

MANAGING PUBLIC
SECTOR RECORDS

A Training Programme

Building
Records Appraisal
Systems



INTERNATIONAL
COUNCIL ON ARCHIVES



INTERNATIONAL RECORDS
MANAGEMENT TRUST

MANAGING PUBLIC SECTOR RECORDS: A STUDY PROGRAMME

BUILDING RECORDS APPRAISAL SYSTEMS

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A STUDY PROGRAMME

General Editor, Michael Roper; Managing Editor, Laura Millar

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Building Records Appraisal Systems

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Building Records Appraisal Systems

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INTRODUCTION TO *BUILDING RECORDS* *APPRAISAL SYSTEMS*

Building Records Appraisal Systems addresses the professional issues involved in determining the continuing usefulness of records, defining the requirements for their retention and disposal and designing and applying disposal schedules. This module should be studied after *Organising and Controlling Current Records*. It assumes that the student has some familiarity with the principles and practices of records management described in *Organising and Controlling Current Records* and in *The Management of Public Sector Records: Principles and Context*.

The module consists of seven lessons:

- Lesson 1: Appraisal, Retention and Disposal of Records
- Lesson 2: The Appraisal Process
- Lesson 3: Appraising Records for Continuing Utility or Enduring Value
- Lesson 4: The Appraisal of Backlogs
- Lesson 5: Choosing Disposal Action
- Lesson 6: Disposal Schedules
- Lesson 7: What to Do Next?

The module deals with the appraisal, retention and disposal of records as an ongoing part of a continuum of care within a life-cycle records management system. It also describes the process of bringing under control the unappraised products of former record-keeping systems. Where appropriate, general statements of theory and principle are distinguished from descriptions of specific practice. Where there is a variety of practices, the options are described but usually one is presented as 'best practice'.

Although this module is directed primarily at those involved in records and archives management in the public sector, the principles and practices it advocates are also relevant in the private sector.

Similarly, although the module is largely concerned in its practical application with paper-based records, the methods described may be adopted or adapted for records in other media and formats, including electronic records.

AIMS AND OUTCOMES

Aims

This module has two primary aims:

1. to explain the concepts and practices of appraisal, retention and disposal
2. to establish best-practice procedures for the management of appraisal, retention and disposal.

Outcomes

When you have completed this module, you will be able to

1. identify and define the basic terms used in appraisal, retention and disposal
2. outline the principle requirements of an effective appraisal, retention and disposal system
3. understand the relevance of series control to life-cycle appraisal
4. conduct a records survey
5. outline the various approaches to records appraisal
6. assess continuing utility and enduring value
7. draw up and implement disposal schedules.

METHOD OF STUDY AND ASSESSMENT

The six lessons in the module should occupy about 50 hours of your time. You should plan to spend about:

- 5 hours on Lesson 1
- 8 hours on Lesson 2
- 8 hours on Lesson 3
- 8 hours on Lesson 4
- 8 hours on Lesson 5
- 8 hours on Lesson 6
- 5 hours on Lesson 7.

This includes time spent doing the reading and considering the study questions.

At the end of each lesson there is a summary of the major points. Sources for additional information are provided in Lesson 7.

Throughout each lesson, activities have been included to help you think about the information provided. Each activity is a 'self-assessed' project; there is no 'right' or 'wrong' answer. Rather, the activity is designed to encourage you to explore the ideas presented and relate them to the environment in which you are studying or working. If you are studying these modules independently and are not part of a records or archives management organisation, you should try to complete the activities with a hypothetical situation if possible. If the activity suggests writing something, you should keep this brief and to the point; this is not a marked or graded exercise and you should only spend as much time on the activity as you feel necessary to understand the information being taught.

Following the summary at the end of each lesson are a number of self-study questions. Note that these self-study questions are designed to help you review the material in this module. They are not intended to be graded or marked exercises. You should complete as many of the questions as you feel will help you to understand the concepts presented. External assessments, such as assignments or exams, will be included separately when this module becomes part of a graded educational programme.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Anyone working through this module should not require any additional resources to understand the concepts and ideas expressed here. However, the module will assume that you have access to a records office, records centre or archival institution or that you have some involvement with the management of records; the various activities may ask you to draw on your own experiences and compare those with the information provided in the lessons. If you do not have access to such facilities, you may need to develop a fictitious scenario for your activities. Alternately, you may wish to discuss this module with friends or colleagues who work with records and archives so that you can discuss principles and concepts with them and compare your understanding with theirs.

Case Studies

The MPSR Study Programme includes a series of case studies on various records-related topics. The following case studies are particularly relevant to the appraisal; users of the module may wish to review these case studies as they work through the module.

Case Study:

- 1: Candace Loewen, Canada, 'Appraisal of Common Administrative Records of the Human Resources Management Function of the Government of Canada'
- 2: Catherine Bailey, Canada, 'Macro-Appraisal: The Case of Income Securities Program Branch'
- 24 Ann Pederson, Australia, 'Appraising the Records of the Australian Shipbuilding Engineers Association (ASEA)'
- 25 Ann Pederson, Australia, 'Scheduling the Records of the Wagga Wagga Outpost of the New South Wales Forestry Commission'

APPRAISAL, RETENTION AND DISPOSAL OF RECORDS

Lesson 1 examines the central concepts of appraisal, retention and disposal of records. Topics discussed include

- the general principles of appraisal, retention and disposal
- the aim of appraisal, retention and disposal
- the preconditions for effective appraisal and disposal
- legislation and policies
- service targets.

PRINCIPLES OF APPRAISAL, RETENTION AND DISPOSAL

Appraisal, which is sometimes called 'evaluation' or 'selection', has two purposes. First, appraisal involves deciding what records need to be kept and for how long in order to allow the organisation to continue its work. This is known as appraisal for 'continuing utility'. Second, appraisal involves deciding what records merit permanent preservation as archives because they have an enduring value for purposes other than those for which they were created, such as historical research. This is known as appraisal for 'enduring value'.

Appraisal: The process of determining the value of records for further use, for whatever purpose, and the length of time for which that value will continue. Also known as evaluation, review or selection.

Continuing utility: The finite usefulness that records may have for the continuance of business or as evidence thereof.

Enduring value: The indefinite value that records may have for any purpose and that justifies their preservation as archives.

These two appraisal processes are linked and frequently take place at the same time. For example, at the creation of certain categories of records, such as the primary copies of minutes of a top-level committee, it is possible to predict how long those records are likely to be needed by their creators and users. It is also possible to predict that the records will have an enduring value because the evidence they contain will have a permanent value for the purposes of evidence or research.

For other categories of records, it is not always possible to predict at the point of their creation how long their usefulness or value will last. For example, no matter how precisely the contents of a series of operational files has been defined, it will not be possible to determine in advance whether the whole series will have an enduring value or whether the whole series may be destroyed at a future date. For this reason, review at a later date will be necessary for some categories of records.

However, the aim should always be to undertake the two appraisal processes at the same time. This means that, at the time the records are created, a future action is determined, whether it is to destroy the records, transfer them to the archival institution or review them at a particular date. Similarly, when records are reviewed, usually when they are no longer in day-to-day use, their continuing utility and enduring value will need to be assessed.

Without the control imposed by the processes of appraisal, current record systems will become congested with semi- and non-current records. A backlog of undifferentiated records will develop, storage furniture and facilities will become full and information will be increasingly difficult to access. Eventually, the entire records management system could collapse.

The Purpose of Appraisal

Appraisal involves determining what the records are (or what they will be once they are created), who creates them and why, how they relate to the creating agency's functions and to other records, how they are used, when and by whom. Once all this information is known, the continuing utility or enduring value of the records may be assessed.

Appraisal makes it possible to dispose of records promptly when their continuing utility for business purposes has expired, whether that disposal is by destruction or by transfer for archival preservation. In order to balance economy with good administration, it is necessary that records are neither disposed of too late or too early in their life cycle. If disposed of too early, records with continuing utility or enduring value may be destroyed. If disposed of too late, resources are wasted storing and maintaining unneeded records.

While the destruction of records is irreversible, the retention of records with no further utility or value involves high and continuing costs.

One of the functions of appraisal is to determine the life expectancy of records by assigning retention periods. Retention periods must be assigned to all records in an agency, not just those with possible archival value.

Retention: The function of preserving and maintaining records for continuing use. This may be done in the agency of origin, in a records centre or in an archival institution.

Retention period: The length of time, as provided for by legislation, regulation or administrative procedure or based upon an estimate of the frequency of continuing use, that records should be retained in an office or records centre before they are transferred to an archival institution or otherwise disposed of.

Retention is the process of maintaining records for continuing use, either in the agency of origin, in a records centre or in an archival institution. It follows that records retained for use must remain accessible. If records no longer have continuing utility and have no enduring value, they should be destroyed. If they no longer have continuing utility but have enduring value, they should be preserved in an archival institution.

Retention periods must be assigned to all records in an agency, not just those with possible archival value.

Disposal is the action taken as a consequence of appraisal decisions.

Disposal: The actions taken with regard to records as a consequence of their appraisal and the expiration of their retention periods. *Note:* Disposal is not synonymous with destruction, though that may be an option. Disposal is also known, especially in North America, as disposition.

Other disposal options include transfer to an archival institution or retention in the agency of origin. As already noted, for certain categories of records whose continuing utility or enduring value cannot be judged at the time of their creation, the appraisal decision can only be made following a review of the records undertaken at some specified date.

In North American usage the equivalent term for disposal is 'disposition'.

It follows that disposal can only take place when records have reached the non-current stage of their life cycle.

The product of the appraisal function is the disposal schedule.

Disposal schedule: The control document recording appraisal decisions and prescribing disposal action. Also known as disposal list, disposition schedule, records schedule, retention schedule, retention and disposal (or disposition) schedule or transfer schedule.

The disposal schedule

- identifies all the series of records (not just the file series) created or maintained by an agency or an administrative unit of an agency
- notes the appraisal decisions that have been taken in respect of them
- specifies the periods for which they are to be retained and their place of custody during those prescribed retention periods
- authorises their disposal at the appropriate time.

The disposal schedule is sometimes known as the 'disposal list', 'disposition schedule', 'records schedule', 'retention schedule' or 'retention and disposal (or disposition) schedule'.

The appraisal and disposal of records are two distinct activities, but they are inextricably linked. They need not be undertaken together; indeed they are usually separated by a prescribed period of retention. However, appraisal that is not followed in due course by disposal is pointless; and disposal without prior appraisal is an unsound practice and may even be unlawful.

Destruction: The disposal of documents of no further value by incineration, maceration, pulping, shredding or another secure method.

Disposal is not synonymous with 'destruction', though that may be the most common disposal option.

Appraisal in Practice

In poorly managed record-keeping systems, records appraisal is often an ad hoc exercise. It may be undertaken in a hurry when the quantity of records has outgrown the storage space available or when an agency has to move to new accommodation. When appraisal is done in an unplanned, non-systematic manner, the wholesale, uncritical destruction of records may take place. Or if records are examined, it may be necessary to appraise them on an item-by-item basis in order to separate current, semi-current records and non-current records. This can be a very time-consuming exercise. The non-current records, or at least some of them, may then be offered to the archival institution for archival appraisal to determine whether any of the records have enduring value. The archival institution then has to review these records, often without necessary contextual information about their origins or purpose, in order to select for preservation as archives those materials with enduring value. Thus, the appraisal of records that are the product of poor record-keeping systems can be wasteful of resources.

Even when records appraisal is better organised, it is often managed as two distinct operations. First, current records are appraised in order to destroy those records that do not merit continued retention and to transfer to a records centre those semi-current records that still need to be retained. Second, non-current records are appraised as part of the archival process, to identify records of enduring value for transfer to an archival institution.

Traditionally, these two operations have been handled separately, the first by the records manager and the second by the archivist. To that two-stage appraisal process, the records manager is expected to bring a knowledge of the current activities of the agency and of the records that support them. The archivist is expected to have an awareness of the history of the period covered by the records, a familiarity with other records accepted previously from the agency and a knowledge of the relationship of the records of that agency to those of other agencies. The archivist should then be able to determine, either from experience or by seeking advice, which records have a potential research or historical value.

No matter how knowledgeable the records manager or archivist might be, it is not possible to cope with the bulk of the records of a modern government on an ad hoc basis, or in a two-stage process in which decisions are made first on the basis of continuing utility and later on the basis of enduring value.

Appraisal can be conducted effectively only if it is based on an analysis of records maintained within a well-conceived and effectively operated life-cycle records management system. Appraisal should be performed as early as possible in the records life-cycle, informed by an in-depth understanding of the functions and activities that led to the creation of the records. The aim should always be to reduce the appraisal and disposal process to a routine whenever possible, so that it becomes part of the regular activities of the records professional and the administration.

It is not possible to appraise the bulk of modern government records on an ad hoc basis.

Only in exceptional cases should it be necessary to undertake a detailed examination of individual files and their contents to determine their disposal. A detailed review may be necessary when sorting through a disorganised backlog, in order ensure that no records of continuing utility or enduring value are destroyed. It may also be necessary when dealing with file series containing a mixture of policy, operational and administrative files.

Specific appraisal processes are dealt with in more detail in Lesson 2.

The Aim of Appraisal and Disposal

The aim of appraisal and disposal is to ensure that records are either destroyed or transferred to an archival institution at the right time, as a result of the systematic implementation of decisions made concerning the continuing utility and enduring value of the records.

It is neither practical nor desirable to preserve all the records created by every agency. Records *must* be removed, and records *must* be destroyed. Though practice will vary widely between agencies, an often quoted estimate is that less than five per cent of government records are of enduring value and therefore ought to be preserved permanently.

While the destruction of records is irreversible, the retention of records of no further value involves high and continuing costs. Striking the right balance between destruction and retention requires a planned and consistent approach to appraisal and disposal.

It is not possible to preserve all the records created by every agency in a government or organisation.

Appraisal Strategy

Ideally, appraisal and disposal should be a continuing and systematic process undertaken in the context of an agreed strategy. This strategy should be government- or organisation-wide with respect to administrative records common to all agencies and agency-wide with respect to operational records that are generated as a result of each agency's function. It should contribute to the wider business strategy of the government and its specific agencies.

The appraisal and disposal strategy should be at the macro-level (that is, at the series level) not the micro-level (the file or document level). Ideally, records will be appraised at the time of their creation, or even in advance of their creation, such as

when the format and informational content of new types of records or new record series are being planned. Such advance appraisal is feasible, because it is possible to identify the value of most records on the basis of the importance of the functions they document.

However, when a backlog of unappraised records has been allowed to accumulate, appraisal will have to be retrospective. In this case, appraising records at the series level may not be practical if the series has not been clearly defined or managed. Review at the level of the file or even individual document may be unavoidable.

Activity 1

Write a brief description of the processes used in your organisation at present to identify records to be kept and records to be destroyed. Is the term 'appraisal' used? Are records appraised for their continuing utility and for their enduring value? How are records disposed of once they are considered of no further value or are deemed worthy of archival preservation?

PRECONDITIONS FOR AN EFFECTIVE APPRAISAL STRATEGY

The appraisal and disposal of records cannot be undertaken successfully on a piecemeal basis or in a vacuum. Whether done as part of a continuum of care in an integrated life-cycle records management programme or as a special exercise to eliminate a backlog of unappraised records, appraisal and disposal must be approached with an understanding of the functions and systems that generate the records and the relationship of those records with all others created in the business process.

Effective appraisal, retention and disposal is dependent on an effective records management programme that controls records throughout their life cycle. Ideally, such control will be exercised centrally, even when the files themselves are held in local records offices, file stores or individual offices. It is increasingly likely that the control system will be computerised.

While the records management programme will cover all the records of the agency (including financial and accounting records, personnel records and so on), at its centre will be a file management system.

Such a system will have a number of important features.

- Files will be organised into series that correspond to the functions and activities being documented.
- The series will be the unit of control throughout the life cycle, including the appraisal, retention and disposal process.
- Administrative ('housekeeping') files, common to all agencies, will be distinguished from policy or operational files documenting the specific work of the individual agency.
- Policy and operational files, relating to the formulation and procedures for implementing the agency's policies, will be further differentiated from case files, which document the individual cases arising from the implementation of the agency's programmes.
- With the exception of administrative files, for which a government- or organisation-wide classification system may be appropriate, the files will be organised and controlled by a classification system tailored to the needs of each individual agency (or even individual unit). The classification system will be kept up to date as the agency's responsibilities change and its functions and subject areas develop in new directions.
- The classification system will be adequately documented, with a classification and coding scheme at the series level and with file plans listing individual files within each series, with indexes. It is the classification system that will be used to keep the files in their correct and logical order, even when some or many of them have been destroyed.
- Transitory or ephemeral records of no continuing utility, such as rough drafts, duplicates, announcements and trade publicity materials, will not be filed in the first place, so that the selective destruction of documents within files will not be necessary.

In this ideal records management system, the records in a series will be homogeneous, and their relationship to the functions, activities and business process of the creating agency will be clear. The series will be the basis for control of the records; it will serve as the focus of appraisal. The continuing utility and enduring value of the records in the series will be related to the significance of that function or activity in the context of the agency's business processes.

Appraising all its records file by file, item by item, is beyond the human and financial resources of any organisation.

As already noted, appraisal should be based on the series, with disposal actions applied to the series as a whole. Appraising all its records file by file, item by item, is beyond the human and financial resources of any organisation. Sometimes, however, it is necessary to consider records at lower levels than the series.

For example, operational files at the highest levels of an organisation may need to be reviewed individually. Similarly, at the lower levels of an organisation, there may be mixed in with routine files some procedural files of enduring value that will need to be identified at a later stage in the life cycle.

Activity 2

Think back to your study of earlier modules, particularly about the concept of a series. Write a brief description of the series. What is a series? How are records brought together into a series?

Based on what you have read above and your understanding of series, explain why it is possible to appraise records by series and not file-by-file. What criteria would you use to determine if a series of records were worth keeping?

Appraisal and Disposal of Backlogs

As already noted, where there are backlogs of unappraised and possibly disorganised records, appraisal at the level of the file or even the document may be inescapable. However, even in such a situation, it is necessary to adopt a systematic approach to appraisal and disposal by establishing the functional and administrative context within which the records were created. Business systems analyses and records surveys are used as preliminary steps to appraisal and also to the wider process of restructuring the records management system as a whole.

Records survey: The application of the techniques of business systems analysis to the gathering of basic information regarding the quantity, physical form and type, location, physical condition, storage facilities, rate of accumulation, uses and similar data about the records of an organisation.

Business systems analysis (BSA): An analytical framework that involves analysing organisations as systems or the process of systematically and objectively gathering information about business systems and subjecting that information to formal analysis. This includes identifying broad organisational goals and supporting business areas and processes, and business process definition and decomposition.

Dealing with backlogs is discussed in Lesson 4. Business systems analysis and records surveys are referred to again later in this module and are described in detail in Analysing Business Systems and in Restructuring Current Records Systems: A Procedures Manual.

LEGISLATION AND POLICIES

The basis of all records management authority is comprehensive and up-to-date legislation or, in the case of private sector organisations, concrete and effective policies. In order for a systematic appraisal and disposal process to work effectively, records-related legislation or policies must address a number of important elements.

- Records must be precisely defined. On the one hand, the definition must include records in all media and formats created or received at all levels within an agency. On the other hand, it should exclude other information sources, such as library material and equivalent sources of electronic data, that may be available but do not themselves form part of, or provide evidence for, the agency's business transactions.
- Legislation or organisational policy must establish a framework for the continuous appraisal and appropriate disposal of all records. Responsibility for appraisal and disposal should be clearly assigned to the appropriate heads of agencies (on whose behalf the agency records manager will act) and to the head of the records and archives institution.
- General guidance on appraisal, retention and disposal of records should be issued by the records and archives institution. Within the context of that guidance, the records manager in each agency should draft comprehensive and detailed instructions on the appraisal, retention and disposal of the agency's records, in consultation with appropriate representatives of the organisation and the records and archives institution.
- Rules must be established for the orderly and timely transfer of semi-current records of continuing utility to a records centre and of records of enduring value to an archival repository.
- Rules must be established for the systematic and timely disposal of records. Responsibility must be clearly assigned for ensuring that disposal action is carried out. The approval process must be simple in order to avoid delays.

Legislative issues are discussed in more detail in Developing Infrastructures for Records and Archives Services.

Legislation and policies must allow for the efficient, timely and planned appraisal of records.

Activity 3

Consider the legislation governing the care of records and archives in your jurisdiction. Does the legislation establish a framework for the appraisal and disposal of records? Is responsibility assigned? If appraisal is addressed in the legislation, write a brief description of the policies established. If appraisal is not addressed in the legislation, write a description of how you would incorporate appraisal into the legislation to ensure records are appraised and disposed as part of a systematic process.

SERVICE TARGETS

Performance measurement is discussed in more detail in Strategic Planning for Records and Archives Services.

The setting and monitoring of service targets and the measurement of performance are useful ways of assessing the effectiveness and impact of appraisal and disposal system. Measurement involves more than just counting the number of actions; it is concerned with comparing the relationship between the resources that go into the service (inputs) and what the service achieves using those resources (outputs).

Input: Any resource required for the functioning of a process, in the course of which it will be transformed into one or more outputs.

Output: The product of the transformation of *inputs* by a process.

It is important to be selective when deciding which activities should be subject to service targets. For appraisal and disposal, key areas include

- undertaking a records survey (where necessary)
- drawing up disposal schedules
- implementing disposal schedules in a timely fashion.

The collection and evaluation of statistical information is time consuming. It is important to ensure that the facts and figures collected are relevant for performance measurement.

The performance measures may be timed and targeted objectives. For example, a disposal action recommended as a result of the records survey should be completed within a set time, such as one year, from the acceptance of the survey report. Or the performance may be measured through the cost savings achieved with the disposal of records of no further value.

SUMMARY

Lesson 1 has introduces the central concepts of appraisal, retention and disposal of records. It has defined the following terms:

- appraisal
- continuing utility
- enduring value
- retention
- retention period
- disposal
- disposal schedule
- current, semi-current and non-current records
- archives
- records survey
- business process analysis
- input
- output.

The lesson has also discussed the purpose of appraisal, examined the preconditions for effective appraisal systems and examined the legislative requirements needed to ensure appraisal processes operate smoothly.

The lesson has explained the importance of the series rather than individual records or documents as the basis of that action. The lesson concluded with an introduction to the importance of establishing service targets to measure performance in the area of appraisal.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Define appraisal.
2. Explain the difference between continuing utility and enduring value.
3. Why should appraisal for continuing utility and appraisal for enduring value take place at the same time?
4. Explain the purpose of appraisal.
5. What is a retention period?
6. Explain the concept of disposal?
7. How is disposal different from destruction?
8. Explain the purpose of a disposal schedule.
9. Explain the two ways in which records have traditionally been appraised. Why is this process no longer considered appropriate?
10. Why must some records be destroyed?
11. What is the concept of an appraisal strategy? Why is such a strategy important?
12. Why should appraisal be part of a system of series control of records?
13. Name at least five features of a file management system based on series control.
14. Identify three advantages and three disadvantages to appraising series of records rather than appraising records file by file or item by item.
15. What elements should be included in records-related legislation or policies in order for a systematic appraisal and disposal process to work effectively?
16. What is the concept of service targets and performance measurement?
17. Why is performance measurement important to the appraisal process?
18. What appraisal activities might be measured?

ACTIVITIES: COMMENTS

Activities 1-3

These three activities help you examine the principles of appraisal and compare them with the systems presently in place in your organisation. You should compare the information provided in this lesson with your own answers. For Activity 2, you will want to read further in this module and compare your answers with information provided later, particularly in Lesson 3.

THE APPRAISAL PROCESS

Lesson 2 examines the general principles involved in the appraisal process. It considers in detail life-cycle appraisal and series control and introduces some of the key factors concerned with appraisal practice. Lesson 3 will examine in more depth the approaches to the appraisal of records for their continuing utility or enduring value.

LIFE-CYCLE APPRAISAL

Appraisal can be exercised properly only within an effective life-cycle records management system that

- maintains the provenance of records, thus preserving their administrative context and their organic relationship with each other
- organises and controls records by series based on functions, thereby allowing appraisal decisions to be taken at a higher level than the file whenever possible
- applies document and file handling procedures that exclude ephemeral and duplicate material from the outset, so that there is no need even to consider 'stripping' individual documents from files.

These principles apply to identifying records of continuing utility as well as records of enduring value. However, the strategies used to identify continuing utility and enduring value can differ significantly. These strategies will be examined in more detail in Lesson 3.

As explained in Lesson 1, the appraisal of records has traditionally taken place as two distinct operations at the end of each of the first two phases of the records' life cycle. Each operation has been handled by a different person: at the end of the current phase by the records manager and at the end of the semi-current phase by the archivist. More recently, records managers and archivists have affirmed that management of records throughout their life cycle must take place as a continuum of care, not as a series of discrete phases.

Life-cycle concept: A concept that draws an analogy between the life of a biological organism, which is born, lives and dies, and that of a record, which is created, is used for so long as it has continuing value and is then disposed of by destruction or by transfer to an archival institution.

Continuum concept: A consistent and coherent process of records management throughout the life of records, from the development of record-keeping systems through the creation and preservation of records, to their retention and use as archives.

The benefits of appraising records at their creation or even before is one of the factors that led records professionals to recognise the need to replace the traditional separation of responsibilities. The interests of records managers and archivists overlap at all phases of the life cycle of records. Moreover, the users of records have an important contribution to make to the appraisal process. Hence, appraisal has become a threefold partnership involving the action officer, the records manager and the archivist. In this way, scarce personnel resources can be used effectively by sharing expertise and knowledge.

Action officer: An official engaged in the administration of an agency or in the implementation of its functions and activities. Also known as a desk officer.

Appraisal should involve the action officer, the records manager and the archivist.

The early appraisal of records can be undertaken by the action officer, records manager and archivist as a joint enterprise performed in two concurrent or overlapping stages.

1. The records manager, in consultation with the action officer, decides how long each series of records needs to be retained for the agency's own business purposes, and the archivist monitors the process to ensure consistency with decisions taken in other agencies.
2. The archivist, consulting with the records manager and action officers as necessary, concentrates on the records that need to be retained for a significant time (say ten years) to identify any that are likely to be of enduring value, giving more cursory consideration to those records that do not need to be retained for longer.

These appraisal stages apply equally to electronic records. In fact, the identification of retention standards for electronic records should be integrated into all systems in which they are managed. This must be done at the design stage of systems development.

For guidance on the integration of retention standards in electronic records systems, see Managing Electronic Records.

Early appraisal should ensure that the criteria for retention and disposal, identified at the time records systems are established, are documented from the outset and do not have to be rediscovered at a later date. For example, it is important to record why a particular file series is to be preserved in its entirety as documenting a core function of the agency, or conversely, reviewed so that individual files will be selected either for destruction or permanent preservation.

Recommending early appraisal is not the same as saying that a decision taken at or shortly after creation of the records should necessarily remain unchallenged throughout the life cycle. Organisations are never static: responsibilities and functions change, as do information needs. As business is conducted over time, practical experience may indicate that records will have a longer or shorter administrative or operational life than originally envisaged. In addition, distance from the events may bring benefits of historical detachment (or hindsight) to the archival appraisal process, making it possible to recognise and preserve records documenting the origins of issues that only later became important. However, such cases should be the exception to the general rule. For the bulk of records generated, it should normally be possible to determine retention and disposal requirements at the outset.

Activity 4

This lesson advocates appraising records by series and by function, if possible before the records have been created. Can you think of at least three advantages to determining appraisal periods before records are created? Write each down and explain your thinking.

Then write down at least three disadvantages to appraising records at the point of creation or when record-keeping systems are established. Compare your advantages and disadvantages and write down your ideas for overcoming the disadvantages while still managing records throughout their life cycle according to the continuum principle of records care.

Series Control as the Basis for Appraisal

Series control is dealt with in Organising and Controlling Current Records.

When records have been properly arranged and when administrative, policy and case records have been clearly differentiated, the record units that comprise a series should be homogeneous and require only a single appraisal decision that will stand throughout the life cycle.

The series should form the basis for appraisal.

Some record series have links with other series because they deal with related functions within the same broad business process. In such cases, all the related functions can be treated as a system. The various components can be appraised, with different retention periods and disposal decisions assigned to each, depending on their relative significance or informational value. In this way, it is possible to deal systematically with records relating to the same function or business process that are created, for example, at different levels within the same agency.

This approach can also be used when dealing with records of different provenance, created by separate agencies within the same organisational systems. In such cases, it is possible to undertake a comparative appraisal of the records of the several agencies involved in a particular policy or programme by ascribing greater value to the records of those agencies that were the prime movers ('office of primary responsibility') in formulating and implementing that policy.

Such a systems approach to appraisal is equally appropriate for electronic record-keeping systems or for mixed systems of paper and electronic records. A holistic approach may also be a more useful means of appraising records in other media and formats (such as maps, photographs or audiovisual records) than the more usual item-by-item review.

Duplicate Sources of Information

In arriving at appraisal decisions, it is necessary to determine whether information contained in records is unique or exists elsewhere. The information in the records may be wholly or substantially available in a variety of other sources and forms. For example, the same information may be found in

- records in other formats (maps and plans) or other media (microforms, electronic systems)
- other records of the agency, including its regional and local offices
- the records of other agencies
- published works.

In general, the more compact, complete or accessible records should be retained, but there will be exceptions to this rule when the interests of the agency would only partially be met by retaining a single source of the information. Exceptions may include the following.

- Where different perspectives or arguments are reflected in the records of different agencies or in offices at different levels within the agency, both sets of records may need to be retained.
- Where duplicates or other less valuable records are interfiled with original correspondence and other papers that merit retention, and the duplicates contribute to an understanding of the process, the duplicates should be retained.
- Where records are the source of statistical data, they should be retained in their least aggregated form for future reanalysis.

Item-by-item Review

Some series will contain valuable information, but the quantity will be insufficient in relation to the total volume of records to justify retaining the entire series. In such cases, the selective retention of individual records is a valid option; thus the only practicable appraisal decision may be to undertake an item-by-item review; that is the appraisal of individual files or records. This approach is particularly necessary for mixed series containing files dealing with policy or precedent, operational files documenting processes and individual cases, and administrative files concerning 'housekeeping' matters such as the care of buildings, equipment and staff.

Further guidance on file-by-file review and selective archival retention is given in Lesson 5.

Case Files

Case papers/files: Papers or files relating to a specific action, event, person, place, project, or other subject. Also known as dossiers, dockets, particular instance papers, project files or transactional files.

Case files have the same subject matter, but each individual file relates to a different person, institution, place or project. They are also known as particular instance files, dossiers, project files or transaction files. It may be necessary to appraise case files differently from other records.

Case files may have to be appraised differently from other records.

Because series of case files or papers are usually bulky, they can rarely be preserved in their entirety. However, by their very nature, they may contain valuable information that can be useful for research, particularly by statistical analysis. Moreover, some case file series may contain individual records of enduring value (for example, about an event or person of historical significance), but the value of such records will often not be known when they are created. Some case record series, such as personnel files, will have to be retained for long periods before they are destroyed or transferred to the archival institution because the evidence they contain is required over a very long period (such as the working life or lifetime of the subject) for administrative purposes. Other case files may have an enduring value as ‘specimens’ because of the processes and procedures that they document.

Assessing the continuing utility or enduring value of case files is dealt in Lesson 3.

APPRAISAL AND LONG-TERM UTILITY

Most records cease to be of continuing utility after a relatively short period. After about ten years, only a small proportion are likely to retain any utility to the agency that created them.

Wherever possible, the few records of long-term utility should be identified at the time of creation and not left for retrospective identification at a later stage in their life cycle. Many such records will need to be preserved permanently and should, therefore, be transferred to the archival institution after a period of retention in the records office or the records centre.

Activity 5

Before reading further, think about the idea the records may have different values. Can you think of records that have short-term utility but enduring value? Can you think of records with long-term utility but no enduring value? Write down as many types of records as you can. Then compare your answers with the information in this lesson.

Records of long-term utility are likely to include

- records that must be preserved under any statutory provision
- records documenting continuing rights or obligations of the state, the agency or third parties under national or international law

- legal instruments, such as land titles, leases, endowments, agreements and contracts
- records relating to the formulation of legislation and policy arising from the core functions of the agency
- records documenting precedent
- record copies of agency publications
- personnel records.

Another type of record with long-term utility and of particular significance to the records professional is ‘control documentation’: that is, any record describing how other records or information have been created, used or managed. Control documentation should be retained as long as the related records have a continuing value.

Control documentation describes how other records or information were created.

The following types of control documentation are particularly likely to have long-term value:

- a copy of each version of the agency’s file classification and coding scheme and disposal schedules
- file plans (file transit sheets, file lists, and so on) for series that are to be retained in whole or in part
- correspondence registers that continue to be the only or main means of reference to records that have been scheduled for retention
- indexes to any of the above
- software manuals and other systems documentation essential to the continued use of electronic records scheduled for retention.

Records of long-term utility should not be confused with records of enduring value though, as already mentioned, there will be an overlap between such records. Some records of enduring value may have only a short-term utility. One example might be the signed minutes of a committee that meets frequently, or a signed agreement. After a short time the minutes or agreement may be referred to again only rarely, but they may constitute an important primary source of information and thus have enduring value.

Records that are considered ‘vital’ – that is, essential to the operations of the organisation – do not necessarily have long-term utility. Vital records cease to be essential and may lose all utility when they are superseded by new versions. This is particularly the case for databases. Here it is wise to follow the ‘three generations’ rule: retaining the ‘grandfather, father and son’, or in other words the present and the two previous versions of the records. Such an approach may be more sensible than

simply assigning a specific time regardless of when a present version might be superseded.

Considerations of long-term utility for third parties will also be an important factor when appraising records. Records such as registers of births, marriages and deaths will be kept indefinitely because they have extremely long-term utility as well as enduring value. On the other hand, such records as the personal files of civil servants will have long-term utility for pension and other purposes so long as their subjects (and perhaps their widows or other dependents) are alive. After that, the utility of the records will usually cease.

Records of long-term utility should not be confused with records of enduring value though there will be an overlap between such records.

DOCUMENTING APPRAISAL POLICIES AND DECISIONS

It is important to document the reasoning behind appraisal decisions, for a number of reasons.

- Organisations need to maintain an ‘audit trail’ of important decisions. In the case of government agencies, they must be accountable to the government and to society at large for their decisions about which records have been permanently preserved as part of the archives and which have been destroyed.
- The records and archives institution must also be accountable for decisions about the permanent preservation of records that will provide the ‘historical accountability’ of the government.
- No appraisal decision is perfect, and it may be necessary to re-examine appraisal decisions to determine if a more appropriate decision can be made. Access to the reasoning behind the original decision is essential.
- The research and analysis required to arrive at an appraisal decision can be of use for other purposes. As already noted, business process analysis has wider uses for the redesign or restructuring of records management systems and classification schemes. In archival description, the documentation of appraisal decisions can provide vital information about the provenance of the records and may also help in the preparation of administrative histories and finding aids.

Documentation of appraisal should include the following.

- An overall policy should set out the approach used to appraise the records, for example functional or values-based appraisal (see below), along with any specific guidelines about the methodology used.
- Explanatory reports should be prepared for each appraisal exercise, explaining the methodology followed, the description of the agencies and their functions, programmes and structures, and the reasons some series have been identified as having enduring value and others have not.

Activity 6

Imagine that you have conducted an appraisal exercise for a series of files in your office: the series relates to issuing supplies to staff and the files consist of copies of receipts, signed by staff and held in case there were any questions about supplies issued. You have determined that all records in this series may be destroyed after three years; the records need not be transferred to the records centres at all.

Write a brief description of the documentation you would create about this appraisal decision. Specifically, explain the overall policy used for appraisal; then explain the methodology used, the description of the agency responsible for creating the records, and your reasons for assigning the disposal decision you chose.

SUMMARY

Lesson 2 has examined the general principles involved in appraisal and has introduced some of the key factors involved in appraisal practice. In particular, the lesson has examined the following issues:

- life-cycle appraisal
- the concepts of the life cycle and the continuum
- series control as a basis for appraisal
- issues involved with duplicate sources of information, item-by-item review and case files
- appraisal and the concepts of long-term utility
- the importance of documenting appraisal policies and decisions.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Explain why appraisal can be exercised properly only within an effective life-cycle records management system.
2. What must be the qualities of that life-cycle records management system for it to be effective?
3. Explain the life-cycle concept.
4. Explain the continuum concept.
5. How can records managers and archivists appraise records as a joint enterprise?
6. Explain the relationship between series control and appraisal.
7. Why is it important to document the appraisal process?
8. What types of documentation should be created for appraisal work?
9. Why do case files sometimes need to be appraised differently from other records?
10. Why do duplicate sources of information sometimes need to be appraised differently from other records?
11. What is the relationship between appraisal and storage issues?
12. What is the concept of long-term utility?
13. Explain how records can have long-term utility but little or no enduring value.
14. Explain how records can have no short-term utility but can have great enduring value.

ACTIVITIES: COMMENTS

Activity 4

Appraisal by function allows an organisation to determine retention periods before records are created; such a process enhances the development of a smooth record-keeping system that manages records throughout their life cycle. Advantages include efficient use of time, space and resources, good management of records, greater ability to locate and use records and ongoing management of information resources.

Many people worry that if records are appraised before they are, say, 25 or 30 years old, information of historical value will be lost. People also worry that records needed by the organisation could be destroyed too soon.

However, as this module demonstrates, it is possible to appraise the vast majority of records on the basis of function and activity, and then examine those specific records that fall outside of the 'norm', determining appraisal criteria for those records and taking into account the value of hindsight.

Consider your answers to this activity as you read through the rest of this module and compare your answers with the information conveyed here.

Activity 5

Compare your answers with the information provided in this lesson.

Activity 6

Your documentation would need to explain whether or not there was a policy for the creation and management of supplies-related records. If the business process of distributing supplies meant that staff only had six weeks to question a supply order, then there is little value in keeping records beyond that point, unless the records had enduring value. It is unlikely that such records would have enduring value; they are purely administrative or 'housekeeping' records.

Your documentation would also include an explanation of the methodology used and a brief description of the process of distributing supplies, so that people could understand what records had been created and why you chose not to retain them.

APPRAISING RECORDS FOR CONTINUING UTILITY OR ENDURING VALUE

Lesson 2 looked at the general principles and key factors involved in the appraisal process. Lesson 3 examines the approaches that guide the appraisal of records for their continuing utility or enduring value.

APPRAISING RECORDS FOR CONTINUING UTILITY

Continuing utility must always end at some point. In assessing the continuing utility of records, the appraiser must ask the following questions. Do the records have a continuing use to the creating agency, or its successor, for its own purposes? If the records do have a continuing use, is the end of that use predictable?

The American archivist Theodore Schellenberg set out an appraisal model in the 1950s in which he argued that the value of records could be divided into two basic categories: primary value and secondary value.

Primary value: The continuing utility of records or archives, by virtue of their contents, for the transaction of the business that gave rise to their creation.

Secondary value: The enduring value that records or archives possess, by virtue of their contents, for purposes other than the transaction of the business for which they were created.

Schellenberg's model of 'primary value' remains useful today for determining which records are of continuing utility to an agency for business purposes. In the model primary value is further subdivided.

Operational value: The primary value of records for the continuance of the administration or operations of the creating agency or a successor in function or as evidence thereof. Also known as administrative value. *Note:* the term ‘administrative’ in this context refers not to ‘housekeeping’ records but to those records with operational or core value to the organisation; to avoid confusion in these modules, the term ‘operational value’ is used.

Financial (or fiscal) value: The primary value of records for the continuance of the financial or fiscal business of the creating agency or a successor in function or as evidence thereof (such as for audit).

Legal value: The primary value of records for the continuance of the legal business of the creating organisation or a successor in function or the protection of its legal rights or those of its employees or third parties.

The period of continuing utility may be as short as one year or less, or it may be as long as twenty or thirty years. In some instances it may be even longer. However, it is always finite. In determining the end, the appraiser will need to consider the operational, financial and legal value of the records to the agency. He or she must also consider the enduring or secondary value of the records. For example, the records may have a wider significance as an information resource for the agency, for third parties to whom it provides a service and for the government or organisation in general. These various concepts of value are discussed below.

The period of continuing utility may be long but it is always finite.

Activity 7

For each of the following types of records, explain whether the records might have operational, financial or legal value to the creating organisation and why.

- statutes and executive orders
- inventories of equipment or supplies
- reports and minutes of boards and committees
- contracts and agreements
- budgets and budget estimates
- organisational reports and charts
- policies or directives
- annual and other periodic reports
- invoices and other vouchers.

Determining Retention Periods and Disposal Policy

Making decisions on the continuing utility of records for the agency's own purposes is, in effect, risk management. In other words the records manager, in advising the agency, must weigh relative costs, such as the actual financial cost of retaining records on the off-chance that the information will again be used against the loss of effectiveness or accountability by not having the information available.

This is not the same as saying that regulatory requirements, such as audit, can be ignored if there is only a small chance that particular records may be required for regulatory purposes. One of the aims of records management is to ensure that regulatory requirements are met. Any records that might be needed for audit must therefore be retained until the audit for that period has been conducted.

Consider the retention for an indefinite period of certain staff records (for instance relating to performance) on the off-chance that a request for a personal reference might be received at some future date. There is no obligation to provide personal references for former members of staff based on past records of performance. In this instance, the records manager may recommend a suitable time from the date of retirement or resignation (such as five years), at which time the records of performance may be destroyed.

There will be a time in the life of a record when the savings from disposal will outweigh the disadvantage of losing the information.

It is not necessary to retain records until all possibility of them being required again has ceased. Rather, retention periods should represent the point of balance between risk and continued retention. Retention periods prescribe the length of time records of continuing utility, including records of enduring value that merit eventual preservation as archives, will be preserved and maintained.

Current records in regular use will be retained as near as possible to the operational units that use them. Their care will be controlled by the relevant records office of the creating agency. Semi-current records in less frequent use will normally be transferred to a records centre. Records will not be transferred to archival care until their continuing utility has to all intents and purposes expired, and only those records with enduring value as archives will be kept by the archival institution.

Appraising records for enduring value is discussed later in this lesson.

In a well-run life-cycle management system, the choice of a retention period will be a single decision taken at the time when the series is created. The decision may be confirmed when the first batch of records in the series ceases to be current, but it should not be revised on a regular or ad hoc basis; the decision should be based on sound analysis and should stand the test of time.

Many administrative ('housekeeping'), financial and legal records occur in very much the same form in many or all agencies. Therefore, it is possible for the records and archives institution, in consultation with the agencies of primary responsibility, to set government- or organisation-wide retention periods for these types of records. Where the records are agency-specific (operational records), action officers within the agency and financial and legal officials are the best sources of advice on what retention periods are appropriate.

Determining retention periods and disposal policy is a complex process and it is impossible to lay down a precise formula. Decisions must be based on an analysis of a number of key factors discussed below.

Legal and Financial Requirements

Legislation is a key factor in determining disposal policy.

Primary legislation (enacted by Parliament) and secondary legislation (regulations, instruments and so on issued under Acts of Parliament) may establish policy which will determine or influence the type of records created or received, the period during which they must be retained and where and how they should be stored.

For example, legislation may specify that particular records (such as registers) be kept for special purposes (to provide evidence of registration). Similarly, there may be a statutory requirement that the National Archives keep original contracts and agreements entered into on behalf of the state.

The statute of limitations will be of particular significance in determining the retention of records. This legislation does not itself specify the periods during which records need to

be retained. Rather, it states that actions cannot be brought in a court of law after a certain time. The implication for record keeping is that records will need to be retained by an organisation as evidence to defend itself against an action until the time limit has ended.

The statute of limitations may operate in different ways in different circumstances. Consider the following examples.

- The time limit for bringing a criminal action may not be the same as that for bringing a civil action. In each case there may be different time limits for different types of action.
- The time limit for some kinds of criminal action may run not from the date of the crime but from the date when the crime was first discovered.
- The time limit for bringing a civil action may not start from the date of the record to which it relates. For instance, the time limit for an action for breach of contract may run from the date of completion of the contract, not from the date of the contract itself.
- Different time limits may apply depending upon the form of the record itself. For example, the time limit for an action for breach of contract may be longer for a contract under seal than for a contract under signature.
- In some types of action relating to the affairs of minors (children under the age of majority), such as medical liability, the time limit may not begin to run until the minor reaches the age of legal responsibility.
- In some types of action, such as health and safety, there may be no time limit.

As noted already, it may be the case that the cost of retaining a particular category of records indefinitely is likely to be far greater than the cost to the agency of having to defend itself against an action without having the evidence in those records. If so, there is a strong argument against retaining the records.

Financial regulations or requirements can also influence disposal policy.

Other financial and legislative considerations may include

- financial regulations (for example, in relation to keeping records for audit)
- public service ordinances
- other government- or organisation-wide rules, regulations and practices (for example in relation to certain personnel records)
- international legal obligations (treaty rights)
- requirements of international aid organisations.

For more information on legislative issues, see Developing Infrastructures for Records and Archives Services.

Finally, the legislation that empowers each agency to perform its duties and functions may contain elements that affect the creation as well as the retention of records. For example, an Education Act or Health Act may state that local education authorities or local health authorities shall from time to time provide the Chief Education Officer or Chief Health Officer with certain information. This requirement will have consequences for the retention periods assigned to particular types of records, so that information can be supplied when it is required.

If there is any doubt about financial or legal implications relating to the retention or disposal of records, financial and legal experts should be consulted.

Current Information Requirements

Each agency's requirements for retaining records must be based on an analysis of the agency's functions, activities and transactions, and the relative importance of them. The following questions should help initiate the analysis.

- What are core function(s) of the agency? What does the agency primarily exist to do?
- Which functions, activities and transactions are 'vital' to the agency?
- Which functions, activities and transactions are neither 'core' nor 'vital' to the agency? Which functions, activities and transactions are facilitative, and which play a support function.

Records that relate to the core and vital functions, activities and transactions will be of greater overall value to an agency than records that do not. However, for any agency, the activities and operations carried out at a number of organisational levels are likely to become less important as the work flows downwards, from the general to the specific and the varied to the routine.

Those records related to core and vital functions, activities and transactions may have high value to an agency.

Every agency uses information to make decisions, consider options, execute its programmes and plan for the future. This information may come from records created by the agency itself, or from other sources of information. It is important to know where information comes from and what contribution it makes to the agency's ability to conduct its business. For example, if information such as employment statistics, vacancy returns or economic indicators is received entirely from an external source, it is likely to be of short-term value. In any case it should continue to be available elsewhere. The agency's copies of this information may therefore be destroyed after a relatively short period.

A further factor in determining the agency's records retention requirements is the role of records in the agency's operations. The following questions will need to be asked.

- Is the value of the records evidential? That is, do the records provide evidence of the agency's organisation, policies and procedures?
- Is the value of the records purely informational? That is, do the records contain information that relates purely to individuals, organisations, events and so on with which the agency deals in the course of its routine business?

Records likely to have continuing utility to an organisation are those that relate to the development of policy, methodology and procedure. Records unlikely to have ongoing value are those that deal with the routine application and implementation of established policy.

An agency's functions, responsibilities and obligations may involve it in relationships with other parts of the organisation or may extend to organisations and individuals external to it. For instance, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs deals with other states and international organisations; the Ministry of Trade deals with companies and businesses; and the Internal Revenue Service deals with companies, businesses and individual taxpayers. All of these relationships will have a bearing on the retention of information.

The action officer who deals with the function or activity documented by a series of records will often be able to advise on the continuing utility of that series. However, his or her recommendations should be a guide only; they should not be prescriptive.

When consulting with action officers, it is important to recognise the following risks.

- The over-confident action officer may think that nothing that happened more than a year or so ago, especially if it was done by a predecessor, is of continuing relevance.
- The ultra-cautious action officer may wish to retain any record that might conceivably serve as a precedent for future actions, a justification for past actions or a source of potentially useful information.
- The overworked action officer cannot or will not give priority to records matters.

Moreover, action officers may often be unaware of wider issues of concern to the agency, to third parties or to the government or organisation generally.

*Action officers should offer input into the appraisal process
but should not make final decisions alone.*

The records manager should apply common sense to all recommendations by action officers and ensure that all decisions are consistent with those for comparable records of the same or other agencies. In taking these decisions, he or she will also be guided by a knowledge of whether the agency itself is the office of primary responsibility.

Disposal Recommendation

- 1. Destroy now

- 2. Destroy after years
(give a number in box, not more than 12)

- 3. Retain for second review

- 4. Retain permanently

Signed

Date

Dept/Section

Figure 1: Disposal Recommendation Form

APPRAISING RECORDS FOR ENDURING VALUE

At any stage of their life cycle, records must be accessible to their users, otherwise there is little point in maintaining them. However, the purpose for which records are used, and by whom, may change during their life cycle. Furthermore, the use of records may often be potential rather than actual once their original purpose has been served.

In undertaking the appraisal of records for their enduring value, it is necessary to assess their value for future use. Future users will include officials of the agency which created or last used the records for business purposes, but future users may also include officials of other agencies, historians, researchers and an array of other persons with a possible interest in the records. These people will want to consult records for a variety of purposes that are impossible to predict with certainty. This very unpredictability of use renders the process of appraising records for enduring value different from that of appraising for continuing utility.

Activity 8

Before reading further, explain in your own words whether each of the following records have enduring value. Why or why not? Be as detailed as necessary.

- A draft report on procedures for parking at the office.
- A final report on procedures for parking at the office.
- Extra copies of correspondence.
- Copies of correspondence with handwritten notes in the margin.
- Master copies of correspondence.
- A draft report on revision of legislation that defines the work of the department.
- A final report on revision of legislation that defines the work of the department.
- Original signed contracts for provision of janitorial services.
- Original signed contracts for a legislative consultant to assist with revisions to the legislation that defines the work of the department.

Functional Appraisal

Until relatively recently in the English-speaking archival world, the approach to the appraisal of records for enduring value has focused on assessing specific records against various categories of values. These values included

- the value of the records to the creators
- their value for providing evidence of the origins, organisation, policies, functions procedures and activities of the creating agency
- their value to historians as a result of the information the records contain on important events, or social, political, demographic and economic trends, or on individuals.

This approach has been referred to as values-based appraisal.

Values-based appraisal: The assessment of the worth of records based on specific criteria, such as the historical evidence they provide; the information they convey about events, trends, activities or functions; or their potential use.

By the early 1980s, it became apparent that the values-based approach to appraisal was not appropriate.

Values-based appraisal is no longer considered an appropriate method of appraisal.

For a number of reasons, values-based appraisal did not identify the best records of enduring value. These reasons include the following.

- No matter how objective or informed the archivist, it is impossible to predict all the potential users and uses of records.
- The quantity of records in the second half of the twentieth century is too great for archivists to examine all records item by item to identify information of potential value.
- The values-based approach tends to downplay the importance of the provenance of the records (the organisational and functional context of their creation) in favour of the subject of the records.
- There is too great a potential for the interests and biases of the archivist to determine what records should be preserved on a long-term or permanent basis, to the detriment of research by those with different interests.

In response to these problems with values-based appraisal, a number of archival theoreticians, most notably Hans Booms of Germany, Helen Samuels of the United States and Terry Cook of Canada, arrived at similar strategies for the appraisal of records. These approaches can be collectively referred to as functional appraisal, also known as macro-appraisal.

Functional appraisal: The process of assessing the enduring value of records by determining the functions of the body to be documented, identifying which offices or individuals created records in carrying out those functions and selecting the records that provide the most complete and concise documentation of the functions.

The functional approach is intended to minimize the bias of the archivist by focusing primarily on the functions and structures of agencies rather than on the records themselves. The functional approach places the primary emphasis on the significance of the provenance and purpose of the records, not the information they contain. In fact, the process of functional appraisal puts examination of the records at the end of the appraisal process.

Functional appraisal focuses on the functions and structures of the agencies that created the records.

As previously noted, appraisal for enduring value should take place as early as possible in the life of records. It may take place simultaneously with the assessment of the continuing utility of records. Early appraisal allows for the prompt disposal of records of no enduring value as soon as they are no longer of continuing utility. Functional analysis also helps the archivist make early decisions about the enduring value of records; it is much easier to analyse functions, and the significance of the records they generate, when the functions are still being performed by the agency and when the responsible officials are still available to provide information.

The following is a step-by-step overview of how a functional appraisal can proceed.

Step 1

The archivist decides what functions and activities need to be documented. This is done by analysing the agency and its programmes to identify the most significant functions and activities it performs. This analysis should be based on careful research, including an examination of documentation on the agency and its programmes, and interviews with agency officials.

The significance of the functions can be assessed against factors such as the importance of the agency and its programmes within the overall administrative structure (that is, the government or organisation as a whole); the size of the agency's staff and budget; the impact of its programmes on the political, economic and social

system; and the degree of interaction between the programmes and other agencies, countries, businesses, organisations and individuals. The significance of records arising from processes that support a wider function will need to be considered in relation to the records of the wider function.

For a discussion of how to relate file series to functions, see Restructuring Current Records Systems: A Procedures Manual. See also Analysing Business Systems.

Step 2

The archivist determines where within the agency records documenting the significant functions are created. This is done by analysing the structure of the agency to locate the offices and individuals primarily responsible for these functions.

Step 3

The archivist identifies the record series created by those responsible for the significant functions. These series can include both well-organised records and poorly organised records in backlogs, as well as records that have not been filed in the agency's record-keeping system.

Step 4

The archivist identifies those records that provide the most complete and concise documentation of significant functions. The following types of records may be targeted:

- record sets of minutes, papers and reports of internal committees and of inter-ministerial or inter-departmental committees for which the agency provided the secretariat
- records relating to the formulation of legislation and policy arising from the core functions of the agency, including both successful and unsuccessful programmes
- records that document precedents or major developments in the functions, organisation, working procedures, activities, accommodation and staffing of the agency
- record sets of reports, directives, forms, manuals, official publications (including non-sale items)
- information that is not unique but is more comprehensive or in a more convenient form than that in other records of the agency or in the records of other agencies
- records already identified as of long-term utility to the agency, such as records that must be preserved under any statutory provision; records documenting rights or obligations of the state and so on.

Step 4 could entail a file-by-file review of certain existing series to identify files that will be kept either for the long term or permanently. However, this file-by-file review will not be necessary if spot-checks of files within the series indicate that the series merits preservation as a whole.

Functional appraisal identifies those records that provide the most complete and concise documentation of significant organisational functions.

Appraising for Informational and Intrinsic Value

As noted earlier in the lesson, Schellenberg's appraisal model indicated that records had not only primary value but also secondary value. Secondary value can include two other specific values: informational value and intrinsic value.

Informational value: The secondary value of records or archives for reference and research deriving from the information contained in them and often incidental to their original purpose.

Intrinsic value: The secondary value of records or archives by reason of their age, historical associations, physical form or features, aesthetic or artistic quality or monetary value.

With intrinsic value, it is the uniqueness of the association or form of the record rather than the uniqueness of the information that is the determining factor. For example, the constitution of a newly independent country may be widely available in print, but the original, signed at independence, will clearly have intrinsic value. Similarly, an ephemeral document bearing the autograph of a head of state may have intrinsic value, whereas the same kind of document signed by other persons would not.

Other documents may have an intrinsic value by virtue of their age or the craftsmanship that has gone into their creation. For example, an ancient papyrus document may be valued as a rarity, and a parchment (animal skin) document with a highly decorative illumination may have aesthetic value.

Some records may also have informational or intrinsic value.

The functional approach to appraisal is intended to reduce the need to examine the records themselves for informational value and intrinsic value. However, archivists will occasionally 'discover' records of intrinsic value in unpredictable places, or they may find records that do not document significant functions but do contain valuable, unique information that is of actual or potential use for researchers.

Archivists should be cautious when assessing records for their informational value, as any information can be of potential value to someone. Since it is not possible to keep all records, it is important not to get sidetracked by concerns for more obscure research interests or unusual information requests.

The organisation's appraisal policy or guidelines should set out the criteria for measuring information value, such as

- the uniqueness of the information
- the form of the information and of the records
- the importance of the information to a significant number of actual or potential users.

It can be difficult to appraise records for informational value when appraisal is conducted early in the life of the records. This is because informational value derives from the content of the records themselves. Early in the life of the record series, few records may exist, and informational value will not be apparent.

However, in those situations where a backlog of older records exists and retrospective analysis is necessary, it is easier to identify records of informational value. The following types of records may be identified:

- records that relate to notable events or persons and that add significantly to what is already known about them
- records that relate to major developments or trends in the political, legal, social, economic or cultural history of the country and its neighbours
- records that relate to significant scientific, technological, ecological or medical research and development
- records that document significant regional or local events, personalities or conditions, where these are not reflected adequately in other records
- records that are suitable for statistical and quantitative analysis for demographic, medical, social, cultural and economic history and historical geography
- control documentation that continues to serve as a means of reference to records of enduring value or to provide a useful overview of the activities that resulted in records that are not themselves of enduring value.

Activity 9

Can you identify types of records that might have informational or intrinsic value, either those in your organisation's archival repository or those you can think of yourself? Write a list of as many as possible. How would you incorporate identification of such records into an appraisal strategy, so that you were able to find those records with informational or intrinsic value but you did not spend so much time that you did not perform your other appraisal duties efficiently and effectively?

APPRAISING CASE FILES

Series of case files are frequently bulky and often unlikely to contain a high level of information of enduring value. Such files cannot all be preserved as archives. Some will have no value after their continuing utility to the creating agency has ended. These records may be destroyed once their retention period has expired.

Not all case files can be retained as archives.

For other series that may contain information of enduring value, it is essential to find some way to reduce the bulk. This reduction may be done by selecting as archives prescribed categories of records within the series or by sampling or extracting representative specimens. In general, retrospective item-by-item review should be avoided because of the time and cost involved. Instead, procedures for preselection should be put in place.

Sampling is defined and discussed in Lesson 5.

The Canadian macro-appraisal theorist Terry Cook recommends that case files, specifically those containing personal information on individuals, should be considered for permanent preservation if they contribute to a clearer understanding of the nature of the interaction between the state and its citizens. Such case files can be valuable if they reveal significant differences between the intentions of programmes and their actual results, particularly if the interaction between state and citizen allows for self-expression by the citizen in the form of records created by or about him or her.

See the resources section in Lesson 6 for information on Cook's publications.

Different categories of case files may call for different schemes of preselection. The following suggestions address the appraisal of some common types of case files.

- Action files may document the implementation of policies or procedures but may be too great in quantity to justify total retention. These records may be dealt with by asking the action officer to identify the more important files. Action officers may be invited to recommend files for permanent preservation and to justify that recommendation. Figure 1 illustrates a form that can be used if action officers are involved in the process of reviewing files to determine their disposal.
- Personnel records will have continuing utility for pension and other purposes so long as the individual concerned (or any dependent with a possible claim) is or may be presumed to be alive. Only a small proportion of these records will have enduring value. Those files relating to individuals who reach a specified high rank or who become otherwise famous or infamous may be preselected if possible. Similar arrangements may be made for other categories of records containing personal information. The preselection of 'famous cases' is not always

possible. Inevitably, some decisions about the permanent retention of ‘famous cases’ will need to be ad hoc.

- Building plans and other records relating to the ownership, construction, fitting out and use of accommodation will have continuing utility until they are superseded or the accommodation is subject to extensive alternation or reconstruction or is demolished. Similarly, engineering drawings and other technical records are usually valuable only until the facility or equipment is no longer in use. Only a small proportion of these kinds of records will have enduring value. Those files relating to buildings or structures of historical or architectural importance, or equipment and facilities of historical or scientific importance, may often be preselected.

It is possible to preselect certain types of case file for enduring value and retention as archives.

Activity 10

Can you think of other types of case files created by your organisation? Write a list of them and identify as many issues as you can think of that might affect their appraisal and disposal. For each type of case file you identify, explain whether or not you believe some files could be preselected for retention and others disposed of once their continuing utility had ended.

SUMMARY

Lesson 3 has examined approaches for the appraisal of records for their continuing utility or enduring value. It has looked at the factors involved in determining retention periods. It has introduced the concept of functional appraisal as a means of identifying records of enduring value. It has provided guidance on the appraisal of records for their informational or intrinsic value. It has also looked at the appraisal of case files.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What two questions must be asked when the appraiser is assessing the continuing utility of records?
2. Define primary value.
3. Explain the concept of operational or administrative value and give examples of records with this value.
4. Explain the concept of financial or fiscal value and give examples of records with this value.
5. Explain the concept of legal value and give examples of records with this value.
6. What organisational issues must be considered when determining retention periods?
7. What financial and legal issues must be considered when determining retention periods?
8. How might personnel records be appraised?
9. How might building records or engineering drawings be appraised?
10. What is the concept of appraising records for enduring value?
11. Explain the concept of values-based appraisal.
12. Explain the concept of functional appraisal.
13. Why is values-based appraisal not the best process for identifying records of enduring value?
14. Explain the four steps involved in functional appraisal. Then draw the steps as a flow chart or graphic presentation, identifying the key activities and the person responsible for them.
15. What types of records might be targeted in the last step of functional appraisal, when the actual records are examined?
16. Explain the concept of informational value.

17. Explain the concept of intrinsic value.
18. What criteria might be used to measure informational value?
19. What types of records might be identified as having informational value?
20. What challenges arise when appraising case files?
21. What does the Canadian appraisal theorist Terry Cook recommend as one useful way to appraise case files?
22. How might case files relating to the implementation of major policies be appraised?

ACTIVITIES: COMMENTS

Activity 7

The operational or administrative value of records comes from their importance in determining the policy and procedures necessary to carry out the activities of the agency. Records of operational value include

- statutes and executive orders
- reports and minutes of boards and committees
- budgets and budget estimates
- organisational reports and charts
- directives
- rules and regulations
- circulars and procedural manuals
- statistics
- annual and other periodic reports
- personnel files
- files relating to purchase and maintenance of property, equipment and supplies.

The legal value of records comes from their importance in defining the rights and obligations of the agency, its staff and of the individuals and organisations with which it has dealings. Such records include

- contracts
- title deeds
- leases
- agreements
- patents.

The financial or fiscal value of records comes from their importance in showing how money is obtained, allotted, controlled, spent and accounted for. Records with fiscal value include

- ledgers and cash books
- invoices and other vouchers
- inventories
- salary and superannuation records.

Activity 8

This activity is designed to show you two things: (1) that not all records have enduring value and (2) that determining which records are worth keeping as archives involves more than just identifying ‘drafts’ and ‘final versions’ and ‘master copies’. The process of appraisal is complicated and is considered one of the most difficult and important tasks an archivist can do. It is also unwise to appraise records on a file-by-file or item-by-item basis, as has been stated throughout this module. This activity should demonstrate the range of issues that arise when considering whether to retain records or not. Ultimately, this activity should show you that appraising records on the basis of function or activity is more effective, and more efficient, than appraising records one item at a time.

Were you to appraise each of the records identified in this activity individually, you would have to consider the following issues.

a draft report on procedures for parking at the office	The fact that this is a draft report suggests it may not have long-term value. The fact that it is about parking at the office suggests the subject is not part of the central business of the organisation but instead is an administrative issue. The draft report is likely not worth keeping permanently.
a final report on procedures for parking at the office	While a final report is usually more significant than a draft report, this report on parking procedures refers to administrative, not operational, issues and so is likely not worth keeping on an ongoing basis.
extra copies of correspondence	Extra copies are usually not worth keeping, if the originals are on hand, unless the copies are in another file because they relate specifically to an event or issue other than the one for which the correspondence was created. In that case, they have become ‘new’ records; they provide evidence of that new event or issue.
copies of correspondence with handwritten notes in the margin	When someone ‘annotates’ a copy; that is, writing additional information on it, the copy becomes a ‘new’ records; it is now unique and provides evidence of the ideas or actions of the person who wrote on it. However, even though the copy has now become a new record, it may not be worth keeping, as the subject or purpose of the record may not be significant. If it is a letter about parking, it may not be worth keeping; if it is a letter about legislation; it may indeed have ongoing value.

master copies of correspondence	Master copies are usually the best evidence; they are the 'official' records. Again, the decision to retain master copies of correspondence will depend in large part on the subject or purpose of the letters. You would need to examine the function that led to the creation of the records.
a draft report on revision of legislation that defines the work of the department	Draft reports often do not have ongoing value, but on a topic such as revision to legislation, it may be worth keeping both drafts and final versions, since the topic relates fundamentally to the very purpose of the department.
a final report on revision of legislation that defines the work of the department	Again, the topic is significant and the report is the 'official' version, so it is very likely this is worth retaining.
original signed contracts for provision of janitorial services	Original contracts are 'official' records, but the service being contracted is an administrative service; once the service has been rendered and the terms of the contract have expired, it may not be worth keeping the document. You would need to examine the function of janitorial services – which might form a series of records – and then determine if any records within that series were worth keeping.
original signed contracts for a legislative consultant to assist with revisions to the legislation that defines the work of the department.	An original contract for such a significant service may well be worth keeping; it can provide evidence of a key activity within the department: an analysis of its purpose and work.

As you can see, the process of appraisal can be very complex. This activity is not intended to provide you with answers but to show you some of the complexities of the appraisal process. Bear this in mind as you read through the rest of this module and proceed with the rest of this study programme.

Activity 9

It is important to recognise that some records can have intrinsic value, but it is equally important not to become overwhelmed in the identification of records with possible informational or intrinsic value and lose sight of the most effective method of appraisal: functional analysis. By identifying key functions and then protecting the important records that document those functions, an organisation is much more likely

to capture the majority of valuable records than it will by examining records file by file for their informational or intrinsic value.

Activity 10

Compare your criteria against the information provided in this lesson. Remember that case files should be reviewed in series rather than as individual files. It may be that a series continues for many years. When this happens it will be convenient to divide the series into ten-year blocks and apply a review date to each block. In some cases, series or parts of series may merit appraisal on a record-by record basis.

Remember also that information in public records is seldom completely unique, for a given function or activity may generate information that is shared by different agencies. Moreover, records can be duplicated from one agency to another or within an organisation. Thus for a series to merit retention the information contained in the records should be unique and not readily accessible elsewhere in such a complete or unaltered form.

The two most important factors to consider when appraising this category of records are the uniqueness of the information contained in the records and the degree of similarity between individual records in the series.

THE APPRAISAL OF BACKLOGS

When current records systems are choked with low-use or unwanted records, access to information and business efficiency are seriously impaired. Lesson 4 looks at this specific appraisal problem: the appraisal of backlogged records.

The appraisal of backlogs of disorganised or unidentified current, semi-current and non-current records has to be approached differently from the appraisal of records created and maintained in well-managed systems. Backlogs are often the product of badly managed or collapsed records management systems and are likely to be in a disorderly state. Indeed, the very existence of a backlog suggests that records management systems are not in place or, if established, are not effective. By removing from current systems those records longer needed, and by disposing of them appropriately, it is possible to establish or reimpose control over all the records of the agency.

Backlogs are often the product of ineffective records systems.

As indicated earlier in this module, the best method for appraising any body of records is to begin with an understanding of the creating agency and its functions. Business systems analysis focuses on processes and functions rather than the individual content of records. In this way, it relates records to their original purpose, thereby providing a framework for evaluation. The principles of business systems analysis can also be applied to the reduction of backlogs of unappraised records.

This lesson will focus on a key element of business systems analysis: the records survey. It will discuss how to conduct the survey and how to evaluate and implement the findings of the survey.

Detailed guidance on business systems analysis is provided in Analysing Business Systems. Designing new record-keeping systems is dealt with in Organising and Controlling Current Records.

THE RECORDS SURVEY

The records survey seeks to locate, identify and evaluate all the existing records of an agency and to establish their context (provenance), purpose and original arrangement.

A records survey provides the basis for

- identifying records of no continuing utility to the agency and implementing appropriate disposal action
- identifying and quantifying records of continuing utility and scheduling them for appropriate retention and disposal action
- determining staffing and accommodation requirements for records that still need to be retained within the records management system
- calculating the costs of eliminating the backlog and the savings that will accrue.

It is vital to examine and understand the functions and activities of, and the records produced by, the agency as a whole. It is not enough to focus only on the unappraised records. These must be understood in relation to the functions and business processes of the agency, the agency's information needs and all other records created and held by the agency. Only then can appropriate appraisal decisions be made.

A records survey identifies and evaluates an agency's records.

Common sense must determine whether a full-scale survey is required. For example, if the exercise is merely to deal with an accumulation of old files in an individual officer's cabinet, there may be no need to investigate in depth the functions, activities and record-keeping systems of the entire agency. On the other hand, if a substantial backlog of records has built up or the backlog contains a mixture of records from a range of sources, a full survey may be required.

The records survey is also used when preparing disposal schedules for the first time.

The planning and management of projects such as records surveys are dealt with in Strategic Planning for Records and Archives Services; a methodology for conducting a records survey is described in more detail in Restructuring Current Records Systems: A Procedures Manual.

Preparing for the Survey

A records survey requires the active support of senior management within the agency. It is also important to draft appropriate terms of reference and establish an effective survey team. At a minimum, the survey team should consist of representatives of the records and archives institution and staff involved with records management within the agency. The inclusion of other information professionals and action officers from the agency is also desirable.

The team should study existing material relating to the structure and functions of the agency (such as relevant legislation, mission statements, organisational charts, job descriptions, work plans and annual and other reports) to establish a basic understanding of its past and present duties, responsibilities and activities.

Preliminary visits should be made to all the administrative and operational units of the agency to obtain a general picture of the scale of the records management problem and the resources required to tackle it. These visits will also help the team pinpoint any likely areas of difficulty. The visits should also be used to stimulate interest in the survey and establish links with key officers in the units.

As already noted, it is important to survey all records. The team should be sure to survey records in the private offices of ministers or senior officials and confidential and secret records held elsewhere. It may be necessary to seek special authority and obtain appropriate security clearance for the members of the team to survey certain records. Access to the resulting reports and records inventories may also have to be restricted.

In a large agency, it may be necessary to conduct a preliminary study to determine the nature and scope of the main survey. This preliminary analysis will aim to establish

- an outline of the past and present functions and administrative and decision-making structures of the agency
- priorities for the survey
- workload and staffing requirements during the survey
- the cost and benefits of the survey.

When the preliminary groundwork has been completed, a plan for the implementation of the survey should be drawn up. This will involve

- explaining to appropriate staff the nature, purpose and benefits of the survey
- establishing a methodology
- establishing a viable timetable
- securing staff resources
- assigning staff to the various tasks.

The Survey Methodology

The choice of methodology will be governed by such factors as the size of the agency, the quantity and condition of existing records, the capabilities and willingness of the staff to co-operate and the extent and complexity of the problems to be solved.

Various methods may be used to conduct the survey.

One method is to send questionnaires to each unit of the agency and then follow up with visits by survey team members to check on omissions, anomalies and discrepancies.

An alternative is for survey team members to complete the questionnaires themselves. They can do this by inspecting offices and records storage areas and interviewing the staff.

In practice, a useful approach is to combine a questionnaire with inspection and interview. Such a methodology is assumed in this lesson.

Whatever methodology is adopted, it is necessary to build on the relationships established with individual units through the preliminary briefings and visits and to develop and make use of links with key staff in the units.

An example of a records survey form and interview sheet are included in Restructuring Current Records Systems: A Procedures Manual.

The Survey Timetable

The survey team should work to a coherent plan that establishes attainable deadlines for the completion of the survey. One option is to work to a plan that follows the hierarchy of the organisational structure (upwards or downwards). For example, the interviews could begin with senior staff and their records, followed by the staff who report to them and so on down through the agency's functional hierarchy. Alternatively, the survey could begin with the lower operational levels and work upwards.

The work on the survey should be completed as quickly as reasonably possible to maintain momentum and move forward with clearing backlogs.

Designing the Questionnaire

Any questionnaire should be addressed to all the units within the agency, including the private offices of ministers or senior officials. It should be accompanied by a copy of the directive authorising the records survey, and it should indicate clearly to whom the questionnaire should be returned and by what date. The questions asked should be as simple and unambiguous as possible. More difficult and complex questions can be addressed by inspection and interview. If the organisation has the resources, it may be worthwhile consulting with a specialist forms designer to check the wording of the questions and the design of the questionnaire.

The questions themselves should be designed to ascertain basic facts relating both to the position of the unit within the present administrative structure of the agency and to the records that it creates, uses or holds. The questionnaire should also ask for the names, official addresses and telephone/fax numbers of the head of the unit, the person (if any) responsible for its records and the person completing the questionnaire. In general, questions about past activities or practices are best raised at the inspection and interview stage.

Since the questionnaire will be completed by action officers with little or no knowledge of records management, technical terms (such as 'linear metres' or 'series') should be avoided. If such terms must be used, they should be defined or explained.

Activity 11

Before reading further, write down as many questions as you can think of that might be included in a records survey questionnaire. Think of all the information you would want to know and be as creative as possible.

Consider the following lists of questions as suggestions only.

Questions about the Administrative Structure

The unit's position in the administrative structure should be determined. Following are some questions that might be asked.

- What is the unit's official title?
- What accommodation does it occupy and where is that accommodation located?
- What unit is its immediate superior in the administrative hierarchy?
- What units within the hierarchy are immediately subordinate to it?
- Does the decision-making process always follow the administrative hierarchy and, if not, when and how does it diverge?

- What are the unit's functions, and under what authority does it exercise them (what does it do and why)?
- What is its relationship to other units of the agency or to other agencies in relation to any shared functions? Which is the office of primary responsibility for shared functions?

Where relevant, questions should relate to past as well as present circumstances.

Questions about the Records and Other Information Sources

The first set of questions about the records should ascertain basic information.

- Who has line management responsibility for records management in the unit?
- What are the duties of the head of the records office?
- What are the duties of the records staff?
- What records originate within the unit?
- Where are they held when not in use?
- Does the unit hold any other records?
- What other records are used by the unit, where do they originate and where are they held?
- What other information sources are used by the unit or its officers in the course of its activities (include 'private' filing systems)?

Supplementary questions about records should identify the following information.

- What are the formats and media of the records?
- What is their physical condition?
- In what types of storage are they kept (filing cabinets, open shelves, boxes on shelves, etc)?
- What is their quantity (for example, for files: linear metres of shelving or number of filing cabinets occupied; for some other types of record: number of items)?
- If they are files, are they registered or unregistered, and, if registered, to what file series do they belong?
- What is the nature of the file classification scheme and how are file numbers generated?
- If they are in other formats or media, how are they arranged? Can record series be identified?
- Are there any other numbering systems in operation, and if so, how are reference numbers assigned?

- Where record series can be identified, further questions should seek to discover the following for each record series:
- What is its relationship to other series (related series, sub-series)?
- What are its covering dates?
- Are there any gaps in the series, and, if so, why? Can gaps be filled by information in other record series or by records held elsewhere or from other information sources?
- Are the records originals or copies?
- Are they accruing (accumulating) or non-accruing, and, if accruing, what is their annual rate of growth?
- What is the extent and frequency of their use, by whom are they used and for what purposes and how long will their use continue?
- Do any of the records bear a security grading? If so, how are security gradings assigned? Is access to security graded records restricted?
- What disposal arrangements exist? Are they operated?
- What control documentation exists (such as registers, file movement records, file plans, keyword lists, indexes)?

Inspection and Interview

The questionnaire should be followed up by interviews with action officers and records office staff. This follow-up will both verify and supplement the information gathered by the questionnaire.

Inspections and interviews should

- investigate and rectify any anomalies, inadequacies or omissions in the returned questionnaires
- spot check various items of information to confirm their accuracy
- confirm that all accommodation in the unit has been examined for record holdings
- ascertain whether any of the unit's functions have ever been undertaken by other units or other agencies, and, if so, where the relevant records are held
- chart any past changes in the unit's position within the administrative structure
- relate the unit's records to the agency's wider information needs and systems.

EVALUATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF SURVEY RESULTS

Facts revealed by the records survey should be evaluated, and then follow-up action should be undertaken as quickly as possible. Evaluation and implementation involve a number of parallel activities, discussed below.

Follow-up work to act on survey findings should happen as soon as possible after the survey is completed.

First, it is important to remember that even though the main purpose of the records survey in this context is to deal with a backlog of unappraised records, the survey may reveal a number of inadequacies in the records management system as a whole. These deficiencies may range from the absence of an essential control mechanism (such as a procedure for the systematic closure of files) or a need to assign overall responsibility for records management within the agency, to the need for total restructuring of the records management system.

Any inadequacies will need to be addressed. If appropriate records control systems are lacking, they will need to be introduced. If complete restructuring is required, the case for it will have to be made to the agency's senior management. It is important not to ignore any deficiencies. At the very least, deficiencies in the records management system may lead to the build up of backlogs again. However, they could cause other serious problems in the future, such as a failure to meet regulatory requirements, the destruction or loss of vital information or the inability of the agency to defend itself against a legal action because of the absence of certain records.

Restructuring Current Records Systems: A Procedures Manual *provides a methodology for restructuring a records office. More details on records control systems are provided in Organising and Controlling Current Records.*

Management Reports

A survey report should be prepared for the heads of the agency and its divisions and branches. If the scale of the survey justifies it, an interim as well as a final report may be produced. These reports will

- summarise the findings of the survey
- assess rates of growth of the records
- comment on such matters as the effectiveness of record and information retrieval

- estimate the potential for savings in storage costs and staff time if specified improvements are made
- propose consequential action
- estimate the resource needs and costs of that action.

Such reports may help to maintain the momentum of the survey and pave the way for implementation.

Survey reports are critical to documenting findings and clarifying actions to be taken.

The Records Inventory

As the survey progresses, the survey team will build up a records inventory that describes in general terms the nature, quantity and location of all the records, in whatever form or medium, held throughout the agency. (For example, the survey will identify whether records include registered files organised by the title of the series, how many files there are and where they are kept.) This inventory should be in loose-leaf form, a separate sheet being completed for each series, sub-series or category of records (see Figure 2). The inventory should be maintained after the survey has been completed by updating it to incorporate new categories or series of records, changes in quantity or location and disposal action undertaken.

The records inventory is often the basis for the inventory or other finding aid created by the archival institution.

Inventory: A basic archival finding aid whose unit of description is usually the series.

The task of maintaining an inventory can be automated. A computerised database would simplify the updating process and facilitate access to the information. It would also make it possible to integrate information into a wider records automation system.

Sorting Records of Uncertain Origin

If the survey has identified records of unknown origin or records in a state of considerable disorder, the survey team should co-operate with the unit holding the records to identify and sort them. This process will involve ascertaining their provenance, their function and, if possible, the series to which they belong.

Appraisal and Disposal Action

The records survey should trigger appropriate appraisal and disposal action.

When disposal schedules already exist, the disposal actions they specify should be checked to see whether they are still appropriate. If they are, they should be implemented.

If no disposal schedules exist or if existing schedules are inadequate or inappropriate, the records should be appraised and appropriate retention and disposal recommendations made. Where records need to be retained by the agency, retention and disposal recommendations should be integrated into the agency's disposal schedules and implemented in due course.

Determining disposal actions is the subject of Lesson 5. Disposal Schedules are dealt with in Lesson 6.

Records Inventory Worksheet			Date	Sheet no.
Title of Agency	Unit		Contact officer	Tel no.
Room number/storage location			Room size (metres)	
Type of Equipment:				
Racking:	No. of shelves	Total shelving in linear metres		
Filing cabinets:	No. of 4-drawer	No. of 2-drawer	Total capacity in linear metres	
Cupboards:	No.	No. of shelves	Total capacity in linear metres	
Other (specify):	Total capacity in linear metres			
Record Series/Description			Record type (files, volumes, printouts)	
Year/date range	Estimated no. of records		Total in linear metres	
Average no. of retrievals per week	Average no. of records created per month		Are records indexed?	Are records listed?

Figure 2: Records Inventory Work Sheet

SUMMARY

Lesson 4 has discussed the problems associated with the appraisal of backlogs of records. It has introduced the record survey as a means of gaining control over backlogs of unappraised records. It has discussed the following specific issues:

- preparing for the survey
- developing a survey methodology
- the survey timetable
- designing a questionnaire
- the process of inspection and interview
- the process of evaluation and implementation
- the importance of documenting records identified and disposal decisions made.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Why is the records survey the best method for appraising a backlog of records?
2. What is the purpose of a records survey?
3. Why is it important to have active support from senior management for a records survey?
4. Explain the steps involved in preparing the survey.
5. What is the purpose of a preliminary survey?
6. What four issues will be addressed when a plan for the implementation of the survey is drawn up?
7. Explain two methodologies for conducting the survey. Name three advantages and three disadvantages to each method.
8. What general areas of information should be covered by the questionnaire?
9. What information should be gleaned during an inspection and interview?
10. What is the purpose of a management report?
11. What is the purpose of a records inventory?
12. If the survey has revealed records of uncertain origin, how should they be managed?
13. What is the purpose of a records inventory form and a records inventory and appraisal form?
14. What information should be captured on a records inventory form?
15. What different information should be captured on an inventory and appraisal form?

ACTIVITIES: COMMENTS

Activity 11

Compare your answers with the list of questions included in this lesson. Did you come up with many of the same questions? Did you come up with many different questions? Continue to compare this information as you read through the rest of this module and continue with this study programme, and think about information you would want to capture if you were surveying your organisation's units to assess their records management systems.

CHOOSING DISPOSAL ACTION

The appraisal process should specify how long the records should be retained in the agency that created or used them, and how long they should be kept in the records centre. But to be truly effective, the appraisal process must also identify what specific action should be taken at the end of the retention period. Records must be moved out of their offices of creation at some point, perhaps to be destroyed as obsolete or to be retained for their enduring value or to await a review to determine their ultimate disposal.

Without appropriate disposal actions, appraisal becomes a meaningless exercise.

As stressed elsewhere, the disposal action should be assigned to the whole series whenever possible. No administration has the resources to consider each file individually, let alone each separate document, in order to decide whether it should be retained or destroyed. Such item-by-item review also has a tendency to fragment the historical record and may result in the separation of records from their context, thus destroying evidence of their provenance.

Lesson 5 looks at the options for disposal, focusing particularly on the choices available when whole series cannot be dealt with by the same disposal action. Topics dealt with include

- disposal options
- transfer of records from government control
- selective archival preservation
- file-by-file review
- sampling
- choosing specimens.

Lesson 6 examines how disposal actions are expressed in and implemented by disposal schedules.

DISPOSAL OPTIONS

In an ideal system – one in which record series are homogeneous and all the records in a series can be disposed of in the same way and at the same time – the choice of ultimate disposal action will either be to destroy records or to transfer them for archival preservation. Where transfer for archival preservation is prescribed and there is a choice of archival institutions, the institution of choice should be specified.

Ultimately, records are either destroyed or transferred to an archival institution.

A frequently used intermediate disposal action is to transfer to the records centre those records that need to be retained but are no longer in regular use. The records will remain there for a predetermined period before they are destroyed or transferred to an archival repository.

In practice, not all series will merit complete destruction or wholesale transfer for archival preservation. Other options may be

- selective preservation (also called selective retention), which for some series will involve file-by-file or item-by-item review, the retention of samples and the selection of specimens and representative selections
- item-by-item review
- sampling
- transferring a representative selection or specimens for archival preservation
- transferring to another medium (the medium must be specified).

Selective preservation: The process of selecting and maintaining a specific portion of records or archives for continuing use. Also known as selective retention.

When any of the first four options is specified, it is important to identify the criteria used for the selection or sampling.

Remember, as few as 5% (or even less) of all the records created within the public sector will merit transfer to the National Archives. This is not the same as setting a quota of 5% for each agency: some agencies will produce a greater proportion of records of enduring value; others will produce less. It is to be expected that the proportion of records transferred to the National Archives from a President's Office or Cabinet Secretariat will be greater than the proportion transferred from a large ministry that implements policies and delivers programmes, such as those involved with health, agriculture or education.

Similarly, a larger proportion of operational records than administrative (housekeeping) records will usually merit archival preservation. Operational records will contain the evidence of government policies and programmes; administrative records are more likely to deal with routine matters relating to day-to-day office procedures and use of resources.

Among operational records, there will be more policy records than case papers that will merit transfer as archives (see Figure 3).

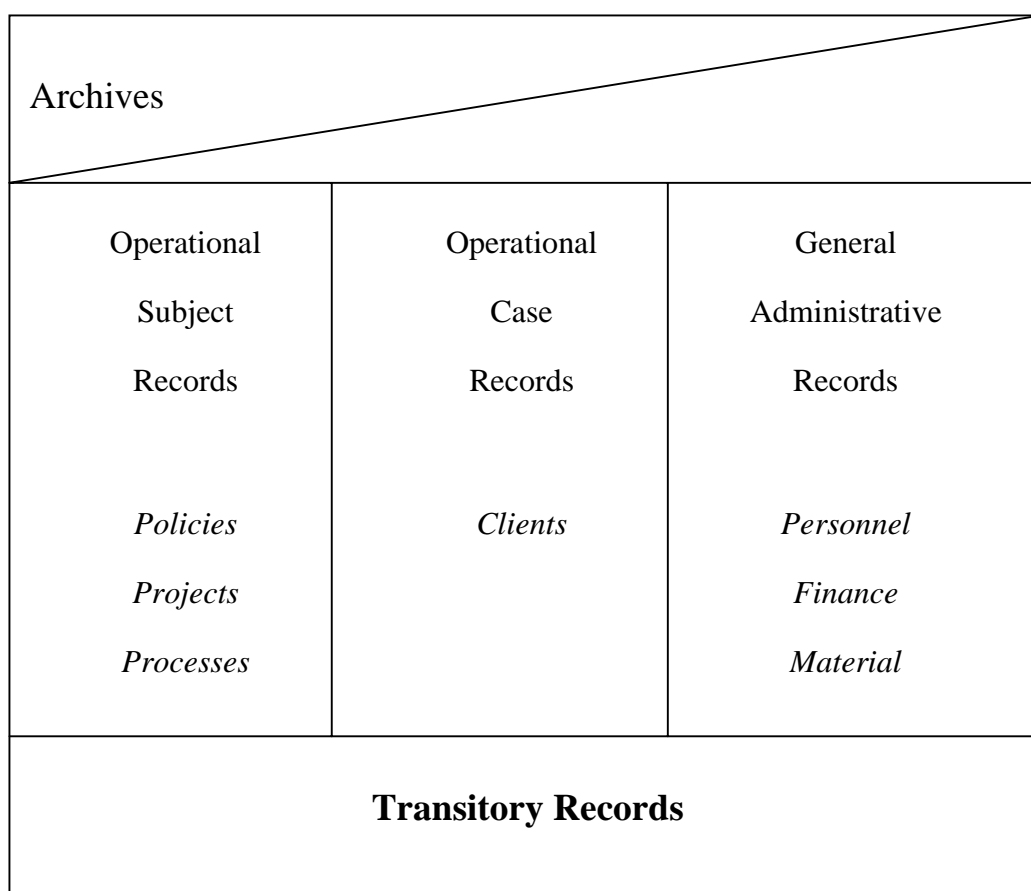


Figure 3: Archives as a Proportion of an Agency's Records

Source: Adapted from Canada, National Archives of Canada.

When to Dispose of Records

For many record series, it will be possible to identify in advance a disposal date calculated from the retention period for the records. In this case, the ‘trigger’ for disposal will be the disposal date. For example, if a series is to be destroyed six years after the end of the year in which the records were closed, and the records were closed in the year 2000, the disposal date will be 1 January 2007.

Triggers are actions or events that remind staff that it is time to act on the requirements given in disposal schedules.

Disposal triggers will be documented in the disposal schedule. When the trigger is a date, control mechanisms will need to be in place so that records scheduled for disposal are identified at the appropriate time. For example, when records are transferred to a records centre (according to instructions in a disposal schedule) a transfer list is prepared and is sent with the consignment. The transfer list will include details of the disposal action and disposal date. At the records centre, a copy of every transfer list is kept in a special file in action date order. This file is consulted to determine the date of the next disposal action.

More information about disposal dates is given in Lesson 6.

For some records, more than one disposal trigger will govern the disposal of the record. It may only be necessary for one of the triggers to have operated before the disposal action may take place. Alternatively, it may require that all of them have operated. The following examples should help to make this clear.

- If the disposal of accounting records is determined by the end of the financial year in which the transaction occurred and by the acceptance of the auditor’s report by a higher authority, the disposal instruction is likely to be expressed as follows:
‘DESTROY either six years after the end of the financial year or two years after the acceptance of the audit report, whichever occurs latest.’
- If the disposal of personnel records is determined by the date of birth, date of death or date of termination of employment, the disposal instruction may be expressed as follows:
‘DESTROY either 85 years after date of birth or five years after date of death or seven years after termination of employment, whichever occurs soonest.’
(Note: date of death alone will not be a good trigger if there are no procedures in place for the automatic reporting of deaths of former staff members.)

- If the disposal of records relating to a construction project cannot take place until either the building is demolished or sold, or until new records are prepared as replacements for the existing records, the disposal instruction may be expressed as follows:

‘DESTROY either immediately when superseded or twelve years after sale or five years after the building’s demolition, whichever is the latest.’

Disposal triggers for particular series of records may be derived from a wide range of different factors.

The event or action that will act as a trigger for disposal may be either documented within the record itself (an internal trigger) or may be external to the record (an external trigger). In the case of an internal trigger, the timing of the disposal action may result from the date of an event or action documented. Or the internal trigger may be deferred until a future event or action has taken place. In this case it will be a deferred internal trigger.

Internal triggers may occur after a specified number of years, such as after

- acceptance or rejection (for applications)
- settlement (for accounts, claims)
- acceptance (for bids, tenders)
- the end of the financial year (for financial records, vouchers, payment authorities)
- transfer (for staff, property)
- publication or distribution (for reports, regulations)
- date of receipt (for letters).

Deferred internal triggers may occur a specified number of years after such actions as

- completion of an activity (for study, projects, programmes)
- sale or transfer (for property, land)
- expiration (for programmes, instructions)
- termination (for contracts, personnel, pensions, allowances).

External triggers may occur a specified number of years after such actions as

- a document is superseded or replaced (for notices, circulars, instructions, codes of practice, manuals)
- audit (for accounts, cash books, journals, ledgers, stock control records, other financial accounting records).

Remember, it may be necessary for the outcome of an audit to be accepted by a higher authority, such as the Public Accounts Committee, before disposal of records may take place.

TRANSFER OF RECORDS FROM GOVERNMENT CONTROL

On occasion, the disposal action will be neither destruction nor transfer to an archival institution. Rather, the disposal action may be to transfer records out of the custody of the agency or government. This process need not be accompanied by a transfer of ownership or by the loss of 'public records' status; nor need it be permanent.

In the face of financial constraints, some governments are disposing of certain government functions by offloading them to the private sector or, in federal systems, to other levels of government. This transfer of responsibility has implications for the records that relate to the functions. The new bodies performing those functions will need to have access at least to the relevant current and semi-current records for the ongoing conduct of the business arising from the functions.

If transfer takes place without following established retention and disposal practices, the creating agency can risk losing records of continuing utility, particularly records needed to document the organisation's continuing liability or ongoing responsibilities. The preservation of records of enduring value that document government functions prior to privatisation or devolution may also be threatened.

The records and archives institution should establish and implement regulations and practices to prevent the inappropriate transfer of records of continuing utility or enduring value. Where transfer of custody is appropriate in the interests of continuing good business practice, the regulations and practices should ensure that

- legal ownership is retained by the state and the continuing public records status of records created before the transfer of functions is asserted
- records are returned to the creating agency or disposed of in accordance with appropriate retention and disposal decisions once their utility for current business has evaporated.

The transfer of custody of records of enduring value to a specialist institution other than the records and archives institution may be the only means of preserving records of enduring value that cannot, for example, be sampled and might otherwise be destroyed. However, this action must be regarded as a last resort. Whenever possible, this transfer should be done under the 'places of deposit' provision in records and archives legislation. Ownership should not be transferred.

An organisation should make every effort to secure the resources required to preserve within its own institution all of its records of enduring value.

SELECTIVE PRESERVATION

The guidance set out in Lessons 2 and 3 for determining which records are of continuing utility for the creating agency, or of enduring value for other potential users, is intended primarily for application in the macro-appraisal process (that is, the appraisal of entire systems and series). However, the guidance offered may also be relevant when the records in a series are of variable quality and so selective preservation is appropriate.

In general, selective preservation (sometimes called micro-appraisal) should be determined by decisions taken at the creation stage. However, there may be occasions when a retrospective review of records is unavoidable. For example, review and selective preservation may be necessary when appraising

- the products of old filing systems in which administrative, operational, policy and action files are inextricably mixed in large general series
- records that have been organised into series by medium or format and not by function and activity (such as audiovisual records)
- backlogs of case papers.

Item-by-item review is expensive and must be justifiable on cost-benefit grounds.

Before embarking on a substantial review exercise, a cost-benefit analysis is likely to be required. For instance, a series of 1,000 files occupying 60 standard size storage boxes is to be reviewed. It takes one hour to review a sample of 20 files. Only five (25%) are identified for destruction. It is therefore decided that the cost of reviewing the entire series (50 working hours) is not justified by the ongoing savings in storage costs, since only about 250 files (or 15 boxes of material) will be destroyed. On the other hand, if it takes 50 hours to select from the 1,000 files 50 (3 boxes or 5%) for permanent preservation, the cost may well be justified.

When considering item-by-item review, the following questions should be asked.

- Is the value or quality of the records sufficient to justify the cost of the review? If the records are of questionable continuing utility or enduring value, there is a strong case for destroying the entire series without review.
- If the series is likely to contain a high proportion of records of continuing utility or enduring value, will the quantity of records likely to be identified for destruction provide enough savings in storage costs to justify the expense of the review?

File-by-file Review

As already mentioned, file-by-file review is sometimes unavoidable when dealing with series of policy and operation files that cannot or should not be preserved in their entirety.

File-by-file review should never be used to avoid taking firm appraisal decisions applicable to the whole series. It should only be used when there is no other practical option. One particular weakness of reviewing files as single items is the tendency to concentrate on the information in the individual file rather than on the wider context of the function and process that led to the creation of the file in the first place.

One model for reviewing record series file by file is called the Grigg system. Until recently, this system was widely used by government departments in the United Kingdom. In the Grigg system, a review is undertaken in two stages.

- The ‘first review’ represents the records management appraisal process. It is undertaken by the ‘departmental records officer’ (records manager) in consultation with the appropriate action officer, usually five years after the closure of the files. The criterion for further retention is continuing utility to the agency for its own purposes. On that basis, files are divided into those that should be destroyed immediately, those that should be destroyed after a further specified period and those that should be retained until ‘second review’. It is assumed that records that have sufficient continuing utility and are set aside for ‘second review’ will include any that have enduring value.
- The ‘second review’ represents the archival appraisal process and is undertaken jointly by the departmental records officer and an ‘inspecting officer’ (archivist). It usually takes place when the records are 25 years old. The criterion for preservation as archives is the enduring value to the agency for its own purposes or to third parties for research purposes.

In the Grigg system, files are reviewed in two stages.

The timing of first and second review is not rigid. In the UK, a period of five years set for first review fits in with the common practice of five-year file cycles. Likewise, the period of 25 years for second review fits well with the ‘30-year rule’, which requires that public records are open for inspection when they are 30 years old. The timing ensures that the second review and all necessary arrangements for listing and transfer to the archival repository have been concluded before the records are opened for public access.

In other record-keeping systems, the timing of first and second review might well be different. For example, in a system of three-year file cycles, first review might take place three years after the closure of the file, and the delay before second review would need to be reduced if archival transfer and public access were to occur earlier than thirty years after creation. In a system governed by freedom of information legislation, public access to many categories of information may be allowed immediately upon the creation of the records.

Reviewing files for selective retention is a time-consuming and costly process. Conducting the review in two stages, as in the Grigg system, may well put even more pressure on resources. One option is to conduct the review as a one-stage process at a date when continuing utility and enduring value can both be assessed. The timing of such a review will depend on a number of factors, including

- the nature of the material
- the information requirements of the user agency
- the cost of retaining material until the review.

The review must strike a balance between allowing sufficient time to enable the enduring value of records to emerge and be confirmed, and avoiding long-term storage costs for records that have no continuing utility or enduring value. A single review conducted ten years after files have ceased to be active may be an appropriate compromise.

Reviewing Parts of Files and Subfiles

Where item-by-item review is practiced, related files should be appraised as a group.

Part: One of a number of physical units to which a file has been subdivided chronologically as it has increased in size. Also known as a volume or partfile.

Subfile: A separate file dealing with a discrete aspect of the subject of a more general file.

Though part-files and subfiles could be judged on their individual merits, their contribution to the wider picture arising from their shared context and sequence may often justify retention when their individual content is of marginal value.

As a general rule, all the parts of a file should be selected for preservation or earmarked for destruction on the basis of the appraisal of the whole file as a single unit. For long-running files, this appraisal may have to be done when the first part of the file is reviewed.

Stripping

Many files selected for retention will include duplicate, routine or other ephemeral material that appears to contain no significant unique information. However, 'stripping' of such material is rarely cost-effective. Further, there is always a risk that the removal of documents of no apparent value will destroy important evidence of context and sequence.

Stripping: The removal of individual documents lacking continuing value from a file. *Note:* The term ‘stripping’ is preferred to the obsolete term ‘weeding’.

The practice of stripping should be avoided. A file should always be treated as a unit and be retained or preserved in its entirety or not at all. Exercising discipline in filing to exclude rough drafts, duplicates and ephemera from the outset will facilitate the management of records.

Stripping files should be avoided; instead, good filing practices should be in place from the outset.

Sampling

Where bulk precludes the archival preservation of the whole of a series, especially of case papers, sampling may be an alternative or supplement to item-by-item review.

Sampling: The selection of items from a body of records made in such a way that, taken together, the items selected are representative of the whole.

Sampling will only be appropriate when the records contain significant quantities of information that can be analysed statistically.

See also the discussion of appraising case files in Lesson 3

Sampling is not an appraisal option to be used indiscriminately to evade responsibility for the destruction of a series of records. Rather, sampling is a positive appraisal decision to be used in specific instances, when the outcome will be of benefit to future users. Moreover, it is an option that may be costly both in terms of the need to take advice from outside consultants, the time required to implement the decisions and the continuing expense of storing and maintaining the sample.

Before deciding whether to take a sample of a series, it is necessary to define the purpose the sample is intended to serve. Only when there is a close match between the record, the sample and the purpose of the sample should sampling be undertaken.

Samples may take several forms, depending on the type of record and the purpose of the sample. Random statistical samples are closest to the objective ideal, but their objectivity depends upon several factors, including

- the completeness and homogeneity of the records
- the use of a random numbers table that gives each item an equal chance of selection
- the careful determination of the sample size in relation to the size of the whole series and the number of statistical variables.

The advice of a statistician – preferable an expert in quantitative history – is essential if serious error is to be avoided. As a result, the process of sampling can be costly and time consuming and perhaps not the best use of resources for institutions in many countries.

Numerical or serial samples (such as every tenth or twentieth form, file or box) may be acceptable as an alternative to random samples if the existing order of the whole body of the records is random and the individual units are separable and of equal value.

Chronological or time-series samples (such as all the records for every fifth or tenth year) may be appropriate when the records are homogeneous within and between years and are arranged in annual sequences. However, these samples will only measure long-term variations, ignoring changes between the selected years. There is also a risk that some selected years will not be typical or representative.

Alphabetical samples (such as all the records relating to individuals or organisations with names beginning with a particular letter of the alphabet) may be appropriate when the records are homogeneous and the letter chosen gives a sample of adequate size and does not impart a regional or ethnic bias.

Samples should be taken before any records identified are removed for selective preservation.

Choosing Representative Selections

Where there are several series relating to the implementation of the same policy or programme, each one dealing with its application in a particular geographical area, one or two series may be preserved in their entirety as a representative selection of all the related series. Such a selection is sometimes incorrectly described as a topographical sample. This method of making a selection has been criticised as unfair to other parts of the country. Further, the level of use of the resulting records may not justify the cost of keeping them, and they will not have country-wide statistical validity.

Choosing Specimens

Where series of records are not to be preserved in their entirety or in the form of samples, it may be desirable to preserve specimens to illustrate the ways in which actions or processes were undertaken and to preserve examples of the format of the records.

Specimens: Representative examples of records kept to illustrate particular forms, styles or processes rather than for their information content.

Such specimens are usually selected so that they include at least one example of each type of transaction and of each form of documentation. They may be additional to the selective preservation of individual records when these do not provide an adequate representation of the varieties of transactions or documentation.

Activity 12

How are records presently disposed of in your organisation? Are any of the methods described here used, such as sampling, selective retention, stripping or choosing specimens? Describe in detail the processes used and write down at least three suggestions you would make to alter or amend the processes to improve them, based on your reading in this lesson.

SUMMARY

Lesson 5 has looked at the options for disposal, with particular emphasis on the options available when whole series cannot be dealt with by destruction or transfer to the archives. It has considered transfer of records from government control, selective archival preservation, file-by-file review, sampling and choosing specimens.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Name the two disposal actions found in an ideal records management system.
2. Explain the concept of selective archival preservation.
3. Explain the concept of transfer of records from government control.
4. What dangers are inherent in the transfer of records from government control?
5. Explain three appraisal situations when review and selective preservation may be necessary.
6. What questions should be asked when considering whether to conduct an item-by-item review. Why are those questions important?
7. Explain the concept of the Grigg system.
8. What are the advantages and disadvantages of a two-stage review of records?
9. Define a part and a subfile.
10. How should parts of files and subfiles be handled during the appraisal process?
11. Explain the concept of stripping.
12. Why should stripping be avoided?
13. What is sampling?
14. When can sampling be used effectively?
15. What factors must be considered when determining how to sample records?
16. Explain the concept of numerical samples, chronological samples and alphabetical samples.
17. Explain the concept of choosing representative selections.
18. What are specimens?

ACTIVITIES: COMMENTS

Activity 12

This activity should help you compare the information provided in this lesson with the reality of practices in your organisation. Examine your organisation's practices carefully and continue to refer back to this information as you proceed through this lesson and the other modules in this study programme.

DISPOSAL SCHEDULES

Lesson 6 examines the concept, development and use of disposal schedules. Topics discussed include

- the concept of a disposal schedule
- general disposal schedules
- agency disposal schedules
- roles and responsibilities
- the content of disposal schedules
- disposal control documentation
- destruction of records
- updating disposal schedules.

WHAT IS A DISPOSAL SCHEDULE?

The disposal schedule is the document that controls the process of appraisal, retention and disposal. To repeat the definition offered earlier in this module,

Disposal schedule: The control document recording appraisal decisions and prescribing disposal action. Also known as disposal list, disposition schedule, records schedule, retention schedule, retention and disposal (or disposition) schedule or transfer schedule.

Disposal schedules have four purposes.

1. They identify all the records of an agency, irrespective of medium and format, including those in the private offices of ministers or senior officials and confidential and secret records held elsewhere.
2. They document decisions about the length of time records need to be retained because of their continuing utility to the creating agency (retention periods).

3. They document decisions about the appropriate disposal action to be taken at the end of retention periods.
4. They serve as authorities for disposal action.

Disposal schedules fall into two distinct categories: general disposal schedules and agency disposal schedules. These two categories are discussed below.

Disposal schedules should follow the same general arrangement as the agency's file classification and coding scheme, to permit ease of reference between the two types of control documentation. One document may serve both purposes (as shown later in this lesson), but the disposal schedule must be concerned with all the records of the agency, not just the registered files. Any combined document needs to take account of that. It is more common for the disposal schedule to be a separate document. Figure 4 shows a sample disposal schedule.

Together with the records inventory, disposal schedules are the principal control documents generated by a records survey.

GENERAL DISPOSAL SCHEDULES

A general disposal schedule is one that applies to categories of records common throughout all or most agencies of a government or business.

General disposal schedule: A disposal schedule that applies to categories of administrative records throughout an organisation.

Records legislation or policies should make the records and archives institution responsible for ensuring the compilation, authorisation and issue of general disposal schedules. Such schedules will cover a large proportion of the records generated by individual agencies. The records concerned will be mainly administrative or housekeeping records.

Administrative records: Records relating to those general administrative activities common to all organisations, such as maintenance of resources, care of the physical plant or other routine office matters. Also known as housekeeping records.

Remember, administrative or housekeeping records are created to carry out common organisational functions, such as administration, finance, personnel and resource management. In many cases these records will be kept in a standard form. They deal with a wide range of subjects, including the management of office services (such as mail, typing, information technology), public relations, security, buildings and property, equipment and supplies, accounts, audits, budgets, contracts, grants, official travel, salaries and gradings, pensions, benefits, health and safety, hours of work, labour relations, leave, recruitment, promotions and postings, and training.

General disposal schedules will cover a large proportion of the administrative or housekeeping records generated by individual agencies.

Since the retention periods for particular categories of common records will often have legal implications and will need to comply with audit requirements or other policies and directives, the drafting of general records schedules should be done in consultation with senior officials of those agencies primarily responsible for government- or organisation-wide personnel, financial and legal matters. These officials might include representatives of the government's public service commission, finance ministry, Auditor General or Attorney General.

Remember, in lead departments (or ‘offices of primary responsibility’) such as the public service commission or finance ministry, records relating to the formulation of government- or organisation-wide policy and procedures will be operational records arising from core functions, and will need to be dealt with by agency disposal schedules specific to the agency, rather than general disposal schedules. In many other offices copies of the same records may be held, but they are most likely to be among the administrative or housekeeping records relating to general activities and will be covered by general disposal schedules.

General disposal schedules can only operate by using generic titles for series and types of records. For example, general terms such as ‘payment vouchers’, ‘payroll’ or ‘expenditure authorisation’ will be used in general schedules. It may be necessary within each agency to annotate such schedules with any local titles.

Figure 5 illustrates a general disposal schedule covering stores, plant and cost accounting records found in many agencies. Note that the focus of the schedule is on categories of records. These should be organised into series or sub-series that can be subjected to a single disposal action, for example destroy after three years. However, in poorly organised record-keeping systems, the schedule will still be of use because it identifies disposal actions for particular categories of records regardless of whether they have been kept separately. Note also that the schedule includes a brief explanation of the purpose of each category and, in some cases, details of the format.

SCHEDULE 17

Stores, Plant and Cost Accounting Records

Specialised stores, plant and cost accounting records are maintained by most government ministries and departments, particularly those with extensive plant and stock inventories. These records are voluminous and often diverse, but they are integral parts of the fiscal and supply controls of government. These records, which reflect the net monetary worth of government and its assets, are periodically reconciled with the supply data reflected in stock inventory records, but they are not procurement papers.

(A) Stores Accounting

These records are maintained to provide personal accountability for the receipt and custody of materials and to provide information as to the monetary worth of such materials. Custody is established by accomplished copies of material movement document and stores accounting information is posted from the documents covering the movement of goods to intermediate records.

(B) Plant Accounting

These records consist primarily of cards recording the principal characteristics of each item of physical plant and equipment, including real property. They constitute primarily a type of inventory control, but in addition are a principal source of data on the capital investment in physical plant and other items not normally represented in a stores or stock inventory system.

(C) Cost Accounting

These records are designed to accumulate and show data on the costs of ministry/department operations, the direct and indirect costs of production, administration and the performance of programme function of the agency. The data, which are normally accumulated by means of cost reports and statistics accumulated by operating personnel are ultimately posted to the accounts in the agency general ledgers concerned with operating and programme costs.

Transfer surviving records to the record centre and review after five years.

Figure 5: General Disposal Schedule for Stores, Plant and Cost Accounting Records, part 1

Source: Adapted from The Gambia, National Records Service, Retention Schedule.

Item	Description of Records	Transfer to Records Centre	Review
1	Plant account cards/ledgers re: structures	10 years after date of last paper	Review 25 years after date of last paper
2	Correspondence files of units responsible for plant cost and stores accounting operations	5 years after date of last paper	Review after 5 years
3	Invoices or equivalent papers used for stores accounting purposes	2 years after date of last paper	Destroy after 6 years
4	Stores accounting returns and reports		Review after 6 years
5	Work papers used in accumulating stores accounting data		Destroy after 2 years
6	Plant account cards and ledgers, other than those described in Item 1		Destroy 4 years after item is withdrawn from account
7	Copies of cost accounting reports: copies in units receiving reports copies in reporting units, and related work papers	3 years after date of last paper or issue of report	Destroy after 6 years Review after 6 years
8	Ledgers, forms and machine records used to accumulate data for use in cost reports: (a) ledgers and forms (b) machine records (i) detail cards (ii) summary cards (iii) tabulations	2 years after date of last paper	Review after 6 years Destroy after 2 years Destroy after 2 years Review after 4 years

Figure 5: General Disposal Schedule for Stores, Plant and Cost Accounting Records, part 2

Source: Adapted from The Gambia, National Records Service, Retention Schedule.

Notes re: Items in Schedule

Item 1

These cards should be retained because they document the physical features, placement and nature of structures on government areas and installations.

Item 2

These are routine administrative correspondence files, not containing accounting data, held long enough to satisfy reference needs.

Items 3-5

The invoices are held long enough for posting of stores accounting data to intermediate records and to allow for internal recheck of transactions involving the movement of goods, while the returns and reports are retained for a sufficient period to permit utilisation of the data they contain for management purposes. Summary general ledger data should be retained for not less than a ten-year period. Work papers should be disposable after an appropriate period shorter than that provided for the records they support.

Item 6

These records are held long enough to ensure administrative control over the account while the item is active and to allow for reference after the item is no longer carried on the account. Basic data is available in procurement or project files scheduled for permanent preservation.

Items 7-8

If the data in cost records are reflected in general ledger accounts that are retained for a ten-year period, the cost records are disposable after they have served agency budget and other management needs. Subsidiary records involved in the accumulation of cost data are scheduled for an appropriately short period.

Figure 5: General Disposal Schedule for Stores, Plant and Cost Accounting Records, part 3

Source: Adapted from The Gambia, National Records Service, Retention Schedule.

AGENCY DISPOSAL SCHEDULES

All the operational records of an agency that are not covered by a general disposal schedule should be the subject of an agency disposal schedule.

Operational records: Records created for the purpose of carrying out the core functions of an organisation. Also known as functional records.

It should be the joint responsibility of the agency's head of records management and the records and archives institution to ensure that agency disposal schedules are drawn up, receive appropriate authorisation and are issued and implemented within the agency.

Agency disposal schedules identify retention periods for all records not covered by a general disposal schedule.

Figure 6 illustrates an extract from an agency specific disposal schedule for Ministry of Agriculture records. Note that the disposal action for all the series listed is 'review'. Clearly, it has not been possible to organise the Ministry's records into separate series each of which is either destroyed as a whole or transferred to the Archives as a whole after a specified period. Not even all policy files (Item 1) can be scheduled for permanent preservation; similarly, none of the series of correspondence files (Items 3, 4 and 6) can be destroyed in their entirety.

The schedule reflects the reality of many policy and operational files series: namely, that file-by-file review is required to ensure that no records of continuing utility or enduring value are destroyed and, conversely, that no records are retained that have no further value. Note also that this agency specific schedule makes reference to a general disposal schedule (see Item 2) dealing with research and development records.

SCHEDULE 19

Ministry of Agriculture Records

The Ministry of Agriculture is responsible for the production of food crops and the diversification of cash crops through the intensification of rain-fed production and the release of production related activity to the private sector.

The Ministry is organised into five operational departments

- Extension Services
- Livestock Services
- Research and Specialist Services
- Co-operation
- Planning

It also has jurisdiction in the following areas:

- International Trypanosomiasis Centre / Parastatal
- Organisations / Jahally/ Pachaar Project
- Agricultural Development Project (ADPII)
- Central Management Unit

Figure 6: Agency Disposal Schedule for Ministry of Agriculture Records, part 1

Source: Adapted from The Gambia, National Records Service, Retention Schedule.

Item	Description of Records	Transfer to Records Centre	Review
1	Files pertaining to the Ministry's responsibility in the formulation of policies in the sector departments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies • Projects • Food Programmes 	5 years after date of last paper 3 years after date of last paper 3 years after date of last paper	Review 10 years after date of last paper Review 5 years after date of last paper Review 5 years after date of last paper
2	Programme files consisting of programme documents, schedules and correspondence maintained by the department responsible for the execution, review and analysis of research and development programmes and relating to the general planning and supervision of programmes (see also Schedule 11 of the General Disposal Schedule)	5 years after date of last paper	Review 10 years after date of last paper
3	Correspondence files relating to extension services for the provision of technical services to the farming communities, conservation, control and monitoring of major pests and diseases	5 years after date of last paper	Review 10 years after date of last paper
4	Correspondence files relating to livestock services pertaining to animal production, inspection and control of notifiable diseases.	5 years after date of last paper	Review 10 years after date of last paper
5	Files relating to the formation and promotion of cooperative societies, development and marketing activities	5 years after date of last paper	Review 10 years after date of last paper
6	Correspondence files relating to project preparation, monitoring and evaluation and collection and analysis of statistics.	3 years after date of last paper	Review 10 years after date of last paper

Figure 6: Agency Disposal Schedule for Ministry of Agriculture Records, part 2

Source: Adapted from The Gambia, National Records Service, Retention Schedule.

Note that different disposal schedules may need to be prepared for separate levels or branches of the same agency. These schedules may specify different retention periods and disposal actions for broadly similar records, depending on such factors as the completeness of the records or whether they are the product of the office of primary responsibility. For example, routine personnel documents held in local offices may be destroyed after a relatively short retention period if copies are held on the master personal files in the headquarters office.

General and agency disposal schedules may be combined if convenient.

In certain circumstances, general and agency disposal schedules may be combined. Figure 7 is an example. In this example, it is more convenient to schedule in one document all Cabinet records, whether they are generated in the office of the Secretary to the Cabinet or in line ministries and departments. In this example, three categories of records are covered in this combined disposal schedule:

- the master set of Cabinet records, created and held by the Secretary to the Cabinet (in this case, the office of primary responsibility): these are operational records relating to the core business of the agency and are scheduled for permanent preservation
- copy sets of Cabinet records, held by ministries and departments: these are record sets kept for information only and are scheduled for destruction at the end of their retention period
- records generated by ministries and departments in support of Cabinet business: these are operational records relating to the activities of the agencies themselves and are scheduled for permanent preservation or review to determine their ultimate disposal.

The records and archives institution and the agency will need to decide whether there should be a single agency disposal schedule or a number of schedules: one covering records common throughout the agency and the others covering those records specific to its individual divisions and branches. The number of separate schedules required will largely be a consequence of the size of the agency and the variety and complexity of its functions.

It may be necessary to maintain a separate schedule of series, composed solely or largely of classified, secret or confidential records. That schedule may also be classified.

Classified records: Records that are restricted in their circulation and access because they bear a security marking (such as ‘Confidential’, ‘Secret’, ‘Top Secret’).

SCHEDULE 2

Cabinet Business Records

The documents that record the deliberations and conclusions of the Cabinet are the single most important series of documents created by a parliamentary democracy. They record all aspects of the government's business, its aspirations for, and its efforts on behalf of the people.

The Secretary to the Cabinet shall be responsible for ensuring the permanent preservation of a complete set of:

- (a) Agenda
- (b) Minutes of Cabinet sub-committees
- (c) Conclusions
- (d) Memoranda
- (e) Index of Cabinet Conclusions

This master set should be clearly identified and transferred to secure accommodation after five years.

Where no record set exists files, folders and other records containing minutes and papers of Cabinet committees and sub-committees shall be preserved.

Figure 7: Combined Agency and General Disposal Schedule, part 1

Source: Adapted from: The Gambia, National Records Service, Gambia Retention Schedule.

Disposal of Cabinet Records Held in Ministries and Departments

Each ministry or department holding sets of Cabinet records should dispose of them after the following periods.

Item	Description of Records	Transfer to Records Centre	Review
1	Agenda	No	Destroy 5 years after date of meeting
2	Minutes of Cabinet subcommittees	No	Destroy 5 years after date of meeting
3	Conclusions	No	
4	Memoranda: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • relating to responsibilities of ministry or department • dealing with subjects that are not the responsibility of the ministry or department 	No No	Destroy 10 years after date of issue Destroy 10 years after date of issue
5	Index of Cabinet conclusions	No	Destroy when replaced

Note: A schedule of Cabinet records to be destroyed should be sent to the Secretary to the Cabinet by the Permanent Secretary.

Figure 7: Combined Agency and General Disposal Schedule, part 2

Source: Adapted from: The Gambia, National Records Service, Gambia Retention Schedule.

Disposal of Records Created in Ministries and Departments Relating to Cabinet Business

All ministries and departments produce records to support the activities of the Cabinet. Disposal of these records should be as follows.

Item	Description of Records	Transfer to Records Centre	Review
1	Draft memoranda	No	Review 10 years after date of last paper
2	Ministerial briefs	10 years after date of last paper	Permanently preserve
3	Interdepartmental correspondence	No	Review 5 years after date of last paper
4	All other records pertaining to Cabinet deliberations not otherwise covered by this schedule	No	Review 5 years after date of last paper

Figure 7: Combined Agency and General Disposal Schedule, part 3

Source: Adapted from: The Gambia, National Records Service, Gambia Retention Schedule.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The various groups within the organisation – the agency, the records and archives administration and senior management – all have roles to play in developing and authorising disposal schedules.

The Role of the Agency

Irrespective of how the disposal schedule is finally presented, it will be the task of the agency records manager to

- identify all the series of records created by the agency and not covered by general disposal schedules
- consult appropriately within the agency, and outside if necessary, on the periods for which each series needs to be retained
- draft a disposal schedule that takes account of that consultation
- ensure the implementation of the disposal schedule when it has been formally agreed.

The agency records manager must identify agency records, determine appropriate retention periods in consultation with the agency and ensure implementation of the schedule.

The Role of the Records and Archives Institution

It will be the task of the records and archives institution to

- supervise, guide and advise generally on the scheduling process
- identify in the draft disposal schedule those series that merit complete or selective preservation as archives
- review the proposed retention periods to ensure consistency within the agency and harmonisation with other agencies carrying out related functions
- agree and secure authorisation for the disposal schedule.

The records and archives institution will have more responsibility if the agencies have limited records management expertise. For example, in small agencies where there is no qualified records manager, the records and archives institution will need to work

closely with the agency officer responsible for records management (who will have other duties) to draft, agree and secure authorisation for the disposal schedule.

To give disposal schedules maximum authority, it may be necessary to involve senior officials responsible for financial or legal issues individually or as members of the national records and archives advisory body. Their role is not to replicate the work done by the experts but to monitor the operation of the system on behalf of the government and the public. While their input can be valuable, they should not be allowed to become a bottleneck in the appraisal and disposal process.

The records and archives institution will also be responsible for monitoring the implementation of schedules to ensure that the correct disposal actions are being carried out at the specified time. Monitoring may involve, for example, spot checks on item-by-item reviews to ensure that reviews are conducted consistently and that the appropriate files are being identified for destruction or transfer to the archival institution.

The records and archives institution will supervise the scheduling process, identify archival records, review retention periods and secure authorisation for the disposal schedule.

The Role of Senior Management

Senior management must approve decisions made about the disposal of records. Very often, this responsibility is automatically authorised through records legislation or policies, which provide authority for the appropriate disposal of records as soon as they cease to be of further value. At other times, senior managers may authorise responsibility to agency records managers or to the head of the records and archives institution. The disposal schedule serves as the document that identifies the specific actions to be taken.

The agency records manager will be responsible for initiating disposal action for records within the agency. The head of the records and archives institution will initiate action for records within the records centre. In practice, the manager of the records centre will normally act on behalf of the head of the records and archives institution.

Ideally, the disposal schedule should provide sufficient authorisation for the records management unit or records centre to proceed automatically with the prescribed disposal action when records have reached the end of their retention periods. However, if the appraisal and disposal system is new or has recently been re-established, especially if retention periods are being implemented for the first time, it may be necessary to reassure action officers by consulting them before destruction takes place. In some areas of government (such as the courts) or with respect to certain categories of record (such as contracts) it may be necessary to confirm with action officers that legal actions involving the records are not in progress or pending.

Some action officers may be reluctant to destroy records. To counter inertia or deliberate delaying tactics, the records manager should give action officers a deadline for replying to a request for the endorsement of destruction under the disposal schedule. The agency records manager should try to secure a standing authority from senior management to go ahead with destruction if no response is received by that deadline. He or she should at least be able to count on the support of senior management in forcing a response if the deadline is ignored.

It is critical to obtain authority from senior management to proceed with the disposal of records so that backlogs do not develop.

THE CONTENT OF DISPOSAL SCHEDULES

Disposal schedules should be arranged in a logical order that reflects function and process, and they should set out in tabular form the retention and disposal decisions that have been made for each series of records.

The following information should normally be included:

- the provenance and function of the series
- the title (or some other brief description familiar to local staff) of the series to serve as the identifier for those who have to implement the schedule
- its file classification code (where appropriate)
- the retention period
- the place of custody
- the disposal actions.

Retention Periods and Disposal Dates

Remember, a retention period is defined as follows:

Retention period: The length of time, as provided for by legislation, regulation or administrative procedure or based upon an estimate of the frequency of continuing use, that records should be retained in an office or records centre before they are transferred to an archival institution or otherwise disposed of..

Retention periods should normally be expressed in the form of the current year – which may be the calendar year (CY) or the financial year (FY) as appropriate – plus so many years. For example:

CY + 10 years

FY + 6 years

For files or other records that span more than one year, the ‘current year’ is taken to be the latest year or the year of closure of the record.

In special cases, the retention period may run from some other starting date, such as from the completion of a contract, the termination of a lease or the supersession of a building plan.

Disposal dates are calculated by taking the actual current year (that is, the latest year of the file or other record, or the year it was closed) and adding the retention period plus one year.

Disposal date: The date on which actions specified in a disposal schedule should be initiated.

For example, a file opened in February 1998 should ideally be disposed of in February 2004. However, as it is too cumbersome to find and dispose of files on a month-by-month basis, an extra year is added and the file is kept to the end of 2004 and then disposed of as part of an regular routine. Thus the records are likely to be disposed of in early 2005.

The additional year also allows for the efficient management of files within a series that cease to be in current use in different years within that cycle. For example, for a file cycle spanning the period 1990-1992, the current year is 1992. The last year of the cycle may be taken as the basis for calculating a common disposal date for the whole cycle. If the retention period is six years (CY + 6), the complete cycle will become due for disposal in 1999 (1992 + 6 + 1).

As already noted, when the same kind of records are created in all agencies, general disposal schedules may need to prescribe different retention periods and disposal actions for the agency of primary responsibility and for other agencies. The schedule in Figure 7, for example, requires the Secretary to the Cabinet’s set of Cabinet papers to be preserved permanently, while all other sets kept in ministries and departments are destroyed.

Similarly, when the same kind of records are created at various levels within an agency (such as at headquarters and in local offices), different retention periods and disposal actions may be prescribed in agency disposal schedules for the office of primary responsibility and for other offices.

Where no standard rule is applied to all agencies for the period after which semi-current records should be transferred to a records centre, two retention periods and two disposal actions will need to be specified for records that are to be retained

into their semi-current phase: one for transfer from the agency to a records centre and the other for final disposal at the end of the retention period in the records centre.

In the case of files for which a two-stage (Grigg system) item-by-item review is appropriate, two retention periods will be specified (CY + 5 years and CY + 25 years), each with its own disposal action (first review and second review).

Records scheduled for archival preservation should be assigned a retention period. This will normally be a standard period government- or organisation-wide.

The term 'permanently' may be used when the records are to be preserved in the agency itself as part of a statutory registration function (such as for registries of births, marriages and deaths).

The agency must determine the appropriate criteria for developing retention periods.

Disposal Action

For the sake of conciseness, each form of disposal action may be represented in the disposal schedule by an abbreviation. For example:

DE = destroy

RC = transfer to the records centre

TR = transfer for archival preservation

SP = selective preservation

RV = review

RV1 = first review

RV2 = second review

SA = sample

RS = transfer representative selection for archival preservation

MT = transfer to new medium (to be specified).

Where transfer to an archival institution is prescribed, a supplementary abbreviation may be used to indicate to which institution the records will go. In the public sector, this might be as follows:

NA = national archives

RA = regional archives.

It is wise not to use the same abbreviations to refer to different terms, even in different documents. Using the same abbreviations can only cause confusion, especially as many people using or referring to the schedules will not be as well trained in records care as the records professionals in the records management unit.

Disposal action should be undertaken at the scheduled time and in a systematic manner. Even when it is not prescribed in legislation or policies, it is convenient to treat 1 January as the effective disposal date.

However, some agencies, particularly those with limited resources, may wish to stagger the implementation of disposal schedules over a longer period so that the work is more manageable.

At some time (such as three months) before the end of the previous year:

- the records due for disposal should be identified from the control documentation
- any necessary confirmation of authority to destroy should be sought (the necessary letters or minutes can be created automatically in an automated system), setting the beginning of the disposal year as the deadline
- an action plan should be drawn up.

The action plan should establish priorities for the implementation of disposal action with the intention of releasing storage space for reuse as quickly as possible by disposing of bulky series of records first.

When the authority for destruction is delayed, there is no reason why work should not go ahead on

- the transfer of series of records scheduled for permanent preservation to the appropriate archival repository (this activity should not need confirmation from the action officers in the creating agency)
- the appraisal of series scheduled for selective archival preservation or the drawing of samples (the transfer of selected records can take place despite the need to await confirmation of authority to destroy the residue).

When classified or sensitive records scheduled for archival preservation reach their disposal dates, they should be reviewed for continuing sensitivity. When sensitivity has lapsed, they should be declassified and transferred to the appropriate archival institution. When sensitivity continues, they may have to be retained in the creating agency under the relevant provisions of records legislation or policies, but a date should be set (such as five years later) for a further sensitivity review.

Activity 13

Does your organisation presently schedule records for disposal? If so explain the processes used. If possible, obtain copies of disposal document and compare them with the samples shown here. Write down at least three or four differences between the documents and explain why you think those differences are there.

If your organisation does not schedule records, write a brief proposal for how you would introduce a scheduling process. Where would you begin? How would you justify such a system?

DISPOSAL CONTROL DOCUMENTATION

The retention periods set out in disposal schedules are expressed in terms of years, such as 'x' years from the date the records were created or closed 'y' years from the conclusion of a particular action relating to the records. Hence, if a series has been running for a number of years, the disposal schedule itself will not identify specific records within that series that are ready for disposal. It is necessary to create a separate control document that will assign disposal dates to the records.

Disposal control documentation must be maintained to provide evidence of all disposal actions taken with regard to records.

Disposal control documentation may take the form of a card index or a duplicate set of file transit sheets arranged by disposal dates. It will include for every record (or sequence or cycle of records)

- the title(s) and code(s) (or some other brief description) of the record(s)
- the current location (it is vital that this information be kept up-to-date)
- the quantity (for sequences and cycles)
- the disposal date
- the disposal action (to avoid the need to cross-refer to the disposal schedule).

A disposal control system is described in more detail in Managing Records in Records Centres.

DESTRUCTION OF RECORDS

There are several means of destroying records. The appropriate choice in any particular case will depend largely upon the sensitivity of the records.

Pulping and recycling is the preferred option for the majority of paper records, providing it is done by contractors who can provide the degree of security commensurate with the sensitivity of the records.

Shredding within the agency or records centre followed by pulping and recycling by a contractor is appropriate for confidential and secret paper records. Where large quantities of records have to be shredded, an industrial quality shredding machine will have to be acquired.

Incineration may be necessary for the most confidential paper records. However, incinerating paper in bulk can be difficult. In open bonfires, combustion is likely to be incomplete, and any wind will scatter partly consumed papers. Moreover, bonfires

constitute a fire hazard and are not environmentally sound. Even when a large industrial furnace is available, it is not unknown for documents to be drawn through the chimney by the draught of the combustion process and dispersed, charred but still legible, around the surrounding area.

Dumping public records in landfill sites is not appropriate, even for the least sensitive records. Such an action can diminish public confidence in the government's commitment to the protection of personal and commercial privacy.

When destroying paper records, it is not wise to reuse paper records with information on one side only. This is partly because sensitive records may be inadvertently made available and partly because there can be confusion about which side of a paper record is the correct one, the side with the new information on it or other side with the original information.

When destroying electronic records, it is important to realise that just removing an electronic file from a directory does not mean the file has been destroyed. Reuse by overwriting is an option for magnetic media (computer tapes and disks, audiotapes and videotapes), but if the media contain sensitive information, total erasure or destruction may be necessary. When destroying restricted documents, especially those that are security classified, it is usually necessary to erase the entire disk or tape, in order to ensure that the file in question cannot be recovered.

For more information on electronic records care, see Managing Electronic Records.

Activity 14

How are obsolete records presently destroyed in your organisation? Write a brief description and identify at least three or four changes you would recommend to improve the process.

UPDATING DISPOSAL SCHEDULES

Schedules should be constantly monitored and updated in the light of changes that affect the records. New editions should be issued from time to time, with the edition number and date clearly displayed.

The completion of a disposal schedule is not the end of the scheduling process.

The kinds of change likely to cause a revision of disposal schedules include

- changes in legislation or regulations
- a reorganisation of the agency
- the introduction or discontinuance of functions
- the transfer of functions within the agency or between agencies
- the introduction of new work patterns and record-keeping systems (perhaps as a consequence of automation)
- changes in security rules and systems
- changes in arrangements for the storage of semi-current records.

Such changes will, of course, affect much more than just disposal schedules. Records inventories, file classification schemes and location control documentation will change if existing series of records are closed, new series of records are opened or records are transferred within the agency or to or from other agencies.

Particular attention should be paid to changes that will affect the retention periods prescribed in disposal schedules for existing series of records. A change in the statute of limitations would have an impact on many schedules. For example, if the period during which an action could be brought in a court of law to recover a sum of money were extended from six years to ten years, this change would have crucial implications for the retention of many series of financial records. Rather than keeping financial records for a minimum of six years from the end of their year of closure, the agency would have to consider extending the minimum retention period to ten years. In this case the agency would need to consider first whether it would cost more to keep the records for ten years than it would to defend itself against actions without recourse to the evidence in the records.

SUMMARY

Lesson 6 has described the purpose and content of the disposal schedule and provided examples to serve as models.

It has defined the terms

- disposal schedule
- general disposal schedule
- administrative or housekeeping records
- organisational records
- classified records
- retention period
- disposal date.

It has explained the difference between the general disposal schedule and the agency disposal schedule. It has also provided guidance on the implementation and updating of disposal schedules and the options available for destroying records.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Explain four purposes of a disposal schedule.
2. What is a general disposal schedule?
3. What is an agency disposal schedule?
4. Why should disposal schedules be different for administrative and operational records?
5. How do schedules for classified records differ from other schedules?
6. Name four tasks the agency records manager should undertake to develop an agency disposal schedule.
7. Name four tasks the records and archives institution should undertake to assist with the development of an agency disposal schedule.
8. What information should be included in disposal schedules?
9. Explain how abbreviations can be used to represent disposal actions, giving at least two examples from this lesson.
10. Why do disposal schedules need to be updated?
11. Name at least five changes that are likely to trigger a revision of disposal schedules.
12. Who should authorise disposal schedules?
13. What is a disposal date?
14. Explain the process normally used to devise a disposal date.
15. What kinds of disposal control documentation should be developed.
16. Explain how disposal actions are implemented.
17. Name four ways that records can be destroyed. For each method, describe two advantages and two disadvantages.

ACTIVITIES: COMMENTS

Activities 13-14

As with other activities in this module, these activities are designed to allow you to compare the information provided in here with the reality of processes in your organisation. It is important to compare systems honestly and objectively, so that you can learn as much as possible about ideal and recommended systems and how they can be implemented in reality.

WHAT TO DO NEXT?

Building Records Appraisal Systems has focused on the appraisal, retention and disposal of records as part of a continuum of care within a life-cycle records management system. It has addressed the issues involved in determining the continuing utility and enduring value of records. It has provided guidance on tackling a common problem faced by records managers: appraising a backlog of undifferentiated current, semi-current and non-current records produced by collapsed or ineffective systems. It has considered the options available for dealing with series that cannot be destroyed or transferred to the archival institution as a whole. Finally, it has examined the design and application of disposal schedules, the control documents used to record appraisal decisions and possible disposal actions.

To be effective, appraisal and disposal must operate within a sound records management system which matches the resources and meets the requirements of the government or the institution.

Even within systems which are well organised and working efficiently, there are likely to be some problem areas: for example, unappraised records may be accumulating where responsibilities for taking disposal action are unclear or are being neglected; new records may be created that are not covered by disposal schedules; or retention requirements for particular records may need updating because of changes in legislation or business functions. In fact, the appraisal process will be ever-changing as policies and programmes, and the institutions that develop and implement them, evolve.

ESTABLISHING PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

Once the principles, concepts and practices described in this module are understood, the next step is to consider what action is necessary to build or improve records appraisal and disposal systems. Are the systems for determining the retention and disposal of records effective or are they in need of modification or redesign? Are there backlogs of records that need to be appraised? Are there any categories of records that are not covered by disposal schedules? If the answer to any of these questions is yes, it will be necessary to take action. But which tasks should be undertaken first? Which are high priority and which are low?

Activity 15

Based on the work you have done for this module, what priorities would you establish to start building a records appraisal system in your organisation? What would you do first? What next? Why?

Consider the following as suggestions only.

Priority 1: Confirm the Legislative and Policy Framework

No programme of appraisal and disposal can succeed unless it is built upon a legislative or policy framework that

- embraces all the records to be covered by the programme
- assigns responsibility for the records throughout their life cycle
- assigns responsibility for designing and implementing the appraisal and disposition programme.

Within the context of public sector records, legislation must define public records and assign public agencies and the records and archives institution with specific responsibilities in relation to appraisal and disposal. This also ensures that programmes are consistent and co-ordinated and that there is accountability for disposal decisions.

Revisions of legislation or policy are beyond the scope of this module. See Developing Infrastructures for Records and Archives Services.

Priority 2: Gather Information about the Records

The process of appraising any particular body of records involves acquiring information about the creating organisation, its functions, the generation, maintenance and use of its records and the relationship of these records with other records. Unless this information is known, the continuing utility or enduring value of the records cannot be assessed. If the records are not already covered by disposal schedules, a records survey will be needed to gather the information on which the schedules should be based.

However, the existence of schedules does not preclude the need for a records survey. Schedules must plan the life of all categories of records from the time of their creation or receipt until their ultimate disposal, either by destruction or transfer to the archives. A preliminary investigation may be needed to establish whether the schedules are adequate. If they are found to be out of date or insufficiently comprehensive, a records survey will need to be planned and carried out.

Priority 3: Confirm the Effectiveness of Disposal Schedules

Disposal schedules must meet the information needs of the agency. The retention and disposal action that they specify must ensure that any information of continuing utility to the agency is available when required and that those records that have enduring value are safeguarded and transferred to the archives at the appropriate time. Schedules must also take into account any legislation or regulations that have a bearing on how long particular records should be retained and remain accessible. A Limitation Act is an obvious example, but there may be other relevant legislation, for example in relation to the retention of original copies of contracts and agreements.

Disposal schedules must also be mandatory. Once formally agreed and authorised, they must be implemented by the agencies concerned and the records and archives institution. If they are not, inactive records will accumulate in agencies, access to current information will be impaired and records of enduring value will be put at risk.

Priority 4: Clear Backlogs and Prevent their Reoccurrence

The existence of a large backlog of inactive records is often the most obvious symptom of a collapsed or ineffective system and the trigger that prompts a records management improvement or restructuring programme. Administrators and senior managers may claim that clearing a backlog is simply a matter of working through a large quantity of records and making decisions about what should be kept and what may be thrown away. However, backlogs indicate systemic problems. Unless the systems are fixed, backlogs will reoccur and there will be a repetition of all the undesirable consequences for business inefficiency and wasted resources.

The existence of a backlog of undifferentiated current, semi-current and non-current records suggests problems in the following areas:

- appraisal and disposal policy and procedures are lacking or are inadequate
- responsibility for appraisal, retention and disposal has not been properly assigned
- disposal schedules are non-existent, inadequate or not enforced
- appraisal and disposal programmes have not been matched to resources
- staff need further training in their roles and responsibilities in relation to appraisal and disposal.

Tackling these problems is no easy matter. Solutions may only be provided by a fundamental restructuring of records management systems, even the enactment of new legislation. This module has provided a methodology for clearing backlogs. Other modules will need to be consulted for further guidance on developing new records management infrastructures and systems.

Priority 5: Ensure that Key Players Understand their Roles

Appraisal and disposal systems will not be effective unless all the staff who have a role to play in their operation understand the systems and can undertake the actions required. Where new systems are being introduced, agency records staff will need training in the new procedures which affect them. Action officers and senior staff will also need to be familiarised with the purpose and benefits of the new systems.

Where major improvements or complete restructuring are required, records staff are likely to be involved and action officers are likely to be approached during the information gathering phase of the exercise. However, seminars, formal presentations or training sessions may also be needed, depending on the scope of the work to be undertaken.

As already noted, an appraisal, retention and disposal programme must be an ongoing process. Systems will need to be regularly monitored by the records and archives institution to ensure that they are operating effectively and continue to be appropriate.

GETTING HELP

Many institutions, particularly in countries with limited resources, have little access to information resources about appraisal. However, many national archival institutions make their schedules available for review and can assist with questions about appraisal issues. Following are names and addresses of selected national archives that may be able to offer assistance with appraisal issues.

See the Additional Resources document for information on other organisations and associations involved with records and archives management generally.

National Archives of Australia

PO Box 34
Dickson
Canberra, A.C.T. 2602 Australia
Fax: +61 6 257 7564
Website: <http://www.naa.gov.au>

The National Archives of Australia offers a number of publications free, including information about various archival issues. The NAA also participates in international activities and makes many of its resources available on its website.

National Archives of Canada

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON
K1A 0N6, Canada
Website: <http://www.archives.ca>

The National Archives of Canada is an active partner in international archival projects, including hosting the International Council on Archives website and participating in a range of ICA activities. The National Archives' website includes valuable information about archival policies and procedures, examples of on-line research tools and finding aids and information about exhibitions and publications.

National Archives and Records Administration (NARA)

8th and Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC
20408, US
Fax: +1 202 208 5248
Website: <http://www.nara.gov/>

The National Archives and Records Administration is an independent federal agency of the United States government, responsible for preserving the nation's history and managing its federal records. NARA has a wide range of publications available on archival management issues; the website provides details. People can also view NARA's general disposal schedules online through the website.

Public Record Office (PRO)

Kew, Richmond
Surrey TW9 4DU, UK
Tel: +44 208 876 3444
Fax: +44 208 878 8905
Website: <http://www.pro.gov.uk>

The Public Record Office in the United Kingdom seeks to ensure that public records are preserved for present and future access and to raise awareness of the importance of caring for records and archives.

State Records Authority of New South Wales

Level 3, 66 Harrington Street
The Rocks
Sidney, NSW 2000
Australia
Tel: +61 2 9237 0200
Fax: +61 2 9237 0142
Email: srecords@records.nsw.gov.au
Website: <http://www.records.nse.gov.au>

The State Records Authority of New South Wales was previously known as the Archives Authority of New South Wales. The State Records' website offers valuable information on record keeping, including on-line finding aids to holdings, updates on programmes and services, and online versions of various publications including the *Government Recordkeeping Manual*.

Activity 16

Find out if your institution has any information about any of the agencies listed above. Does your organisation receive publications, participate in conferences or meetings or otherwise work with any of these groups?

In your opinion, which groups should your institution consider communicating with first, if any, and what would you expect to achieve by doing so? How would you go about building a productive relationship?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

There are a number of publications available about appraisal. Some are more easily obtained than others, and some more up-to-date than others. However, older publications also contain valuable information and may be more easily found in libraries in your particular country or region than new publications that have not yet circulated around the world. Core publications are identified with an asterisk (*).

Core publications are also identified in the Additional Resources document; refer to that document for information on more general publications on records and archives management.

Major Publications

ARMA. *Developing and Operating a Records Retention Program*. ARMA International Guideline. Prairie Village, KS: ARMA International, 1989.

Charman, Derek. *Records Surveys and Schedules: A RAMP Study with Guidelines*. (RAMP Study PGI-84/WS/26). Paris, FR: UNESCO, 1984.

- * Cook, Terry. *The Archival Appraisal of Records Containing Personal Information: A RAMP Study with Guidelines*. (RAMP Study PGI-91/WS/3). Paris, FR: UNESCO, 1991. Available electronically through the UNESCO website.

Guptil, Marilla B. *Archival Appraisal of Records of International Organizations: A RAMP Study with Guidelines*. (RAMP Study PGI-85/WS/4). Paris, FR: UNESCO, 1985.

- Ham, Gerald F. *Selecting and Appraising Archives and Manuscripts*. Chicago, IL: Society of American Archivists, 1993.
- Harrison, Helen P. *The Archival Appraisal of Sound Recordings and Related Materials: A RAMP Study with Guidelines*. (RAMP Study PGI-87/WS/1). Paris, FR: UNESCO, 1987.
- * Hull, Felix. *The Use of Sampling Techniques in the Retention of Records: A RAMP Study with Guidelines. Admissibility of Microforms as Evidence: A RAMP Study*. (RAMP Study PGI-81/WS/26). Paris, FR: UNESCO, 1981.
- Kula, Sam. *The Archival Appraisal of Moving Images: A RAMP Study with Guidelines*. (RAMP Study PGI-83/WS/18). Paris, FR: UNESCO, 1983.
- Leary, William H. *The Archival Appraisal of Photographs: A RAMP Study with Guidelines*. (RAMP Study PGI-85/WS/10). Paris, FR: UNESCO, 1985.
- Naugler, Harold. *The Archival Appraisal of Machine-readable Records: A RAMP Study*. (RAMP Study PGI-84/WS/27). Paris, FR: UNESCO, 1984.
- Samuels, Helen W. *Varsity Letters: Documenting Modern Colleges and Universities*. Metuchen, New Jersey and London: Society of American Archivists and Scarecrow Press, Inc, 1992.
- Schellenberg, TR. *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques*. Reprint. Chicago, US: University of Chicago Press, 1975: 139.
- * Schellenberg, TR. *The Appraisal of Modern Public Records*. National Archives Bulletin 8. Washington, DC, US: National Archives, 1956; excerpts reprinted in Daniels, MF, and Walch, T, eds. *A Modern Archives Reader: Basic Readings on Archival Theory and Practice*. Washington, DC: National Archives, 1984.
- Skupsky, DS. *Records Retention Procedures*. Denver, CO: Information Requirements Clearinghouse, 1990.
- Whittick, MH, ed. *Records Appraisal*. RMC11. London, UK: Society of Archivists, 1985.

Readings on Specific Appraisal Issues

Following are some valuable additional readings on aspects of appraisal, retention and disposal.

- Bailey, C. 'From the Top Down: The Practice of Macro-Appraisal.' *Archivaria* 43 (Spring 1997): 89-128.
- Bloomfield, P. 'Plan, Control and Review: Framing a Retention Policy.' *Records Management* 8 (1983): 18-24.
- Booms, H. 'Society and the Formation of a Documentary Heritage: Issues in the Appraisal of Archival Sources.' *Archivaria* 24 (Summer 1987): 69-107.
- Booms, H. 'Überlieferungsbildung: Keeping Archives as a Social and Political Activity.' *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991-92): 25-33.

Cook, T. 'Mind over Matter: Towards a New Theory of Archival Appraisal.' Craig, BL, ed. *The Archival Imagination. Essays in Honour of Hugh A Taylor*. Ottawa, ON: Association of Canadian Archivists, 1992: 38–70.

Menne-Haritz, A. 'Appraisal or Documentation: Can We Appraise Archives by Selecting Content?' *The American Archivist* 57, 3 (Summer 1994): 528-42.

Menne-Haritz, A. 'Appraisal or selection: Can a Content Oriented Appraisal be Harmonized with the Principle of Provenance?' *The Principle of Provenance. Skrifter utgivna av Svenska Riksarkivet* 10. Stockholm, SW: Swedish National Archives, 1994: 103-31.

Samuels, H. 'Improving Our Disposition: Documentation Strategy.' *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991-92): 125-40.

United Kingdom. *Committee on Departmental Records. Report*. Cmnd. 9163, London, UK: HMSO, 1954.

Activity 17

Check your institution's library or resource centre. What books or other resources do you have about appraisal? Are any of the publications listed above available in your institution? If so, examine two or three of them and assess their currency and value to your institution. If not, identify two or three publications you think would be most useful to help develop or expand your library. Devise a plan outlining how you could realistically obtain copies of these.

SUMMARY

This lesson has provided an overview of the entire module, *Building Records Appraisal Systems*. The lesson has then discussed how to establish priorities for action and suggested that the main priorities for action are often as follows:

- Priority 1: confirm the legislative and policy framework
- Priority 2: gather information about the records
- Priority 3: confirm the effectiveness of the disposal schedules
- Priority 4: clear backlogs and prevent their reoccurrence
- Priority 5: ensure that all key players understand their roles.

The lesson also provides guidance on where to get help and suggests some sources of further information.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. In your own words, explain the reason why the priorities proposed in this lesson are offered in the order they are in.
2. Indicate two of the organisations listed in this lesson that you would choose to contact first and explain why.
3. Indicate two of the publications listed in this lesson that you would choose to purchase first and explain why.

ACTIVITIES: COMMENTS

Activity 15

Every institution will find itself at a different stage of development in terms of appraisal processes. Similarly, every person will have a different level of knowledge of appraisal issues. It is important to study core materials first and become comfortable with key principles and concepts before exploring those with colleagues or reading into more complex literature. However, contact with colleagues and access to other literature is valuable, and joining and participating in professional associations is one way to expand your horizons and those of your institution.

Activity 16

If resources are limited, it is wise to communicate with international organisations first, as they often obtain and filter information from national or regional associations. Thus valuable information is passed on to your organisation through the international group, which can save resources for all. It is also advisable to focus on records and archives management information before obtaining specialised publications or information.

Activity 17

As mentioned in relation to the previous activity, it is important to begin with general information and ensure you have a good resource library of introductory and overview publications before developing a more specialised library.