

Selecting what data to keep and what to bin

Selectively disposing of files will help you to find up-to-date information and save on backup time and cost. Most of your research material - including data, some emails and reports - are classed as 'records' and may be covered by your funder's or department's records retention policy. If you do choose to delete material, make sure you dispose of it securely (e.g. by shredding paper records or by the appropriate destruction of electronic records).

Deciding what to keep

First decide what you are obliged to keep, what is of use to you now and what may be of use to you or others in future. If you answer **Yes** to any of these questions, you should probably keep it.

- Does the University or your funder stipulate a retention period for this material?
- Are there legal reasons to keep it, e.g. health & safety, financial regulation?
- Are you responsible for keeping the master copy (as its creator or owner)?
- Is the material fundamental to your project?
- Does the material record one-off events that cannot be recreated?
- Does the record (e.g. email) provide evidence that you did something and why?
- Would the material be useful in further research (by you or others)?

Deciding what to bin

Once you have decided what you need to keep, review the rest of your material. Following are some key issues: if you answer **Yes** to any of these, you could consider deletion.

- Is someone else responsible for the master copy?
- Is it a duplicate of a master held elsewhere, e.g. an email attachment?
- Is the file a draft that was subsequently revised?
- Do restrictions on reuse of the material limit the justification for keeping it?
- Does copyright prevent sharing or reuse of the material?
- Are you prevented from archiving/reusing material identifying living individuals?
- Would it be easier / cheaper to recreate the material than to store it?

More useful information can be found at <http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/library/rdm/>
For questions contact rdm@lancaster.ac.uk

This sheet was adapted from [University of Cambridge](#)