

GUIDANCE FOR FILE SECTIONS



photo by J.W. Proctor

produced
by
Departmental Record Office

Photo front cover: View of Pendle Hill from Nelson
by Mr J. W. Proctor

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INTRODUCTION

This booklet has been produced by the Departmental Record Office as a part of our records management programme.

The DRO is responsible for ensuring that the Departments comply with the Public Record Act, 1958, which requires us to retain items of historical or future research value, whilst destroying the remainder when they are no longer needed for administrative purposes.

Prior to 1979 DHSS had only one registry, serving all Central Office and HQ Branches. Following a decision to "de-centralize", individual Branch registries were created – there are currently 400 of these! Each is responsible for registering, maintaining, and storing files; up-dating records of file movements; and referring 'closed' files to branch officers (usually HEO or above), at specified intervals, to review the need to keep them.

Each of the 400 registries has its own unique identification pre-fixes and numbers, which are allocated by the DRO's Central File Records section. This section keeps track of the frequent newly-created, merged, or closed Branch file sections, by maintaining central index lists. You can help by ensuring that we are notified of all such changes.

The DRO's file section Inspector visits each registry in turn to ensure that they are being run efficiently, and are following the correct procedures. Senior officers are notified in advance of the visit, which is like a systems audit, and are given a full written report afterwards. Follow-up checks are made to ensure that remedial action has been taken!

DRO staff are always willing to help or advise you on any registry or records management matter, and you should not hesitate to contact them.

(M V Marsh)
The Departmental Record Officer
January 1989

STRUCTURE OF THE FILING SYSTEM

1. For the system to be efficient it is necessary for staff to be aware of the need to consult with Central File Records when any of the following occur:
 - a) Creation of new file sections
 - b) Amalgamation or transfer of file sections
 - c) Closure of file sections
 - d) Creation of all new file series
 - e) Amalgamation or transfer of part or whole file series
 - f) Closure of a file series
2. File Office Numbers – are allocated by Central File Records to each file section operating within the filing system and each number will be unique to that particular file section. All sections should insert this number before the file prefix on the front cover of files.
3. File Prefixes – are allocated by Central File Records following a written request from the file section. The prefixes being issued at present consist of three letters and are unique to the file section to which they have been allocated. No prefix should be used that has not been allocated by Central File Records.
4. File Sequence Numbers – when opening a new file the next sequential number should be used. e.g. last file was numbered '1045' therefore the next file to be opened in that series will be numbered '1046'. Under no circumstances should the same number be used for two files – except when there is more than one volume to that file, when sequential volume numbers should be added (e.g. '1046 Vol. 1', '1046 Vol. 2' etc).
5. File Covers – all papers should be retained in an orderly manner within a file cover. DRO recommends the use of cover EF491.
6. On opening any new file or volume ensure that the file cover is completed clearly and properly. The date a file 'begins' is the date of the first paper or minute which goes in the file. If a file is opened without the first paper then the 'begins' date should be entered on the file cover as soon as possible. The file reference should be placed in the appropriate box at the top left hand side of the file. An oblique stroke is only necessary when a sub-series is created. The subject title should be placed in the top right hand corner of the file. All files should be kept in alpha-numerical order.

7. Index Slips – (form EF 201H) – to be completed for each file and volume created within the registered file series. The information required on the front of the slip is the same as that on the file cover. The slips should be kept in green binders (code 1921 for stationery order purposes) in alpha numerical order. Ensure that the reverse of the slip is kept up to date with all movements of the file, both in and out of the section. It is important that the 'review' decision is annotated on the slip before the file is despatched to the Departmental Record Office. Index slips should be retained by the file section even after the file has been sent to the Departmental Record Office but may be destroyed 5 years after the date of destruction of the files.
8. Old Volumes – a file should be closed when it reaches a maximum thickness of 3 cm or has a life span of 5 years from the date of the first paper. Note the front of the file cover boldly, preferably in red, with 'CLOSED' across the next unused transit space. Note the 'ends' space with the date of the last action recorded in the file. Also note the index slip with the relevant details.
9. New Volumes – should be opened when a file has reached its maximum thickness of 3 cm or has been closed 5 years after the 'begins' date and new material is to be placed on the file. Ensure that a fresh index slip is made for the new volume. The number of the volume should be in arabic without any continental additions to the 1 and 7.
10. Out of Action Files – after a file has been out of action for a period of 2 years from the date of the last recorded action, the file should be reviewed and the 'Destroy/Review' action box completed by the reviewing officer.
11. B.F. Diary – should be kept and maintained by entering the appropriate dates against the reference of files required by individual officers. The diary should be checked daily, the required files provided and the relevant entries deleted.
12. P.A. Markings – to be placed in the next empty transit/charging grid every time a file is returned to the file section. All previous chargings to be deleted.

COMPOSITION OF A FILE

13. A file is by definition an orderly arrangement of papers on one subject, kept in a secure and logical form. To achieve a uniform presentation of files within the filing system the following should be observed:

- a) The file cover should be clearly marked with the complete reference and full subject title.
- b) Minutes kept on the left hand tag to be numbered in sequence.
- c) Documents on the right hand tag are also numbered in sequence but have an additional suffix letter for example:–
 - i) First or only document – 1A.
enclosures with, or continuation of that document 1B, 1C, 1D.
 - ii) Second document – 2A.
enclosures with, or continuation of that document 2B, 2C, 2D.
- d) Documents which must not have holes punched in them must be placed within a pouch (form PS2) on right hand side.
- e) If it becomes necessary to recover a file, the old front file cover must be placed immediately under the new file cover.

PROCEDURE FOR CLASSIFIED FILES

14. It may be necessary, from time to time, for a file section to deem that a file be classified due to its sensitive nature. For full details on security classifications, opening, handling and despatch of security classified files please read the current Departmental Security Instructions (DSI) Manual. The basic rules to follow are:

- a) Only an officer authorised by branch DPM5 may request a file to be 'classified'.
- b) Only Classified File Office may register, maintain, and despatch a 'classified' file.
- c) All security classified files must be returned to Classified File Office immediately after work on the file has been completed.
- d) If it is necessary to retain a classified file overnight, the file must be kept in the approved type of security cabinet. (DPM5 will provide advice).

15. "IN – CONFIDENCE" FILES – may be registered by the file sections. These files should be kept separate from other files, and placed under lock and key when not in use. Special arrangements can be made with the Departmental Record Officer to preserve the privacy of the files when they are transferred to the Departmental Record Office after review action has been completed.

REDISTRIBUTION OF BUSINESS

16. Central File Records must be informed immediately of any split of a file series or proposal to split a file series. Instructions will be given on what procedures to follow.

CLOSURE OF A FILE SECTION

17. Central File Records must be informed immediately if it is proposed to close a file section. Detailed instructions will then be given.

COMPUTERISATION OF INDEXES

18. In this technological age some file sections may wish to change from a manually maintained index to a computerised index.
19. Under no circumstances should a file section change from one form of index to the other without prior consultation with the Departmental Record Officer. The process of setting-up the system can then begin, but until final approval has been granted the manual index must still be maintained. Once the computer has been programmed a sample 'print out' of details held on the computer index must be sent to the Departmental Record Officer, who will either ask for additional information to be programmed, or will approve the format and give clearance for its use. The disposal of the manual index can then be discussed with Central File Records.
20. Suggested details to be included on a computer 'print out' for file section index purposes are:
 - a) Full File Reference
 - b) Volume Number
 - c) Number of Volumes held
 - d) Full Subject Title
 - e) Room and location
 - f) 'Begins' date
 - g) 'Ends' date
 - h) 'Review' date
 - i) Related papers
 - j) Related files
 - k) Disposal comments
 - l) Transit chargings

EXAMPLE

File No.	ABC 2 Vol 5
Previous Ref.	XYZ 6
File Title	Policy on Office Accommodation
Date opened	01/02/96
Date closed	
P.A. date	
B/F date	
Held by	Mr Smith
Room	001 Ext.
Disposal details	
Date to DRO	
Destruction date	
Review date	

FILE REVIEW ARRANGEMENTS AND PROCEDURES

21. Reviewing of files should be undertaken by an officer of HEO grade or above. In exceptional circumstances prior permission may be granted by the Departmental Record Officer, for reviewing to be undertaken by an officer of EO grade.
22. Files will be passed to the reviewing officer by the file section when the due date for review has been reached.
23. Files are reviewed to investigate two different aspects:
 - a) Administrative value – a file can be reviewed and a recommendation made on its future administrative value. This recommendation is a technical opinion on whether the contents of the file are likely to be required for reference/administrative purposes. The administrative value is best assessed at branch level by the reviewing officer.
 - b) Historical/Research value – see HQ code para 555 for criteria.
24. Possible recommendations:
 - a) 'Destroy now' – the file is to be destroyed at once.
 - b) 'Destroy at First Review' – the file to be given a date for destruction up to 5 years from the date of last action.
 - c) 'Retain for Second Review' – the file is to be retained for 25 years from the date of the first paper. A minute must always be placed on the file stating the reason for retention. When making this recommendation, the cost of storage over 25 years must be borne in mind.
25. After branch review/recommendation all files must be sent, via the file section, to the Departmental Record Office, who will inform the file section if it is decided to retain a file despite the Branch recommendation for destruction.
26. Files that have reached the Second Review date will be assessed, for historical value, by the Departmental Record Office staff in conjunction with the Public Record Office. The branch will be notified of any files which are not to be permanently preserved in the Public Record Office, following this assessment. The branch will be given the option of either agreeing to the destruction of the files, by the Departmental Record Office, or retaining them for administrative purposes. It should be noted that custody of files so retained will be the responsibility of the branch, as they cannot be stored by the Departmental Record Office, and that the approval of the Lord Chancellor must be obtained, via the Departmental Record Office, if files are to be retained for more than 30 years after the date of the last action.

27. When files are referred to the Departmental Record Office, the file section should ensure that:

- a) the review recommendation box at the bottom right hand corner of the file cover is fully completed. Failure to do so will entail the return of the files by Departmental Record Office.
- b) if any correspondence relating to the files is being referred to the Departmental Record Office e.g. special instructions about the disposal of the files ~~on form DRØ 9~~, the file section should attach the correspondence securely to the files to which it relates. The correspondence should not be sent under separate cover.
- c) if, because of the number of files, several separate parcels are required a copy of the correspondence should accompany each parcel.

PRIVATE OFFICE FILES

("Yellow Jackets")

28. The Departmental Record Office is the repository for Private Office files for the Department of Social Security. These files may be requisitioned by the branch at any time up to the date of destruction which is 3 years from the date of last action on the file.
29. Private Office files for the Department of Health are retained by the branch. These should be placed in batches inside registered file covers, treated as ordinary files and sent to the Departmental Record Office for destruction. The only difference being that such a file is not destroyed until the due dates of destruction of all the Private Office files it contains, have passed (i.e. 3 years after the last action).

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