Information sheet: The use of digital signatures for online forms

What is a digital signature?

A digital signature is a digital mechanism for verifying a person's authentication, and ensuring data integrity and signatory non-repudiation. In plain English, this means a digital signature:

- Proves a particular person with a particular identity has digitally signed a form or document;
- Can assist in making sure information in the signed document isn't changed after the digital signature is applied; and
- Provides confidence to the department that the person who signed the form cannot deny they did not sign it.

A digital signature appears in the form of a digital 'stamp', which includes the person's name and time and date of signing.

> Digitally signed by Joseph Bloggs
> Joseph Bloggs
> Signed Tue 20/10/2015 10:15:00am (GMT+10:00)

Additionally, users can check if a document has been changed or edited since a signature was applied. This decreases the likelihood of fraud. For example, the below text would appear when the signature is clicked on:

> The document has not been updated since this signature was applied.

Or, where the document has been changed or edited:

> The signature is valid but the document has been updated since the signature was applied.

Is a digital signature the same as scanning in a hand-written signature?

A scanned hand-written signature superimposed on a document is not considered a *digital* signature. This instead is called a *digitised* signature. Legally, there is no difference between the two, however the use of *digitised* signatures raises security concerns around people maliciously using other people's scanned signatures in a fraudulent way.

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Version: DRAFT Updated: November 2015
Trim:

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Are digital signatures considered to be legally acceptable?

Yes. Under the *Electronic Transaction Act 1999*, digital signatures are equally as valid a traditional 'pen and paper' signature.

Why are we moving towards digital signatures?

To make gaining signatures faster and easier in an increasingly on-line environment. As sending and submitting forms electronically becomes the norm, using digital signatures enables completing and submitting forms and documents quicker and easier.

To reduce waste. Using entirely electronic transactions reduces the need for printing, posting and storing paper-based records.

To improve security and reduce fraud. Digital signatures allow users to know when a form has been edited or changed since it has been signed.

How do I sign an online PDF form using Adobe Reader?

Using a digital signature

Note: Only departmental staff will be able to create digital signatures using this method. Non-departmental staff should follow instructions under 'Using a digitised signature'.

1. Select the signature panel in the PDF document where you wish to insert the digital signature. A dialogue box will appear.
2. Select that you want to sign the document using 'a new digital ID I want to create now'. Click 'next' then select 'New PCKS#12 digital ID file', and 'next'.
3. Enter your first and last name as you would like it to appear in your digital signature. Enter an email address and select 'Australia' as the country. Leave all other settings as they are. Click 'next'
4. Enter a password that will be used to protect your digital signature. Click 'next' then click 'finish'.
5. You will now be presented with a graphic preview of the signature stamp. Here you can add logos, pictures or a scanned signature (though this is not required).
6. Enter the signature password again and click Sign.
7. At this point you will be prompted to save the document. Select where you would like the document saved and 'save'.
8. The document will now be signed, with a date and time stamp associated with your signature. Next time you sign a PDF, you won't have to create a new signature – just select your existing signature.

Using a digitised signature

1. Using Adobe Reader, choose Document > Comment.
2. Select Add Text Box in the toolbar and click where you would like to add your name, company, title or date and fill this information in. Ensure the text box is the same size as the form's signature field.

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