

Guide to Basic Indexing

Departmental Weeding Guidance

Why create an index?

Filing, both paper and electronic, grows over time and it often needs to be retained for lengthy periods (as defined by the University Retention Schedule). However, staff turnover means that it can often be difficult to keep track of filing over the years and that in turn can make files difficult to manage without a considerable amount of effort. Creating an index helps to bridge that gap.

An index will tell you:

- What files you have (and don't have)
- Where they are located
- When they need to be reviewed or destroyed

An index will help you to:

- Respond more efficiently to requests for information
- Reduce the costs associated with unnecessary storage and retrieval
- Comply with legislation relating to record keeping

Things to consider when creating an index

Does an index exist already?

If an index already exists, it may prove a useful starting point and, depending on the quality of the index, may save you a lot of work. Don't re-invent the wheel if you don't have to; but likewise don't be afraid to start again, if you need to!

Where should you store your index?

Too often, excellent indexes are lost when the person who maintained them leaves the organisation and the index is not passed on. Indexes should be stored in a secure, shared location. If you use FileStore, you could consider using the PinPoint system to index the files in each box. However, if you are indexing personal data, you should consider that only those who need to use the index should have access to it.

How will you maintain your index?

An index is not a static document. It only remains of value if it is updated regularly and referred to as necessary. This needs to be planned into workloads. In addition, those updating the index need to do so consistently. For example, if you use abbreviations to avoid repetitive typing, then you *must always* use abbreviations, otherwise you will have great difficulty searching your index and lose a lot of the benefit it could bring you. You may need to document these rules so that future colleagues can both maintain consistency and interpret your index. If you are indexing in an Excel spreadsheet, this information could be put into a separate sheet. If you are using the FileStore PinPoint system, this information could be put into a Word document and held in a secure, shared location (e.g. the EDM system).

More information on consistent naming of paper and electronic files can be found in the Records Management factsheets (www.port.ac.uk/records) and the same principles of consistency can be applied to the information entered on to indexes.

What should be in an index?

An index is a spreadsheet, or database, which lists your records. Each entry (or row) should cover either one record, or a set of records which can be managed as a single entity, for example:

- A record would be: the minutes of the Board of Governors meeting held on 7th October 2015
- A set of records capable of being managed as a single entity would be: the minutes of Board of Governors meetings 2015-2016

The decision to enter either individual records, or sets of records, will depend on two things:

1. The University Retention Schedule
2. The level of detail required to locate an individual record

For example, it may be advantageous to list each student file by name and number, rather than simply “Students A-J 2007”, because the greater detail may help to locate the right alumnus. However, you will need to strike a balance and avoid breaching Data Protection principles, or creating a rod for your own back, by recording too much unnecessary information.

Minimum information

For each entry the following minimum information should be recorded:

Description

This can cover several columns and will depend on what you are indexing. But as a rule of thumb 3-4 columns would be considered appropriate and more than that would be excessive (except in rare circumstances). Here is a just a small selection of possible columns you could consider using (this list is not exhaustive):

- First name
- Surname
- Student/Staff number
- Year (academic, calendar, graduation year etc)
- Course name or code
- Unit name or code
- Supplier

Location

This is where the record can be found. E.g.:

- A FileStore box reference
- A UoP room number (avoid saying “John’s room”, because the room may not always belong to John... always use the official number on the door. If you aren’t sure, ask Estates)
- A particular filing cabinet
- A digital location (e.g. a K:drive folder)

Review / Disposal Date

This is when you next need to do something with the records. If you are managing student files, you may wish to include separate columns for “review” and “disposal”, so that you can record both dates, allowing you to both weed the file down to transcript data after 6 yrs and dispose after 80 yrs. E.g.:

First Name	Surname	Number	Graduation	Location	Review	Disposal
Joe	Bloggs	654321	2015	FileStore Box 12345	01.08.2021	01.08.2095

Additional information for reviews

Where you include a review date as well as (or instead of) a disposal date, it is probably wise to give your future colleagues some idea of why they are expected to review the record and to what purpose. Usually, this could be a simple cross reference to the University Retention Schedule.

*NB: always include the version of the schedule as well as the schedule reference,
e.g. v3.0 s11.3.2*

However, there are some occasions when this simple cross reference may not be enough. The main example of this would be the 6 year review of a student file. At the point of review, all data other than the transcript data should be removed from the file... but what constitutes transcript data and where it is held will depend on the age of the file and the course the student was on. The Weeding Starter Pack has some general guidance on what constitutes transcript data; but if you have courses with professional accreditation that require extra information to be retained, that would not normally be considered transcript data (e.g. number and dates of field trips), then this should be recorded for the benefit of your future colleagues. It doesn't have to be recorded on the index, but it should be clearly documented (e.g. for students on BSc XXXX, retain the standard transcript data plus proof of all field trips undertaken) and stored in the same secure, shared area as the index.