



UNIVERSITY OF
STIRLING

RECORDS MANAGEMENT

Managing Email – Good Practice Guidance

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Introduction

The use of electronic mail as a business communication tool within the University has grown to the extent that many transactions and decisions that were previously recorded on paper documents, such as letters and memos, are now solely recorded amongst the large volume of email messages sent and received by individual users. These messages often constitute important University records and need to be managed in the same way as other University records to ensure that information can be located when needed and is disposed of appropriately. This will benefit all staff in terms of business efficiency as well as helping to ensure the University complies with relevant legislation, particularly the Data Protection Act 1998 and Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002.

The following guidance is intended to inform good practice and procedure in both the appropriate use of email and the identification and management of record emails.

Glossary of Terms

The following definitions are given for terms used in this guidance.

Records:

Information “created, received and maintained as evidence and information by an organisation or person, in pursuance of legal obligations or in the transaction of business” (BS ISO 15489:2001)

Record Keeping System:

A system in which records are organised and maintained to enable operational access, maintenance and disposition.

Capture:

The actions taken to secure a record into a record keeping system along with sufficient information to describe the record and supply its context.

Filing System:

A system of organising, storing and identifying documents and records to enable their retrieval, use, and disposition. Can be either paper or electronic.

Filing:

The physical process of placing documents and records in the appropriate location and order within a filing system.

File:

A set of related documents and records (regardless of format) organised and kept together

Electronic Folder:

An area on the computer where electronic documents can be filed and organised, within the Windows operating system environment.

Shared Network Drive:

Electronic storage location on network accessible to a defined group of users.

Part 1 – Appropriate Use

The following section provides guidance on how to use email appropriately to help control and manage the volume of email received and limit the risks of inappropriate use. You must also ensure your use of email complies with the University's [Information Technology Use Policy](#) (available on the Information Services website) which addresses, amongst other things, allowable use, prohibited use, security, copyright and Data Protection Act matters.

1.1 When to Use Email

Before using email you need to consider whether it is the most appropriate or timely method of communication for the situation. In some circumstances other communication forms, such as a phone call or short meeting, may be better. Your decision on whether or not to use email should be based on factors such as the subject matter, availability of recipient and speed of response required.

For example:

- If the matter is complex, technical or in danger of being misunderstood, a phone call or meeting may be more appropriate. Consider that a 5 minute phone call or ten minute meeting can often resolve a matter which could otherwise take an hour or more over several days to settle by email.
- If the matter requires a quick reply, consider using the phone. Many employees receive many more emails than they can easily handle and their response may not fit your timescale.

Managers should:

- Avoid unnecessary use of email for discussion of employee performance issues. This limits the risks of messages being missent and the creation of unnecessary records which are disclosable under information access legislation. Such matters may be more appropriately dealt with through face to face discussion, with records of meetings created as necessary and in accordance with the relevant procedure.

Remember:

- Email use creates documents and records which then have to be managed and may be disclosable under information access legislation. If a matter which does not require a record to be kept can be easily settled by other means, don't use email.

1.2 Creating and Replying to Messages

The following guidance should be observed when creating, writing and responding to email messages.

1.2.1 Subject

As far as possible you should limit email to one subject per message. When creating the subject line of the message you should ensure that it:

- Clearly indicates the content of the message: Consider:

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A subject line reading “*Meeting*” tells us very little of its content (is it requesting a meeting?, informing of the date of a meeting? reporting the outcome of a meeting?) A title such as “*Smoking Policy Working Group: Meeting Date: 12 October 2005*” reflects the message content much more accurately and will help the recipient to act on the message appropriately.

- Indicates whether any action is required or whether the message is for information only. Using Outlook flags or phrases in the subject line, such as “FOR INFORMATION”, “FOR ACTION” or “NO REPLY NECESSARY” to indicate purpose, will help the recipient to identify and prioritise the message appropriately
- Indicates the priority level of the message. This should be done by use of the “high” or “low” importance Outlook flags or by adding text such as “URGENT” in the subject line. **N.B.** The high priority flag should be used sparingly and reserved only for those matters which require urgent and immediate attention
- Indicates whether the subject matter is sensitive. This can be done by adding text such as “CONFIDENTIAL” to the subject line.

1.2.2 Addressing Messages

When deciding who to send messages to you should consider the following:

- Only send messages to staff who actually need to know the information contained
- Only include recipients in the “To” field who are expected to act or take decisions based on the message content
- Include recipients in the “CC” field for information only and consider carefully whether these recipients really need to know
- The “BCC” field should not be used as we need to retain a record of all recipients of a message. If you do require this function you can forward the message to any additional recipients after sending instead
- Use the “reply all” function with care. It is unlikely that everyone included in the original message will need to know your reply – avoid information overload.

1.2.3 Content and Tone

When composing the message you should:

- Use neutral, professional language and tone - assume that anything you write will be published
- Avoid ill advised comments on individuals and ensure that you differentiate between fact and opinion
- Avoid angry emails – monitor the tone of the message and consider a delay, followed by a re-read before finally sending
- Take care to ensure that the message is inoffensive and cannot be construed as harassment, discriminatory, abusive or offensive. In this respect messages must comply with the University’s [Information Technology Use Policy](#) (section 3.3 “Prohibited Use”).

1.2.4 Structure and Grammar

You should take the same care over structure, spelling, grammar and punctuation when writing an email message as you would with a letter or memo. Professionalism extends to all forms of communication. In particular you should:

- Use plain English as far as possible and avoid abbreviations
- Use paragraphs to structure information
- Position important information at the beginning of the message
- Re-read to check spelling and grammar before sending (the spelling and grammar checking function can help with this but is not a substitute for proof reading).

1.2.5 Attachment Rules

The use of attachments to circulate information internally presents problems through the resulting proliferation of duplicate information in mail folders across the University (which must then be managed) and the increased use of server space.

Attachments in internal emails should be avoided as far as possible and only used where absolutely necessary. Consider the following alternatives:

- Try to include the information in the body of the message rather than an attachment where it is practical to do so
- Use a publish and point approach. Place a copy of the document in an accessible location on a shared network drive and send the pointer or link to the document in the email. This can be done by putting in a network path link using [Insert – hyperlink] then browsing to the document in the folder. Users can then link directly to the document in a single location.

In some circumstances, it may be appropriate for the document to be published on a web page (e.g. final version of a policy, procedure or guidance document), in which case the URL can be sent with the email message e.g. : <http://www.rec-man.stir.ac.uk/foi/documents/CommitteeConventions.pdf> .

1.2.6 Managing Dialogues

When managing email conversations with one or more people, the following should be observed:

- Restrict the message to one topic and try not to stray from it. Messages containing more than one topic are difficult to file and manage. If you need to discuss another matter with the recipient, write a new message
- If the subject changes significantly within a message string you should begin a new string by changing the title when you respond
- Always reply with the original message text. This provides the context to your response and allows a complete record of the exchange to be retained in a single message
- For internal message strings, delete all but the most recent

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- Do not annotate the original text in your response. Any formatting to distinguish your comments from the original text can easily be lost if any alteration is made to the original message format. Instead, make any comments separately.

1.3 Managing the Inbox

Many staff who receive large volumes of email may find managing their mailbox a difficult and onerous task, however there are steps that can be taken to alleviate this. There is no “right” way to organise a mailbox and you must follow a method that works best for you. Some approaches that may help to manage email messages within your mailbox to consider are:

- Allocate a fixed period of time in your schedule to read through and sort messages. This could be a small amount of time at the end of each day or a short period once a week
- Consider the sender, subject line and any flags to gauge the importance of a message
- Prioritise which messages need to be dealt with first
- Use Outlook functionality to set up a flag to indicate where you have been cc'd into email messages. Often these will be for information and will not require immediate, if any, action on your part
- Use folders to group related messages together. Where possible these should mirror existing file and folder structures in your paper and electronic record keeping systems
- Identify record emails and move them out of the email system promptly (this is covered in part 2)
- Promptly delete low value, non-record messages which are no longer needed for reference purposes from the inbox and sent items folders (this is covered in part 2)
- Use Outlook functionality where appropriate to set up rules, such as automatically moving messages sent to particular addresses to folders or flagging messages received from particular addresses.

For further details or advice on how to use Outlook functionality, please contact the IS Information Centre.

Part 2 – Identifying and Managing Record Emails

Email messages often constitute important records of University business and need to be managed in the same way as other University records to ensure that information can be located when needed and is disposed of appropriately. The following section provides guidance on measures that can be taken to effectively identify, retain and manage the emails created and received by the University which constitute our business records.

2.1 Identifying Email Records

A record has been defined as “*information created, received and maintained as evidence and information by an organization or person, in pursuance of legal obligations or in the transaction of business*” [BS ISO 15489: 2001).

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In broad terms, an email will be considered a record where it provides evidence of University business related activities, events and transactions which have ongoing business, compliance, operational or historical value.

The following (non-exhaustive) list of criteria should be considered when determining whether or not an email needs to be retained as a record.

If the answer is **YES** to any of the questions below, then the email is a record:

Does the message:

- Contain information which documents University decisions, including the discussion showing how the decision was arrived at?
- Document the formulation and execution of policy?
- Contain information upon which University business decisions will, or are likely to be, based?
- Commit the University or its staff to certain courses of action including the commitment of resources and provision or purchase of goods or services?
- Document the establishment, negotiation and maintenance of business relationships with clients (including staff and students)?
- Record contractual undertakings entered into by the University?
- Have long term value for future reference or historical purposes?

Is it needed to:

- Prove a business related event or activity did or did not occur?
- Demonstrate the initiation, authorisation or completion of a business transaction?
- Identify who took part in a business activity?
- Satisfy legal/compliance purposes?
- Facilitate business analysis and reporting?
- Display public accountability for policies or decisions?

If none of the criteria above are met, it is unlikely that the email has any record value. Specifically, emails should **not** be considered as records where they are:

- Circulated for information or reference purposes only e.g. event announcements
- Of short term operational value e.g. meeting arrangements
- Mass circulated communications received from external agencies which require no action and are not required for 'record' purposes. These may include newsletters, magazines, product information and flyers
- Personal.

Non-record emails can be deleted as soon as they are no longer needed. This should be done as soon as possible.

2.2 Responsibility for Keeping Email Records

When determining who has responsibility for capturing and keeping the "official" copy of an email record, the following conventions should be observed. **Please note:** This is a general rule to which there may be exceptions.

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For internal (i.e staff to staff) email records sent or received:

- The sender or initiator of the dialogue forming a message string is responsible for keeping
- If action is required by recipients, or the recipient is responsible for keeping the record on the matter communicated, they should also keep a copy

For email records sent externally (including from staff to student):

- The sender is responsible for keeping

For external email records received (including from students):

- By one person – the recipient is responsible for keeping
- By multiple recipients – the person responsible for the area of work relating to the message is responsible for keeping e.g an email from Universities Scotland containing information about a Freedom of Information issue received by the Principal, Director of Information Services and Records Management Office. As the Records Management Office is responsible for FoI compliance, they keep the record copy.

All other duplicate copies of record email messages can be deleted by users when no longer needed.

2.3 Managing Attachments

As outlined in 1.2.5 above, attachments should be avoided as far as possible for internal communication. However, they will still need to be used in many cases when sending and receiving external email, and in such cases a decision has to be made as to whether the message, attachment or both need to be kept as a record. Such decisions are dependent on context.

- In most cases the attachment and the message will need to be captured and stored together (ideally in their original electronic formats), as the message often provides the context to the attachment. This will mean saving the message with attachment embedded in .msg format to an appropriate shared network drive electronic folder (see 2.5 below). Alternatively they can be printed off together and filed in a paper filing system.
- In some cases the attachment may require further work, in which case you should capture both the original message and attachment together as a record and a separate copy of the attachment to work on. This separated attachment then becomes a new and distinct record.
- If the carrying message provides no context to the attachment, serving only as a compliment slip in effect, only the attachment need be retained.

Remember: Only separate an attachment from the carrying email message where the context of the email is not required to support the attachment.

2.4 When to File Email Records

Emails which need to be retained for longer than six months should be captured and filed as soon as possible (see 2.5 below).

Email exchanges often result in elongated dialogues stretching over a period of time. This presents a problem in determining the point at which to capture and file a record

email. It is not necessary to wait until the conclusion of the dialogue if it is likely to continue over a long period. You should capture the message and file it at significant points in the discussion, deleting all previous messages in the string.

2.5 Where to File Email Records

Email messages which are records and need to be kept for longer than six months should be moved out of the email system into a departmental/sectional record keeping system where they are kept in one place with all related records and accessible to all staff working in the same business area. This should be done, preferably by saving to electronic folders within an electronic filing system on an appropriate network shared drive, but can also be achieved by printing to paper and filing in paper based filing systems. Record emails which need to be kept for longer than six years should be printed and filed in paper based systems to ensure their long term accessibility.

The periods for which records need to be retained are determined according to business and regulatory requirements. Guidance on the retention of University records is available on the [Records Management Website](#).

The following guidance on where to file and manage email records should be observed:

- If the email is a record, but does not need to be kept for any longer than six months, it should be kept within the email system and filed in appropriate email folders which mirror any existing file and folder structures in your paper and electronic record keeping systems. It should be deleted promptly as soon as no longer required and in any event within the six months.
- If the email is a record which needs to be kept for longer than six months, but less than six years, it should be moved out of the email system into a suitable record keeping system, preferably to a shared network drive folder within an electronic filing system or printed and filed in a paper based system. If printing the message you should ensure that all header information (sender, recipient, date, subject) are displayed on the printout. Storage of emails in their original electronic format is preferred as this ensures that all the metadata (embedded information about the message) is captured and preserved. This approach also ensures that emails are kept together with all other electronic records relating to the same matter. Guidance on managing electronic records in shared network drives is available at: www.rec-man.stir.ac.uk.
- If the email is a record which needs to be kept for longer than six years it should be printed and filed in a paper based record keeping system. This position may be revised subject to the University developing a digital preservation strategy to ensure the long term accessibility of its electronic records.

A flow chart to help determine how to deal with email records is appended.

2.5.1 Instructions for saving to shared network folder

There are two methods which can be used to save messages to shared network drive electronic folders.

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- **“Save As” method:**

- 1) Highlight or open message.
- 2) Select “File” – “Save As”.
- 3) Use “Save in” option to browse to the shared network folder you wish to save the message in.
- 4) Amend “File name” to change the file title where appropriate (see 2.6 below).
- 5) Use the “Save as type” drop down menu to change to “Message Format”.
- 6) Select “Save”. The message will appear as a .msg format file in the selected folder.

- **Drag and Drop method:**

- 1) Locate and open the shared network folder you wish to save in.
- 2) Click on the message and drag it into the folder using the mouse. The message will appear as a .msg format file in the selected folder.
- 3) Rename the .msg file in the folder where appropriate (see 2.6 below).

N.B It is only the .msg file that should be renamed. The title of the original message within the file must not be altered.

Once saved to the shared network folder you should delete the original message from the Outlook mailbox.

2.6 Titling Email Messages in Electronic Folders

When an email message is saved into an electronic folder on the shared network, the title of the resulting .msg format file, which defaults to that of the original email message, is the main way in which the email record will be identified and retrieved. However, in many cases the title of the original message will not reflect its content or the reason for capturing it as a record and will make subsequent identification and retrieval difficult.

To facilitate the easy identification and retrieval of saved email records, the following conventions should be observed:

- If the default title of the saved email does not accurately reflect the content of the message then the .msg file title should be changed. For example, titles such as “*RE: Fol Request*” provide no information on content or purpose that would help identify relevant records relating to a particular case.
- The file title should provide sufficient information to identify its content.
- The file title should use natural language and spell words in full.
- The prefixes ‘*RE*’ and ‘*FW*’ should be omitted from titles as they provide no information on the message content.

For example, a series of emails saved to an electronic folder with the default titles “*Fol Request*”, “*FW: Fol Request*” and “*RE: Fol Request*” can be more meaningfully renamed as follows.

Fol Request - Expenses - Applicant’s Request
Fol Request - Expenses - Finance Consultation
Fol Request - Expenses - Response

N.B It is only the .msg file that should be renamed. The title of the original message within the file must not be altered.

For further guidance on naming conventions for electronic documents please see guidance on managing electronic records in shared network drives, available at: www.rec-man.stir.ac.uk .

Part 3 – Other Relevant Issues

3.1 Email When Out of Office

Appropriate arrangements for dealing with your email when you are out of the office for an extended period are essential to enable the effective conduct of our business and to ensure that we meet our legal obligations. As a matter of good practice, you should always set an out of office message indicating when you will return and providing an alternative point of contact. Please note: At present University out of office messages are not automatically sent externally.

There is a risk that the University could fail to comply with the 20 working day timescale under the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 where an information request is received in a member of staff's personal email account when they are out of office for a prolonged period. The risk varies depending on your role and the likelihood of external information requests being received in your account.

The following measures are recommended to ensure your email is monitored and actioned where necessary when you are out of office for an extended period:

- Use permissions to grant a colleague proxy access to your inbox, which they should check periodically for messages requiring immediate action.
- Set auto forward to re-direct email to a colleague (this can be configured in various ways to ensure only messages likely to require action are forwarded).

For further details or advice on how to use this Outlook functionality, please contact the IS Helpdesk.

Please note. In any event, the University may access your email account in these circumstances under section 3.9(c)(i.v) of the University's [Information Technology Use Policy](#).

3.2 Email Accounts of Leavers

Before leaving the University you should:

- Ensure that you have moved all record emails out of your personal mail folders into your departmental record keeping system (as per 2.5 above) where they are accessible to any colleagues who need them
- Delete all personal email messages and non-record emails from your account
- Set an out of office message giving an alternative contact
- Grant proxy inbox access to a colleague/s to enable your account to be checked periodically for messages requiring action.

Managers should:

- Confirm that record emails have been moved to the relevant departmental recordkeeping system (as per 2.5 above) prior to leaving date

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- Confirm an out of office message has been set on the last day
- Ensure that the leaver grants proxy access to their inbox
- Arrange with IS for access to the account if it is believed important record messages are still held on it.

Unless otherwise instructed, IS will close the account and dispose of data after it has been inactive for a period.

3.3 Use of Generic Email Addresses

Where possible, generic email addresses, accessible to a group of people, should be used in preference to personal email addresses. A generic email address is one which reflects a business grouping (academic or service department), function or role e.g. economics@stir.ac.uk or records.management@stir.ac.uk or academic.registrar@stir.ac.uk .

This allows a consistent contact point which will not change when staff change role or leave (ensuring mailing lists, web references and printed materials will not go out of date as quickly) and ensures a group of staff can access the generic mailbox to retrieve and action messages, reducing the risk of messages lying unattended in the personal mailboxes of absent staff.

Organisational measures should be in place to ensure that generic mailboxes are regularly checked and appropriately managed.

To organise a generic email address please contact the IS Information Centre.

For further advice or assistance on this matter please contact the Records Management Office:

Records.management@stir.ac.uk
www.rec-man.stir.ac.uk
X6672/6670

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Appendix

Identifying and Managing Record Emails – Decision Tree

