AN INTRODUCTION TO RECORDS MANAGEMENT

Records Management Factsheet 01

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What is records management?

Records management is the systematic and effective control of records (both paper and electronic) throughout their life cycle from creation or receipt through to the time of their disposal. It aims to ensure that records are accurate and reliable; can be retrieved speedily and efficiently, and are kept for no longer than necessary.

Current:
Initially records are current or active while they are used to carry out day-to-day work.

Semi-current:
Next records become semi-current or semi-active, when they only need to be referred to occasionally, or have to be retained for legal or regulatory reasons.

Inactive:
Finally, records become inactive, and a decision has to be made whether to discard them or, in a few cases, keep them permanently because they have historical value.

Why is records management Important?

Records management is crucial to all organisations. Unless records are managed efficiently it is not possible to conduct business, to account for what has happened in the past, or to make decisions about the future. Records are a vital, corporate asset and are required:

- To provide evidence of actions and decisions
- To support accountability and transparency
- To comply with legal and regulatory obligations, including employment, contract and financial law, as well as the Data Protection Act and Freedom of Information Act
- To support decision making
- To protect the interests of staff, students and other stakeholders
What does records management involve?

Records management involves controlling records throughout their life cycle. There are ten key elements

Element 1 – Creation

Each department must create records that are accurate and complete, so that it is possible to establish what has been done and why. The quality of the records must also be sufficient to allow staff to carry out their work efficiently, demonstrate compliance with legal and regulatory requirements, and ensure accountability and transparency expectations are met. Where appropriate, templates should be used, so that records are produced consistently and quickly. In addition, version control procedures should be applied to records that are periodically revised (such as policies and handbooks) to ensure the current versions can be easily identified.

Element 2 – Information Audit

It may be helpful to carry out an audit in order to establish what information (both paper and electronic) is held by a department and where it is held, and to clarify who is responsible for keeping the definitive versions of records and who is simply holding copies. Unless a department can readily locate its records, it will be difficult not only to respond to enquiries promptly, but also to implement retention schedules effectively (see Element 10). Conducting an audit may also help to eliminate unnecessary duplication, leading to a reduction in storage and maintenance costs.

Element 3 – Classification

All records (e.g. paper files, electronic documents, emails) should be arranged systematically, so that they can be retrieved easily and quickly. The main areas of work carried out by a department should be identified, and then a paper filing structure and electronic directory tree developed into which all the records can be logically placed. The University is adopting a Function – Activity – Task based file plan for its records held in the Electronic Document Management System (EDM).

In addition, file titles and document names must describe the content or subject matter of individual files and documents accurately and helpfully (see Factsheet 02: Managing Paper Records and Factsheet 03: Managing Electronic Records).

Element 4 – Storage

Staff must be able to retrieve the information they need to carry out their work. Information that is only accessible to a single person should be kept to a minimum. Wherever possible records should be stored on a secure, shared network, or within a centralised filing system, so that departments can operate efficiently when individual members of staff are absent.
Paper records that are consulted frequently should be kept close-at-hand within the immediate office space, while semi-current material can be housed in separate store rooms or stored off-site at ReStore, aka FileStore (see FileStore Intranet Page).

Electronic records should either be held in an appropriate corporate database (e.g. the student record system, the HR system etc), or within the EDM system.

**Element 5 – Security**

Paper records containing personal or confidential information must be stored behind two locks when not in use (e.g. in a locked cabinet in a locked room) and access only granted to authorised staff. In the case of electronic records, access should be controlled through the use of log-ins, strong passwords and read-only settings, and computers should not be left unattended when logged-on. It is also essential that data held on portable media (e.g. CDs, DVDs, USB memory sticks), as well as laptops, is kept securely and protected from theft. Any disclosure that takes place must be in line with the requirements of Data Protection and Freedom of Information legislation. Mobile devices should have appropriate encryption.

**Element 6 – Tracking**

In departments where several people need to consult the same paper records, it may helpful to track the movement of files to ensure they can always be found. For example, a form can be used to record the name of the person retrieving a file, as well as its reference, title and the date of retrieval; the form can then be inserted in place of the file, so that other members of staff will know where to find it. Gathering data on the level of use will also assist retention decisions.

Electronic records are not physically removed in the same way, but it is still possible to gather data on the level of usage for some electronic records by checking the EDM system audit logs.

**Element 7 – Vital Records**

Records that would be vital to the continued functioning of the University in the event of a disaster must be identified and protected: e.g. current financial information, current contracts, proof of ownership, current course materials, current research information.

It is essential to store all critical business data on appropriate corporate systems or secure, University network storage, so that it will be protected by appropriate back up and disaster recovery procedures. Vital records that are only available in paper format should be duplicated, and the originals and copies stored in separate locations. If, however, duplication is either impracticable or legally unacceptable, fire-proof safes must be used to protect these records.
**Element 8 – Preservation**

Records of continuing value need to remain accessible. Wherever physical documents are stored, they should be protected from potential hazards, such as fire and flood, and the temperature and humidity maintained at stable levels (to prevent the development of mould). Critical electronic records must be held on a network drive, so that it will be adequately backed up and safeguarded from hardware and software failure. In addition, electronic records should be reviewed periodically and, if necessary, upgraded to new file formats so that it does not become trapped in obsolete technology (see Factsheet 07: Preservation).

**Element 9 – Retention**

Records should only be retained as long as necessary to conduct business, and to comply with legal and regulatory requirements. The University has a retention schedule listing its major categories of records (both paper and electronic) and for how long they are required. The schedule is available to all staff on the [records management pages](#). For more information on applying retention schedules, see the Retention Policy in the Document Warehouse, and Factsheet 08: Retention Schedules.

**Element 10 – Destruction**

There must be clear, auditable procedures for destroying records. The disposal of each department’s core administrative records (both paper and electronic) should be controlled by retention schedules, and a record should be kept of what is destroyed and when (see Factsheet 09: Destruction).
What are the benefits?

Managing records effectively makes it easier for staff to carry out their work because they are able to find the information they need whenever they need it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BENEFIT</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TIME</td>
<td>Saves time by ensuring that records can be found easily and quickly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPACE</td>
<td>Saves space by preventing records from being kept longer than necessary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MONEY</td>
<td>Saves money by reducing storage costs and maintenance costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFFICIENCY</td>
<td>Improves efficiency by ensuring records are readily accessible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEGAL</td>
<td>Improves compliance by keeping records in line with legal and regulatory requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONTROL</td>
<td>Keeps records under control by preserving important data and preventing the accumulation of ephemeral material.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUALITY</td>
<td>Improves the quality of information, providing staff with access to accurate and reliable records</td>
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<tr>
<td>SECURITY</td>
<td>Increases the security of confidential records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONTINUITY</td>
<td>Supports business continuity and risk management</td>
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</tbody>
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Further information

If you require any further information, please contact the University Records Manager (recordsmanagement@port.ac.uk or ext. 3390) or visit the records management web pages.