. Departmental Record Officers (DROs)/Information Managers (IMs) or their public authority equivalents and Operation Managers (an individual responsible for a particular operation or function within a government department or agency) are responsible for examining the records of their organisation to determine the disposal action to be taken. Such action may be a destruction date or a review date. This should be done in accordance with the records' use and value to the organisation's operations and/or legal obligations.
- 2.3. The DRO/IM is also responsible for ensuring that disposal action specified in the schedule is undertaken and that the schedules are regularly monitored so that they are kept up to date.
- 2.4. PRONI staff in the Records Management, Cataloguing and Access Team are responsible for giving advice to Public Bodies on the make-up and operation of disposal schedules and for quality assuring and agreeing such schedules put before them by the DRO/IM.

3. Coverage

- 3.1. Each Public Body's disposal schedule must include all the records generated or held by that department or agency.
- 3.2. Separate disposal schedules should be drawn up for each operational area.

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4. Format

A disposal schedule should contain all the following elements:

- name of the operational area creating or holding the records described in the schedule
- schedule reference and version number
- reference numbers (where applicable) of the records
- descriptions of the records
- retention period and/or disposal action
- signatures as follows:
 - DRO/IM or equivalent
 - Head of RMCAT, PRONI
 - Director, PRONI
 - Permanent Secretary of relevant Department (or equivalent)
 - Permanent Secretary, DCAL
- date on which the schedule was agreed and signed
- date of implementation of the schedule

5. Description of the Records

- 5.1. Disposal schedules should identify and describe each record collection, series or system (defunct or alternative names should also be supplied), not individual records. By taking into account the physical organization of records or the filing system in this way, disposal can be handled in blocks. A 'simple' numeric filing system undermines against this method of disposal scheduling.

6. Disposal of the Records

- 6.1. There should be three elements to the disposal instructions:
- Disposal action, for which there are three possibilities:
 - (a) Review
 - (b) Preserve permanently
 - (c) Destroy

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- Timing of disposal – a minimum period for which the records should be retained before disposal is undertaken
 - Event which triggers the disposal action
- 6.2. The DRO/IM is responsible for ensuring that disposal action is undertaken in accordance with the prescribed periods and in a manner commensurate with the sensitivity of the material.

7. Records Documentation (Metadata)

- 7.1. Records which document records series, such as registers, databases, indexes, docket books, etc, require special attention. They should be kept at least until all the registered or indexed records have been disposed of, whether this is by destruction or by transfer to PRONI. Thereafter some of these records may themselves be transferred to PRONI with the records they document, or may be retained for a further period for business needs of the organisation.
- 7.2. The documentation records should also be marked with any action that takes place on the records they document. This can usually be limited to the main item (normally the docket book or database). Indexes need not be annotated.

8. Monitoring

- 8.1. It is the responsibility of the DRO/IM to monitor disposal schedules regularly and preferably review once a year, to see that:
- retention periods and disposal actions are still appropriate in the light of experience
 - records no longer generated are removed from the schedule after disposal on them is complete
 - newly-created categories of records are added to the schedules
 - records which are on the schedules as requiring retention are still in existence
- 8.2. Amendments and additions should be discussed and agreed with the Operational Manager and PRONI before updated versions of the schedule are issued.

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9. Distribution

- 9.1. The DRO/IM should maintain a master set of departmental and agency disposal schedules. Copies should be provided for the Operational Managers to whose areas each schedule relates. PRONI will also hold a master set.
- 9.2. Disposal schedules should form an integral part of the records management strategy or information systems strategy of a Public Body.