

Version Control

For whom is this guidance intended?

1. This guidance is intended for all Microsoft users who create and edit documents with multiple versions, but it also sets out general principles that other members of staff may find useful.

What is version control?

2. Version control is the management of multiple revisions to the same document. Version control enables us to tell one version of a document from another.

Why does version control matter?

3. Version control is important for documents that undergo a lot of revision and redrafting and is particularly important for electronic documents because they can easily be changed by a number of different users, and those changes may not be immediately apparent. Knowing which version of a document you are looking at is important if you are trying to find out which version of a policy is currently in force, or which version of a policy was in use at a particular time. Version control is also important if you are working on a collaborative document with a number of contributors and/or frequent revisions, for example a consultation response.

Version control options

4. There are a number of techniques you can use to version control your documents, these are described below in order of complexity starting with the simplest first. Use the most appropriate option for your document. Most documents will only need the simpler techniques, such as the use of naming conventions (see paragraphs 8-10), but some formal documents will need a version control table (see paragraphs 14-17).

Version numbers

5. Use a unique version number to distinguish one version from another. Use this procedure for all documents where more than one version exists, or is likely to exist in the future.
6. There are two version numbering systems and you should use the one that is used by your business unit. One version numbering system uses consecutive whole numbers, such as version 1 for the first draft, version 2 for the next draft and so on. The other version numbering system uses version numbers with points to reflect major and minor changes, such as version 1.1 (first version), version 2.1 (second version with a major change), version 2.2 (third version with a minor change).

7. Put the version number on the document itself. The placement of the version number will depend on your local style sheets but common places for version numbers are the document cover, or in either the header or footer text of each page.

Naming conventions

8. Include the version number at the end of the document's file name, as described in rule 12 of the file naming conventions for electronic records, <http://www.recordsmanagement.ed.ac.uk/InfoStaff/RMstaff/RMprojects/PP/FileNameRules/FileNameRules.htm>. For example OrgHier2002V04.xls.
9. The words "Draft" or "Final" can be added to the end of the file name to indicate the status of the version.
10. Use this procedure for all documents where more than one version exists, or is likely to exist in the future.

Read-only tag

11. To reduce the likelihood of one version being overwritten with another use the read-only tag. Applying a read-only tag will prompt users to save the document with a new file name if they make any changes to the original document.
12. Use this procedure for finalised documents where loss of the original would be a problem. For example if the 2004-5 assessment regulations were overwritten when the 2005-6 version was being drafted this would mean that the University would no longer have a file copy of the 2004-5 regulations and it would be difficult to answer complaints and appeals relating to that version of the regulations.
13. To add a read-only tag to your document:
 - Open Windows Explorer and navigate to your document.
 - Right click on the document name and select "Properties".
 - On the "General" tab check the "Read-only" box.
 - Select "Apply" and then "OK".

Version control table

14. Use a version control table to keep track of what changes were made to a document, when and by whom.
15. Use this procedure when you need to keep track of document changes for legal or regulatory reasons, or to show when particular changes were introduced. For example use a version control table to show when changes to the University strategic plan were introduced and who suggested the changes.

16. Table 1 shows an example of a version control table. The table should be updated each time a change is made to the document, with the answers to the following questions:
- What is the new version number?
 - What was the purpose of the change, or what was the change?
 - Who made the change?
 - When was the change made?

Table 1: Example of a version control table

Version number	Purpose / Changes	Author	Date
1	Initial draft shown to line manager	James Smith	01/02/2005
2	Consultation draft shown to working group	James Smith	08/02/2005
3	Final draft approved by committee	James Smith	01/03/2005
4	Correction of spelling error in paragraph 12	Mary Jones	10/05/2005
5	Amendment of paragraph 15 to reflect a procedure change	James Smith	15/09/2005
6	Change of business unit name from Personnel to Human Resources	Kate Brown	06/01/2006

17. The table can either be included at the start of the document, for example for very formal documents, or it can be created as a separate document and filed in the same folder as the document concerned, for example for guidance or procedure documents.

Final versions

18. When you are ready to circulate your document, perhaps by putting it on the Internet or by sending it to an external recipient, remove any hidden data from it first. This will prevent recipients from being able to see any track change history, comments or other hidden information in your document. See the procedures for removing tracked changes from Microsoft office documents (<http://www.recordsmanagement.ed.ac.uk/InfoStaff/RMstaff/RemovingTrackedChanges.htm>) for further information and guidance.

A versioning don't

19. Do not use the Microsoft Word Versioning tool. This substantially increases the size of your document which is wasteful of server space and makes the document unwieldy to work with.

What help is available?

20. The University Records Management Section provides advice, guidance and training on records management, data protection and freedom of information issues. Contact us at recordsmanagement@ed.ac.uk.

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