

GOVERNANCE SERVICES

What is and what is not a confidential record

1. Introduction

Only a small proportion of the records you produce will be confidential in nature. However it is important to remember that:

- Any record produced by the University which is not already within the public domain, and which contains information on identifiable individuals, should always be treated as confidential.
- Any record produced by the University which is not already within the public domain and which contains commercially sensitive information, should always be treated as confidential.
- The format of the record has nothing to do with whether or not it is confidential or not, email may just be as confidential as formal records.

2. What is a record?

A Record is recorded information in any form created or received by the University in the transaction of its business or conduct of its affairs and which it retains as evidence of that activity. Put simply, a record is 'recorded evidence of business activity'.

3. What is not confidential?

Any record or document that is already in the public domain eg:

- Prospectuses;
- Timetables;
- Regulations;
- Press Releases'
- Published Reports;
- Published Minutes;
- Mission Statements;
- Constitutions;
- Charters;
- Statutes;
- Presentation materials;
- Course guides;
- Published surveys;
- Theses (accepted); and
- Blank examination papers (post exam)

4. What is confidential?

Any record which if made public before a certain period may breach commercial confidentiality eg:

- Contracts;
- Tenders;
- Purchasing records;
- Insurance records;
- Unpublished accounting records; and
- Maintenance records.

Any record which may breach intellectual property rights eg:

- Unpublished research material, manuscripts.

Any record which contains personal information about a living individual eg:

- Job applications;
- Sick pay records;
- Medical records;
- Wages and salary records;
- Grant applications;
- Student records;
- Student or staff discipline records;
- Interview notes;
- Admissions records;
- Questionnaire or other data collected under an understanding of confidentiality;
- Correspondence or other documents that reveal the contact details or any financial details of a named living individual; and
- Correspondence or other documents which reveal personal details or pass comments on a named living individual.

5. Handling and storing confidential records

Information being supplied in confidence should be stamped, marked, or include a statement that it is confidential or being supplied in confidence, and be treated in a consistent confidential manner. It is not sufficient to stamp information confidential and then treat it as any other general information. Sufficient evidence must exist to support the assertion of confidentiality.

The following guidelines should be considered for confidential records:

- Store confidential records in secure filing cabinets. Cabinets should always be kept locked when not in use, not located in a public area, and access to the confidential records should be restricted only to those employees that require the information;

- Confidential records should never be left in an open area such as an in-tray or on a desk. The record should be returned to the cabinet when not in use;
- Confidential records must be destroyed by confidential disposal or shredding only;
- For electronic records, store confidential records in separate directories or files, restrict access to these directories or files.

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