Good Practice Guidance

Managing Records and Information in the Office

The information you create and use to carry out your day-to-day business is a University resource. It is important, therefore, that it is managed appropriately within your office. Each department, and office within the department, should have in place procedures which facilitate the easy management of its information resources.

Not being able to locate accurate, up-to-date information has a negative impact upon your ability to do your job efficiently and effectively. Paper records often end up being left on desks, or stacked on the floor when the filing cabinet gets full. This quickly leads to an untidy and unpleasant working environment, with potential adverse Health & Safety implications. Long periods of time taken to locate records, whether held in paper format or stored electronically is very frustrating and takes you away from your day-to-day job. Leaving records in an unsecure environment may also leave you in danger of breaching the Data Protection Act. Establishing procedures to manage information and records will ease these problems, allowing you to spend your time more productively.

Filing Systems

It is essential that each department has a central shared filing system in place – whether there are five or twenty-five members of staff. The system should cover both paper and electronic records, and provide a logical place for the filing of information/records relating to each activity carried out by the department. A robust filing system will ensure that every member of staff requiring access can retrieve accurate and authentic information quickly and efficiently.

There are a number of filing systems that can be adopted, ranging from a simple alphabetical system, to a more complex alpha-numeric referenced system. Think carefully about a filing system before implementing – it should meet the needs of your department or office. Too complex a system and staff will become confused, too simple a system and it will not provide enough detail to indicate where information should be filed. Advice and assistance on establishing a filing system can be obtained from the Records and Information Management Service (RIMS)

Filing systems will only be of value if all staff use them and file information appropriately. All staff should be properly briefed on the filing system, and the usefulness of the system should be monitored.

Filing paper records

The following guidance will help to keep a paper filing system in order:

- File covers should be sturdy, secure and convenient to handle. See Good Practice Guide: Filing and Storage Solutions).
- Retain records in a chronological order, with the earliest paper at the back of the file, working to the most recent paper at the front.

- If necessary, number each paper on a file in sequence from the earliest to the latest. This will ensure you know when records have been removed from the file.
- Place only the master copy of a record on file. Extra copies can be made when necessary.
- Don't file unnecessary copies of information which can be accessed elsewhere (e.g. committee reports/publications).
- Don't keep blank pro-formas or stationery with files.
- When a file becomes too bulky (over 1 inch/2cm), close it. Open a new file, and refer to the older file on the cover.
- Weed and destroy low-value information rather than filing it. Reports, brochures and newsletters from other organisations are prime candidates for immediate destruction. See Good Practice Guide: Routine Destruction Guidance for further advice.
- Keep project files on your desk for your day-to-day business. Once complete, place the relevant records in the main file.

Filing electronic records

Records created electronically should be stored in a filing system which mirrors the system in place for paper records. The system of folders, sub-folders and files which exists in the paper system can be easily transferred into the electronic domain.

Each department/office should have a shared drive in which all electronic records are stored – the J: drive is most commonly used for this purpose. The filing system should be set up on this shared drive. All electronic records, including word documents, spreadsheets and business emails, should be saved into this filing system. Staff should not save business records on personal network drives or the computer's own hard drive (known as the H: and C: drives respectively). Records stored on the C: and H: drives are inaccessible to all other staff.

The following guidance should keep an electronic filing system from becoming overloaded:

- Delete personal documents at the earliest opportunity.
- Working drafts should be given a version number. When a document is finalised, the working drafts should be deleted. See Good Practice Guide: Version Control.
- Templates should be used for routine administrative documents – fax cover sheets, internal memos, cover letters, etc. Where these are used, they should not be placed on the file unless they contain information not recorded elsewhere in the file.
- An annual review of electronic records held should be carried out at the same time as the review of paper records. Those which are no longer required should be deleted from the relevant J:, H:, or C: drives.
- Where both a paper and an electronic file are held on one subject, there should be clear reference to the other format of the file. If the file is to be retained for a number of years prior to destruction (whether in the office or at the University Records Centre), the electronic version should be printed to paper and placed in the paper file. The electronic documents should be deleted after printed.
- Emails should be managed appropriately and timeously. See Good Practice Guide: Good e-mail Management - A checklist for staff.

Naming records

Paper and electronic files, folders and documents should be given meaningful titles to allow easy location and understanding. Titles such as "general", "miscellaneous", and "John's file" are unhelpful and must be avoided. Where possible, a standard vocabulary should be adopted by each department. This will ensure that all staff refer to the same record by the same title.

Within an electronic system it is important to title individual documents coherently. The title should consist of a brief description, and the date on which it was created, e.g. "2004.23.11 Minutes", for the notes of a meeting. The series of minutes would be stored within a folder titled with the name of the group, e.g. "Finance Committee".

Closing files

The key to maintaining a usable, efficient filing scheme is closing files regularly. In this way, files remain manageable and damage to the records is less likely. Closing a file does not mean that it must be immediately removed from the filing system. Rather, this removal should be done as part of the annual review of records. Closing a file does mean that no new papers should be added to it, and that it must only be used for reference.

Files should be closed when:

- the file becomes too bulky (over 2cm / 1inch thick);
- the individual case has been completed;
- the project has been completed;
- papers have not been added to it for two years;
- the contents of the file span more than five years; or
- if appropriate, at the end of the calendar or financial year.

When a file is closed, this should be clearly marked on the file cover, a reference to the new file marked on the closed file, and a reference to the closed file marked on the new file.

Reviewing and destroying records

A review of the records held within your office should be carried out each year (the calendar or financial year as appropriate to the records). This is the time to ensure that records of low-value are not being kept, to destroy records which are time-expired and, where appropriate, to transfer records to the University Records Centre (URC). When transferring records to the URC, it is essential that the procedures set out by University Archive Services are followed.

This records review should be carried out in line with the records management guidance issued by the Records and Information Management Service. Your department may have its own records retention schedule, which sets the timescales and fate of each of the records series held by the department/office. If this is not the case, contact RIMS to discuss the creation of a bespoke retention schedule.

Further advice

For further advice on managing records and information in the office, please contact the:

Records & Information Management Service
tel: +44 (0)141 330 6494 or 5146
email: recman@glasgow.ac.uk