Records management: introduction and route map

For whom is this guidance intended?

This guidance is intended for all University staff who need to know what records management is. This will include staff who have been nominated as freedom of information practitioners and their managers. It explains what is records management and the benefits that records management can bring to an organisation.

What is records management?

According to the University's records management framework, records are "recorded information, in any form, created or received and maintained by an organisation or person in the transaction of business or conduct of affairs and kept as evidence of such activity". They include things like paper files, electronic documents, e-mails and maps.

Records management is a discipline which uses an administrative system to direct and control the creation, version control, distribution, filing, retention, storage and disposal of records, in a way that is administratively and legally sound, whilst at the same time serving the operational needs of the University and preserving an adequate historical record.

Records management aims to ensure that:

- the *record is present*: that the University has the information that is needed to form a reconstruction of activities or transactions that have taken place
- the *record can be accessed*: that information can be located and accessed, and that the current version is identified
- the *record can be interpreted*: that the context of the record can be established: who created the document and when, during which business process, and how the record is related to other records
- the *record can be trusted*: that the record reliably represents the information that was actually used in or created by the business process, and its integrity and authenticity can be demonstrated
- the *record can be maintained through time*: that the qualities of accessibility, interpretability and trustworthiness can be maintained for as long as the record is needed, perhaps permanently, despite changes of formats

Why do we need records management?

Information is a corporate asset. The University's records are important sources of administrative, evidential and historical information. They are vital to the University in its current and future operations (including meeting legislative requirements), for the purposes of accountability, and for an awareness and understanding of its history and procedures. They form part of the "corporate memory" of the organisation.

The need to improve the University's records management has become clear from several legislative developments including the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002. However we are not seeking to

improve its records management functions solely because of the impending legislation.
Records management also offers organisational benefits, including:

- Better use of physical and server space
- Better use of staff time
- Improved control of valuable information resources
- Compliance with legislation and standards
- Reduced costs

The University believes that its internal management processes will be improved by increased internal availability of information.

What are the components of a records management system?

The key components are:
- Information map to identify the functions of the organisation and the records generated by those functions.
- Filing scheme to organise records into meaningful files and series.
- Filing systems to capture the records and implement the filing scheme and retention schedule.
- Tracking and monitoring systems to ensure that the location of each record is always known.
- Inventory to keep a record of the records held by a business area and their ultimate disposition.
- Survey to identify which records a business area holds.
- Retention schedule to identify how long particular types of records should be kept.
- Storage arrangements to avoid using expensive office accommodation to store little-used records.
- Records disposal procedures to implement and document the operation of the retention schedule recommendations.
- Access policy to identify who is allowed to have access to which records, and to highlight if special security precautions are required for any records.
- Vital records programme to identify the vital records of the organisation and ensure that back up procedures are in place in the event of a disaster.
- Preservation strategy to ensure that records remain accessible over time.

For each of these components, guidance is available on how to implement them in your business area.

Who is responsible for records management?

All University staff who create, receive and use records have records management responsibilities. Heads of colleges, schools, other units and business functions within the University have overall responsibility for ensuring that records controlled within their unit are managed in a way which meets the aims of the University's records management policies.

The University Secretary has a particular responsibility for ensuring that the University corporately meets its legal responsibilities, and internal and external governance and accountability requirements. Day-to-day responsibility will be delegated to the University Records Manager. The Records Manager will have a coordinating and enabling role and will advise on policy and best practice.

Edinburgh University Library houses the Edinburgh University Archives, where University records with long-term research value are preserved and made available.

How should I introduce records management to my business area?

There are three stages to introducing records management within a business area:
1. Establish the functions and recordkeeping requirements of the area
2. Set up systems and procedures to capture and manage these records
3. Bring existing records within the managed environment

The steps towards full and reliable records management are set out in figure one and summarised in the following table. It is recommended that sections start at step one and work through each step sequentially, but specific business needs may require a deviation from this sequence. For example, an office move might lead to a pressing need to tackle existing records before setting up systems for the future.

1	What records should we be keeping?	Develop an information map to discover what information needs to be captured as records.
2	How can we be sure that records that should be kept are captured and accessible?	Set up a filing scheme, filing system, access policy, inventory, and a tracking and monitoring system.
3	How long should we keep our records?	Develop a retention schedule and set up disposal procedures to implement it, including transferring records of long term value to the University Archive with the agreement of the University Archivist.
4	What records do we actually have?	Conduct a survey of all existing records. Integrate findings into inventory, retention schedule and tracking and monitoring system.
5	How can we ensure that our records remain accessible for as long as they are needed?	Develop a preservation strategy for electronic records, consider using off-site storage facilities for paper records, identify vital records and put in place measures to preserve them.

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Records management route map