

File and Folder Management Guidance for staff

This guidance covers best practice in managing files (documents including emails) and folders at the School.

Why this guidance

Only about 20% of electronic records are structured. Unlike paper files, where good record keeping practice has been established, unstructured electronic records are liable to flawed standards of management. The following good practice guidelines give examples on how to improve electronic record keeping.

The principles of good record keeping are:

- That records can be accessed easily by those who need them
- That records are kept securely so that people who shouldn't see them can't
- That records are managed from creation to disposal and not kept longer than they need to be

The guidance below will help to meet those principles and by minimising the amount of files we create take up less storage space, making searches easier and reducing carbon impact.

Definitions

File – this refers to an electronic file, not a paper one. Electronic files are any discrete computer generated package of data and information which does not form part of a database or system. For example, documents, spreadsheets, emails etc.

Document – another name for a file. I will be using file and document to mean the same thing throughout this guidance.

Folder – a container for files/documents.

Format – the type of file e.g. Word Document, pdf, Excel Spreadsheet.

Primary copy – the main copy of the document which should be linked to

Convenience copy – a printout or electronic copy that will be destroyed immediately after use e.g. after a meeting has been held.

Naming Conventions

File/Document titles.

A good title for a document will describe content, making it easier for a user to find what they are looking for. This includes using a proper subject line for emails.

Good file titles include:

- Guidance File and Folder Management
- Letter J Smith Complaint Response
- Policy Data Protection

Bad file titles include:

- Doc.docx
- Doc2.docx
- DM(7).msg
- Nothing in the subject line of an email

It is useful to say what the document is about e.g. Guidance, Annual Report, Financial Report first and then follow with the subject. It means that all document types will bunch together to make them easier to look for in a folder. If you are using metadata, you may not need to put the document type in the file name (see below, Utilising metadata and classification).

You can use abbreviations where these are obvious to you and your colleagues. For example, I use DPIA rather than Data Protection Impact Assessment.

If a file relates to a student, use their student number rather than their name as that is more unique to the student.

Folder names

Use subject headings for folder names. This makes documents easy to find and means that they can be managed correctly through their life cycle. For example, the folder name 'Departmental meeting minutes 2008-09' not only describes content but when the folder and the documents it contains were created. Once the retention period has been reached, it is easy to tell if the file can be deleted. For example, I have a folder in my OneDrive called 201920 for all the documents that were finished in that year.

Version control including pre and post publication

Use the version number in your document title to trace the various changes.

Use [File title] v1.0, [File title] v2.0 etc for major changes and [File title] v1.1, [File title] v1.2 etc for minor changes. Once a document has been finished, mark it as 'Final.' If you are not using Teams or SharePoint, it is worth designating one colleague as the 'librarian' for these documents so that someone will have stored the definitive versions.

Pre publication files can be labelled as version 0.1 etc. At first publication, all files should be versioned as 1.0, then follow the guidance above for major and minor changes.

Within SharePoint/OneDrive, versioning is [automatic](#). You can access previous versions of a document by opening Version History.

More than one storage area?

Use the same names across shared drive, Outlook, Teams folders, SharePoint folders and paper folders. Hybrid filing, such as this, can make it easier to see duplications between your paper and electronic files, and helps embed a coherent filing system into a team.

Managing Retention and Disposal

Where to save files

Save documents onto a shared space, such as Teams, SharePoint or shared drives. This means that information can be shared and accessed amongst team members. H: space and OneDrive should only be used for documents which relate to sensitive issues, or issues which are personal to you. All documents relating to your work should be in the shared spaces. Where a group of people need access to sensitive information, folders on shared drives can be restricted. You should contact your IT cluster support about this.

Aside from emails which are saved by default into Outlook, format does not matter when it comes to saving files. It is subject matter that should determine where to save. You should not have an Excel folder, but spreadsheets should be put where most appropriate e.g. student marks data in an assessment folder, budget information into a budgets folder.

There is also [guidance](#) on the best places to store particular information at the School e.g. course related information should be in Moodle.

Why shouldn't I keep files forever?

Information has a life cycle, where it is created or collected, used and then disposed of. A small amount of the business personal data we create will be of historical importance, but most can be deleted when we no longer need it. If we are keeping personal data past the point it is necessary to, we are breaching the 5th data protection principle. Any files kept will be recoverable under legal hold, freedom of requests and data protection requests. It makes it harder to conduct searches if there is a lot of material that we no longer need clogging up our storage spaces.

How should I destroy files?

Electronic data should be deleted from recycled bins and backups when we no longer need to retain it. Paper based data should be destroyed via the School's secure destruction service if in the office or shredded or redacted via stamping or black marker pen (cover the personal data on both sides of a document) if at home.

By adding the year (academic or calendar) to a folder, that tells you when the contents were created and helps to manage retention of the folder. For example most financial data does not need to be kept for more than 7 years, so a Budget 2020/21 folder would only need to be kept until end of July 2027/28.

How long should I keep files for?

The School has a [general retention schedule](#) and [academic department retention schedule](#). If you are unsure how long to keep files and folders, contact glpd.info.rights@lse.ac.uk for further guidance.

The likelihood that you will need to keep anything permanently is low, but if you want to check the School's [Archive policy](#) is available.

Sharing files and documents

Primary and convenience copies

The primary copy of a document is the single copy that is saved to OneDrive, SharePoint, Teams etc that will be linked to for reading access or collaboration purposes.

Convenience copies can be used for editing or use in meetings, but then must be destroyed as soon as possible after the editing or meeting is over.

Links not attachments

Instead of sending an attachment when sharing files, use a link instead if the file is in Teams, SharePoint or OneDrive. It means that if you send it to the wrong person, you can just remove their access via the link. Once you've sent an attachment, it could end up anywhere. That said, if you are sending a document externally, it can only be sent as an attachment unless that person has access to Teams, SharePoint or OneDrive.

All files which are intended for collaboration should be linked to in an email rather than sending it as an attachment and creating a new copy. This is the default in Outlook. Attachments should only be sent in the following cases:

- Providing a template
- Providing a document for signing

Folder Structure for Managing Files

Should we organise by team member?

No. What you create is not 'your' files, they are the School's files. Organising shared spaces by team member name makes it hard to find what they have created after they have left or even while they are still there.

What is a better way of structuring folder?

Based on what your team does. For example, here is a suggested departmental folder structure:

- 0. Archive
- 1. Teaching and Curriculum
- 2. Assessments
 - 2015.16 Assessment Year
 - Formative Assessments
 - EX212
 - EX213
 - EX458
 - EX501
 - Summative Assessments
 - Resits
 - 2016.17 Assessment Year
 - 2017.18 Assessment Year
- 3. Student Records
 - Current Students
 - 2018.9 Graduating Year
 - 2019.20 Graduating Year
 - 2020.20 Graduating Year
 - Prospective Students
 - 2016.17 Intake Applicants
 - 2017.18 Intake Applicants
 - 2018.19 Intake Applicants
- 4. Alumni Records
- 5. Publication Records
- 6. Learning Support
- 7. Financial Records
- 8. HR Records
- 9. External Communications
- 10. Research

You could put this in a slightly different order e.g. with the academic year and then assessments, student records etc, but all staff should be using the one structure and any new staff will know where to look for a file.

What about research data and related documents?

Guidance on [managing research data](#) is available on the School's website. Associated documentation like contracts, informed consent forms, etc can be kept in a separate folder relating to the research

project for up to 7-10 years after the end of the project (depending on what your funder requires).

Utilising Metadata and Classification

What is metadata?

Sometime this gets the somewhat unhelpful definition of being data about data. However, it is whatever you could use to describe your file or document. So examples of metadata relating to files are:

- The file title or subject of an email
- Date created
- Date modified
- Author
- Keywords
- Security classifications

Searching on metadata or refining a search with metadata can be a much better way of finding files and documents. Further guidance on how to apply keywords and security classifications will be forthcoming.

What are keywords?

Keywords are subject descriptors e.g. accounts payable, recruitment, student wellbeing, etc. They can either be created by users (e.g. folksonomies) or by information professionals (taxonomies, thesauruses). Keywords can help with searching by gathering together like documents in a way that general search does not. For example, a general search on 'student wellbeing' could bring up files with student or wellbeing or student wellbeing together whereas a keyword search for 'student wellbeing' as a term would bring up all documents tagged with that keyword.

Security classifications

The School has a set of security classifications. The standard is [here](#), but in brief they are:

- [Confidential](#) – information of significant value to the School and special categories data as defined in [Article 9](#) of the General Data Protection Regulation.
- [Restricted](#) – open to staff and students but not to the general public. Includes normal personal data.
- Public – can be provided to anyone.

The standard has examples of what fits into each category. Further guidance is linked to in the list above. The most restrictive category wins in a group of files or folders. That is if you have a mix of confidential, restricted or public files in a folder, the overall category for that folder will be confidential. If you have a mix of restricted or public files, the overall category would be restricted.

To apply the standard can be difficult as we do not have an automatic way of applying metadata to documents at this point in time. However, you can apply the standard manually these ways:

- On cover papers for committees, boards and other meetings
- Within the Header or Footer of a document or template
- Using the Categories function in Outlook
- Setting up a column in SharePoint

Please contact the Information and Records Manager if you want more details on any of the above.

Review schedule

Review interval	Next review due by	Next review start
3 years	30/11/2026	01/11/2026

Version history

Version	Date	Approved by	Notes
1	23/10/2020	IGMB	No changes as at 6/11/23
1.1	15/01/2024	IGMB	Minor changes

Links

Reference	Link

Contacts

Position	Name	Email	Notes
Information and Records Manager	Rachael Maguire	r.e.maguire@lse.ac.uk	

Communications and Training

Will this document be publicised through Internal Communications?	Yes/ No
Will training needs arise from this policy	Yes/ No
If Yes, please give details	