

MANAGING PUBLIC
SECTOR RECORDS

A Training Programme

Managing Current Records: A Procedures Manual



INTERNATIONAL
COUNCIL ON ARCHIVES



INTERNATIONAL RECORDS
MANAGEMENT TRUST

MANAGING CURRENT RECORDS: A
PROCEDURES MANUAL

MANAGING PUBLIC SECTOR RECORDS

A STUDY PROGRAMME

General Editor, Michael Roper; Managing Editor, Laura Millar

MANAGING CURRENT
RECORDS: A PROCEDURES
MANUAL

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Managing Current Records: A Procedures Manual

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Managing Current Records: A Procedures Manual

Prepared by the staff of the International Records Management Trust.

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SAMPLE FORMS

Sample forms are organised by figure number.

1. Inward Correspondence Register
2. Remittance Register
3. Outward Correspondence Register
4. Messenger's Despatch Book
5. Sample File Cover
6. Minute Sheet
7. File Diary
8. File Transit Sheet
9. File Movement Slip
10. File Census Form
11. Disposal Schedule
12. Proposal to Destroy Scheduled Records
13. Records Centre Transfer List
14. Records Centre Request Form
15. Records Centre Disposal Form

INTRODUCTION TO *MANAGING CURRENT RECORDS: A PROCEDURES MANUAL*

The *Managing Current Records: A Procedures Manual* describes the procedures for managing and maintaining current records. It also sets out procedures for transferring records to and retrieving records from the records centre once they are no longer in current use.

The main focus of this manual are the policy, operational and administrative files created by most organisations, commonly called ‘subject’ files. These document the policies, functions and procedures of the organisation, as well matters relating to ‘housekeeping’ such as buildings, equipment and supplies and internal administration. Four special categories of records – financial, personnel, hospital and legal – are dealt with in separate modules.

The *Manual* is intended as a generic guide for records office staff. The principles and practices of managing current records are also explored in the module *Organising and Controlling Current Records*.

TERMINOLOGY AND FORMS

In this manual, ‘records office’ is used to refer registries or any unit that creates and maintains current files. The manual refers to ‘archival institution’, ‘records office’, ‘records centre’ and ‘records and archives institution’ in a generic sense. The body that controls the archival institution, records centre and records offices is referred to as the ‘records and archives institution’. In some government or business situations, the archival facility may take on all record-keeping functions. Note that the term ‘archives’ is displayed in lower case when referring to the materials; the term ‘archival institution’ is used when referring to the agency itself. Users should apply appropriate terminology for their specific situation, such as ‘national archives’, ‘provincial records centre’ or ‘corporate records office’.

All forms are included at the end of this manual, in Section 12, for ease of access by users.

FUNCTIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF A RECORDS OFFICE

The essential functions of a records office are to

- receive, record and distribute incoming and internally created mail of all kinds (such as letters, memoranda and faxes)
- open and index files, attach relevant papers and pass the files to action officers
- build up and control all officially registered files and other documentation in their care, so that they can be produced quickly by means of effective indexing, classification and tracking procedures
- know the location of all officially registered files in their care and be able to produce them quickly, by means of effective indexing, classification and tracking procedures
- provide storage, repository and reference services for all officially registered files and other documentation in their care
- record and arrange for the efficient and timely despatch of all correspondence produced by the officers they serve
- review and dispose of all outdated files or other records in accordance with retention periods as agreed between the records and archives institution, the organisation or department concerned and other relevant officials.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES FOR RECORDS OFFICES

Responsibility for the management of records offices may be shared between the records and archives institution and local line management. The records and archives institution should be responsible for all professional and technical matters relating to the delivery of effective and efficient records services including training and inspection. Local line management may be responsible for matters regarding the welfare, discipline and non-specialist training of records staff as well as non-technical issues relating to records

offices. The separate responsibilities of these two management chains must be closely co-ordinated.

The head of the records office has immediate responsibility for the day-to-day work of the records office and the service it provides to users of records. He or she liaises with the records and archives institution on any technical records management or procedural matters.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF RECORDS STAFF TOWARD USERS

Records offices exist in order to provide a service to the action officers who need to use the records. Users are always shown the maximum possible courtesy and co-operation, and efficient records staff will take every opportunity to learn the particular needs and requirements of their agency and its action officers. The records staff will react promptly to complaints by users, giving reasoned replies and explanations. Suggestions for improvements from users are warmly received and actively encouraged. These are implemented wherever possible.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF USERS

Well-run records offices depend upon an active partnership between records office staff and users. Records staff rely upon action officers to

- deal with files promptly and return them to the records office when they are no longer required
- use the bring-up system when action on a file needs to be temporarily suspended
- keep files free of ephemeral material such as duplicates, drafts and so on
- include the relevant file reference on all outgoing correspondence
- give clear guidance, if required, on how they wish their mail to be indexed
- provide the records office with a completed file movement slip whenever they pass a file to another officer or elsewhere other than through the records office
- co-operate fully with all necessary record checks, including censuses and searches conducted by the records office.

THE RECORDS OFFICE AND THE LIFE OF RECORDS

Records offices are concerned with files in the earlier 'operational' phases of their lives, when they are used for the purposes for which they were created. It is important, however, that records offices know how and when to pass files on to the records centre.

The records and archives institution manages all phases of the life of a record in order to ensure that the information requirements of the government or organisation are met efficiently. In addition to its responsibilities for records offices, it will manage the records centres and archival facilities.

The records centre provides a storage and retrieval service for semi-current records. Semi-current records are records that are no longer needed for day-to-day use but that must be kept because they may need to be referred to occasionally or because they have a continuing legal and financial value. By making regular use of the records centre, records staff will be able to provide users of records with access to semi-current records that are no longer kept in the agency. Use of the records centre will also achieve improvements in working conditions, as they will keep the records offices clear of files not needed for current work.

Procedures for managing the records centre are outlined in the Managing Records Centres: A Procedures Manual. The role of the records centre is also described in greater detail in Section 9 of this manual.

Preserved within the archival institution are those records of permanent historical value. Once these records have reached a certain age they are open to the public for research purposes.

Procedures for managing archives are described in Managing Archives: A Procedures Manual.

INCOMING CORRESPONDENCE

TYPES OF CORRESPONDENCE

Records staff must deal promptly and accurately with many different kinds of correspondence. Incoming correspondence will reach the records office in a number of different ways. Some will come through the mail, some by hand, some by telex, fax or electronic mail. There will also be differences in the way in which items are addressed. Some will be addressed to a ministry, department or agency and some to individuals either by name or by title of office. Other items may be either inadequately or illegibly addressed. A smaller number of items will bear security or privacy markings, such as 'confidential' or 'personal.' Some mail may contain cheques, money or other valuables which will need to be carefully recorded and accounted for in the records office.

OPENING MAIL

Rules for handling 'confidential' and 'personal' letters should always be followed. All other mail should be opened and date-stamped as soon as it is received by the records office. During this process letters should be kept in a box file or other suitable container.

Slit envelopes across the top to open. Care must be taken to ensure the contents of letters are not damaged when the envelopes are slit. Many enclosures are received loose or separated from their covering documents. Attach such enclosures to the relevant documents, taking care not to damage cheques, certificates or similar items. All attachments must be noted on the covering document. This is particularly important when the enclosures are valuable or are personal papers.

Certificates, deeds and other legal documents require special care. Place such documents in separate envelopes, noting the contents and the number of the file on the outside. These are recorded in a register or valuables book (see below) and then stored in a safe place and cross-referenced on the file.

INWARD CORRESPONDENCE REGISTER AND MAIL FOLDER

After the mail has been opened and all enclosures accounted for, each letter must be registered by a designated officer in the Inward Correspondence Register. All columns of the register must be completed. The details to be entered initially are

1. serial number (the next number in sequence)
2. date of the letter
3. date the letter was received
4. from whom the letter was received
5. reference given by the writer of the letter
6. subject of the letter.

See Figure 1: Inward Correspondence Register.

The head of the records office or a designated officer will decide how items are to be handled.

Mark routine documents with filing instructions and pass to the officer responsible for filing (see Section 4 on filing papers). Place letters which are not routine in mail folders for circulation to the most senior officers in the agency. The officers on the circulation list will vary from agency to agency, but it is important that the list is as short as possible so that the mail folder is returned to the records office quickly.

The officers on the circulation list should attend to the documents in the mail folder promptly. They should mark those letters that they would like to deal with personally or that they would like referred to their staff by noting on the officer to whom they are to be sent. All such directions should be initialled and dated by the officer making them. Letters may not be removed from the mail folder. All must be returned to the records office for filing.

Where there is more than one circulation of mail each day, correspondence delivered after a circulation has been despatched should be held over and included in the subsequent batch, except for any that are marked 'urgent' which must be delivered immediately. In records offices receiving mail once a day only, it may still be necessary to have a second circulation to deal with letters delivered by messengers.

When the mail folder is returned to the records office place the documents immediately on the appropriate files. Before the files are passed to the nominated action officers, a member of the records office staff should note on the relevant file transit sheet the name or title of the action officer and the date of transit (see Section 7). At this time the following information will be recorded in the Inward Correspondence Register:

1. name or title of the action officer to whom the file was passed, and the date the letter was filed
2. number of the file on which the letter was placed.

The files must be delivered to the relevant action officers without delay.

MAIL CONTAINING VALUABLES

Post containing, or likely to contain, cheques, bank drafts, money orders or other valuable items must be carefully safeguarded from the time it is received.

A written record of all postal remittances received each day must be prepared (in addition to the Inward Correspondence Register) and signed by the post opener. A Remittance Register is used for this purpose. Records office staff should record the following information in the Remittance Register:

1. serial number (the next number in sequence)
2. date received
3. name of person sending remittance
4. amount
5. bank sort code (cheques only)
6. cheque number
7. name and signature of officer opening remittance.

See Figure 2: Remittance Register

Each sheet of the register must be serially numbered. Cash received should be counted and noted in the register as well as on the accompanying document by the post-opener. Any uncrossed cheques/postal orders must be crossed. Erasures and pencils entries must not be made in the register. A wrong entry may only be cancelled by ruling it through and correcting it with a new entry that leaves the original entry legible. All such alterations must be initialled jointly by the post-opener and the supervising officer.

Examine all payable instruments (cheques, money orders, postal orders, bank drafts and so on) to ensure that

- the amount agrees with that on the remittance advice slip or other accompanying document

- the amounts in words and figures agree
- the date and payee details are completed correctly
- the remittances are signed (excluding postal and payable orders).

If the purpose for which a remittance was sent cannot be identified, include it with the daily banking and take action to obtain the necessary information as quickly as possible.

In cases in which money apparently has been omitted or differs in amount from that stated on documents received by post, a note must be made on the document jointly by the post-opener and the supervising officer. The person who sent the remittance is then advised at once that there is an error. The cheque may be banked in the meantime.

TELEGRAMS, FAXES AND ELECTRONIC MAIL

Place telegrams in folders marked 'URGENT' immediately after they have been registered. These folders must then be passed without delay to a senior officer for directions on how they are to be treated.

An increasing quantity of mail is received by fax. As 'junk' mail is sometimes sent by fax, check that faxes received concern genuine office business. Much routine non-urgent correspondence is sent by fax. The unnecessary use of fax should be discouraged and care should be taken in deciding whether faxes need to be treated as urgent. The head of the records office should consult the appropriate action officer if in doubt.

Faxed material tends to fade if printed on thermal paper. Once it has been established that a fax concerns official business, the fax should be photocopied and the copy placed in the mail folder or on the appropriate file as necessary. The fax, as received, should then be placed on a file kept for original faxes. All incoming faxes on the fax file should be destroyed after six months as a matter of routine. If the original of the document faxed is received at a later date in the records office, it should also be placed on the appropriate file. Both the photocopy of the fax and the original document should be retained on the file as the photocopy may have had comments written on it by action officers.

In the future, more communications will be received by electronic mail on computers used by action officers at their desks. However, many e-mail messages are routine or unrelated to official business and will not need to be retained once they have been read. Officers sending or receiving electronic mail must decide whether each item of e-mail received or despatched concerns official business and needs to be printed so that a copy is placed on file.

In all cases when incoming electronic mail is printed for filing, any outgoing reply should also be printed and filed with the incoming message. Where possible, e-mail messages should relate to one subject only to facilitate filing. If an e-mail relates to several subjects, copies will need to be made and placed on the appropriate files. Ultimately it will be possible to file and retain electronic messages electronically, but at present the facilities to do so are not in place in most cases.

OUTGOING CORRESPONDENCE

PREPARING LETTERS FOR DESPATCH

Every letter leaving the records office must quote the full address and reference number (file reference and folio number) as well as the reference(s) of any other correspondence quoted in the text of the letter. Security or privacy markings are typed in a prominent position at the top and bottom of each sheet.

Once a letter has been signed by an action officer it must be returned to the records office for despatch.

OUTWARD CORRESPONDENCE REGISTER

Records office staff are responsible for maintaining a record of what is despatched. The following information about letters leaving the office is noted in the Outward Correspondence Register:

1. serial number
2. date letter received for despatch
3. date despatched
4. subject of the letter
5. reference number of the letter
6. name of the addressee of the letter
7. mode of despatch (by hand or post).

See Figure 3: Outward Correspondence Register.

MESSENGER'S DESPATCH BOOK

Letters to be delivered by hand are recorded in the Messenger's Despatch Book. The following details will be entered:

1. date letter despatched
2. reference number of the letter
3. messenger's name
4. where sent (ministry/department/agency)
5. name and signature of receiving officer and date.

See Figure 4: Messenger's Despatch Book.

DELIVERY OF MAIL

The records office will then pass the letter and all others ready for despatch to a messenger, together with the Messenger's Despatch Book. When delivering the letters, the messenger must obtain the name and signature or initials of the persons to whom he delivers the letters. This is written in the last column of the Despatch Book together with the date of receipt.

FILING PAPERS

THE REGISTERED FILE

The registered file is an organised assembly of documents kept together for use, and relating to a specific subject, type of transaction or area of business. The registered file should have three components:

- a cover to protect the contents and act as a title page and a record of the file's circulation
- the contents
- some method of securing the whole together.

File covers (also known as jackets or folders) are usually made of rigid manila paper or board, cut larger than the dimensions of the documents to be filed, and folded to enclose the documents and so minimise damage from handling and use.

The file cover should be pre-printed with the name of the agency and division or department of the agency if this is appropriate. The file cover should include a space for the file title, file number, index headings or keywords, security marking, references to previous, subsequent or related files, and file period (ie the date or year of opening, and closure when known). The cover should also have a grid (or ladder) for recording the file's circulation when in use.

See Figure 5: Sample File Cover.

Maintaining the order of documents within the file is a vital requirement of filing. This establishes the context within which decisions and actions were taken, and the sequence of those decisions and actions. Hence, papers should be filed in the same order as the transactions of which they form part. This is not the same as saying that the individual papers are filed in their date order. Place papers within a file in the order in which they are received in the records office for filing. For example, an outward letter dated 29 May 1999 will be filed before an incoming letter dated 26 May if the outgoing letter, with the later date, is sent out and a copy filed before the incoming letter, with the earlier date, is received.

Secure individual documents within a file so that they do not become misplaced or lost. The 'treasury tag' is still the cheapest and easiest method of securing documents within a file. There is a recommended method for using treasury tags. Holes are punched in the

top left-hand corner of the front cover and inside back cover of the file, taking care not to lose information where the hole is punched. The tag is inserted through the front cover from the inside, passed round the 'spine' of the file on the outside and inserted through the back cover. Holes should be punched in the top left-hand corner of each document to be filed, three centimetres (one inch) down and three centimetres in from the edge. Documents are secured to the end of the tag which passes through the back cover to the inside of the file.

THE CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

Classification systems are required to identify individual files and forms of records, and to indicate the logical relationships between files and records. Without some system for classifying papers, it is not possible to show the links between related files or to file papers consistently and accurately. Whichever system is used in the record office, each file must have a unique identifying reference number. This may be a number or a combination of letters and numbers.

The options for classifying files are described in Organising and Controlling Current Records.

IDENTIFYING THE SUBJECT OF A PAPER

Mail received in the records office after registration, or on return from circulation, must be placed on files as soon as possible.

If no directions on filing have been given by senior staff or action officers and if the letter does not quote a reference to a file in the records office, the officer responsible for filing must read the letter carefully to determine its subject and place it on an existing file, if one already exists, or open a new file if there is no appropriate file.

Determining whether an appropriate file already exists requires a careful search of the file index or classified list of files (file plan). The procedures for opening a new file and assigning it a reference number are described in Section 5.

See Organising and Controlling Current Records for more details.

NUMBERING PAPERS ON FILES

Documents and the accompanying enclosures must be placed on files in 'date of receipt' order (the most recent on the top). Number each paper on the file consecutively in the top right hand corner with the number being enclosed in a small circle. This is called the folio number. If a document runs to more than one page, the whole document, not the individual pages, is numbered. If the document has several attachments, then these must be given alphabetic suffices, for example:

- main document
- first enclosure = A
- second enclosure = B.

MINUTE SHEETS

The split file system is the standard method of maintaining registered papers on files. In this system, papers are divided thus.

- Incoming letters, copies of outgoing letters, memoranda, notes of meetings, statistical data and similar documents are placed on the right-hand side of the file and secured by a treasury tag.
- On the left-hand side of the opened file is a series of 'Minute Sheets', secured with a treasury tag. The purpose of these sheets is to enable action officers and records office staff to bring attention to particular action points arising from correspondence on the right-hand side of the file, eg a request for additional papers, a bring-up date or a point for clarification. The instructions should be short and to the point, addressed, signed and dated.

See Figure 6: Minute Sheet.

CROSS-REFERENCING AND REMOVING PAPERS FROM FILES

If a single letter or other item of correspondence relates to more than one file it should be photocopied and the original placed on the file for which it has most relevance. Place the photocopies on the other files to which the letter relates. On the original letter note the file numbers on which additional copies have been placed. Similarly, note the location of the original on each copy placed on other files. Alternatively, if a photocopier is not available or photocopying is considered too costly, place the

original on the file for which it has most relevance and put a note on each of the other files to which the letter relates, giving the date of the letter, its subject and the number of the file on which it can be found. Do not delay urgent mail by this process.

If a letter is received which refers to earlier correspondence, write the folio number of the previous letter on the new letter and then place it on the same file as the earlier letter.

Papers may only be removed from files in exceptional circumstances on the instruction of the head of the records office. When this is done, place a temporary note on the file at the point from which the paper(s) have been extracted, indicating the subject of the paper(s) and where they may be found. It must be signed by the member of staff responsible for the removal.

HANDLING CLASSIFIED DOCUMENTS AND FILES

The circulation of classified documents should be strictly limited to those officers who need them for the efficient performance of their duties.

Classified papers should bear their gradings on the top and bottom of each sheet. Top Secret and secret documents must be addressed to an officer by name and should only be opened by the addressee, or in his/her absence, by an officer performing his/her duties. Top secret, secret and confidential letters should be sent under double cover, the inner envelope being sealed at both ends and bearing the appropriate security classification. The outer envelope must not bear any classification nor should it be sealed. Restricted mail may be sent out in a single cover but in such cases the classification should not appear on the cover.

The same file cover design is suitable for both unclassified and classified files. Classified files must be clearly marked with the appropriate classification and should contain handling instructions pasted on the inside of the front cover.

MANAGING ELECTRONIC RECORDS

Using computers makes the management of records more complex. Some computerised records never appear on paper. Rules for the creation, maintenance and disposition of computerised records must be developed and records management practices modified to avoid the problems of unauthorised disposal of electronic records.

These practices must be designed to ensure that

- the integrity of records is maintained
- records are retrievable
- only authorised records disposal occurs according to established rules
- records having long-term value can be easily transferred to the archival institution.

See Section 2 for procedures for handling electronic mail.

See Managing Electronic Records for more information.

FILING CHECKLIST

- Ask the following questions regularly.
- Does the document belong on the file selected?
- Does the file reference on the document agree with the reference number of the file? (It should, unless it is a copy being used for cross-referencing.)
- Are all pages of a multiple page document present?
- Are all attachments present?

Do not file

- spare copies of letters, old drafts and so on, unless there is a likelihood that they will be significant in the foreseeable future. Such documents should either be destroyed or, if there is a genuine need to keep them, stored away from the file.
- published material and bulky reports. Much of the published material received in records offices has no relevance to the work of the agency. With the agreement of the line manager this material should be destroyed. Bulky published material or reports which are relevant should be marked with the file and folio number to which they relate and stored separately. Mark the covering letter to indicate the location of the published material.
- ephemeral material such as announcements of parties, greeting cards or advertisements for events that have no relevance to the agency.

CREATING A NEW FILE

OPENING A NEW FILE

When a document comes into the records office, the records staff must decide whether an appropriate file already exists, as described in Section 4. If no appropriate file exists, create a new file and allocate a reference and a title. No new file may be opened before there is correspondence to go on it. Opening files in the expectation of future correspondence leads to waste of effort, waste of valuable file covers and, most damaging of all, confusion in the file index. If there is any doubt at all about whether a new file is required, the head of the records office will ask the relevant action officer for advice. Action officers should be encouraged to indicate their need for files.

If a new file is required, the records office staff must think carefully about what it will contain and how it will grow. Remember that each file should relate to a single subject, a well-defined area of business or a particular type of transaction. The steps taken when opening a new file are described in Section 6.

Not all papers need to be placed on registered files. Keep ephemeral papers off files altogether (see Section 4) or on files that can be destroyed early. It is vital that files destined for early destruction contain only papers that have a short-term potential value. See Section 9 for file disposal procedures.

GIVING FILES TITLES

Choose a clear and precise title for each file. The title should be as descriptive as possible to provide adequate details of the file's actual and likely contents. It should trigger in the users' minds what the file contains. At the same time it ought to be specific enough so that the records office staff do not use the file to cover different aspects of the same business or new developments that really should be the subjects of several files. As well as describing the contents, a file title should also limit the scope of the material to be placed on it.

When adding new papers to a file, take care that the file title continues to reflect the contents accurately. At the same time, do not change the title of a file unless it is absolutely necessary. Users become familiar with titles, and changing them leads to confusion. If necessary, create new files for new papers and make cross-references to the files containing earlier related papers.

If there is any doubt about the title of a file, consult the appropriate action officer. Users' views on file titles should always be taken into account.

Where it does seem justified to change the title of a file, obtain the permission of the head of the records office before any change is made. In exceptional circumstances, a file whose title no longer reflects its contents should be closed and a new file with the correct title opened.

ASSIGNING FILE REFERENCE NUMBERS

The reference number for a file should be constructed in accordance with the file classification system in use in the records office. The classification scheme provides a logical framework for organising files in relation to each other. The coding system is a representation of the classification scheme, in letters and/or numbers, and in accordance with the pre-established rules. Whichever system is used, each file must have a unique identifier comprising a multi-part alpha and/or numeric reference code.

Options for classification and coding schemes are discussed in Organising and Controlling Current Records.

IDENTIFYING THE FILE SERIES

The first step in assigning a file number is to determine the appropriate file series. In general, there is a file series for each of the ministry's, department's or agency's clearly identifiable principal functions. If the agency has been organised into self-contained units that clearly support these functions, there will be a file series for each unit.

If one unit handles several distinct functions this will best be supported by several series. Alternatively, if two units served by the same records office routinely work together on a common function, one file series should be established to cover work in this area. Where units share some files but in general have different files for their own particular functions, two separate file series will be required.

It will sometimes be difficult to relate the functions of an agency to the organisational units. In such cases, work out the content and scope of the file series with the action officers who use the files.

ASSIGNING SEQUENTIAL NUMBERS

The last element in the file reference will be a sequential number distinguishing it from other files relating to the same or a closely connected subject. This is normally written as '01', '02', etc. For example:

AC/10/17/01

The growth of sequential numbers must be carefully monitored. When the number of files exceeds 20, this will be an indication that the classification of these files may need to be subdivided into narrower themes. Alternatively, a large sequence of files with the same classification may indicate that they are 'case' files which can more conveniently be classified as a series.

OPENING NEW FILE PARTS

Files when initially opened do not need to be given a specific 'volume number'. Open a new part or volume of an existing file when the current part has become full or if it contains papers which span more than an agreed number of years (usually three to five, representing the file cycle). Indicate this by the use of sequential letters of the alphabet, thus, for example:

AC/10/17/01 (first part)

AC/10/17/01A (second part)

AC/10/17/01B (third part).

Note that the second part is numbered 'A'. Many documents already filed on the first file part, as well as the records office's file control forms, will already bear the file reference number AC/10/17/01. These cannot be changed. Write the reference number of any previous and subsequent file parts in the relevant boxes of the file cover and the file transit sheet (see Section 6 for information on the file transit sheet).

CLASSIFYING CASE FILES

Case files are files that are similar in content but relate to different individuals, organisations, projects, places, events, items of equipment or other common characteristics. The most common type of case file found in government agencies is the personal file containing official papers relating to an individual public servant. Other types of case files include contract files (containing documents relating to contracts between a ministry and outside organisations or individuals); vehicle files (including records relating to specific government vehicles); or files containing similar information relating to individual non-government organisations (NGOs).

Because particular series of case files contain similar records and only differ from each other by being specific to a particular person, institution, geographical area and so on, they are easy to identify and should be assigned their own series codes. Within their own series, the simplest method of arrangement is by the characteristic which identifies them, whether it is a name, geographical area or project title. For example, case files relating to individual NGOs can be identified by the exact name of the organisation. Each NGO may be issued a number in sequence and an alphabetical index of NGOs, linking them to their numbers, will be held as a finding aid to the files.

RECORDING THE EXISTENCE OF A NEW FILE

ESTABLISHING CONTROL OVER NEW FILES

When a new file has been created, its existence must be comprehensively recorded so that it can be managed, tracked and produced whenever it is required.

There are three basic control mechanisms that are required to document each file. If any one of these is omitted, then the records office will not be able to keep track of files and this will prevent action officers from carrying out their work efficiently. The control mechanisms are the file diary, the file transit sheet and the file index.

FILE DIARY

When a new file of opened it must be recorded in the file diary. The following details should be included:

- a sequential number (the next number available in a single sequence)
- the file reference number (generated by consulting the file classification scheme to determine the series/sub-series in which the file should be placed, and the code numbers)
- the date of opening of the file
- the full file title
- any previous file number.

See Figure 7: File Diary.

FILE INDEX

Next, the file must be indexed. The index is the key to rapid retrieval of files and the efficiency of the records office. Great care must be taken in preparing and using the index. It is the basic tool of the records office, but it can also be consulted by action officers under the close supervision of the records office. The index must be stored securely by the records staff at the end of the day.

The 'subject' terms used to index files must be taken from the keyword list or controlled vocabulary, otherwise files on the same topic may be indexed under different terms and it will no longer serve as reliable retrieval tool. Rules for indexing names or 'proper nouns' must also always be followed.

To index a file, the two most important subjects of the file must be identified and the appropriate words selected from the controlled vocabulary. If an appropriate term does not exist, a new one may need to be created. A decision to create a new term is taken by the head of the records office. Occasionally, it may be necessary to index a file under three or even four terms.

FILE TRANSIT SHEET

The next step is to prepare a file transit sheet. These sheets show the location, at all times, of the all files opened by the records office. File movements must be recorded promptly to enable the records office to provide an efficient and reliable file retrieval service. The following must be included:

- security grading (if relevant)
- file reference number
- file title
- index headings (taken from the file index)
- any previous or subsequent file numbers
- the file's location (to whom sent and on what date).

See Figure 8: File Transit Sheet.

Each file should have its own sheet. The sheets must be arranged in series and file number order. They may be kept in a docket book or ring binder. All file movements must be recorded on the sheets.

If a new part of an existing file is opened, this too must be fully recorded in a new file transit sheet, as well as in the file diary and file index, in exactly the same way as for a new file. The previous file number will be written on the new sheet in the appropriate box. Similarly, the file number of the new file will be written on the old sheet in the box headed 'Subsequent File Number'.

When a file is closed this must be indicated on the transit sheet. When the file is destroyed or transferred to the records centre this must also be noted on the sheet, and the sheet should then be transferred to a separate transit book, or a tagged file, containing sheets for files that are no longer held in the records office. The transit sheets for closed files should be arranged alphanumerically. In due course, when this book of file is full, the sheets are removed, tied up and transferred to the records centre. The sheets are kept permanently as they provide a record of the disposition of files.

CONTROLLING FILE MOVEMENT

RECORDING FILE MOVEMENTS

Files are issued to action officers in at least three circumstances.

- A document arrives in the records office, is recorded and filed, and the file is passed to the officer.
- A file is to be 'brought up' to the officer (see Section 8).
- The officer requests the file in person or by telephone.

Records office staff must be able to determine the location of every file for which they are responsible. Each time a file moves, this fact must be recorded in the records office. File movements are monitored in a number of ways: on file transit sheets that are filed in a file transit book, on transit ladders that appear on file covers, on file movement slips and through regular file censuses. (These are all discussed in this section.)

Using the File Transit Sheet

Each time a file is issued to a user, for whatever reason and for however short a period, this fact must be noted by records staff in the 'Sent To' and 'Date' boxes on the relevant transit sheet. The date when the file is returned to the records office, this must also be recorded.

File Movement Slip

Files are frequently passed backwards and forwards between officers for short periods as a part of everyday business. Short-term file movements, for example, when an action officer passes a file to another officer to read a document on the file, need not be recorded in the records office. However, as a general rule, when an officer completes an action on a file and passes the file to another officer, even if only temporarily, the action officer should inform the records office.

An officer wishing to pass a file directly to another officer must complete a file movement slip and send it immediately to the record office.

The head of the records office should ensure that action officers always have an adequate supply of file movement slips.

As soon as records office staff receive the file movement slip, the information must be recorded on the transit sheet.

Keep completed file movement slips on file for six months and then destroy them.

See Figure 9: File Movement Slip.

File Transit Ladder

Each file movement must be recorded on the transit ladder on the front of the file cover. This records the same information that appears on the file transit sheet. Transit ladders provide a record of all officers who have handled any particular file. When a ladder is full, it must be replaced with a new blank ladder.

File Census

It must be accepted that sometimes an officer will pass a file to another officer when he/she has finished using it, without the file's transfer being recorded in the records office. In order to confirm the location of files that are not in the records office's custody, records staff should carry out a regular census of every file outside the records office. If no discrepancies are found the frequency of file censuses can be reduced.

Records office staff must visit every action officer at regular intervals (once a week is recommended) to list on a file census form all the files held by that officer. The person carrying out the census must sign the bottom of each census form used, and the form is also initialled by the relevant action officer. Then check the information on the file census form against that in the transit book to ensure that the up-to-date location of each file is correctly recorded. If there is any discrepancy, the file transit sheet must be amended and the discrepancy reported to the head of the records office.

See Figure 10: File Census Form.

Recording the Return of Files to Records Office Custody

The return of a file to records office custody is a 'file movement' and must always be fully recorded on the file's transit ladder and on the transit sheet.

Requests for Files

All requests for files from the records office should be directed to the head of the records office who is responsible for ensuring that file movements are fully recorded before files are issued. In the case of a request for a file that is in use elsewhere, records office staff should locate the file and ask the person requiring the file for instructions.

TRACING MISSING FILES

If a file is missing, the records office must proceed as follows.

- The head of the records office must contact the action officer to whom the file was last recorded in the file's transit sheet and ask him or her to trace it.
- If this fails or is impracticable, the head of the records office must circulate a note to all officers in the department/ministry asking them to check whether they have the file.
- If the file still cannot be found, a special search must be initiated by an officer with specific authority to ensure that the search is effective. The search must be repeated several times if necessary.
- As soon as the records office staff learn that a file is missing and may be lost, they must write the words 'missing file' on the relevant transit sheet. A list of missing files should be maintained by the head of the records office, periodic searches carried out and a record kept of the areas searched.

TEMPORARY FILES

If action on a topic covered by a missing file continues, open a temporary file. This should only be done if absolutely necessary. A temporary file is opened in the same way as a normal file. It is given the same number as the missing file and its existence is recorded in the normal way. If available, temporary file covers should be used. If temporary file covers are unavailable, a standard file cover should be used but must be boldly marked with the word 'TEMPORARY'. All relevant record sheets should be similarly marked. (See Section 6 for instructions on recording the existence of a new file.) No temporary file should be opened without the authority of the head of the records office.

When the original file is found, all papers on the temporary file must be transferred to the original file (in proper date sequence) and must be renumbered in folio order. Mark the front cover of the temporary file with the date that the original was found. The printed area and transit ladder of the temporary file cover should then be cut away and

placed on the original file. The temporary file's transit sheet and all index sheets must similarly be marked with the date that the original was found and then struck through, but retained in the same place in the respective books. Also amend the transit sheet for the original file and update the list of missing files to show that the file has been found.

HANDLING FILES RETURNED TO THE RECORDS OFFICE

RETURNING FILES TO THE RECORDS OFFICE

Action officers should return files to the records office as soon as they have finished with them. The records staff must check to see whether any returned file contains mail to be despatched. If so, the file copy must be filed immediately, any loose papers having first been firmly attached. The letters for despatch are then removed, recorded and dealt with (see Section 3). The fact that the file has been returned to the records office must be noted on the file's transit ladder and transit sheet.

Next, check the file for any instructions to the records office. For example, if 'bring-up' action (BU) is required, this must be recorded in the bring-up diary (see below). If the file is to be passed to another officer, department or ministry, this must be noted on the transit sheet and the file despatched.

If there are no outstanding instructions for action, the file must be put away immediately. No file, other than those due for 'bring up' the next day (see below) will be left out in the records office at the end of the day.

Bring-up Diary

The bring-up system enables an action officer to request the records office to reissue a file on the day that he or she needs it. File users should be encouraged to take advantage of this service when action needs to be temporarily suspended. The bring-up system eliminates the need for action officers to hold on to files for long periods if they are not working on them and also helps to keep offices uncluttered. The system must be reliable if users are to trust it.

The bring-up system is one of the prime indicators of the efficiency of a records office and of the trust and reliance placed on it by action officers. Its successful and efficient use prevents many of the problems encountered by records office staff, such as prolonged retention of files by users and the consequent difficulties in locating files or the need to spend excessive amounts of time carrying out censuses and searches.

The most effective method of maintaining bring-up records is to use a desk diary with a space for each day. File users will indicate the need for, and details of, any 'bring-up' ('BU') in writing on the minute sheet. Records office staff should record this request in the bring up diary under the appropriate date.

Each afternoon the member of the records staff responsible must look in the bring-up diary for the next day's entries, take out each file due for bring-up and mark up the transit ladder and the transit sheet for the file's despatch to the relevant officer the next day.

If a file due for BU is not in the records office, then the records office staff must locate it, using the transit sheet. If the file is already being used by the officer who has requested it, or by another officer, it is the responsibility of the head of the records office to notify the officer or officers and co-ordinate action between them.

CLOSING FILES AND USING THE RECORDS CENTRE

CLOSING FILES

Records offices are required to close files at regular intervals. They retain the closed files for periods laid down in disposition schedules (see below). At the end of this period some files are destroyed, but the majority are transferred to the records centre. This section of the procedures manual deals with all aspects of closing files and their subsequent treatment.

The records office staff should ensure that files are closed as soon as they become either three centimetres thick or five years old, whichever is the sooner. This is necessary because

- files that are thicker than three centimetres are hard to manage and this may result in damage to the contents
- papers more than five years old are rarely required for reference and should not be regarded as current records.

No further papers should be added to files that are closed.

The method of closing a file is to write the word 'CLOSED' diagonally in bold letters across the front cover, together with the date the file was closed. The file transit sheet must be marked to show that the file has been closed. The date when this was done is also recorded.

If it is necessary for action to be continued on a topic covered in a file that has been closed, a new file part should be opened (see Section 5). The existence of the new part must be noted on the transit sheet for the closed part in the 'subsequent file number' box. All the usual control records must be completed for the new part. The new file part should also carry a note explaining that the previous part has been closed and giving its reference. If or when the closed part is transferred to the records centre, this should also be noted on the transfer sheet and on the new file part.

CUSTODY OF CLOSED FILES

Although no new action may be taken on a closed file, and no new papers added, closed files should be kept available in the records office (or in a nearby file store) for a period of time so that users may easily refer to them. If action officers request closed files, the file movement should be recorded on the transit sheet for the closed file. If the records office holds the current part of a closed file, the current file should be passed to the action officer with the closed part once the transit records have been completed.

Usually, closed files are retained in records offices for a period of three or five years. The retention period is specified in the disposal schedule (see below). At the end of this specified period, closed files are transferred to the records centre or destroyed. Records offices are responsible for seeing that these actions are carried out.

DISPOSAL SCHEDULES

Only a few records are permanently preserved because of their enduring value; these are transferred to the archival institution. Most records must be destroyed as soon as they cease to have legal or administrative value.

If records are not required, or are unlikely to be required, for the conduct of current business but they still have a continuing value, they should be transferred to the records centre.

Decisions about the transfer or destruction of closed files are the responsibility of the head of the records and archives institution in consultation with the relevant officials. Disposal schedules are the means by which these instructions are communicated by the records and archives institution.

See Figure 11: Disposal Schedule.

There are two classes of schedule. These are general schedules, covering records relating to common functions such as finance or motor vehicle maintenance; and specific schedules relating exclusively to the records of individual agencies/units. Records offices will be issued with the specific (or 'agency') schedule relating to their own agency as well as with copies of relevant general schedules. The records centre should hold copies of all general and specific disposition schedules.

In most cases the schedules will indicate that closed files should be transferred to the records centre after a predetermined period of time has elapsed. Following the transfer of records to the records centre, staff of the centre are responsible for carrying out all subsequent procedures laid down for records, including retrieval for use, reviewing (where required), destruction or transfer to the archival institution.

The records centre staff will notify the transferring agency when a review is required.

If there are any queries about how the schedules are applied, the records centre staff should advise. The head of the records office will notify the records centre if there are specific reasons why records should be retained for periods other than those laid down in the schedule. The records centre will not normally accept records which are not included in a disposal schedule. The head of the records and archives institution may give permission to do so.

DESTRUCTION OF RECORDS HELD BY RECORDS OFFICES

Records which are scheduled for destruction in five years or less should not be transferred to the records centre unless there is no storage available in the creating agency or unit. Any such transfers should be authorised by the head of the records and archives institution.

Every six months the records office should complete two copies of a Proposal to Destroy Scheduled Records Form, listing the record series scheduled for destruction. The records centre will return the top copy of the form authorising destruction or, if there is any query, will inspect the records. The records office should preserve the returned forms on a file maintained for this purpose.

See Figure 12: Proposal to Destroy Scheduled Records.

Arrangements for the collection of records to be destroyed should be made by the records centre. Destruction may be by shredding for recycling or by incineration. The records office staff should indicate on the relevant transit sheets that the files are being destroyed.

For more information about the destruction of records held by the records centre, see below.

TRANSFERRING FILES TO THE RECORDS CENTRE

The records centre will send an appropriate number of boxes for files to be transferred, a Records Centre Transfer Notification Form and a supply of Records Centre Transfer List Forms, which are to be completed by the records office. The Transfer Notification Form is used as the consignment form and it describes in summary all the records that are being sent and gives the overall dates covered and the records' format.

The procedures for transferring files are described below.

- Arrange the files to be transferred in the order in which they were originally created. This will involve sorting them into series or groups of similar records which were created and maintained as units. Within each series the records should be arranged in the order of their original reference numbers.
- Mark the relevant file transit sheets to indicate that the files are being transferred to the records centre.
- When preparing the documents for packing, take care to remove from the files any loose ephemeral material such as greeting cards, advertisements and extra copies of documents. The files should be dusted and metal pins and clips removed if this will not cause papers to become detached from the file. If a file is broken, it should be tied together with twine.
- The records should be placed in boxes flat, one on top of the other. The boxes should not be overloaded. If possible, the boxes should contain files closed at around the same time. If any of the records do not fit into the boxes, they should be tied into bundles no deeper than 30 centimetres (10-12 inches). No information should be written on the boxes, as the contents must remain confidential.
- Bulky lever-arch files and ring binders which will not fit comfortably into the boxes should have their contents removed and the contents placed in envelopes or made up into bundles by being tied up with twine, and carefully labelled ready for transfer.
- The files in each box (or the contents of bundles) should be listed on a records centre Transfer List Form, leaving blank the columns for the action date, the records centre location number and the action category. Each box must be listed on a separate form (with continuation sheets as necessary). Four copies of the form should be made (three copies are for use in the records centre). If carbon paper is used it is important to check that the information is clear on all the copies. The records centre will not accept records which are inadequately described. The four copies of the form should be placed on top of the files in the box to which they refer and the boxes should be sent to the records centre.
- When the consignment has been received by the records centre, the staff of the records centre will check the Transfer Lists. If there are any queries the records office will be contacted. Otherwise, the records centre will return to the records office a marked up copy of the Transfer Lists with the action dates, records centre location numbers and action category added, together with a written acknowledgement.
- The records office must maintain a records centre Transfer file. Completed Transfer Lists should be added to the file in box number order. The Transfer file provides a simple method of ordering files from the records centre in the future.

See Figure 13: Records Centre Transfer List.

RETRIEVING FILES FROM THE RECORDS CENTRE

Files that have been closed and transferred to the records centre may only be retrieved by authorised staff. The records centre will not accept requests for files from anyone except the head of the records office in the agency concerned, or an agency that is a successor to it. All requests for files should therefore be directed through the head of the records office.

When a user requests a file which is held in the records centre, consult the records centre Transfer file to determine the exact title, reference number, box number and location number. Then complete three copies of the Records Centre Request Form. The three copies of the form should be sent or taken to the records centre and the file collected. One copy of this form will be sent with the file requested to the records office. The two other copies will be retained by the records centre.

See Figure 14: Records Centre Request Form.

Files should be returned to the records centre as soon as they are no longer required.

Records issued by the records centre must be returned within one month unless an extension to that period has been granted by the records centre. If files are retained for more than one month, the records centre will send a Follow-up Form asking for the file to be returned or for the records office to contact the records centre to arrange for an extension. If no response is received from the records office, a reminder form will be sent.

Records offices may withdraw records permanently from the records centre if it is judged essential for a file to be held for an indefinite period by the agency which originally transferred it, or the successor agency. A Records Centre Request Form should be used and a note should also be written on it indicating that the file is to be withdrawn permanently from the records centre. On receipt of the request, the records centre will send a memorandum confirming the permanent withdrawal and asking the records office to amend its copy of the relevant transfer list.

CONSULTING RECORDS IN THE RECORDS CENTRE

Authorised personnel may choose to consult records in the records centre rather than ask for them to be issued on loan.

Records may only be seen by persons specifically authorised by the originating or transferring agency. Records centre staff will ask to see this authorisation and also proof of identity before producing records.

Records that are still subject to security classification may only be seen by those who have the appropriate security clearance.

Visitors must give prior notice of their intention to go to the records centre to consult records.

SUPPLYING INFORMATION OR COPIES FROM THE RECORDS CENTRE

The general policy of the records centre is that only specified original records will be issued on request by authorised users through the head of the records office. However, there are circumstances in which users, instead of requesting records to be issued on loan, have the option of asking for one of the following alternatives.

- They may ask for the information contained in the records to be supplied, instead of the original documents.
- They may ask for copies of specified documents instead of the originals.

Information, other than original records, may only be supplied when specifically authorised by the head of the records centre.

The head of the records centre may allow the supply of information from the records where

- in his or her opinion the information can be obtained quickly and easily and without ambiguity
- the alternatives would be much more cumbersome and time-consuming.

The records centre may supply copies of original records in place of originals whenever it appears more economical or efficient to do so. In particular, copies should be produced in the following circumstances:

- whenever this is requested by the enquiring office
- whenever the head of the records centre decides that this should be done
- in cases where it is clear that supplying copies will be more economical than supplying the whole original file, and the enquiring office has agreed to it.

ACTION DATE AND REVIEW PROCEDURES

All records transferred into the records centre must be transferred out of it at the appropriate date, termed the 'action date'. The records centre staff are responsible for

ensuring that these procedures are activated and carried through at the appropriate time.

The records are categorised as follows:

- those for destruction
- those for transfer to the archival institution
- those for review.

Records subject to review are brought up after a period set by the relevant disposition schedule, and then appraised by appropriate officers in the originating agency in consultation with senior records staff.

It is the responsibility of the records centre to notify the transferring agency that it must carry out a review. The records centre will do this by sending a Records Centre Disposal Form, to which a duplicate copy of the relevant transfer list or lists have been attached.

The Disposal Form lists three options on a Reply Slip at the foot of the form. The options give alternatives for dealing with the records specified in the transfer lists attached. These are

1. the records should be destroyed
2. the records should be retained for a further period of x years as the records are still required for official business
3. the records should be considered for transfer to the archival facility for permanent preservation.

A course of action will be indicated by the records centre.

The head of the records office should complete the Disposal Form and return it to the records centre. When the Disposal Form is returned duly completed and signed, the records centre is authorised to carry out the action specified.

If the Disposal Form is returned with a recommendation for further retention, the new action date is recorded by the records centre. If the head of the records centre considers that further retention would not be reasonable, the transferring agency will be contacted.

If the originating agency does not return the Reply Slip on the Disposal Form to the records centre within three months, with an appropriate authorisation on it, the records centre will proceed with the specified action.

See Figure 15: Records Centre Disposal Form.

DESTRUCTION OF RECORDS HELD BY THE RECORDS CENTRE

Records are destroyed by the records centre when

- they are specified in the disposition schedule as being for routine destruction and the appropriate action date has come, or
- the Disposal Form is received with a signature authorising destruction.

When every box listed on a Records Centre Transfer List has been destroyed, the records centre will send a copy of the list, stamped 'BOXES DESTROYED' to the records office which transferred the files. On receipt of the stamped list, the records office must ensure that its own copies of the same list are removed from the records office Transfer List file and destroyed.

STORING FILES

FILE STORAGE METHODS

There are three basic ways of storing files: the lateral, vertical and stacking. Lateral filing is usually done in four-drawer filing cabinets, with the files held upright on their long narrow edge, often within a 'hanging folder'. Vertical filing, where files are held upright on their short narrow edge with their 'spines' facing outwards, is done in cupboards (which may or may not be enclosed) or on racking or shelves. The stacking method stores files flat, one on top of the other, with the spines of the files facing out.

There are advantages and disadvantages to all three methods. Lateral filing in cabinets, using hanging folders, is the least economical but provides easy access. Storage on open shelves is economical, but is unsuitable for confidential materials. The stacking method can be the cheapest and most convenient, but may cause difficulties of retrieval unless the stacks are small. Files stored vertically on open shelves may slip down unless the shelves have moveable dividers that can support the files and keep them upright. However, vertical storage is suitable for records with rigid covers or binders, such as files held in ring binders. If open racking is used, shelves and files must be dusted regularly, particularly during the dry season.

Storing Current Files

Records offices should be located conveniently for the action officers they serve. They should be separate from other administrative functions such as typing and should be of sufficient size to house the records staff who work in them and the records for which they are responsible. The accommodation must be secure and well maintained (see Section 11) and must be of strong enough construction to bear the weight of the files.

Sufficient and appropriate equipment should be provided for the safe handling and secure storage of records within the records office. Where appropriate, supports should be provided to prevent files from slipping down. Shelves and cabinet drawers which hold current records should be clearly labelled to indicate the file number ranges. Adequate space should be left on shelves or in drawers to allow for easy withdrawal and replacement of files. As more new files are opened, the contents of

shelves and drawers may need to be rearranged to allow for the expansion. When this is done, labels will need to be changed.

An adequate stock of file covers, forms, registers for control documentation and other stationery should be maintained.

Storing Closed Files

Files which have recently been closed may continue to be stored in the records office for an appropriate period so that they are readily available when required. However, closed files should always be stored separately, preferably in different cupboards or cabinets or on separate shelves, to avoid confusion of closed with current files. Again, shelves and cabinet drawers should be clearly labelled, and labelling must be kept up-to-date.

Arrangements for transferring files to the records centre are described in Section 9.

MAINTAINING THE SYSTEM

SECURITY OF RECORDS

The following security precautions must be in place at all times.

- Ensure that the entrance to the records office (or any other place where files are stored) is strictly controlled. Cabinets containing confidential records must be kept locked. The outer door to the records office must always be locked when no member of the records office staff is present, and ground floor windows should have security grilles or bars. There should be a secure place where keys can be stored so that members of staff do not take them home.
- Measures should be taken to prevent and control outbreaks of fire. Do not allow smoking in any file storage areas. Adequate numbers of fire extinguishers must be provided and maintained. Electrical appliances should be switched off at the end of the day. Regular fire drills should be held.
- An emergency plan should be in place and tested regularly.

GOOD HOUSEKEEPING

Eating and drinking in the records office should not be allowed. Spilt drinks and food can cause serious damage to records.

The records office should be cleaned regularly and waste paper baskets emptied daily.

RE-COVERING FILES

When a file transit ladder is full a new transit ladder should be pasted on to the front of the file cover. When a file cover has been badly damaged, it may be necessary to

provide a new cover. If this is done, the front page of the old file cover must not be destroyed or thrown away but will be kept on the file immediately before the first folio.

MONITORING RECORDS OFFICE PERFORMANCE

Heads of records offices will initiate regular surveys of users' responses to the services provided and take immediate action to make improvements when problems are reported.

The head will submit quarterly reports regarding the performance of the records office to the records and archives institution and to the line manager responsible for the records office. These reports should include details of

- the number of files opened
- the number of letters received
- the length of time it takes to clear circulation folders
- the service provided to action officers in terms of the best and the worst times it took for them to receive files from the time a letter was received
- the number of boxes transferred to the records centre
- the number of records destroyed
- any problems encountered in running the records office.

From time to time, the records and archives institution will carry out inspections of records offices to measure performance and complete a monitoring exercise. The outcome of these inspections will be communicated to the line manager of the records office and the head of the records office. It is the responsibility of the head of the records office to ensure that any improvements or changes recommended in monitoring reports are implemented.

SYMPTOMS OF DIFFICULTIES IN THE RECORDS OFFICE

The records office and its procedures need attention when

- mail folders take too long to circulate
- papers are put on the wrong files
- there is lack of user trust because papers are not readily available

- action officers keep files and documents in their own rooms, thus making information unavailable
- action officers send files to the records office only when they need space in their rooms
- the records office has a filing or indexing backlog
- files become so thick that covers and contents are damaged
- the records office staff are discouraged, hide files or falsify records
- there is a backlog of inactive papers in the records office that should have been transferred to the records centre
- the records office becomes untidy.

OVERHAULING THE RECORDS OFFICE OR ITS PROCEDURES

There are several reasons why the records office or its procedures may need overhauling.

- Activities have increased and expansion is therefore required.
- New functions have been assigned to the agency.
- Functions have been withdrawn from the agency.
- There is a reorganisation of the area served by the records office.
- The present system is ineffective through neglect or faulty design.

Where the head of records office or his or her line management feel that a records office is in need of attention they should draw this to the attention of the head the records and archives institution.

SAMPLE FORMS

Sample forms are shown on the following pages in figure number order.

1. Inward Correspondence Register
2. Remittance Register
3. Outward Correspondence Register
4. Messenger's Despatch Book
5. Sample File Cover
6. Minute Sheet
7. File Diary
8. File Transit Sheet
9. File Movement Slip
10. File Census Form
11. Disposal Schedule
12. Proposal to Destroy Scheduled Records
13. Records Centre Transfer List
14. Records Centre Request Form
15. Records Centre Disposal Form

Inward Correspondence Register

(1) Serial Number	(2) Date of Letter	(3) Date Received	(4) From whom Received	(5) [Agency] Reference	(6) Subject	(7) Officer to Whom File Passed, and Date Filed	(8) File Number

Figure 1: Inward Correspondence Register

Remittance Register

Sheet No _____

(1) Serial Number	(2) Date Received	(3) Remitter's Name	(4) Amount	Cheques Only		(7) Name and Signature of Officer Opening Remittance
				(5) Bank Sort Code	(6) Cheque Number	

NOTE: Entries must not be erased or obliterated. Mistakes must be corrected by ruling through.

Figure 2: Remittance Register

Outward Correspondence Register						
(1) Serial Number	(2) Date Received for Despatch	(3) Date Despatched	(4) Subject	(5) Reference Number	(6) Addressee	(7) Mode of Despatch

Figure 3: Outward Correspondence Register

Messenger's Despatch Book				
(1) Date Despatched	(2) Reference Number	(3) Messenger's Name	(4) Name of Agency	(5) Name and Signature Of Receiving Officer and Date

Figure 4: Messenger's Despatch Book

	<div style="text-align: right; margin-bottom: 10px;">_____</div> File Reference
	Minute Sheet

Figure 6: Minute Sheet

FILE MOVEMENT SLIP	
Use for long-term file movements	
(Please complete this form and send it to the records office when you pass a file to another officer. This will enable the records office to ensure that its records are accurate.)	
File number	
File title	
Passed to	
Location	
Date	
Signature	

Figure 9: File Movement Slip

File Census Form		
DATE _____		
File Ref Number	File Title	Location/Officer
SIGNED _____ INITIALLED _____		

Figure 10: File Census Form

Bank Account Records

TYPE	ITEM	DESCRIPTION	DISPOSAL
Cheques and associated records	1	cheque book/butts for all accounts	2 years
	2	cancelled cheques	2 years
	3	dishonoured cheques	2 years
	4	fresh cheques	6 years
	5	paid/presented cheques	6 years
	6	stoppage of cheque payment notices	2 years
	7	record of cheques opened books	2 years
	8	cheque registers	2 years
	9	record of cheques drawn for payment	6 years
Bank deposits	10	bank deposit books/slips/butts	2 years
	11	bank deposit summary sheets; summaries of daily banking; cheque schedules	2 years
	12	register of cheques lodged for collection	2 years
Bank reconciliations	13	reconciliation files/sheets	2 years
	14	daily list of paid cheques	2 years
	15	unpaid cheque records	2 years
Bank statements	16	Bank statements	2 years
	17	bank certificates of balance	2 years
Electronic banking and electronic funds transfer	18	cash transactions; payment instructions; deposits; withdrawals	Disposal action in line with paper records
	19	audit trails	Retain for the same period as the base transaction record

Figure 11: Sample Disposal Schedule

Proposal To Destroy Scheduled Records

To: Head of Records Centre

From: Records Office

Agency/Unit _____

Records Office Code _____

Date: _____

Please may we have your authority to destroy the records listed below, which are now scheduled as due for destruction?

Schedule Number	Title of Series	Covering Dates	Number of files/items

Destruction is hereby authorised.

Signed _____ Date _____

Head of Records Centre

Figure 12: Proposal to Destroy Scheduled Records

Records Centre Transfer List

Continuation Page No.

Agency _____

Code _____

Unit _____

Consignment No. _____

Record Office _____

Action Category (destroy, review, permanent) _____

For records centre Use

Box No.	Title/Description of Records	Ref. Nos.	Covering Dates	Action Date	Records Centre Loc. No.

Figure 13: Records Centre Transfer List

Records Centre Request Form

Box number _____	Location _____
	Records Office code number _____
Agency/Unit _____	
File number _____	
File title or description of record required _____	

Date loaned _____	
Signature of issuing officer _____	
Signature of receiving officer _____	
Reminder form sent _____	
Second reminder form sent _____	
Reported to Records Centre manager _____	
Date returned _____	

Figure 14: Records Centre Request Form

Records Centre Disposal Form

Records Office: _____ Code Number: _____

Consignment Number: _____

The records listed in the enclosed transfer list(s) are now due for action as indicated in the 'action category'.

Please complete and return the reply slip below.

If we receive no response from you within three months of the date of the report form we will assume that you agree to the action as indicated on the transfer list(s).

Signed: _____
Head of Records Centre

Reply Slip

Records Office: _____ Code Number: _____

Consignment Number: _____

I have considered the records listed on the transfer lists(s) and authorise the following action(s):

- 1 The records specified should be destroyed*
- 2 The records specified should be retained for further period of _____ years as the records are still required for official business*
- 3 I recommend that the records be considered for transfer to the archival institution for permanent retention*

**Cross out which are not appropriate*

Signed: _____

Position: _____ Date: _____

Figure 15: Records Centre Disposal Form