

JISC infoNet Award for Innovation in Records and Information Management

SWANSEA UNIVERSITY

INTRODUCTION

Founded in 1920, Swansea University was the twenty-ninth university established in the United Kingdom. Swansea began life with just eighty nine students; today, almost ninety years later, there are over 12,000 students and 2000 staff. From its beginning the University was both a scientific and technical institution, linked to the historic heavy industries of South Wales and a centre for the study of the humanities. Swansea has maintained its broad academic front and now offers courses as varied as medicine and health science, physical and biological sciences, law and business, arts and the humanities.

BACKGROUND

Throughout its existence the University had created and received a considerable amount of records but had not developed a corporate strategy for dealing with them. Rather, academic and administrative departments had to make their own local arrangements for the maintenance, storage, use and disposition of their material, usually on an ad hoc basis. Such a situation, in an increasingly litigious environment, often made it difficult to demonstrate effective institutional governance and legal and regulatory compliance. The University was aware of the broad issues around the management of its records and had appointed a working group to investigate. Matters became more urgent (as it did for the higher education sector in general), with the enactment of the Freedom of Information legislation.

Accepting the need to efficiently and systematically control location, use and disposition of its legal, financial and administrative records, the University appointed its first Records Manager in June 2003.

RECORDS MANAGEMENT

The records manager's responsibilities lay in the following areas:

- to develop a management service for hard-copy records throughout the University;
- to advise on the retention of electronic records;
- to co-ordinate compliance with the Data Protection and Freedom of Information Acts.

The service would include the development of a dedicated records store for records transferred out of offices and local storage areas, and would offer retrieval and disposal procedures.

A preliminary information audit of the administrative departments had revealed a wish for the removal of accumulated records from work areas, but with continued access to them. However, the University did not have a software system for the management of records, nor had it budgeted for the purchase of one. The service was therefore obliged to re-invent a paper-based system for the management of records sent to the records store, which, with the acquisition of mobile racking, offered a capacity of around 2,300 cubic feet.

The principal paper-based management tools developed to support the new Records Management service were:

- Accession register
- Departmental accession register
- Transfer lists
- Location register
- Issue slips

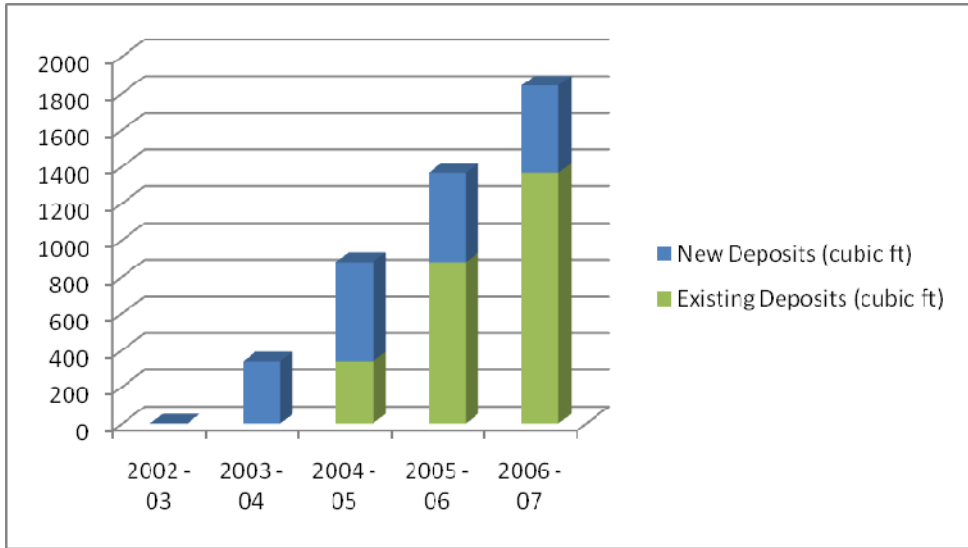
These tools, and the associated mechanisms to which they gave rise, were sufficient to manage small volumes of analogue records, though clearly they would not achieve acceptable levels of detail and control of the larger amounts of material the service would receive as it continued to expand.

The figures over the next few pages show the year on year development of the service:

DEPOSITS

The volume of records submitted to the records store.

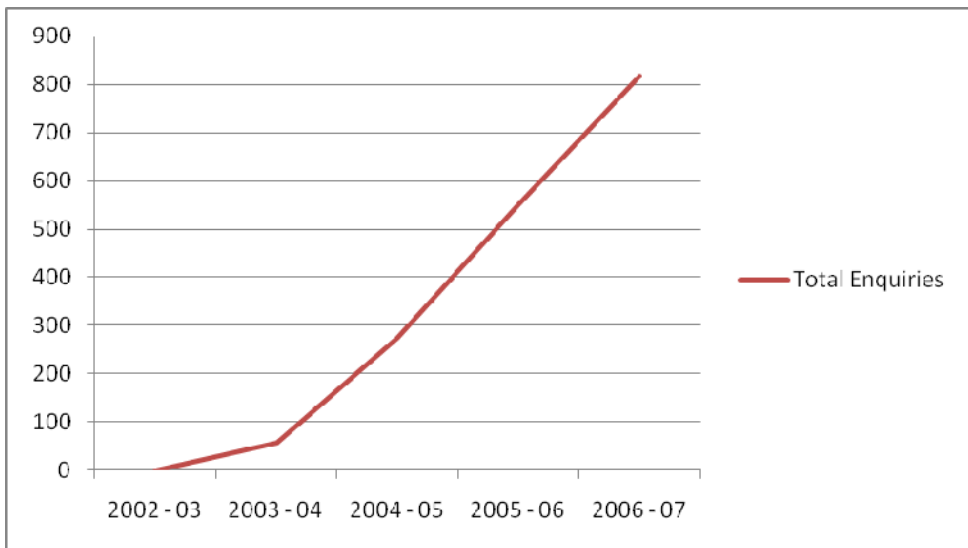
Period	New Deposits (cubic ft)	Total (cubic ft)
2002 - 03	0	0
2003 - 04	338	338
2004 - 05	541	879
2005 - 06	486	1365
2006 - 07	476	1841



ENQUIRIES

The number of enquiries made relating to records in the records store.

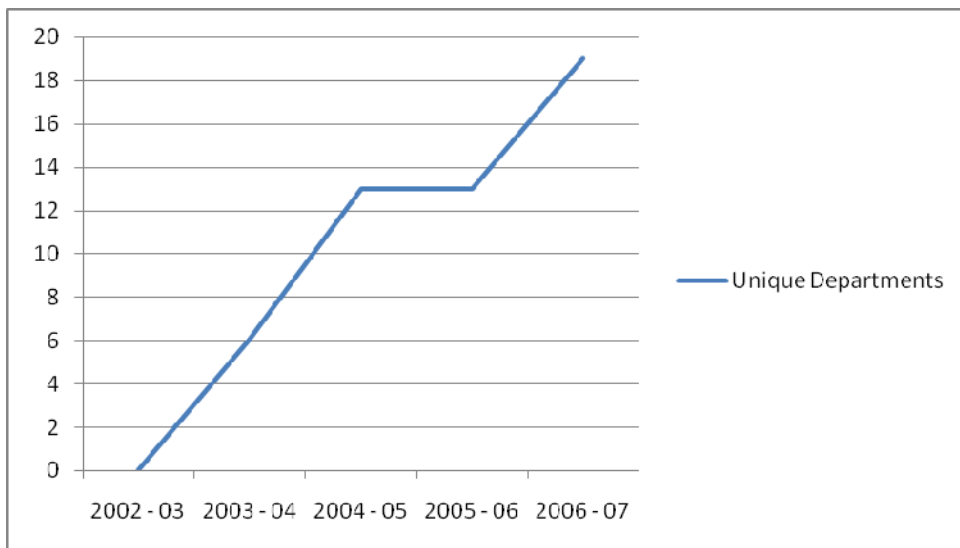
Period	New Enquiries	Total
2002 - 03	0	0
2003 - 04	58	58
2004 - 05	217	275
2005 - 06	275	550
2006 - 07	267	817



USERS

The number of 'unique' departments using the Records Management Service. (Some departments made use of the service one year, but not the next, having already moved large volumes of physical records from their workspaces).

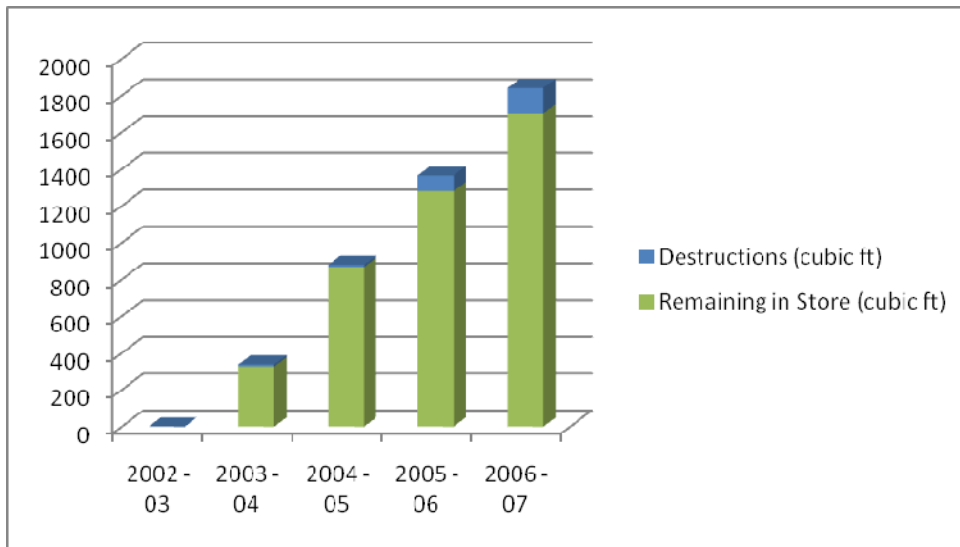
Period	Unique Departments
2002 - 03	0
2003 - 04	6
2004 - 05	13
2005 - 06	13
2006 - 07	19



DESTRUCTION FROM RECORDS STORE

The volume of records destroyed in accordance with the retention schedule.

Period	Destructions (cubic ft)	Total (cubic ft)	Remaining in Store (cubic ft)
2002 - 03	0	0	0
2003 - 04	11	11	327
2004 - 05	11	22	868
2005 - 06	85	107	1280
2006 - 07	140	247	1701



Note: Controlled destructions directly from office accommodation and other stores would be in excess of 1600 cubic feet.

The Records Management service needed to build in its capacity to absorb not only current structures, but to look ahead to future arrangements as:

- student and staff numbers continue to rise;
- the University would be developing a second campus.

There would also be matters of detail and focus; the University would be offering a full graduate entry medical degree with the likelihood of a University NHS Trust in the region.

Service Summary

Policies and procedures were in place and the service was rolling out across the campus with surprising speed. With user levels increasing and the University readily agreeing to an expansion of the records store into former maintenance areas (and even a further expansion of storage as part of the second campus developments), it was clear that a simple, paper-based management system would soon be overwhelmed.

FROM DISSERTATION TO PRODUCT

At much the same time as the records manager was beginning his task, a former Swansea Engineering graduate had re-entered the University to undertake a Master's degree in Computer Science. His chosen subject was Records Management and the home department asked that practical support be provided; so began a collaborative journey that would lead from successful dissertation, to dedicated Records Management software, to a new commercial company (M:Link Software), and eventually, the full commercial Electronic Document and Records Management System which the University uses today: ARC EDRMS.

ARC EDRMS has emerged from a long period of practical testing and use at Swansea University. It is based on core Records Management processes, largely in place with the earlier paper-based system,

but then takes them forward to a far more sophisticated level. In essence, a core requirement for our Records Management solution was that it would not change existing working practices. We wanted to continue using our tried and tested arrangements but in a controlled and easy-to-use electronic environment. We wanted to complement existing methodologies, not abandon them.

ARC effectively manages the complete record lifecycle from creation within the Records Management service, through capture, storage and maintenance, use and retrieval, to final disposition.

The record accessioning feature allows all types of records, from paper to electronic, to be added and classified using a series of metadata fields. Every record has an associated record retention allocated upon entry to the system which governs the record lifecycle and eventual disposition schedule. ARC automatically alerts the system administrator to the existence of records which have reached the end of their administrative or legal life and require archival appraisal or destruction. The system makes searching for records in response to enquiries very simple; the entire database can be searched in a variety of ways that allow for rapid and refined searches. Records can also be tracked and retrieved throughout their physical journeys, whether held in-house or in off-site storage facilities. While ARC automatically logs every enquiry made against a record, it also enables users to retrieve and borrow submitted records in a manner similar to a library system.

The system also provides an extensive audit trail; every action within ARC is recorded for the entire lifecycle of each record, stating what took place, who did it and when; this has provided complete institutional accountability. There are also many handy features such as the 'Favourites' facility which enables information to be kept to hand for easy or frequent reference. This is particularly useful for dealing with complex enquires or FOI requests.

ARC provides a complete Records Management structure including:

- built-in security through individual user accounts allowing agreed system privileges and levels of access to information;
- warehouse management facilities that provide reliable automation of all warehouse processes;
- reporting tools which allow for meaningful analysis of all aspects of Records and Information Management and enable further policy refinement.

ARC is both powerful and easy to use; the simple and intuitive user interface ensures minimum training and maximum usability. It also offers some welcome flexibility; an institution can start with a single user system and then increase the number of users as requirements increase.

INSTALLATION AND APPLICATION

Throughout 2005 and 2006 the Records Management service of Swansea University worked with M:Link Software to test and refine ARC EDRMS to something approaching its present level of sophistication. The then most recent edition of the software was installed in the University in December 2006 with training of the Records Management staff taking place the following month. Thereafter the principle focus was upon populating the database with descriptive data for all

deposited records and record enquiries, developing retention schedules (to also include electronic records), and the ongoing familiarisation with the software's processes.

The University's in-house paper system for the management of records had been sufficient to support the introduction of core Records Management processes including the deposit of records, storage and retrieval from a dedicated records store, and accessioning to provide provenance and search tools. However, the successful introduction of Records Management services across large areas of the University and the positive response of academic and administrative departments had sounded some alarm bells. Without management software to support the service, there was a very real danger of it being overwhelmed. As such, what began as support to a dissertation project took on a particular life of its own.

M:Link Software have developed ARC EDRMS into a powerful and effective Records and Information Management solution focused initially, though not exclusively, on the education sector. Swansea University for its part has unlimited use, including the most up to date version, of a sophisticated EDRM system that will now allow the full implementation of robust Records Management processes across the campus. ARC EDRMS will roll out in 2008 to selected academic and administrative departments; they, as active users, will then be able to make their own database searches, request records through the system and conveniently access the developing retention schedules. They will also submit all subsequent records directly into the ARC database, removing the need for any paper-based legacy system and freeing up valuable time for both themselves and the Records Management team.

The collaboration between Swansea University and M:Link Software has been a resounding success and will continue into the foreseeable future, (so watch this space!).

ROWLAND WILLIAMS

UNIVERSITY RECORDS MANAGER

SWANSEA UNIVERSITY