

Decommissioning business systems

Most public authorities use a number of business systems to undertake their activities. These could include common administrative functions, such as those performed by financial management or human resources systems, or systems designed to manage processes specific to an agency, like registrations or licensing. Due to aging systems, changing functions or merging of agencies, some systems are 'switched off' or decommissioned.

This Public Records Brief provides advice on the recordkeeping issues that should be considered when decommissioning such systems.

Information in business systems are public records

Business systems contain public records if they document the decisions and actions of a public authority. Public records (including those located in business systems) must be managed in accordance with the *Public Records Act 2002* and *Information Standard 40: Recordkeeping*.

Public records in business systems can only be disposed of with the permission of the State Archivist

Under the *Public Records Act 2002*, any public record, including those in business systems, can only be disposed of with the permission of the State Archivist. This permission is given through retention and disposal schedules which set out minimum retention periods for different types of records. Retention and disposal schedules are usually not format-specific and identify records by the business functions and activities they document. Making a record inaccessible by decommissioning the system supporting it may be regarded as unlawful disposal in accordance with s.13 of the *Public Records Act 2002*.

Managing records in a decommissioning process

In order to maintain public records in an accessible format, the following steps should be undertaken when there is a proposal to decommission any business system:

1. Identify the public records in the system

Talk to the staff who use the system and read system documentation to determine what business processes are recorded in the system. Consult with the records manager to determine what information about these processes form public records. For more information, see [Identifying a public record in the electronic environment](#) and the [Guidelines and Functional Requirements for Records in Business Systems](#). In this process, it is also useful to identify related paper records, to be aware of any duplication, or if one set of records are necessary to understand the other.

2. Determine retention periods for those records

Use a retention and disposal schedule approved by Queensland State Archives to determine for how long the public records need to be retained.

As systems may document different processes, or different aspects of the one process, there may be different retention periods for the different types of information within any one system.

For general administrative records such as finance and human resources, the [General Retention and Disposal Schedule for Administrative Records](#) will usually provide disposal coverage.

For business systems that support an agency function, for example licence registrations, establish whether there is an approved schedule in existence that covers the records. If no organisation-specific schedule exists, or if there are gaps in coverage of an existing schedule, contact Queensland State Archives for advice.

3. Determine what information needs to be retained, and what can be disposed

By determining retention periods, you will be able to determine what records need to be retained in an accessible format, and what information can be deleted when the system is decommissioned. You will need to seek advice of technical staff on whether the different types of information can be separated. If information cannot be separated, it should be retained for the longest required retention period.

4. Preserve information required for retention

It is necessary to determine how the information will be preserved for its retention period. Retaining a record includes the obligation to keep it accessible. For this reason, Queensland State Archives does not recommend creating an 'archive' version of the old system which is accessible only to a limited number of people. If the information is to be retained over a long period, staff changes or outsourcing arrangements may mean knowledge of the system is lost and the records therefore become inaccessible. Options for preserving the information in an accessible format include:

- migrating it to a new system, or
- preserving the information in an accessible form, such as xml or pdf.

Alternatively, a combined approach may be used where current records are migrated to the new system, and non-current records required to be retained for accountability purposes may be moved to offline storage, while still ensuring that they are maintained in an accessible format such as xml or pdf.

Queensland State Archives does not recommend migrating all information to the new system without first determining whether public records are required to be kept for business and legal purposes.

For more detailed guidance on the management of public records visit the Queensland State Archives website at www.archives.qld.gov.au or contact us on:

Telephone: 07 3131 7777

Email: info@archives.qld.gov.au