

# **Corporate Records Management Standards - Guidelines for Creating and Maintaining Electronic Filing Systems**

**UPR IM11 Appendix III version 07.0**

## **Policies superseded by this document**

This document replaces version 06.0 of UPR IM11 Appendix III, with effect from 1 September 2024.

## **Summary of significant changes to the previous version**

See Appendix I, UPR IM11.

## **Glossary**

A glossary of approved University terminology can be found in [UPR GV08](#).

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## **1 Purpose of Guidelines**

As most records are created electronically, shared storage areas (such as X:drive, OneDrive, SharePoint or MS Teams as appropriate) have superseded traditional paper filing systems as the main repository for storing records. As a result, due care and attention must be paid to how records and documents are saved, stored, organised and managed.

The University is committed to using an institution-wide electronic Document Management system to manage key University documents more effectively. These

guidelines have been written to help departments and SBUs to develop, implement and maintain a shared electronic fileplan<sup>1</sup> or filing structure.

## 2 Benefits

A well-managed shared area will provide the following benefits:

- provides clear, consistent folder structures for all records and documents
- supports effective information sharing
- aids search and retrieval process
- reduces duplication of records, assisting version control
- supports proper retention and disposal of records.

## 3 Creating the Folder Structure

The file plan structure should be a hierarchy of folders and sub-folders representing business functions (eg. student administration), activities (eg. Student records administration) and individual record series or types (student files).

Structures based on organisational structure or individual team members are ineffective as frequent changes in both team structure and members mean that file plans will quickly become out of date and meaningless. They are also not conducive to information sharing and retrieval.

The following sections describe the steps to be taken in order to build a file plan or folder structure which supports the way you work and complies with records management best practice.

### 3.1 Identify business processes and records

Before creating the structure it is a good idea to discuss amongst your team what functions and activities you carry out and the records you create as a result.

Use the University's top level file plan as a starting point, this can be found on the Information Management pages of HertsHub here:

<https://herts365.sharepoint.com/sites/Legal-and-compliance/SitePages/Documents-and-Records-Management.aspx>

The file plan has been based on the JISC classification scheme and retention schedule but adapted for the University. The JISC scheme can be used to help you create the lower levels of your file plan.

The file plan should begin with the main function at the top, progressing into sub-levels to represent the activities and split into further levels representing the record series created. For example, the structure for the function of Student Administration may look like this:

- Student Administration (FUNCTION)

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<sup>1</sup> Also referred to in records management terms as a classification scheme

- Application (ACTIVITY)
  - Application forms (RECORD SERIES)
- Admission (ACTIVITY)
- Student Records Administration (ACTIVITY)
  - Student Files (RECORD SERIES)

Or for a finance related function

- Financial Management (FUNCTION)
  - Accounts (ACTIVITY)
    - End of year accounts (RECORD SERIES)

### 3.2 Arranging the records

The next step is to determine how the records within each folder should be arranged (eg by date, alphabetically, by order number etc.). This should support retrieval requirements and the retention and removal of out-of date records, where possible.

For example, year folders can be added to enable retrieval and retention of documents as follows:-

- Financial Management
  - Accounts
    - Year End Accounts 2006-2007
    - Year End Accounts 2007-2008
    - Year End Accounts 2008-2009

Not only does it make it clear which records are where for retrieval purposes, structuring records in this way means that the folder and its contents can be destroyed at the same time once they have passed their retention (7 years in the case of finance related material).

Another example is meeting minutes which are usually retrieved according to date; therefore, it may be sensible to name a set of minutes with the date featuring first, ensuring the most recent set of minutes is filed at the top;

2008-10-31-Marketing Team meeting  
2008-09-30-Marketing Team meeting

Project files could be created by project and would be structured either alphabetically by project name or numerically by project number where such a

number exists (see 3.3 **File codes**). It may also be helpful to have a closed projects folder, which projects can be moved to once they have been completed.

### 3.3 File codes

File codes (eg project number) may be used to name files in order to aid identification and retrieval. They can be numeric or alphanumeric in design but should be as simple and short as possible. Any numbering system used should be documented so everyone is aware of it.

### 3.4 General rules for electronic filing structures

There are some general common sense practices which should be followed when creating structures for an e-filing system. These are:

- the top level of the structure should not include too many folders. No more than nine (9) folders is recommended but there may be times when it is practical to exceed this
- try not to have a mix of folders and documents on the same level; all documents should be assigned a folder
- avoid creating folders for one or two files as this creates too many layers of information which slows down the retrieval process
- once a structure at the top level has been decided upon, extra folders should not be added to this level unless absolutely necessary and should be done by a nominated member of the team (see section 5.)
- do not use overly verbose folder names – the full path to a document should be less than 255 characters

## 4 Naming Files and Folders

It is important to have clear titling conventions which all staff using the folder structure can use and adhere to.

- Folder titles should be clear, consistent and reflect the contents. Personal names and generic terms (eg General, Miscellaneous) must not be used
- All related records and versions should follow the same naming structure with the same elements being used in the same order.
- Dates should follow the international date format of YYYY-MM-DD (eg 2005-11-05 for 5<sup>th</sup> November 2005) as this will file documents in date order.
- Acronyms can be used only if they are familiar to the user group, eg UH, otherwise names should be written in full. Where acronyms are used, a glossary of these should be written and publicised for all users.
- Documents stored in a repository that maintains version information, such as the Document Management System or Office 365, should not include version in the filename.

## 5 Implementing and Maintaining the Folder Structure

The file plan needs to be implemented properly if it is to be adopted and used effectively by all members of the team. The following good practice pointers will help you to do this.

- Establish and write local guidelines on managing your shared filing structure to include folder structure and descriptions and file numbering and naming conventions.
- Make all new and existing staff aware of these guidelines and the folder structure. Provide training where necessary.
- Put time aside to weed and transfer files from old shared areas and folders to the new structure. See section 1 of the Records Management Standards for help on identifying records and what needs to be retained.
- Nominate a member of staff as administrator for the shared area to do the following:
  - create new folders and ensure any changes in work practices and activities are reflected in the folder structure
  - document any changes to the structure or naming conventions
  - check for duplication and misfiling
  - carry out regular health checks on the structure and content of the shared area
  - ensure naming conventions are being adhered to
  - make sure unnecessary and out of date folders and documents are weeded out regularly in line with local and University retention policies.

For help or further information please contact the Records Manager.

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Secretary and Registrar  
Signed: **3 January 2023**

### Alternative format

If you need this document in an alternative format, please email us at [governanceservices@herts.ac.uk](mailto:governanceservices@herts.ac.uk) or telephone us on +44 (0)1707 28 6006.