

Guidance on Tracking Records

1. For whom is this guidance intended?

This guidance is intended for freedom of information practitioners responsible for setting up records management systems in their part of the University.

2. What is the purpose of this guidance?

The aim of this guidance is to help you set up a records tracking system to ensure you know where your paper records are. When implemented, the records tracking system will enable you and your colleagues to quickly locate the information you need to carry out your job.

3. Why do we need a records tracking scheme?

Records tracking is the component of a records management system that ensures that you can locate records when you need to use them. Accurate recording and knowledge of the whereabouts of all paper records is essential if the information they contain is to be located quickly and efficiently. One of the main causes of lost records is that their next destination is not recorded anywhere.

If a member of staff is away, other staff need to know what information is held by them and how to locate it. A records tracking system used by everyone in the business area will enable staff to locate the required information even if relevant staff are absent.

We need records tracking to keep track of the records we hold so that they can be located and managed effectively, and so that we can respond to freedom of information or data protection requests within the statutory deadlines.

4. What is involved in records tracking?

The physical movement of paper records should be documented to ensure that they can be located when required. The records tracking system should be able to record the item number, a description of it (such as a title), the person or business area having possession of the item, the date of movement and the new location of it.

5. Whose responsibility is it to set up a records tracking system?

It is the responsibility of each business area to develop and implement a records management system for the records it holds. Records tracking is a vital part of that records management system. This might be implemented by the nominated practitioner for the specific area concerned.

Individual staff are responsible for complying with any system which is set up and the Records Management Section is available to provide advice about introducing and operating a records tracking system.

6. How can I track records?

Where the number of file movements is less than 400 per week, manual systems such as location cards, index cards, docket books, and file transfer slips will suffice. Serious consideration should be given to the use of computer databases when there are more than 400 file movements per week. An electronic system can reduce the amount of paper generated, and therefore the volume of paper to be stored. It can be more efficient by speeding up information retrieval times and reducing misfiling. Also, several people can use a database at the same time.

Irrespective of the system chosen, whether paper-based or electronic, the most important part of any tracking system is that it is supported by adequate equipment and is able to deliver the information users need quickly and accurately. Its success will ultimately depend upon the people using it, so staff should have adequate training to ensure they are aware of its importance and can use it accurately and efficiently.

There are three components to any system which tracks paper records:

- Central records,
- Documentation which travels with the file, and
- Periodic check/annual census.

The main elements of these are summarised in the following table. The remainder of this guidance gives more information about these techniques.

What	When	Where	How
Central records			
Out list	When a record is sent out of the central location	Central location	Lists all records out of the central location and where they are
File location card	When a record is sent out of the central location	Replaces the file in the central location	Shows the current location of the file and needs to be updated when transferred
Docket book	When a record is sent out of the central location	Central location	Can be used to track who has used a file
Documentation which travels with the file			
File movement sheet	When a file is transferred to a new location	Travels with file	Can be used to track who has used a file

File transfer slip	When a file is transferred to a new location	Travels with file, transfer slip sent to central location if file passes to new user	Used to ensure the central location is aware of files being transferred
Periodic check/census			
Periodic check form (census form)	Once a year	Sent to users who have files booked out to them	Reminds staff to return old files and updates the records kept at the central location

7. What central records should be made?

Out lists, file location cards and dockets are three ways of maintaining a record of an individual file's location at a central place.

Out lists are a means of retaining a central list of the location of files. They list all files that are currently out of the central location and where they are. Out lists are a simple way of keeping a summary of what is being used, how many files are being used and where they have been sent in a single document. For example, the Out list at Annex A can be used to summarise file usage in the business area; or it can be modified and stored as a spreadsheet in Excel or similar software. On occasions where file location cards and dockets are not regularly filled in by users, out lists can be an especially useful tool for maintaining accurate details of where the record can be found.

When a file is removed from its usual location, a file location card can be retained in its place so the file can be located later. If the file location card is kept up to date, then it is possible to know at all times where each record should be. For example, if the file location card at Annex B is used, it should replace the file at the file's usual location so that staff can go straight to the usual location and identify where the file should now be. If the file is passed to another user, the file location card should be updated with information about the file's new location.

Docket books are an alternative option for keeping a central record of the location of several files and can be stored at the usual location of the files or somewhere else accessible to staff who need to know where the file is located. Dockets are forms which record the reference, title and location of a document. They can be used to track who has used the file and when it was used. For example the Dockets at Annex C should be stored in a folder and staff can refer to the records to confirm when certain files were used and by whom.

8. What documentation should travel with the file?

File movement sheets and transfer/transit slips travel with individual files and can be used to track who and when specific files were used.

A file movement sheet can be kept with the file at all times to monitor who has used the file in the past. For example the file movement sheet at Annex D can be used to identify who used the file and when it was used. This may be important in legal cases. The file movement sheet also provides an indication of the level of usage so when it comes time to destroy the file or transfer it to archives, then you can check the movement sheet to see if the file has been used recently. If it has, you should consider extending the retention period.

File movement sheets can also be used for reasons other than tracking the location of specific files. A file movement sheet will help you identify who has used the file and when it was used. The need to track who has looked at a record over time, whether or not any changes were made, is a decision based on a number of factors, including the risks involved in not collating this tracking information. In some cases, it may be very important and in others the benefit may be negligible but a consistent approach will minimise confusion. For example, it is unlikely that internal procedures documents such as the planning round instructions would be challenged in court, whereas it is possible that the University may need to demonstrate for audit or legal reasons when a research proposal was changed and who changed it.

When a file is transferred to somebody else, a file transfer slip can be filled out and sent back to its usual location so that the file location card can be updated with the new location. For example the file transfer slip at Annex E is a useful way to ensure that the central location is aware of the location of files at all times. If they are used it is important that all staff send them to the central location quickly after receiving a new file. Ideally the file transfer slip should be copied on bright coloured paper and be the first page seen when someone opens a file so that they are encouraged to fill it in straight away and send it to the file's usual location.

9. How do periodic checks/censuses assist in records tracking?

A periodic record check (also called a record census or audit) is used to confirm that files sent out to users still exist and are with the person they are meant to be with. These checks should be conducted once a year.

The periodic check form shown at Annex F can be sent to users who have records booked out to them and asks them to fill in updated information about the location of particular records. It reminds staff to return files which are no longer needed, to advise that the files are still needed or have been transferred – so that the appropriate file location cards can be updated.

10. How do I track the location of records?

The level of activity and the risk that files will be misplaced will determine the level of documentation required to track the record.

The objective is to record who has the file and where it is so that it can be located if required. So, if files move within your immediate business area then you may not need to record this daily movement provided the file is returned to its usual

location at the end of each day. If the file moves outside your immediate business area, it is important update the file's current location in the records tracking system (for example on a file location card, in a docket book or in a computer database).

12. What help is available?

The University Records Management Section provides advice, guidance and training on data protection, records management and freedom of information issues. Much information is available on our website, www.recordsmanagement.ed.ac.uk or we can be contacted at recordsmanagement@ed.ac.uk

David Halliday
September 2005



The University of Edinburgh

(insert business unit name)

File location card

File reference			
Date	Requested by	Location and/or contact phone	Returned date



The University of Edinburgh

(insert business unit name)

File location card

File reference			
Date	Requested by	Location and/or contact phone	Returned date



The University of Edinburgh

(insert business unit name)

Docket

File title			File number		
Sent to	Date	Sent to	Date	Sent to	Date



The University of Edinburgh

(insert business unit name)

Docket

File title			File number		
Sent to	Date	Sent to	Date	Sent to	Date



The University of Edinburgh

(insert business unit name)

File Movement Sheet

Keep this sheet as the top page of the file at all times.

File no: _____

Charged to	Date	Date returned	Charged to	Date	Date returned

Add another sheet when this one is full. Retain previous sheets on file.



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(insert business unit name)

File Transfer Slip Sheet

To: _____ (usual file location)

Please complete this form when you pass a file to someone else so that a central record can be kept of the file's current location.

Please remember that the file booked out to you is your responsibility and you must be able to produce it on request.

File number (include section or part no where appropriate)	Passed to (individual's name)

From: _____ Date: _____



The University of Edinburgh

(insert business unit name)

File Transfer Slip Sheet

To: _____ (usual file location)

Please complete this form when you pass a file to someone else so that a central record can be kept of the file's current location.

Please remember that the file booked out to you is your responsibility and you must be able to produce it on request.

File number (include section or part no where appropriate)	Passed to (individual's name)

From: _____ Date: _____

(insert business unit name)

[illegible]



The University of Edinburgh

(insert business unit name)

Periodic Check (Records census)

To: _____ Department: _____

The following files have been booked out to you. Please indicate the current location of the file and return this form to Central Registry.

File number	Title/subject	Date sent	Please indicate whether the file is:		
			Attached to this memo, or	Still retained by yourself, or	To whom and when you passed it on

Date: _____ Signed: _____