

MANAGING PUBLIC  
SECTOR RECORDS

A Training Programme

# Managing Records in Records Centres



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INTERNATIONAL  
COUNCIL ON ARCHIVES



INTERNATIONAL RECORDS  
MANAGEMENT TRUST

# MANAGING RECORDS IN RECORDS CENTRES

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# MANAGING PUBLIC SECTOR RECORDS

## A STUDY PROGRAMME

General Editor, Michael Roper; Managing Editor, Laura Millar

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## MANAGING PUBLIC SECTOR RECORDS: A STUDY PROGRAMME

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Managing Records in Records Centres

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Produced by the International Records Management Trust  
12 John Street  
London WC1N 2EB  
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Printed in the United Kingdom.

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## **Donors**

The International Records Management Trust would like to acknowledge the support and assistance of the following:

Association of Records Managers and Administrators (ARMA International)

British Council

British High Commission Ghana

British High Commission Kenya

Caribbean Centre for Development Administration (CARICAD)

Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)

Commonwealth Secretariat

Department for International Development (East Africa)

Department for International Development (UK)

DHL International (UK) Limited

Foreign and Commonwealth Office Human Rights Fund

Hays Information Management

International Council on Archives

Nuffield Foundation

Organisation of American States

Royal Bank of Scotland

United Nations Development Program

# Managing Records in Records Centres

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# **INTRODUCTION TO *MANAGING RECORDS IN RECORDS CENTRES***

*Managing Records in Records Centres* addresses a range of issues relating to the care of semi-current records. It begins with a discussion of the concept of a records centre and an examination of why semi-current records should be stored outside of records offices. It then examines the steps involved with planning and developing a records centre, including

- establishing an administrative structure
- collecting information about records systems
- deciding on a physical site for the records centre
- constructing or adapting a building for use as a records centre
- conducting a pilot project to manage the records of selected agencies
- establishing a full records service
- caring for records in different formats
- determining a plan for costing services

It also examines the procedures to be followed in the records centre, such as liaising with records offices; transferring, retrieving, using and disposing of records; compiling statistics; measuring performance; and implementing standards. It concludes with a discussion of where to go for more information on records centre issues.

*Managing Records in Records Centres* consists of four lessons:

- Lesson 1: The Concept of the Records Centre
- Lesson 2: Planning and Developing a Records Centre
- Lesson 3: Managing the Records Centre
- Lesson 4: What to Do Next?.

Although this module concentrates primarily on paper-based records, much of what it has to say is relevant to records in other media and formats. Guidance on managing records in an electronic environment is provided in greater depth in *Managing Electronic Records*.

Similarly, although some information may focus on the management of records created in the public sector, particularly in regional, provincial or national government settings, much of the information in this module is equally relevant to institutions within the private sector.

## AIMS AND OUTCOMES

### **Aims**

This module has four primary aims. These are to

1. explain the concept of semi-current records and the idea of a records centre
2. outline the key steps involved in planning and developing a functional records centre
3. identify essential actions to take to manage the records centre effectively
4. indicate where more information can be found on records centre management.

### **Outcomes**

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

1. understand the concept of semi-current records and the idea of a records centre
2. describe in detail the steps involved in planning and developing a records centre
3. know what actions should be taken to manage the records centre effectively
4. know where to go for more information on records centres.

## METHOD OF STUDY AND ASSESSMENT

This module of four lessons should occupy about 30 hours of your time. You should plan to spend about:

- 5 hours on Lesson 1
- 10 hours on Lesson 2
- 10 hours on Lesson 3
- 5 hours on Lesson 4

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 4.

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. At the end of each lesson are comments on the activities that will help you assess your work.

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.

## WHAT RESOURCES WILL YOU NEED?

This module assumes that you have access to a records office, records centre or archival institution or that you have some involvement with the management of records, particularly semi-current 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.

### Manuals

Associated with this module is the training manual *Managing Records Centres: A Procedures Manual*. Users interested in detailed descriptions of recommended procedures and practices are encouraged to review the procedures manual while they are studying this module.

## **Case Studies**

The following case studies may be useful additions to this module:

- 4: Laura Millar and Harry Akussah, Ghana, 'Developing an Automated National Records Centre Management System in Ghana'
- 18: Gail Saunders and Elaine Toote, Bahamas, 'Records Management - Building or Adapting a Records Centre Facility: The Case of the Bahamas Records Centre'

## **THE CONCEPT OF THE RECORDS CENTRE**

Lesson 1 examines the concept of the records centre. It begins with a series of key definitions, theories and principles, then examines the key functions of a records centre.

Topics discussed include

- what is a records centre?
- characteristics of a records centre.

## **WHAT IS A RECORDS CENTRE?**

It is the responsibility of the government or corporate records and archives institution to control all records created by the organisation and ensure that they are put to use to the best advantage throughout their life.

The term 'records' includes all information materials produced in the course of administrative work. Most records are on paper, but other formats also exist (for example, audio or videotape, photographs, maps, electronic records). The care of both paper and non-paper records are covered by the procedures outlined in this module.

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***Record:*** A document regardless of form or medium created, received, maintained and used by an organisation (public or private) or an individual in pursuance of legal obligations or in the transaction of business, of which it forms a part or provides evidence.

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Good records care begins with establishing policies, procedures and priorities before records are even created. As discussed in other modules in this MPSR Programme, the establishment of an overarching records and archives institution or similar agency charged with overall records care is critical to the success of a record-keeping programme.

*For an overview of key issues in record keeping, see particularly The Management of Public Sector Records: Principles and Context and Developing Infrastructures for Records and Archives Services.*

However, the day-to-day administration of records may fall to various departments or agencies, depending on the currency of the records. Records that are in full daily use within the agency that created them are often called 'current records'. When, after some time, they are no longer used regularly but must still be kept, they become 'semi-current records'. At this point they should be removed from current systems, in part so that they do not take up space unnecessarily. After some time, many of these records are deemed obsolete and can be destroyed, while others are retained for their ongoing value as evidence or for research. These records become 'non-current records', some of which are kept as archives.

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**Current records:** Records regularly used for the conduct of the current business of an organisation or individual. Also known as active records. Current records will normally be maintained in or near their place of origin or in a registry or records office.

**Semi-current records:** Records required only infrequently in the conduct of current business. Also known as semi-active records. Semi-current records will normally be maintained in a records centre or other offsite intermediate storage pending their ultimate disposal.

**Non-current records:** Records no longer needed for the conduct of current business. Also known as inactive records.

**Archives:** Records, usually but not necessarily non-current records, of enduring value selected for permanent preservation. Archives will normally be preserved in an archival repository.

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When records cease to be current and become semi-current, some of them can be destroyed (under the authority of the disposal schedules). The majority of records should be transferred from the records offices to a central place where they can be kept securely, used as sources of information and then disposed of systematically. This central place is the records centre.

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**Records centre:** A building or part of a building designed or adapted for the low-cost storage, maintenance and communication of semi-current records pending their ultimate disposal.

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In practice, there may be more than one records centre in an organisation, or one records centre may have several storage areas. Even if the institution holds records in several locations, administratively all of these should form part of one records centre.

The majority of semi-current records have to be kept for various periods of time for legal, financial or administrative requirements. Some should be kept because it is thought that they will be valuable for research. The records and archives institution is



charged with keeping these categories of records in such a way that they can be retrieved for use when required and can be disposed of correctly at the proper time.

The function of the records centre is to hold semi-current records and make available for use until the date of their disposal. Therefore, the records centre is a temporary or, as it is often called, an intermediate storage facility. In other words, it is an intermediate stage between the organisation's records offices and the archival institution.

The records centre provides a general service to all parts of the government or corporation. It is a high-density, low-cost storage area, equipped with a system for retrieving and consulting the records held. The records centre receives and makes available all records that have any continuing utility, regardless of their bulk or form. It is also a service intermediate between the records offices of operational agencies and the archival institution.

*The function of the records centre is to hold semi-current records and make available for use until the date of their disposal.*

The records centre should be safe, secure, clean, efficient and economical. It should be capable of holding all designated semi-current records in all media and able to provide a dependable retrieval service. The records centre is not a place for permanent retention of records. It is a fundamental rule that no records should be transferred to the records centre unless appraisal has taken place and there is an action date attached to the records.

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**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.

**Action date:** The date when records are scheduled to be removed from a records centre and either destroyed, sent to an archival institution or reviewed for future action.

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The appropriate action may be to destroy, review or transfer them to the archival institution or to another appropriate repository within the records and archives institution. These actions are indicated against each series of records in the disposal schedule, which is an authoritative official record.

### Activity 1

Does your institution have a records centre? If so, write a brief description of the centre. How big is it? How is it administered? When and how are records transferred there? How long are records kept there? Are records removed from there regularly?

If your institution does not have a records centre, write a brief description of how records are managed when they are no longer needed in the office where they were created and used. Then identify four issues (such as advantages, disadvantages, challenges, or concerns) that could arise if a records centre were to be established.

## THE FUNCTIONS OF THE RECORDS CENTRE

Governments, corporations, organisations or individuals create records in the course of their daily work. During the period when the records are current – when they must be available for use in the office – it is the responsibility of the records offices to manage them and to see that they are available when needed.

After a period, virtually all records cease to be current. Especially within government, many records that must be retained for legal or other reasons can be very bulky. It is expensive and difficult to manage them when they are kept in the offices in which they were originally created and used. It is generally advantageous to establish a central repository to provide for medium- to long-term records storage. Systems for the management of current records should not be used to administer non-current or semi-current records.

The point at which records cease to be current should be established in the organisation's records retention and disposal schedules. These schedules set out instructions for transferring records from the agency records office to the records centre. The schedules also provide instructions for the eventual disposal of the records, either by destruction or by transfer to the archival repository.

*The process of records scheduling is discussed in Organising and Controlling Current Records.*

When the appropriate time for transferring records is reached, they should be retired from the current systems in the way specified in the disposal schedule. Some series of records will be destroyed at this stage, and a small number may be transferred directly to an archival repository, but the majority (all that have any continuing utility) are transferred to the records centre.

### Activity 2

Outline the processes presently in place in your organisation to establish disposal schedules and move records from current to semi-current or archival care. If this work is not presently done, write a brief argument outlining the key reasons such a process should be established in your institution.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF A RECORDS CENTRE

A records centre must be secure, clean, efficient and economical. These issues are discussed below.

*The records centre should be safe, secure, clean, efficient and economical.*

### Security

There is no point in transferring records to a records centre if it is not completely secure. It is also important that all users of the records centre know that the facility is safe and secure.

To ensure security, a records centre must be

- externally secure, as a place of custody of valuable materials
- environmentally secure, as a place where valuable documents and information must be maintained in a usable state for long periods
- clean and orderly.

Security involves both custodial and environmental security and is necessary both externally (outside of the physical space) and internally (within the building itself). Preventive measures must be in force at all times. All parts of the building, including the storage areas, should be protected.

### Custodial Security

It should not be possible for unauthorised persons to gain access to records in the records centre. All of the storage conditions and access controls in the records centre should conform to the requirements laid down in general regulations for secret or confidential records.

In some cases it may be necessary for a special area to be set aside for classified records, in order to satisfy government security concerns. These areas should be

separated from the rest of the storage area by a locked enclosure, and access should be restricted to staff who have been specially authorised for this purpose.

A high level of security must be maintained in and around the records centre at all times. The records held there include many of great sensitivity, arising from all levels of government or corporate activity. If there is any suspicion of poor security, clients of the records and archives institution will lose confidence in it, and its services will be rendered difficult or useless.

The office areas must always be staffed during working hours. The building must be guarded at night. No person other than authorised records and archives institution staff should be admitted to the storage area or to the working areas without the direct and specific permission of the head of the records and archives institution.

Everyone in the records centre should be identifiable. Usually, all people in the facility are required to wear a visible identity card. Staff should wear a card carrying their photograph, and visitors should wear a temporary identification card issued to them at the entrance. Anyone on site without a visible identity card should be challenged. The entrance to the records centre should have a prominent notice that no unauthorised persons are permitted.

The records centre manager is responsible for controlling the keys to the building. The manager should keep a record of all keys issued to personnel. If push-button control pads or combination locks are used, the manager should take care to control the security codes used. All external doors must be kept locked, subject to safety regulations. Keys should be numbered and kept in a locked security cabinet. Spare keys for use in an emergency should be kept in a location set out in the disaster control plan.

### **Environmental Security**

The records centre should be isolated from any dangers that might threaten the safety of the records, including fire, flood or natural disaster. This system of isolation should be supported by the installation of automatic alarm systems and by constant monitoring of the area.

Intruder alarms should connect automatically with the appropriate police or security authorities. Smoke, fire and flood alarms should connect with the appropriate fire service. Staff should be trained in the use of extinguishers and should know what to do in an emergency. All alarm systems should be tested regularly.

### **Security and Access**

Records brought into the records centre are stored in randomly selected locations. Usually, the boxes themselves should carry no markings that give a direct indication of their contents. It is important to ensure the contents of boxes are not easily identifiable on the outside of the box, in order to ensure the secure storage of the records.

Records officially classified as confidential, secret or above must be kept in accordance with the general rules for the management of such confidential or classified materials. However, records centre staff should seek to declassifying records according to regulations and guidelines whenever possible. In particular, it is important not to allow obsolete restrictions to remain in effect, preventing the full and appropriate use of the information in the records.

Records may only be issued to, or by the direct authority of, the office that transferred them to the records centre. If duly authorised people come to the records centre to consult records there, they must do so under supervised conditions, and they must conform to the rules in force.

Requests for access by other persons must be referred to the head of the records and archives institution, who will, as appropriate, seek authorisation from the office concerned.

*For more information on security issues, see Preserving Records and Emergency Planning for Records and Archives Services.*

### **Activity 3**

Outline the steps taken at present to ensure the security of records within your organisation, whether in a records centre or not. Identify three steps you would take to improve the security of those records. Explain your reasons.

## **Cleanliness and Order**

The records centre must be clean. This means that the records in it must be protected from damage from dirt, insects or rodents or infestation by moulds. To maintain cleanliness, no one should be allowed to eat or bring food into the records centre: crumbs could encourage insects or rodents. Smoking must be prohibited in the records centre at all times, and there should be prominent notices to this effect. The records centre should be cleaned, dusted and inspected on a regular basis.

The records centre should also be orderly. This means that the records kept in it must be in proper order on the shelves, so that any record can be found at any time with a minimum of delay. Records should be kept in proper containers or wrappings, clearly labelled with their reference codes. Regular checks should be made to ensure records are returned to their appropriate locations and are not stored inappropriately.

#### Activity 4

Outline the steps taken at present to ensure the cleanliness of records storage areas within your organisation, whether in a records centre or not. Identify three steps you would take to improve the maintenance of a clean environment.

## Efficiency and Economy

The records centre must be efficient. Every record held in the centre should be retrievable quickly and easily; records should also be disposed of according to a predetermined disposal schedule. The recommended procedures given in this module are designed to ensure that this provision is observed. They must be followed carefully.

It is generally accepted that high-density, low-cost storage away from the offices where records were created will be much more economical than non-current storage in or near active offices or centres of administration. However in some situations there may be special factors that affect these relative costs. Staff must be able to calculate and report reliably on the costs and benefits of their service and how these relate to possible alternatives.

The following features of a records centre help to ensure that cost targets are met.

- The unit cost of space in a records centre is less than that in active office buildings.
- The records centre is itself a less expensive building than an active office site. This is because it is designed or adapted for its specific purpose.
- Records can be stored more densely in a records centre than in an office. This density can be quantified in terms of the ratio between cubic metres of records stored per square metre of floor space.
- Records centres are organised so as to be able to identify and retrieve records efficiently, whereas offices are generally organised in support of administrative services.
- Records centres can be planned on the basis of calculations made of relevant factors: the quantity of backlog records to be absorbed; the rate of creation of new records; rules for the retirement of records from current systems; retention policy as expressed in the disposal schedules; legal requirements. In this way, the optimum space can be provided centrally.
- Records in special formats require special conditions for storage and special techniques for retrieval. These can be better provided in the records centre than in the office.

### **Activity 5**

Outline the steps taken at present to ensure the efficient and economical management of records within your organisation, whether in a records centre or not. Identify three steps you would take to improve the efficiency and economy of records care.

# SUMMARY

Lesson 1 has outlined the function of a records centre: to hold and make available semi-current records from the time they are retired from current systems until the date of their disposal, either by destruction or by transfer to an archival repository. It is a temporary or intermediate storage facility.

Lesson 1 has provided definitions of the following terms:

- records
- current records
- semi-current records
- non-current records
- records centre
- action date.

Records centres provide a service to their sponsor agency, and they must be secure, efficient and economical.



# STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the function of a records centre?
2. What is the difference between current records, semi-current records and non-current records?
3. Who does the records centre serve?
4. Explain why a records centre should be secure.
5. What qualities must a records centre have in order to ensure security?
6. What is the difference between custodial security and environmental security?
7. What security issues arise when storing confidential or classified records in a records centre?
8. Explain why a records centre should be clean and orderly.
9. What qualities must a records centre have in order to ensure cleanliness and orderliness?
10. Explain why a records centre should be efficient.
11. What qualities must a records centre have in order to ensure efficiency?
12. Explain why a records centre should be economical.
13. What qualities must a records centre have in order to ensure economy?
14. Name at least five features of a records centre that ensure it is a more economical storage facility than a records office.

# ACTIVITIES: COMMENTS

## **Activity 1**

The specific organisational structure of a records centre will differ depending on the nature of the institution itself. Large complex bureaucracies may have a number of storage sites, each administered by the records and archives institution. A small organisation may have one records storage facility. The issues outlined in this lesson should be taken into account whenever considering the establishment or reorganisation of a records centre.

## **Activity 2**

Much information about disposal schedules is provided in other modules. See particularly *Organising and Controlling Current Records* and *Building Records Appraisal Systems*. It is important, for this module, to understand the importance of having an established process for moving records from current to semi-current or archival care.

## **Activity 3**

Good security is essential not only to good records care but also to the respect and authority given to the records centre. For more information on security issues, see *Emergency Planning for Records and Archives Services* and *Preserving Records*.

## **Activity 4**

Cleanliness is also important to good records care and to the respect given to the records centre. For more information on cleanliness and physical care of records and records storage areas, see *Preserving Records*.

## **Activity 5**

Efficiency and economy are among the best arguments for establishing and maintaining a records centre. For more information on these management issues, see *Managing Resources for Records and Archives Services*.

## **PLANNING AND DEVELOPING A RECORDS CENTRE**

Lesson 2 discusses the steps involved in planning and developing a records centre for the care of semi-current records. These steps are outlined below and discussed in detail in this lesson

1. Establishing an administrative structure.
2. Collecting information about records systems.
3. Deciding on a physical site for the records centre.
4. Constructing or adapting a building for use as a records centre.
5. Conducting a pilot project to manage the records of selected agencies.
6. Establishing a full records service.
7. Caring for records in different formats.
8. Determining a plan for costing services.

### **ESTABLISHING AN ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE**

As discussed in Lesson 1, the function of the records centre is to

- receive and administer all records, in whatever format, that are retired from current records systems
- provide a reference service based upon the records
- dispose of all records held in accordance with disposal schedules and plans.

It is assumed that the records centre will exist within the structure of the organisation's records and archives institution, as a branch of the archival facility. The records centre is therefore an essential element in the records and archives institution. It provides a physical base and centre of operations for that administration, and it facilitates the administrative and intellectual control of the organisation's records.

*The records centre is one of the principal components of a government or business and it should operate efficiently.*

The records centre serves as one of the principal instruments of the records and archives institution and is an important element in a government's or business's capital investment programme. It is important that the organisation should make proper use of the records centre and that records centre policies be clear and appropriate.

When planning a records centre, decisions have to be made on the following policy issues:

- centralisation
- location
- means of transport
- communications and technology
- staffing
- accommodation
- authority, service levels and costs.

## **Centralisation**

Should there be one records centre or several? This is a practical question. The best control may be achieved when there is one single records centre, under a unified management. However, local circumstances must be taken into account. In the national sphere in large countries, or in countries where the government is decentralised, or where record-creating agencies are widely scattered, it will probably be necessary to establish decentralised records centres at points convenient for particular groups of agencies, such as branches or regions. Most countries with provincial or regional governments will need to establish provincial or regional records centres. Businesses and organisations may have records centres in both their head offices and regional offices.

### Activity 6

Based on the structure and needs of your organisation, give three advantages and three disadvantages to centralising a records centre for your organisation. Then give three advantages and three disadvantages to decentralising the records centre. (Your advantages and disadvantages for each will no doubt include similar points.) Which way would you suggest is best?

## Location

Should the records centre be on the central site or at a remote site?

The advantage of locating the records centre close to the creating agencies is that transfer and retrieval of records is facilitated. Not only does the close proximity allow for timely service but it also helps demonstrate the benefits of good records management practice, because retrieval is speedy and staff quickly become familiar with the records centre.

*Records may be housed centrally or at an offsite location.*

The principal disadvantage of a central location is cost. Records centres are essentially bulk warehouses, and this type of accommodation is usually best provided in industrial estates or in low-cost areas away from the main urban or business centres. Communications and transport arrangements, and their cost, must be borne in mind when making this decision.

The classic model records centre is a free-standing building situated not too far from the main record-creating agencies but in an area that allows for minimum capital and recurrent costs and convenient communications.

### Activity 7

Based on the structure and needs of your organisation, give three advantages and three disadvantages to maintaining the records centre near the central offices of the organisation. Then give three advantages and three disadvantages to locating the records centre on a remote site. (Your advantages and disadvantages for each will no doubt include similar points.) Which way would you suggest is best?

## Means of Transport

How will the records be transferred, disposed of and retrieved? Records that are retired from current systems should be transferred to the records centre regularly. In general, agencies should be encouraged to make smaller transfers more frequently rather than larger transfers less often. However, difficult transport arrangements may make this impractical. Suitable transport arrangements will always improve the efficiency of the service.

*Procedures for the transfer of records are described later in this module.*

The records centre should have accommodation and equipment to facilitate large transfers of records. There should be a weather-proof loading bay, adequate parking space for large vehicles and a working area where transferred materials can be cleaned and checked before being placed on shelves. The records centre should also be able to receive, store and retrieve records in non-typical formats.

The records centre is not simply a storage area but the base for an information service. Materials held in the records centre must be available for use. The records and archives institution should take active steps to encourage agencies within the organisation to use records during their decision-making processes or in any work involved in administration. The records centre should be designed to make the procedure for retrieving, issuing or consulting records as easy as possible.

Consignments of records are also regularly moved out of the records centre, under the provisions of the disposal schedules. Records moved out comprise records transferred to the appropriate branch of the archival repository and records ready for disposal or destruction under controlled conditions.

The records centre should have facilities to allow users to attend at the records centre and examine documents under certain conditions. For example, there should be a controlled and supervised search room. There should also be suitable arrangements for visitors to reach the records centre, including a car park with ample space for the records centre's own official vehicles, staff members' own cars and visitor's cars.

The records centre should also be able to control the issue and replacement of records that are on loan to agencies. To carry out these duties, records centre staff should have offices where records of transfer, issue, return or consultation of records are recorded and from which all management functions can be exercised. These functions involve the movement of staff as well as of materials, and so various requirements should be considered when determining what kind and amount of transport is required.

### **Activity 8**

Write a brief description of how semi-current records are presently made available for use by the various agencies or individuals within your organisation. How are records transported to users? How is the transfer documented? After considering these questions, identify three issues relating to the transportation of records to offices, or vice versa, that should be considered when establishing a records centre or reviewing its operations.

## **Communications and Technology**

Apart from the physical transport of materials and people, there must be easy and practical means of communication between the records centre and its users. Means of communication in this context include not just physical access but also telephone, fax and local computer network links.

Communications systems are required to

- arrange for and facilitate the transfer of records from the agencies to the records centre
- arrange for the transfer of records from the records centre to the archival repository
- arrange for the disposal of records ready for destruction
- allow agencies to request records, to ask for statistical and other information about the working of this aspect of the records and archives institution or to obtain information on the presence or absence of records
- allow records centre staff to check on the whereabouts and return of records that have been issued to agencies.

### **Activity 9**

Write a brief description of the communications systems presently available for records care in your organisation. Does the organisation have telephone and fax technologies? Are these adequate for records management needs? Does the organisation have electronic mail access? Is it reliable? After considering these questions, identify three issues relating to communications between records centre officials and users of records that should be considered when establishing a records centre or reviewing its operations.

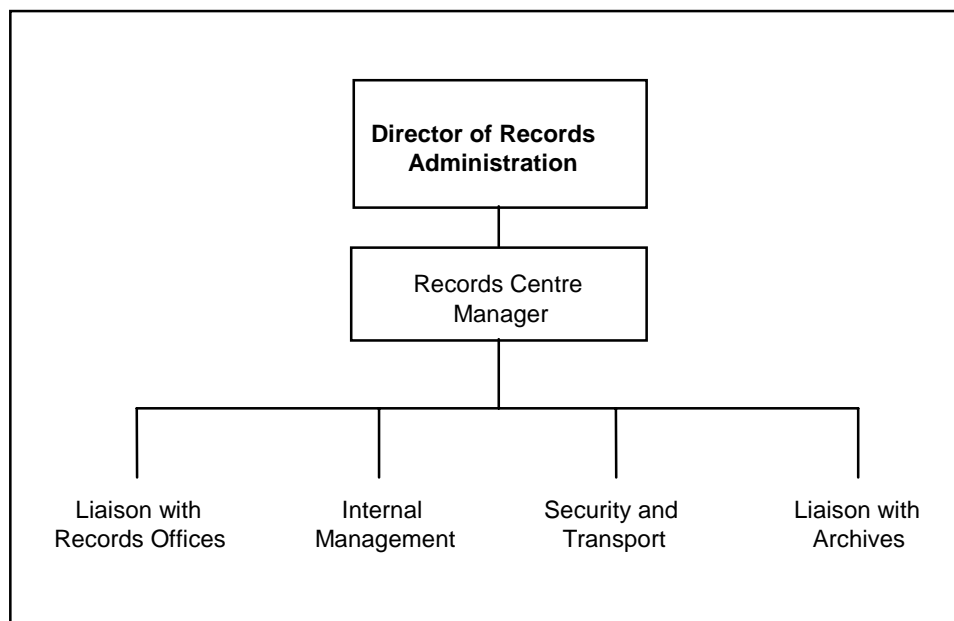
## Staffing Requirements

Within the records centre, there are four types of staff activity:

1. liaising with creator agencies and managing reference services
2. managing the holdings within the records centre
3. providing security, transport and housekeeping within the centre
4. liaising with the archival institution.

The responsibility for tasks within these groups should be allocated to particular posts. Suitable job descriptions should be prepared, regardless of the size or scope of the staff.

The records centre manager is responsible for reporting to the records and archives institution at agreed intervals. A suggested staffing structure is shown below.



*Figure 1: Organisation of Records Centre Staff*

In order to provide high-quality service, the records centre should be adequately staffed. Adequate staffing means that there should be enough people to do the work efficiently. But the service should always be cost effective; there should not be too many staff. Further, each staff member should be given a set of tasks and responsibilities he or she is reasonably capable of carrying out. Within the public sector, the general terms of service and conditions of employment that apply to the public service must of course be observed.



*Records centre staff must undertake a range of activities, from liaison with creating agencies to care of records and related administrative work.*

### **Duties of Records Centre Staff**

The duties of records centre staff include the following, which are discussed below:

- liaising with creating agencies
- receiving records from creating agencies
- retrieving records on demand
- retrieving records for transfer to the archives or for disposal
- communications and technology management
- administrative duties.

#### ***LIAISING WITH CREATING AGENCIES***

Records centre staff need to be aware of the current situation within each of the user agencies, particularly in their records offices. The service begins with identifying which records should be transferred to the records centre. Records staff should always be able to know and state the basic statistics of their branch of the service in relation to any particular creator agency. They should know the overall bulk of records held in the records centre for each department or office; the frequency of reference to the main series; and the rate at which records are removed from the centre according disposal schedules. This information enables the records and archives institution to draw up and carry out its plans of action.

#### ***RECEIVING RECORDS FROM CREATING AGENCIES***

When records are received in the records centre, they should be accompanied by completed transfer lists. Records centre staff are responsible for completing and filing these in accordance with agreed procedures. Transfer lists, loans issued, authority to destroy and proposal to transfer records to archival care should be filed appropriately. Staff should review the files periodically to ensure they are kept in good order.

Staff should shelve boxes of transferred records in accordance with a plan. The plan should allow for both the accumulation of backlogged records (that is, records that should have been transferred earlier but were not) and regular consignments of records that have been retired from the current systems. All records should appear in the authorised disposal schedules. No transfer of records should be contemplated until there is a satisfactory and agreed disposal schedule.

### ***RETRIEVING RECORDS ON DEMAND***

When staff in the creating office request records, these should be retrieved and issued in accordance with agreed procedures. Records centre staff should track the movement of records issued to user departments and ensure that records are returned within the normal time.

In some cases, records may be made available to authorised persons in the search room of the records centre, under supervision. Records centre staff are responsible for retrieving the correct record, controlling its issue and return, supervising its use in the search room and ensuring its return to the correct location.

Ideally, only one staff member in the records centre should be in charge of the copying and reproduction of records. There may be a guideline that records should be issued in photocopy form and not in the original, wherever feasible, to protect originals from loss.

### ***RETRIEVING RECORDS FOR TRANSFER***

Records centre staff will be responsible for identifying and preparing records for transfer to the archival institution or for destruction. This work involves maintaining disposal schedules, ensuring the appropriate and secure transfer of records and documenting all actions taken.

### ***COMMUNICATIONS AND TECHNOLOGY MANAGEMENT***

Only one staff member should be responsible for the computer system, if one is used. This area of responsibility involves liaison with the appropriate officer in the records and archives institution. Tasks may include the choice of the hardware and software systems used. The choice of system should be in general accord with government or corporate policy and civil service or organisational practice. Every effort should be made to standardise computer systems across the organisation.

*Any automated systems used should be standardised across the organisation.*

The staff member responsible for computers will be responsible for the supervision of clerical and other work in data input, management of the databases, retrieval of information and compilation of statistics.

*Automation of records systems is discussed in more detail in Automating Records Services.*

### ***ADMINISTRATIVE DUTIES***

In addition, there should be adequate trained staff available to carry out cleaning and housekeeping work, enforce security procedures and drive and maintain vehicles needed for records centre work.

#### **Activity 10**

Imagine you are the newly appointed manager of the records centre and you are able to hire two people to work for you. The total staff complement, including yourself, will be three. Based on the recommendations listed above concerning staffing needs, write a short job description for each of the three positions, including your own. Then, for each position, write a description of the desired education, experience and qualities of the ideal candidate. How would you divide responsibilities between positions? How would you construct a job that could be filled by one person with suitable qualifications?

## **Accommodation Requirements**

*There must be adequate accommodation for all records centre functions.*

There must be accommodation for all of the processes of the records centre, including the transfer, management and storage of records, the provision of reference services, staff facilities and storage and maintenance of vehicles.

### **Transfer of Records**

The physical movement and transfer of records involves the following processes:

- receiving new consignments of records from agencies
- issuing records to agencies on request and receiving returned records from them
- transferring selected records to the archival institution.

All these movements require the use of a loading bay. This area should be protected from the weather and should lead directly to a clean, secure work area.

## **Management of Records**

Suitable accommodation is needed for the following processes:

- preparing records for storage
- executing and maintaining control and retrieval system procedures (this includes checking transfer lists, filing lists in the appropriate places and completing the accessioning procedure)
- completing statistical information
- receiving and carrying out requests for information or records.

These processes need sufficient office space to allow for the use of boxes or cabinets in which to file the transfer lists and other forms in use. The records centre's communications systems (telephone, fax, computer) will be sited here. Ordinary office facilities will be needed, including desks, filing cabinets (for filing correspondence with agencies), stationery and materials storage.

## **Storage of Records**

The main purpose of the records centre is to hold records for the agreed time. The bulk of space in the building should be devoted to storage.

## **Reference to Records**

If authorised persons will be given supervised access to records, provision needs to be made for a records centre search room. Generally the facilities offered should be similar to those available in the archival institution, though perhaps not as large. There should be

- desks or tables at which users may consult the records
- a desk for the supervising officer (placed so that the officer can see the users)
- shelves for reference material
- access to a photocopier.

## **Facilities for Staff**

Staff need suitable working and recreational accommodation, in accordance with the standards in effect within the government or organisation. At remote sites this may involve the provision of meals. Toilets and washrooms must also be provided and must meet appropriate standards.

## **Storage and Maintenance of Vehicles**

If transport is provided by the records centre, such as to bring records to and from offices, accommodation will be needed for the vehicles, together with facilities for maintenance.

It may be that this accommodation is shared with other facilities. However, the records centre must have regular, reliable and authorised access to enough vehicles to conduct its work without interruption or delay.

### Activity 11

Based on the requirements discussed above for accommodation, draw up a floor plan for an 'ideal' records centre for your organisation. Which requirements are most needed? Which ones are taken care of by other parts of your organisation?

## Authority, Service Levels and Costs

The service offered by the records centre and its staff form part of the larger records and archives institution, which should be established on a firm statutory basis and managed in accordance with a records policy. Actions taken by the records centre staff should have the authority of the records and archives institution and should follow procedures laid down by it.

*For more information on management, see Developing Infrastructures for Records and Archives Services, Strategic Planning for Records and Archives Services and Managing Resources for Records and Archives Services.*

The level of service offered should be the subject of specific regulations, procedures and agreements, which should cover such matters as

- the retirement of records from current systems
- the preparation of records for transfer
- the arrangement and transfer of backlog accumulations of records
- the provision of reference to records held at the records centre
- the release and return of records used for reference purposes
- the destruction of records under the provision of the disposal schedule.

*The level of service offered by the record centres should be based on established policies and procedures.*

### Activity 12

What legislation or policies currently in place in your organisation could affect the care of records in a records centre. Write a brief description of the main regulations or agreements in place. You may need to discuss this with various people in your organisation to obtain information. Take advantage of the time to discuss records centre issues with them, but do not spend so much time that you cannot move on with studying the rest of this module.

## COLLECTING INFORMATION ABOUT RECORDS SYSTEMS

The second step in planning for a records centre is to find out what that centre is likely to contain and to calculate the effects of this on the planning of the service.

To do this, the records and archives institution will need to carry out a survey. The survey results will be used to

- establish rules for the retirement of non-current records (in any format) from current systems
- gather information for the construction and authorisation of disposal schedules
- calculate the overall bulk of non-current records to be housed
- calculate the rate of creation of new records by the various agencies of the organisation
- estimate the anticipated amount of retrieval and reference to records.

On the basis of the information obtained, the optimum size and capacity of the records centre can be calculated. It is wise to take a medium- to long-term view; a plan for twenty years ahead would be reasonable.

*A survey allows the organisation to determine the appropriate size and scope of the records centre.*

In principle, records centres should reach their full capacity fairly quickly but should not continue to expand significantly thereafter. This is because all records transferred into the records centre should be balanced by records transferred out of it, under the provisions of the disposal schedules.

A small proportion of the records transferred out will go to the archival institution; the rest will be destroyed under controlled conditions. In the future, it is likely records will need to be kept for longer periods to meet increased legal and administrative requirements; thus some continued expansion must be allowed for. Nevertheless, the records centre will not expand in an uncontrolled way if the initial planning has been sound.

### Activity 13

Conduct a 'mini-survey' of a specific section of your organisation, to determine the present state of records care and the potential growth of use of a records centre. Choose one small department or office within the organisation and ask the following questions.

1. Are there any rules in place for removing non-current records (in any format) from current systems?
2. Are there any disposal schedules in place?
3. How many boxes or metres of non-current records would have to be housed in a records centre?
4. How many new records are created each year by that department or office?
5. How many times are non-current records referred to in a year?

Based on this information, indicate how big you believe the records centre would need to be to care effectively for the records of this one office or department. Remember, that's only one department within the entire organisation!

## DECIDING ON A PHYSICAL SITE FOR THE RECORDS CENTRE

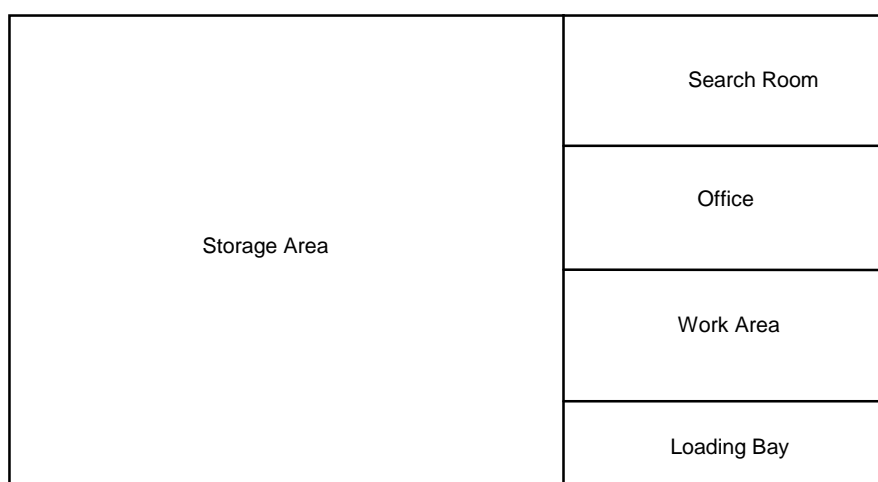
The location of the centre should be chosen in accordance with the organisation's overall development plan. Factors to consider include cost, centrality, security and the provision of services. The siting of branch or regional records centres should be chosen with equal care, in the light of the service to be offered locally.

*The records centre should be a high-density, low-cost storage facility.*

# CONSTRUCTING OR ADAPTING A BUILDING FOR USE AS A RECORDS CENTRE

A model records centre is essentially a secure, clean and sufficiently capacious warehouse, containing economical and easily controlled racking or shelving to a good local standard.

Since it is important that the records centre should be a high-density, low-cost storage facility, it is normal to have a high ratio between linear metres of shelf space and square metres of floor space. The object is to store as much material as safely possible in the least amount of space. This high-density storage is normally achieved by building the shelving stacks as high as possible. However, local circumstances must always be taken into account, particularly if it is necessary to use a pre-existing adapted building.



*Figure 2: Sample Records Centre Floor Plan*

The majority of the shelves should be set at uniform spacing in order to accommodate standard sized boxes or containers. However, it is wise to have some adjustable shelving, as there will always be records that will not fit the standard space.

One limitation on the height of shelving is the difficulty of accessing excessively high shelves. Shelves above about two metres in height can be reached only if proper ladders or equipment are available. If it is not possible to provide these, it would be better to limit the shelving to a height that can be reached by staff members standing on the floor or on simple moveable stools.

Floor loading is also a limiting factor, if the main storage is not at ground level. Standard boxes can be stored three to a one-metre shelf. Double depth shelves are often used in records centres, so that in this case six boxes per one-metre shelf is possible.



Records in specialised formats (audiovisual, photographic, electronic) require storage conditions that conform to relevant standards.

*The care of records in different formats is discussed below; see also Preserving Records.*

#### **Activity 14**

Compare the floor plan above with the plan you developed for your 'ideal' records centre. Indicate three similarities or differences and indicate what you might change in your floor plan to improve the care of records, based on the information provided in this part of the lesson.

## **CONDUCTING A PILOT PROJECT**

Before embarking on any new system for the care of records in records centres, it is always advisable to carry out a pilot project. This project should test, in a limited area, the systems proposed for the whole organisation.

*A pilot project will allow the records centre to test systems before installing them throughout the entire organisation.*

One way is to base a pilot project upon one or a few selected agencies. Non-current records from these designated places should be appraised, scheduled and transferred, as appropriate, to the records centre. Retrieval for reference should be tested. The pilot scheme should be evaluated so that faults and problems are identified and corrected.

The pilot project should begin with an office that is in urgent need but that presents a manageable problem. The purpose of the pilot project is to test the working of the system and to provide experience for the records centre staff. It will not serve these purposes if its scope is too large or the task is too difficult to complete within a reasonable time.

*Project management is discussed in detail in Strategic Planning for Records and Archives Services.*

### **Activity 15**

Imagine you have been asked to conduct a pilot project for a records centre. Write down in order the first ten actions you would take to prepare for such a pilot project. For each action, explain your reasons for doing that in that order.

## **ESTABLISHING A FULL RECORDS SERVICE**

In accordance with the agreed order of priorities, all agencies should be brought into the records centre system in sequence. This is best done under an annual programme, whereby specified agencies are brought in under an agreed timetable. The records centre manager will be responsible for initiating contacts with the specified agencies and arranging times and other specifics for the exercise.

Regular evaluation of performance should be part of any system. Evaluations should be conducted of all records centre services on a regular basis. These evaluations should consider the quality and relevance of all of the key components of the records centre programme, including staffing, costs, physical facilities and quality and timeliness of service to users.

### **Activity 16**

Imagine you have been asked to evaluate a records centre operation. Write down five specific questions you would ask to determine if the service was working well and how it could be improved.

*Evaluation procedures are discussed in detail in Strategic Planning for Records and Archives Services.*

# CARING FOR RECORDS IN SPECIAL FORMATS

Most records held within the records centre will be in formats (mainly paper) that permit their storage in standard boxes or bundles. Where this is so, the bulk of the records centre can be shelved on a regular pattern and boxes allocated to spaces on a random access basis.

However, it is likely that there will be a proportion of records that cannot fit into standard shelf spaces or standard boxes or that demand special treatment. These include

- maps and plans
- photographs
- moving images
- audiotape
- electronic records
- computer printouts.

*For practical reasons, it is sometimes necessary to store documents in special formats away from their original context.*

In general, it is not desirable to separate documents in special formats from their original context. However, for practical reasons it may be necessary to do so. For example, photographs or maps may be taken out of a file of which they are part, so that they can be given specialised conservation or retrieval.

If this is done, it is essential to create a link that will allow the connection between the photographs and the original file to be seen and understood, even though the records are no longer physically together.

Users must be able either to

request the original file, see the reference to the special media item (such as a photograph) that has been extracted and then request the item

or

request the item (such as the photograph) from an index of specialised media (such as an index to photographic holdings) and then request the appropriate original file.

This link between records must be made wherever any documents in specialised format have been extracted from their original context and stored elsewhere.

## Storage of Media Materials

Following is a brief overview of guidelines for the storage of various media materials within the records centre.

*For more information on the care of records in different media, see Preserving Records.*

It must be remembered that the records centre is an intermediate storage facility and some materials will not be retained permanently. Therefore, it is important to provide storage suitable to the long-term value of the materials. For example, it is not a good use of resources to provide special storage containers for maps or plans that are only going to be retained for one or two years before being destroyed. The funds are better used to provide more secure storage for records with enduring value, while the maps with a short life span can be housed using regular records centre storage facilities.

Records centre staff should seek to acquire suitable storage equipment at the time records are transferred. In general, if the records in question are to be kept permanently, the best way may be to transfer them directly to the archival institution. Otherwise, a special area of the records centre should be allocated in which appropriate storage equipment can be placed instead of standard shelving.

*Records centre staff should seek to acquire suitable storage equipment at the time records are transferred.*

### Maps, Plans and Engineering Drawings

Maps, plans and engineering drawings are best kept in plan cabinets equipped with drawers or in vertical plan cabinets equipped with hangers. If these are not available, cardboard tubes should be used.

In archival conservation, maps, plans and drawings are usually wrapped around the outside of core tubes, as this is the best way to ensure long-term preservation. Records centre practice is sometimes different. It would be acceptable to roll the maps, plans or drawings inside cardboard tubes, as this tends to protect them from accidental damage during use. This practice would be especially appropriate for maps, plans or drawings that are not destined for retention as archives.

### Photographs

Photographs should be kept in acid-free folders, individually, and kept in a controlled environment. They also really need specialised indexing. It is particularly important that links between photographs and other records be retained; it is often impossible to understand what a photograph depicts unless the contextual documents reveal it.

## **Audiovisual Materials**

Moving image film also requires special storage conditions. If the film is nitrate based, it should not be accepted into the records centre under any circumstances, as it poses a significant fire risk. If the film is on safety stock it may be accepted for storage under controlled conditions. These records, like any others, should be subject to appraisal and have an action date for destruction or transfer to the archival repository.

Audiotape requires the same storage conditions as films. The records centre may decide to keep equipment on which the tape can be played. This could be kept in the reference room for use by authorised users.

Videotape should be stored in conditions similar to those used for electronic (machine-readable) records. As with the latter, it will be necessary to migrate videotape records periodically to new technical standards when these become current.

## **Electronic Records**

The guidelines for the storage of electronic records are continually changing, as new mechanisms are established. Provisions for the storage of electronic records in the records centre should conform to procedures issued by the records and archives institution. In general, electronic records should be stored in areas free of dust and magnetic fields and protected as much as possible from fluctuations in temperature and humidity.

Computer printouts on continuous stationery do not produce any special storage problem, except that they tend to be too big for standard boxes or shelf spaces. It may be necessary to use larger containers or to wrap the records in bundles.

In some cases it may be necessary to allocate special areas of the shelving to these materials, adjusting the shelves to different sizes. The records centre manager should talk with the records offices about the likelihood of receiving this material and remember to ask about printouts during the survey of creator agencies. Like all other records, computer printouts must be appraised and have action dates allocated to them on transfer, so that they are not retained in the records centre indefinitely.

*See Managing Electronic Records for more information on the care and storage of electronic records.*

### **Activity 17**

Write a list of all the different media types records found in at your organisation. Describe how semi-current records in these formats are presently stored and handled.

# DETERMINING A PLAN FOR COSTING SERVICES

All aspects of the work of the records and archives institution should be subject to costing controls. It should be possible for records centre staff to measure the comparative costs of the specific services they provide and the records services provided by creator agencies. The records centre should provide a more economical as well as a more efficient service for the storage, retrieval and use and disposal of records than would be possible by a more decentralised method.

## Determining the Costs of Services

All managerial staff in the records and archives institution should be able to produce reliable costings for their overall service and for all the main aspects of it. All procedures carried out in the records centre can be costed by estimating the proportion of the overall resources, per person-year, allocated to records centre services.

In some systems, creator agencies that use the services of the records centre may be required to pay charges for each of the services offered. Chargeable services may include

- transfer of records to the records centre and storage there
- retrieval of records and issue to the creator agency for reference
- replacement of records after reference
- retrieval of records for consultation in the reference room
- advice on records management procedures and appraisal.

The costing of records services can only be done as part of a general policy of the government or corporate service. Creator agencies that are required to pay charges for records centre services must have the option of finding those services elsewhere, at a cheaper rate, if they can do so. This means that they must also be required to meet storage and retrieval charges for records that are stored in their own office premises.

As a general principle, well-organised records management services will be able to show gains in economy and efficiency whenever these can be tested by fair competitive costings. In certain circumstances this situation can best be realised by contracting these services out to external specialist agencies.

There may be reasons for not considering the contracting out of records services, even if these might be offered more cheaply or more efficiently by external agencies. These reasons chiefly centre on security and relative cost: records often contain sensitive or security-classified material. However contracting out aspects of records management services is becoming more common in countries around the world, and there is no principle in professional practice that would oppose it.

### **Activity 18**

Discuss the costs associated with records care with someone in your organisation responsible for financial management. Based on those conversations and your research, write an argument for whether you would charge for the following services, why or why not, and according to what criteria or conditions.

1. transfer to and storage of records in the records centre
2. retrieval of records and issue to the creator agency for reference
3. replacement of records after reference
4. retrieval of records for consultation in the reference room
5. advice on records management procedures and appraisal.

# SUMMARY

Lesson 2 has examined the steps involved in planning and developing a records centre. It has explained that the function of the records centre is to

- receive and administer all records, in whatever format, that are retired from current records systems
- provide a reference service based upon the records
- dispose of all records held in accordance with disposal schedules and plans.

It noted that the records centre was best placed within the structure of the records and archives institution, as a branch of the archival institution. The records centre was considered an essential element in the records and archives institution, providing a physical base and centre of operations for that administration. The records centre also facilitates the administrative and intellectual control of records.

The lesson has explained the steps involved in developing a records centre. These include

- establishing an appropriate administrative structure
- collecting information about records systems
- deciding on a physical site for the records centre
- constructing or adapting a building for use as a records centre
- conducting a pilot project to manage the records of selected agencies
- establishing a full records service
- caring for records in special formats
- determining a plan for costing services.



# STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Why is the records centre an essential element in the records and archives institution?
2. Explain the concepts of centralisation and decentralisation of records centre services.
3. What factors need to be considered when deciding whether or not to centralise records centre services?
4. Explain the advantages and disadvantages of locating a records centre in a central site.
5. What facilities does the records centre require in order to manage the transfer of large quantities of records?
6. What facilities should the records centre have for users of records?
7. Why do records centre staff need to manage the process of issuing records for use by departments?
8. What functions do communications systems in the records centre perform?
9. Explain the four types of staff activity in the records centre.
10. Explain each of the six main duties of records centre staff.
11. Describe the processes involved with transferring and physically moving records to and from the records centre.
12. Describe the processes involved with managing records in the records centre.
13. Describe the processes involved with providing reference to records in the records centre.
14. What facilities are required for staff?
15. What facilities are required for storage and maintenance of vehicles for use by the records centre?
16. Describe six issues that should be addressed in legislation or policies related to records centre management.
17. Explain the reason planning for a records centre includes conducting a survey to collect information about records systems.
18. What factors should be considered when constructing or adapting a building for use

as a records centre?

19. Why is it wise to carry out a pilot project before embarking on a new records centre system?
20. Why should regular performance evaluations be part of any records centre system?
21. Briefly explain the main issues involved with caring for records in the following formats:
  - maps and plans
  - photographs
  - moving images
  - audiotape
  - electronic records
  - computer printouts.
22. Explain why it is necessary to create a link between materials in different formats if they are stored separately.
23. Why is it important to monitor costs for records centre services?
24. Name five chargeable services the records centre might perform.

# ACTIVITIES: COMMENTS

## **Activity 6**

The decision about centralisation or decentralisation will be based in large part on the particular needs of the organisation; neither option is 'better' or 'worse' than the other. Consideration must be given to security, cost, and transportation, as well as the other factors outlined in this lesson.

## **Activity 7**

There are, as noted, great administrative and political advantages to locating a records centre near the central office. Equally, there are often cost benefits to locating the records centre on a remote site. The preferred option for any institution will vary depending on its own particular needs.

## **Activity 8**

Many of the important issues relating to the transportation of records to offices, or vice versa, are discussed in this lesson. Also important will be local realities such as the availability or cost of vehicles or fuel, the opening hours of the organisation and so on.

## **Activity 9**

Good communications are critical to successful records centre administration. It is important not to try to achieve more than the communications infrastructure will allow. For example, if the organisation has to choose between operating close to the head office in cramped quarters or moving to a remote location with more space, the quality of communications would be a factor in determining which would offer the best services.

## **Activity 10**

It is important, when considering how to develop job descriptions and then fill the positions, to make sure that you do not ask too much of any one person. Someone with excellent organisational skills may not also have the strength to carry boxes; someone strong enough to carry heavy boxes may not know how to type or work a computer.

It is necessary to balance needs against the skills available. You may wish to take your finished 'ideal' job descriptions to someone responsible for hiring or personnel management in your organisation and discuss with him or her some of the qualities you have identified and how the personnel department might develop job descriptions.

## **Activity 11**

A sample floor plan is given later in this lesson; don't look at it until you have finished this activity so that you can think through your own ideas before seeing one example.

### **Activity 12**

A range of legislation can affect the care of records in a records centre, from an archives act to employment legislation. It may not be possible to identify every legislation, regulation or agreement that could affect records care, but it is useful to spend some time considering the main types of legislation.

As you review your findings, consider what areas of records care are *not* covered by or protected by any legislation. Do you see any major omissions? How might these be fixed?

### **Activity 13**

This ‘mini-survey’ should show you the various factors that must be considered when examining records centre development. The most important lesson to learn from this activity is that planning a records centre requires a lot of forethought and organisation.

### **Activity 14**

You will no doubt have found many similarities between your floor plan with this one, as well as differences. It is critical to ensure the records centre is safe, secure, efficient, and accessible, as discussed in this lesson.

### **Activity 15**

The actions you choose will depend on the present situation in your institution. However, planning is critical: surveys, interviews and studies must be undertaken to determine the best course of action. Discussing the pilot project with as many people as possible allows you to gain a wide range of input so that the pilot itself runs smoothly and people are aware of and sympathetic to your goals and objectives.

### **Activity 16**

You may wish to find out if

- the service is efficient
- requests for files are filled quickly
- confidentiality is protected
- physical facilities are secure
- staff are well trained
- policies and procedures are in place and effective.

Many other issues would also be considered; this module helps to identify many of the key points to consider.

### **Activity 17**

Much more information about media materials can be found in *Preserving Records*. *Managing Electronic Records* specifically addresses the care of records in electronic form.

### **Activity 18**

Charging for services can bring revenue to the organisation, but it can also reduce service, if people object to or are not able to pay the fees. Decisions about charging are usually made in consultation with senior management within the organisation. This issue is discussed in more detail in *Managing Resources for Records and Archives Services*.

## **MANAGING THE RECORDS CENTRE**

This lesson examines the procedures to be followed in the records centre. Topics discussed include

- liaising with records offices
- transferring records to the records centre and accessioning records
- retrieving and using records held by the records centre
- disposing of records, including destruction or transfer of records to the archival institution
- compiling statistical controls
- measuring performance.

The records centre is the vital link between the records and archives institution and the agencies that create and use records. It provides clean, secure and well-organised high-density storage for semi-current records that are retained for administrative or operating purposes or for review at a later date. This releases valuable space in the agencies and in the records offices. The records centre provides an efficient retrieval service for agencies who wish to consult their records.

This lesson discusses the management of records once they are ready for transfer to the records centre and during their custody in the records centre.

## **LIAISING WITH RECORDS OFFICES, TRANSFERRING RECORDS AND ACCESSIONING RECORDS**

Ideally, each department or agency will have a records office, responsible for managing all the current records created and used by action officers within the office. Records centre staff should be familiar with the records office's procedures and situation. Similarly, records office staff should understand the procedures used in the records centre. Active liaison between the two offices is necessary, so that records are removed from records office and are deposited in the records centre, transferred to the archival institution or destroyed as required by the schedules. Active communication and co-operation is also needed to ensure records that are issued to the records office

for reference use are returned to the records centre in a timely fashion.

## Disposal Schedules

Disposal schedules are the means by which the records and archives institution documents decisions about the disposal of files. As explained in other modules in this study programme, there are usually two types of disposal schedules: general disposal schedules, covering all administrative records common to the organisation as a whole; and agency disposal schedules, covering those records specific to particular agencies.

*For more information on records scheduling, see Building Records Appraisal Systems.*

*Disposal schedules govern actions about the management, transfer and disposal of records.*

Records offices should be issued with the specific schedule relating to their own agency (ministry or department) as well as with copies of relevant general schedules. They are responsible for seeing that closed files are transferred to the records centre at the proper time. The records office supervisor will notify the records centre if there are specific reasons why records should be retained for periods other than those identified in the schedule.

The records centre holds copies of all disposal schedules. Once the records have been transferred to the records centre, staff there are responsible for carrying out all required procedures, including retrieving records for use, reviewing files if required, destroying obsolete records or transferring files to the archival institution.

### Activity 19

Briefly describe the process presently used to create and administer disposal schedules for records in your institution. Identify three actions you would take to improve the process.

## Destruction of Records in Offices

Some records may be scheduled for destruction within one year or less of their creation. These records should not be transferred to the records centre. Instead, they should be destroyed by the records office under secure conditions. The only exception might be if there is no storage available in the office to hold records pending destruction. However, if such records are transferred to the records centre temporarily, arrangements must be agreed beforehand by the head of the records and archives institution or records centre. Otherwise, the records centre could become

cluttered with obsolete records that should be have been destroyed as a matter of course.

To destroy those records scheduled for destruction within one year from their creation, the record offices should undertake the following actions.

1. Every six months, office staff should complete in duplicate a Proposal to Destroy Scheduled Records form, listing the records ready for destruction, the covering dates, the number of files and the relevant schedule number. (See the sample proposal form below.)
2. The head of the records centre will authorise destruction. If there is any query, he or she will inspect the records before confirming that they may be destroyed. Actual destruction will be carried out by the office, following guidelines established by the records and archives institution.

*For information on appropriate methods of destruction, see Building Records Appraisal Systems.*

#### **Activity 20**

Briefly describe the process presently used to destroy obsolete records in your institution. Identify three actions you would take to improve the process.



## 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 for destruction?

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

Destruction is hereby authorised.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Head of Records Centre

*Figure 3: Proposal to Destroy Scheduled Records*

## Emergency Planning and Vital Records Care

The creator agencies and the records centre need to collaborate in drawing up and implementing an emergency plan, in order to ensure the best possible recovery in the event of a disaster involving the loss of records, or damage to records, in any office. The emergency plan should also cover the possibility of damage occurring in the records centre itself.

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***Emergency plan:*** Policies and procedures developed by an organisation to be used during an emergency or disaster to prevent or minimise damage to an organisation, its people and its resources.

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Vital records are those records that have been designated as essential to the continuation of orderly administration in the event of catastrophic loss. Such a loss might be from fire, flood, war or other disaster.

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***Vital records:*** Records considered critical to the ongoing operations of an organisation or the re-establishment of operations after an emergency or disaster. Also known as essential records.

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Whether vital records are held in records offices or by the records centre, records centre staff must be aware of their existence and condition. In collaboration with office staff and the archival institution, records centre personnel must ensure that these records are preserved and retrievable.

*Records centre staff must work with records office staff and archivists to ensure vital records are protected.*

Vital records are often duplicated, with the second copy kept in a building separate from the one where the original is held. This requirement is usually met simply by ensuring that the original is held in the office and the copy in the records centre (or vice versa).

*For more information on emergency planning and vital records management, see Emergency Planning for Records and Archives Services.*

### Activity 21

Does your institution have an emergency plan in place? Does it identify vital records? If so, describe the emergency plan and explain the process used to identify vital records. If not, identify three reasons you would encourage the institution to establish an emergency plan and undertake a survey of vital records.

## TRANSFERRING RECORDS TO THE RECORDS CENTRE

All records transferred to the records centre must be easily accessible and must be managed according to the disposal instructions outlined in the records schedules.

### Accessioning Records in the Records Centre

When records are received at the records centre they must be subject to precise control procedures.

Records centre staff advise records offices on how to apply disposal schedules and on how to arrange for the transfer of records from the offices to the records centre.

The records centre should not ordinarily accept records that are not included on a disposal schedule. If such a transfer is requested, it must be agreed by the head of the records and archives institution or records centre. If an office is having difficulty with its records, its staff can either visit the records centre or telephone to request assistance.

Following are the steps involved in accessioning records in the records centre.

#### Identification of the Originating Government or Corporate Office

The office that has originated or used records while they were still current retains a direct interest in what happens to them after retirement. Offices that have transferred records to the records centre need to know where they are and how to access them. Equally, the records centre staff must always know which office transferred any particular records and which office retains continuing responsibility for them.

A good way to ensure that agencies keep track of their transferred records, and that the records centre can keep track of which agencies have transferred records to it, is for the records centre to allocate a code number to each records office.

<b>Date code Issued</b>	<b>Name of Records Office or Agency</b>	<b>Code Number</b>
1/1/99	Office of the head of the Civil Service	102
1/1/99	Land Registry principal office	103
3/2/99	Ministry of Agriculture extension programme main registry	104

*Figure 4: Example of a Register of Records Office Codes*

Code numbers should be allocated serially, at the time when the first transfer of records is requested to be made by that office. No code number should ever be repeated. The records centre should keep a register of code numbers. This register will be one of the records centre's own permanent records. No index of codes is necessary because codes are written on the relevant files and on any correspondence and forms.

The code number should be written on each transfer list, disposal form and so on. It should be quoted on all correspondence with the records office, and files of such correspondence should be filed under the code number by the records centre.

When an office has been allocated a code number, this number should remain unchanged. If as a result of administrative reforms a particular records office is merged with another, the new records office should be given a new code number. The old one will remain in use to identify transactions that occurred and records that were created before the reorganisation.

### **Activity 22**

Briefly describe the process presently used in your organisation to document the transfer of records from offices to a records centre or other storage facility. Identify three actions you would take to improve the process.

### **Communications and Transport**

Good communications and transport services are essential to the success of the records centre and its services. If client agencies do not feel that they can communicate easily with the records centre and can request their records and get them delivered rapidly and reliably, the records management service will not succeed.

Communication systems must be kept operational at all costs. Client agencies must be able to request records for reference at any time during the normal working day. (There may need to be special requirements for access to records outside office hours.) The records centre staff must be able to communicate efficiently with agencies in order to provide the best service and encourage expanded use of the records centre.

Transportation is a vital element in the records centre's service. The following actions, for example, all require transportation.

- Records staff must be able to visit creator agencies in order to carry out surveys and liaise with records offices.
- Transport is required to transfer consignments of records to the records centre.
- Records issued for reference must be sent to the creator agencies and returned when they are finished with.
- Records destined for destruction must be taken from the records centre to the place of secure destruction.
- Records selected for permanent retention must be transferred to the archival institution.

To carry out these duties, the records centre will need to plan for regular deliveries, which may include daily, or even twice daily, deliveries of records issued on request. Only in urgent circumstances should it be necessary for agencies to send their own staff or transport to the records centre.

Transportation should be the responsibility of a named manager in the records and archives institution, who will ensure that it is used economically and to the best advantage. This may involve the management of a fleet of vehicles in accordance with general government or corporate guidelines and regulations.

*The transport of materials is best organised as part of an overall records centre programme.*

### **Transferring Records to the Records Centre**

When an office asks to transfer records to the records centre, the records centre will send it an appropriate number of empty boxes and a supply of records centre transfer lists. The records centre should keep a record of the number of boxes and lists supplied, for purposes of stock control.

The records centre should prepare instructions on the proper method of preparing records for transfer. These instructions would require office staff to

- complete the list according to instructions
- describe records appropriately, making sure the action date column has been left blank

- enter covering dates for records
- compare the contents of the box with the transfer list to ensure the information is the same
- ensure the records are clean and orderly, without metal clips or ephemeral additions.

*Office staff must take responsibility for ensuring records centre requirements are met when transferring records.*

The office staff must sort the records they intend to transfer into correct reference number order. They then pack the records in the boxes, making sure the boxes are neither overfilled nor too tightly packed. The boxes should be temporarily numbered in sequence.

The office staff then return the full boxes with three copies of the completed records centre transfer list inside each box, retaining a fourth copy for their own reference. Note that all copies of the transfer list should be readable. If photocopiers are readily available, it may be enough to send one copy of the transfer list with the boxes. If no photocopier is conveniently available, three good copies should be sent to the records centre.

If the transfer procedures are not carried out properly, the records centre may request that the office staff visit the records centre and revise the forms. Alternatively, the boxes can be returned to the records office for repacking.

Information about the location number and action date is added by the records centre staff. See the sample records centre transfer list shown in Figure 5.

## 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 5: Records Centre Transfer List*

On arrival, the records centre staff then check to see that the number of boxes sent out is the same as the number returned. Boxes are costly and should not be left unused or diverted to improper purposes. They then enter initial details of the transfer in the records centre accession register (see Figure 6). This ensures that there is a permanent record of the consignment.

Records centre staff place the boxes that make up the consignment in order, and deal with them in sequence. For each box they undertake the following steps:

1. Check the records
2. Prepare the boxes
3. Determine the action category
4. Distribute the transfer list
5. Label the boxes
6. Store the records
7. Update the location register and accessions register.

These steps are outlined in detail on the following pages.

### **Activity 23**

Before reading the information on the following pages, briefly describe the processes presently used in your institution to undertake the seven steps outlined above. If nothing is done for a particular action, note that as well. Compare your findings with the information on the following pages, as you continue to study this lesson.

#### ***CHECKING THE RECORDS***

1. Remove the records centre transfer list from the box.
2. Check that the form has been completed correctly, with an adequate description of the contents, but with the box number, location and action date columns left blank.
3. Check that the contents are actually the same as those listed on the transfer list, the files are in order and have been properly prepared for transfer. Records should be clean and orderly, without metal clips or messy ephemeral additions.
4. If it appears that the records sent in the boxes are not the correct ones, or if they are not in order, or if they have not been prepared properly, the matter should be reported to the records centre manager. It is particularly important that the covering dates of



the records transferred are entered on the transfer list, because it is from these that the action date is calculated.

#### ***DETERMINING THE ACTION CATEGORY***

1. The approved list of disposal schedules should then be consulted. Look at the appropriate schedule(s) and decide what is the correct action category of these records, and the appropriate action date.
2. If the action category is 'DESTROY', this instruction should be entered in the action category space. The correct destruction date should be written into the appropriate column of each copy of the transfer list. There must be only one destruction date for each box, so take the date of the most recent record as the destruction date for the whole box.
3. If the action category is 'REVIEW', this instruction should be entered in the action category space. The correct review date should be entered in the appropriate column of each copy of the records centre transfer list. There must be only one review date per box, so take the date of the most recent record as the review date for the whole.
4. If the action category is 'PERMANENT', write on the transfer list the date on which the box is to be transferred to the Archives. Also write that the action is to transfer it to the archival institution. There must be only one transfer date per box, so take the latest date as the effective one for the whole box.

Note that no box should contain a mixture of records that have to be treated differently. For example, there a box should not contain some records to be destroyed, some to be reviewed and some to be transferred to the archival institution. If such a box is found, the records in it should be divided into the different categories and each group put into a separate box. Whenever changes like this are made, they should be recorded on all copies of the transfer list, and the matter brought to the attention of the office concerned.

All actions, whether destruction, review or transfer to the archival institution, are best carried out on the whole consignment at one time rather than on single boxes. The action dates entered in the transfer lists help the records centre staff to arrange this, because they bring up records for action at the right time. It is important that action dates for the whole consignment be co-ordinated at the time they are received in the records centre. However, if this is not done, the action dates entered in the transfer list will bring boxes up for action. Staff can then co-ordinate the appropriate action so that it takes place for a large group of records at the same time, saving resources.

<b>Records Centre Accessions Register</b>								
<b>Date Received</b>	<b>Name/Address Depositing Agency</b>	<b>Records Office Code Number</b>	<b>Consignment Number</b>	<b>Number of Boxes</b>	<b>Location Numbers Used</b>	<b>Action Category (add date when completed)</b>		<b>Comments</b>

*Figure 6: Records Centre Accessions Register*

<b>Records Centre Location Register</b>							
<b>Location</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Consignment</b>	<b>Box No</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Consignment</b>	<b>Box No</b>

*Figure 8: Records Centre Location Register*

### ***PREPARING THE BOXES***

1. Each box should be marked in sequence with the next available box number. To find what this number is, consult the list at the front of the records centre location register (see Figure 7).
2. Carry on numbering in order. When each box in the consignment has been numbered, the numbers that have been used should be crossed off the list, so that they will not be reused by mistake. Note that box numbers are not the same as location codes. A location code refers to only shelf space. Box numbers are never reused and always go in sequence from the start to the finish of each consignment. The next consignment continues with the next box number. The purpose of the list in the front of the location register is simply to help keep track of the numbers used, to ensure that there are no gaps or duplications in box numbering. Location numbers are reused only when all the contents of the box at that location have been destroyed or transferred to the archival institution.
3. The box numbers should be written on all copies of the records centre transfer list, in the appropriate column.

### ***STORING THE RECORDS***

The next vacant storage location is then found from the records centre location register. As far as possible, it is best to keep consignments together in one block, because they should have a common action date. However, for the sake of economy, locations for the consignment may be chosen at random from among the shelf spaces that are vacant.

In general, it is best not to allocate blocks of shelf space to particular agencies, as this wastes space and creates difficulties in the management of the records centre. If there is a shortage of shelf space, individual boxes may be given locations randomly; but it is important to be sure that any particular box (and the documents inside it) can be quickly identified.

Boxes should be placed in the shelf spaces that correspond to their location codes. Their box numbers are then recorded in the records centre location register alongside the correct location code.

Records centre staff should always be able to find the location code of any box from its number, and they should always be able to go straight to the shelf space from the location code.

### ***DISTRIBUTING THE TRANSFER LISTS***

Three completed copies of the records centre transfer list should be distributed as follows.

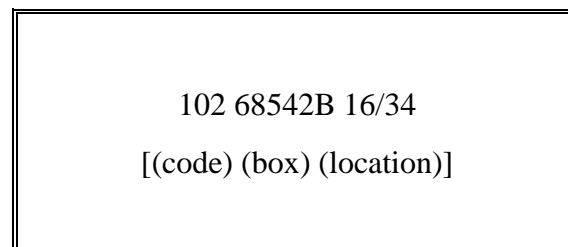
1. The first copy should go in the master transfers file. This file contains the transfer list, in a separate file for each transferring office, in the date order as received. Records office code numbers may be used to identify the file for the office of origin.

2. The second copy should go in the action dates file. This file holds the records centre transfer list in a single sequence by the action date, irrespective of the office of origin.
3. The third copy should go in the records office transfers file. This file holds forms to be sent back to the transferring records office or agency for retention as a permanent record for their use. Agencies will consult this form to find out the box number of any record they require. On receipt of this copy the record office should destroy the fourth copy they kept at the time of the transfer.

### ***LABELLING THE BOXES***

It is also useful to attach a label to each box. This label should indicate the

- originating office code number
- box number
- location code.



*Figure 8: Sample Box Label*

For security reasons, it is important that these should be the only marks on the outside of boxes, so that unauthorised people cannot easily identify records, particularly sensitive or confidential files.

If labels are unreliable, perhaps because heat or humidity prevent them from adhering to the boxes properly, the information should instead be written directly on the box.

### ***UPDATING THE LOCATION REGISTER***

The location register holds the following information:

- records office code
- consignment number
- box numbers
- location codes.

The location column in the records centre location register should contain a list of all the empty locations. If new shelves are added to the records centre, the new locations must be added to the register.

On the last working day of each month, records centre staff should count up the number of boxes transferred by each records office and enter this information in the front of the master transfers file. This allows the records and archives institution to be aware of the level of records activity in each office.

This statistical record acts also as an index of transferring agencies, since it is a list of all who have transferred records to the records centre, together with information on their production of records and the amount of space they occupy (see Figure 9).

It is advisable to have a card index of box numbers and location codes. Entries should be made in this index before the boxes are sent in for placement on the shelves.

Figure 10 is a summary of the key procedures involved in transferring records to the records centre.

## Statistical Analysis

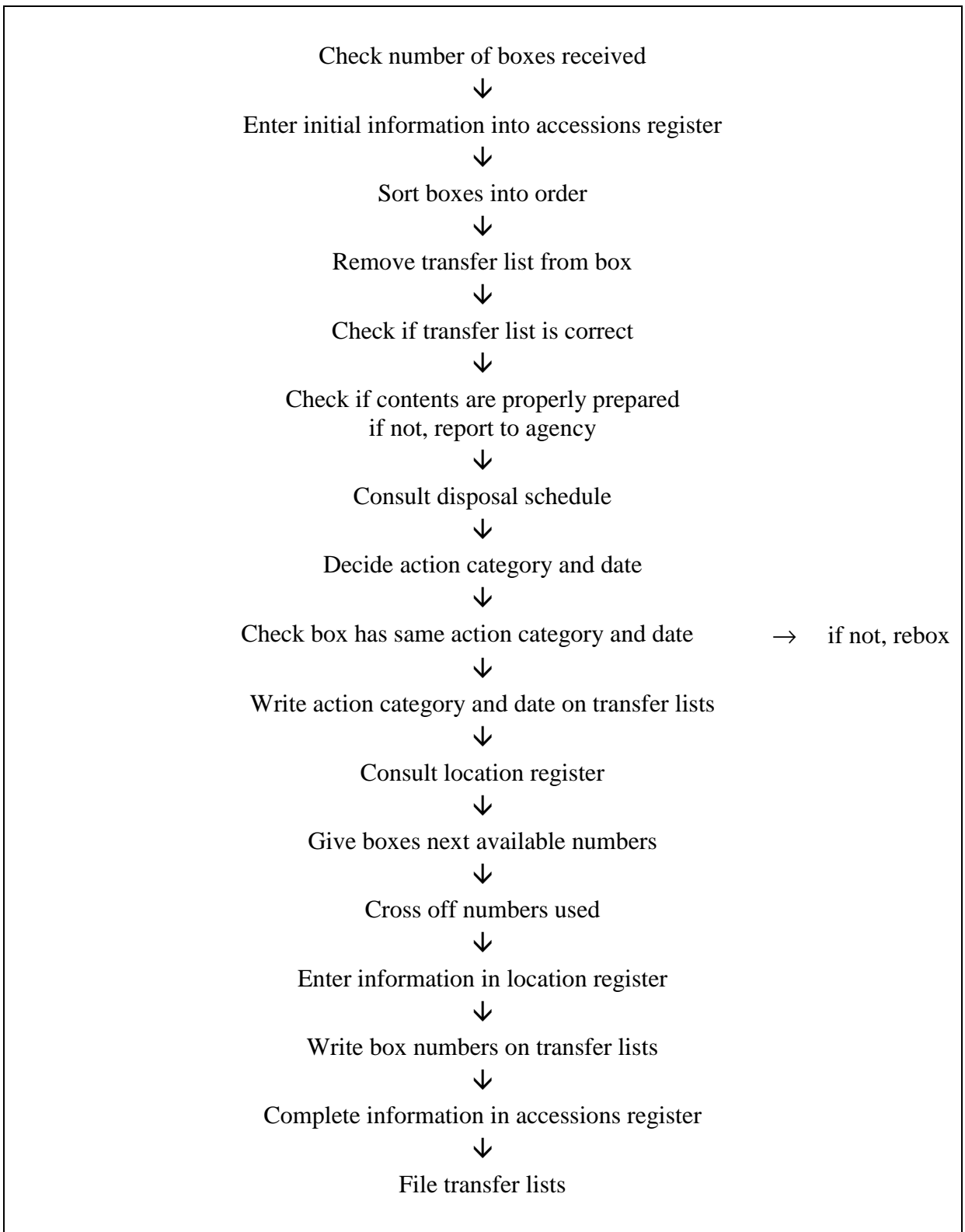
Agency:     Records Office Code 102  
                   Office of the Head of Civil Service  
                   Policy and Personnel Management Division

<i>Consignment Nos.</i>	<i>No. of Boxes</i>	<i>Destruction</i>	<i>Notes</i>
1	4	3	shredded: confidential
2	6	2	
3	8	7	shredded: confidential
4	2	1	
5	9	4	includes oversized registers
6	1	0	
7	9	7	includes electronic records

[continued]

Running Totals:	--	39	24
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*Figure 9: Agency Statistical Record*



*Figure 10: Summary Chart of Transfer Procedures*



### Activity 24

Now that you have read through the information on how to undertake the seven steps involved in transferring records and have compared those with the steps undertaken in your institution, write down two actions you would take to improve the processes involved with *each* of the seven steps for transferring records in your organisation.

## RETRIEVING AND USING RECORDS HELD BY THE RECORDS CENTRE

It is critical to the success of the records centre that information and files held there are easily and quickly retrieved. Records centre staff should also be able and willing to provide action officers with advice on the use of the facilities. Staff should ensure that there is controlled access to the records held for each office.

Originating or transferring agencies have a right, stated in the legislation or policies, to consult any of their records held in the records centre. Such records should be returned to the records centre when the consultation is completed. It is the duty of the records centre staff to see that records issued in this way are duly returned.

In general, records centre facilities are not available to the public. Public access to documents is provided by the archival institution, subject to statutory provisions. In some cases, access is provided directly by agencies. Only in rare circumstances is access provided by the records centre.

*In general, records centre facilities are not available to the public.*

### Providing Access to Records

Only the office that created the record, or its successor office, may borrow a record from the records centre. Requests to borrow records may be made by post, by telephone or in person.

The records centre should plan for regular deliveries of requested records to the records offices. It must ensure it includes such a service in its estimates of staff time, resources and so on. Records offices should be supplied with copies of records centre request forms.

### **Issuing a Record by Post**

When an office wishes to borrow a record, the records office will send three copies of the completed records centre request form (see Figure 11) to the records centre. The issue form has the following information on it:

- agency details
- reference number of the record requested
- title of the file or description of the record requested
- box number.

If no box number is provided, it is necessary to consult the master transfers file appropriate to the requesting office. This contains the box number and also its location.

One issue form (with its duplicates) should be used for each record requested. The records will be delivered to the requesting office against a receipt.

### **Responding to a Telephone or Fax Request**

If a request comes by telephone, records centre staff must obtain all the above information and make out an issue form to include it. Again, the records requested must only be delivered to the requesting office against a receipt.

### **In-person Requests for Records**

If someone comes to the records centre in person, records centre staff must obtain all the above information and complete an issue form. The records requested will be handed only to an authorised messenger. The records can also be made available for inspection by authorised officers of the originating office (or persons specifically authorised by them), in the supervised reference room of the records centre.

### **Retrieval Procedures**

Issue forms are used to control the replacement of the records and to compile statistics of use. The first step is to find the location of the box required. Consult the records centre location register if the box number and location number are not entered on the issue form. Note the location code of the record to be issued on the issue form. Also enter on the issue form the date on which the record was issued on loan or produced for reference.

Using the issue form as a guide, identify the relevant box and the files or records to be taken out of it. A cardboard marker can be put in the place normally occupied by the file. The top copy of the records centre request form can be clipped to the outside of the box or to a place on the shelf space.

A records centre issue sticker or red marker can be attached to the front cover of the record, with the box number written on it. If there are no stickers, it may be best to use a stamp or write the box number on the front of the file. Do not cover up any of the writing on the file cover by doing this.

## 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 11: Records Centre Request Form*

The purpose of the issue sticker is to

- identify the record as having been issued by the records centre
- remind officers to return it at the proper time
- help records centre staff replace it in the proper place
- identify the record as a returned issue and not as a new transfer
- be a ready reference marker in checking how often records are used.

Name:
Address:
Telephone:
ON LOAN FROM THE RECORDS CENTRE
PLEASE RETURN AS SOON AS POSSIBLE
Box Number _____

*Figure 12: Records Centre Issue Sticker*

Once the procedures for issuing the record have been completed, the requested record can then be despatched to the requesting office by the normal means. When it is handed over, the second copy of the records centre request form should be signed by the requesting office as proof of receipt. The records centre staff member handing over the record should also sign and date the issue form.

The completed second copy of the records centre request form may then be filed in box number order in the 'records issued out' index. This index helps to control the movement of records by providing a reference to physical locations. The third copy of the issue form is kept in a records centre requests control index in order of the date of issue. This index helps to control the tracking of records by prompting for action on appropriate dates.

Once a week, the issues out and issues control indexes should be checked. All the slips should be in box number or date order, respectively. Any cases of irregularity or overdue returns should be reported for investigation. As a rule, if a record has not been returned within one month, a records centre reminder form should be sent to the borrower of the record. If after another month the record is still not returned, another reminder form is sent. After three months the case should be reported to the records centre manager. Whenever a reminder form is sent, the sender should sign and date the issues form indicating the action taken.

When the file is returned, the top copy of the records centre request form should be checked against the copy of the issue form that relates to it in the records issued out

index. If the two tally with each other, the second copy is withdrawn and the return date completed. This completed form is filed in the returned issues index in box number order. The third copy should also be checked to see that it corresponds to the top copy. It will be retrieved and returned to the requesting office as a record of the completed transaction, once the record is returned to the records centre.

The records centre request form can then be used to locate the box from which the record was taken. The first copy of the records centre request form can be removed and destroyed, and the record returned to its proper place. Under certain circumstances, the loan period may be extended. When this is done, the issue control index slip should be refiled in the new date order.

At the end of each reporting period the number of documents issued on loan for each office should be counted up for operational statistics. This information can be entered in the front of the transfer list file. For example:

102	Office of the Head of Civil Service	254 items issued
		249 items returned

When completed, the accumulated issues forms should be scheduled for destruction at, say, five years after the return of the record.

## Consulting Records in the Records Centre

Authorised personnel may choose to consult records in the records centre rather than by asking for them to be issued out on loan. External researchers may also consult records in the records centre, if authorisation is received from the head office.

Records may only be seen by persons specifically authorised by the originating or controlling agency. Records centre staff must check this authorisation and see proof of identify before producing records. Records that are still subject to security classification may only be seen by those who have the appropriate security clearance.

Records may only be seen in the reference room of the records centre, under the supervision of records centre staff and subject to appropriate regulations. Visitors must give prior notice of their intention to come to the records centre to consult records. On arrival, visitors should record in the attendance register their name, position in the organisation and research purpose. Reference numbers of the records consulted should be recorded against their names.

### Activity 25

Before studying the summary chart of retrieval procedures later in this module, write a brief description of the steps presently followed in your institution to retrieve records, whether current or semi-current, and make them available for use. Then compare your institution's procedures with the summary chart and identify three actions you would take to improve the process of retrieval

## Records Centre Reminder

Records Office Code:                      Date:  
To:    Officer:  
Agency:                                      Unit:  
Address:

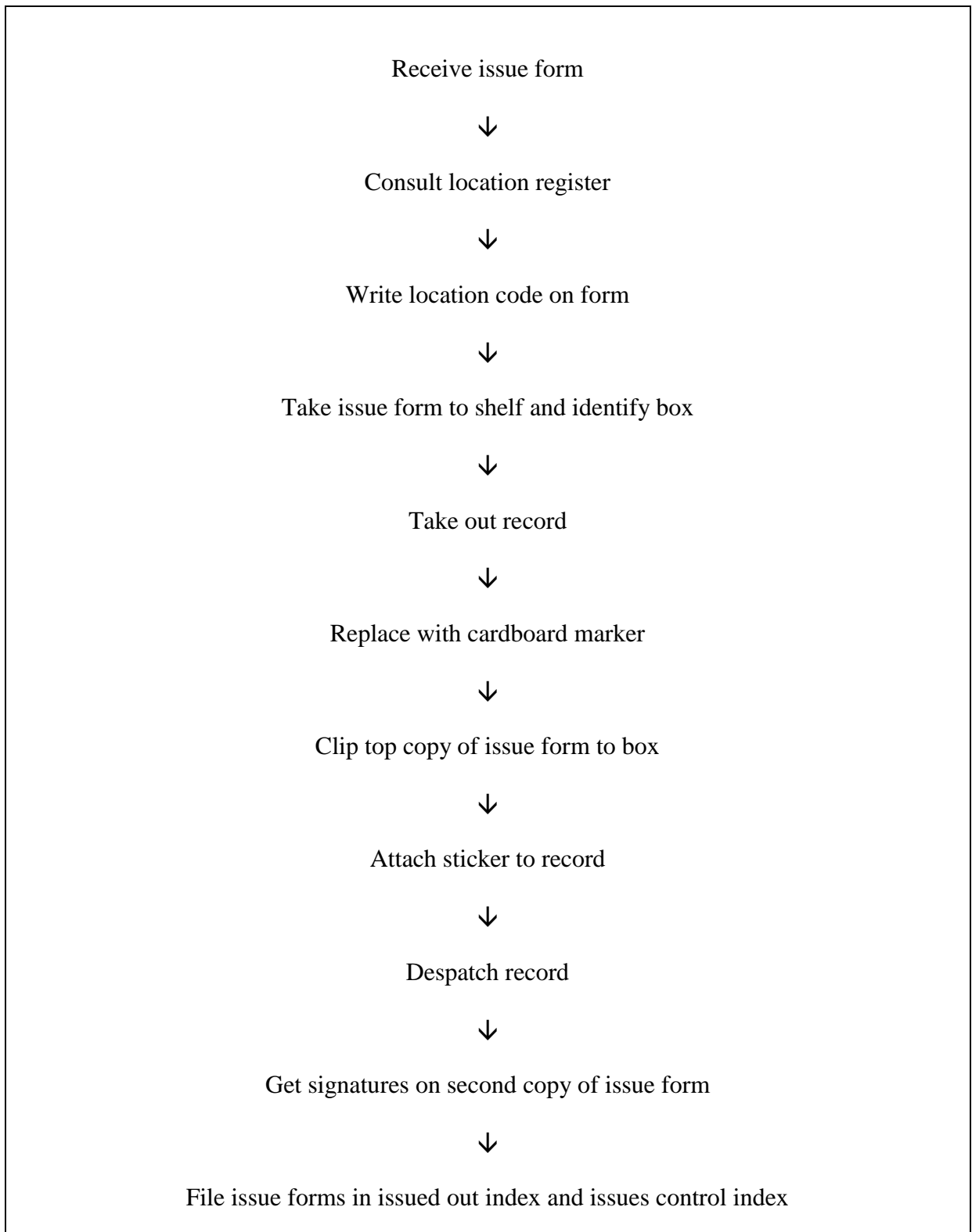
Dear Sir,

Our records show that the following records were issued to you more than one month ago, and that they have not yet been returned.

It would be appreciated if you could either arrange to return the records listed as soon as practicable, or contact us to arrange for the issue period to be extended. If you choose the latter course, we will need to be assured of the whereabouts of the records in question.

Reference	File Title	Date Issued
-----------	------------	-------------

*Figure 13: Records Centre Reminder Form*



*Figure 14: Summary Chart of Retrieval Procedures*

## Access to Personnel Records and Other Special Classes

Personnel records are usually identified as confidential or classified records; therefore records centre staff need to care for these records according to particular rules, since they are subject to special legal or policy requirements and are also highly sensitive.

It is likely that personnel records will have long retention periods under the relevant disposal schedules, in order to ensure that the rights of employer and employee are protected. Special care should be taken to see that only specifically authorised persons are given access to these records. In some countries, access to these records in the public sector is governed by freedom of information or similar legislation.

Records that have special security classification should be treated in accordance with regulations applicable to this type of record. Security in the records centre should conform to the highest level demanded for these special categories; if this is not possible, then a special storage area must be provided for security-classified records.

*Security in the records centre should be of the highest level in order to protect special classes of records.*

The records and archives institution should seek to establish a regular procedure for the declassification of security-classified records when they are retired from currency or when their classification ends.

*For more information on the management of personnel records, see Managing Personnel Records.*

## DISPOSAL OF RECORDS

*Disposal of records includes destruction of obsolete files and transfer of records of enduring value to the archival institution.*

The records centre staff facilitate the authorised and timely destruction of records that are no longer needed for ongoing business and that have no archival value. Staff may also take part in the process of identifying records that do have archival value (appraisal) and ensure that these are transferred to the archival institution.

No records should ever be destroyed without written and specific authority, based upon procedures laid down in the ruling legislation. In the case of records scheduled for destruction, this authority comes from the disposal schedule.



Responsibility for carrying out the procedures lies with the records centre. In the case of records reviewed for a disposal decision, the responsibility is shared between officers specifically nominated for this purpose by the records and archives institution and the office concerned.

## Action Date and Review Procedures

All records transferred into the records centre must be transferred out of it at the appropriate date. As explained earlier in this module, this is called the action date. The records centre staff are responsible for ensuring that disposal procedures are activated and carried through at the appropriate time.

The action dates file contains the second copies of the transfer lists, arranged in order of the dates of proposed action. These records are used to control the disposal process. It is a good practice to keep a noticeable marker, such as a coloured piece of cardboard, inserted in this file at the current date, so that records centre staff can turn at once to the records coming up for action.

Disposal action should be undertaken on an annual cycle. It is good practice to consult the action dates file at the same time each year, such as January, and retrieve all boxes assigned for disposal action at that date. If there are too many to be dealt with at one time, it is advisable to spread the task by selecting only the boxes that came from one agency, deal with these, and continue with the next office when the first is completed. It is important that an annual disposal action cycle should be completed within one year, otherwise control of the records centre's tasks becomes increasingly difficult.

Records are categorised as followed:

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

The procedures for removing records for destruction or for transfer to the archival institution are described below.

Records scheduled for review are those that are impossible to evaluate for disposal at an early stage in their life. Usually they are general types of record, such as files containing correspondence, which may include information on a range of topics, from the mundane to the critical. These general records are distinct from others, whose value (or lack of it) is clear from the beginning, such as routine financial papers, which may only be kept for audit purposes, or signed minutes of high-level committees, which must be kept permanently. The appraisal process should ensure that only a small percentage of records are scheduled for review.

*For more on appraisal, see Building Records Appraisal Systems.*

The records and archives institution is responsible for ensuring that reviews are carried out on time and to a satisfactory standard. However, the review procedure

itself may vary, depending on a number of factors. These include the nature of the records and their age, the infrastructure for records management and the resources of the records and archives institution and the creating agencies.

In some cases, the staff of the records centre or records and archives institution may conduct the review. They may examine the records file by file and decide which files should be destroyed and which should be transferred to the archival institution. Or they may arrive at a disposal decision for the series as a whole. For example, records centre staff may have to review records when there is no records management capacity in the creating agency, when the creating office no longer exists and there is no obvious successor, or when there are no officers in the creating agency qualified to make disposal decisions.

The advantage of review by the creating office is that those with the most detailed knowledge of the contents and use of the records are able to make decisions about their continuing value. This advantage is particularly important when reviewing recent records, since office staff will understand better than records office staff the purpose and nature of the materials.

The advantage of review by records centre staff is that the review process is consistent between agencies. The continuing value of the records generated by one office can be considered in the context of records generated by other agencies. However, this assumes that the records centre staff are sufficiently experienced; if not, they should work under the close supervision of senior staff.

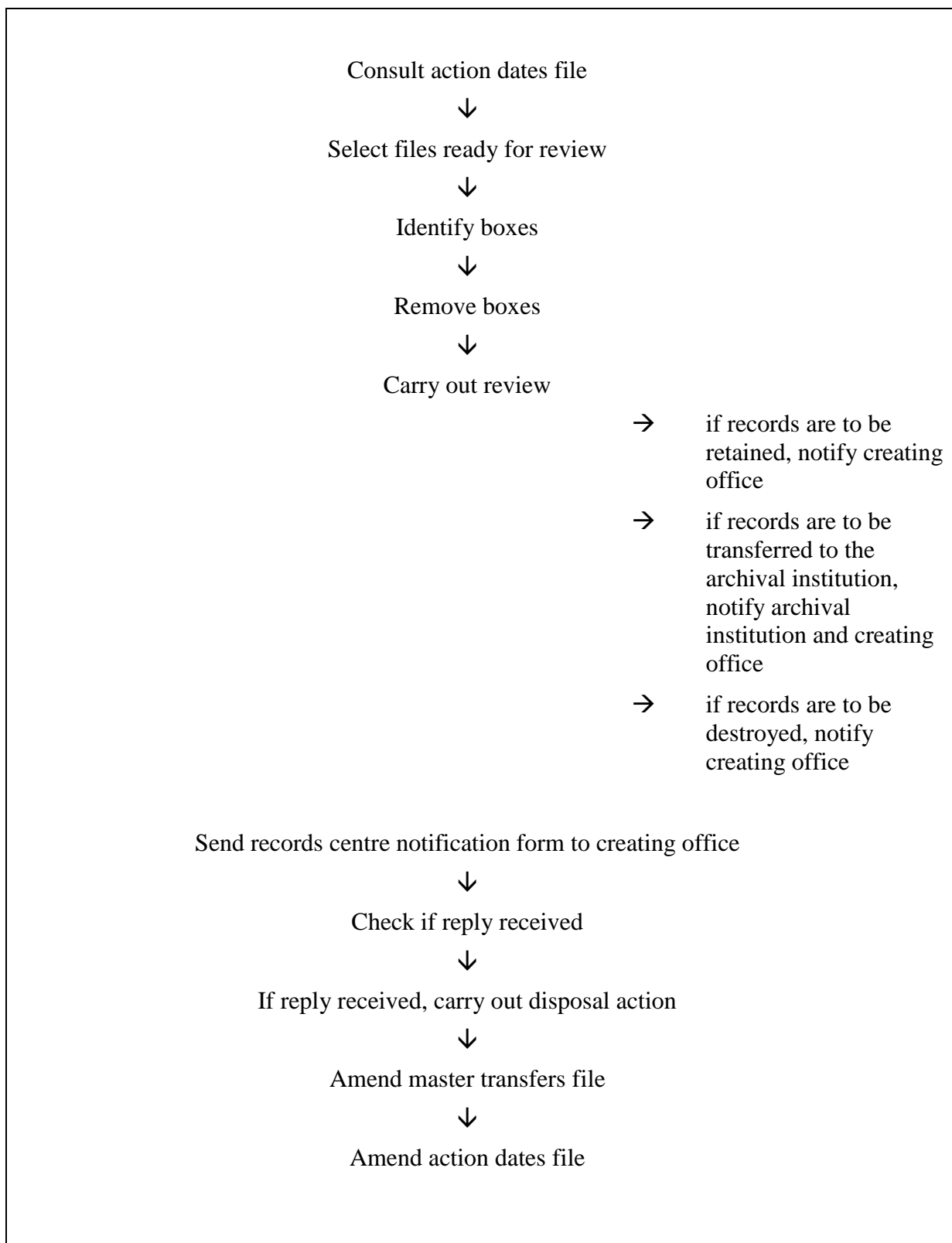
The disadvantage of having reviews done by records centre staff is that reviews are time-consuming and will absorb the resources of the records centre and records and archives institution. Moreover, if the records and archives institution is unable to keep to the review programme as required by disposal schedules, a backlog of review work will rapidly grow. The records centre may become less efficient over time.

If a review results in records being kept in the records centre for an extended period, the review date on the copies of the records centre transfer list must be changed, in both the departmental transfer lists file and the action date file. The copy in the action date file can then be refiled under its new action date. The records centre manager should be notified if it is decided to retain records beyond their review date. The archival institution should be informed if it is decided to transfer records there.

Figure 15 illustrates one example of review procedures if the review is conducted by the records centre.

### **Activity 26**

Before studying the summary chart of review procedures below, write a brief description of the steps presently followed in your institution to review records and determine if they should be retained, transferred or destroyed. Compare your institution's procedures with the summary chart and identify three actions you would take to improve the process of review.



*Figure 15: Summary Chart of Records Centre Review Procedures*

## Records Centre Disposal Form

Records Office: \_\_\_\_\_ Code Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Consignment Number: \_\_\_\_\_

The records listed in the enclosed transfer list(s) are now scheduled 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 16: Records Centre Disposal Form*

## Scheduled Destruction of Records in the Records Centre

In principle, the legislation or policies governing records authorise the records centre to destroy scheduled records when the action date arrives. However, it is generally good practice for the records centre staff to notify the office responsible for transferring the records of their imminent destruction (see Figure 16). This will allow the office to put the case for further retention, if it feels there is one. Changes in regulations often result in record series acquiring longer lifetimes, and these changes do not always get inserted into the disposal schedules in a timely fashion.

*When records are ready for destruction, the records centre should notify the creating office and receive confirmation.*

The records centre should keep a duplicate of the form on an 'authority to destroy' file, and note the date by which a reply should be received. If the signed disposal form is not returned with a reply within one month of the despatch date, a copy with a reminder should be sent. If a signed form is not received in response to this, the matter has to be reported to the records centre manager.

When the form is returned from the transferring office duly signed, the records centre is authorised to carry out the destruction. The procedures are set out below.

The first step is to review the location register and identify the location of the boxes to be destroyed. Remove these boxes and stack them in the loading bay area. The actual destruction can be carried out by the records centre staff, following established procedures, particularly procedures concerned with preserving confidentiality. Destruction should be carried out in a controlled manner.

Records are managed by destroying whole boxes, not individual files. As long as a box still contains records that must be kept, the whole box should be retained. It is uneconomical to move the records that remain in half-empty boxes to another box, because this would involve updating all the retrieval records as well.

When the files have been destroyed, the box number may be crossed off the box and the box reused, if it is in reasonable condition.

The location register entry for the destroyed boxes should now be crossed out and the new empty locations noted in the location column. These locations are now ready to be used for a new set of transferred records. It should always be possible to identify vacant locations from the location register.

The entry for the box on the relevant list in the master transfers file should be crossed out and stamped with a 'boxes destroyed' stamp, with the date of destruction. If every box on the records centre transfer list has been destroyed, remove the list and place it in the destroyed boxes file under the records office code, by box number.

A copy of the amended transfer list should be sent to the creating office with instructions to destroy superseded copies. The entry for the box in the action dates file should be crossed out. If every box on the relevant list has been destroyed, the list should be destroyed. At the end of the year, statistics may be compiled of the number of boxes destroyed.

## **Transferring Records to the Archival Institution**

The action dates file can be used to identify records to be transferred to the archival repository. The records centre disposal form may be used to notify the office of the proposed action.

These boxes should be removed and stacked in the appropriate space near the loading bay for removal. The contents of the boxes should be checked, to ensure that physical preparation for transfer has been done. This means that all ferrous pins, clips and so on have been removed and that the records are clean and in order.

All records transferred must be listed. The archival institution will likely use an accession form, and it may ask the records centre to complete this form when preparing the records for transfer. Much of the information for this form can be obtained from the transfer lists used to transfer the records to the records centre from the creating office.

Once the accession form has been completed and the records transferred, the relevant transfer list should be amended. The second copy of the transfer list should be removed from the action dates file, amended to indicate when the records were transferred to the Archives and placed in a 'records transferred to archival institution's file. The originating office must be notified of the change in the status of the records, by sending them a copy of the amended transfer list.

*Once materials are sent to the archival institution, they become archives and are subject to the regulations that govern the archival facility and its holdings.*

Note that records transferred to the archival institution become archives and are subject to different regulations from records still under the control of the records centre. Requests for access to archives are addressed to the archival institution, not to the records centre.

### **Activity 27**

Write a brief description of the steps presently followed in your institution to destroy obsolete records and the steps involved in transferring records to the archival institution. Based on the information provided in this lesson, identify three actions you would take to improve the processes of destruction and transfer to archival institution.

<b>Archives Accession Form</b>	
Accession Number (to be completed by archival institution):	
<b>Transferring Ministry/Depositor:</b>	
Is this a transfer from the records centre?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Covering Dates:</b>	
Will more items be added to this series?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Quantity</b> (number of items or boxes):	
<b>Physical Type</b> (files, volumes etc.):	
<b>Physical Condition</b> (note any problems):	
<b>Can Records be Opened After 30 Years?</b> (specify items to be opened earlier or later)	
<b>Further Information</b> (note any items missing or retained, or containing special materials such as photographs, maps, coins and so on)	
<b>Proposed for transfer to Archives by</b>	
<i>Name:</i>	<i>Date:</i>
<i>Position (of representative of ministry/depositor/records centre):</i>	
<b>Accepted for transfer to Archives by</b>	
<i>Name:</i>	<i>Position:</i>
<i>Signature:</i>	<i>Date:</i>

*Figure 17: Archives Accession Form*



## Measuring and Reporting on Performance

The records and archives institution must always be able to account for its operations and their costs. The institution should also be able to identify measurable benefits to the government. The records centre must therefore take care to quantify its work.

*The records centre must always be able to account for its actions.*

At the beginning of each new financial year, a report may be prepared on the operations of the records centre. This may be suitable for inclusion in the annual report of the records and archives institution.

The information recorded in the records centre control documentation, as described above, can be used to compile statistics for each of the following categories of information:

- number of boxes accessioned to the records centre
- number of boxes destroyed by the records centre
- number of scheduled files destroyed in records offices
- number of files transferred to the archival institution
- number of records issued on loan to agencies.

These statistics can be calculated either for services provided to the entire government or for services offered to specific agencies. The records centre can also use the figures for monitoring and planning purposes.

At an early stage, the head of the records and archives institution, in consultation with his or her management staff, should determine the units of performance measurement applicable to his or her service. These units should include the following:

- performance of procedures for the retirement and transfer of semi-current records from the records office, and their accessioning in the records centre
- performance of procedures for the retrieval, issue and return, and provision for use of records or information from the holdings of the records centre
- performance of procedures for the orderly and appropriate disposal of records from the records centre, either by destruction or transfer to the archival institution.

### Activity 28

Describe the processes in place in your institution to measure performance of records personnel, whether in the records centre, Archives, or records office. Are there written guidelines or procedures? Are there regular evaluations? Identify three actions you would take to improve the process of measuring performance.

## **Records Centre Forms Control**

All forms used in the records centre should be standardised and controlled. One officer in the records centre should be responsible for controlling the creation of all forms. This officer should ensure that there are adequate stocks, that supplies are kept in convenient places, and that they are filed properly when completed.

If computerisation of records centre procedures is possible, many of the actions recorded by forms can be automated.

*For more information on automating records services, see Automating Records Services.*

# SUMMARY

Lesson 3 has examined the procedures to be followed in the records centre. It has described the following issues and procedures:

- liaison with records offices
- transfer of records to the records centre, including accessioning records
- retrieving and using records held by the records centre
- disposal of records, including destruction or transfer of records to the Archives
- compiling statistical controls
- measuring performance.

It has emphasised the need for standardisation, control of systems and active involvement by the records centre in all aspects of the organisation's records systems.

The following terms have been defined:

- emergency plan
- vital records.

# STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Why should each agency have its own records office?
2. Why should the records centre hold copies of all disposal schedules?
3. How should office staff destroy records scheduled for destruction within one year from their creation?
4. Why should records scheduled for destruction within one year or less of their creation not be transferred to the records centre?
5. Why should the records centre participate in the development of an emergency plan?
6. Why should the records centre participate in the identification of vital records?
7. How can the records centre identify on an ongoing basis the offices that originated records?
8. What records centre actions require transportation of records?
9. What steps should records office staff undertake to prepare records for transfer to the records centre?
10. What is the purpose of the records centre transfer list?
11. Explain the steps involved with determining the action category for records received in the records centre.
12. Explain the steps involved with distributing the transfer list.
13. Explain the steps involved with labelling and storing boxes of new records in the records centre.
14. Explain the steps involved with updating the location register and accessions register once new records are received in the records centre.
15. Write a summary of all procedures involved in transferring records.
16. Identify any specific issues involved with providing access to records by posting them back to the records office.
17. Identify any specific issues with providing access to records requested by telephone or fax.

18. Identify any specific issues with providing access to records requested by someone who comes to the records centre in person.
19. Identify any specific issues with providing access to records by posting them back to the records office.
20. What is the purpose of an issue sticker or red marker attached to the front cover of the records issued for reference?
21. Why should control indexes be checked? How should they be checked?
22. What conditions must be in place for people to consult records in the records centre?
23. Write a summary of all procedures involved with retrieving records for use in the records centre.
24. Why should access to personnel records or other special classes of records be carefully controlled?
25. Name the three ways records can be categorised for disposal.
26. Why should disposal action be undertaken on an annual cycle?
27. What are the advantages and disadvantages of having records centre staff conduct reviews of records?
28. What are the advantages and disadvantages of having records office staff conduct reviews of records?
29. Write a summary of the procedures involved with reviewing records.
30. What is the purpose of a records centre disposal form? What is the purpose of the archives accession form?
31. Explain the steps involved with destroying records in the records centre.
32. Explain the steps involved with transferring records from the records centre to the archival repository.
33. Why should records centre performance be measured?
34. For what purposes can performance statistics be used?
35. Why should records centre forms be managed and controlled?

# ACTIVITIES: COMMENTS

## **Activities 19-28**

Each of the activities in this lesson is intended to have you compare the suggested actions in this lesson with the reality of practices in your institution. There are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers to procedures for managing the records centre. However, the mechanisms established must be accountable and should document clearly all actions taken and decisions made. It is hoped that the information provided in this lesson, along with your analysis and comparison with institutional practices, will help you see the principles behind good records centre care and the options available for improving existing systems.

## WHAT TO DO NEXT?

*Managing Records in Records Centre* has focused on the care of semi-current records. It has addressed the following issues:

- the concept and purpose of a records centre
- the steps involved in planning and developing a records centre
- the principal operating procedures in a records centre.

Once you understand these principles, concepts and practices, the next step is for you to consider what to do next. It is necessary to establish priorities for records centre management and to know where to go to find out more about records centre operations.

## ESTABLISHING PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

This module has introduced key activities in records centre care. But which tasks should you undertake first? Which are high priority and which are low? Each institution will make different decisions based on its environment, administrative structure, needs and short- and long-term plans. However, it is possible to offer some recommendations for action, to help the institution manage its semi-current records in a planned fashion. Complete the next activity then consider the suggestions offered here.

### **Activity 29**

Based on the work you did throughout this module, identify the priorities you would establish to establish or improve a records centre programme for your organisation.

## **Priority 1: Establishing Standardised Processes**

A first priority is to establish standardised procedures for transferring and storing records, regardless of whether there is a formalised records centre or not. Forms should be created to receive records into storage, even if a records centre as such does not exist.

Procedures should be established and written down, and all staff should be trained in their use and required to follow them. The development of standards will help the organisation improve processes; standards also help illuminate where current methods are not working as efficiently as they could.

## **Priority 2: Assessing Current Needs**

A second priority, once day-to-day records care is established, is to conduct an assessment of current needs and determine priorities for action. If the records centre facility is operational and in good physical condition, a first priority might be to review and clarify operating procedures.

If the records centre is in poor condition, or does not exist, an early priority might be to urge senior government support for a records centre facility. If records are clogging records offices, action to transfer them out should be taken as soon as reasonably possible.

## **Priority 3: Preparing an Implementation Programme**

A third priority would be to prepare a plan for the implementation of a fully operational records centre. As discussed in this module, a pilot project helps commence such an implementation programme and shows where systems or processes need to be reviewed or improved.

If possible, it would be ideal to begin by identifying a specific location – even temporary – for the care of semi-current records, then to undertake a pilot project, improve policies and procedures and then move toward a full-fledged records centre operation.



# GETTING HELP

Many institutions, particularly in developing countries, have limited access to information about records management. However, there are places you can go to get more information or to obtain assistance. Following are names and addresses of two agencies that could be contacted for assistance.

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

## Organisations

### **Association of Records Managers and Administrators (ARMA) International**

4200 Somerset Drive #215  
Prairie Village, KS 66208 USA  
Tel: +1 913 341 3808  
Fax: +1 913 341 3742  
Email: [hq@arma.org](mailto:hq@arma.org)  
Website: <http://www.arma.org/>

ARMA International is a not-for-profit association serving more than 10,000 information management professionals in the United States, Canada and over 30 other nations. ARMA International members include records and information managers, MIS and ADP professionals, imaging specialists, archivists, hospital administrators, legal administrators, librarians and educators. The mission of ARMA International is to provide education, research and networking opportunities to information professionals, to enable them to use their skills and experience to leverage the value of records, information and knowledge as corporate assets and as contributors to organisational success.

### **Records Management Society (RMS)**

Woodside  
Coleheath Bottom, Speen  
Princes Risborough  
Bucks HP27 0SZ, UK  
Tel: +44 1494 488599  
Fax: +44 1494 488590  
Email: [bulletin@rms-gb.org.uk](mailto:bulletin@rms-gb.org.uk)  
Website: <http://www.rms-gb.org.uk>

The Records Management Society is open to all those concerned with records and information, regardless of their professional or organisational status or qualifications. Organisations wishing to develop records or information systems and those that provide such services are also welcome. The RMS is developing its own training programmes and extending its range of technical and information publications.

### Activity 30

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 records centre care. 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 very 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.*

### Introduction to Records Centre Issues

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

- \* Bradsher, JG, ed. *Managing Archives and Archival Institutions*. Chicago, IL: Society of American Archivists, 1991
- \* Couture, Carol and Jean-Yves Rousseau. *The Life of a Document: A Global Approach to Archives and Records Management*. Montreal, PQ: Vehicule Press, 1982.

UNESCO. PGI. *Survey of Archival and Records Management Systems and Services 1982*. (RAMP Study PGI-82/WS/3). Paris, FR: UNESCO, 1982.

## Security

Dunn, F.I. *Security: A Guide for Use in Appraising and Implementing Security Systems and Procedures in Archives Operations, covering Buildings, Staff, the Public, and Repository Management* (London, UK: Society of Archivists, 1994). ISBN 0-902886-47-9.

Thomas, David L. *Study on Control of Security and Storage of Holdings*. (RAMP Study PGI-86/WS/23). Paris, FR: UNESCO, 1986.

Walch, Timothy. *Archives and Manuscripts: Security* (Chicago, USA: Society of American Archivists, 1977). ISBN 0-931828-13-9.

### Activity 31

Check your institution's library or resource centre. What books or other resources do you have about records centre management? 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, *Managing Records in a Records Centre*. This lesson has then discussed how to establish priorities for action and suggested that the main priorities for action are often as follows:

- Priority 1: establish standardised procedures
- Priority 2: assess current needs
- Priority 3: prepare an implementation programme.

The lesson then outlined ways to find out more information or get help with records centre issues. The lesson concluded with a discussion of valuable information resources relevant to records centre care.

# STUDY QUESTIONS

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

# ACTIVITIES: COMMENTS

## **Activity 29**

Every institution will find itself at a different stage of development in terms of records management. The priorities established will have to take into account the particular needs of that institution, the region and the country.

## **Activity 30**

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 general information before obtaining specialised publications or information.

## **Activity 31**

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.