

**UNIVERSITY OF LONDON
RECORDS MANAGEMENT MANUAL:
BEST PRACTICE PROCEDURE No. 4**

ELECTRONIC RECORDS MANAGEMENT

1. Introduction

1.1 The principles governing the closure and subsequent retention of electronic records are identical to those for paper records although systems are not yet in place to fully support these principles. It is, however, essential that good practices are developed in preparation for full electronic document and records management (EDRM).

1.2 Unless significant effort is put into managing electronic information and securing long-term access to the University's digital resources, uncertainties will continue to impede the growth of the organisation and its new working practices. Investment made solely in e-storage will only secure short-term rather than lasting benefits.

1.3 Please read in conjunction with the *Records Management and Archives Policy* document points 5.1-5.22, Best Practice Procedure No. 1: *Managing Information* for supporting documentation and Best Practice Procedure No. 11: *Electronic mail management and storage* for specific advice on email management.

2. The problem

2.1 Staff are using office software and email to create and exchange electronic documents; but in the absence of any alternative method of control the University is unable to manage these documents as corporate records as it would those in a paper format.

2.2 Documents are often not printed and placed on the paper files, because this is seen as increasingly burdensome by the end user at the desktop, but...

2.3 On the other hand, the electronic version of the document is not consistently managed either; documents may be stored unpredictably in a variety of locations and under varying names, and with no guarantee of lasting access or accuracy and without regard to legality.

3. Why is it necessary to start now?

3.1 The move towards fully integrated electronic working methods, and the consequent need for fully integrated electronic records management, will inevitably involve many changes in approach, practices, attitudes and behaviour. It is better to start the change process early and in a controlled manner than to be forced by circumstance.

3.2 The key point is to recognise that the transition to full EDRM, where retention schedules and management principles can be applied in an electronic environment, is a programme which must start from the University's current situation, and can not be solved by the implementation of a piece of software.

4. Electronic record creation: interim procedures

4.1 Responsibility for the capture and maintenance of electronic records will rest with all staff who create and use them.

4.2 E-records must be structured into folders and sub-folders with other electronic records that form part of the same narrative to ensure that all evidence of the same business activity is grouped together and safeguarded.

4.3 E-records of value to the University's business must be captured into a corporate current filing structure within each Division or Responsibility Centre and must be accessible to all authorised staff primarily through a shared drive or equivalent.

4.4 Ephemeral e-documents of no enduring value, such as those of purely personal relevance, must be deleted from the system at the earliest opportunity.

4.5 Non-confidential records identified as of continuing value to the business of the University must be moved out of personal workspace into shared workspace (i.e. by changing to appropriate drives) and filed in the appropriate electronic folder.

4.6 Isolated records are of minimal value; therefore records, including emails, must be saved into a structure of folders. Each record will form part of a narrative and a greater insight into that particular business activity will be gained by keeping the record within its wider context. The structure of the folders and sub-folders must be simple and logical. It should proceed from the general to the specific; dividing a broader theme into sub-themes.

4.7 The electronic filing structure must capture all metadata needed to identify, access and retrieve the electronic record so that it is possible to establish the context of the record, who created it, during which business process, and how the record is related to other records.

4.8 Electronic folders should be organised by type, consistent with paper files. This will enable global decisions to be made about the fate of similar records.

4.9 The folder system must use the same file titles/index terms as the paper filing system, reflecting the relevant **retention schedule**. File titles should be as short as possible and care be taken to avoid repetition.

4.10 Clear, consistent terminology should be used so that records can be identified and retrieved quickly, accurately and consistently.

5. Electronic record disposal: interim procedures

5.1 Each electronic folder will be in one of three stages during its working life:

- **current** when records may be added to it;
- **semi-current** when it has been closed but is used as a reference tool for administrative purposes;
- **archival** selected for permanent retention:
 - The print to paper policy should come into force when a record is designated as permanent.

- The permanent retention of records in electronic format is dependent on future technological developments and investment.

5.2 Folders of e-records should be closed and reviewed for retention in the same way as records held in a paper format. These folders should not be deleted from the system except in relation to retention periods specified in approved **retention schedules**. If, according to a Division's retention schedule, they are to be retained for a number of years before disposal, they will need to continue to be held in an electronic format, but to be moved to a semi-current electronic storage system. They will then be accessible in much the same way as paper records moved to out of office storage.

5.3 All files and folders that have outlived their administrative usefulness and are not of historical significance will need to be destroyed in a secure manner e.g. by overwriting. IT input will be necessary to ensure that such secure destruction has taken place. Destruction of files and folders should take place only after consultation with the creating Division.

5.4 Until the University has established a policy for the permanent preservation of non-current records in an electronic format, word-processed *records that need to be kept permanently must be transferred to paper and filed*.

5.5 Appropriate references linking the electronic file to the paper file must be used in order that retention criteria can be applied consistently.

6. Electronic records management: future procedures

6.1 Templates should be developed for common forms of documents e.g. memos, standard letters, reports. When a new document is created, a template will prompt the creator to register the details of the new document: appropriate title, date of creation, name of creator etc.

6.2 Staff will be responsible for making judgements on whether to register a document or not and for completing the registration template.

6.3 Once added to the electronic filing structure, the record should not be capable of change. New versions of the record must be created by making and editing a copy and saving this as a new record.

6.4 Naming conventions should be developed; use of common terminology throughout the University will be required for integration.

6.5 Where there are significant numbers of e-documents stored on a shared network drive, a filing structure should be established. The filing structures of individual divisions or offices should reflect the types of information included on their **retention schedules**.

6.6 IT systems controlling e-records should include an audit trail to document the uses of each record.

6.7 Microsoft has announced a 5-year redundancy period for all its software. This suggests that electronic records will have to be reviewed at least every 5 years and action taken as follows:

- either destruction according to the appropriate retention schedule; or

- migration pending later review; or
- permanent retention in an approved format, with built-in planning for further migrations as necessary.

An appendix suggesting possible folder and file titles and ways of listing files follows.

University of London Records Manager & FOI Officer

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APPENDIX: SAMPLE FOLDER AND FILE TITLES AND LISTS

Folder and file titles

It is desirable to correlate the titles of paper and electronic files which deal with the same function as closely as possible. A balance must be struck between emulating the paper system, and recognising the different demands of usability and practical use which operate in the electronic environment.

Hard copy (paper) files usually tend to be fairly broadly titled as follows:

- **Folder title:** Electronic records
- **File title:** Records audit

Electronic files, on the other hand, tend to be smaller, primarily for ease of circulation to other parties, and this may lead to a greater depth in the folder structure as follows:

- **Folder title:** Electronic records
- **File title:** Records audit
- **Sub-title:** Survey forms returned

An electronic file title, on a file header and including the file drive, would therefore look something like this:

K:\electronic records\records audit\survey forms returned

Listing files

It is essential that all staff keep a list of all records they create and maintain, with a record of format and location, so that the records can be accessed in their absence if needed by authorised staff. This is a requirement of the Freedom of Information Act.

When listing files, it is therefore important to include all elements which will assist in file identification as follows:

Records Manager: folder and file list:

FOLDER	DATES	FORMAT	LOCATION
Electronic records			
Files:			
Records audit:	2002-	Paper; electronic	Room 218; K:\ drive
Correspondence with staff	2002	Paper; electronic	Room 218 K:\ drive
Survey form template	2002	Electronic	K:\ drive
Survey forms returned	2002-2003	Electronic	K:\ drive