



Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What kind of information is covered by the Data Protection Act 1998?

A. The Act covers information about a *living* person which identifies that person, and which may be of a sensitive nature. Advice on data safety is available on the Britain Yearly Meeting website at www.quaker.org.uk/data-safety.

Q. Does the Freedom of Information Act 2000 apply to the Religious Society of Friends?

A. No, but it does apply to your dealings with organisations who do fall under the Act. If your Area or Local Meeting has transactions with a public organisation covered by the Act, the records of that body, covering those transactions will normally be subject to the Act.

Q. Why do we keep minutes in paper format? Can't we keep them electronically?

A. No. Minutes are **permanent** records of the Religious Society of Friends. At present the best format to retain minutes permanently is paper. Minutes held in electronic format are vulnerable to loss. A piece of paper can last for hundreds of years. Electronic records do not have the same longevity. They rely on specific hardware and software in order for information to be accessed. Media can be short-lived. Magnetic materials such as floppy disks and magnetic tapes deteriorate quickly. Also, technology evolves rapidly, even if a CD is still intact after 100 years, the likelihood of there being a computer capable of opening it is slim. Each upgrade of software reduces backward compatibility, so the older an electronic record gets, the more difficult it will become to access it. Further advice is given in [Guide No. 5 Minutes and supporting papers](#).

Q. Is there a binder I can use for storing minutes that is cheaper than the Twinlock binders?

A. Minutes are permanent records of the Religious Society of Friends and should be stored in appropriate, good quality binders to ensure their longevity. Springback Binders are a good medium term solution to storing minutes and papers; binding minutes and papers being a longer term solution. They are reasonably priced and afford protection to the papers stored within them; there are no metal clips holding pages in place meaning that the risk of damage to pages through acid-erosion is lessened. One supplier of Springback binders is: Springback Binders Ltd., Grange Farm, Pinley Green, Claverdon, CV35 8NA; email: william.davenport1@btinternet.com; tel: 01926 484107; fax: 01926 484780; website: www.springbackbinders.com. Minimum orders may apply. Other suppliers are listed in [Guide No. 10 Records equipment and suppliers](#). You may like to consider sharing the cost with other Meetings.

Q. Where can I buy archival quality paper?

A. One supplier of archival paper is Atlantis European Ltd. Their contact details are: 7-9 Plumber's Row, London, E1 1EQ. Other suppliers are listed in [Guide No. 10 Records equipment and suppliers](#). You may like to consider sharing the cost with other Meetings.

Q. How long should records be kept?

A. [Guide No 2 Meeting records and their retention and disposal](#) provides advice on the kinds of records Meetings create, how long they need to be kept for administrative, business, financial, accounting and legal reasons, and guidance on which records should be kept permanently as archives of a Meeting.

Q. Do I need to index minutes and if so, how?

A. An index makes the information in a minute book quickly and easily accessible. It is good practice to keep an interim index while a minute book is in use by a meeting to help the meeting find a minute it requires. It makes the task of producing a full index when the minute book is full less arduous. A professional indexer does not need to be employed, but the task does need to be done by someone methodical and accurate. Approach indexing minutes by asking the question, 'If Friends wanted this information what word or subject would they look for in the index?' Indexing necessitates reading the minutes in full and writing down headings. Headings will often need breaking down into sub-headings. Further advice and an example index are given in [Guide No 5 Minutes and supporting papers](#).

Q. When should we deposit records with our chosen local repository?

A. Records that are no longer used by a Meeting for day-to-day work, and particularly archives of a Meeting should be deposited with an appropriate local repository. Only current records, i.e. those used regularly for day-to-day work, should be kept by a Meeting. **As a general rule, Library Committee advises that records over 10 years old should be deposited.** Further advice is given in [Guide No. 9 Depositing archives with appropriate repositories](#).

Q. We are depositing records with a local repository. What should be included in the terms of deposit?

A. The terms of deposit should be a written agreement between the Area Meeting and local repository which sets out the conditions of the deposit. The terms of deposit could include: a statement that the deposit is on permanent loan (therefore the Meeting still owns the records), the types of records being sent, closure periods (50 years or longer for records containing personal/sensitive information), how often deposits are likely to be made and in what form the local repository will receive them, notice period in case the Meeting wished to withdraw records or if the repository decides to return them (include who will pay for the transfer and whether the Meeting would reimburse the repository for conservation work carried out, etc.), photocopying restrictions, access conditions, and how regularly the terms of deposit will be reviewed. Further advice is given in [Guide No. 9 Depositing archives with appropriate repositories](#).

For further advice on managing records and archives, see the [Guides for clerks and custodians of records](#) or contact the Library at Friends House, Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ, telephone 020 7663 1135, email library@quaker.org.uk