

# Case Study: University of Edinburgh

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## ***1. Overview***

The general aim of the case study is to explore the real-world potential for implementing identified Greening Information Management (GIM) methods. Each case study undertaken will determine current information management practice across a specific information service/collection within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). It will then assess the feasibility of implementing GIM methods within that environment and consider the costs and benefits to the organisation as a result of such implementation(s).

## ***2. Introduction***

The University of Edinburgh obtained its charter from King James IV in 1582 and was Scotland's fourth University but the first founded by civic authorities. It has 10,000 employees, 25,000 students, 300 buildings, 3 Colleges, 21 schools, led by Research at an international level.

Within the institution, work is already underway to introduce energy-saving practices. Within EDINA, for example, a member of staff was designated to make available information about how staff members can play their part in reducing energy consumption. This information has been made available in common areas, and on the EDINA Intranet. There has been extensive labelling of light switches allowing staff to recognise lights that do not need to be left on all day. Awareness has been raised about switching off all electrical equipment when it is not needed, both in the office and at home.

EDINA is currently working on a check-list of things that staff members can do to ensure that they are minimising their energy usage at work. Policy guidance will be made available to make staff aware of the costs of printing, both in terms of finances and impact on the environment. EDINA is also deploying time switches on electrical equipment that does not need to be left on overnight.

Relating more specifically to information, the records management department provides the institution with advice and guidance to manage (paper and electronic) records effectively. The priority is to manage records, whatever their format, so that the University can locate information when it needs it, and disposes of information that it no longer needs. The institution holds a retention schedule

(<http://www.recordsmanagement.ed.ac.uk/InfoStaff/RMstaff/RMguidance.htm#RetentionSchedule>) and advice on how to identify records that hold potential archive value is available from the Edinburgh University Archives. Specific guidance is also given on managing records (both paper and

electronic) and managing email (see <http://www.recordsmanagement.ed.ac.uk/InfoStaff/RMstaff/RMguidance.htm>).

In addition, a cross-service repositories and preservation group has been established. This group has been working on auditing EDINA's business data using the Inventory of Data Assets from the DAF (Data Audit Framework)<sup>1</sup>. A visit from a HATII<sup>2</sup> representative has taken place, to discuss implementation of the DRAMBORA<sup>3</sup> methodology.

Information for this case study has been gathered to reflect the information management policy for the institution as a whole, and techniques applied therein. Additional input has been provided by EDINA, a division within Information Services at the University designated by the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) to provide online data and information resources for staff and students in Higher and Further Education in the UK and beyond. While referred to as a *National Data Centre*, EDINA does not run servers itself; these are under the control of the IT Infrastructure division of Information Services.

### ***3. Phase 1: Examining the current IE***

The University of Edinburgh deals with a huge range of information types and formats, for a host of different purposes, with varying associated levels of legislation.

### ***4. Phase 2: Evaluating techniques to green IM***

The University promotes retention

(<http://www.recordsmanagement.ed.ac.uk/InfoStaff/RMstaff/RMguidance.htm#RetentionSchedules>) and Disposal

(<http://www.recordsmanagement.ed.ac.uk/InfoStaff/RMstaff/RecordsDisposal/RecordsDisposal.htm>) of records on a regular or irregular basis. Policies also already exist within the University of Edinburgh on two of the techniques included in a list of seven derived within the Green Information

Management project. These are weeding of legacy electronic records

(<http://www.recordsmanagement.ed.ac.uk/InfoStaff/RMstaff/LegacyElectronic/LegacyElectRecs.htm>) and Version Control

(<http://www.recordsmanagement.ed.ac.uk/InfoStaff/RMstaff/VersionControl/VersionControl.htm>).

#### **4.1 Retention and Disposal**

Retention schedules have been established specifically for a range of different information types including: committee information, finance records held within departments, general council information, health and safety records held within departments, HR records, internal audit files, planning records, student records, school records and web content.

A six page document explaining the need for adhering to best practice in disposing of records, together with practical guidelines, is available across the institution.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.data-audit.eu/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.gla.ac.uk/hatii/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.repositoryaudit.eu/>

### **4.1.1 Local benefits**

Retention and disposal of records by each department within the institution is well-controlled and regulated at policy level. This promotes standardisation of record management practice across all staff involved.

### **4.1.2 Institutional benefits**

The existence of generalised policy will improve compliance.

The retention of unnecessary paper and electronic records consumes staff time, space and equipment.

## **4.2 Weeding**

Guidance provided on this technique within the institution is intended for any member of University staff who has a sizeable collection of old electronic records, such as tens of thousands of e-mails or records stored on a shared or personal drive, on tapes, CDs, floppy disks, optical drives or the EUCS archive system, with separate information relating to paper legacy records also provided (<http://www.recordsmanagement.ed.ac.uk/InfoStaff/RMstaff/LegacyPaper/LegacyPaper.htm>).

The institution defines legacy electronic records as collections of 'old' records (including e-mails, databases or word processed documents) with no apparent organisation, created in folders or on machines that are no longer used, or inherited from predecessors or staff who no longer work for your area. They may still be on a shared or personal drive, but could also be stored on tape, CD, optical drive, floppy disk or the EUCS archive system. In many cases there may be little knowledge of their content or importance.

Individuals are responsible for clearing out the legacy electronic records held in their e-mail accounts, personal drives, or off-line storage (such as CD, floppy disk, or the EUCS archive system), and also for those created on a shared drive (unless an area has records management policies that assign the responsibility elsewhere). In the case of unattributed records on a shared drive, for example, records whose creator has since left, legacy electronic records are the responsibility of the business area that is holding them and the freedom of information practitioner would ordinarily take the lead in clearing these out.

### **4.2.1 Local benefits**

Improves the search time and rationalises results sets when seeking information. Although it is possible to retrieve information using the search facilities in e-mail and file directories, the more records held, the more unhelpful this facility will become. Storing large amounts of unnecessary information on the IT network also leads to longer IT back up and restoration time.

### **4.2.2 Institutional benefits**

Keeping unnecessary information can also incur costs under Freedom of Information and Data Protection legislation. Under the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 and the Data Protection Act 1998, people have the right to ask for copies of any information held by the University. The cost of locating information cannot be passed on to the enquirer, and a maximum of 10% of other costs can be recovered. Therefore, it is in the institution's interest to improve the

management of legacy records so that time is not spent searching through old information to respond to requests for information.

### **4.3 Version control**

A number of techniques are promoted by the institution to assist in the version control of documents. These include using version numbers, naming conventions, read-only tags and version control tables. The use of the Microsoft Word Versioning tool is discouraged as it substantially increases the size of documents which is wasteful of server space and makes the document unwieldy to work with.

#### **4.3.1 Local benefits**

Improved working practice will be achieved relating to the management of documents undergoing considerable revision and redrafting. The technique is particularly important for electronic documents because they can easily be changed by a number of different users, and those changes may not be immediately apparent. Knowing which version of a document is being consulted is important when trying to find out e.g. which version of a policy is currently in force, or which version of a policy was in use at a particular time. Version control is also important when working on a collaborative document with a number of contributors and/or frequent revisions.

Such practice will make files easier to assess for retention or disposal.

### ***5. Phase 3: Assessing costs and benefits***

It proved difficult to obtain information relating to the assessment of costs and benefits through implementing these techniques.

Feedback from the EDINA Management Team stated that questions put to case study participants by the Green Information Management project are interesting from a data management point of view, but that the distinction between the requirements of large scale data providers and the requirements of administrative users seems not to have been recognised. For example, for organisations whose remit is to provide information services, replication of key data is a positive practice for effective data management and service provision but negative in terms of saving energy. Indeed, while in general there are clear benefits in weeding redundant and legacy documents and files, the overall changes in the price/performance profile of modern storage devices is such that energy saving is unlikely to be significant unless the degree of redundancy was excessive.