

## Information Principles

University information needs to:

1. be fit for purpose  
*within the context of the University's mission, corporate plan and related strategies and in terms of accuracy, relevance, consistency and completeness, currency and timeliness, audience, accessibility, longevity and medium.*
2. be held and used with respect or conform to legal, contractual and local policy and rules.
3. have a clearly identified custodian  
*with the following responsibilities clearly assigned and agreed by that custodian:*
  - *maintenance (via data entry or issuing of reminders)*
  - *provision of appropriate checks and audits*
  - *procedures for promoting availability of the data and mediating/agreeing appropriate access*
  - *provision of appropriate indexing and search facilities*
  - *appropriate read and write access ensured*
  - *appropriate archive, preservation and disposal procedures*
  - *observation of these principles and appropriate policies*
  - *(seeking) resourcing of the above.*
4. be collected, held and made available effectively and efficiently, *for example -*
  - *collected/maintained once only, and as close to source as possible/feasible;*
  - *with appropriate links to related information;*
  - *with provision of appropriate search and retrieval facilities*
  - *with clear procedures for negotiating access;*
  - *with clearly authorised working source (usually in e-format) and master copy.*
5. be publicised and shared appropriately

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### Notes

1. These principles would seek to underpin an institutional information strategy, which needs to develop organically with an institution.
2. The initial list of principles, given above, are derived in part from a series of example sets, including "Guiding Principles" accepted as part of the University of Bristol's information strategy, and from presentation examples given by Tracey Stanley, Head of e-Strategy and Development at Leeds University Library, and by Sheila Corral, Director of Academic Services at the University of Southampton.

## Commentary

This indicates some of the thinking behind, and suggests issues for discussion in relation to, each principle:

**Information and Communication** - While these principles concern a university's information, they imply and identify a clear need to ensure information is communicated and shared appropriately, so as to fully exploit its potential in enabling the University to operate efficiently and effectively.

So far there is no attempt to restrict the information to a specific medium (eg electronic or paper) or purpose (eg academic or administrative). Some principles may apply in different ways, or to a different extent, for a specific medium or purpose.

1. "**Fitness for purpose**" is essentially a sign of "quality".

Collection and management of information is expensive, and a university should be confident that information held is relevant in terms of its mission (as expressed through its corporate plan and strategies) and operations.

It is important that "for purpose" is recognised as part of the "fitness" - it does not mean "complete" accuracy, currency... etc, but the level of accuracy, currency or whatever required by the (different groups of) users of the information.

The terms to which this needs to be applied each raise issues, some of which need to be discussed in respect of specific information sets. General issues include:

- currency and timeliness - one meaning not out of date and the other meaning published at an appropriate time (eg up-to-date dates and details available before an event takes place).
  - accessibility - who should have access/no-access to what information? Should information be regarded as open, or closed, unless indicated otherwise? It also pertains to ensuring appropriate security, means of authorisation, and usability (eg for disabled or distant users).
2. It needs to be noted that **legal, contractual and local policies** change, sometimes quite rapidly, over time. Clarification of the means by which local policy is made, agreed and disseminated may help raise users' awareness of their legal rights and responsibilities.
  3. The term "**custodian**" implies a guardian or keeper, taking responsibility for the information on behalf of a university. This differs from an "owner" who may claim rights of access and control. This is because much information has multiple uses for a variety of different groups, and it makes sense for such data to be held once, in an integrated system, and made available as appropriate - mediated via an appropriate level of authority. The custodian should be gatekeeper to the mediation process rather than gatekeeper to the information itself.
- The custodial responsibilities listed broadly cover (good practice of) records' management issues.
4. **Collecting and holding information** effectively and efficiently implies ensuring that information is not collected randomly, in response to immediate need, and that those using information operate in an integrated manner. This requires a culture that seeks data from existing sources, before initiating primary data collection.
  5. Corporate information is a corporate resource - so those with custody of information need to recognise their responsibility to ensure the data is available to appropriate others - so as to prevent duplicate data collection and management. This also implies appropriate security to manage appropriate access.

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*Further details of the project can be found via the website  
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