

## Recordkeeping responsibilities on a single sheet of paper

With the move from paper to electronic documents, the responsibility for recordkeeping within organisations has shifted to individual staff and away from centralised records management specialists.

Much is therefore made of the need for all staff to understand their recordkeeping responsibilities. To this end, many training and communication programs have been conducted within government agencies (and elsewhere).

To a large extent, this training has failed. While staff gain a general awareness of recordkeeping, they are not provided with sufficiently concrete and detailed guidance to make recordkeeping happen successfully and consistently.

This article explores helping staff meet their recordkeeping obligations by creating a single sheet of paper for each staff member with everything that they need to know.

### Traditional recordkeeping training

Most organisations have a fairly well-established staff training program on recordkeeping, covering topics such as:

- what is a record
- why records need to be kept
- recordkeeping obligations of all staff
- how to file records in corporate record keeping systems
- when and how to dispose of records

Crucially, this training only talks of records in general terms, outlining statements such as ‘records are any documents that provide evidence of a decision or activity’.

In practice, not every document or email needs to be kept, and these general statements do little to help staff make judgements on what to file.

The training also fails to tell staff *where* to file individual records, other than generally pointing to the corporate records systems.

### Day-to-day recordkeeping challenges

Recordkeeping obligations will only be met when staff actually file everything that they should in the records management systems.

Day-to-day, however, staff are left to make value judgements on when and how should be done. Do emails get filed, and if so, which ones? Does internal correspondence get filed? Where do staff hiring records go?

Furthermore, staff are not the same as each other. The specific documents that need to be filed by an HR team member vary greatly to call centre or admin staff.

### A single sheet

Staff need to know *exactly* what they are supposed to do regarding recordkeeping, with this provided to them in the simplest possible way.

To this end, each staff member should be provided with a tailored, personalised *single sheet of paper* that covers:

- the top six (or a dozen) types of documents that they need to file
- which *specific* folders each of these documents is filed in
- which documents they *don't* have to file
- guidance on common issues or challenges

In addition to listing specific documents to be filed, the guidance should be equally specific, covering common issues (such as whether broadcast emails need to be filed by recipients).

To highlight: this is not a general training document, but an *individualised* ‘cheat sheet’ for each staff member.

If it cannot be distilled down to something this simple, then it is the responsibility of the records staff to find the answers before expecting individual staff to meet their obligations.

This also forces recordkeeping staff to roll out recordkeeping approaches incrementally, identifying the key documents that have to be kept, and those that can be safely disposed of.

While very simple, the ‘single sheet’ approach is quite different to traditional recordkeeping training, and much more effective.

### More information

See the earlier article *Rolling out a records management system* for a broader framework on achieving successful recordkeeping.