

Document Title	Code of Practice 3: Content of information and records – minutes, handwritten notes, emails, interview and case notes, web pages, exam scripts, references
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Relevant to	All academic and professional services staff

All information which the University of Greenwich holds is liable to disclosure to enquirers. Staff should apply the following good practice when producing the following:

1. Minutes

- Write in the appropriate style for your audience
 - Formal committees or public minutes – use more formal language
 - Working groups – use more informal language
- Consider whether each minute is fact or opinion, and write it accordingly
- It may not be necessary to name speakers. Opinions of speakers could be recorded anonymously, or speakers could be named if they so wish
- It's not necessary to record everything that was said. Record:
 - Decisions made and reasons for them
 - Objections to decisions
 - Actions to be taken
- If third parties are referred to, they probably need to be named in the minutes (in which case, the minutes may be treated confidentially)
- Minutes of Progression & Award Boards, for instance, or other meetings which discuss students (or staff) may be liable to disclosure to the individual
 - Minutes should be capable of being produced without disclosure of personal data about a third party
- Secretary's (or indeed anyone's) notes of the meeting (whether handwritten or typed) may be liable to disclosure too

For more detailed advice on good practice in minute-taking, refer to [Resources for Meetings guidance](#).

2. Handwritten notes, notebooks and diaries

- These are the property of the University if work-related, and also liable to disclosure
- A transcript of notes may need to be provided, if the notes are illegible

3. Emails

- These are the property of the University if work-related, and also liable to disclosure
- Take care with grammar, punctuation, spelling, and don't write in capitals, as this can be construed as shouting
- Think carefully about the title of your email and make it appropriate
 - Start a different email for a different topic if necessary
- Think carefully to who you are addressing and copying it
 - Remember to use "blind copy" if you are sending to a number of recipients and need to protect their email addresses (which may be personal information)
 - This in any case is good practice for large numbers of recipients
- Think twice before sending personal or sensitive information by email
 - A breach of Data Protection principles is easy by email e.g.
 - Passing on personal information about an individual to a third party without their consent
 - Passing on excessive personal information, or inaccurate personal information, or unsubstantiated personal opinion
 - Keeping personal information longer than necessary
 - Sending personal information to a country outside the EEA
 - Email is not a confidential medium. It can be:
 - Intercepted by third parties
 - Wrongly addressed
 - Forwarded accidentally
 - Forwarded to third parties by recipients
 - Viewed inadvertently on screens
 - At least password-protect attachments
 - Refer to the [Data Classification Policy](#) for more advice
- Take the same care when sending emails internally as externally
- Think before you press Send
- Delete emails from your Inbox promptly when you have dealt with them
 - Many emails are ephemeral and can be disposed of almost immediately (e.g. spam, junk, out of office automatic responses, emails for information only when read, etc.)
 - File more important emails in appropriate folders for a defined period of time (refer to the relevant [Retention Schedule](#))
- Remember that your own emails are inaccessible to colleagues; anything of importance to the team should be filed in the shared drive
- Do email housekeeping regularly, in order to keep on top of it
 - Remember to empty your deleted emails folder on a regular basis

4. Interview notes and case notes

- Feedback may need to be given to staff and student candidates, so notes may need to be retained for a certain length of time for this purpose, however be aware:
- If interview notes and case notes are held they may be liable to disclosure to the individual
- Distinguish between fact and opinion when writing notes
- Opinions should be recorded as such - "In my opinion ..." "In the opinion of ..."

- Personal information or opinion should be sufficient for purpose and not irrelevant
- Controversial or sensitive opinions should include more explanation, which should be based in fact
- Individual members of panels should not retain their notes once the formal record of the interview has been prepared by the panel Chair

5. On the website

- Information on the website needs to be kept up to date and accurate
- Keep a record if you need to of what your web pages stated at a particular time. Ways of doing this might include:
 - Keeping a log of minor changes made
 - Keeping snapshots of web pages at regular and appropriate intervals
- Don't use the website as an archive of documents – the primary location for documents should be on the shared drive
- Don't put personal information about people on the website without their permission

6. Exam script examiner comments

- Students do not have a right to see their exam scripts, however they do have a right to their marks, and they do have a right to see examiners' comments
 - Some exam scripts may bear ticks, crosses, and other markings (such as underlinings, circlings, exclamation marks or question marks) with just a few words here and there. These are not classed as comments. Comments will be words, but not single words which have no meaning out of context. They may be expressions of opinion about the answers given, not merely an indication of the correctness or otherwise of an answer
- Comments may need to be transcribed into an intelligible form, with reference to the exam questions but separate from the exam script
- Comments should be capable of reproduction without disclosure of the original script

7. References

- Requests for telephone or verbal references should be refused as they may be misinterpreted and the validity of the requester can't be verified. All references should be written
- Human Resources will write references for members of staff. Refer to HR for more advice
- Standard factual references may be written by Student Academic Services about students
 - These would contain: name, date of birth, duration of study at the University, title of programme, degree classification if appropriate, year of award. It could include names and addresses of placements, length of placement and date
- Standard factual references could contain this footnote: "It is the general practice of the University of Greenwich to provide only factual information in response to enquiries about its students and employees. The provision of such information does not imply any comment, negative or positive, about the person in question or their course of employment or study with the University of Greenwich."

- Professional references for students may be provided to professional bodies such as health care institutions, educational establishments or similar organisations, which may relate to such matters as professional competence, honesty, trustworthiness etc. These should:
 - Be written by appropriate academic staff, such as personal tutor or programme leader, where they have direct knowledge of the student
 - Specify the relationship between the subject and the referee
 - Where professional judgements about competence are made they should be consistent with and supported by the available evidence from reports, observations, assessment data etc.
 - Be signed by the referee in their official capacity
- Personal references may occasionally be written but it should be made clear that it is in that capacity only
 - These references may be signed by the referee, not on behalf of the University
- Students or staff (whether past or present) who want a member of staff to be their referee should:
 - Contact that member of staff and get permission to name them and give their contact details to third parties
 - Contact them again at a later date if a further reference is required with a warning that a request may be sent to them
 - Remember that member of staff may have left the University or their contact details may have changed
 - Be aware that the University is under no obligation to provide references for students and staff who have not asked it to do so

8. Comment and opinion made in any written information

- Comment and opinion about a person may be liable to disclosure to that person (as well as factual information)
- Don't make comments in an inflammatory, subjective or unprofessional way
- Negative comment is acceptable if it is backed up with factual evidence
- All comment should be backed up with factual evidence
- Comment and opinion should be relevant and to the point, not unnecessary or not asked for
- Don't express opinions as if they were statements of fact – distinguish between opinion and fact
- Insulting and derogatory comments and personal attacks on individuals or groups are unacceptable in any context. They may contravene one of the University's policies and / or legislation, and could lead to disciplinary or legal action.