

# RAME: EUI Records and Archives Management

Electronic Records Manager | **Prisca Giordani**

When the records management programme of the European University Institute was launched in mid-2005, I had no idea how much material would be unearthed and how many unstable piles of boxes I would find scattered over the EUI sites and storage areas.

Today, two-and-a-half years later, whenever the umpteenth occasional batch of 'forgotten' material reappears, I am no longer surprised but simply acknowledge that this means the work is bearing fruit, and lots of it.

In my first year at the Historical Archives of the European Union I was also entrusted with the pilot project for managing the EUI's documentary resources.

The job involved procedures for recovering documents, implementing tools to manage documents more efficiently and effectively, and the adoption of an electronic records management system (ERMS). The work was carried out on several fronts.

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## **Recovery of documents in storage and management of office space needs**

Given the huge quantity of material set aside in the past and spread over the EUI sites, this was a very urgent task. The boxes did not often identify the Service that had produced them, they never contained a list of the documents inside nor any indication as to why the documents were in storage (did they need to be thrown out or was it still 'useful' material that could no longer be kept for lack of office space?).

The established procedure had always been to box up surplus material—without assessing whether or not it should be kept or disposed of—and to send it to what was rather mysteriously known as 'the static archives'. If a document was needed again, there was no way to locate it and no topographical map of the various 'removals'.

Alongside recovering existing material, the need for space in the EUI offices led to problems regarding the management of future quantities of material which, unless handled methodically, would quickly lead to the production of even more unidentified boxes that no-one knew what to do with (disposal or preservation).

In the end the problem, besides the risk of losing documents vital to the operation of the EUI or their future consultation at the Historical Archives), was a serious problem of space and storage costs.

We needed to make an inventory of all the material in the various locations, decide whether to preserve or dispose of it and act accordingly.

We also needed to establish procedures to enable staff to administer the production of new documentation in a more rational manner: disposal procedure or transfer procedure if it could not be kept in the office where it was produced.

These procedures were drafted and published on the EUI intranet under the name of RAME (Records and Archives Management at the EUI).

From 2005 to the present RAME has identified a total of 639 boxes of documents no longer needed by the EUI which could be disposed of, and 447 to be preserved. Of these 447, a good percentage need be kept for a limited time after which they may be disposed of: indeed, for legal and fiscal reasons, certain types of documents have to be kept as long as required for any request to produce them for checking, after which they may be disposed of.

RAME allows us to keep track of those deadlines and dispose of boxes as soon as they are no longer needed, thereby avoiding the unnecessary logistical and administrative costs of keeping unwanted material.

## **Creation of records management tools**

RAME initially involved three services (the Offices of the Principal and Secretary-General and the Economics Department) in devising classification schemes integrated with selection tools to organise office documents rationally (filing) and to indicate deadlines for preserving documentation on the basis of the EUI's needs (office, legal, fiscal, historical). Given the nature of the EUI, the aim was to devise classification schemes that were a hybrid of those generally devised for universities and those devised for international organisations. ▶▶

- ▶ The Services analysed the types of documents produced or received during the course of work, identified the activities and devised a functional classification scheme (based on the functions analysed) consisting of rules for the disposal or preservation of the documentation concerned. The Services, carefully monitored and given full support at every stage, then tested the classification scheme and proposed any necessary alterations or adjustments. The results were published on the RAME intranet pages. As a further incentive the Services involved were assisted as a matter of priority with the disposal or transfer of the documentation that had accumulated in their offices over the years.

All the Services and Departments were progressively involved in the task of drafting the classification scheme and have now reached varying stages of progress with this work.

### RAME on the EUI website

In late 2006 I set up a web page to publicise the project's activities and provide useful tools for the colleagues involved. The training activity is now on the agenda and will be carried out in a targeted way. The pages were published on the intranet in the section entitled Records and Archives Management at the EUI.

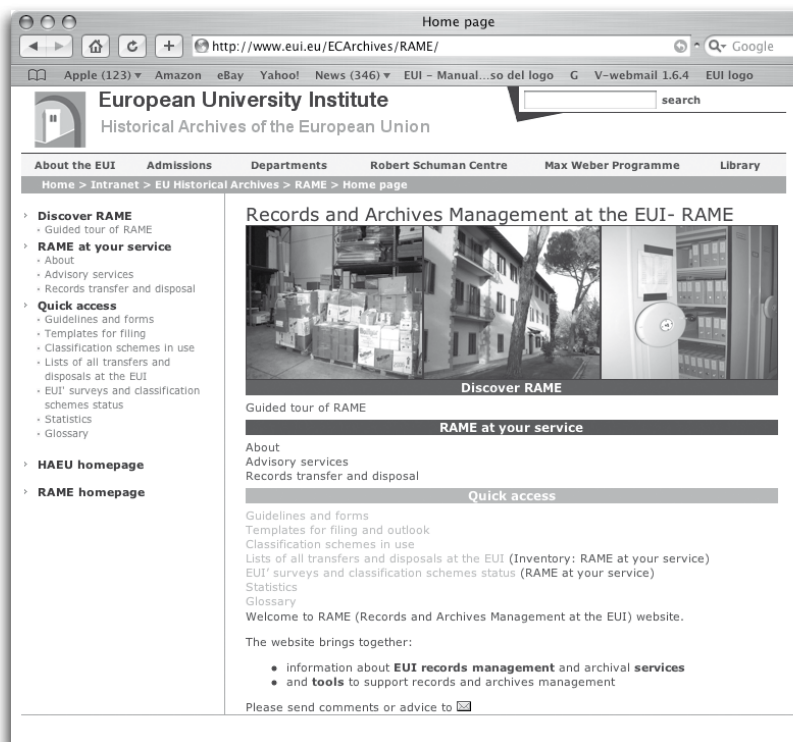
The pages are structured in three sections:

- Discover RAME
- RAME at your service
- Quick access

Discover RAME explains the objectives and benefits of the project for the EUI. It explains the tools available to staff and their responsibilities when managing documents owned by the EUI, and gives an outline of how things were done before RAME.

RAME at your Service presents the services available in an information section (About) and two specific sections: Advisory services, showing what is available (inventories of material, development of classification schemes including disposal deadlines, control of transfer and disposal operations), and Records transfer and disposal, giving practical information on each procedure (appropriate material, templates to fill in, etc.).

Quick access gives fast retrieval of the information needed to use a service (Guidelines and forms, Templates for filing, Classification schemes in use), and showcases RAME's activities (such as the status of the classification schemes in use, detailed information on each transfer or disposal procedure from 2005 to date, statistics on activities). It also contains a brief glossary of the more complex technical terms used.



### RAME goals in the future

- to complete and implement the classification schemes for the whole EUI for filing paper and electronic documents
  - to continue the work of transferring and eliminating material (when the classification schemes are fully operational it will be less complex than at present)
  - to organise staff training
  - to identify an IT system suited to the EUI requirements and to implement the decentralised protocol by means of a series of procedures and rules
- Involving any institution in a records management project implies a change in mentality and serious initial efforts in relation to a series of improvements that are not that visible initially, but which have far-reaching effects, such as:
- more efficient administration
  - more effective capability to respond to needs within and outside the EUI
  - reduced costs
  - institutional transparency & accountability
  - preserve historically relevant documents which will in time be merged into the Historical Archives of the EU.

Despite many initial difficulties, we are now beginning to see results as the project progresses. I also feel a personal satisfaction at the growing cooperation of colleagues involved, finally 'convinced' as they appreciate the everyday use and advantages of RAME. ■