

Version and Document Control Policy

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Department/Team: Data and Information Management

Relevant policies: N/A

Distribution: Internal

Author/Owner: Data and Information Management

Approved by: Iman El Mehdawy, Group Manager, Data and Information Management

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Security classification: Official

Key messages

This policy sets the minimum level of expected practice required for version and document control at the ICO. This policy covers:

- What we mean by version control
- Why version control is important
- What a significant change is to a document
- How to calculate the correct version number for a document
- Publishing our version controls externally

Does this policy relate to me?

This policy relates to all ICO staff.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	2
2. What is version control?	2
3. Why is version control important?	3
4. Less significant documents.....	3
5. Significant documents	4
6. What is a significant change?	6
7. How do I calculate the correct version number for a document?	7
8. Should version control information be published externally?	8
Version history	8

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This policy outlines the ICO's approach to monitoring ownership of our significant documents and tracking changes made to these documents over time.
- 1.2. This policy does not cover more detailed version control built into digital repositories, such as SharePoint.

[Back to the top](#)

2. What is version control?

- 2.1. Version control is the process of tracking and managing different versions of a document. Version control allows us to:
 - tell one version of a document from another;
 - track 'significant changes' to a document over time; and,
 - capture important details including Author, Owner and Security Classification.
 - Communicate key changes made to a document to the reader.

[Back to the top](#)

3. Why is version control important?

3.1. Effective version control is essential for governance and accountability purposes. Version control enables us to:

- create authentic, complete, and reliable documents, making a clear separation between drafts and final versions;
- provide a clear audit trail of how the document was created, developed, and changed over time;
- find the latest version of a document quickly and easily trace which document was 'in force' at any one time;
- allow the deletion of drafts or redundant versions with confidence, reducing duplication, errors, confusion, or misunderstanding.

[Back to the top](#)

4. Less significant documents

4.1. Many documents only require simple version controls. It will be sufficient to add any of the below information to the header or footer of the document. You do not need to add in all of the information below, use your discretion and only add in what you feel is relevant and necessary.

- document name/title
- version number
- status (draft, published or superseded)
- department/team
- relevant or related policies
- distribution (internal or external)
- author/owner
- approved by
- date signed off
- review by date
- security classification

[Back to the top](#)

5. Significant documents

5.1. A 'significant' document is a document that:

- affects or directs how the ICO carries out its functions;
- is placed into the public domain as an official publication of the ICO; or,
- contains information that has a legal effect on either the ICO or any third party.

Examples include:

- Policies and procedures;
- Guidance;
- Key project documentation;
- Codes of practice;
- Manuals;
- Strategies; and
- Business plans.

5.2. 'Significant' documents require additional controls, such as document control and version history panels.

5.2.1. A document control panel must be saved on the front page of the document, and contain the following headers:

Version number: This is the current version number of the document.

Status: The status of document should be either draft, published, or suspended/superseded.

Department/Team: The name of the Department or Team responsible for the document.

Relevant policies: The names of all the relevant policies/procedures/guidance.

Distribution: Clarify when the document can be shared by marking it as internal, external, or both internal and external.

Author/Owner: The name of the colleague who authored or owns document and is responsible for its updates.

Consultees: The names of colleagues involved in the development of this document.

Approved by: The name of the colleague who signed off the document.

Application date: The date the document was first put in effect.

Review date: The date by which the document is next going to be reviewed.

Security classification: Indicate whether the document contains sensitive information by marking it as official – sensitive, or just official.

5.2.2. You must then update the document control panel each time:

- A significant change is made to the document;
- The document is reviewed;
- The document is replaced; or
- Ownership of the document changes.

5.2.3. 'Significant' documents will also require a version history panel. The version history panel provides a history of the changes made to the document from the initial draft to the current version. You must add a version history panel at the end of the document, as follows:

Version	Changes made	Date	Made by

5.2.4. You can copy and paste the above table into your own document. The version history panel should be updated each time a significant change is made to the document. An example of a completed version history panel is as follows:

Version	Changes made	Date	Made by
0.1	First draft	07 April 2020	Joe Bloggs
1.0	Approved and published	20 April 2020	Joe Bloggs
1.1	Update to roles and responsibilities	14 September 2020	Jane Smith
1.2	Added section 4.2	09 January 2021	Joe Bloggs
2.0	Annual review – no changes made	07 April 2021	Joe Bloggs

[Back to the top](#)

6. What is a significant change?

6.1. A 'significant change' is one that alters how the reader will act due to the new wording or is likely to think about the subject because of the new wording. In relation to both the document control panel and the version control panel, a significant change could include:

- The addition or removal of new paragraphs or sections;
- Changes to the scope of the document; or
- Changes to the roles and responsibilities of the people dealing with the document.

6.2. Although it's not possible to provide an exhaustive list of examples here, a 'significant change' would not include very trivial changes, such as:

- Correcting spelling and grammar mistakes;
- Changing the order of the paragraphs; or
- Making insignificant alterations to the wording of a sentence.

[Back to the top](#)

7. How do I calculate the correct version number for a document?

7.1. A first draft of a document can always be version 0.1, until the drafting is complete, and it is approved as a final document. It is not necessary to track every change made to the document whilst it is being drafted. Following approval, the document will then become version 1.0 – which is the first published version.

7.2. Any further revisions to a published document are reflected by creating either a new minor or major version and updating the document control panel and version history.

7.3. Minor changes are typically small updates to a document, but not a full review of the whole document. For example, the insertion of a new paragraph or an amendment to existing content would be considered a minor change.

7.4. Minor changes are reflected by incrementally increasing the version number by 0.1. For example, the first change to 'Information Management Policy 1.0' will amend the version number to 1.1. Every time a change is made, the minor version will increase again by 0.1, e.g. 'Information Management Policy 1.2'. and so on.

7.5. A major change is when the entire document is reviewed and updated. Full reviews of significant documents can take place as often as necessary, but, as a minimum, they should be reviewed periodically

(no longer than 36 months) to ensure their content remains accurate and up to date.

- 7.6. Each time the full document is reviewed and approved; a new major version should be created. Major changes are reflected by increasing the version number by a whole number. For example 'Information Management Policy 1.0' will become 'Information Management Policy 2.0'. Even if no changes have been made after a periodic review, you must still update the document control panel and version control panel to clarify that the review has taken place and no changes have been made.

[Back to the top](#)

8. Should version control information be published externally?

- 8.1. You should include this information in significant documents you publish externally. It is important that we are transparent about how these documents have changed and developed over time.
- 8.2. Both your document control and version history panels are likely to contain the personal data of ICO staff. For example the name and job role of the document owner, or the names of colleagues who have reviewed or amended the document throughout its lifecycle. Prior to publishing personal data you should always consider our [policy on disclosure of ICO employee information](#), as well as any specific objections to publication that you may have received from a member of staff.

[Back to the top](#)

Version history

Version	Changes Made	Date	Made by
V0.1	First draft	18/11/2020	Jennifer Matthews
V1.0	Published	13/05/2021	Ben Cudbertson / Iman El Mehdawy
V1.1	Minor content edits. Addition of 'Should version control information be published externally?'	20/08/2021	Steven Johnston
V2.0	Annual review 2022. No changes made.	26/01/2022	Ben Cudbertson
V2.1	Content moved to new template, minor formatting changes	12/09/2022	Ben Cudbertson
V3.0	Annual review. Amendments to key messages section. Minor changes to sections 3, 4, 5 and 6.	10/02/2023	Steven Johnston
V3.1	Formatting changes to meet accessibility requirements.	24/05/2023	Ben Cudbertson
V4.0	Annual review. Amended link to policy 'disclosure of employee information'.	01/02/2024	Rosie Simpson
V5.0	Annual Review. Additional bullet point added to 2.1.	16/01/2025	Steven Johnston
V5.1	To align with corporate standards: Document control panel at 5.2.1	18/06/2025	Simon Lochery

	removed from table format and version history panel at 5.2.3 changed to plain table format		
V6.0	Annual review completed. Section 5.2 amended to align with the headings contained in the version control panel of the corporate policies, procedures, and guidance template. Format of document updated to new template requirements.	16/02/2025	Simon Lochery

[Back to the top](#)