

Records management guidance – electronic record keeping

Electronic records fall into two categories:

- Structured, that is, records held on databases like SITS.
- Unstructured, that is every other type of electronic record, like documents, emails, spreadsheets, etc.

Only about 20% of electronic records are structured. Unlike paper files, where good record keeping practice has been established, unstructured electronic records are liable to flawed standards of management. The following good practice guidelines give examples on how to improve electronic record keeping.

Electronic record keeping – good practice

The principles of good record keeping are:

- That records can be accessed easily by those who need them
- That records are kept securely so that people who shouldn't see them can't
- That records are managed from creation to disposal and not kept longer than they need to be

To make keeping electronic records easier, the following good practice points should be used:

- Document titles. A good title for a document will describe content, making it easier for a user to find what they are looking for. This includes using a proper subject line for emails.
- Use subject headings for folder names. This makes documents easy to find, and means that they can be managed correctly through their life cycle. For example, the folder name 'Departmental meeting minutes 2008-09' not only describes content but when the document was created. Once the retention period has been reached, it is easy to tell if the file can be deleted.
- Version control. Use the version number in your document title to trace the various changes. Use [File title] v1.0, [File title] v2.0 etc for major changes and [File title] v1.1, [File title] v1.2 etc for minor changes. Once a document has been finished, mark it as 'Final.' If working in a group without access to collaborative tools, it is worth designating one person as the 'librarian' for these documents so that someone will have stored the definitive versions.
- Save documents onto a shared drive. This means that information can be shared and accessed amongst team members. The H: space should only be used for documents which relate to sensitive issues, or issues which are personal to you. All documents relating to your work should be on the shared drives. Where a group of people need access to sensitive information, folders on shared drives can be restricted. You should contact your IT cluster support about this.
- Use the same names across shared drive, Outlook and paper folders. Hybrid filing, such as this, can make it easier to see duplications between your paper and electronic files, and helps embed a coherent filing system into a team.