

MANAGING E-MAIL

This guidance focuses on managing e-mails as records of the university's activities. E-mail is increasingly used to carry out university business, which means that many important university records are stored in individual staff in-boxes. This creates a number of risks for the university if e-mails cannot be located or are deleted. This guidance aims to highlight the importance of managing e-mails and outlines a number of good practice principles.

Further guidance is also available on e-mail etiquette, acceptable use and the security aspects of e-mail – please see the links at the bottom of this document for further information.

1. Why Manage E-mail?

There are a number of risks associated with unmanaged e-mail -

- *Important business records may be inaccessible or lost*

Email is increasingly used to confirm actions and agree contracts. Such emails are business records but they are often treated in the same way as other e-mails and are left in the inbox of the recipient or in a personal folder. This means that e-mails are not accessible to colleagues and could easily be deleted by mistake.

- *E-mail can be disclosed to comply with legal obligations*

E-mails may have to be retrieved and disclosed to comply with legal obligations such as the Data Protection and Freedom of Information Acts. This can create risks if e-mails cannot be located, are badly organised or have been written unprofessionally.

- *E-mails being kept for too long*

Without a systematic approach to managing e-mail, e-mails may be kept for far too long when they should have been destroyed. This creates a number of risks –

- the more e-mails you have the more difficult it is to find the ones you need
- a possible breach of the Data Protection Act if e-mails containing personal data are kept for longer than necessary
- e-mails having to be retrieved and disclosed to comply with legal obligations when they should really have been deleted
- records may be being kept beyond the retention period specified by university policies
- you will regularly receive messages to say your mailbox is full!

2. Types of E-Mail and how to manage them

There is no perfect solution to the problem of managing e-mail, but it can help to understand the three main types of e-mail and how they should be handled. Please see the table at the end of this guidance for further detail, but in summary: -

Type 1 – Business Records (master copies)

These are key e-mails which record contracts and agreements, policy decisions, records of expenditure and other important information. These type of e-mails should not be retained within an individual e-mail in-box, but should be moved to an appropriate file –

this may mean, for example, saving to a shared folder or printing to a paper file. The original e-mail should then be deleted.

Type 1a) – Business Records (duplicates)

There is no need for every member of staff who receives an important e-mail to save it to a file. There should be a shared understanding of who is responsible for retaining records of a particular project or issue, so that staff with duplicate e-mails can confidently delete them.

Type 2 – Short Term Reference

E-mails which are not business records but which are needed for day to day reference should be retained within a folder within your e-mail in-box for a temporary period. When the project or issue has finished the folder should then be deleted.

Type 3 – Ephemeral E-mails

Ephemeral e-mails such as an informal conversation, rearranging a meeting, checking something with a colleague etc should be deleted once no longer needed.

3. Who is responsible for managing e-mail as records?

Where e-mails are business records normally one person should be responsible for ensuring all records relating to an issue or project are saved. This should be agreed at the beginning of a project, so that other staff can confidently delete all duplicate records. Some examples could be –

Student Complaint – the Complaints Officer and LiSS could ensure a master copy of relevant e-mail records of the complaint are retained. All duplicate copies of e-mails held by other staff should then be destroyed.

Project – The Project Manager should ensure all relevant e-mail records relating to the project are retained. All duplicate copies of e-mails held by other staff should then be destroyed.

Committee Records – The Secretary and Chair will normally be responsible for ensuring that e-mails relating to the business of a committee are retained. All duplicate copies of e-mails held by other staff should then be destroyed.

4. When should an e-mail be saved as a record?

E-mails can be saved at a number of different stages depending on the particular issue they relate to. Some examples are: -

- where the e-mail is obviously significant save it as soon as received or sent
- at the end of a project you could save all significant e-mails and then delete the remainder (or keep for a short period then delete).
- When saving e-mail conversation 'threads', you could either save as soon as it is clear that the conversation is finished, or if this is not clear, save at the point when a definite conclusion or decision has been reached. You only need to save one copy of the full 'thread' and not each individual e-mail.

5. How should shared e-mail in-boxes be managed?

When using shared e-mail in-boxes (e.g. 'admissions', 'IT Service Desk' etc), it is important that the users of the in-box have a shared understanding of how messages will be managed. The following areas should be agreed –

- who should answer which messages and how this will be indicated (e.g. colour coding or flagging)?
- how should users indicate that a message has been read or is being progressed?
- who is responsible for capturing any business records contained in the e-mails?
- where will the different types of e-mails be retained if needed for reference?
- How long will messages in the in-box be retained for and who is responsible for this?

6. How should attachments be managed?

There are risks associated with retaining e-mails with their attachments in your mailbox, in particular: -

- older versions of documents will be retained in your in-box and may then need to be disclosed to comply with legal obligations, even when they should have been deleted
- attachments will increase the size of your in-box
- retaining duplicate versions of documents within your e-mail can create confusion as to which version is the correct one

Good practice principles to follow are: -

- avoid using attachments where possible – instead send a link to a shared folder or to a website/StaffNet. This will prevent the multiplication of different versions within e-mails.
- If you do need a record that a document has been sent consider whether you should save/print to file a copy of the e-mail and attachment together
- Follow version control protocols so that it is always clear which version of a document has been circulated and to whom.

7. How long should e-mails be kept for?

E-mails which are being managed as business records should be retained in line with university policy depending on the type of information they contain. If e-mails are saved to the relevant file outside of your in-box then the file should be destroyed in line with the retention period for the file (e.g. if a student file, this would normally be 6 years after graduation).

E-mails which are not being managed as records should be retained in your e-mail in-box for a temporary period and then deleted once no longer needed. When deleting e-mails remember to regularly empty your deleted items folder.

8. Further guidance on E-mail use

This guidance covers the records management aspects of e-mail. Further guidance on other aspects of e-mail use is available as follows: -

[Acceptable use](#)
[E-mail etiquette](#)
[Information security/data protection](#)

[Shared Area Management, Naming Conventions, Version Control and Records Retention](#)
(ie. how long records should be retained for).

External References:

[JISC InfoNet – Managing Information to Make Life Easier](#)

[JISC InfoNet – Managing E-mail InfoKit](#)

[The National Archives – Managing E-mails](#)

Types of E-mail Message and How to Manage them

<i>Type of e-mail</i>	<i>Examples</i>	<i>How to manage</i>	<i>Where to Store</i>	<i>Other issues</i>
Type 1 Business Record – master copy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> formal agreements/ contracts approval to spend money legal advice record of a decision record of a complaint or appeal 	<p>File alongside other records relating to the topic (e.g. save to student file)</p> <p>Remember to delete the original e-mail</p>	<p>Some examples could be: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a shared folder on the Z Drive a folder on your H Drive (only for confidential or personal issues which are not suitable for sharing) a paper file a specialist electronic system designed for storing records a shared team e-mail in-box 	<p>When saving to shared areas remember to make sure the title of the e-mail is short and meaningful. If necessary rename the e-mail when you save it.</p> <p>Remember that long titles may cause difficulties when trying to open the message in future.</p> <p>See also guidance on managing shared areas, naming conventions and version control.</p>
Type 2 Short term reference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not a business record, but needed for day to day work reference 	<p>File temporarily within outlook folder structure. Delete folder when no longer needed.</p>	<p>Set up a folder structure within your e-mail in-box. Where possible this should mirror or relate to other folder structures – e.g. shared areas.</p> <p>These types of e-mails should be stored temporarily in these folders. The folder should then be deleted when the project or issue is complete.</p>	<p>Remember to delete both received and sent items.</p> <p>Ensure folder titles are meaningful as e-mails may need to be retrieved to comply with legal obligations.</p>
Type 3 Ephemeral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> informal discussions agreeing to meet checking something with a colleague 	<p>Delete as soon as no longer needed</p>	<p>Store temporarily in your e-mail in-box and then delete</p>	<p>Remember to delete both received and sent items.</p>