Standard naming conventions for electronic records

Introduction
This document is intended to provide a common set of rules to apply to the naming of electronic documents and records. The conventions are primarily intended for use with Windows based software and documents such as word-processed documents, spreadsheets, presentations, emails and project plans.

Similar conventions will be used for naming the different levels and folders when developing the University file plan.

Naming records consistently, logically and in a predictable way will:-

- distinguish similar records from one another at a glance

- facilitate the storage and retrieval of records

- enable users to browse file names more effectively and efficiently

- make file naming easier for colleagues because they will not have to 're-think' the process each time.

Summary of the rules
The conventions comprise the following 12 rules:-

1. Keep file names short, but meaningful.

2. Avoid unnecessary repetition and redundancy in file names and file paths.

3. Use capital letters to delimit words, not spaces or underscores.

4. When including a number in a file name always give it as a two-digit number, i.e. 01-99, unless it is a year or another number with more than two digits.

5. If using a date in the file name always state the date 'back to front', and use four digit years, two digit months and two digit days: YYYYMMDD or YYYYMM or YYYY or YYYY-YYYY.

6. When including a personal name in a file name give the family name first followed by the initials.

7. Avoid using common words such as 'draft' or 'letter' at the start of file names, unless doing so will make it easier to retrieve the record.

8. Order the elements in a file name in the most appropriate way to retrieve the record.

9. The file names of records relating to recurring events should include the date and a description of the event, except where the inclusion of any of either of these elements would be incompatible with rule 2.

10. The file names of correspondence should include the name of the correspondent, an indication of the subject, the date of the correspondence and whether it is incoming or outgoing correspondence, except where the inclusion of any of these elements would be incompatible with rule 2.

11. The version number of a record should be indicated in its file name by the inclusion of 'v' followed by the version number and, where applicable, 'Draft'.

12. Avoid using non-alphanumeric characters in file names.

Rule 1

Keep file names short, but meaningful

File names should be kept as short as possible whilst also being meaningful. Long file names mean long file paths and long URLs which increase the likelihood of error, are more difficult to remember and recognise, and are more difficult to transmit in emails as they often 'break'. However, avoid using initials, abbreviations and codes that are not commonly understood.

Standard terminology should be used for Departments/Faculties, subject areas, external bodies and agencies, job titles, buildings and locations, types of information (e.g. minutes, agendas, project initiation documents, reports etc). Either use the full name or an acronym, but never mix both.

Rule 1 Example		
	Correct	**Incorrect**
File name	HealthSafetyCtteeRemit.doc	The_health_and_safety_committee_remit.doc
Explanation	Some words add length to a file name but do not contribute towards the meaning, for example words like "the", "a", and "and". Where the remaining file name is still meaningful within the context of the file directory these elements can be removed. Sometimes words have standard abbreviations, e.g. "cttee" is a standard abbreviation for "committee"; where this is the case the standard abbreviation can be used. Abbreviations that are unlikely to be understood by others should be avoided.	

Rule 2

Avoid unnecessary repetition and redundancy in file names and file paths

Avoid redundancy in file names and file paths. Unnecessary repetition increases the length of file names and file paths, which is incompatible with rule 1. There is no need to include information apparent from the file extensions in the document titles.

Rule 2 Example		
	Correct	**Incorrect**
File name	/.../Procedures/Appeals.doc	/.../Procedures/AppealsProcedures.doc
Explanation	In this example the folder is called "Procedures" so it is not necessary to include the word "Procedures" in the file name because all the records in that folder are procedure records	

Rule 3

Use capital letters to delimit words, not spaces or underscores

Avoid using spaces and underscores in file names. Some software packages have difficulty recognising file names with spaces so it is best to avoid using spaces. Using underscores and hyphens in your file names increases the length, which is incompatible with rule 1.

Where capitalised acronyms are used in file names the acronym should appear in capitals and the first letter of the following word should also be capitalised.

Rule 3 Example		
	Correct	**Incorrect**
File name	RiskManagement.doc RAEInstructions.doc	Risk_management.doc Risk management.doc RAE_instructions.doc Research Assessment Exercise instructions.doc
Explanation	Removing the space or underscore reduces the length of the file name, but by using capital letters to differentiate between the words the file name is still readily recognisable.	

Rule 4

When including a number in a file name always give it as a two-digit number, unless it is a year or another number with more than two digits

The file directory displays file names in alphanumeric order. To maintain the numeric order when file names include numbers it is important to include the zero for numbers 0-9. This helps to retrieve the latest record number.

Rule 4 Example		
	Correct	**Incorrect**
File name	Newsletter01 Newsletter02 Newsletter03 Newsletter04 Newsletter05 Newsletter06 Newsletter07 Newsletter08 Newsletter09 Newsletter10 Newsletter11 (Ordered alphanumerically as the files would be in the directory list)	Newsletter1 Newsletter10 Newsletter11 Newsletter2 Newsletter3 Newsletter4 Newsletter5 Newsletter6 Newsletter7 Newsletter8 Newsletter9 (Ordered alphanumerically as the files would be in the directory list)
Explanation	If two-digit numbers are used the latest version will always be at the bottom of the list.	

Rule 5

If using a date in the file name always state the date 'back to front', and use four digit years, two digit months and two digit days: YYYYMMDD or YYYYMM or YYYY or YYYY-YYYY

Dates should always be presented 'back to front', that is with the year first (always given as a four digit number), followed by the month (always given as a two digit number), and the day (always given as a two digit number). Giving the dates back to front means that the chronological order of the records is maintained when the file names are listed in the file directory. This helps when trying to retrieve the latest dated record.

Rule 5 Example		
	Correct	**Incorrect**
File name	20040324Agenda.doc 20040324Minutes.doc 20040324PaperA.doc	1Feb2005Agenda.doc 1Feb2005Minutes.doc 24March2004Agenda.doc

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20050201Agenda.doc 20050201Minutes.doc (Ordered alphanumerically as the files would be in the directory list)	24March2004Minutes.doc 24March2004PaperA.doc (Ordered alphanumerically as the files would be in the directory list)
Explanation	This example shows the minutes and papers of a committee. By stating the year 'back to front' the minutes and papers from the most recent meeting appear at the bottom of the directory list.

Rule 6

When including a personal name in a file name give the family name first followed by the initials

It may be appropriate to include within a file name the name of an individual, usually when the record is a piece of correspondence. However, it will not usually be appropriate to name records after the record owner or creator. When it is appropriate to include a personal name it should be given as family name first followed by initials as it is most likely that the record will be retrieved according to the family name of the individual.

Rule 6 Example		
	Correct	**Incorrect**
File name	BrownSR20041201.doc	SamRBrown20041201.doc
Explanation	This is a letter to Mr Samuel R Brown. By putting the family name first the file directory will display this file next to the b's, which is where you would expect to find a letter to Mr Brown.	

Rule 7

Avoid using common words such as 'draft' or 'letter' at the start of file names

Avoid using common words such as 'draft' or 'letter' at the start of file names, or all of those records will appear together in the file directory, making it more difficult to retrieve the records you are looking for.

You may only ignore this rule if starting file names with these sorts of words aids the retrieval of the records. See rule 8 for further details.

Rule 7 Example		
	Correct	**Incorrect**
File name	…/Publicity/ Advertisingv0.1Draft.doc Advertisingv1.0Final.doc	…/Publicity/ DraftAdvertising.doc DraftBudgetReport2003-2004.doc DraftOfficeProcedures.rtf

	BudgetReport2002-2003v2.0Final.doc BudgetReport2003-2004v0.15Draft.doc GrantS20040312.doc OfficeProceduresv0.10Draft.doc ThomasA20031205.doc (Ordered alphanumerically as the files would be in the directory list)	FinalAdvertising.doc FinalBudgetReport2002-2003.doc LetterAThomas.doc LetterSGrant.doc (Ordered alphanumerically as the files would be in the directory list)
Explanation	The file directory will list files in alphanumeric order. This means that all records with file names starting "Draft" will be listed together. When retrieving files it will be more useful to find the draft budget report next to the previous year's budget, rather than next to an unrelated draft record.	

Rule 8

Order the elements in a file name in the most appropriate way to retrieve the record

The elements to be included in a file name should be ordered according to the way in which the record will be retrieved during the course of every day business. This will depend on the way you work. For example, if the records are retrieved according to their date, the date element should appear first. If the records are retrieved according to their description, the description element should appear first.

Rule 8 Example		
	Correct	**Incorrect**
File name	/…/MarketingCttee/ 20040630Agenda.doc 20040630Minutes.doc 20050120Agenda.doc 20050120Minutes.doc 20050201Agenda.doc 20050201Minutes.doc /…/Events/ BookLaunch20040630.doc ConferenceDinner20030304.doc ProcurementAward20040905.doc (Ordered alphabetically as the files would be in the directory list)	/…/MarketingCttee/ Agenda1Feb2005.doc Agenda20Jan2005.doc Agenda30June2004.doc Minutes1Feb2005.doc Minutes20Jan2005.doc Minutes30June2004.doc /…/Events/ 20030304ConferenceDinner.doc 20040630BookLaunch.doc 20040905ProcurementAward.doc (Ordered alphabetically as the files would be in the directory list)
Explanation	The first example shows minutes and agenda of the Marketing Committee. Minutes and papers of a meeting are likely to be retrieved on the basis of the date of the meeting, it is therefore best to have the date at the start of the file	

	name, otherwise all the Agendas will come at the top of the directory list, followed by all of the minutes, and then by the papers.	
	The second example shows the file names of the files in the Events folder. Because events are likely to be retrieved by the name of the event rather than the date of the event, it is most useful to have that element first	

Rule 9

The file names of records relating to recurring events should include the date and a description of the event, except where the inclusion of either of these elements would be incompatible with rule 2

The file names of records relating to recurring events (e.g. meeting minutes and papers, weekly, monthly or annual reports, event management and budget planning documents) should include both the date and the event name or event description so that the record can be identified and retrieved.

When deciding the order of the elements consider rule 8. Date first will usually be appropriate for events that are time specific and recurring. Event first will usually be appropriate for events that are infrequent, but regularly recurring.

The event description could be the title of the event or the subject of the event, whatever description you choose, ensure that it is short, to the point, and readily recognisable to you and the colleagues you work with.

Rule 9 Example		
	Correct	**Incorrect**
File name	/…/Website/ 20040301WebStats.doc 20040401WebStats.doc /…/Planning/ Budget2003-2004v10.xls Budget2004-2005v01Draft.xls (Ordered alphanumerically as the files would be in the directory list)	/…/Website/ WebStats20040301.doc WebStats20040401.doc /…/Planning/ 2003-2004BudgetV10.xls 2004-2005BudgetV01Draft.xls (Ordered alphanumerically as the files would be in the directory list)
Explanation	The first example shows the website statistic reports which are created on a monthly basis. Because the reports recur frequently and are retrieved by date it is most appropriate that the date is given first. Also remember rule 2; in some cases it may be appropriate for the folder to be called "WebStats", in which case the file names only need to include the date. For another example see the first rule 8 example.	

	The second example shows annual budget reports. Because the reports are annual and likely to be retrieved by the description rather than the date, it is likely that it will be most appropriate for the description element to come first. Also remember rule 2; in some cases it may be appropriate for the folder to be called "Planning2003-2004", in which case the file names only need to include a description. For another example see the second rule 8 example.

Rule 10

The file names of correspondence should include the name of the correspondent, an indication of the subject, the date of the correspondence and whether it is incoming or outgoing correspondence, except where the inclusion of any of these elements would be incompatible with rule 2

The file names of correspondence should include the following elements so that the record can be easily identified and retrieved:
- Name of correspondent, that is the either the name of the person who sent you the letter/email/memo or the name of the person to whom you sent the letter/email/memo
- Subject description, where it is not given in the folder title
- Date of letter/email/memo
- If incoming correspondence, include 'rcvd'
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When deciding the order of the elements consider rule 8. It will usually be appropriate to order the elements in the same order in which they are listed above, as it is likely that correspondence will be retrieved on the basis of the correspondent. Also consider rule 2; a description of the subject may already be given in the folder name.

The sender is responsible for filing correspondence and any attachments or enclosures, except when the correspondence originates from outside the University, when the main recipient is responsible for filing the correspondence and any attachments or enclosures.

If more than one email is received from the same person, on the same day, on the same subject and the latest email does not include the whole string of the correspondence, the time of the email can be included in the file name to differentiate it from the email received earlier in the day.

Further guidance will be developed on managing emails as records.

Rule 10 Example		
	Correct	**Incorrect**
File name	/…/Complaints/ BloggsJ20031205.doc BloggsJ20040105rcvd.doc	/…/Complaints/ EmailFromHelenThomas10Jun03.txt LetterFromJoeBloggs5Jan04.doc LetterToHelenThomas10Jul03.doc

	BloggsJ20040220.doc ThomasH20030610rcvd.txt ThomasH20030710.doc /…/ EvansWAppeal20040715rcvd.doc EvansWAppeal20040820.doc EvansWAppeal20040905rcvd.doc (Ordered alphanumerically as the files would be in the directory list)	LetterToJoeBloggs20Feb04.doc LetterToJoeBloggs5Dec03.doc /…/Correspondence/ WilliamEvans15Jul04.doc WilliamEvans20Aug04.doc WilliamEvans5Sep04.doc (Ordered alphanumerically as the files would be in the directory list)
Explanation	The first example shows some incoming and outgoing correspondence concerning complaints. All the correspondence with Mr Joe Bloggs appears together in chronological order and it is easy to pick out the incoming correspondence because it is indicated by 'rcvd'. The same is true of the correspondence with Miss Helen Thomas. In this example it is not necessary to include an indication of the subject in the file name because it is given in the folder name. The second example shows some incoming and outgoing correspondence with Mr William Evans regarding an appeal. All the correspondence is listed in chronological order, it is easy to see what the correspondence is about, who it is with and whether it is incoming or outgoing correspondence. In reality it is likely that it will not necessary to include an indication of the subject matter in the file name because the folder title would be likely to be 'Appeals'. It is not recommended to give folders very general names such as 'correspondence'.	

Rule 11

The version number of a record should be indicated in its file name by the inclusion of 'v' followed the version number and, where applicable, 'Draft' or 'Final'

Some records go through a number of versions, for example they start out as working drafts, become consultation drafts and finish with a final draft, which may then be reviewed and updated at a later date. It is important to be able to differentiate between these various drafts by giving them each their own number.

Where a version number is applicable, it should always appear in the file name of the record so that the most recent version can be easily identified and retrieved.

Rule 11 Example		
	Correct	**Incorrect**
File name	IEAM2003-2004v3.3Draft.doc IEAM2003-2004v4.0Final.doc	Iemodel0304_draftv3.htm Iemodle0304_finalv4htm

OrganisationalHierarchy2002v2.0.xls	Organisational_Hierarchy_002_v2.xls
OrganisationalHierarchy2002v3.0.xls	Organisational_Hierarchy_2002_v3.xls
OrganisationalHierarchy2002v4.0.xls	Organisational_Hierarchy_2002_v4.xls

Explanation	The first example shows two versions of the income and expenditure attribution model for 2003-2004, version 3.3 is a draft version and version 4 is the final version. The common abbreviation for the model is used. The covering years are given in four-digit format. The second example shows a number of versions of the organisational hierarchy for 2002. In this case none of the versions are marked as draft or final because the nature of the record means that 'draft' and 'final' are not applicable.

Rule 12

Avoid using non-alphanumeric characters in file names

Different operating systems (e.g. Linux, OS X, Windows) have different file name requirements, in particular different characters that they do not recognise in file names. The use of these characters can cause problems. Even if your operating system allows you to save the file you may encounter difficulties if you try to transport the file to another operating system, for example the file may not be recognised, or if you send it to someone else they may not be able to open it. It is therefore recommended that you avoid the use of non-alphanumeric characters in file names
Avoid: * : \ / < > | " ? [ ] ; = + & £ $, .

However, hyphens (-) may be used and a full stop (.) may be used to indicate decimal increments in version control.

Rule 12 Example		
	Correct	**Incorrect**
File name	SmithJohn20070507.txt DavidLaingCollection.doc GuidelinesAndRegulations.pdf Budget2006-2007	Smith,John20070507.txt "DavidLaingCollection".doc Guidelines&Regulations.pdf Budget2006/07
Explanation	Most non alphanumeric characters can be omitted without much loss of meaning, e.g. commas and quotation marks. Others can be replaced with alphanumeric characters, e.g. "&" and "+" can be replaced with "And" and "Plus". Hyphens can be used in place of forward slashes and brackets.	

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