

Quest for Learning

Records Management, Retention and Disposal Policy

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Quest for Learning Governance Framework

This document forms part of Quest for Learning's Governance Framework.

Level 1 – Policies

Policies define the Charity's principles, governance arrangements, responsibilities and organisational expectations.

Level 2 – Procedures & Guidance

Procedures and guidance explain how policies are implemented in practice.

Level 3 – Forms, Registers & Templates

Forms, registers and templates provide the records and evidence required to demonstrate compliance.

1. Purpose and scope

Records are fundamental to the effective operation, accountability and governance of Quest for Learning. They provide evidence of decisions, support the delivery of services, demonstrate compliance with legal and regulatory requirements, protect the rights of individuals and preserve the organisational knowledge needed to fulfil the Charity's charitable objectives.

Effective records management enables the Charity to maintain accurate and reliable information throughout its lifecycle, ensuring that records remain accessible, secure and appropriately managed from the point of creation until their lawful disposal or permanent preservation.

Quest for Learning recognises that good records management is an essential component of information governance. It supports safeguarding, financial accountability, operational effectiveness, transparency, organisational learning and public confidence.

This policy establishes the Charity's approach to the creation, management, retention and secure disposal of records by:

- establishing the principles governing records management;
- defining organisational responsibilities;
- setting expectations for everyone working on behalf of the Charity;
- ensuring records are retained only for as long as necessary;
- supporting compliance with legal, regulatory and contractual obligations.

This policy applies to:

- Trustees;
- employees;
- freelance tutors;
- volunteers;
- contractors;
- consultants;
- agency workers;
- anyone creating, managing or disposing of records on behalf of Quest for Learning.

The policy applies equally to records held electronically, on paper or in any other format.

This policy does not form part of any contract of employment and may be amended by the Charity where necessary.

2. Policy statement

Quest for Learning believes that effective records management is fundamental to good governance, organisational accountability and the responsible stewardship of information.

We are committed to creating and maintaining records that are accurate, reliable, secure and accessible throughout their lifecycle. Records will be retained only for as long as necessary to support the Charity's operational, legal, regulatory, safeguarding and financial responsibilities before being securely disposed of or, where appropriate, permanently preserved.

Effective records management supports more than legal compliance. It enables informed decision-making, protects the interests of the children and families we support, safeguards organisational knowledge and strengthens public confidence in the Charity.

The Charity therefore commits to ensuring that:

- records are created and maintained consistently;
- records remain accurate, complete and reliable throughout their lifecycle;
- records are stored securely and protected from unauthorised access, loss or destruction;
- retention periods are applied consistently and proportionately;
- records are disposed of securely when no longer required;
- records management arrangements are regularly reviewed and continually improved.

3. Records Management Principles

Quest for Learning's approach to records management is founded upon six core principles.

3.1 We create records that are accurate and reliable

Records should accurately reflect the activities, decisions and transactions they document and be created in a timely manner.

3.2 We manage records consistently

Records will be organised, maintained and stored using consistent arrangements that support efficient retrieval, appropriate security and effective business continuity.

3.3 We retain records only for as long as necessary

Records will be retained only where there is an operational, legal, regulatory, contractual or safeguarding need.

Retention periods will be defined within the Charity's approved Records Retention Schedule.

3.4 We protect records appropriately

Records will be protected throughout their lifecycle using proportionate organisational and technical safeguards appropriate to their sensitivity and importance.

3.5 We dispose of records securely

Records that have reached the end of their retention period will be securely destroyed or permanently anonymised unless there is a lawful reason for continued retention.

3.6 We remain accountable

The Charity accepts responsibility for demonstrating that records are managed consistently, retained appropriately and disposed of securely in accordance with this policy and applicable legislation.

4. Roles and responsibilities

Effective records management depends upon everyone working for or on behalf of Quest for Learning understanding and fulfilling their responsibilities. While specific responsibilities differ according to role, all individuals are expected to manage records in accordance with this policy and the supporting procedures.

4.1 Board of Trustees

The Board of Trustees has overall accountability for ensuring that Quest for Learning maintains appropriate arrangements for records management and complies with its legal, regulatory and contractual obligations.

The Board is responsible for:

- approving this policy and any significant amendments;
- ensuring appropriate governance arrangements are in place;
- receiving assurance that effective records management arrangements are operating throughout the Charity;
- overseeing significant records management risks through the Charity's Risk Management Framework;
- ensuring sufficient resources are available to support effective records management.

The Board delegates day-to-day operational responsibility for records management to the Chief Executive.

4.2 Chief Executive

The Chief Executive has overall responsibility for implementing this policy and embedding effective records management throughout the Charity.

This includes responsibility for:

- promoting a culture of good records management;

- ensuring appropriate procedures, guidance and retention schedules are maintained;
- assigning responsibility for operational records management activities;
- ensuring records management arrangements remain proportionate to organisational needs;
- ensuring appropriate action is taken following significant records management failures;
- reporting significant risks to the Board where appropriate.

4.3 Data Protection Lead

The Data Protection Lead is responsible for supporting the operational implementation of this policy.

This includes responsibility for:

- maintaining the Records Retention Schedule;
- providing advice and guidance on records management matters;
- supporting managers in applying retention requirements;
- monitoring compliance with records management arrangements;
- supporting investigations where records management issues arise;
- coordinating periodic reviews of retention arrangements.

4.4 Managers

Managers are responsible for ensuring that records are appropriately created, maintained, retained and disposed of within their areas of responsibility.

Managers must:

- ensure staff understand their responsibilities;
- promote good records management practices;
- ensure records remain complete, accurate and appropriately stored;
- ensure retention periods are applied consistently;
- authorise the secure disposal of records where appropriate;
- identify and report records management risks.

4.5 Employees, Tutors, Volunteers and Contractors

Everyone working on behalf of Quest for Learning has an individual responsibility to manage records appropriately.

All individuals must:

- comply with this policy and supporting procedures;

- create records that are accurate and complete;
- maintain records securely;
- retain records only in approved systems or locations;
- follow approved retention periods;
- ensure records are securely disposed of when authorised;
- report any records management concerns or incidents promptly.

Failure to comply with this policy may result in disciplinary action, termination of contractual arrangements or, where appropriate, referral to regulatory authorities.

5. Managing records

Quest for Learning manages records throughout their entire lifecycle, from creation to secure disposal or permanent preservation.

Records should be managed consistently to ensure they remain reliable, accessible and appropriately protected throughout their lifecycle.

5.1 Creating records

Records should be created whenever they provide evidence of decisions, activities, services delivered, financial transactions, safeguarding matters or other significant organisational business.

Records should be:

- accurate;
- complete;
- timely;
- objective;
- created in approved systems or formats where appropriate.

5.2 Maintaining records

Records should remain accurate, accessible and reliable throughout their lifecycle. Appropriate arrangements should be in place to ensure records can be retrieved efficiently, protected against unauthorised alteration and maintained in accordance with this policy.

5.3 Storage of records

Records must be stored securely using organisationally approved systems and locations appropriate to their sensitivity.

Appropriate physical, technical and organisational safeguards should be applied to protect records against:

- unauthorised access;
- accidental loss;
- destruction;
- alteration;
- misuse.

5.4 Digital and paper records

This policy applies equally to records held electronically and in paper form. The same standards of security, retention, accessibility and disposal apply regardless of format.

Where records exist in multiple formats, arrangements should ensure that duplicate copies are managed appropriately and unnecessary duplication is avoided.

5.5 Business continuity

Records should be managed in a manner that supports the Charity's ability to continue operating during periods of disruption.

Appropriate backup, recovery and continuity arrangements should be maintained for records that are essential to the continued operation of the Charity.

6. Retention

Quest for Learning will retain records only for as long as necessary to support its operational, legal, regulatory, safeguarding and financial responsibilities.

Retention periods will be determined using applicable legislation, regulatory requirements, recognised good practice and organisational need.

The Charity will maintain an approved Records Retention Schedule setting out the normal retention periods for different categories of records.

Records should be reviewed periodically to ensure they continue to be retained only where there is a legitimate reason to do so.

Retention periods may be extended where appropriate, including where records:

- are required for ongoing legal proceedings;
- relate to investigations or complaints;
- are subject to statutory or regulatory requirements;

- are subject to a request relating to information rights;
- are required for safeguarding purposes;
- have permanent historical or organisational value.

7. Secure disposal

Records that have reached the end of their approved retention period and are no longer required will be securely disposed of in a manner appropriate to their format and sensitivity.

Secure disposal should ensure that confidential or personal information cannot be reconstructed, retrieved or accessed by unauthorised individuals.

The Charity may engage appropriately qualified third-party providers to undertake secure disposal where appropriate.

Where external organisations are used, the Charity will satisfy itself that appropriate contractual and security arrangements are in place.

Appropriate records of significant destruction activities should be maintained where required to demonstrate accountability.

The secure disposal of records should be authorised in accordance with the Charity's records management procedures.

8. Monitoring and compliance

Maintaining effective records management requires ongoing monitoring and continual improvement.

Quest for Learning will monitor the effectiveness of its records management arrangements through a range of proportionate assurance activities, which may include:

- internal reviews;
- compliance checks;
- audits;
- review of records retention arrangements;
- review of disposal activities;
- monitoring of records management incidents;
- periodic review of the Records Retention Schedule.

Monitoring is intended to provide assurance to the Charity, support continuous improvement and demonstrate compliance with legal and regulatory obligations.

Failure to comply with this policy or supporting procedures may expose individuals, the Charity and the people we support to significant risk.

Where weaknesses are identified, the Charity will take appropriate action to strengthen systems, procedures, training and organisational practice.

9. Related documents

This policy should be read alongside the following Quest for Learning governance documents.

Governance framework

- Information Governance Framework

Level 1 Policies

- Information Governance and Data Protection Policy
- Safeguarding Policy
- Risk Management Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy

Level 2 Procedures and guidance

- Records Management Procedure
- Information Handling Guidance
- Data Breach Procedure
- Remote Working Guidance

Level 3 Registers, schedules and forms

- Records Retention Schedule
- Information Asset Register
- Record of Processing Activities (ROPA)
- Data Breach Report Form

External documents

- Workforce Privacy Notice
- Pupil, Parent and Carer Privacy Notice
- Volunteer Privacy Notice

- Supporter Privacy Notice
- Website Privacy Notice

10. Review

This policy will be reviewed every two years, or sooner where:

- there are significant changes to legislation or regulatory guidance;
- organisational changes affect records management arrangements;
- monitoring or audit activities identify opportunities for improvement;
- significant records management incidents identify the need for revision.

Minor amendments that do not materially alter the intent of this policy may be approved by the Chief Executive.

Material amendments will be submitted to the Board of Trustees for approval.

Quest for Learning believes that effective records management is fundamental to protecting the people we support, preserving organisational knowledge and demonstrating accountability. Every person working on behalf of the Charity has a responsibility to ensure that records are created, managed, retained and disposed of responsibly throughout their lifecycle.