

**UNIVERSITY OF LONDON  
RECORDS MANAGEMENT MANUAL:  
BEST PRACTICE PROCEDURE No.11**

**ELECTRONIC MAIL MANAGEMENT AND STORAGE**

This procedure should be read in conjunction with the *Outlook* training offered by the Staff Development Office for practical advice on how to manage your emails.

**1.0 Electronic records and potential loss of information**

1.1 Vital information, instead of being properly filed, sits randomly on personal computers. Important emails are deleted. Electronic systems are continuing to evolve. Planning must start now for the proper storage of essential information in electronic format. This includes email storage.

**2.0 Points to consider**

2.1 Email management should be part of normal business day to day practice, not undertaken once a year.

2.2 The Information Commissioner has advised that external email addresses can be classed as personal data, in the context of the Data Protection Act 1998, so email needs secure storage in the same way as a paper record containing personal information. It should be noted that University email addresses are not personal data and are property of the University.

2.3 E-storage issues are consistent with paper storage issues: not only must the actual physical storage be costed, but people costs, warranty and maintenance costs, and the efficiency of retrieval systems must be taken into account.

2.4 The statutory and business requirements for the retention of records and information are the same; format is irrelevant when deciding how to dispose of a record.

2.5 Retention schedules are, therefore, essential before any e-storage system can operate efficiently.

2.6 In other words, e-storage is a tool to assist with, not a replacement for, good records and information management. It is simply *one way* of storing semi-current records.

**3.0 Email as a potential corporate record of the University**

3.1 Email is often viewed as personal and private. It is not. It is potentially a record of the University in just the same way as a letter or a fax.

3.2 Any email address or account associated with the University of London is the property of the University.

3.3 It is assumed that staff will use email responsibly and in accordance with normal standards of professional and personal courtesy and conduct.

#### **4.0 The evidential value of email**

4.1 Email is unreliable. There are admissibility versus evidential weight issues; if a lawyer can show your email management system is unreliable an email record may prove to be inadmissible as evidence in court. A regulated log of incoming emails and outgoing emails is necessary in order to substantiate authenticity.

4.2 There is no guarantee that an email has arrived at its destination; the absence of a bounce-back does *not* mean it has been received.

4.3 A paper copy of an email may *not* be valid in law because a lawyer can suggest that it was altered prior to copying.

4.4 New legislation such as the **Civil Evidence Act 1995** has removed the distinction between paper and electronic transactions. This means that e-documents have the same storage requirements as paper documents i.e. if a user must store a paper record for a number of years then he must store the electronic version for the same length of time. This requirement has particular implications for email storage; according to Professor of Internet Law Lars Davies, the advice to delete electronic mail is flawed; email must be kept until any potential legal liability falls away.

#### **5.0 The security of email**

5.1 Email is not a secure medium; its confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

5.2 Staff should be aware of this problem if using email to transmit confidential information; utilising an attachment is advisable.

#### **6.0 Retention of material of legal, business or permanent archival value**

6.1 When is an email important?

- Non-important emails are of a transitory nature i.e. they contain information that is required only for a limited time to ensure a routine action is completed or a subsequent record is prepared. Such emails should be deleted as soon as they are no longer of use.
- Important emails are those which comprise corporate information e.g. which initiate, authorise or complete a business transaction; original messages of policies or directives, external messages which are essential to the organisation in the conduct of its business. Such emails should be saved into a corporate records and information management system.
-

6.2 The University centrally stores back-up copies of email for up to 6 months.

6.3 The University has a print-to-paper policy.

6.4 The legal validity of paper copies of emails can be challenged in court.

6.5 *Do not*, therefore, use email as the sole means to record policy, procedural or business decisions or to document any decision which may have legal implications. Such important documents should be created as word documents, saved to the relevant drive whilst in draft and when finalised, by the individual responsible, printed out, signed and dated, stamped or otherwise validated. It is far more difficult to alter a hard copy record than an email or its attachment.

6.6 If you *do* send or receive an email which must be retained, make sure that you either:

- store it on the designated networked drive, which is a secured area on the server to which only you have access and which is automatically backed-up, or;
- move it to a personal Outlook folder and save it for as long as necessary.

6.7 Check your retention schedule for the relevant retention period. Remember, the format of a record is irrelevant when looking at retention criteria; the subject matter is of importance. If the retention schedule grants permission to delete a class of emails, then do so. If it does not, then do not.

6.8 If you *are* saving important material in email format, then you will need to keep a record of the classes of emails deleted and the authority for doing so in exactly the same way as you record the scheduled destruction of classes of paper records. It is of course *not* necessary to record the deletion of every individual email, any more than you would record the destruction of every individual document within a paper file.

## **7.0 Practical management of your emails**

7.1 Manage your emails as part of your normal business day to day practice.

7.2 For internal messages the management of the email is the responsibility of the message originator/sender. When messages are received from external sources it is the responsibility of the recipient to manage the message appropriately.

7.3 Consider whether a phone call or memo may be more appropriate.

7.4 Prioritise email reading and then action.

7.5 Don't send unnecessary routine reports on activities or acknowledgements of receipt, i.e. don't ask for receipts unless you really *must* know if something has arrived.

7.6 If you need to share email with other staff, set up shared folders.

7.7 When going on leave make sure that you enable the *out of office* function so that emails requiring action will not sit in your inbox for weeks. More suitably set up functional mailboxes (e.g. [records.management@london.ac.uk](mailto:records.management@london.ac.uk)) which can be regularly checked by colleagues. This is of particular importance for Freedom of Information enquiries, which must, by law, be answered within 20 working days.

7.8 Material on which you do not have to act, but may find useful for a while should be moved to a specific folder for that purpose until you decide to delete it.

7.9 Non-essential emails and attachments should be deleted as soon as practicable e.g. personal emails and information only emails.

7.10 Remove yourself from mailing lists that are not, or cease to be, relevant.

7.11 Spam or other unwanted messages should be sent to the junk email folder.

## **8.0 Email storage**

8.1 Try not to create or store important documents solely as email.

8.2 Where appropriate, print to paper any email which you may need for later reference, file the paper and then delete the email in accordance with the appropriate records retention schedule.

8.3 Isolated records are of minimal value and hard to retrieve, so save emails into a structure of directories and folders which reflect the classes set out in your retention schedule. Each record will form part of a narrative and a greater insight into that particular business activity will be gained by consulting the information within its wider context.

8.4 You will need to create folders for your email which clearly reflect the functions you carry out, as reflected by your retention schedule. If you need to retain an email, move it to those folders once you have finished acting on it.

8.5 Make sure that you can retrieve your emails easily, by using a logical filing system within each folder e.g. the Outlook facility for chronological or alphabetical filing.

University Records Manager and FOI Officer

Approved 23/06/04; reviewed: 3/7/06; 29/9/09, 11/11/09