1. **Introduction**

1.1 Many of the records held by the University exist solely in a digital format.

1.2 In terms of retention, electronic records should be treated no differently to records existing in other formats.

1.3 Records that are created in electronic format are not covered by this guidance.

1.4 This guidance is specifically aimed at electronic records that are copies of original documents that existed as a hard copy. For example, where paper copies have been scanned to create pdf versions.

1.5 Scanning paper records can bring major benefits in terms of freeing up space and providing better accessibility. Large volumes of paper records that were taking up valuable space can be condensed into electronic format, and these records can then become easily accessible to anyone who has sufficient permissions to access them.

1.6 However, whilst there are many benefits to scanning paper copies, there are important issues that must be acknowledged and addressed, both in determining whether the records selected are suitable for scanning and, if they are deemed suitable, issues relating to their retention.

2. **Retention of original documents**

2.1 In the vast majority of instances, original documents do not need to be retained once they have been scanned, and can be safely destroyed in line with the University’s Retention and Disposal Guidance (RMP-I2).

2.2 There are some instances where the original documents should be retained. Examples include:

   a) Signed leases
   b) Title deeds
   c) Signed contracts

3. **Provenance**

3.1 The primary purpose of tracing the provenance of a record is to provide contextual and circumstantial evidence for its original production by establishing, as far as practicable, its history.

3.2 If the provenance of a document is clear, and its integrity is incontestable, then its legal admissibility is not an issue irrespective of how many steps removed from the original it is.

3.3 The following steps should be taken to ensure the electronic version is a true copy of the original:
a) The scanned image must be an exact replica of the original and must mirror the original in all legal respects, even if this means scanning essentially empty pages. If the original document was in colour, then so should the scanned version.

b) The scanned image must be of a high standard of legibility (except where this is impossible due to the legibility of the original) and there should be no ambiguity of interpretation.

c) The decision to scan documents should be approved by an authorised person within the department; ideally the Head of Department or a nominated deputy and there should be a clear audit trail detailing the date the decision to scan was taken, as well as the date the scanning was undertaken. Again this should be signed off by an authorised person.

d) Heads of Department should seek advice from Legal Services on the admissibility of the document in scanned form.

4. **Other factors to consider**

4.1 Although it can be seen as a positive step, large scale scanning projects can be costly, both monetarily and in terms of staff time to undertake the scanning. Give careful consideration as to whether scanning documents really will be cost effective.

4.2 Once scanned, the digital documents must be treated the same as any other official record of the University in terms of security and retention as laid down by the Records Management policy.

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*Failure to comply with University Policy may lead to disciplinary action.*

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