

Digital Conversion for Schools

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1. Introduction

As more and more organizations are looking to reduce the storage required for physical records, questions are being raised about whether or not it is appropriate to store the principal (and sole) copy of a document in an electronic format if it has been received in paper format.

These guidelines are intended to help schools decide whether they wish to move over to a solely electronic system for their record keeping. These guidelines are also intended to highlight the issues that the school needs to consider whilst developing a policy to convert physical records to a digital format.

The school's management team will need to undertake some business risk analysis to ensure that any proposed policy meets with legislative requirements and to ensure that all documents are stored securely and can only be accessed by those authorised to do so.

2. Converting Information from a Physical to a Digital Format

Schools may consider it appropriate to convert information which is received by the school in physical format to digital format so that it can be maintained in a digital information management system.

Listed below are the issues which the school must take into consideration if the policy is to scan information and then dispose of the physical copy.

Information which has been identified as being a principal copy can be scanned into a digital format and then stored in a digital system. As digital capture and storage are resource intensive, Digital Conversion for Schools version 1: March 2015

duplicate copies should not be scanned and retained in a digital system.

2.1 Identifying Principal Copies

Schools should identify which records are principal copy records and which are duplicate records. There is guidance in the Information Toolkit for Schools about how to do this.

The school should then establish a documented process about which records are to be captured digitally.

2.2 Legal Admissibility and Evidential Weight

There are some records which the school may need to produce for legal purposes. In order to ensure that the electronic documents will be accepted by a court of law, they should be scanned to the standards laid out in *BS 10008 Electronic Information Management*.

This is a lengthy standard, however, so some basic information has been included below. If a school requires more information they should contact KCC's Records Manager.

In order to retain evidential weight in an electronic document, it must be:

- captured in an unalterable form [see section 2.3 below];
- captured in a structured filing system which provides context [see section 2.4 below];
- be legible and accessible [see sections 2.3 to 2.5 below]

2.3 Capturing Physical Records in Digital Format

2.3.1 Size of the Scanned Image

The school must ensure that it has sufficient server space to store the scanned images – some scanned images, especially those containing colour can be quite large. The policy should contain information about the quality of the scanned image, for example, is the colour on any image important or could all documents be scanned in black and white or greyscale. The policy should also state whether the files are going to be compressed before being stored in the record keeping system

2.3.2 Quality of the Scanned Image

The policy must document the scanner settings which have been agreed and there must be a process in place to ensure that the scanner settings are set to the correct dpi.

The best way to ensure that the scanner settings are correct is to scan some test documents at different resolutions to see which best matches the size and quality of the images required. This must be done before any digitization project goes live.

If it is decided that it will be policy to destroy physical records after they have been scanned, each image must be checked to ensure legibility. In this scenario, it is not appropriate to check a sample of images as it is crucial that each individual image is legible. The policy should include the process for re-scanning documents which are captured correctly on the first scan¹.

¹ AIIM suggest that 5% of documents in a digitisation programme will not be captured the first time they are scanned and therefore an additional 5% should be added to time and resources to allow for documents to be rescanned.

2.3.3 Format of the Scanned Image

In order to ensure that the document is captured in an unalterable format it should be captured in either pdf/A or jpg format. This locks down a document so it cannot be added to or altered without creating a new iteration of the document.

If the school requires documents to be scanned and OCR²ed then the document will need to be captured in standard pdf format, but the school needs to be aware that a standard pdf document which has been OCRed may not meet legal admissibility requirements.

2.4 Storage and Retrieval of Digital Images

2.4.1 Capture Scanned Images into Record Keeping Systems

The scanned images should be captured into a record keeping system or repository, this may be based on SharePoint or on shared drives. The images should be captured into a folder structure which is likely to be structured in a similar to a physical filing system.

Ideally, the filing system should be held on a server that is backed up regularly. If this is not possible then all the storage media which is being used should be backed up regularly and checked for data degradation³ on a routine basis.

2.4.2 Consistent File Naming Conventions

Electronic documents (especially those captured in pdf format) can be more difficult to search than a physical file. In a paper system the user can flick through a file to find the individual document they are looking for. An individual paper file may be made up of several hundred sheets of paper but they are all visible at the same time. This is not true of an electronic folder which may contain hundreds of pdf documents all of which may need to be opened before the user finds the one they are looking for.

Therefore, a consistent file naming convention should be developed as part of the scanning policy. File naming conventions can be developed in a variety of different ways, for more advice about creating consistent file naming conventions please contact KCC's Records Manager.

2.4.3 Disposal and Retention

The electronic images should have disposal rules applied to them and disposal should take place on a routine basis. For more information about disposal and retention please see the Information Management Toolkit for Schools.

2.5 Digital Continuity

If principal copy records are being retained in digital format, then it is important that digital continuity is taken into account.

The long term preservation of digital records is more complex than the retention of physical records. The school may create and/or store data in electronic format which needs to be retained for longer than 7 years. If this data is not retained in accessible formats then the school will be unable to retrieve the documents when required.

Although the average life of a computer system can be as little as 5 years, as digital continuity is

² Optical Character Recognition

³ Ensuring the the data is still accessible and legible and has not become corrupted.

resource intensive, only records which are required to be retained for 7 years (in line with the Limitation Act 1980) or longer should be subject to Digital Continuity Statements.

All digital records which need to be retained for longer than 7 years need to be included in a Digital Continuity. This will ensure that digital records are retained in a way that ensures they can be retrieved when required in an accessible format.

Information relating to digital continuity can be found in section 8 of the Information Management Toolkit for Schools.

3. Resources

Information Management Toolkit for Schools - <http://www.kelsi.org.uk/running-a-school/data-and-reporting/access-to-information/records-management>

BS 10008:2014 Evidential weight and legal admissibility of electronic information - Specification – Available from the BSI shop priced £168

BIP 0008-1:2014 - Evidential Weight and Legal Admissibility of Information Stored Electronically: Code of Practice for the Implementation of BS 10008 – in three parts available from the BSI Shop priced £75 for each part

4. Useful Contacts

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