

## **GOVERNANCE SERVICES**

### **Records Management Good Practice**

#### **1. Introduction**

This guidance is intended for all staff employed by Edinburgh Napier University who create records, including emails, in their day-to-day work.

#### **2. What are Records?**

For the purposes of this guidance, records are recorded information in any form, including paper, email and other documents in computer systems, created or received by and maintained by the University and our staff in the conduct of our business. They are kept as evidence of our functions, activities and transactions. These records are the basis of organisational accountability, compliance with legislative requirements and the development of the corporate memory.

#### **3. Why do we need records management?**

The University's records are important sources of administrative, evidential and historical information. They are vital to the University in its current and future operations, including meeting legislative requirements, for the purposes of accountability, and for an awareness and understanding of its history and procedures. Records form part of the "corporate memory" of the University.

The need to improve the University's records management has become clear from several legislative developments including the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002. The Data Protection Act permits people to see information that the University holds about them, including information in emails and on personal drives of computers, if they make a subject access request. As of 1 January 2005 the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act will give people the right to access any other recorded information that the University holds. In both cases the legislation lays down statutory periods within which the University must respond to these requests for information; 40 calendar days for data protection and 20 working days for freedom of information.

These deadlines mean that the University must know what information it holds, and must be able to retrieve that information even if key staff are away.

We are not seeking to improve records management functions solely because of the impending legislation. Records management offers organisational benefits including:

- better use of physical and server space;
- better use of staff time;

- improved control of information sources;
- compliance with legislation and standards; and
- reduced costs.

The University believes that its internal management processes will be improved by increased internal availability of information.

#### **4. Who is responsible for records management?**

All staff who create, receive and use records have records management responsibilities. These can be summarised as a responsibility to create records, to capture them in an appropriate record-keeping system, and to destroy those records that are no longer required. Senior Management and Head of Departments have responsibility for ensuring that records controlled within their business area are managed in a way, which meets the aims of the University's records management procedures.

The University Secretary and Registrar has a responsibility to advise on the good governance of the University which includes ensuring that the University meets its statutory obligations. Day-to-day responsibility for ensuring that the University is fully compliant with records management legislation is delegated to the Records Manager.

#### **5. What information should I keep as a record?**

Exactly what records you keep will vary according to the work you do. Reasons for keeping records include:

- we need the information to carry out our business;
- there is a legal requirement to keep the information;
- we need the information for financial purposes;
- we will need the information to explain a particular decision; and
- we will need the information to be publicly accountable for our policies and decisions.

#### **6. What should I bear in mind when managing my emails?**

Emails are as much an official communication as is a letter, memo or fax. Your emails may be disclosed in response to a freedom of information or data protection request and in legal cases. Electronic messages can be legally binding; contracts can be set up via email and we may be held liable for defamatory statements in emails. For these reasons, do not say things in emails that you would not say in other forms of written communication.

If an email contains important information or an important decision, it should be added to the relevant paper or electronic file. When working on group

projects it is good practice for the project leader to set up a shared email folder within Outlook. This will enable members of staff to save and access emails relating to the project, this practice will reduce the amount of email duplication within personal inboxes.

Most emails are about ephemeral matters. It is a drain on the University's resources to store them on our system and to search them when we have to respond to a freedom of information or subject access request. Delete ephemeral or out-of-date emails as soon as they are no longer required; do not allow a backlog to accumulate as this becomes difficult to manage. Sent emails should also be deleted regularly.

## **7. How long should I keep information?**

We are developing guidance for the retention and disposal of records. In the meantime if you have a query regarding review or disposal periods for a particular document, please contact the Records Manager.

## **8. Working from home**

The Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act applies to all information that you create as part of your employment with the University, regardless of whether you work from home or in the office. The primary copy of information should not be stored at home, and the University's records should be updated with copies of the work that you do at home. If you are working with sensitive information, you should take precautions to prevent unauthorised access to that information, for example by ensuring that a copy is not saved to your home computer.

## **9. What help is available?**

Governance Services, which is based in Room 5.B.18, Sighthill Campus, provides advice, guidance and training on Data Protection, Records Management and Freedom of Information issues. Contact details are listed below:

| <b>Job title</b>                                       | <b>Tel. Number</b> |
|--|--------------------|
| Senior Governance Officer (Records Manager)            | 0131 455 6257      |
| Governance Assistant                                   | 0131 455 6255      |
| Senior Governance Officer, (Data Protection and Legal) | 0131 455 6359      |

And are also available at:

<http://staff.napier.ac.uk/services/secretary/Pages/uso.aspx>

**Governance Officer (Records Manager)**  
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