

Managing information

The key to managing information is good housekeeping.

This is a guide to the main principles of effective information management.

Save information of ongoing value onto University systems

Always use HWU email and IT systems for University work.

Save any information that you or colleagues will need to continue to use or see onto a University shared or home drive as soon as possible- preferably at the point of creation.

When working away from the University, the remote desk top service (VPN) will give you secure access to your home and shared drives. IT Help colleagues can provide advice on using the VPN.

The Heriot-Watt University One Drive is a secure alternative way to store and work on documents while away from work. Remember to save documents onto the shared or home drive when you return to work.

Save important emails to a shared filing system where they will be accessible to colleagues who have a business need to see them.

Organising information

Information relating to a specific project or activity can take many formats: from spreadsheets to tissue samples. The activity should be the starting point for organising these records, not the format. Applying consistent filing systems and naming conventions will identify all relevant information relating to the activity. This will also enable colleagues to readily find information if they need it in your absence.

Filing systems for electronic and paper records should reflect the functions and activities that they support.

For example

- Student recruitment
- Financial Management
- Learning and Teaching strategy

A classification scheme can combine valuable information about the

- organisation
- retention policy
- security status

of the records it describes.

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Within Teaching, a classification scheme may be structured like this

The middle column shows the confidentiality status of each category of information
MEDIUM RISK= controlled access; **LOW RISK** = open

The right hand column shows the retention policy.

E.g., D CAY +1 means Destroy one year after the current academic year. A means preserve in University Archive:

| | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| Strategy | M | A |
| Programme and course approval process | M | D:Life of programme+ 5 |
| Approved programmes and courses | M | A |
| Academic review | M | D: after next review |
| Professional accreditation | M | D: after next accreditation |
| Undergraduate handbooks | L | A: sample only |
| Individual courses by year: | | |
| Course content and delivery | M | D: CAY +1 |
| Feedback | M | D: CAY +1 |
| Review | M | D: after next review |

Most activities have a natural lifecycle – such as a project - or are cyclical and repetitive, taking place over a financial year e.g. budget management, an academic year e.g. examination management, or calendar year e.g. Performance and Development Review.

It makes sense to structure electronic and paper records systems to reflect these cycles. It is then easy to identify records from previous years when they are no longer in active use.

Identify and protect confidential information

The University uses a HIGH (red), MEDIUM (amber) and LOW (green) rating to identify confidential information based on the level of harm that would result if this information was lost, stolen or accidentally disclosed to others. More information is on our Information Security pages.

Naming and version controls

Consistent folder and file naming conventions and version controls are important tools as they help users to

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- retrieve the right information quickly
- link related files within the same folder
- identify the most current version of each document or file
- identify information that is no longer current

Using dates in file titles

Using a consistent date structure like YYYYMMDD either at the start of a file name or after a consistent prefix e.g., RC, to denote other files in the same series, will make the files appear in date order in the folder.

| |
|--------------------|
| RC20160627_Agenda |
| RC20160627_Minutes |
| RC20161003_Agenda |
| RC20161003_Minutes |
| RC20161219_Agenda |
| RC20161219_Minutes |

Version control

Using a consistent naming convention for work in progress also helps with version control. This is especially valuable when collaborating on documents with other people.

Working in SharePoint forces users to check out documents to work on them and then check in either a minor version (e.g. 1.1) to save the changes while in use or as a major version (e.g. 2.0) to “publish” i.e. share with other people who have access to the site.

There is also a prompt to summarise changes made to the document.

Other useful version control conventions are

Saving the file with a new name at each editing session to record minor or major changes e.g.

| |
|-------|
| V1.0. |
| V1.1 |
| V2.0 |
| V2.1 |

Saving the file with a new name ending with the date and last editor e.g.

| |
|--------------|
| 20160530JC |
| 20160530JCMY |

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| |
|------------|
| 20160601KE |
|------------|

Protecting the golden copy

Final versions of documents need to be identified and protected from accidental over writing or deletion.

Where reports, policies and other documents have completed an approval process, this can be reflected in the name of the document e.g.

CDP20151117_Aproved_FC

Secure final versions of policies, reports and papers from unintentional alteration by activating Microsoft Office or equivalent controls to restrict editing rights.

Protect vital records

Every School and Service relies on some vital records. We could not function as an organisation without them. Here are some examples:

| |
|------------------------------------|
| Timetables |
| Unique research data |
| Out of hours staff contact details |
| Payroll |
| Contracts |
| Student records |

Consider what records are vital for your area of work. These need to be securely stored and copied on to back up university systems. Restoring access to vital records is a key aspect of our disaster recovery and business continuity planning.