MANAGING PUBLIC SECTOR RECORDS

A Training Programme

Organising and Controlling Current Records

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON ARCHIVES

INTERNATIONAL RECORDS MANAGEMENT TRUST

ORGANISING AND CONTROLLING CURRENT RECORDS

MANAGING PUBLIC SECTOR RECORDS

A STUDY PROGRAMME

General Editor, Michael Roper; Managing Editor, Laura Millar

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Organising and Controlling Current Records

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INTRODUCTION TO *ORGANISING AND CONTROLLING CURRENT RECORDS*

Organising and Controlling Current Records addresses a range of issues relating to records and records management. It looks at the essential role of records in underpinning business efficiency, accountability and the rule of law. It examines the characteristics of records as reliable and accurate 'evidence' of the decisions and actions they document. It considers the principles of 'records control' and the fundamental requirements of a records management system. It then looks in detail at the mechanisms and practices governing the control of current records from the point of their creation. This control ensures that records may be maintained and retrieved efficiently for the use of the current administration and guarantees the effective management of records at all later phases of the life cycle.

The main focus of this module is the file and the documents that make up the file. The file remains the primary record type used by most organisations to support the conduct of day-to-day administration.

Organising and Controlling Current Records consists of nine lessons:

Lesson 1:	The Concepts of Records
Lesson 2:	Principles of Records Control
Lesson 3:	The Infrastructure for a Records Management System
Lesson 4:	Building Sound Record-keeping Systems
Lesson 5:	Managing File Series
Lesson 6:	Creating Files
Lesson 7:	Document Handling
Lesson 8:	Maintaining and Using Files
Lesson 9:	What to Do Next?

The first two lessons deal with the theoretical basis of records and records control. Lessons 3 and 4 look at the foundation of a records management system and the means of re-establishing control of systems that have broken down. Lesson 5 examines the requirements for managing files and considers a range of options for the classification and coding of filing systems. Lessons 6, 7, and 8 look in more detail at the control mechanisms and documentation for files and documents in current use.

Lesson 9 explains where to go for more information on the organisation and control of current records.

Where appropriate, general statements of principle are distinguished from descriptions of specific practice. Where there is a variety of practices, the options are described and an indication given of their advantages and disadvantages in different circumstances.

This module is closely linked to the module on *Analysing Business Systems* and to the associated manuals: *Managing Current Records: A Procedures Manual* and *Restructuring Current Records Systems: A Procedures Manual*. These modules and manuals will help students understand the basic issues, principles and procedures of current records care.

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 current 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 five primary aims. These are

1. to explain the concepts of records and records control

2. to explain the principles and practices of life-cycle records management

3. to outline the steps to be taken in developing or improving record-keeping systems

4. to establish best-practice procedures for the creation, maintenance and use of current records

5. to explain how to obtain more information on current records management issues.

Outcomes

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

1. understand the basic concepts and key characteristics of records
2. recognise the importance of series control and secondary level records control
3. outline the principal requirements of an effective records management system
4. outline the steps involved with building sound record-keeping systems
5. understand the key issues in establishing classification and coding systems
6. identify the key procedures in creating and controlling files
7. identify the key procedures in handling documents
8. identify the key procedures in maintaining and using files
9. know where to go for more information on current records management.

METHOD OF STUDY AND ASSESSMENT

This module is one of the core modules in The Management of Public Sector Records Study Programme. It contains a great deal of information that forms the foundation for understanding topics addressed in other modules. Therefore, this module should be studied carefully and the activities completed as fully as possible.

This module of nine lessons should occupy about 150 hours of your time. You should plan to spend about

8	hours on Lesson 1
20	hours on Lesson 2
20	hours on Lesson 3
20	hours on Lesson 4
25	hours on Lesson 5
20	hours on Lesson 6
15	hours on Lesson 7
15	hours on Lesson 8

7 hours on Lesson 9.

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 9.

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. You are encouraged to write down your answers for all of the activities and keep the answers together in a booklet or file; you may want to refer back to your answers as you work through this module or through other modules in this study programme. 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.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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. 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

As mentioned above, associated with this module is the training manual *Managing Current Records: 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. Also associated with this module is the manual *Restructuring Current Records Systems: A Procedures Manual*, which examines methods for reorganising systems that have collapsed or are not functioning properly. Again, users will find this manual provides more detailed procedural information than is contained in the module.

Case Studies

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

Case Study:

7: Andrew Evborokhai, The Gambia, 'Development of a Records Management Programme in The Gambia'

14: Cassandra Findlay, Australia, 'Development and Implementation of the Immigration Department's New International Traveller Movements System'

21: Setareki Tale, Fiji, 'Improving Records Control and Storage in Papakura'

25: Ann Pederson, Australia, 'Scheduling the Records of the Wagga Wagga Outpost of the New South Wales Forestry Commission'

28: Ann Pederson, Australia, 'Management Case Study: Revising the Record-keeping Programme for the Widget Manufacturing Company'

LESSON 1

THE CONCEPTS OF RECORDS

Lesson 1 examines the central concepts of records. It introduces the latest international thinking on the role of records in society, identifies the essential characteristics of records and introduces some general principles relating to records management and record keeping. Topics discussed include

- the importance of records
- records as evidence
- the essential characteristics of records
- understanding the value of records
- the records life cycle and the concept of the continuum
- the general principles of records management and record keeping
- users of records.

THE IMPORTANCE OF RECORDS

Records are critical to the operations of any organisation.

No government body or business could survive without making records of its activities. No office could operate successfully if it had to rely on memory alone to keep track of every transaction. Without records, all organised administration would quickly come to a halt. Records, and more specifically the information they contain, are one of the vital resources that an organisation needs to conduct its operations effectively. No organisation could continue without funding, personnel and material supplies. Similarly, it could not operate if it did not keep accurate and accessible records.

Activity 1

Before reading further in this lesson, write down at least five different reasons records are important, in your opinion. What administrative tasks do records help organisations do? What benefits do records provide for citizens?

In the context of an organisation's business activities, records help to

- provide a corporate memory
- formulate policy
- make appropriate decisions
- achieve greater efficiency, productivity and consistency
- meet statutory and regulatory requirements
- protect the organisation's interests and those of its staff and clients
- reduce the risks associated with missing evidence of decisions and actions
- document activities and achievements.

In the public sector, records are fundamental to the concept of democracy. Recorded information underpins the protection of human rights, the rule of law and fair and equal treatment of citizens. Citizens should expect their government to maintain reliable and accurate documentary evidence of its decisions and actions.

For example, records are the basis for determining whether revenue collected on behalf of citizens is spent in a way that benefits them: on health, education and other services. Records also protect citizens' rights, such as their rights to ownership of land, documented through land registration records, or their rights to pensions, documented through employee or personnel records. Records also enable citizens to obtain legal redress in cases where their rights are not upheld.

Records as Evidence

Without records to provide documentary evidence of its activities, no government or organisation can be held accountable. Accountability is established when evidence can be provided about what public servants knew, when they should have known about it, what action they took and the outcome of their activities. Records document compliance with laws, rules and procedures. Reliable records can serve as evidence to identify abuses of position misuse of resources and non-compliance with financial regulations. Records provide verifiable evidence of fraud and can lead investigators to the root of corruption. Well-managed records can act as a cost-effective restraint. Prevention of fraud is cheaper than the cost to the state of corruption and prosecution.

Records help to preserve a nation's sense of identity.

Records also help to preserve a nation's collective memory. Those records that have a permanent value are kept as archives and provide essential evidence in the chain of history. They give people their sense of identity; they serve as a country's documentary memory.

However, the activities of an organisation do not automatically result in the creation of records. When records are created, they must be accessible and usable for as long as they have a value. Organisations need to develop strategies and procedures to ensure that records are created and maintained and are available when required. This is one of the functions of records management.

***Records management*:** That area of general administrative management concerned with achieving economy and efficiency in the creation, maintenance, use and disposal of the *records* of an organisation throughout their entire life cycle and in making the information they contain available in support of the business of that organisation.

Records management aims to supply the right record to the right person, at the right time and at the least possible cost.

When records systems break down, there are major consequences for governments and citizens. Consider the following examples.

- Officials are forced to take decisions on an ad hoc basis without the benefit of an institutional memory.
- Fraud cannot be proven and meaningful reporting and audits cannot be carried out.
- Government actions are not transparent.
- Citizens cannot claim or protect their rights.
- Citizens cannot make an informed contribution to the governance process.
- The nation's collective memory is impaired.

One of today's challenges is to ensure that from the mass of data and information created in paper and electronic form, reliable evidence of business transactions is captured, is accessible and is disposed of effectively when no longer required.

Guidance on preserving evidence in an electronic environment is available in Managing Electronic Records.

Defining Records

Activity 2

Before reading further in this lesson, write down your own definition of a record. What do you think is the difference between records and information?

Records come in a variety of physical forms, such as paper documents, files, registers, maps, photographs, microfilms and data in electronic form. However, it is not their format that defines records. In fact, computer-held records have no physical form and only exist as logical assemblages of electronic data, yet they can still be records. Records are the products of a business activity: it is the evidence of activities or transactions contained in records that makes them records.

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.

A record implies evidence written down or recorded in some other way and retained so that it can be read and accessed again. Records are able to convey information independent of human memory. They may ultimately have some value for historical research, but they are not created in the interests of future researchers. Records are maintained by or on behalf of those responsible for the activities or transactions they reflect, and they are kept for the future use of those responsible, or their successors.

It is their 'evidential' nature that distinguishes records from other types of data or information.

Information: Knowledge that is communicated.

***Data** (pl.):* The representation of information in a formalised manner suitable for communication, interpretation and processing, generally by a computer system. *Note:* the term 'raw data' refers to unprocessed information.

For example, published materials may provide important information to support business activities, but they do not provide the evidence of those activities. A record is more than data. A record gives data, or information, meaning and context by

linking it to the activity or transaction, which it documents and from which it arose. Only records serve as evidence of the conduct of business.

In this module, the term 'document' is used in the sense of a single discrete unit of recorded information, published or unpublished, in hard copy or electronic form. It may be a physical and intellectual entity (such as a letter, memorandum, report or printout of a computer-held document) or an intellectual entity only (such as a document held in electronic form on a computer)

***Document*:** A unit of recorded information.

THE ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF RECORDS

Because records arise from actual happenings, they represent a 'frozen' picture. A record fixes an action within its particular context of function, authority, place and time. Certain essential characteristics of records may be identified.

- Records are static in form.
- Records have authority.
- Records are unique when in context.
- Records are authentic.

Records are Static

During the process of creating a record, a document will go through a phase of development and change. For example, minutes of a meeting will be produced in draft form and reviewed by the members of the committee before being approved. Once this process of creation, or drafting, is finished and the document is considered complete, it may be regarded as a record. In order to provide evidence, the record must now be fixed and must not be susceptible to change. If a record is changed or manipulated in some way, it no longer provides evidence of the transaction it originally documented. If someone alters the minutes of a meeting after they have been approved, the minutes can no longer be considered an accurate record of the meeting.

However, drafts themselves, such as the draft minutes, may be considered 'records', since they can be considered completed documents at a certain stage of development; that is, as draft minutes.

Records are static; they provide evidence of a particular action in time.

Records Have Authority

Records provide the 'official' evidence of the activity or transaction they document. Records must be reliable and trustworthy. The reliability of a record is linked to its creation. Who generated or issued the record? Under what authority? Can this authority be proved? Consider again the case of the draft and final minutes. The committee has the authority to confirm that the minutes accurately represent the events of the meeting. If someone changed the minutes after the committee had approved them, he or she perhaps did not have the authority. Those revised minutes may be evidence of that person's view of the meeting but they are not the 'official' record of the meeting as authorised by the committee.

Signatures, letterheads, seals and office stamps are obvious indicators of the official nature of records. However, not all records have official stamps or seals. The continuous safekeeping of records is one important way to protect their reliability. If the official version of the minutes is filed by the records manager and thus protected from change, the unauthorised version will not form part of the official record. The authority of the official version will remain intact.

Records have authority; they provide official evidence.

Records Are Unique

Records are not isolated bits of information. They have meaning because they were generated during a particular transaction or business process. The records make sense within the context of the overall functions and activities of the individual or organisation that created or used them. Their relationship with other records makes them unique.

The minutes may not be 'unique' in that there may be ten copies made available to all members of the committee. But the minutes are unique within the context of that organisation, because the official copy represents one event – the meeting – that only took place with those committee members on that day at that place.

Copies of a record may be unique within another context. For example, if one member of the committee gives his or her copy of the minutes to a colleague, with a cover note suggesting that the format used for minute-taking may be of value to the colleague's organisation, those minutes become a new record. They are part of a separate set of transactions between that one member and the colleague. For this reason, the context of the record (the activity and authority that gave rise to it) is vital

and must be preserved. Only by knowing how and why a record was created and used can its contents be fully understood.

Records are unique; they have meaning in relation to a specific action or transaction.

Records Are Authentic

It must be possible to prove that records are what they say they are. The authenticity of a record is derived from the record-keeping system in which it was created or received, maintained and used. A record is authentic if it can be verified that it is now exactly as it was when first transmitted or set aside for retention. For example, a letter received in an office may be date-stamped, registered and placed on a file. The file containing the letter is tracked throughout its use and stored in a records office when not in use.

Think again of the minutes. In order to prove that the 'official' minutes are in fact authentic, it is necessary to be able to show that they were produced, approved and then filed appropriately in the organisation's record-keeping system. Without this process for authenticating records, the 'unofficial' version produced by that one member after the fact could be mistaken for the official record.

Records today may be produced in a range of systems and stored in a range of media, including paper and electronic forms; different versions may be stored in different media in different locations. One of the dangers today, with the advent of sophisticated information technologies such as computers, is that information can be extracted from the record that originally conveyed it; the information can then be taken out of its context. An electronic version of the minutes can be altered and could replace the original version without anyone noticing the difference. Similarly, new versions of the minutes could be made using electronic technologies, just as in the examples earlier. As a result no copy can be guaranteed to be authentic.

Consider another example. A government department may be responsible for buildings and physical plant maintenance. As part of its responsibilities, it might create architectural plans for a new building. It might also take photographs of that building as it is built and it might create minutes and reports of various stages of construction. Each type of material is a record. The architectural drawings, photographs, and minutes gain meaning as records by being retained as part of the entirety of records relating to the construction of that particular building. The materials would lose their meaning if they were removed from the whole body of records relating to the work of that government department and kept as single items, without information about their origins or context.

Records are authentic; their creation and use can be verified.

THE QUALITY OF RECORDS

Just as records need to be created and maintained to provide documentary evidence, they also have to be of sufficient quality and completeness. To carry out its business functions effectively and to be accountable, an organisation must keep full and accurate records. Without full and accurate records, officials could not conduct their business. The conduct of that business could not be scrutinised and the financial, legal and other rights of the organisation, its clients and any other people affected by its actions and decisions could not be protected.

> *Records cannot achieve the four characteristics discussed above if they are not maintained appropriately.*

To serve their purpose in providing reliable evidence, records must be accurate, complete and comprehensive. Records, in both paper and electronic form, should be

- **comprehensive:** a record should be created for every transaction for which evidence is required
- **accurate:** a record should accurately document the transaction that gives rise to it
- **adequate:** a record should be adequate for the purposes for which it is kept (in other words, the record should contain the information necessary to provide evidence of the transaction it documents)
- **complete and meaningful:** as well as containing sufficient information to document a transaction, a record should include sufficient information about the context in which it was created and used, about its structure or physical form, and about its linkages to other records, to enable its contents to be understood
- **understandable and usable:** it should be possible to extract from the record the information it contains and is intended to convey; and it should be possible to use the record without loss of information
- **authentic:** as already noted, it should be possible to prove that the record is what it says it is
- **unaltered:** no information in the record should be deleted, altered or lost, whether deliberately or accidentally, once the transaction that gave rise to it has taken place (in other words, records must be securely maintained, and unauthorised access or use must be prevented)
- **compliant:** the record should comply with any regulatory and accountability requirements that apply to the organisation that created it, such as audit requirements.

Thus if records are to be full and complete, reliable and authentic, they must be managed within systems that control them throughout their existence, from creation to ultimate disposal.

The control of records is dealt with in Lesson 2.

Activity 3

Can you think of two examples of types of records that do **not** meet the criteria discussed above? Write down at least two examples for each of the following qualities of records:

comprehensive
accurate
adequate
complete and meaningful
understandable and usable
authentic
unaltered
compliant.

These characteristics of records in an electronic environment are discussed in detail in Managing Electronic Records.

PRINCIPLES OF RECORDS AND ARCHIVES MANAGEMENT

One of the longstanding principles of records and archives management is the concept of *respect des fonds*. Originally a French term, *respect des fonds* is often defined simply as 'respect for the creator of the records.' The principle of *respect des fonds* consists of two related concepts: provenance and original order. Provenance refers to the 'office of origin' of the records; original order refers to the order and organisation in which the documents were created or stored by that office of origin.

***Respect des fonds*:** Respect for the creator of the records or archives, involving the maintenance of provenance and original order.

***Provenance*:** The organisation or individual that created or received, maintained and used records while they were still current.

***Original order*:** The order in which documents were created, arranged and maintained by the office of origin.

The principal of provenance emphasises the conceptual rather than the physical characteristics of records. As we have seen, it is the 'evidential' nature of records, rather than their physical format, that distinguishes them from other kinds of information. Provenance also provides the basis for retrieving information from records. Knowing who created or used a record, and where, when and why, provides the key to retrieval rather than format, subject matter or content of the records.

Archivists and records managers must concern themselves with the record-creating process itself, rather than be passive recipients of records.

It is not sufficient to study the record and its physical nature and characteristics. Records professionals must understand the business functions, activities and working practices that cause documents to be created. Records and archives managers need to be involved in records care from the beginning and care for them as part of a continuum of care. For example, it is no use designing a classification scheme that does not match the business processes that give rise to the records to be classified. Equally, it is illogical to wait for records to arrive in the archival institution before appraising them and identifying what should be kept; in many instances records will no longer be available to appraise if they are not managed at the point of creation.

Phases of the Life Cycle of Records

The life cycle and continuum concepts are outlined in detail in the module *The Management of Public Sector Records, Principles and Context*. In order to understand how to organise and control current records, it is important to understand the concept of the three phases of the life cycle.

In the current phase, records are regularly used in the conduct of current business and are maintained in their place of origin or in the file store of an associated records office or registry.

***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.

In the semi-current phase, records are still used, but only infrequently, in the conduct of current business and are maintained in a records centre.

***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.

In the non-current phase, records are no longer used for the conduct of current business and are therefore destroyed unless they have a continuing value for other purposes, which merits their preservation as archives in an archival institution.

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

For more information on the life-cycle concept, see The Management of Public Sector Records: Principles and Context.

Records follow a life cycle, and their care should be part of a continuum, with records and archives managers involved at all stages.

THE PURPOSE OF RECORDS MANAGEMENT

Activity 4

Before reading further, write down your own understanding of the purpose of records management, based on the information you have read so far in this study programme. Can you name at least three benefits to a functioning records management programme?

Broadly speaking, records management is concerned with all the processes by which recorded information helps an organisation achieve its operational and business needs and meet its requirements for accountability. Records management is not an end in itself. It is a vital component of business activity and, in a broader sense, a

cornerstone of the effective functioning of organisations and society at large over time.

Records management is a cornerstone of effective operations in an organisation.

Organisations rely on efficient access to information. Records management is fundamental to policy formulation, decision making, business operations and organisational accountability. The process of records management captures evidence of an organisation's transactions, documents its activities and decisions and provides ready access to this evidence.

Records management enables an organisation to create, maintain, use, store and dispose of its records efficiently and cost-effectively. It helps the organisation conduct its business, deliver its services and meet regulatory and accountability requirements. It promotes the pooling and sharing of information and helps make good use of precedents and organisational experience. It also enables an organisation to control the volume of records being created, received and stored. Records management not only maintains records economically; it also promotes operational efficiency by improving access to information through the removal of unneeded records from current systems. Finally, records management controls the retirement and disposal of records once their value for business purposes has ended.

Taking into account the concepts of records management mentioned earlier, we might summarise the aims of records management as follows:

- managing records throughout their life cycle, beginning with the design of a record-keeping system to the destruction of records or their transfer to the archival institution
- providing services to met the needs and protect the interests of the organisation, its staff and clients
- capturing complete, accurate, reliable and usable documentation of the organisation's activities to met its legal, regulatory, evidential and accountability needs
- managing records as a resource
- promoting efficiency and economy through sound record-keeping practices.

The various stages of an integrated records management programme are described in The Management of Public Sector Records, Principles and Context.

The Concept of Record Keeping

The term 'record keeping' has already been mentioned in this study programme, but what exactly does it mean? Record keeping is a core function of records management. It has evolved from the need to preserve complete, reliable and accurate evidence of, and the source of authority for, rights, decisions and transactions.

> ***Record keeping:*** The processes of creating and maintaining complete and accurate records of business activities.

Communicating by letter as part of a business activity usually means creating an original letter to be sent and then retaining a copy of the original. For both the recipient and sender, these documents serve as evidence of the activity. Record keeping involves maintaining that letter so that it serves as a valid and authentic record.

Some business activities, such as telephone conversations and meetings, do not themselves generate a record. Similarly, an electronic transaction or message does not automatically create a record as defined here. In these instances, record keeping involves taking steps to record the meeting, decision or electronic transaction and to capture the activity in a record-keeping system so that the evidence of it is maintained and is accessible.

As a general principle, the aim of good record keeping should always be to build the creation and capture of records into the business process itself, rather than require people to create records as the need arises. For example, formal meetings need to be documented in agendas, minutes and associated papers. Similarly, electronic mail needs to be captured so that its content and context are preserved and are accessible.

> *Records should be the natural products of the systems used to conduct business and carry out transactions.*

Activity 5

Can you think of three activities you do that you always document? Can you think of three activities that you do not document? Write down a list of as many activities as you can think of and ask yourself why you do or do not document them. Should you document them? Why or why not?

Organisations need to develop specific strategies to ensure that their activities are documented. Record creation and record keeping must be part of the organisational culture and should be the collective responsibility of staff at different levels in an organisation.

For example, action officers have a responsibility to ensure that copies of all records they generate in the course of business transactions are incorporated in the record-keeping system. This usually means ensuring that all the documents they receive or generate in the course of their work are filed. Likewise, records staff are responsible for ensuring that the right records are available at the right time. Everyone involved with records care must have clearly defined responsibilities.

Whether paper-based or electronic or a mixture of both, record-keeping systems are in essence a set of procedures and controls to ensure that

- records are created
- records are captured
- records are full and accurate
- records can be identified and found when required
- records are accessible
- records are secure
- records are not destroyed when still required
- responsibilities for record-keeping functions are assigned.

> *The principal aim of record keeping is to control the processes of creating, identifying, organising, accessing,, using, maintaining, storing and disposing of records.*

The requirements of record keeping are dealt with in more detail later in this module. Meeting the aims of record keeping in an electronic environment is discussed in Managing Electronic Records.

USERS OF RECORDS

As we have seen, records are the product of administrative and business activity. They are created either as a product of or to provide evidence for the activity they document. Records supply the corporate memory; they are a source of information about decisions, events and transactions that happened in the past.

However, records are not always used for the purpose for which they were created. In both government offices and archival institutions, records may be used for a wide range of purposes, such as the following.

- Governments need well-managed records to uphold the rule of law, to be accountable for their actions and to ensure that the interests of citizens are protected.
- Executives need records to enable them to formulate policy and make decisions on the basis of well-organised, accurate and comprehensive information.
- Action officers and administrators need well-structured, complete and accessible records so that they have the information available to them to implement policy, deliver services to citizens, manage resources and carry out their work.
- Auditors and other regulators need access to the information in records to ensure that resources have been used fairly and honestly, that programmes and procedures have been carried out and that standards have been met.
- Ombudsmen, or official 'watchdogs', need records to determine whether or not decisions and actions have been taken fairly and equitably.
- People need access to the information in records to ensure that their rights and interests are protected and to enable them to make an informed contribution to the government process.
- Historians and researchers need access to records as evidence of what happened in the past.
- The community at large needs certain records to be permanently preserved as archives to enable today's society to connect with the past.

Records may actually be used for a wide variety of purposes, from the development of government policy to the study of a country's history.

HOW SENIOR MANAGEMENT CAN HELP THE RECORDS MANAGER

It takes time and effort to restructure records management systems to meet an organisation's changing requirements. New systems must be based on a careful analysis of needs, which may involve detailed study of existing systems, business processes, the information that records contain and the use made of that information. In order to match requirements, new systems must be carefully designed so that all the processes of creating, receiving, distributing, using and disposing of records are effectively controlled. Once the new systems have been designed, their introduction needs to be planned through a programme of technical training for records staff and awareness training for the users of the records.

Therefore, records managers need strong support from senior management so that adequate time and resources can be invested in designing and introducing new records systems. This investment will bring benefits, such as better planning and decision making, cost-savings, increased efficiency and productivity, improved working environments and greater accountability.

Institutions need to promote an environment in which effective records management is encouraged. Senior management should support an agenda that includes

- developing an efficient records service that meets the needs of the organisation
- promoting a culture of reliable and accessible records
- strengthening the role of records management within the organisation
- developing and strengthening records legislation, regulations and policy
- defining and implementing records-related standards
- providing incentives for better records management and disciplinary action for poor record keeping.

Promoting records care to senior management is discussed in Strategic Planning for Records and Archives Services.

SUMMARY

Lesson 1 has introduced the concepts of records. It has looked at the importance of records to government and society and the value of records as documentary evidence. It has dealt with the essential characteristics of records and how archivists and records managers are best placed to understand the concepts and value of records. It has introduced the life cycle and continuum models of records management. It has considered the general principles of records management and record keeping, the range of uses of records and how senior management can help the records manager.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What are records?

2. What is information?

3. What do records help an organisation to do?

4. Why are public sector records fundamental to the concept of democracy?

5. How do records serve as evidence?

6. How do records preserve a nation's collective memory?

7. What is records management?

8. What can happen to government and citizens when a records system breaks down?

9. Explain the concept that records are static.

10. Explain the concept that records have authority.

11. Explain the concept that records are unique within their context.

12. Explain the concept that records are authentic.

13. Define the following terms related to the quality of records:

    comprehensive
    accurate
    adequate
    complete and meaningful
    understandable and usable
    authentic
    unaltered
    compliant.

14. Explain the principles of *respect des fonds*, provenance and original order.

15. What is the life-cycle concept?

16. What is the continuum concept?

17. Define current records, semi-current records and non-current records.

18. What are the records management actions and archives management actions involved with the process of identification and acquisition of records?

19. What are the records management actions and archives management actions involved with the process of intellectual control of records?

20. What are the records management actions and archives management actions involved with the process of providing access to records?

21. What are the records management actions and archives management actions involved with the process of physical control of records?

22. What is the purpose of records management?

23. Describe five aims of records management.

24. Explain the concept of record keeping.

25. What processes are controlled by record-keeping systems?

26. Who uses records and why?

27. Name at least five steps senior management could support in order to ensure a records system functions well.

ACTIVITIES: COMMENTS

Activity 1

There are many reasons records are important, some of which are outlined in this lesson. Compare your answers with the information given in this lesson and amend your list if you wish, to add more information.

Activity 2

Again, compare your own definitions and explanations with the information provided in this lesson. Did your definition of records conform with the definition in this lesson?

Activity 3

A record may not be **comprehensive** if it is only created for some transactions and not for others. If the process is ad hoc, evidence is not always being captured when it should be. What if minutes are taken of some meetings but not of others? The record cannot be considered comprehensive.

A record may not be **accurate** if it contains deliberately false information or does not represent all the facts that should have been documented. What if the minutes record that people were present but other documents prove they were not there? Such falsification makes the record inaccurate and therefore suspect.

A record may not be **adequate** if part of it is missing or if important information is missing, such as who authored the record, when it was made, or why it was made. What if only the last two pages of the minutes are kept but not the cover page providing the contextual information: when the meeting was, where it was held, and so on? The record would not be adequate.

A record that does not identify the organisation or agency, that is missing sections, or that cannot be linked to other records is not **complete** and **meaningful**. What if a record were removed from its file folder and just kept by itself? Its context is lost and it is not complete or meaningful.

What if an electronic record cannot be opened or read using any software available to the organisation? It may no longer be understandable or usable because no one can access the information on the computer disk.

If a record was created falsely or if it cannot be shown that the record is a true record, it may not be **authentic.** What if the minutes were rewritten by one of the board members after the meeting; the minutes may not be the authentic, approved version.

If part of a record is deleted, rewritten, or lost, it is not **unaltered.** What if the original minutes were deleted and the board member retyped them, recalling from memory what transpired in the meeting? The attempt to recreate the minutes may be honourable but the records are still altered.

If records do not comply with regulatory or accountability requirements, they are not **compliant.** What if the minutes of the meeting had to be filed according to a

particular procedure but this was not done because they were lost and recreated by a board member? The minutes no longer comply with the procedures outlined.

Activity 4

Compare your answers with the information in this lesson. Did your answer match the definition in the lesson? Did you identify similar benefits to those discussed here?

Activity 5

Do you always document the deposit of your pay cheque or your regular payments for expenses? Most people document financial transactions, because they want to guarantee that they have evidence that they paid a bill or received a payment. What about other daily activities? Do you document exactly when you arrive or leave work? Do you document what you had for lunch? Do you document all the phone calls you make or receive? People tend not to document more mundane activities because there is little reason to prove later that they did that particular task.

What if you received a disturbing phone call from someone at work? You might document this in order to bring the information to your supervisor. You may realise that the call was inappropriate and that further action might be taken about it in future, so you want 'proof' that the call came in and that it was disturbing

LESSON 2

THE CONCEPT OF CONTROLLING RECORDS

Lesson 2 introduces the main concepts and principles involved with and the mechanisms used for controlling records. Many of the topics discussed in this lesson are discussed further in later lessons. This lesson provides a theoretical foundation for the control of records; Lesson 3 expands on this foundation by examining the infrastructure required for a records management system. Lesson 4 then describes the actual processes of building new or improved systems. Later lessons in this module deal with classification schemes and the detailed procedures for organising and controlling records.

Topics discussed in this lesson include

- the general principles of records control
- loss of control
- the primary level of control: the records series
- secondary levels of control: registration, classification, indexing, tracking and appraisal and disposal.

PRINCIPLES OF RECORDS CONTROL

No matter how good a records management system is in theory, in practice it will only be as good as the level of control that is exercised over its elements. Establishing control over the creation and organisation of records must be regarded as the most important record-keeping function.

> *Records control is a prerequisite to all the other record-keeping functions, including using, storing and disposing of records.*

It is not possible to decide how long a record needs to be retained or stored or how its usability can be assured without having control of the record at its point of creation or receipt. This control comes from knowing the functions or activities that gave rise to

the record, the context in which it was created and the nature and essential characteristics of the record itself.

Re-establishing records control when systems have not been functioning well is dealt with in detail in Lesson 4.

Effective systems control both the individual records and bodies of related records and also the 'metadata' or information about the records themselves (who created them, when, where, for what purpose and so on).

Metadata: The information about a record that explains the technical and administrative processes used to create, manipulate, use and store that record.

Metadata is a term often used in relation to the management of electronic records. See Managing Electronic Records *for more information on metadata.*

Metadata is information about how records were created, stored and used.

Control systems can be large or small, may operate in traditional registries or records offices (current records), repositories (semi-current and non-current records), in an electronic environment or together in any combination of the three. Regardless of scope, the overall purpose of control is constant: it is to identify and organise records produced by record-keeping systems so that they can be easily accessed, stored and retrieved for appropriate use by authorised persons for as long as they are required.

The purpose of records control is to identify and organise records produced by record-keeping systems so that they can be easily accessed, stored and maintained and retrieved for use.

Loss of Control

In the past, record keepers have been able to manage records adequately because the volume of records generated has been within manageable bounds. As well, the slow rate of administrative change, the gradual evolution of the media in which records are made and the narrow scope and extent of administration meant that record keepers could maintain reasonable access to records without developing complex systems or procedures.

More recently, however, records professionals have been unable to keep up with the rapid pace of change as the activities of the state have rapidly expanded. Moreover, in the past few decades, information technology has leapt forward without any consideration for the quality of records and the preservation of evidence over time. The records profession around the world has been slow in responding both to the challenge of new technologies and communication systems and to the needs of the creators and users of modern records.

> *The nature of modern records means that good record keeping is essential to an organisation's efficiency and effectiveness.*

Thus the huge volume of modern paper records, the non-physical nature of electronic records, the emphasis on data and information rather than contextual evidence and the rapid growth in the use of personal computers all threaten to bring chaos to the management of records. Some of the symptoms of a failure to manage records effectively are

- the loss of control over the creation and use of records
- the loss of control over access
- the fragmentation of official records
- the existence of different versions of the same information and the absence of a definitive or authentic record
- the loss of contextual information, such as the originator and the date of creation
- the ease with which electronic records can be changed
- technology-related difficulties in retrieving records
- the misuse of records, such as unauthorised access to or alternation of records.

Whether the loss of control has come from an increased dependence on electronic information or the breakdown of traditional registry systems has resulted in inadequate management, the consequences are the same. In the absence of reliable control systems, action officers and the users of records become their own records creators and managers, keeping records to serve their own immediate and limited needs.

Countries around the world are threatened by the breakdown of records control. This has prompted archivists and records managers to attempt to design national codes of practice and standards for records management. These standards provide guidance on implementing strategies and procedures in any organisation that needs to control and manage its records in order to meet its business, legal and accountability requirements, and those of its staff and clients, and the wider cultural needs of society at large.

See lesson 9 for more information on national and international standards.

Activity 6

What mechanisms are used in your organisation to control how records are created, used and maintained? Do you think those systems are effective or could they be improved? How might they be improved? Write down as many mechanisms as you can think of that are used to control records and for each one describe steps you might take to make it work more efficiently.

THE PRIMARY LEVEL OF CONTROL: SERIES CONTROL

There are two principal levels at which records can be controlled: the primary level (records series) and the secondary level (registration, classification, indexing, tracking and appraisal and disposal).

For much of the last century, the main record-keeping systems in many organisations managed paper files. All records received or generated in the course of day-to-day business – such as correspondence, reports, memos and other documents – were placed on files. The contents of each file usually related to one particular function, activity or subject. For paper records, the file was the physical entity, made up mainly of paper documents kept together because they were related to each other. A physical file told its own discrete story, documenting a well-defined area of business or a particular type of transaction.

Today, many organisations are creating more and more of their records using electronic technologies. Records created or received electronically (such as word-processed documents and electronic mail messages) can be printed as paper copies and added to the relevant files. Alternatively, these electronic records can remain in an electronic filing system that mirrors the paper filing system. For practical purposes, it is often better to print electronic messages and file the print document, especially if the record-keeping system is a mixture of paper and electronic records. It is possible to maintain electronic records instead, but the processes involved can be quite complex and the technological costs can be high.

Managing records in electronic format is discussed in Managing Electronic Records.

Regardless of whether files are accumulations of paper documents or computer held records linked electronically, the file remains the basic intellectual entity that brings together records related to the same function or activity. Filing is a necessary part of managing records in an office environment no matter the medium.

The file is the basic intellectual entity that brings together records related to the same function or activity.

Just as documents or records may be organised into files, files may be organised into series. The primary level of arrangement and control of records is by series.

***Series*:** The level of arrangement of the files and other records of an organisation or individual that brings together those relating to the same function or activity or having a common form or some other relationship arising from their creation, receipt or use. Also known as a file series or records series.

Records in a series are linked together because

- the records relate to the same functions and activities
- the records are the products of those functions and activities.

When control systems based on series are well devised and consistently applied, they help facilitate retrieval beyond the current into the semi-current and archival phases of the life cycle. Good management of current files in the records office ensures that disposal decisions are reduced as much as possible to a routine. It also facilitates archival arrangement in accordance with the principles of *respect des fonds,* provenance and original order. Control of records based on series, called 'series control', also makes it possible to transfer a whole file series with the function it serves when there is an administrative reorganisation.

Series control is the logical arrangement of records into series as the basis for their management.

Activity 7

Can you identify three or four series of records found in your organisation? Remember, series in a series are linked together because the records relate to the same functions and activities and the records are the products of those functions and activities.

Write a description of at least three or four series of records, and explain the functions and activities the records reflect. How are these records managed? Are they controlled as a series or are they managed as individual files? How might you ensure that records are controlled as series?

Business Systems Analysis

Business systems analysis is used to determine the series level of arrangement and provide the logical framework for series control. The records that make up the series generally share the same business context: they are created, accumulate and used as part of the same processes. Thus, different record series reflect the different functions and business processes of the organisation.

Sometimes called functional analysis or business process analysis, business systems analysis can be applied to any organisation, regardless of its size or whether it is public or private. The organisation is viewed as a system with inter-related components. Business systems analysis identifies and breaks down the organisation into these component parts. It is a means of understanding the business functions of an organisation, and the activities and transactions that are performed as part of those functions. Business systems analysis tells us what an organisation does in order to achieve its objectives and shows the linkages between tasks, people and information.

Records managers can use business systems analysis as a tool to understand how records and business work together. The analysis of an organisation's business functions and activities is also used as a basis for designing the classification and coding scheme, and in determining retention and disposal requirements for its records.

Using business systems analysis to establish or restructure a records management system is examined in Lesson 4. Business systems analysis is discussed in greater detail in Analysing Business Systems. *Some examples of how business systems analysis can be related to record series are given in* Restructuring Current Records Systems: A Procedures Manual.

SECONDARY LEVELS OF CONTROL

As we have seen, the records series is the primary level of control throughout the life cycle of records. At a lower level, other control mechanisms are used to manage records from the point of their creation or receipt and enable them to be identified, retrieved and used when required.

Five mechanisms are used at the secondary level to manage records systematically:

- **registration:** to provide evidence that a record has been created or received
- **classification:** to assign a record to its proper physical and intellectual place within the records management system
- **indexing:** to label records to enable them to be searched for and retrieved

- **tracking:** to document the physical movement of records so their location is known at all times
- **appraisal and disposal:** to take the appropriate action as soon as a record has moved beyond first the 'current' phase then the semi-current phase.

Records can also be controlled by the processes of registration, classification, indexing, tracking and appraisal and disposal.

Registration

The act of registering a record provides evidence that the record has been created or received and has been captured by the record-keeping system. Typically, registration involves providing a brief description of the record and adding a unique identifier so that the record can be filed and retrieved easily.

Registration: The process of recording standard information about a document so that it is captured in a record-keeping system.

Recording letters received in an incoming correspondence register is an example of registration. This is a document-based registration system: it controls records document by document. Some record-keeping systems, such as the index to a filing system, are file based. Incoming correspondence is dealt with differently in a file-based system. When a document is received, the first step is to determine whether or not a file has already been opened on the activity or subject to which the document relates. If a file exists, the document is placed immediately on the file and sent to an action officer. If no file exists, a new file is created. New files are 'registered' when they are first opened: details of the files are recorded in the control documentation. 'Registered files' is a common term to describe files organised and numbered in a classification scheme.

Registered files are those files organised and numbered in a classification scheme.

One system may include both document-based controls and file-based controls, with links between them. For example, a register of incoming correspondence will indicate the file on which each letter or document has been placed. Each file may include at the front a list of all the documents it contains.

In traditional record-keeping systems, such as in the British Civil Service, every document was registered. However, document-based systems have largely been

replaced by file-based systems because of the volume of documents being processed. Rather than being individually registered, documents now tend to be placed immediately upon the appropriate file and sent to an action officer. However, registration may still be retained for specialised types of documents, such as numbered memoranda.

Either action officers or records staff may register records, depending on the type of records and the responsibilities of the staff member. Action officers may be responsible for registering certain types of documents that represent specialised areas of business, such as the issue of loans or payment of fees. In the case of day-to-day records, such as correspondence or memos relating to an organisation's main functions and activities, central registration by the records office will be necessary.

In document-based systems, the information entered into the register may include

- a unique identifier
- date of registration
- name of document
- indication of content
- author
- sender
- recipient
- physical form
- means of transmission
- links to related records.

Document-based electronic systems should model their registration system on the existing paper system. However, the electronic system also needs to record details of the software in which the record was created or captured and other structural or contextual information (metadata).

Activity 8

Are records in your organisation registered? If so, write a description of the process used and the information captured during registration. If not, explain how incoming or newly created records are managed.

Classification

Classification is the process of assigning records to their appropriate place within a logical arrangement, enabling them to be identified. Classification implies giving records a unique identifier or reference number, assigned according to predetermined rules.

> ***Classification*:** The process of identifying and arranging records and archives in categories according to logically structured conventions, methods and procedural rules represented in a classification system.

The classification of records needs to take into account the existing structure, functions and activities of the organisation and its divisions and branches. Thus, records may be arranged in a structure that corresponds to the work being documented, making it easier to decide where documents should be filed and where they may be found. Classification usually involves organising records into mutually exclusive categories so that there can be no doubt about the appropriate place for an individual item. The 'top-level' category will be the series, but in a classification scheme of any complexity, there will be further divisions into sub-series.

Classification schemes are likely to be hierarchical. That is, they will form a tree-like structure, with multiple levels if necessary. To a large extent, classification schemes may be pre-determined on the basis of business systems analysis, but they must be flexible enough to accommodate new and changing structures, functions and activities. At the same time, they must be kept under review to determine whether they continue to meet requirements. Classification schemes based on business systems analysis should be designed in consultation with users.

Classification systems are often hierarchical.

A classification scheme must

- suit the organisation it serves
- enable reference numbers or codes to be assigned to each item that requires classification
- be fully documented so that the rules, structure and vocabulary used to classify records are consistent and precise
- be kept up to date and flexible, to reflect changes in functions and activities.

Classification and coding schemes are discussed in Lesson 5.

Activity 9

Are records in your organisation classified? If so, write a description of the process used and the information captured during classification. If not, explain how records are organised.

Indexing and Controlled Vocabularies

Indexes can be designed to provide access to a range of information in the organisation, including

- whole information systems (such as an organisation's filing system, publications, library and documentation centre and audiovisual materials)
- groupings of records, such as a filing system
- individual documents within a records series, such as personnel files or staff record cards.

Indexing: The process of establishing and applying terms as access points to records. *Note:* The terms are usually organised in alphabetical order.

As already noted, classification organises items according to a structured arrangement that shows the provenance of records and their logical relationships with each other. Classification indicates the context of records. Indexing, on the other hand, is used as a fast means of access by subject, regardless of context or provenance. Indexing indicates the content of records.

Generally speaking, the wider the range of material covered by an index, the greater the risk that the index will lose precision because of the absence of contextual information. For example, if one index is created for an entire information system (including official records, publications, library, and so on) the index may provide many irrelevant references when used to search for a specific subject.

Indexing is a means of providing quick access to records by subject or activity.

Indexing involves applying terms or 'labels' to individual records to enable them to be searched for and retrieved. Indexes based on subject or business activity are more likely to be effective if the terms used are controlled. For example, it is better to use only one term, such as 'agriculture' or 'farming' than to use both and perhaps not find those records indexed under one or the other term. The tool used to control the vocabulary in an index is called a thesaurus.

Thesaurus (pl. thesauri): A controlled and structured vocabulary of keywords showing synonymous, hierarchical and other relationships and dependencies.

If the retrievable term is simply a name (such as the name of a person, organisation or geographical area) it may not be necessary to control the vocabulary but there will need to be rules relating to the order of names (last name first), the use or non-use of abbreviations and the treatment of variant spellings. It is possible to include proper names in an 'authority list', which includes all the names used in their standard form.

***Authority list*:** A list of standardised keywords, including names (personal, corporate and geographic), used as access points in retrieving information.

If an ad hoc, 'no-rules' index is used to index policy, operational and administrative files, problems are likely to occur, such as the following.

- Documents on the same subject may be placed on a number of different files.
- Files may not contain complete information.
- Files and documents may not be easily found when required because there is uncertainty about the term used to index them.
- Retention and disposal procedures may not be reliably and efficiently carried out.

A keyword list is an example of a controlled vocabulary.

***Keyword*:** A term or combination of terms taken from the title or text of a document or file characterising its content and establishing an access point for its retrieval.

A keyword list is an alphabetical listing (sometimes called an authority list) of all the standard terms from which index entries should be selected.

Keyword list: A controlled vocabulary that limits the choice of keywords when classifying or indexing files.

A keyword list is a control mechanism. It limits the way individual records are classified and indexed by imposing precision and consistency on the indexing process. Thus, it should tell its users and operators where to place records on particular subjects or where to look for them. The list can also provide a standard vocabulary to be used when giving files titles. By limiting the choice of words to be used when assigning titles to files, a controlled vocabulary or keyword list assists the indexing process and removes uncertainty about where to file documents.

Keyword lists control vocabulary and so help users find information more easily.

Increasingly, organisations are tending to share information across divisions and departments, both in paper and electronic form. As a result, a number of staff in different locations are involved in the processes of naming and retrieving files and documents. In these circumstances, a corporate-wide thesaurus or controlled vocabulary will be required. This document will need to include 'specialist' terms relevant to individual departments as well as terms that relate to the organisation as a whole. Though ready-made thesauri can be purchased, it is normally necessary for the organisation to construct its own thesaurus for records purposes so that it matches the requirements of the organisation.

As already noted, a controlled vocabulary may be used purely as a tool to support a classification scheme. For instance, by limiting the terms used to classify files, consistency and uniformity will be achieved, thereby enabling files on particular subjects or activities to be found more easily. The examples of classification schemes shown in Figures 10 and 11 later in this module are illustrations of a controlled vocabulary: that is, an authority list of terms that limits the way in which files are classified.

The main steps in constructing a controlled vocabulary are as follows. Some of these may take place concurrently.

1. Understand the functions and activities of the organisation.

2. Develop retrieval terms by analysing functions and activities, discussing them with action officers, and studying work programmes, existing file lists and other available documentation.

3. Define the scope of the controlled vocabulary, for example the level or depth of indexing and whether proper names and very general terms will be included.

4. Draft the authority list of terms.

5. Produce the thesaurus, which involves

    - deciding whether phrases need to be broken up into their component parts or retained as phrases
    - deciding whether any individual terms need to be combined into compound phrases
    - identifying any groupings of terms into broader and narrower terms
    - identifying non-allowed terms and incorporating cross-references to allowed terms

- including ‘use’ and ‘used for’ indicators – the allowed terms in preference to the ‘non-allowed’ terms and the coverage of allowed terms
- writing scope notes, that is, a note explaining how a term is defined for the purposes of the thesaurus.

The creation of a controlled vocabulary or keyword list is dealt with in Lesson 6. Examples are also given in Restructuring Current Records Systems: A Procedures Manual.

Indexing is a task that requires care and consistency. A keyword list will rapidly lose its usefulness and reliability if there is no control over the addition of new keyword terms. For this reason, keyword lists and controlled vocabularies should be managed by records management professionals.

In practice, classification and indexing are interdependent. In a typical file management system, for example, when a new file is registered, it is placed within its appropriate category or series and given a title that represents its contents. At the same time, it is indexed under terms (taken from a controlled vocabulary) that represent the function or are included in the file title. In the keyword code system, the index terms themselves are used to generate the file reference, which is assigned at the time of file creation.

Originally purely a manual task, indexing can now be done using computers. Various computer programs are available but should be selected with care to ensure that they can meet operational requirements. In an electronic system, file-naming conventions and standardised directory structures should relate as closely as possible to the classification and indexing system adopted by the organisation.

Keyword code systems are discussed in Lesson 5. File-naming conventions and standardised directory structures for electronic systems are discussed in Managing Electronic Records.

Activity 10

Are records in your organisation indexed? Is a controlled vocabulary used? Is a thesaurus in place? Write a description of the process used to index records and the criteria used to choose terms for indexing. If your organisation does not index records, explain how records are accessed by users.

Tracking

The purpose of tracking is to document the movements of records so that the organisation knows where its records are at any time. Tracking may also be used to monitor the use of records and to maintain an auditable trail of record-keeping processes, such as access to records by users. In addition, tracking may be used to

ensure that, for example, a particular record is dealt with by the person to whom it has been assigned and that action is taken by a predetermined date.

> ***Tracking:*** The process of documenting the movements and use of records so that their whereabouts are known at all times.

Typically, tracking systems monitor the physical movement of records, control the issue of records and document their transfer between offices or persons and their return to storage. As a minimum, such controls need to record the item identifier (usually its reference number), the person or office to whom it has been transferred and the date of movement.

File tracking controls are discussed in Lesson 8.

In very sophisticated tracking systems, electronic controls may be installed. For example, files may be marked with individual barcodes that are scanned into the tracking system whenever a file movement occurs.

Tracking systems ensure that the location of records is always known.

No tracking system is foolproof. Records sometimes move from person to person or office to office without the movement being captured by the record-keeping system. Therefore, tracking systems may be supplemented by a physical 'census' or 'audit' of records to update location records.

Activity 11

Is there a tracking system in place in your organisation? What does the tracking system monitor? Write a description of the process used to track records. If your organisation does not track records, explain how the movement of records is managed.

Appraisal and Disposal

Appraisal involves two tasks. First is the process of deciding what records need to be kept for their continuing value to their creators and users for the conduct of business, and how long they should be kept. Second is the process of deciding what records have an enduring value for purposes other than those for which they were created, such as historical research.

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.

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

An outcome of appraisal is the disposal schedule. This document identifies all the records series created or maintained by an organisation, notes the appraisal decisions that have been taken, specifies the periods for which the series are to be retained and their place of custody, and authorises their disposal at the appropriate time (either destruction or transfer to the archival institution).

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

However, appraisal may be carried out for reasons other than to draw up a disposal schedule. For example, a whole series of files may be appraised or 'reviewed' file by file to determine whether or not they should be retained. Here the purpose will be to decide which files have a continuing value, whether administrative or historical, and which have no further value and may be destroyed. Normally, the criteria adopted for making such decisions will need to be documented.

Appraisal and disposal ensure records of continuing value are retained for as long as they are required and are disposed of appropriately, either by destruction or transfer to an archival repository, as soon as that value has ended.

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

Appraisal, retention and disposal are dealt with in Building Records Appraisal Systems.

Appraisal and disposal planning must be undertaken at the creation stage, rather than at the end of the records' active life. Especially in light of the increasing use of computers for information management, deferring appraisal until the records are five or ten or 50 years old risks the loss of those records.

Some electronic information, for example that held in certain databases, may be constantly changing and may never have the status of records in a static form unless specific action is taken. If such data needs to be captured as a record, steps will need to be taken to build controls into the system.

Appraisal planning must be undertaken when records are created.

Appraisal and disposal planning needs to

- identify the records needed to capture sufficient evidence of business activities
- determine the length of time the records need to be kept
- decide and document the format and location in which the records need to be kept
- determine the ultimate disposal of the records (destruction or preservation as archives).

Activity 12

How are records appraised in your organisation? Are records disposed of according to a formal procedure? Write a description of the appraisal and disposal process used in your organisation. If there is no such process, explain how records are removed from offices and destroyed or transferred to archival care.

SUMMARY

Lesson 2 has considered the general principles of records control. It has looked at what happens when there is a loss of records control. It has looked at the primary level of control (series) and the secondary levels of control (registration, classification, indexing, tracking and appraisal and disposal).

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is metadata?
2. What is the purpose of records control?
3. Name at least five symptoms of the loss of control of records.
4. Explain the concept of series control.
5. What is the series?
6. Why are records linked together in a series?
7. What is the concept of business systems analysis?
8. How does business systems analysis relate to series control of records?
9. What are the five main mechanisms used as secondary levels of control of records?
10. Define registration.
11. What is a document-based system?
12. What is a file-based system?
13. What kind of information should go into a document-based register?
14. Define classification.
15. What are the four main requirements of a classification scheme.
16. Define indexing.
17. What is a thesaurus and why is it important in indexing?
18. What is an authority list and why it is important in indexing?
19. What problems can occur if indexing does not conform to any rules?
20. What is a keyword list?
21. What are the main steps in constructing a controlled vocabulary?

22. Define tracking.

23. What is the purpose of tracking?

24. Define appraisal.

25. What two tasks are involved with appraisal?

26. What is disposal?

27. What is a disposal schedule?

28. Why is the process of appraisal and disposal considered a control mechanism?

ACTIVITIES: COMMENTS

Activities 6-12

Each of these activities is design to allow you to compare the information provided in this lesson with the reality of records care in your organisation. The activities form a basis for your future work, so you are encouraged to spend some time investigating each of the systems in place in your organisation, for the various types of records control, and then compare that information with the suggestions offered in this lesson. These various control systems will be discussed in more detail in later lessons.

LESSON 3

THE INFRASTRUCTURE FOR A RECORDS MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Lesson 2 looked at the principles of records control and organisation at the primary level (series) and secondary levels (registration, classification, indexing, tracking and disposition). With this theoretical foundation, Lesson 3 examines the principles involved in establishing the infrastructure, or framework, for a new records management system. This will be followed by a lesson on building good record-keeping systems. Later lessons look in detail at specific mechanisms for control: classification schemes and file and document control.

Organisations must have strategies to ensure that full and accurate evidence of their decisions, actions and transactions are recorded, captured and maintained by record-keeping systems. Strategies are needed to determine how, when, where and in what form information should be captured in records as 'evidence' and held as long as it is required. Strategies are also needed to dispose of records promptly and appropriately, either by destruction or transfer to an archival institution, once their business value has ended.

Topics discussed in Lesson 3 include

- conducting a needs analysis
- designing the framework
- marketing records management
- establishing service targets and performance measurement.

Each of these topics is discussed in more detail in other modules in this study programme, particularly in Developing Infrastructures for Records and Archives Services *and* Managing Resources for Records and Archives Services.

NEEDS ANALYSIS

Records are not created in isolation; they are products of the organisation's business activity. To determine what kind of records management system is required, it is necessary to look behind the records produced and concentrate on the processes of their creation and use. By understanding the functions and activities of the organisation, its requirements for preserving documentary evidence will become clear. The first task in designing a records management system is to carry out an analysis of the organisation's records needs.

> *By understanding the functions and activities of the organisation, its requirements for preserving documentary evidence will become clear.*

A needs analysis should do the following.

1. It should define and agree a records management policy for the organisation (if one does not exist or if the existing one is inadequate). The policy will need to state the role of records management within the organisation and how it relates to record-keeping requirements. It should set out the objectives of the records management programme, linked to the organisation's overall goals. The policy should define the responsibilities of staff at all levels.

2. It should identify the records needs of the organisation. This will include, in broad terms, the records management systems and the practices and processes required to capture and maintain adequate records of the organisation's business activities.

3. It should identify the personnel and organisational structure required to meet the organisation's records needs. This will include the location of and management responsibility for the records management function and its staff.

4. It should identify levels of financial support. A commitment will be needed from the organisation's senior management to support the records management programme and assign adequate funds to establish and maintain it.

5. It should identify service targets and performance measurements. Setting and monitoring service targets are useful ways of measuring the impact of a records management programme, persuading senior management of the benefits and securing ongoing financial support.

The following sections look at the broad framework for a records management system.

Determining the specific needs of a records management system and the principal mechanisms of records control are topics discussed in later lessons.

Activity 13

Has your organisation ever conducted a needs analysis of its records management requirements? If so, examine the analysis and findings and determine if the following questions were answered:

Is there a records management policy and is it adequate?

What are the records needs of the organisation?

What are the personnel and organisational structure needs for a functioning records management programme?

What financial support is required?

Are service targets and performance measurements in place?

If your organisation has not conducted such a needs analysis, write up at least two questions you might ask in a needs analysis to address each of the five points listed above. How would you go about conducting such a needs analysis? Would you interview people, prepare a questionnaire or form discussion groups?

DESIGNING THE FRAMEWORK

There is no one universally applicable records management system. Each organisation, and each division and branch of that organisation, needs to establish a system relevant to its work. The system must also be appropriate to the needs of its staff and must meet all regulatory and accountability requirements. Moreover, that system has to be reanalysed periodically and adapted or redesigned as the work and needs change.

Records management systems must be developed to suit the individual needs of each organisation and its divisions or branches.

An effective records management system is a major component of the general management system of any organisation. The control functions it exercises can make a vital contribution to the achievement of business objectives and administrative efficiency. Indeed, a records management programme will only function effectively if it is developed as part of the larger managerial environment, so that the procedures reflect overall management objectives.

While many of the decisions affecting records management are out of the direct control of records managers, it is possible for an enthusiastic, well-prepared and persistent records manager to make a significant contribution to the process. This part

of the module will examine those areas in which records managers can participate most effectively.

The topics discussed below are examined in more detail in Developing Infrastructures for Records and Archives Services.

Legislation

The basis of all records management authority is comprehensive and up-to-date legislation or, in non-government organisations, policy statements. Such legislation or authority documents must include the following elements.

- Records must be precisely defined so that the legislation covers records in all media and formats, and incorporates records created or received at all levels within all parts of the organisation, such as the executive, judiciary and legislature in government. In the public sector, this includes parastatal institutions and regional and other local government organisations. In the private sector, this includes all subordinate or associated agencies or operations.
- Primary responsibility for the management of records throughout their life-cycle system must be clearly assigned, and the roles of all key officers and of the head of the records and archives institution must be defined.
- A framework must be established for the continuous appraisal and appropriate disposal of all the records of an organisation.
- Rules must be set out for the orderly and timely transfer of semi-current records of continuing value to a records centre and of records of permanent value to an archival repository.

Activity 14

What legislation or authority documents are in place to govern your organisation's records management systems? Does the legislation address the points listed above?

Are records precisely defined?

Does the legislation cover records in all media?

Is responsibility for records care clearly assigned?

Is there a framework in place for appropriate appraisal and disposal?

Are there rules for the orderly transfer of semi-current records to a records centre and of archives to an archival repository?

If your organisation does not have such legislation or authority documents, how would you go about the process of drafting such a document?

Location of the Records Management Unit

The records management unit should be located within the central management division of an organisation. This is essential for effective administration and operations. The head of the unit should have the equivalent rank to the heads of other branches within that division. The head should also have clear lines of communication to the head of the division and to the head of the organisation, each of whom will have ultimate responsibility for the effectiveness of the records management system within the organisation.

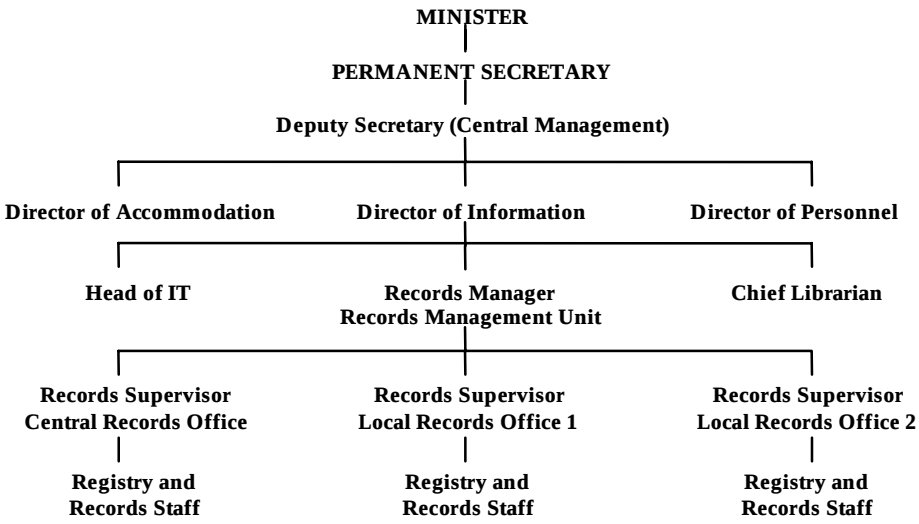


Figure 1: Location of the Records Management Unit

When an organisation operates an integrated information strategy that encompasses not only records but also internal and external electronic data, library materials and other information sources, the respective professional branches may usefully constitute an information management sub-division of the central management branch.

> *The records management unit should be located within the central management division of an organisation.*

Activity 15

Where is your records management unit within the hierarchy of the organisation? Is it well placed or could it be in a more advantageous position? Write a description of where you are presently located and then write a description of your ideal location. If you wish, you may want to prepare two organisational charts as shown above, one for where you are placed now and one for where you might be placed in an ideal situation.

Collaboration with Other Specialists

In some agencies, various components of the records management system (such as forms management) may be the responsibility of separate specialists with whom the records manager will co-operate.

Even where all elements are the responsibility of the records manager, he or she may collaborate with a range of specialists within and outside the organisation, such as

- with action officers in relation to the creation and use of records

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

- with archivists in relation to the disposition of records

> ***Archivist*:** A person professionally engaged in archival management.

- and with information managers in relation to electronic and other information resources.

> ***Information manager:*** A person professionally engaged in information management.

There must also be collaboration between records managers and senior administrators and policy makers responsible for approving new systems or alterations. Again, the level of this collaboration will depend upon the size of the organisation and the degree of records management expertise within it. In large organisations, where there is sufficient scale to have a resident senior records professionals in each agency, branch or division, matters of policy may be discussed and resolved within those agencies, with limited input from the larger records and archives institution. Further guidance for smaller agencies is given below.

In large organisations, each agency, branch or division may have its own records professional, referred to here as the agency records manager.

Functional Authority

Responsibility for records within an organisation should be delegated to a records manager within each agency, branch or division whenever possible. The extent of this records manager's authority should be clearly publicised throughout the agency.

In particular, the agency's records manager should be authorised to establish a records management system, as described in this module, and to institute the necessary procedures to operate it. Top-level support should be provided to ensure that all heads of divisions and branches are instructed to co-operate in implementing it.

The documentation necessary to implement and control the records management system should be issued under the authority of the head of the agency or the head of the records and archives institution. Above all, the agency records manager should establish a personal authority based upon his or her expertise and professional standards.

Professional Support

The organisation records manager should also be able to call on the support of the head of the records and archives institution, not only in the provision of technical and professional advice but also in dealings with superior officers. Mechanisms should be established to allow the staff of the records management unit and of the records and archives institution to co-operate and collaborate. The records and archives institution may be closely involved with training or with monitoring and measuring performance.

Small Agencies

In small agencies with their own records management systems, it may not always be possible to have a dedicated records manager with the appropriate training and management skills. In such circumstances, the authority for records management may need to be assigned either to a records manager who covers a number of agencies or to a records professional within the central records and archives institution. Either arrangement will ensure that the agency's head of records services is able to call upon technical and professional advice and to be supported when dealing with policy makers within the agency or its parent organisation.

Staffing

The quality of any records management system is directly related to the quality of the staff who operate it. Records work should be seen as a worthwhile career for those who are well educated, intelligent and industrious. It is not the posting of last resort for those who are unqualified, incompetent or idle.

> *Records management is a professional career.*

The agency records manager, in collaboration with the head of the records and archives institution, is responsible for ensuring that staff members are adequately trained and that action officers are aware of their particular roles. Appropriate standards, manuals and guidelines should be developed to supplement training and instruction.

Accommodation

Records offices should be in a location easily accessible to action officers and should be separated from other administrative units, such as the typing pool. Records offices should be adequate in size to house both the records and the staff responsible for them. The accommodation must be secure and well maintained, and it must be of strong enough construction to bear the weight of the records.

Equipment and Stationery

Sufficient and appropriate equipment should be provided for the handling and storage of current records within the records office. An adequate supply of suitable file covers, boxes and other stationary materials should be maintained. Stocks of forms and control documentation should always be kept.

Finance

A prerequisite of all the above resources is adequate funding. Appropriate provision must be made in annual estimates for sufficient funds to enable the records management unit to perform its functions properly. Ideally, the unit should have its own budget, but if this is not possible, adequate allowance should be made in the budget of the larger agency.

Financial resources, whether from the unit's own budget or from its share in the budget of the agency, should be managed prudently and in accordance with established priorities. Value for money should be achieved through a programme of expenditure on staff, accommodation, equipment and materials that will match the

requirements for the delivery of an efficient and economical records management programme.

A records management programme should be well planned, professionally staffed and sufficiently resourced.

Activity 16

Write a brief description of the present situation in your records or archives unit with regard to the following:

professional support

level of staffing

accommodation

equipment and supplies

financial resources.

Next, write down three changes you would make in each category to improve your situation. Note, you may not have detailed information for some of these categories, but do the best you can with the information you have.

MARKETING RECORDS MANAGEMENT

The records manager cannot rely only on legislation, policies or his or her functional authority to ensure organisation-wide compliance in the records management system. It is essential to 'market' records management by publicising its benefits.

The records manager needs to 'sell' records management both to top management and to heads of agencies, divisions and branches. The records management programme should be presented as a service that can help them to attain their aims and objectives through the efficient and economical provision of the information they need for business operations. Marketing requires effective written and oral communication and consultation with managers and staff at all levels throughout the organisation, to give them a sense of shared ownership in the systems.

It is essential to market records management in order to obtain adequate support.

Moreover, marketing is not something that can be done once and then forgotten about. The cause of records management must be preached constantly to maintain interest and involvement. This is done through appropriate training, the provision and

maintenance of standards, manuals and guidelines and awareness raising and other promotional activities. Every opportunity should be taken to provide a clear sense of the importance of records management and to promote good practice.

It is also essential to deliver the service that has been promised. Promptness, accuracy, reliability and confidentiality must be guaranteed. Complaints must be dealt with speedily and satisfactorily. Service targets should be set and monitored. Resources should be managed so that they provide value for money.

Records management units must be efficient and effective to maintain support.

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

Activity 17

Is there or has there ever been a programme in place to market records management work within or outside your organisation? If so, write a brief description of it. If not, write a short plan for how you would market the services of the records management unit. What key points would you emphasise? Who would you address in the marketing plan?

ESTABLISHING SERVICE TARGETS AND PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

Setting and monitoring service targets (also known as performance measurement) are useful ways to assess the effectiveness of a records management programme and to demonstrate its benefits to senior managers.

Performance measurements are discussed in Managing Resources for Records and Archives Services.

This involves more than just counting the levels of activity of the records management unit, although quantitative measures may be useful in presenting a case for the resources necessary to maintain or improve those levels. Rather, setting and monitoring service targets involves measuring the relationship of the resources that go into the service (inputs) to what the unit achieves using those resources (outputs).

When a new records management system has been introduced, it is important to demonstrate and quantify the improvements it has been able to achieve. This will require measuring records activities both before and after the introduction of the system. Measurements taken before are referred to as 'baseline' measurements. Quantifying a reduction in delays or the improved reliability in finding records provides proof of the effectiveness of the new systems. Moreover, having demonstrated improvements, new targets can be set.

Measuring performance can help quantify results and identify strengths and weaknesses.

The collection and evaluation of statistical information is time consuming. Therefore it is important to ensure that the facts and figures collected are relevant to the purpose of measuring performance. Furthermore, it is important to be selective in deciding which key areas of activity should be subject to service targets. For current records, service targets can be established for

- the registration and circulation of incoming correspondence
- the identification and delivery of records requested by action officers.

The quantitative measures most relevant to the management of current records are

- the number of items of correspondence or other documents received and sent
- the number of new files created
- the number of existing files requested by action officers
- the number of files disposed of by destruction or transfer to the records centre.

Performance in the following areas may be measured:

- quality of service, such as the percentage of action officers expressing satisfaction with the service provided by the records office (identified by means of a periodic questionnaire)
- timed and targeted objectives, such as achieving a 95% success rate in registering and circulating inward correspondence within four hours of receipt
- value for money, such as determining the cost per item of correspondence processed, the cost per file request handled and the storage cost per file held.

Activity 18

Have service targets or performance measurements ever been used in your organisation? If so, write a brief description of the measures used. If not, write a short plan for how you would develop performance measurements. What areas would you examine? How would you determine satisfactory performance?

SUMMARY

Lesson 3 has examined the principles involved in establishing a framework or infrastructure for a records management system. It has looked at the concept of needs analysis. It has dealt with the following issues in relation to the design of a system framework:

- legislation
- location of the records management unit
- collaboration with other specialists
- functional authority
- professional support
- small agencies
- staffing
- accommodation
- equipment and stationery
- finance
- marketing records management
- service targets and performance measurement.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is a needs analysis and what is its purpose?
2. What four areas should be examined in a needs analysis?
3. Why must agencies establish their own records management systems?
4. Why is legislation important to good records management?
5. What elements should be included in legislation or authority documents?
6. Where is a records management unit best placed within an organisation?
7. What other specialists might a records manager need to collaborate with?
8. Why should the records manager have responsibility for records within the organisation?
9. What kinds of professional support does the records manager need?
10. What is the best way to provide authority for records management in small agencies?
11. Why must records staff be well trained?
12. What accommodation needs do records offices have?
13. What equipment and stationery needs do records offices have?
14. Why are appropriate funds necessary to run a records management unit?
15. What is the concept of marketing?
16. Why do records managers need to market their records management work?
17. What is the purpose of establishing service targets?
18. What kinds of tasks can service targets be established for?
19. What areas of performance can be measured?

ACTIVITIES: COMMENTS

Activities 13-18

These activities are all designed to allow you to compare the reality of your situation with the information provided in this lesson. For each activity, you should imagine you are in a position of management responsibility and try to complete the questions in as much detail as possible. Then compare your answers with the suggestions in this lesson and consider how you might change your answers or adapt the suggestions to suit your organisation's needs.

There are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers to these questions; what is important is that you get a sense of how the information provided in this module applies to your own environment and how you could make use of the suggestions offered.

LESSON 4

BUILDING SOUND RECORD-KEEPING SYSTEMS

Lessons 2 and 3 have looked at the principles of records control and the framework for a records management system. Lesson 4 examines the principles and practices involved in building sound record-keeping systems or strengthening existing systems. Establishing effective systems is critical to records control. Later lessons in this module will look in more detail at the specific mechanisms and procedures for controlling records. Topics discussed in this lesson include

- responding to changing requirements
- the breakdown of records control
- strategic objectives of a record-keeping system
- analysing the requirements of a record-keeping system
- clearing a backlog of closed files
- centralised or decentralised control
- introducing control functions and points of control.

RESPONDING TO CHANGING REQUIREMENTS

There are four situations in which new record-keeping systems need to be introduced.

- A record-keeping system has collapsed.
- The record-keeping system is not meeting information requirements.
- A new organisation is created or an existing organisation is restructured.
- Electronic information systems are installed in the organisation.

Regardless of the reasons for a new record-keeping system, a systems analysis is the basis for everything that follows. Once the business processes and activities are understood, decisions can be made about the records series, the classification and

coding scheme and retention and disposal. The record-keeping system will never satisfy requirements unless it has been matched to the functions, activities and transactions of the organisation it serves.

If an initial survey and analysis shows that the system is mainly working well and is only failing in certain areas (for example, files contain the right information but cannot be found when officers require them), it may only be necessary to change some of the control mechanisms. If the survey shows that records, and the information they contain, are not being captured by the record-keeping system (for example the papers relating to a specific subject are scattered between files), then it may be necessary to restructure the file management system. When the analysis and survey are complete, decongestion (that is, the removal of non-current records) can be carried out. Once the current records can be examined, decisions can be made about the changes required.

A systems analysis should form the basis for all records restructuring activities.

It is important to go through the same analysis whether a system needs complete overhaul or whether it is ineffective only in parts. Collapsed systems, or systems that fail to meet an organisation's information needs, often prompt the organisation to introduce new record-keeping systems. But before considering in detail the steps required to gain control of records or to introduce new systems, it is necessary to look at the causes and consequences of collapsed systems.

When the records management system requires radical restructuring, it is likely that the head of the civil service, the head of the organisation or the head of the records and archives institution may instigate reforms. The agency records manager will probably oversee subsequent changes, in consultation with the head of the records and archives institution. In agencies where there is little records management expertise, the restructuring exercise may be led by the records and archives institution.

Activity 19

Have any of the following events taken place in your organisation?

a record-keeping system has collapsed

the record-keeping system is not meeting information requirements

a new organisation has been created or an existing organisation has been restructured

electronic information systems have been installed in the organisation.

If so, write a brief description of the event and explain whether the record-keeping needs of the organisation were considered as part of that event. For example, have attempts been made to improve systems after a collapse? Were processes changes when computerised systems were introduced?

THE BREAKDOWN OF RECORDS CONTROL

Traditionally, the hub of the records control system within an organisation is the records office, which was often traditionally referred to as the registry.

The registry should be responsible for all elements of records control. However, all too often its role has degenerated into the routine work of registering and filing correspondence. As a result, the effectiveness of the registry has weakened and its status has diminished. This in turn has encouraged the mistaken view that records management work may be assigned to staff of low ability and achievement.

The key elements of records control – series control, registration, classification, indexing, tracking and disposition – were introduced in Lesson 2.

Unfortunately, along with this degeneration of registry activity has often come the collapse of the registry system itself. In some situations, the registry has been overwhelmed by the weight of the paperwork arising from the expansion of a small secretariat into the complete administrative apparatus of a modern state or major corporation.

The registry or records office should be responsible for all elements of records control.

Document and file handling systems break down, classification and coding systems decay, file stores overflow, valuable files cannot be retrieved and redundant files are not removed. As a result, the organisation runs out of storage space; it is frequently embarrassed by the failure to find documents and files; it wastes considerable staff effort in lengthy, often unproductive, searches; and it is unable to locate or provide adequate records for legal, audit or other accountability purposes.

When central registry systems breakdown, unfiled documents end up being retained in the administrative and operational units; files no longer circulate; and parallel filing systems are established by officers who have no trust in the registry. Information becomes fragmented and dispersed and cannot be shared. In effect, a decentralised records system has developed, but it is uncontrolled and unable to serve the needs of the organisation.

One solution to these problems may be to establish a completely decentralised records system, under central control. Therefore, a primary decision in re-establishing control is whether a centralised or decentralised system will better meet the organisation's needs.

Issues relating to centralised and decentralised control are discussed later in this lesson.

It may be advisable to abandon the general use of the terms 'registry' and 'sub-registry' and to use the term 'records management unit' for the organisational entity that is operationally responsible for records throughout the organisation. If the unit has more than one office within the organisation, the term 'records office' may be used to refer to various specific entities, such as the 'central (or organisation) records office' and 'local records office'. This change of names will reflect more accurately the role of records staff and will help to shift the view of their work away from the traditional image of the registry.

Records management unit: The administrative unit of an agency responsible for the life-cycle management of that agency's records.

Records office**:** The subunit of a records management unit responsible for the receipt, control and maintenance of current records.

Activity 20

What is the name of the part of your organisation responsible for records care? What are the duties of that agency? In your opinion, what would be the effect if the name were changed to 'records management unit'?

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES OF A RECORD-KEEPING SYSTEM

Whether the records function is centralised or decentralised, there must be a consistent pattern of oversight and control. Whether this control comes from the organisation's records manager, a records manager responsible for several agencies or the records and archives institution will depend upon the size and complexity of the organisation.

In order to exert such control, it will be necessary to undertake the following steps.

- Establish and maintain appropriate record-keeping systems and procedures.
- Set and monitor standards for the implementation of those systems and procedures.
- Provide relevant and easy-to-understand procedural manuals and directives.
- Train records service staff and action officers.
- Create and maintain necessary control documentation.

- Provide authority control for the allocation of file titles and establish appropriate systems for their classification, coding and indexing.
- Assign responsibility for maintaining or filing multiple-copy documents (such as reports, directives, committee minutes and papers).
- Monitor filing in decentralised systems to correct misfiling mistakes, rename poorly titles files and prevent the filing of ephemera and duplicates.
- Ensure the proper storage and security of all the organisation's records.
- Establish a vital records programme.
- Determine media conversion needs for records.
- Ensure appropriate disposal under agreed schedules.

Whether the records function is centralised or decentralised, there must be consistent control.

ANALYSING THE REQUIREMENTS OF A RECORD-KEEPING SYSTEM

As noted in Lesson 2, business systems analysis is a vital initial step in establishing an appropriate records management system.

The principles of business systems analysis are introduced in Lesson 2 and covered in greater detail in Analysing Business Systems.

Business systems analysis is used to understand how an organisation works and how it uses its information. By charting the business process in the context of the organisation's information needs, it is possible to trace the flow of records and information up, down and across administrative structures in the performance of specific functions and activities. This analysis is used as a basis for designing new record-keeping systems or streamlining existing ones.

Because it is an analytical tool, business systems analysis has many useful and practical benefits. It allows the records manager to devise workable systems by creating the appropriate mechanisms for managing the records of an organisation.

The analysis identifies the points at which decisions are taken and implemented, policy is executed and actions are carried out. It establishes what information is

required at each of those points to ensure that appropriate decisions and actions are taken.

The analysis also determines what information is worthy of capture in the record-keeping system to support business operations and ensure accountability. It also establishes the form in which the information needs to be recorded.

> *Business systems analysis identifies the organisation's information activities and needs.*

Specifically, business systems analysis helps the records manager to

- see where information flows occur in the organisation
- see where the information supports business processes
- match information requirements to the information that exists
- develop work flow systems and identify information inputs and outputs to systems
- eliminate duplication
- determine the appropriate format of records
- determine the relationships between categories of records
- determine the logical arrangement of records into series
- design classification schemes for records
- give logical reference numbers to records
- determine the ideal locations for records storage
- identify vital records
- identify records of enduring value
- provide an audit trail of record-keeping practices
- develop records retention and disposal schedules.

Activity 21

Review each of the actions listed below and write a brief description of whether that you think that task could be improved in your organisation. Does the task take place? If so, does it work efficiently? How could it be improved? If it does not take place, should it?

eliminate duplication in the creation and retention of records

determine the appropriate format of records

determine the logical arrangement of records into series

design classification schemes for records

determine the ideal locations for records storage

identify vital records

identify records of enduring value

develop records retention and disposal schedules.

Conducting a Records Survey

An important component of a business systems analysis is the records survey. The survey locates and identifies the existing records of an organisation and relates them to its present functions and information needs. The records survey will also identify semi-current and non-current records within the existing system in anticipation of their appraisal and disposal.

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

The correlation between the existing record-keeping system and the functions and needs of the organisation is a measure of the system's adequacy and an indication of whether radical restructuring or minor reform is required. As noted earlier, where a radical restructuring is necessary, business systems analysis will provide a means of developing a new file classification scheme.

Classification is dealt with in Lesson 5.

Introducing a New or Improved System

'Best practice' procedures for introducing new record-keeping systems in records offices are described in detail in *Restructuring Current Records Systems: A Procedures Manual.* The following sections of this lesson summarise the steps in this process.

> *Refer to* Restructuring Current Records Systems: A Procedures Manual *for a more detailed discussion of restructuring.*

The first step in any restructuring exercise is to ensure that the terms of reference for the exercise are defined and agreed. The head or senior member of staff of the records and archives institution should meet the head or senior member of staff of the organisation or agency to ensure that there is a full commitment to the restructuring exercise and that all necessary support will be forthcoming. The two parties will then write the precise terms of reference, defining

- the scope of the restructuring exercise and what it will involve
- who is responsible for what
- the expected outcomes and benefits
- the cost
- the time scale.

> *Restructuring requires precise terms of reference and clear identification of time scales and responsibilities.*

The head of the organisation or agency should appoint a senior manager as sponsor for the exercise and define his or her responsibility in writing. This manager must be of sufficient seniority to act as a catalyst and mediator throughout the exercise and should chair any steering committee. Ideally, he or she should have a management responsibility for records functions. Once the sponsor is appointed, all requests and queries regarding the exercise must be co-ordinated through him or her.

The head of the records and archives institution should appoint a project manager or team leader to head the restructuring team, composed of members of the records and archives institution and other information professionals where appropriate. Records staff within the organisation may also help with the restructuring exercise, provided they have received appropriate training. The leader will need to brief the team on the terms of reference and the methodology of the exercise. The team will then make a presentation to the senior and middle management of the organisation to explain the reasons for the restructuring exercise, what it involves and the timetable for its implementation.

> *Project management and team building are discussed in greater depth in* Strategic Planning for Records and Archives Services.

Collecting Data

Once the restructuring exercise has been scheduled, the collection of data can begin. This work comprises three steps:

- collecting background information
- conducting the records survey
- carrying out interviews with action officers and records staff.

Some of these activities will need to occur concurrently. For example, interviews with staff will identify additional areas in which background information is required. The records survey will clearly involve talking to records staff.

The team leader and facilitator will need to conduct preliminary discussions with senior staff, secure their commitment to the exercise and agree on the proposed schedule of work.

Collecting Background Information

The team leader and the facilitator will collect background information for study by the team. All information gathered should be dated and its source noted. The availability and extent of background information will vary from organisation to organisation.

In gathering background information, it is important not to lose sight of the overall aims: to achieve an understanding of the organisation and functions of the organisation and to begin to build a picture of its information requirements.

> *The purpose of gathering background information is to gain an understanding of the organisation's organisation, functions and information requirements.*

Conducting a Records Survey

The team members will conduct a records survey (also known as a records inventory or audit) to provide a picture of the information structure and broad requirements of the organisation. This comprehensive and systematic gathering of information about the records created, received and held by the organisation will be conducted by questionnaire and interviews with action officers and records staff at all levels.

The records survey will enable the restructuring team to

- find out what records exist and gather relevant information about them
- understand how the records are used
- identify and resolve record-keeping problems
- develop disposal schedules

- stimulate interest in and raise the profile of records work.

Records surveys and interviews should be conducted using standard forms and sample questions such as those shown in Restructuring Current Records Systems: A Procedures Manual.

Conducting Interviews

Interviews with senior staff will enable the team leader to obtain a better understanding of the organisation's information and will supplement the information gathered in the course of the records survey.

Interviews should be carefully structured, preferably with a prepared list of standard questions to be asked so that information gathered is as complete and comprehensive as possible.

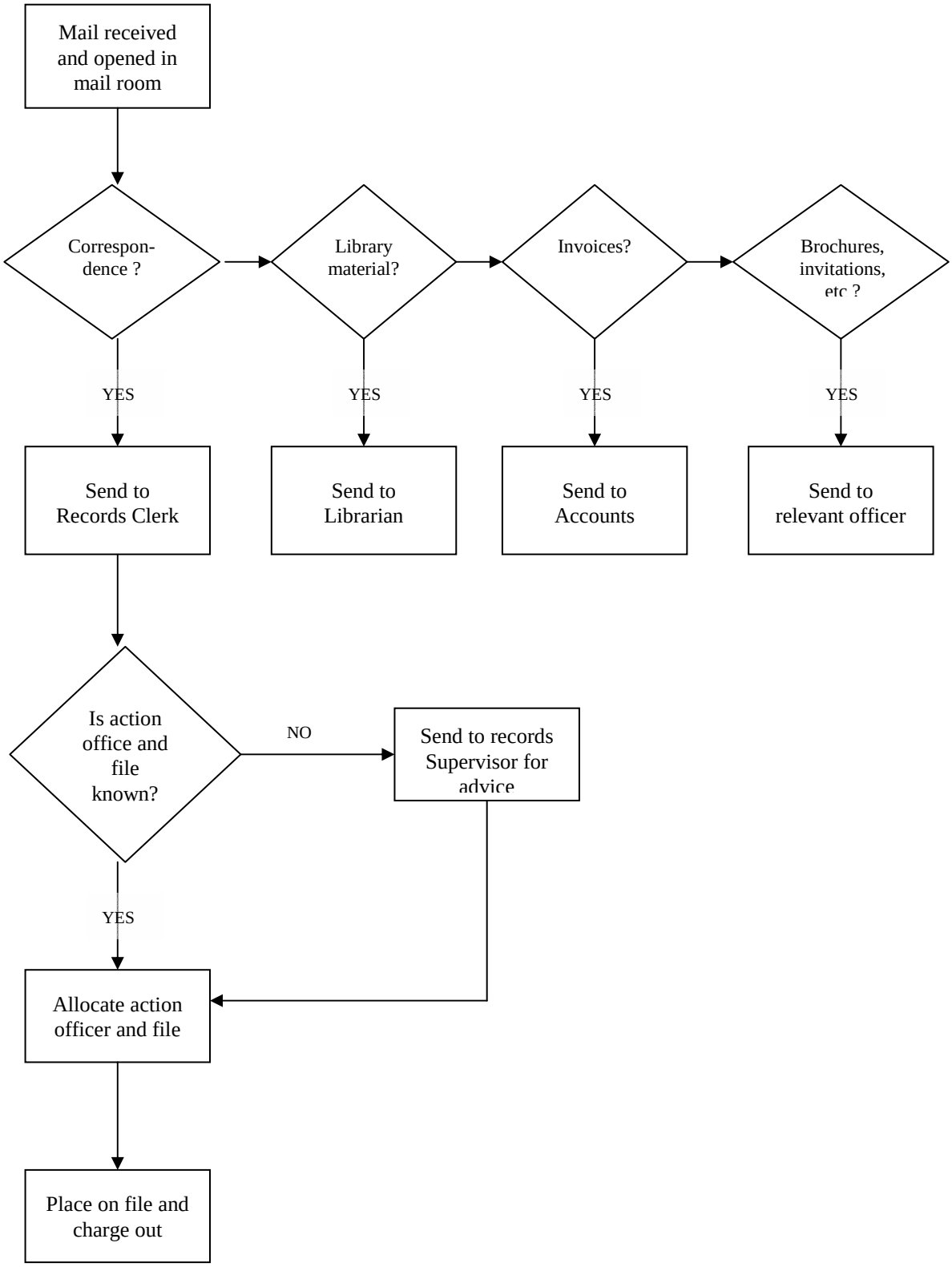
Data Analysis

Records analysts use management analysis techniques to examine organisational structures and operations in order to understand what work is done and why, what information the organisation needs and its record-keeping requirements. They analyse this information in order to recommend practical means of enhancing efficiency and making cost savings through improved systems design. Flow charts are used to illustrate how the organisation is structured and how it generates, receives and uses its information. Consider, for example, Figure 2: Flow Chart of Incoming Mail, reproduced from Jay Kennedy and Cherryl Schauder, *Records Management: A Guide to Corporate Record Keeping*, 2d ed. (Melbourne, AUS: Longman, 1998), p. 37. (Reprinted with permission of Pearson Education Australia; copyright Addison Wesley Longman Australia PTY Ltd © 1998.)

The information gathered needs to be analysed to identify the way activities are conducted and records created.

Using this methodology, the restructuring team will list the functions and activities carried out by each division and branch of the organisation and develop flow charts to illustrate

- the inter-relationships between the divisions of the organisation
- the internal and external relationships of the branches and offices within a division, and the flow of information into and out of them
- the processing of information and the generation of records.


Mail received and opened in mail room
Correspon-dence ?
Library material?
Invoices?
Brochures, invitations, etc ?
YES
YES
YES
YES
Send to Records Clerk
Send to Librarian
Send to Accounts
Send to relevant officer
Is action office and file known?
NO
Send to records Supervisor for advice
YES
Allocate action officer and file
Place on file and charge out

The team will also analyse the interview and survey notes and other information collected in order to ascertain the following information.

- What records work is being done, why, by whom, when and where?
- Are the records arranged and controlled in a way that facilitates the retrieval of information?
- How far do present records-handling procedures conform to the needs of the organisation in relation to its functions, activities, working practices and any statutory or regulatory requirements?

Working closely with the records staff of the organisation, the team will assess the survey results to determine the following.

- Can registry and file store operations be improved?
- Can records control systems (registration, classification, indexing, tracking and appraisal and disposal) be improved?
- Are the records protected against unauthorised access or loss? How secure and environmentally sound is the current storage?
- Can the registry and file store layouts be improved?
- Can the filing equipment be used more efficiently? Does is need repair or replacing? Would different storage methods be more effective?
- What records can be closed, listed and transferred to the records centre or other lower-cost storage, or to the archival institution?
- Can any of the records be consolidated (for example, can temporary files be merged with permanent files)?
- What records can be destroyed under existing disposal arrangements? How are these records to be destroyed? What is their volume?
- What quantities of non-current records are not covered by existing disposal arrangements?
- What is the records workload of the organisation and its divisions and branches? What is the volume of active records held at any one time? How frequently are they consulted and by whom?
- What is the likely growth rate of the organisation's current records?
- How many personnel are engaged on records work? What are their grades or employment levels?

The team will then put together the information needs of the organisation that have been identified by the flow charts and the organisation of records work as determined by the survey. From this information, the team will do the following.

- Devise a records management system that matches records creation and handling procedures to information needs.

- Determine the control points needed to record the creation, receipt and movement of records.
- Prepare new records forms and control documentation if required.
- Establish a controlled vocabulary or list of keywords for the use of the organisation, based on its functions, activities and areas of business.
- Estimate the number and location of records offices, registries and file stores and the number and grades of records staff needed to implement and run that system.
- Establish procedures for handling semi-current records.
- Prepare draft disposal schedules.
- Recommend other practical means of enhancing efficiency and making cost savings.
- Assess training needs of records staff and users in operating the new system.
- Design and deliver a training programme to explain how the new system works.

After discussion with the facilitator, the team's conclusions will be incorporated into a formal report to the head of the records and archives institution and the head of the organisation or agency. This report should be clear and concise. It should address executive issues of concern to senior management, rather than professional issues of concern to records managers.

Implementation can begin once the head of the records and archives institution and the head of the organisation have approved the report and its recommendations.

CENTRALISED AND DECENTRALISED CONTROL

Re-establishing control of a record-keeping system does not necessarily mean the re-establishment of a single central records office for the whole of the organisation's records. Where an organisation is large and occupies a number of buildings, some degree of decentralisation will be necessary. However, co-ordination of record-keeping systems across the organisation is necessary to ensure the most efficient management of records and the maintenance of appropriate standards. Though different systems may be in use, they should be subject to the same standards.

> *Decentralisation of record systems should be done cautiously.*

As a general rule, it is preferable to decentralise cautiously. For example, a central records office could be established within the headquarters building, with one subunit in each other building occupied by the organisation.

Where an organisation has a structure of regional or other local branches, each branch should have its own records system. Each system should replicate the central system and should be subject to central control. Subsequently, more responsibility can be devolved as discipline in records handling is developed at the branch level.

In many countries, the trend in recent years has been to introduce decentralised records systems. In these systems, the day-to-day work of document and file handling and the maintenance and retrieval of current files is carried out in subunits of the records office, located within the divisions and branches they serve. The records staff are familiar with the functions and working systems of their organisation and are consulted in the work of classification and appraisal.

All this records work is conducted under the overall control of a central records office, headed by a records manager. This overall control ensures conformity with organisation-wide systems and standards.

The introduction of the computer into the records office, especially when it is part of a computer network such as a local area network (LAN), has facilitated decentralisation because it offers the opportunity to control files centrally while locating them close to the action officers.

Computer network: A grouping of computers and peripherals connected together by telecommunications links to enable a group of users to share and exchange information.

Local area network: A computer network located within a relatively limited area such as a building, agency or university campus. Also known as a LAN.

The computerisation of records control systems is discussed in Automating Records Services.

Whatever the degree of decentralisation, it is essential to ensure continuity between each records office or subunit and the functions of – and therefore the file series used by – the divisions and branches it serves. File series should be transferred between records offices when functions are transferred within the organisation.

A number of factors need to be taken into account when considering the decentralisation of records systems. These include the following.

- Will users be better served? Will there by any advantage in closer proximity to the records? Will users in other business areas have reduced access?
- What are the staffing implications?
- Will more records staff be required? Are staff of sufficient capacity available?

- What are the storage and equipment implications?
- Will new storage areas, more shelving and filing cabinets be required?
- Are there sufficient funds for the additional resources required?
- Will professional support and guidance be available, when needed, to the decentralised units?
- Will the level of records control be similar to that exercised in the central system?
- Are there any security considerations?
- Can effective co-ordination be maintained with dispersed systems? For example, can updated versions of the controlled vocabulary or keyword index be effectively distributed?
- Will decentralised systems encourage duplication?
- Will appraisal and disposal procedures operate effectively?

Activity 22

Are records in your organisation managed centrally or in a decentralised system? Or is there a combination of systems? Which way do you think records are best managed in your organisation and why?

CLEARING A BACKLOG OF CLOSED FILES

Before a start is made to introduce new or improved record-keeping systems, it is necessary to clear out any records that are no longer regularly used. Even systems that have been working quite well are likely to include records that should have been removed from current records storage.

Removing old and unused files can help to bring about a dramatic change in record-keeping systems. Physical conditions are greatly improved, as large quantities of low-use or valueless materials are separated from the current records. Regaining intellectual control of the remaining current records is far more easily achieved when only those records that support current functions and activities remain in current records storage.

Before a backlog reduction exercise begins, it is important to reassure users that important records are not being destroyed and will still be accessible. By removing older records and placing them in better order, these records will in fact become more easily accessible, as will the current records left behind.

Clearing a backlog can greatly improve the access to and use of records.

The first step in clearing the backlog of old and unused records is to decide a cut-off date for removal of items from the current system. For example, if a file has not been in active use for three years, it can be closed and removed from the system.

The processes of records appraisal and disposal are dealt with in Building Records Appraisal Systems.

Removed records will need to be maintained or sorted by series, arranged in file number order and appraised. A general sort may have to be done first, followed by a more detailed sort. If the records are already classified, they may be placed or maintained in this order. If there is no reliable classification, or there is a mixture of systems, it may be necessary to order the records in chronological blocks within their main series. This will facilitate storage, retrieval, appraisal and later disposal. Remember the definition of series provided earlier.

***Series*:** The level of arrangement of the files and other *records* of an organisation or individual that brings together those relating to the same function or activity or having a common form or some other relationship arising from their creation, receipt or use. Also known as a file series or records series.

General and agency-specific retention schedules will need to be applied. If they do not exist, they will need to be developed on the basis of the business systems analysis and records survey. For example, operational records (documenting specific agency transactions and the execution of its policies) may need to be reviewed within ten years from the date of their closure. Administrative or housekeeping files relating to routine office matters may be reviewed after five years.

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

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

These types of records are discussed in more detail in the next lesson.

Agreement will need to be sought to destroy those records that have been identified during the decongestion exercise as having no further value

All ephemeral, non-record and library materials should be separated from the records. Ephemeral material should be destroyed unless it provides key information about the activities of the organisation, in which case it should be transferred to the archival institution for examination. Published materials no longer required may be offered to an appropriate library. Non-record and published materials still required should be housed in a 'documentation centre' or separate storage area under the control of the records management unit.

Ephemera: Informal documents of transitory use and value (such as advertisements, calling cards, notices, brochures and tickets.

Whenever records are removed from current systems, they should always be made subject to some future action so that they are captured in the appraisal and disposal system and are never again overlooked. This process ensures that they do not cause further congestion problems in the future. For example, closed files identified for retention should be listed by series and file number, boxed and removed to semi-current records storage, such as in a records centre. At the same time, appraisal and disposal actions and action dates should be determined for each series. Where necessary, for example in the case of policy files, disposal actions may need to be assigned to each file.

The process of transferring records to low-cost storage are described in Managing Records in Records Centres.

Records should always be appraised and then subject to some disposal action so that they do not cause further congestion problems in future.

Activity 23

Are there records in your organisation that are not currently used, that are older or that should have been removed long ago? If possible, examine some of these records and try to determine how old they are and what functions or activities they represent. In your opinion, would it be possible to remove those records? Where could they go? To a records centre? To the archival institution?

IDENTIFYING CONTROL POINTS

To be effective, a record-keeping system must exercise control over the processes of creating, receiving, distributing, using and disposing of records. This is done through 'control documentation'. Following is an overview of the concept of creating control documentation.

Specific steps for creating such documentation are outlined in detail in Lessons 7 and 8 and in Managing Current Records: A Procedures Manual.

Control documentation: Recorded information that monitors and governs the creation, maintenance, use and disposal of records. Also known as control records.

Control documentation may be needed at the following points in the records process:

- the creation of documents, for example the preparation of outgoing letters by action officers
- the receipt of documents, for example the receipt of incoming correspondence or electronic mail from outside the organisation
- the despatch of documents, for example an outgoing letter or electronic mail
- the creation of a file
- the movement of a document between the registry and an officer or between officers
- the filing of a document on an existing or new file
- the retrieval of an existing file or document from its place of storage
- the movement of a file between the registry and an officer or between officers
- the replacement of a file within its appropriate storage location
- the closure of a file when it has become too bulky or its contents reach a certain age
- the transfer of a file from one storage location to another, for example from current to semi-current storage
- the retrieval of a file from, and the return of a file to, semi-current storage
- the movement of semi-current files
- the destruction of a file having no further value.

In an electronic environment, an audit trail of documents viewed, modified or deleted should also be a standard feature of the system.

If any of these controls are not in place, or are not working, the records management system may break down and records will become misplaced or lost.

Activity 24

What control documentation exists in your organisation to manage the following tasks?

the creation of documents

the receipt of documents

the creation of a file

the closure of a file when it has become too bulky or its contents reach a certain age

the transfer of a file from one storage location to another, for example from current to semi-current storage

the destruction of a file having no further value.

Do you think that control documentation could be improved? How would you improve it? Write a brief description for each of the tasks outlined in this activity of any actions you would take to improve the processes.

Control Documentation

To exert control over the record-keeping system, it is necessary to create and maintain appropriate systems documentation. In most cases, the documentation will be in paper form, though it is now possible to replicate such documentation within a computerised records management system.

Control documentation manages the records system and ensures consistency of practice.

Whether the control system is manual or computerised, or a mix of the two, a typical system may include the following elements:

- correspondence registers to record the receipt and despatch of correspondence and other external and internal communications and the location of correspondence received and copies of correspondence despatched
- a classification and coding scheme to assign files or documents to their proper place in a logical arrangement and to generate reference numbers
- file diaries to record the creation of each file

- file plans to record the existence and location of each file within the classification and coding scheme
- indexes and/or lists of the classification scheme and file titles
- a controlled list of index terms
- tracking records to document the movement of files and enable their current location to be known at all times
- transfer records to document the movement of semi-current files from current systems to lower-cost storage and their retrieval when required
- disposal schedules to document appraisal decisions and serve as the authority for disposal action (these may be combined in practice with the classification and coding scheme)
- disposal records to document the completion of disposal action authorised by disposal schedules.

Many of these control systems are discussed in more detail in the later lessons of this module and in Managing Current Records: A Procedures Manual. *Handling semi-current records is covered in depth in* Managing Records in Records Centres. *Disposal schedules are dealt with in* Building Records Appraisal Systems.

SUMMARY

Lesson 4 has considered the principles and practices involved in building sound record-keeping systems. It has discussed the need to respond to changing records requirements and has dealt with the breakdown of records control. It has examined the strategic objectives of a record-keeping system.

It has looked at how the requirements of a new system are determined through business systems analysis and the analysis of data gathered from a records survey and interviews with staff. It has considered the options for centralised and decentralised control of systems. It has outlined the processes involved in clearing a backlog of closed records. It has introduced the idea of control points in record-keeping systems.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Describe three situations in which new record-keeping systems need to be introduced.

2. Why is the functional analysis critical to developing or improving record-keeping systems?

3. What is a registry?

4. What are the responsibilities of a registry or records office?

5. What is the records management unit?

6. Describe at least eight steps that can be taken to control record-keeping processes.

7. How can business systems analysis help the records manager?

8. What is a records survey?

9. Why should a records survey be conducted when reviewing a record-keeping system?

10. What terms of reference need to be determined when planning a restructuring exercise?

11. What are the three steps involved in collecting data for a restructuring exercise?

12. What is the purpose of gathering background information?

13. What will a records survey enable the restructuring team to do?

14. How can interviews help with a records survey?

15. How information is sought when data is analysed?

16. Name at least five questions that the restructuring exercise seeks to answer.

17. What ten actions might the records restructuring team determine once they have studied the information needs of the organisation?

18. What is the difference between centralised and decentralised control of records?

19. What questions should be considered when determining whether to decentralise records systems?

20. Why is it important to clear out any records that are no longer regularly used when beginning to implement new or improved record-keeping systems?

21. How should removed records be organised?

22. What is the difference between operational and housekeeping records?

23. When records are removed from current systems, what step should always be taken so that they do not cause congestion problems in the future?

24. What is control documentation?

25. At what points in the records process might control documentation be needed?

26. What kinds of elements might be found in a typical control system?

ACTIVITIES: COMMENTS

Activity 19

This activity is designed to help you compare the suggestions in this lesson with the reality of your organisation. Try to find out as much information as possible about the care of records in your organisation, as this information will help you work through these lessons and will give you a clearer understanding of how records are and can be managed.

Activity 20

Consider the political and organisational implications of changing your organisation's name. Will a name change offer more influence or less? How could you ensure that records management became a more central part of your organisation's administration?

Activity 21

Review the suggestions in this lesson for ideas about how to improve processes. You will also learn more about these processes as you read further in this module and other modules in this study programme.

Activity 22

There are benefits and drawbacks to both centralised and decentralised systems. The most important factor is that the decision to decentralise or manage records centrally is a conscious decision, made in the best interests of the organisation and its records. Review the information in this lesson carefully for more ideas on centralisation and decentralisation.

Activity 23

Decongesting is a common and useful records management activity and should be considered a valuable part of records work. It is important not to consider this a poor use or time or to do the work in a hurry and then allow the records to clog up the system again later.

Activity 24

If possible obtain copies of any forms or other control documents used and examine them closely. Consider how they might be improved. Then, hold onto this information and review it again when you study specific control documentation in later lessons in this module.

LESSON 5

MANAGING FILE SERIES

The first four lessons in this module have looked at the general concepts of records, the principles of records control, the framework for a records management programme and the principles of building sound record-keeping systems. Lesson 5 examines the requirements for managing file series and considers a range of options for the classification and coding of filing systems. Later lessons look in more detail at control systems and procedures for files and documents.

Topics discussed in Lesson 5 include

- types of files
- arranging files within series
- classification and coding systems
- types of filing systems
- types of coding systems
- documenting filings systems
- arranging computer files.

TYPES OF FILES

When creating file series, it is helpful to distinguish between the different categories of files. Most agencies create a wide range of files, but some common broad categories may be identified:

- *Policy* files relate to the formulation of policy and procedures by the organisation.

> ***Policy files:*** Operational files relating specifically to the creation of policies and procedures.

- *Operational or subject* files deal with the implementation of the organisation's policies and procedures (the distinction between *policy* and *operational* files may

not always be clear when a policy is being developed). Remember the definition included earlier.

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

- *Administrative* or 'housekeeping' files (common to all agencies) deal with subjects such as buildings, equipment and supplies, finance and personnel, as well as with general internal administration. Again, remember the definition shown above.

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

- *Case* files contain similar information on a wide range of, for example, individuals or organisations, usually reflecting the particular functions and activities of the agency. Case files may be operational (such as school inspection files) or administrative (such as personnel files).

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

Case files require further explanation. Case files relate to the actual conduct of business or the execution of policy or legislation as it concerns individual cases. Each individual file within the series concerns a separate person, institution or place but otherwise is similar in form and content to other files in that series. If case files are generated in large quantity (more than say 25 files), they will need to be arranged and classified separately from policy, operational and administrative files.

> *Case files relate to individual people, organisations and places or some other common characteristic.*

Recognising these distinctions between policy, operational, administrative and case files helps to give greater specificity to file series and sub-series and to file titles. The distinction is also particularly significant in the context of appraisal and disposal.

Activity 25

Examine various files in your organisation and find specific examples of

policy files

operational files

housekeeping files

case files.

For each type of file, explain how file titles are assigned and how files are organised.

ARRANGING FILES WITHIN SERIES

The concept of series *is dealt with in Lesson 2.*

The arrangement of series, and of files within series, should be as simple as possible. Normally, the structure should not need to extend beyond two levels: the series and the sub-series.

At the primary level, each of the specific functions and broad areas of activities (or tasks) of the organisation (or an agency, division or branch of that organisation in a decentralised system) should be part of a separate series.

At the lower level, each precise subject addressed in carrying out the function or activity should be part of a separate file.

In large filing systems where functions and activities are clearly defined, it will be possible to create a hierarchical arrangement of series. For example, one of the functions of an organisation might be 'training'. In a small organisation, all training files could be accommodated within one series.

In a larger organisation generating a higher number of training files, some subdivision may be necessary. 'Training' could, for instance, be broken down into separate sub-series for 'in-house training', 'external training courses', 'professional training', 'training overseas' and so on. For all practical purposes, the more specific sub-series will be treated as if they were separate series. Their relationship to each other can, however, be reflected in the hierarchical arrangement of the classification and coding scheme.

Small Organisation		Large Organisation	
Series:	Training	***Series:***	Training
Files:	In-house training External training courses Professional training	***Sub-series:***	In-house training External training courses Professional training
		Sub-series:	In-house training
		Files:	Classification training Emergency training Staff orientation

Classification of series is discussed in more detail later in this lesson.

Transferring Records Series

By relating the series to specific functions through business systems analysis, it becomes easy to transfer files between local records offices when reorganisations occur. This transfer of records is necessary situations such as when

- an operational unit moves from one location to another
- a function is transferred from one unit to another
- a function is transferred from central government to the regional administration.

Normally, when the reorganisation takes place the old files will be closed and a new series of files will be opened. However, where the changes are only at the higher levels of the administration, but the function or activity is still carried out in the same way by the same staff in the same location, the same files may continue to be used.

Transfers of function within or between agencies involve not only the transfer of current records series, but also the transfer of responsibility for any semi-current records relating to the transferred function.

When responsibilities are transferred, records also have to be transferred or closed.

As already noted in earlier lessons, the series is the main level at which appraisal and disposal decisions will be made and implemented.

Activity 26

How are records managed when functions or activities are transferred from one organisation to another or are reorganised within your institution? Write a brief description of the processes followed and indicate if there are formally documented procedures in place or if new methods are devised each time functions are reorganised.

CLASSIFICATION AND CODING

A classification scheme organises files and documents into a logical arrangement. Classification is done in relation to the provenance of the record, that is, the function and context in which the record is created. Indexing, on the other hand, is related to the subject of files and documents, and makes no distinction as to their context. Remember the definitions provided in Lesson 2.

***Classification*:** The process of identifying and arranging records and archives in categories according to logically structured conventions, methods and procedural rules represented in a classification system.

Indexing: The process of establishing and applying terms as access points to records. *Note:* The terms are usually organised in alphabetical order.

No classification scheme is perfect, and any scheme will inevitably group together some items which relate to more than one subject area. An index (normally based on a controlled vocabulary) should compensate for this by providing more than one retrieval term for each document or file.

Many government and business filing systems are based on 'function' because this provides the most logical and useful structure for the classification scheme. Functions represent the broad responsibilities and work areas of the organisation. The functions of an organisation are defined as its main areas of business: functions are what an organisation does.

Functions relate to the purpose of the organisation and are the reason for its existence.

At a lower level, activities are the means by which the organisation carries out its functions. A filing scheme based on functions and activities ensures that records are

held in an arrangement that reflects the work that led to their generation. Put simply, the functional approach links together records that relate to the same activities.

Activities are how the organisation carries out its functions.

Some classification and coding schemes may need to take into account other factors, such as the department that originated the records or the subject matter dealt with in the records. To a large extent, the classification and coding scheme may be predetermined on the basis of business systems analysis. However, some flexibility must be built into the system so that new and changing structures, functions, activities and responsibilities can be accommodated.

It is of no value to have a scheme that perfectly maps the work of the organisation but that does not allow the insertion of new files when new activities arise. Therefore, business systems analysis is an ongoing process; it must be repeated from time to time in order to keep the classification and coding schemes up to date.

The classification scheme also normally provides rules by which each file or document is given a unique reference number. This is known as coding.

Coding system: A representation of a classification scheme, in letters and/or numbers and in accordance with a pre-established set of rules.

It can be difficult to predict what subjects may arise in the future, particularly at the file level. A classification scheme wherein file codes or reference numbers are assigned as needed will prove more flexible than a rigid, predetermined classification and coding scheme.

As a general rule, the more a coding system reflects hierarchical relationships between records, the more difficult it becomes to insert new subjects and codes. This point must be kept in mind when considering the rapidity of change in today's administrative environment.

A coding system must be flexible to allow for growth over time.

The main features of a coding or reference number system are as follows:

- It must generate unique reference numbers for each item to be classified.
- It should be as simple as possible.
- It should provide a self-evident order: that is, the arrangement of items within the system should be logical and predictable.

- It should be unambiguous in form or format: for example, there should be no choice about upper or lower case letters or the presence or absence of an element
- Its elements should be clearly distinguishable from each other: for example, AB/45/89/01.

Selecting Classification and Coding Systems

There are many different file classification and coding systems, and there are no hard and fast rules for choosing a system. Choosing the right filing system will depend on a number of factors, such as

- the size and complexity of the organisation
- the range of its business
- the quantity of files and other records
- the presence of case files
- the rate of creation of new files and records
- the cost of installing and maintaining the system
- the ease or difficulty with which the files and records can be organised into mutually exclusive categories reflecting specific functions and activities
- the training required to operate and sustain the system
- the skills level of the records staff.

File classification and coding systems must be designed to match the requirements of the organisation they will serve. The requirements of a file classification system are set out in more detail in Figure 3 below.

Activity 27

Refer back to the work you did in the earlier activity where you were asked if the records in your organisation were classified and if so, how. For this activity, examine the classification system(s) used and write a brief description of whether the classification system seems to take into account

the size and complexity of the organisation
the range of its business
the quantity of files and other records
the presence of case files
the rate of creation of new files and records
the cost of installing and maintaining the system
the ease with which the files and records can be organised
the training required to operate and sustain the system
the skills level of the records staff.

- **A file classification system should support business or organisational requirements.**

  It should suit the organisation it serves and support decision making and the activities of the organisation.

  It should matches users' needs.

  It should provide the best, easiest and simplest solution.

  It should be cost effective.

  It should match resources, with adequate equipment, funds or staff.

  It should not be dependent on outside resources for operational requirements.

- **A file classification system should be easy to understand, use and maintain.**

  It should be based on logic or common sense.

  It should be understood by records staff and users.

  It should be independent of human memory.

  It should use simple processes.

  It should inspire confidence in operators and users.

- **A file classification system should be precise.**

  It should minimise doubt about where to file papers.

  It should allow the quick identification and retrieval of files.

- **A file classification system should be complete and comprehensive.**

  It should cover all the files that need to be included.

  It should be capable of including files that may be created in future.

  It should be flexible and allow for expansion, contraction or reorganisation.

- **A file classification system should be backed up by a procedures manual and training materials.**

  It should be clearly and comprehensively documented.

  All procedures should be explained in easy-to-follow steps.

  It should provide master copies of all forms, with completed examples.

  It should be supported by training programmes.

  It should be supported by professional advice or guidance.

- **A file classification system should be easily automated.**

  It should be capable of some form of useful automation, regardless of whether automation is planned, such as for word processing, computerised indexing, database management or a computerised record-keeping system.

Figure 3: Requirements of a File Classification System

TYPES OF FILING SYSTEMS

At its simplest, a file classification scheme can be a set of file titles arranged alphabetically in one series. At this level, there are no file reference numbers, no index and no controlled vocabulary for the file titles. This system would serve the needs of a small office with no more than 30 to 50 files and little expansion.

Even in a very small office, there would be disadvantages to such a simple system. For example, there would be no means of assigning a file reference to an outgoing letter, which can be a useful aid to locating a file when a reply quoting the reference is received. There would also be a danger, as the system grew, of creating a new file when a file dealing with that subject already existed.

A simple coding system could be imposed on the system (for example, file 01, file 02, and so on) enabling files to be assigned a reference number. However, the system would still be subject to disadvantages. The advantages and disadvantages of this simplest of systems are set out in Figure 4 below.

Suitable for:	single-series records systems 50 files or less low number of users static systems
Advantages:	easy to understand minimal set up costs not dependent on rules or well-trained staff no need for reference numbers
Disadvantages:	arbitrary arrangement, not based on logic dependent upon memory often user dependent – users choose titles retrieval difficulties if system expands misfiling likely as number of files grows system will break down as it expands does not permit file referencing

Figure 4: Advantages and Disadvantages of a Simple Alphabetical System

Few file classification systems are static. They grow as records are generated and received, activities develop and new subjects arise. Systems of any complexity also need to be based on logical procedures that can be understood by a person with little knowledge of the contents of the files. It is no use having a system based on the personal knowledge or memory of one individual: files will be difficult if not impossible to access when that person is not in the office. Chaos can occur if that person leaves his or her position and no one else can make sense of the system.

The size of the system should not determine the rate of retrieval of a document or file. Systems should be designed to allow for speedy identification and retrieval of files. In principle, it should take no longer to find a file among 800 files than among 100, if the control mechanisms are efficient and working properly.

For any system of 50 files or more there will need to be, as a minimum, a list of activities, subjects or themes dealt with by the organisation to serve as a classification guide and to control the filing and retrieval of records. For larger systems, a logical classification structure, a controlled vocabulary of terms and some form of indexing of files will be required.

General considerations relating to controlled vocabularies and indexing are dealt with in Lesson 2.

As already noted, analysis of functions and activities provides a basis for organising files. By linking file management to functions and activities, the files correspond to work patterns. As well, related items are kept together and it is easier to find records when they are required.

Generally, function/activity-based filing systems provide the most meaningful and most easily understood arrangement of records. However, it is sometimes difficult to make a clear distinction between activities, and this can lead to confusion in assigning files to their proper place in the classification scheme.

For example, if there is a sub-series of files dealing with ‘Training’ and another dealing with ‘Computerisation’, to which sub-series should a file dealing with ‘Computer Training’ be assigned?

It can be difficult to assign files to functional categories

In some cases, functions cannot easily be subdivided into convenient or workable categories. The organisation’s work may not be organised by function or sub-function. Sometimes the nature of the work is subject to constant change. Moreover, the staff operating the records system may not have the level of understanding or educational background needed to evaluate hierarchical relationships. In these situations, a method of classification is needed that does not depend upon precise categorisation.

One such system is the keyword code system. The keyword code system indexes files according to their broad themes rather than locking them into hierarchical categories below the level of the series. The keyword code system is also easily expandable: new activities and subjects can be inserted as they arise.

On the other hand, a well-designed hierarchical system, which organises files into categories or sub-series below the series level, will provide an easily understood structure to the filing system. A hierarchical system can provide clear links between related files, facilitating retrieval. A hierarchical structure is particularly useful when the administration is stable and the functions are already clearly defined. It is harder to apply a hierarchical system when the business of an organisation is constantly changing or growing, or when its functions are less clear.

The following sections of this lesson consider a number of alternative classification systems and discuss their advantages and disadvantages. The systems are not mutually exclusive. The use of one system at a particular level of arrangement or for a particular category of records does not rule out the use of a different system at another level or for another category. For example, a series of case files may be classified according to a numerical or alphabetical system, whereas the policy and administrative files in the same records office may be classified according to the hierarchical or keyword code systems.

Various classification systems can be used for different levels of arrangement or categories of record.

Hierarchical Systems

Hierarchical systems are designed to break down the business of an organisation into a hierarchy of levels. The number of levels in the hierarchy will depend on the degree to which the organisation's work can be broken down into well-defined areas. The number of levels will also depend on the number of files or records likely to be created in each area.

At the top of the hierarchy are the broad functions (series). These are subdivided into narrower functions or activities, represented by sub-series, which in turn may be broken down into activities or subjects. For example:

Buildings (broad function/series)

Maintenance (narrower function/sub-series)

Painting (activity/ sub-sub-series)

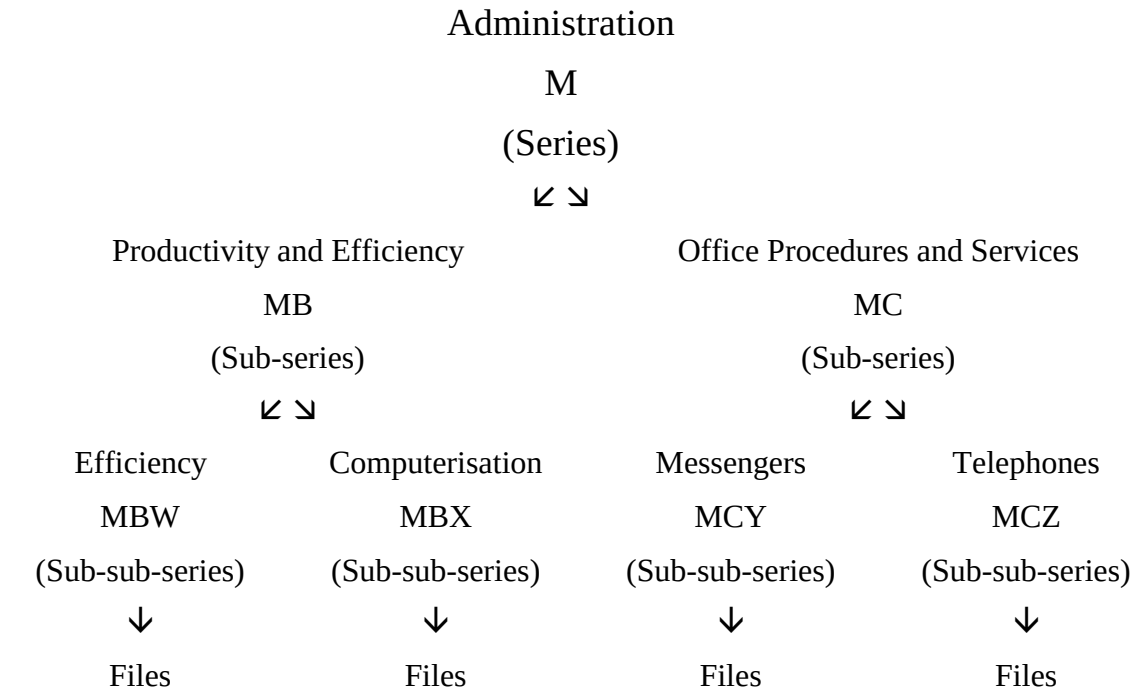
Hierarchical systems can also be mapped to organisational structures but are more likely to be effective and have greater flexibility if they reflect areas of business rather than branches and offices.

See 'Systems Based on Organisational Structure' below.

Multi-level hierarchical systems do not necessarily have to generate complex multiple-part reference codes or, indeed, complex hierarchies of files. Figure 5 below illustrates the hierarchical structure of the broad function ‘Administration’. The function of Administration is divided into two sub-series: ‘Productivity and Efficiency’ and ‘Office Procedures and Services’. These in turn are each subdivided into their own sub-sub-series.

Each level in the hierarchy is represented by a letter (Administration = M; Productivity and Efficiency = B; Efficiency Reviews = W; and so on). These letters supply the first part of the file reference for each file, thereby indicating its exact location in the hierarchy. In the example just cited, a file in the sub-sub-series Efficiency Reviews will be assigned the code ‘MBW’.

For practical purposes, such as when applying disposal instructions, the sub-sub-series may be treated as if they are series.



Summary of Coding

M	Administration		
	MB	Productivity and Efficiency	
		MBW	Efficiency Reviews
		MBX	Computerisation
	MC	Office Procedures and Services	
		MCY	Messengers
		MCZ	Telephones

Figure 5: Multi-level Hierarchical System Reflected in the Coding

As functions are broken down into narrower areas, a more precise organisation of the records results. If hierarchical systems are well-designed, accurate and based on a controlled vocabulary of terms that defines and prescribes each level and category, they leave little doubt about where to file or find documents.

In well-designed hierarchical systems, files are easily found.

In the example above, the classification is obvious for a file dealing with the organisation's telephone systems. Moreover, well-designed hierarchical systems permit the easy transfer of files to another records office in the event of a reorganisation of functions and activities.

However, hierarchical systems do require system managers and operators to have a full understanding of the functions and activities of the whole organisation and how they will develop. The system is likely to prove inflexible if new and unforeseen responsibilities are assigned or if significant changes of emphasis occur. For example, if narrow areas of business rapidly expand to become major activities, it can be difficult to reflect these changes in the filing system. Creating many new series as each new function develops may result in a cumbersome structure with overlapping series.

Hierarchical systems that include many files or are multi-layered may also need an index to the file titles themselves to aid retrieval. To ensure that the subject of the files is captured comprehensively by the index, such a system may require each file to be indexed in at least two ways, according to two words or terms taken from the file title or related to the file's contents. The index may also include the names of people, organisations, geographical areas, and so on, if these may appear in the file title or are the main subject of the file.

Hierarchical filing systems permit a wide range of coding systems based on, for example, meaningful or non-meaningful letter codes or numerical or alphanumerical sequences.

The advantages and disadvantages of hierarchical systems are outlined in Figure 6 below.

Suitable for:	large, more complex systems if well managed 100 to 1000+ files multiple users systems in which accurate mapping of file series to functions/activities is possible systems shared by agencies/branches/departments
Advantages:	easy to understand, if well designed allows multiple series and sub-series suitable for any system from simple to multi-level logical structure allows greater precision less reliance on memory if used with controlled vocabulary/index allows large expansion in number of files can show logical relationships between records appropriate for policy and administration files, but can also be used for case files allows detachment of functions when reorganisation occurs
Disadvantages:	depends on accurate analysis of functions and activities analysis must be kept up to date requires careful and accurate maintenance can cause uncertainty if functions and/or activities overlap or are unclear set up costs relatively high requires consistency and precision, adherence to rules and trained operators larger systems require controlled vocabulary large shared systems will require multi-levels, leading to greater complexity may require skilled system administrator.

Figure 6: Advantages and Disadvantages of a Multiple File Series Hierarchical System

Systems Based on Organisational Structure

These systems reflect the administrative structure of the organisation and the work carried out at each level. In this sense they are also hierarchical. Because organisational structure is generally based on the division of functions, these filing systems may bear a close resemblance to hierarchical systems based on functions and activities. However, difficulties of classification will occur if functions are shared between different units of the organisation.

Systems based purely on organisational structure were used extensively in the past and will be common in older classification and coding systems. An example would be 'Ministry of Agriculture: Farming Division: Livestock Department: Cattle Branch'.

Such systems are difficult to adapt to administrative changes, such as when divisions or departments are divided or combined or when agencies are restructured. It may be difficult to classify and file records when work is shared between departments or branches.

> *Systems based on organisational structure are difficult to adapt when the organisation changes.*

Furthermore, these systems may not fit well with other records management procedures, such as appraisal and disposal, which generally reflect functions rather than administrative organisation. The records series for a branch may contain a mixture of policy and routine 'housekeeping' files.

However, some degree of arrangement by organisational structure will be present in any large and complex organisation. At the level of arrangement above the series (function) level, a group of file series relating to the work of a specific division or agency will be linked together by the classification scheme.

This organisational arrangement is especially true in a decentralised system in which different divisions are associated with particular local records offices, such as 'Personnel Management Office, Management Services Division (MSD)'. In this example, MSD might have its own set of records series, uniquely classified and coded, particularly if it managed its own records in its own records office.

Keyword Code Systems

Like other effective file classification systems, keyword code systems organise files into series. Below the series level, however, keyword systems do not depend upon an organisation of files into sub-series. Therefore, they may be regarded as less rigid than, for example, hierarchical systems.

To use an example already cited, it does not matter in a keyword code system whether a file on 'Computer training' is classified under 'Training' or 'Computerisation' because the keyword index will enable the file to be found under either term. Thus,

classification systems based on well-designed keyword index or controlled vocabulary are still able to bring together functions, activities and subjects of a like nature. Because files on the same or closely related subjects are indexed by the same keywords, they will be drawn together in the file index.

Keywords can represent functions, activities, transactions, subjects, themes or even proper names. However, the indexing of files has to be consistent. If it is not, files on the same or similar subjects will not be drawn together in the index. In keyword code systems, the keyword index is the main filing and retrieval tool. This is unlike a multi-level hierarchical system, where files are classified into mutually exclusive categories.

A clear advantage of the keyword code system is that it enforces the discipline of indexing each file, by its title or content, under at least two keywords taken from the controlled vocabulary or keyword list. If the indexing is carried out accurately, the result can be a powerful and reliable classification and retrieval tool.

Keyword code systems can be powerful and reliable if well developed and well managed.

However, because the index is the critical classification and retrieval tool, people who develop and maintain the index must have a mastery of the keyword index. The keyword list should be as self-explanatory and simple as possible. A rough and ready rule is that if the keyword list goes beyond 500 terms, it will become difficult to use.

The keyword system is particularly useful for filing systems in which the hierarchical structure of, or relationship between, functions and activities are not easy to distinguish or are subject to change. It is also a useful system in cases where staff do not have the skills to analyse hierarchical relationships effectively. On the other hand, it can be difficult to separate files when office functions are reorganised unless series are narrowly defined.

The advantages and disadvantages of the keyword code system are set out in Figure 7 below.

Methods for using keyword code systems to assign reference numbers to records are discussed later in this lesson.

Suitable for:	large systems if well managed 100 to 1000+ files multiple users organisation-wide systems
Advantages:	once mastered, is easy to use one system can work for many agencies allows for expansion and insertion of new files efficient retrieval if indexing is accurate enforces discipline of indexing index structure forces a degree of precision provides relatively simple classification scheme index shows linkages between files requires minimal control documents can operate successfully even when distinctions between functions and/or activities are unclear accommodates policy, administration, case files
Disadvantages:	initially seems a complex system dependent upon careful and accurate construction and maintenance of keyword index retrieval is dependent upon accuracy of file indexing set up costs high requires trained operators requires skilled system administrator requires consistency and care in indexing can collapse if control documents are not maintained less easy to see relationships between series and sub-series than hierarchical systems can cause difficulties if functions are detached file references have little meaning for action officers requires monitoring by skilled records managers

Figure 7: Advantages and Disadvantages of a Keyword Indexing System

Alphabetical Systems

Alphabetical classification systems, in which the arrangement is by the name of a person, place or institution, have the advantage of being self-indexing. However, the indexing can only be based on one term (for example, the surname) unless computerised retrieval is possible. Computer systems can normally search for any term or part of a term, such as a forename or part of a surname.

Alphabetical systems require specific instructions for arrangement (such as letter-by-letter or word-by-word). These systems are also dependent upon accurate filing, which itself is dependent upon the operator's ability, particularly in large systems, to sort items alphabetically with complete reliability. However, alphabetical systems are easy to operate and have obvious applications for series of case files.

Alphabetical systems are self-indexing and easy to operate but they result in an inefficient use of storage space.

While alphabetical systems may allow for efficient indexing, they do not result in efficient storage. New files have to be fitted into the existing sequence, making it necessary to move files frequently to create more space. An alternative method would be to number files, assigning the next available number to each new file created, and maintaining a separate index linking file numbers to names or subjects of the files. There may be instances, however, where moving files around is more cost-effective than having to allocate numbers and construct a separate index.

Activity 28

Read about each of the classification systems above very carefully. Once you have read about all of them, write a brief description of each one in your own words and then indicate which system you think is the most logical for the types of records you use most often. Explain why you chose that system and discuss any disadvantages you see to that or the other systems.

TYPES OF CODING SYSTEMS

Once the series structure has been identified and a classification system selected, a decision will need to be made about how to generate codes or reference numbers for the files or records to be classified.

With the exception of simple alphabetical systems, all classification systems are dependent upon numerical or alphanumerical codes. These codes place files in their

proper place and provide concise and unique series and file identifications. Classification systems may also indicate logical relationships between series and between files within a series, which an alphabetical index of file titles does not. Awareness of these relationships may be important to file users and is certainly important for appraisal. The relationships are also a guide to archival arrangement when the original physical order has been disturbed.

Classification systems depend upon numerical or alphanumerical codes.

However, coding should be kept as simple as possible. Codes should not consist of more than four elements; three are preferred.

In many systems, the primary code, or the first element of the reference number, is represented by alphabetic characters. Using letters gives a wider range of codes (there are 26 letters available, as opposed to the numbers 0 to 9). In practice, however, the full range of letters is rarely required.

It is unwise to use mnemonic or meaningful codes. These are codes that are abbreviations or acronyms for the names of offices or functions. For example, POL for Policy Branch is a meaningful code, as is RES for Research Branch.

Using such codes strictly limits the letters that can be used. As well, the offices or functions may change over time, which means the codes much change. This can be a tremendously time-consuming task. For example, if the Research Branch were renamed Corporate Research, it might be possible to change the code to COR or CRES. However, older files should not be changed, and this makes it very difficult to link older and newer files.

The classification and coding systems for paper documents may also be applied to electronic records; see Managing Electronic Records.

A variety of coding systems may be used to represent the classification of files of an organisation. In the following sections, six types of coding system are discussed to illustrate the range of options:

- decimal systems
- multi-part systems
- alphanumerical systems
- running number systems
- block number systems
- keyword code systems.

Like classification schemes, coding systems are not mutually exclusive. The use of one system at a particular level of arrangement does not rule out the use of a different system at another level.

For example, decimal, multi-part and alphanumerical systems may be used with classification systems directly linked to business functions and activities, such as hierarchical systems. The running numbers system is more suitable for case files, especially when they form a self-contained series such as with personnel files. The block number system is a variant of the running number system, and it may be used when there is a broad classification according to function but not necessarily a detailed sub-division into activities and work areas. The keyword code system is often used in conjunction with keyword indexing and provides a robust system when the distinctions between activities (sub-series) are unclear.

Different coding systems may be used for records at different levels of arrangement.

Decimal Systems

Decimal systems are based on two numerical sequences, one before and the other after a decimal point.

- The first (or primary) number of two, three or four digits represents the main subject of the series. It is largely predetermined by business systems analysis. For example, 575 = Buildings Maintenance. Gaps may be left in the sequence of numbers to accommodate new functions or activities.
- The number after the decimal point represents an aspect of the main subject (in effect a sub-series or grouping of files). For example, 575.03 = Building Maintenance: Painting. This would be followed by the individual file number: 575.03.01.

Such decimal systems may bear a superficial resemblance to library subject classification and coding systems (such as UDC or Dewey). However, the subject terms used in library systems are usually too abstract, inflexible or detailed to be applied to the classification of records.

Multi-part Systems

Multi-part systems are similar to decimal systems. However, multi-part systems can produce long and clumsy codes and may generate a range of reference numbers that contain a different number of elements.

Multi-part systems are based on a combination of numerical or alphanumerical codes, in which each code represents one of the levels (or sub-levels) of arrangement and is

separated from the next by a slash (/). For example, 57/05/03 could be the code for a file in the sub-series Buildings: Maintenance: Painting; 68/42 could be the code for a file in the sub-series Motor Vehicles: Maintenance.

Again, the codes at series level are largely predetermined by business systems analysis. Individual file numbers are usually assigned sequentially. Thus, 57/05/03/01 is the first file in the sub-series Buildings Maintenance: Painting.

Alphabetical and Alphanumeric Coding Systems

Any of the systems already described can be used in combination with alphabetical codes or letters. The letters may represent the series level of file organisation. Applying letter codes to lower levels, particularly meaningful codes, may seem to produce a user-friendly system. For example, the file Staff: Leave: Flexible Working is represented by STA/LEA/FLX. However, such coding is vulnerable because the system may quickly run out of meaningful codes. Also codes will lose their meaning when functions are reorganised or names are changed.

Figure 8 below illustrates a classification scheme based on meaningful letter codes.

ADM/P&E/APP	=	Administration: Productivity and Efficiency: Staff Appraisal
ADM/P&E/COM	=	Administration: Productivity and Efficiency: Computerisation
ADM/P&E/EFR	=	Administration: Productivity and Efficiency: Efficiency Reviews
ADM/P&E/ORG	=	Administration: Productivity and Efficiency: Organisation and Methods
ADM/P&S/ELM	=	Administration: Office Procedures and Services: Electronic Mail
ADM/P&S/MES	=	Administration: Office Procedures and Services: Messengers
ADM/P&S/REP	=	Administration: Office Procedures and Services: Reprographics
ADM/P&S/TEL	=	Administration: Office Procedures and Services: Telephones

Figure 8: A Classification Scheme based on Meaningful Letter Codes

Alphabetical coding systems based on non-meaningful letter codes are easily expandable. However, they can be more difficult to maintain as the system grows. Furthermore, with the increase in complexity there is more scope for errors. For example, the codes EFF and EEF could easily become confused and records might be misfiled.

Alphabetical coding systems based on non-meaningful letter codes are easily expandable but can be difficult to maintain.

Running Number Systems

Running number systems give each new file the next number in a running sequence, irrespective of the subject of the file. Such systems use storage space efficiently since gaps do not have to be left or made within a sequence to accommodate new files. These systems were commonly used in the past for policy and administrative files, but they have now been largely discarded.

Running number systems are totally dependent upon a reliable and accurate index or computerised retrieval systems. Further, they lack the facility to provide linkages between related files created at different times. Obvious problems can arise as files are mixed together in a random order regardless of their different ongoing values. However, running number systems may be suitable for case files where the subject matter is essentially the same but where each file relates to an individual case.

While numerical systems in general can give greater precision, they are liable to human error. It is easy to confuse or transpose numbers in strings of four, five, six or more digits and consequently misfile papers or misplace files. Some systems with large numbers of case files and long file numbers, such as hospital patient files, overcome this difficulty by pairing digits.

For example, the location of the file 48657291 is more easily identified when the file reference is broken down into digit pairs, like this: 48 65 72 91. A particular use of this method is terminal digit filing. Thus, the file 48 65 72 91 would be placed with all other files ending with the digit pair 91. Within 91, files with the second to last digit pair 72 are placed together; within 72, files with the third to last digit pair 65 are placed together. Within 65 files are placed in the order of the first digit pair 48.

Numerical systems can give greater precision but are liable to human error.

Block Number Systems

Block number systems are a variant of the running number system but they include a top-level classification according to function or activity. In other words, predetermined blocks of consecutive numbers are allocated to functions and broad categories of activities. The files dealing with specific aspects of those functions or activities are allocated numbers sequentially within the block.

For example, the block of numbers 93001-93100 is allocated to Public Health. The first file in the block is 93001: Maternity and Child Welfare, the second is 93002: Blind Welfare and so on. Two files relating to Blind Welfare may be distinguished by the end-numbers 93002/01 and 93002/02.

Difficulties may arise if blocks have been preallocated to functions that need to be subdivided. For example, if Transportation were to be divided into Urban Transportation and Rural Transportation, it would be impossible to divide the block numbers. New numbers would have to be assigned to both new functions, and older records would no longer be found with newer ones.

Similarly, if particular areas of activity greatly expand and there is an unplanned growth in the number of files within a given block, the numbering system may break down.

Keyword Code Systems

A keyword code system is included here because as well as being a classification scheme, it is also a coding scheme. Such systems assign numerical codes to keywords representing activities, subjects or themes dealt with in the files. Files are organised at the top-level into series based on functions, but within series they are classified and coded according to two keywords representing the content of the file, taken from a master keyword list. The keyword list is a controlled vocabulary that limits the choice of words when indexing, thereby achieving the precision required for classification and retrieval.

As noted in the discussion about classification, keyword code systems are especially suitable when there are difficulties in identifying the hierarchy of functions and activities within an organisation, or where these functions and activities are in a dynamic state of change.

The system can be used effectively to establish hierarchies if the code for the lead or most important term is placed first. In this way, files on the same subject will be drawn together physically and intellectually within the system, in effect forming sub-series.

However, records staff may not always have the experience to know which is the more significant term. For example, when classifying the file ‘Ministry of Health: Early Retirement’ a decision is required about whether the first term – ‘Ministry of Health’ – or the second – ‘Early Retirement’ – should come first.

One way to make classification easier for staff is to make no distinction between the relative importance of the two terms but rather to arrange the codes in their numerical order with the lower number always coming first. This is illustrated in the following example.

Imagine that the three keywords ‘Ministry of Health’, ‘Early Retirement’ and ‘Training Awards’ are represented by the codes 27, 7 and 56. The files ‘Management Services: Early Retirement in the Ministry of Health’ and ‘Management Services:

Training Awards for Ministry of Health Staff' will be coded AB/7/27 and AB/27/56 (where AB represents the series 'Management Services').

While this coding will physically separate the two files dealing with the Ministry of Health, they will be drawn together in the file index because they share the same keyword 'Ministry of Health', under which they will both be indexed. Thus, looking up 'Ministry of Health' in the file index will locate both files. A typical keyword code file reference is shown in Figure 9 below.

AB/7/27/01 is the first file dealing with 'Early Retirement in the Ministry of Health':

AB	is the code for the file series 'Management Services'
7	is the code for the keyword 'Early Retirement'
27	is the code for the keyword 'Ministry of Health'
01	is the first file to be created with these two keywords representing its content.

Figure 9: Typical Keyword Code File Reference

Keyword code systems inevitably produce gaps in file numeration because not every number is used in combination with every other number. With gaps in numeration, it is not possible to look at the file reference numbers alone and determine where individual files are missing. For example, the file AB/3/18 may be the first file reference beginning with AB/3. Files with the reference numbers AB/3/1 to 3/17 may not exist, but this will not be known without consulting a file list. Similarly, the second file beginning with AB/3 may be AB/3/52. Files AB/3/18 to 3/51 may not exist.

However, this deficiency is not confined to the keyword code system. Block numbering systems also produce gaps in numeration. In fact, any coding system will produce gaps as files are closed and removed from the system

Activity 29

Read about each of the coding systems above very carefully. Once you have read about all of them, write a brief description of each one and then indicate which system you think is the most logical for the types of records you use most often. Indicate why you chose that system and also discuss any disadvantages you see to that or the other systems.

FILE NUMERATION

In decimal and multi-part coding systems, the file number itself may be a pre-determined number if all the possible files within a series or sub-series can be known in advance with certainty. However, it is rarely possible to know all files in advance as the business of modern government is never static. Assigning file numbers in anticipation of files being created in future is not a sound practice: it is a wasted effort if files are not created and it can lead to filing confusion. The preferred option is to use sequential (running) numbers at the end of the main classification code (for example, AB/3/17/01, AB/3/17/02, and so on), where 01 and 02 represent individual files with the same classification.

> *Assigning file numbers in anticipation of the creation of files can be a wasted effort and is not a recommended practice.*

Note that files ending in 01 should be the most common as each file will generally deal with its own self-contained subject. Instances where two files deal with different aspects of the same subject will be less common. However, continuation files (discussed below) will also generate file numbers ending with 02, 03, and so on.

In cases where a file becomes so thick that it must be closed and a new part opened, both parts will have the same number. The two parts will be each have a different part number. For example, each part may be labelled AB/3/17/01 Part 1 and AB/3/17/01 Part 2.

Opening new file parts is dealt with in more detail in Lesson 6.

A file may also be closed because it reaches the end of the file cycle: that is, it reaches a specified age as calculated from its opening date. Closing files at the end of a specified period is a sound practice. It provides a mechanism whereby older documents are removed from the current system.

When file closure occurs but the file is still active and accumulating papers, a continuation file will need to be opened. The new file will have the same classification codes but will be assigned the next available sequential or running number. Cross-references between the old and the new file will be entered on the file covers and in the filing system control documentation.

The handling of continuation files is discussed in more detail in Lesson 6. File control documentation is described in Lesson 8.

DOCUMENTING FILING SYSTEMS

Whatever system of classification and coding is selected, it can only operate effectively if it is adequately documented and if that documentation is properly maintained. Two levels of documentation are required to control filing systems:

- system documentation
- individual file documentation.

System documentation is maintained to provide the logical framework: how the filing system is organised into series and sub-series represented by their codes; where individual files should be placed when they are created; and under what headings should files be looked for in the index or controlled vocabulary. System documentation consists of the classification and coding scheme itself, the file plan and the controlled vocabulary, that is, the structured index or thesaurus of keyword terms.

Three tools are needed to document a filing system: the classification and coding scheme, the file plan and the controlled vocabulary or structured index.

System documentation is described in more detail below.

File documentation is maintained to record the existence of each file as it is created. This documentation shows where documents should be filed, enables individual files on specific subjects to found quickly and tracks each file when it is in use. File documentation consists of the file diary, the file transit sheet and the complete file index containing all the entries for the files in the system.

Three control documents are needed to record individual files within a filing system: the file diary, the file transit sheet and the file index.

File control documentation is described in later lessons.

In some systems, the system and file documentation can be combined to serve the purposes of both. For example, the transit sheets (recording file movements) can be organised into series, sub-series and file number order. Thus they can also serve as the file plan (the complete listing of all the files in the system). Similarly, the controlled vocabulary, containing all the cross-references to preferred terms, related terms, broader terms and narrower terms, can also serve as the file index. In a computerised records management system, it is possible to encompass all types of control documentation within a single database.

These concepts will be explained further as the documentation is discussed.

An organisation's filing system documentation, including classification and coding schemes, file plan, indexes and keyword lists, should be considered archival and should be scheduled for permanent preservation.

Activity 30

What kinds of documentation are used presently in your organisation to maintain filing systems? Do you think these systems are adequate? How would you improve them?

CLASSIFICATION AND CODING SCHEMES

The written or printed classification and coding scheme provides a complete overview of files at the series (and sub-series) level. This documentation allows records staff and file users to see the framework for the classification of files and the hierarchical organisation of series and sub-series.

For operational files, the scheme will be agency-specific, as illustrated in Figure 10.

2100 LIVESTOCK – PLANNING
2110 LIVESTOCK - STATISTICS
2120 LIVESTOCK – SUBSIDIES
2130 LIVESTOCK – CATTLE
2140 LIVESTOCK – HORSES
2150 LIVESTOCK – POULTRY
2150.00 Policy
2150.01 Domestic fowls
2150.02 Ducks
2150.03 Geese
2150.04 Turkeys

Figure 10: Classification and Coding Scheme: Operational Files

For administrative files, which may take a similar form in many units across the whole of an organisation, the scheme may be issued centrally, as shown in Figure 11 below. However, it may be necessary to tailor the scheme within a specific agency to take account of local variations.

500 BUILDINGS – REQUIREMENTS

505 BUILDINGS – CHARGES AND INVOICES

515 BUILDINGS – REPORTS AND STATISTICS

530 BUILDINGS – ACQUISITIONS

535 BUILDINGS – ALTERATIONS AND REPAIRS

540 BUILDINGS – CONSTRUCTION

550 BUILDINGS – DAMAGE

555 BUILDINGS – DISPOSAL

575 BUILDINGS – MAINTENANCE

575.00 Policy and procedures

575.01 Repairs and renovations

575.02 Janitorial services

575.03 Painting

575.30 Inspection reports

Figure 11: Classification and Coding Scheme: Administrative Files

In neither case should the scheme be allowed to become too rigid and constraining. From time to time, new series or sub-series may need to be added, or existing series or sub-series divided or combined. Classification and coding schemes should be allowed to develop to reflect the growth of the filing system.

Classification and coding schemes may also serve as the basis of disposal schedules.

FILE PLANS

File plans (also called file lists) record the individual files within each series or sub-series.

> ***File plan:*** A detailed list or inventory of the individual files within a file classification system.

File plans provide a complete list of all the files in the system. File plans also show where each file fits in the classification scheme. File plans may be maintained in a loose-leaf form within binders, on cards or as word-processed lists.

The details of each file are entered on the form, card or list and entries are arranged in file number order by series or sub-series. The transit sheets (discussed in Lesson 8) may serve as the file plan as well as recording the circulation of files.

File plans are also known as 'file registers' and file lists are sometimes referred to as 'file indexes'. However, these terms are avoided here to avoid confusion with correspondence and document registers and with alphabetical indexes.

CONTROLLED VOCABULARIES

The concept of controlled vocabularies was introduced in Lesson 2. Like indexes to the series (defined in classification and coding schemes) and files plans or lists, they are essential for the identification and retrieval of the right file.

For most practical purposes, the controlled vocabulary (showing the preferred terms or keywords to be used and the linkages between the terms) may be combined with the entries in the index for each individual file to form a single alphabetical index.

However, there is no reason why there should not be a controlled vocabulary indicating the terms under which files are to be indexed, and a separate index to the files themselves showing the pointers (taken from the controlled vocabulary) to individual files.

In a keyword code system, the classification scheme itself provides the file index, thereby simplifying the control documentation.

ARRANGING COMPUTER FILES

In computer systems, filing schemes similar to those for paper systems may be established for word processing applications, databases and spreadsheets. However, the terminology of computer systems is different and may even differ from system to system.

In general usage, an electronic 'file' is a named document or application. It is not, therefore, the equivalent of a paper file.

The electronic equivalent of a paper file is a 'sub-directory', which is an intellectual assembly of electronic files (documents). A 'directory' is an intellectual assembly of files and sub-directories. In other words, it is the equivalent of a paper series.

Each of these levels of logical arrangement is represented by a code or 'name', which typically consists of eight alphanumeric characters, the final level having a three-character extension to represent the type of 'file' (document), such as word processed, database or spreadsheet. The combination of such codes constitutes the 'path' or 'pathname'.

The 'file manager' is the tool within a computer system or electronic environment that organises the files, sub-directories and directories. It includes a 'directory tree' that represents the organisation and shows the hierarchical relationships, and it is thus the equivalent of the file classification and coding scheme and file plans.

Records and Computer Terminology

records management terminology	*computer systems terminology*
document	**file**
file	**sub-directory**
series	**directory**

For more information on naming conventions for electronic records, see Managing Electronic Records.

SUMMARY

Lesson 5 has examined the classification and coding of files by series. It has looked first at the main categories of files and the arrangement of files within series. It has then considered the general principles of classification and coding and how particular schemes should be selected. It has considered the following types of filing systems:

- hierarchical systems
- systems based on organisational structure
- keyword code systems
- alphabetical systems.

It has considered the following types of coding systems:

- decimal
- multi-part
- alphabetical and alphanumeric
- running number
- block number
- keyword.

It has introduced the main procedures needed to document a filing system. Finally, it has looked briefly at arranging computer files.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Explain the purpose of policy files.
2. Explain the purpose of operational files.
3. Explain the purpose of housekeeping files.
4. Explain the purpose of case files.
5. Why should files be arranged within series?
6. How can reorganisation affect records?
7. Explain the concept of classification.
8. What is the difference between classification and indexing?
9. Explain the concept of coding.
10. What is the difference between classification and coding?
11. Describe five main features of a coding or reference number system.
12. Describe at least five factors that must be considered when selecting classification and coding systems.
13. Describe in as much detail as possible the requirements of a filing system.
14. What are the advantages and disadvantages of an alphabetical classification system?
15. What is a hierarchical system?
16. What are the advantages and disadvantages of a hierarchical classification system?
17. Why are systems based on organisational structure difficult to adapt?
18. What is a keyword code system?
19. What are the advantages and disadvantages of a keyword code system?
20. Describe each of the six types of coding system discussed in this lesson and indicate the advantages and disadvantages of each.

21. What are some of the concerns involved with numbering files?

22. What is system documentation and why is it important?

23. What is individual file documentation and why is it important?

24. Why is a written or printed classification and coding scheme valuable?

25. What is a file plan and why is it useful?

26. Why are controlled vocabularies useful?

27. What terms used to manage records in computer systems differ from terms used to manage paper systems? Why is this difference in terminology an issue for records and archives managers?

ACTIVITIES: COMMENTS

Activities 25-30

Each of these activities is designed to help you compare the information in this lesson with the realities in your organisation. You should use these activities as the basis for examining your own record-keeping systems and considering ways you might apply the information provided in this study programme.

You should keep careful notes for these activities and refer back to them as you proceed through this and other modules in the study programme.

LESSON 6

CREATING AND CONTROLLING FILES

The previous lesson looked at the requirements for managing file series and considered a range of options for file classification and coding systems. Lesson 6 examines the processes involved with creating and controlling files. Topics discussed include

- the physical file
- filing procedures
- opening a new file
- giving files titles
- creating a keyword list
- establishing control over new files.

THE PHYSICAL FILE

For paper records, the file is the physical embodiment of an intellectual concept: a number of documents are held together because they relate to a particular business activity or subject. Hence, we usually think of a file as a physical object. However, it is important to bear in mind the distinction between physical and intellectual files. Computer files have no physical form (unless they are printed out) and exist only as logical assemblages of electronic data, which can be viewed as information on the screen. A computer file can be a word-processed document, an index or a database.

> ***File (1):*** An organized physical assembly (usually within a folder) of documents grouped together for current use or in the process of archival arrangement because they relate to the same subject, activity or transaction. *Note:* A file is usually the basic unit within a record series.
>
> ***File (2):*** A logical assembly of data stored within a computer system. *Note:* In word-processing systems it is the intellectual representation of a physical document.

The covers of paper files, also known as file jackets or folders, are usually made of rigid manila paper or board, cut a little larger than the dimensions of the documents to be filed and folded to enclose those documents and so minimise damage from handling and use.

> *It is not wise to use thinner file covers as they quickly become torn and damaged and need replacing more often than thicker file covers.*

File covers are often pre-printed with the titles of the organisation and the appropriate division or branch of that organisation. Typically, covers include spaces for the following information:

- file title
- classification codes
- keywords or index terms
- date of opening
- references to previous, continuation or related files
- security classification
- retention and disposal information.

File covers often also have a grid (or ladder) for recording the file's circulation when it is in use.

In an automated records management system, file labels showing titles and numbers can be prepared easily. With an automated system, labels can also be prepared in multiple copies, one for the file and others for the file transit sheet and file movement record. (These mechanisms are discussed in Lesson 8.) Automatically generated labels can also be produced with machine-readable bar codes, which can be used for file tracking.

The word 'file' derives from the Latin word *filum*, which means thread; it is still common for individual documents within a file to be secured by a tag made up of twisted threads. In countries following British practice, this thread, known as a 'Treasury tag', will be inserted through a hole punched in the top left-hand corner of the folded file cover and in the same position in each document. The Treasury tag system is still the cheapest and easiest system of securing documents within a file with minimal risk of the loss of information through the initial hole punching.

> *Documents are often secured in files by the use of tags or ring binders.*

The correct method of inserting a treasury tag in a file cover is described in Managing Current Records: A Procedures Manual.

Other systems use two tags secured through holes along the left-hand side of the file cover and documents. Another variation is the pillar or ring binder, in which documents are placed after having two, three or four holes punched along their left-hand edges. Such systems are more secure, but they tend to be more expensive than the Treasury tag system. Moreover, turning over the papers of the file is more difficult, and if the documents do not have adequate margins on both sides, the risk of losing information is greater.

If files are to be retained for any length of time, especially in hot and humid climates, the metal used in pillar and ring binders might corrode, causing damage to the documents. The metal ends of tags and staples, paper clips or pins used to secure individual documents within the file can also corrode. Non-metallic (inert plastic) components are preferable, if available.

Files must not become so thick that they cannot be managed easily and safely.

Files must never be allowed to become too thick. There must always be sufficient length of tag, pillar or ring left free so that the documents in the file can be turned over safely and read easily without tearing around the punched holes and breaking loose. Such tearing not only damages the documents but also introduces the risk that the file contents may fall out of order or be lost. When damage to file covers or documents does occur, it should never be repaired with adhesive tape (such as scotch tape or sellotape). Tape discolours and damages the paper to which it is attached, and the stain is extremely difficult to remove. Advice on repairing damaged files and documents should be sought from an archival conservator.

For more information on preservation issues such as the use of adhesives, see Preserving Records.

Activity 31

How are documents secured into files in your organisation? Can you suggest three ways you might change the process of securing papers in files in order to handle the records more efficiently and protect the documents?

FILING PAPERS

Papers should be filed in their order of receipt or creation.

Maintaining the correct order of documents within a file establishes the context within which decisions and actions are taken and confirms the sequence of those transactions. Therefore, papers should be filed in the same order as the transactions of which they form part. However, this principle is not the same as saying that each individual paper is to be filed in chronological order.

Documents should be placed on files in the order in which they are created or received. Associated papers, such as a letter received and its enclosures, are treated in this sense as one document. Thus, a copy of an outgoing letter may be filed before an incoming letter that was received at a later date but perhaps written at an earlier date. The incoming letter will not have been seen before the outgoing letter was despatched. This filing order reflects the correct sequence of business. Filing documents strictly in their order of creation and receipt is a simple rule to follow and is easy to operate consistently when a number of people are responsible for filing.

An alternative method is to place together within the file all the papers relating to each transaction, such as inward correspondence and enclosures, associated minutes and memoranda and a copy of the outward reply. This method ensures that papers relating to different transactions are not interfiled and that file users can easily see the sequence of documents relating to each piece of business.

The disadvantage of this method is that it is not always possible for records staff or action officers to determine when the documentation relating to a particular transaction is complete. For example, further correspondence might be received. The contents of files have to be rearranged regularly so that documents relating to a particular sequence of business can be inserted at their correct point.

This difficulty can sometimes be overcome by using file dividers to separate the different transactions covered by the file or by creating multiple files. However, such systems are more costly because they use more stationery, and they may also be cumbersome and time consuming to operate. For these reasons, the chronological method described above is preferred.

Methods of Filing

There are a number of different methods of filing.

'Back-to-front' is the most common method and is the preferred option. Each new document is added on top of the preceding documents, so that the most recently created or received document is always on top. This method is easy to operate, does not require documents to be removed and ensures that the latest documents are brought readily to the attention of the action officer.

Filing records by adding each new document to the top of the file is the easiest method of maintaining chronological order.

In the opposite method, the 'front-to-back' method, each new document is added below the preceding documents. This system is easy to operate only if ring binders or certain types of pillar binders are used. It does not bring the latest documents readily to the attention of the action officer, though it does make chronological browsing through the file marginally easier.

In some systems, documents are placed in separate chronological sequences on both the left-hand and right-hand sides of a file, those on the left being punched in the top right-hand corner when the file tag system is used. This method may be used to separate internal minutes and instructions associated with individual documents from inward and outward correspondence, memoranda, reports and other transactional documents.

This 'split file' system, common in the past, is rarely used now, largely because it is felt to be too time consuming and demanding to maintain properly. Nevertheless, it has the advantage of directing action officers and records staff to correspondence, instructions and notes requiring their attention, so they do not have to look through the entire contents of the file.

The 'split file' system is often used in conjunction with 'foliating' documents. Foliating refers to the process of numbering documents consecutively on the file, beginning with number one, in the order in which they are filed. Documents are then listed in folio number order on minute sheets on the left hand side of the inside front cover of the file, providing a contents list.

Foliating minimises the need to write instructions on the documents themselves. However, a folio system is likely to degenerate unless action officers and records staff operate it accurately and consistently.

The recommended method of foliating documents is described in Managing Current Records: A Procedures Manual.

The 'split file' system has also been used to separate documents of ephemeral value, usually on the left, from those of long-term value, usually on the right, or to retain a stock of duplicates, usually on the left. As a general rule, it is better to interfile all relevant documents in order to establish the continuity of the transactions recorded on the file and to place purely ephemeral material on separate files, or not to the file the ephemeral material at all. (This is discussed in more detail below.)

What Is to Be Filed?

Substantive documents should be filed; however, not every piece of paper received by the organisation should be placed on a file.

Documents that should be filed include all inward correspondence, internal minutes relating to the correspondence and outward correspondence. As well, internally generated administrative, financial, legal and operational documents should be filed. Documents of ephemeral value and duplicates should not be filed.

Substantive documents are added to the file; ephemeral documents need not be retained on files.

For example, the following types of record are not normally filed:

- rough drafts, whether in manuscript or typescript, that do not differ in substance from later drafts or final versions that are to be filed
- copies of correspondence and internal documents, such as committee minutes and papers, reports and directives, provided for information only, with no annotations, which have no relevance to the ongoing business of the organisation
- spare or duplicate copies of documents
- ephemera, such as manufacturers' and suppliers' catalogues, advertisements, invitations to social events and press cuttings circulated for information only.

Such material should be stored separately, retained only as long as it is current and then destroyed.

It is not always physically practical to place some kinds of document, such as reports or publications, on the file. Similarly, some items in non-standard formats, such as title deeds, photographs, maps, plans or drawings, may need some additional form of protection. A number of options are possible for these items.

Records offices may choose to operate a 'library and documentation centre' in which reports and other bulky items are located. A cross-referencing system will need to be established so that items can be linked to their parent files and to the associated filed documents. Reports and publications may be placed in appropriate containers, such as boxes, envelopes or wallets; each container can be marked or labelled with the classification code of the parent file or files. The filed document with which the item was originally received should likewise be annotated to indicate the location of the item in the documentation centre.

Items such as title deeds, photographs and folded plans may remain with the file but should be placed in a protective cover such as an envelope, which should be marked to indicate its contents. The envelope may either be placed with any associated documentation at its correct position on the file and secured by the tag, or 'tagged' to the inside back cover. Again, the cover and any associated documents within the main body of the file will need to be cross-referenced.

When and by Whom Are Papers Filed?

Procedures for filing should be established and firmly enforced. Whatever the procedures are, consistency in applying them is vital. When and by whom papers are filed will depend upon the type of control system used.

Where there is a traditional centralised system of record keeping, inward correspondence is opened and registered in the organisation records office, associated with or placed on the relevant file (existing or new) and then passed to the appropriate officer or organisation for action.

In some systems, incoming correspondence is first circulated in batches to be 'previewed' by a senior member of staff. This person decides which action officer will deal with each item and marks the correspondence accordingly. After circulation, the file of incoming correspondence, now annotated with instructions, is then returned to the records office for distribution to the relevant action officers. A variation of this system is to circulate the materials not only to the most senior member of staff but also to other senior officers so that they are kept up to date with relevant issues. In this case, it is important to keep the circulation list as short as possible so that any delay in dealing with the correspondence is minimised.

The circulation of correspondence is dealt with in more detail in Lesson 7.

Activity 32

Examine the filing practices in your organisation and answer the following questions:

How are records filed? Back to front? Front to back? Another way?

What materials are put on files? Is anything not added to the files? Why? What is done with it?

Who is responsible for filing? How are records processed and reviewed prior to filing?

CREATING A NEW FILE

The trigger for opening a new file should be the receipt or generation of a document on a new subject. When a new subject arises within the administrative process, a new file should be opened to contain the documents. Similarly, when an existing subject subdivides into new discrete subjects, a new file (or subfile) should be opened for each new subject.

Each file should have a title that describes its contents precisely and concisely. Each file should be classified and coded so that its code number uniquely identifies it and can be used to record it for identification purposes in the file control system.

To ensure control and consistency, files should be opened, titled, classified and coded only by the staff of the records office concerned. However, the records office staff should consult, with the relevant action officers as necessary. The action officers may have essential knowledge about the need for new files and the appropriate terminology to use for the topic in question.

Opening New Files

When a document comes in, the records office staff must decide whether an appropriate file already exists. This is done by checking the file index under relevant headings (or the file plan if there is no file index). If no appropriate file exists, it will be necessary to create a new file, classify it and give it a title and number.

No new file should be opened before there is correspondence to go on it. Opening files in the expectation of future correspondence wastes effort and valuable file covers and, worse, can lead to confusion in the file index.

If there is any doubt about whether a new file is required, the records office staff should ask the relevant action officer for advice. Action officers should also be encouraged to indicate their need for new files.

If a new file is required, the records office staff will have to think carefully about what it will contain and how it will grow. Each file should relate to a single subject, a well-defined business activity or a particular type of transaction. Each file should tells its own discrete story. As long as a file tells a story in its own right, and no more, it is immaterial whether the file remains thin or develops into several parts.

> *Each file relates to a single subject or well-defined business activity.*

If the scope of the file is too narrow and specific, it may only tell part of the story. Too many files of this sort make it difficult for action officers to understand what is going on, because they cannot be certain that they have the whole story. Files that are too narrow in scope will also cause filing and retrieval problems as uncertainties arise about the correct file on which documents should be placed or found.

A file that covers too many issues is also hard to use. The action officer will have to search through a mass of paper to get to the story. Moreover, the file will grow quickly, and new parts will have to be opened frequently, which will make the problem worse.

When a file grows very quickly, or when a file is used for seemingly unrelated papers, it is usually a sign that the file title is too broad and that the file should be broken

down into more specific files. On the other hand, files grow at different rates; certain files covering well-defined areas of business may still expand rapidly.

Parts of Files, Subfiles and Continuation Files

Sometimes a file is subdivided because it has become too thick or because the subject in question has proved to have a number of discrete aspects not foreseen when the file was created. The distinction between parts, subfiles and continuation files is important when considering file classification and coding, and appraisal, retention and disposal.

In the first instance (when a file has become too thick) the old physical file will be closed and a new one opened, but together they will constitute a single intellectual file. They will have the same title and classification code, but will be distinguished as 'Part 1' and 'Part 2'. They will be managed throughout the life cycle as a single entity. In this module, they are referred to as 'parts' (or 'volumes').

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

In some systems, the first file is not called a 'part'; the next file opened to follow the first is numbered 'Part 1'. Then the next file is numbered 'Part 2' and so on. By following this practice, it is not necessary to renumber the original file and the system control documentation. Furthermore, all references to the original file (for example in correspondence registers and in correspondence) will continue to be correct. When a file reference includes a part number, the part number must of course be included in the reference number written on the file cover and in the control documentation.

A subfile is created when the subject of the file has proved to have a number of different aspects. A new physical and intellectual file will be opened for the new aspect(s) of the subject. The more general parent file may continue to be used. The new file will have a title that will clearly distinguish it from the parent file, though it may include elements of that file's title. It will be managed as a separate entity throughout its life cycle. In some systems, the link between the new file and the parent file will be maintained by designating the new file as a 'subfile' of the parent file.

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

Both parts and subfiles should be distinguished from 'continuation files'. A continuation file is a new intellectual and physical file that is opened when the old file on the subject has reached its cut-off point within the file cycle, for example, when it has become five years old from its opening date, but when the subject with which it

deals continues to generate papers. The continuation file will normally have the same title as its predecessor, but it will be identified as belonging to another file cycle, with its file number and opening date recorded on the file cover.

***Continuation file*:** A new file opened when the old file on the subject has reached its cut-off date within a file cycle.

***File cycle*:** A specified period during which documents are added to files, at the end of which new files are opened if the subjects with which they deal continue to generate documents.

In some coding systems, the year of opening forms part of the file reference number. This has the advantage of indicating on the file cover and in the control documentation the year of opening and therefore the year of closing. It has the disadvantage of adding another element to the reference number.

As noted in Lesson 5, a continuation file will also be distinguished from its predecessor by having a different sequential or running number. For example, a continuation file may be coded as AB/3/17/04, where 04 is the next available sequential number.

The processes of closing files are dealt with later in this lesson.

Activity 33

How are new files opened in your organisation? Are files divided into parts or subfiles or continuation files? Explain the processes used.

ASSIGNING FILE TITLES

The file title will be composed of a number of words, terms or phrases used in combination to describe unambiguously the specific subject or contents of the file in its functional context.

The titling of files needs to be carefully controlled. Using different words and phrases to describe the same subject will cause obvious difficulties in filing and locating documents. To achieve consistency, the 'keywords' used in file titles should be controlled by using authority lists for proper names and controlled vocabularies or

thesauri for subject terms to achieve consistency. The definitions provided in Lesson 2 are repeated here.

> ***Thesaurus (pl. thesauri):*** A controlled and structured vocabulary of keywords showing synonymous, hierarchical and other relationships and dependencies.
>
> ***Authority list*:** A list of standardised keywords, including names (personal, corporate and geographic), used as access points in retrieving information.
>
> ***Keyword*:** A term or combination of terms taken from the title or text of a document or file characterising its content and establishing an access point for its retrieval.
>
> ***Keyword list:*** A controlled vocabulary that limits the choice of keywords when classifying or indexing files.

A keyword list is a control mechanism. It limits the way individual records are classified and indexed by imposing precision and consistency on the indexing process. Thus, it should tell its users and operators where to place records on particular subjects or where to look for them.

A keyword list can also provide a standard vocabulary to be used when giving files titles. By limiting the choice of words to be used when assigning titles to files, a controlled vocabulary or keyword list assists the indexing process and removes uncertainty about where to file documents.

Increasingly, organisations are sharing information across divisions and departments, both in paper and electronic form. As a result, staff throughout the organisation are involved in the processes of naming and retrieving files and documents. In these circumstances, a corporate-wide thesaurus or controlled vocabulary will be required.

This corporate-wide thesaurus will need to include 'specialist' terms relevant to individual departments as well as terms that relate to the organisation as a whole. Though ready-made thesauri can be purchased, it is normally necessary to construct in-house a thesaurus for records purposes so that it matches the requirements of the organisation.

File titles should be clear and precise, providing brief but adequate details about the file's contents.

The file title should be as descriptive as possible so that it provides adequate details of the file's actual and planned contents, while being as brief as possible. It ought to trigger in the users' minds what the file contains.

At the same time, the file title should be specific enough so that records office staff do not use one file to cover different developments of the original story that really should

be the subjects of several files. File titles should describe the contents of a file and help to limit the scope of the material placed on it.

File titles that include the words 'General' and 'Miscellaneous' should be avoided. These terms encourage misfiling or inefficient filing and indexing. Nearly all general files quickly become too bulky. They will soon become dumping grounds for papers that ought to be on specific files. They may also oblige action officers or records staff to look for a document in two places: the specific and the general file.

Another danger with general titles is that they may be used to file duplicates of papers already on the proper specific files or ephemeral papers that should not be filed at all.

The file-naming conventions for files of paper documents should also be applied in naming directories and files in electronic text documents, though there may well be limitations on the number of characters or letters that can be used in electronic systems.

The order of terms within the title may begin with the general (the primary concept) and continue with the more specific subject areas or activities, for example, 'Scheme of Service: Administrative Class: New Edition'. Not all file titles will have a clear hierarchy of terms; the use of terms that are consistent and clear is more important than the order in which they appear in the file title.

In many instances, the primary element of the file title will usually be self-evident. It will correspond to the series or sub-series of which the file forms a part. In a functionally oriented system, the term will relate to a primary functional area, such as 'personnel' or to a sub-function or activity within that area, such as 'superannuation'.

The secondary element of the title should be as concise as possible, but it must accurately reflect the contents of the file and not duplicate the title of any other file with the same primary elements. It may resemble natural language, but the substantive terms used may need to be drawn from a keyword list. A specific phrase might be 'Early retirement in the Ministry of Health', where 'Ministry of Health' and 'Retirement', or perhaps 'Early Retirement' are keyword terms. However, there should be no compulsion always to use keyword terms in file titles. The title that best describes the contents accurately and concisely is the one that should be used. Forced use of keyword terms may lead to clumsy titles and ambiguity.

When adding new papers to a file, staff must ensure that the file title continues to reflect the contents and, in particular, that it has not become too general.

> *If there is any doubt about the title of a file, suggestions should be checked with an appropriate action officer.*

It is unwise to change the title of a file unless absolutely necessary. Action officers become familiar with titles and changing them leads to confusion. It is better to create new files or subfiles for new papers that do not conform with the old file's title and, if necessary, to make cross-references between the files. Where changing the title of a file seems justified, the permission of a designated senior member of the records

office staff must be obtained. Care needs to be taken to ensure that all control documentation is appropriately updated, including the file index.

Activity 34

How are file titles assigned in your organisation? Explain the processes used.

CREATING A CONTROLLED VOCABULARY OR KEYWORD LIST

The general principles of controlled vocabularies are dealt with in Lesson 2.

A controlled vocabulary limits the choice of words to be used when classifying or indexing files and other records, thereby achieving precision. It serves as an authority list (providing the standard forms for personal, corporate and geographic names). It also serves as a 'thesaurus', controlling the subject terms to be used (the preferred terms, related terms, broader terms and narrower terms) and establishing the relationships between terms through cross-references. Relationships between terms are discussed in more detail below.

A controlled vocabulary limits the choice of words when classifying or indexing files and other records.

In a small, centralised government, such as in a province or region, or in a small business, it may be possible for the records and archives institution to maintain a centralised vocabulary or keyword list. In larger organisations it is more practical to maintain keyword lists at the organisation level under guidance from the records and archives institution. In the latter case, a senior officer of the organisation's records management unit should be responsible for approving new terms when the index headings required to describe a new file do not exist.

As in the case of opening new files, new index terms should be established as the need arises and not in anticipation of presumed future requirements. The objective is not to compile a universal classification scheme like those used in libraries. Rather, the purpose is to create a working tool for immediate and local use for the actual files in the system. In some cases, it is possible to compile a basic new keyword list from the titles of existing current files.

It may also be possible to adapt an existing keyword list when carrying out a restructuring programme. On the other hand, it is essential not to continue old practices that may not meet current requirements. A keyword list must also be based on a careful analysis of functions and activities. This issue is discussed in Lesson 2.

> *The construction of a controlled vocabulary or keyword index is described in more detail in* Restructuring Current Records Systems: A Procedures Manual.

Keywords used in file titles may be proper names (persons, places, organisations, and so on) or subject terms, which may be concrete entities (such as 'schools') or abstract concepts (such as 'education'). They may be single nouns (such as 'superannuation') or compound terms. Compound terms may be noun phrases (such as 'adult education' or 'Ministry of Health') or nouns qualified by adjectives (such as 'compulsory retirement').

Although all the examples in this lesson are in English and use the English alphabet, the same general principles apply irrespective of language and script.

The choice of keywords is important. They can include words derived from other languages (such as 'safari'), jargon (such as 'white paper'), acronyms (such as 'UNESCO'), abbreviations (such as 'Interpol') and trade names (such as 'Xerox' or 'Windows'). However, such words should be used only if they are widely understood and if there are no better alternatives. Slang should be avoided.

Care should be taken in using words that have more than one meaning. For example, 'duties' can mean either taxation or the obligations and responsibilities of a person or group of persons. Such a term should only be used in compound terms, such as 'import duties' or 'duties of policemen', in which its meaning is quite clear.

Relationships between Terms in a Controlled Vocabulary

Some of the terms in a controlled vocabulary or keyword list will be related to each other. There are three types of relationships.

- an equivalence relationship (terms that mean the same thing)
- a hierarchical relationship (broader and narrower terms)
- an associative relationship (terms that are associated with each other but are neither broader or narrower)

An equivalence relationship exists where two different words have the same or very similar meanings. Only one of the terms, the preferred term, should be used as the keyword. The other, unused term should appear in the controlled vocabulary with a cross-reference directing users to the preferred term.

For example, ‘equipment’ may be the preferred term for ‘machinery’, which will appear in the controlled vocabulary only as ‘Machinery USE Equipment’. (USE is the equivalent of ‘see’ in standard indexing practice).

A hierarchical relationship exists where one keyword may be a narrower term than another keyword, or a broader term for any number of narrower terms.

For example, ‘travel allowances’ is a narrower term than ‘allowances’ and a broader term than ‘foreign travel allowances’, all of which may be terms in their own right. Alternatively, ‘foreign travel allowances’ may not be a term in its own right and any reference to foreign travel allowances will be indexed under the broader term ‘travel allowances’. An appropriate cross-reference (Foreign travel allowances, SEE Travel allowances) will need to be included in the index.

An associative relationship exists where keywords are closely related conceptually but not hierarchically.

For example, ‘technical schools’ is a term related to ‘secondary schools’ and vice versa. In this case, they may both be terms used in the controlled vocabulary to give greater precision in indexing two different aspects of a broader concept. (A related term is equivalent to ‘see also’ in standard indexing practice).

Relationships may be represented hierarchically, as shown in Figure 12 below.

Agriculture (broad)

Livestock (narrower than Agriculture)

Horses (narrower than Livestock)

Cattle (narrower than Livestock)

Poultry (narrower than Livestock)

Figure 12: Hierarchical Representation of Relationships between Index Terms

In the following example (Figure 13), the terms are arranged alphabetically, with the relationships between them indicated.

AGRICULTURE

Livestock (narrower term)

CATTLE

Livestock (broader term)

Horses, Poultry (related terms)

FARM ANIMALS

USE Livestock (preferred term)

HORSES

Livestock (broader term)

Cattle, Poultry (related terms)

LIVESTOCK

Farm Animals (unused term)

Agriculture (broader term)

Cattle, Horses, Poultry (narrower terms)

POULTRY

Livestock (broader term)

Cattle, Horses (related terms)

Figure 13: Alphabetically Arranged Keyword List, with Relationships Shown

By providing these linkages, a controlled vocabulary is an essential 'navigating' tool in a classification and indexing system. On the other hand, care must be taken not to overload a keyword list with cross-references that serve little or no purpose. T he important point is to remove any scope for uncertainty and thereby reduce the risk of unreliable identification and retrieval of documents and files, while at the same time making the index as easy as possible to use.

In some filing systems, keywords form the basis of the classification and coding scheme. In such cases each keyword is also assigned a code number. This is illustrated in Figure 14.

Keyword code systems are outlined in Lesson 5.

In keyword code systems, two keywords are used to index each file. Codes for these keywords are used to create the file reference. For example, in the series AB (Training and Staff Development) a file has been created for 'Computer Training': this will generate the file reference AB/46/54, where 46 is the code for the keyword 'Training' and 54 is the code for the keyword 'Computers'. The file will be indexed under 'Training' and 'Computers' in the file index.

Activity 35

Does your organisation use a controlled vocabulary for filing? If so, explain how the system works. If not, describe whether or not you think such a system would be beneficial and why or why not.

1. Government of [name of Government]	30. Payment Vouchers
2. Ministry [name of Ministry]	31. Rent (of Government Buildings)
3. Policy	32. Pay and Grading
4. Heads of Departments	33. Conditions of Service
5. Heads of Sections	34. Trade Unions
6. Planning	35. Applications
7. Meetings	36. Secretarial Grades
8. Notices and Announcements	37. Clerical Grades
9. Staff	38. Administration Officers
10. General Orders	39. Discipline
11. Finance and Accounts	40. Study Leave
12. Management Services Division	41. Allowances
13. Appointments	42. Job Descriptions
14. Office Facilities	43. Recruitment
15. Buildings	44. Appraisal (of Staff)
16. Stationery and Supplies	45. Overtime
17. Equipment and Furniture	46. Training
18. Maintenance	47. Staff Development
19. Contracts	48. Technical Assistance
20. Telecommunications	49. United Kingdom
21. Transport	50. Publications
22. Accommodation	51. Records Management
23. United States of America	52. Financial Instructions
24. Estimates: Recurrent	53. Pensions and Gratuities
25. Estimates: Development	54. Computers
26. Accounts	55. Legislation
27. Audit	56. Training Officer
28. Audit Queries	57. Civil Service Reform Programme
29. Banks and Banking	

Figure 14: Keywords in Numerical Order by Code Number

Accommodation: 22	Maintenance: 18
Accounts: 26	Management Services Division: 12
Administration Officers: 38	Meetings: 7
Allowances: 41	Ministry [name of Ministry]: 2
Applications: 35	Notices and Announcements: 8
Appointments: 13	Office Facilities: 14
Appraisal (of Staff): 44	Overtime: 45
Audit: 27	Pay and Grading: 32
Audit Queries: 28	Payment Vouchers: 30
Banks and Banking: 29	Pensions and Gratuities: 53
Buildings: 15	Planning: 6
Civil Service Reform Programme: 57	Policy: 3
Clerical Grades: 37	Publications: 50
Computers: 54	Records Management: 51
Conditions of Service: 33	Recruitment: 43
Contracts: 19	Rent (of Government Buildings): 31
Discipline: 39	Secretarial Grades: 36
Equipment and Furniture: 17	Staff: 9
Estimates: Development: 25	Staff Development: 47
Estimates: Recurrent: 24	Stationery and Supplies: 16
Finance and Accounts: 11	Study Leave: 40
Financial Instructions: 52	Technical Assistance: 48
General Orders: 10	Telecommunications: 20
Government of [name of Government]: 1	Trade Unions: 34
Heads of Departments: 4	Training: 46
Heads of Sections: 5	Training Officers: 56
Job Descriptions: 42	Transport: 21
Legislation: 55	United Kingdom: 49
	United States of America: 23

Figure 14 (cont.): Keywords in Alphabetical Order showing Code Numbers

ESTABLISHING CONTROL OVER NEW FILES

Once a new file has been created, it is essential that its existence is comprehensively recorded. T his will enable the records office to manage the file and to locate and produce it when required.

Appropriate control documents must be maintained for every file. If any one of these is omitted, the records office will not be able to keep track of the file; the organisation may not be able to carry out its work efficiently. Accurate and complete control documentation is essential. In a typical system, the control documents used are the file diary, the file index and the file transit sheet.

Files are controlled and managed during day-to-day use by the file diary, file index and file transit sheet.

File control documentation is described here in outline and in more detail in Managing Current Records: A Procedures Manual.

Maintaining the File Diary

The file diary, which is kept in loose-leaf form, is used to record the code or reference number of the new file, its date of opening, its full title and any previous file number (see Figure 15). In large systems, it may be convenient to maintain separate file diaries for each file series.

FILE DIARY				
Serial Number	**File Number**	**Date Opened**	**File Title**	**Previous File Number**

Figure 15: File Diary

The file diary enables the records staff to monitor files opened during any given period. At the end of each year, staff should place the file diary sheets on a registered file and begin new sheets. In addition to serving as the basic record of a file's existence, the file diary may also be used to produce statistics of the number of files opened. For new or restructured filing systems, the file diary may be used to record the reference number of the corresponding file in the old system.

Indexing the File

The file index is the key to rapid retrieval; great care should be taken in preparing and using it. It is the basic tool of the records office, but it can also be consulted by action officers. The staff must store it securely at the end of each day.

The two most important subjects of the file must be established and the appropriate keywords identified. As already noted, these will be either the keywords in the file's title or the keywords which more accurately and precisely indicate the file's contents.

It may be that retrieval of the file could be improved by adding a third or even a fourth keyword. In this case, the file may also be indexed under each of these additional keywords.

The File Transit Sheet

The third control document used to record the file's existence is the file transit sheet. This is also used to record the file's movements when it is in use and it shows the location of the file at all times.

The file transit sheet is described in Lesson 8 and presented in detail in Managing Current Records: A Procedures Manual.

Closing Files

Files should not be allowed to become too thick, nor should they remain in use for too long. Files that are too thick are more difficult to handle; as a result, their contents can be at risk of damage. Files that are in use for too long may eventually contain papers no longer required for the conduct of current business. Moreover, if they stay open for a long period, this will delay their disposal, either to storage in a records centre, to destruction or to the archival institution as a record with ongoing value.

Files should not be allowed to become too thick or be kept in use for too long.

Records office staff should determine a maximum thickness of file appropriate to the type of file covers being used. For example, a size of 3 centimetre or 1 inch is a reasonable limit for files held together with Treasury tags. When that size is reached, the file should be closed and a new part opened. All the usual control documentation must be created for the new part.

However, a new part should not be opened without careful consideration of the reasons the file has become too thick. Consider the following.

- Is the subject of the file too broad? If the papers deal with a variety of discrete aspects of the subject, a separate file may need to be opened for each aspect.
- Is the chronological scope of the file too long? If the subject is long running but earlier papers are rarely required for current action, separate files for each calendar or financial year should be opened.
- Even where files do not become too thick, there should be a cut-off point to their life as current records. This is determined by the file cycle (usually three to five years from the date of the file's opening. In some circumstances, however, a specific period may be assigned in the relevant disposal schedule

It is up to the records office to see that no further papers are added to files after they are closed. The word 'CLOSED' should be written or stamped diagonally in bold letters across the front cover, and the date of closure noted beside it.

To reinforce the file closure, a minute recording it and forbidding further additions may be placed on the file after the last document. However, this should not be necessary if the procedure just outlined is followed. The file transit sheet and other control documentation should be marked to show that the file has been closed on the date indicated.

Although no new action may be taken on a closed file and no new papers added, closed files may remain current in the sense that they are required for reference in the conduct of business. They should therefore be kept available in the records office for a certain period so that action officers may refer to them. This period may be a standard one (such as one year) for all files, or it may be specified series by series in disposal schedules. If action officers request these files, the file movement should be recorded on the relevant file transit sheet in exactly the same way as when the file was still active.

Activity 36

How are files closed in your organisation? Explain how the system works. If there is no formal process, describe whether or not you think a formal system would be beneficial and why or why not.

SUMMARY

Lesson 6 has been concerned with the creation and control of files. After defining a file, it has set out procedures for handling the following actions:

- the order in which papers are to be filed
- methods of filing
- what is to be filed
- when and by whom papers are to be filed
- opening new files
- giving files titles
- creating a controlled vocabulary or keyword list
- establishing control over new files
- closing files.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Explain the difference between a physical file and an intellectual file.

2. What information should go on the covers of files?

3. How can documents in files be kept together? What dangers are there in attaching records in files?

4. Describe two ways to add documents to files.

5. How should associated materials be handled during filing?

6. What types of records are not normally filed?

7. How should such materials be handled, if they are not placed on files?

8. Why should filing procedures be established and firmly enforced?

9. Explain the ideal procedure for opening a new file.

10. Why should files not be created until there are records to place on them?

11. What is a part of a file? What is a subfile?

12. What is a continuation file?

13. Explain the concept of a file cycle.

14. How should file titles be assigned?

15. Why should the assignment of file titles be controlled?

16. How can terms be ordered within a title?

17. What issues must be considered when selecting keywords?

18. What three relationships can exist between terms in a controlled vocabulary? Name each relationship and explain its purpose and nature.

19. What is the purpose of the file diary and a file index?

20. What questions should be asked when considering whether to close a file?

21. Why should the closure of a file be documented?

ACTIVITIES: COMMENTS

Activities 31-36

These activities are designed to help you examine your own organisation's practices and compare these with the suggestions offered in this module. You are encouraged to take careful notes of the situation in your institution so that you may compare your findings as you proceed through this study programme.

LESSON 7

DOCUMENT HANDLING

Before the twentieth century, government departments tended to keep individual items of correspondence separately in numbered series; these documents were often bound into large volumes. Each item was registered with its own number and the connections between items (previous and later papers) were maintained by detailed registers and indexes so that the sequence of transactions could be followed.

With the growth of bureaucracy and government business, faster communications and an ever increasing quantity of documents being generated, such record-keeping systems were no longer a practical means of maintaining coherent and accessible records of government activity. Documents relating to the same subjects or events were now placed together on files as they were received or generated.

The main focus of this module is the file, but the purpose of Lesson 7 is to look at the processes for handling the individual documents that make up files. This lesson discusses the general principles of handling documents during the current stage of the life cycle. A more detailed description of the procedures for handling documents is provided in *Managing Current Records: A Procedures Manual.* Topics discussed in this lesson include

- types of documents
- what is document management?
- receipt of inward correspondence
- registration of inward correspondence
- circulating correspondence
- preparing outgoing correspondence and other internally generated documents
- registration of outward correspondence and other internally generated documents
- filing correspondence
- handling ministerial, senior officers' and security classified correspondence.

TYPES OF DOCUMENTS

Remember the definition of a document, discussed earlier in this module.

***Document*:** A unit of recorded information.

Many documents are forms of correspondence: letters, memos and faxes. Their purpose is to communicate information from one party to another. Such documents include

- mail, in paper form, received or despatched
  - through the post
  - through the organisation's internal mail system
  - through private courier services
  - by hand
- other forms of communication, such as
  - telegrams and telexes
  - fax (facsimile transmissions)
  - electronic mail (e-mail)
  - networked electronic information (such as documents retrieved via the Internet)
- internally generated and circulated material, such as
  - reports
  - circulars and directives
  - forms
  - memoranda and other internal documents
  - committee minutes and papers.

An organisation can suffer if it fails to capture in a record-keeping system the information contained in documents. Misplaced or unrecorded evidence can impair business efficiency, waste staff time, damage accountability and expose the organisation to risk, for example, when disputes or litigation arise.

An organisation must ensure it handles and files its documents efficiently and effectively.

WHAT IS DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT?

> ***Document management*:** The application of records management principles and techniques to the systematic handling and control of correspondence and internally generated documents with a view to their continuing use.

'Document management' is the systematic handling and control of inward and outward correspondence and internally created documents from their creation or receipt through the rest of their life cycle. Document management is a wider term than 'correspondence management', 'mail and telecommunications management' and 'registry management'. Each of these forms of management is embraced within the larger scope of document management.

Correspondence should be subjected to the following operations, usually in sequential order:

- receiving and opening inward correspondence
- sorting correspondence that requires special handling
- registering inward correspondence
- recording enclosed valuables, such as cheques and certificates
- associating inward correspondence with the relevant file
- circulating the correspondence for information or reply
- preparing the reply (usually the responsibility of action officers)
- registering outward correspondence
- dispatching outward correspondence
- filing inward (original) and outward (copy) correspondence and other associated documents.

Internally generated documents, such as reports, directives, forms, memoranda and committee minutes and papers, should be handled in the same way as outward correspondence: a record copy of each, together with the underlying minutes and drafts, should be sent to the records office to be incorporated in the record-keeping system. This may involve registration and filing of individual documents in the case of a document-based system, or filing only in the case of a file-based system.

Documents need to be managed efficiently within a well-designed record-keeping system.

RECEIPT OF INWARD CORRESPONDENCE

All inward correspondence received in an organisation or its agencies, divisions or branches should be delivered to the appropriate records office (whether organisation-wide or within a specific agency), where it should be handled in accordance with standing instructions. These should cover both correspondence addressed impersonally to the agency or to specified parts of the agency or named officers. The instructions should also describe procedures for managing unclassified and classified correspondence and correspondence marked as 'private' or 'personal'.

When processing inward correspondence addressed impersonally to the agency, procedures should include the following:

- opening or receipt by a designated officer, ideally in the presence of another officer
- stamping with the date of receipt
- assigning a serial number in a running sequence where the individual document is the unit of control: this may take the form of a number in sequence (869), a number plus the year (274/99) or a number plus the month and year (331/12/99)
- identifying and appropriately managing security classified items (secret, confidential, etc) and other items marked personal or private
- identifying, recording and, where appropriate, separating remittances and other valuable enclosures such as legal documents or certificates in order to ensure their protection, then providing cross-references to the covering correspondence (the enclosures should not be date-stamped or defaced in any other way)
- attaching other enclosures to the covering correspondence.

In a decentralised registry system, correspondence addressed to divisions or branches should be forwarded directly to the appropriate local records offices. The procedures recommended in this lesson should also be followed by local records staff.

Instructions for handling correspondence addressed to named officers may vary with the rank of the addressee. Correspondence addressed to junior officers may be opened and handled in the records office in exactly the way described above. However, correspondence addressed to ministers and senior officers may have to be sent directly to their private secretaries for processing. Whether managed by the records office or the secretary, the procedures should be the same as those set out above.

Special instructions will often apply to the handling of classified correspondence. While such correspondence may be handled separately, the basic procedures should mirror those set out above.

Inward correspondence should be processed according to standing instructions.

Registration of Inward Correspondence

In a traditional registration system, in which the individual document is the unit of control, correspondence is registered individually after it has been received and opened.

In other systems, the file is the unit of control and documents are not registered individually. In such systems, correspondence is associated with the appropriate file, given a 'folio' number if appropriate and circulated for action.

More information about folio numbers and foliating is given in Managing Current Records: A Procedures Manual.

Because the file-based control system cuts out much routine clerical work, it may be operated by fewer records staff. However, these staff must be well trained in records procedures.

Some file-based systems incorporate an index with keywords representing the document's subject, and the names of any relevant individuals or organisations. While assisting retrieval, such indexes need to be structured and managed with care.

A new or restructured records management unit should not initially institute a system in which only the file is the unit of control. Only when all those involved with the handling of current records have developed a high degree of experience with the existing document-oriented control system should a file-based system be contemplated and the registration of correspondence abandoned. This is for the protection of both records office staff and users.

Automated records management systems allow for the creation of a wide range of control documentation from a single input. These systems make document control easier to manage. Thus document control is becoming an integral part of electronic records management systems.

In-registers

Traditional systems of document registration involve the entry of details about the document in an inward (or incoming) correspondence register, also called an in-register. Such registers take the form of ledgers, either bound or in loose-leaf format, and may be pre-printed.

***Register*:** A document, often a bound volume, in which regular entry of data is made.

An inward correspondence register is illustrated in Figure 16 below.

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

Figure 16: Inward Correspondence Register

The following initial information about each document may be entered in the register:

- the serial number assigned to the correspondence
- the date of the correspondence
- the date of receipt
- any security classification
- the name and institution or organisation of the sender
- any reference quoted by the sender
- the subject of the correspondence
- the number and nature of any enclosures.

> *The basic procedures for handling inward correspondence will remain the same, regardless of who handles the documents.*

At this stage, any enclosed valuables or original documents such as certificates are entered in the remittance register or valuables book, which is illustrated in Figure 17.

Remittance Register

Sheet No _____

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

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

Figure 17: Remittance Register

In systems where the file is the unit of control and an in-register is not kept, it may still be necessary for accounting and audit purposes to maintain a remittance register.

When the subject of the incoming correspondence has been determined, the correspondence must be placed on a file covering the subject (either an existing file or a new one) and marked for circulation as appropriate. In some systems, inward correspondence is circulated to nominated senior officers for instructions prior to filing. This is discussed below.

The following additional information should then be entered in the register:

- the reference code of the file with which the correspondence is to be associated
- the division or branch or the name of the officer to whom the correspondence has been sent for action.

At the same time, the circulation ladder on the front cover of the file is completed and the file movement or transit record, kept by the records office, is updated.

Registers of correspondence should be scheduled for permanent preservation, partly for their continuing value as finding aids and partly because they give an overview of the nature and level of activity of the organisation.

Computerised Registers

It is now possible to replace manual systems, such as those described above, with automated correspondence management systems based upon local area networks (LANs) or even upon stand-alone microcomputers. In such systems, the register is maintained in electronic form and is consulted and updated by means of a computer screen and keyboard.

For more information on electronic information systems, see Automating Records Services.

Circulation of Correspondence

Wherever possible, inward correspondence should be associated with the relevant file and circulated for action following a predetermined route.

In records management units where there is a high level of expertise, with records staff able to decide in most cases which branch or officer should deal with incoming correspondence, new correspondence may be placed directly on the appropriate file and sent to the relevant action officer. In some systems, however, the correspondence is placed in a 'circulation file' and sent first to a senior officer or officers who decide which action officer should deal with each item. The correspondence, with instructions, is then returned to the records office for filing and distribution.

Circulation may be top down or bottom up. In the top down system, correspondence is sent, often in daily or twice-daily batches, to a designated senior officer in the division or branch responsible for the function to which the subject of the

correspondence relates. He or she then decides what action would be appropriate and assigns the correspondence, minuted accordingly, to an officer to take action and draft any reply for approval and signature. This system often slows down action, since all correspondence has to pass through a single potential bottleneck within the division or branch.

In the bottom-up system, the correspondence is sent directly to the appropriate action officer, who minutes his or her proposals and drafts any reply, submits these for approval at the appropriate senior level and acts on receipt of that approval. This bottom-up system tends to speed up action.

Correspondence may be circulated first to senior officers or it may go directly to the appropriate action officer.

Similarly, action is speeded up if correspondence does not have to pass through all the intermediate levels between the action officer and the approving officer. Where other officers need to know what is happening but do not make a direct contribution to decision making, it should be sufficient to circulate copies of documents for information.

Activity 37

How is inward correspondence received, processed, circulated and filed in your organisation? Write a brief description and prepare at least four suggestions for actions you might take to improve the processes.

PREPARING OUTWARD CORRESPONDENCE AND OTHER INTERNALLY GENERATED DOCUMENTS

After approval at the appropriate level, drafts of outward correspondence (whether in reply to inward correspondence or newly generated within the organisation) and of other internally generated documents should be sent by the action officer for typing in accordance with standing instructions.

Standing instructions for preparing outward correspondence and other internally generated documents should cover the roles of both action officers and keyboard operators (including secretaries, typists, word processors and, in automated systems,

computer operators, who may be the action officers themselves). These instructions should include the following points.

- Texts sent for typing should be clearly written or carefully dictated, taking special care with the spelling of proper names, technical terms and other unusual words.
- Information provided to the keyboard operator should include
    - the name and address of the intended recipient
    - any security or privacy markings
    - the organisation's and addressee's file references
    - the name of the intended signatory (normally the action officer in a bottom-up circulation system, the approving officer in a top-down system)
    - the number of copies required.
- Keyboard operators should use organisation headed notepaper for the top copy of outward correspondence (which may be held as a 'template' on the computer) and should follow standard rules of style, layout and dating.

After a typed letter has been checked and signed, all copies should be sent to the records office together with the inward correspondence, internal minutes, drafts and the relevant file. A record copy of every internally generated document should be sent for filing.

When computer or word-processing systems are available, it may be more efficient and economical for action officers to keyboard their own outward correspondence and other internally generated documents. If so, they should follow the same strict rules of style and layout laid down for keyboard operators in order to ensure the quality and consistency of the product.

A record copy of every internally generated document should be sent for filing.

Registration of Outward Correspondence and Other Internally Generated Documents

Where documents are controlled individually, records office staff will register details of outward correspondence and other internally generated documents.

Registration of outward correspondence may be done either in a separate outward correspondence register or out-register (see Figure 18) or in a combined inward and outward correspondence register. In a combined register, information about inward correspondence is normally entered on the left-hand page of an opening, and information about the resulting outward correspondence is entered opposite the inward entry on the right-hand page. However, two registers are preferred so that

there is a clear distinction between the two tasks and no scope for misregistration. Outward correspondence registers may also be in ledger or loose-leaf form and preprinted.

The information recorded about outward correspondence may include

- the serial number assigned to the correspondence
- a cross-reference to inward correspondence, if a separate outward correspondence register is used, in which case a cross-reference to the outward correspondence will be entered in the inward register
- the date of the correspondence
- the date of dispatch
- any security classification
- the name and institution or organisation of the addressee
- the main file reference
- references of other files on which copies have been placed
- the subject of the correspondence, if required
- the number and nature of any enclosures
- the mode of despatch.

In systems where the file is the unit of control and a detailed register of this kind is not kept, it may still be necessary to maintain a record of outward mailings for accounting and audit purposes.

Where some correspondence is delivered by messenger, it will be necessary to maintain a separate messenger's delivery book in which all letters delivered by messenger are recorded and in which the receiving organisation of officer signs for the letters delivered.

Filing Correspondence

On the completion of action, the records office should be responsible for ascertaining that the file has been returned and that all the papers relevant to the transaction are or have been filed in accordance with standard practice. File movement records should also be updated at this stage.

Activity 38

How are outward correspondence and internally generated documents received, processed, circulated and filed in your organisation? Write a brief description and prepare at least four suggestions for actions you might take to improve the processes.

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

Figure 18: Outward Correspondence Register

SENIOR OFFICERS' CORRESPONDENCE

Special arrangements may have to be made for the handling of correspondence addressed to or sent by ministers and senior officers. So far as possible, all such correspondence should be registered and filed in the normal way (even if retrospectively). Where this is not practicable, secretaries should maintain registration and filing systems that are parallel to and are part of the organisation's main systems, even if physically separate from them, and that are subject to the records manager's general oversight and control.

Correspondence bearing high-level security markings (such as confidential, secret or top secret) may also require different handling, usually according to standing instructions. They may have to be opened by the addressee if no records officer has the necessary security clearance. They may then have to be registered in a separate secret register with cross-references from and to the main register. Again, the procedures should be under the control of the agency's records manager.

Private offices and secret registries may have to be regarded as special local records offices.

Activity 39

How are ministerial records and security classified material received, processed, circulated and filed in your organisation? Write a brief description of as much of the process as you can gather information about, and prepare at least four suggestions for actions you might take to improve the systems.

SUMMARY

Lesson 7 has introduced procedures for the handling of individual documents. It has dealt specifically with:

- receiving inward correspondence
- registering inward correspondence
- circulating correspondence
- preparing outward correspondence and other internally generated documents
- registering outward correspondence and other internally generated documents
- filing correspondence
- handling ministerial, senior officers' and security classified correspondence.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Name at least five different types of documents.

2. Explain the concept of document management.

3. Why is document management important?

4. What operations usually take place when receiving and managing correspondence in general?

5. What operations usually take place when receiving inward correspondence?

6. Why are documents registered?

7. What information might be included in an inward correspondence register?

8. What is the purpose of a remittance register?

9. What two methods can be used to circulate correspondence?

10. How should outward correspondence be prepared?

11. How should outward correspondence and other internally generated documents be registered and managed?

12. What information should be recorded in an outward correspondence register?

13. Why do ministerial records and senior officers' or security classified records need to be special handling arrangements?

ACTIVITIES: COMMENTS

Activities 37-39

As with the activities in the last lessons, these activities are designed to help you examine your own organisation's practices and compare these with the suggestions offered in this module. You are encouraged to take careful notes of the situation in your institution so that you may compare your findings as you proceed through this study programme.

LESSON 8

MAINTAINING AND USING FILES

Lesson 8 examines the tasks involved in maintaining and using files. Topics discussed include

- storage and security
- records office equipment
- identifying and retrieving files
- controlling file circulation
- documenting circulation
- housekeeping
- media conversion.

A more detailed description of the procedures presented here are given in Managing Current Records: A Procedures Manual.

STORAGE AND SECURITY

When current files are not in use, they are normally stored in a records office. This may be a central records office serving the whole of an organisation or, in a more decentralised system, a local records office serving the divisions and branches of the organisation within a single location or even individual divisions or branches.

Storage and security issues are discussed in more detail in Preserving Records.

Only when a system has been specifically established on a completely decentralised basis should files be stored more than temporarily in the offices of action officers or in adjacent file stores under their direct control.

An exception to this general rule may have to be made for the offices of ministers or senior officials of the organisation. It may also be necessary to set up a separate

secure and fireproof store or safe for files containing highly classified or valuable documents.

Nevertheless, in all such cases a system of maintenance and handling should be used that parallels that for the general files of the organisation and that is under the control of the organisation's records manager.

Separate arrangements should also be made to safeguard essential or vital records and back up copies of electronic records in an off-site location, often the records centre.

Disaster recovery plans are discussed in Preserving Records *and in* Planning for Emergencies: A Procedures Manual.

Entry to the records office (or any other place where files are stored) should be strictly controlled. Doors and windows should be locked when no member of the records office staff is present. Doors should be of strong construction with good locks, and all windows should be fitted with shutters, security grilles or bars.

Measures should be taken to prevent and control outbreaks of fire. These will include a ban on smoking in all file storage areas, installation of smoke detectors and alarms and provision and maintenance of fire extinguishers. Regular fire drills should be held, and a disaster recovery plan should be in place and tested regularly.

Floors should be strong enough to bear the weight of large quantities of paper. The records office may have to be located on one of the lower floors of a building. However, basement accommodation should be avoided, since it has a high risk of flooding from leaking or burst water or sewage pipes, from water leakage from outside and from water used to fight fires in higher floors of the building.

The accommodation should be adequate to house the staff of the records office, the equipment they need and the records for which they are responsible. It should be well maintained and there should be a regular cleaning programme.

Records must be held in a safe and secure location, regardless of whether they are managed centrally or in a decentralised system.

Records Office Equipment

Files should be stored safely. There should be sufficient storage containers to ensure that files are not packed so tightly they cannot be removed or replaced. The types of equipment required for the storage of current files should be determined by the volume of records, the level of use made of them and their degree of confidentiality.

There are two basic ways to store files: vertical filing in cabinets and lateral filing in cupboards or on racking.

Vertical filing, usually in four-drawer filing cabinets, is suitable for small records offices and file stores, for confidential and personnel records and for the secure storage of files held temporarily in offices. Filing cabinets should never be stacked one on top of another; the top cabinet may fall off when its drawers are opened.

Lateral filing in cupboards or on racking (which can safely be higher than the height of a filing cabinet) is preferable for large quantities of files in frequent use, since it provides savings in space of up to 50% and achieves improvements in speed of retrieval of up to 30%.

Even greater savings of space (up to 80%) can be achieved with mobile racking, but retrieval may be slower when the files are subject to heavy use. Further, the floors in office buildings may not be strong enough to take the extra load. Also, the risk of mechanical breakdown is higher and the cost is much greater.

Storage systems must be sturdy, economical and secure.

A number of automated storage and retrieval systems are available, such as carousels, container pickers and computer assisted retrieval (CAR) for microforms, but such systems are expensive to install and maintain.

To assist location and retrieval, cabinet drawers, cupboards and shelves should be clearly labelled by a method that allows labels to be updated when the contents are rearranged.

Whichever method of storage is selected, storage units that house security classified and other confidential files should be lockable.

In addition to storage equipment, a records office will need desks and tables, fire extinguishers, office supplies, card or strip index containers and shelving for control documentation. Where an automated records management system is in operation, hardware and computer supplies will also be required and there will need to be a maintenance or service agreement for the equipment.

Containers

Semi-current files no longer in day-to-day use should be placed in containers rather than stored loose on shelves. This makes retrieval easier, limits wear and tear and provides protection against fire and water. Boxes used at this stage of the records life cycle do not need to be of archival quality. A less satisfactory, but cheaper, alternative is to leave the files unboxed but to have rigid shelf dividers at frequent intervals to support the files and prevent them from slipping down and becoming damaged. Shelf dividers can be locally made or supplied with the equipment.

Some storage equipment, both horizontal and lateral, requires that files be placed in pockets suspended from rails instead of on shelves. Such suspended filing equipment is marginally lighter and easier to use, but obtaining supplies of the pockets may

present a problem because they are relatively expensive. Moreover, they do not offer the same degree of protection as boxes. Suspended pockets are also liable to become damaged quickly when files are in frequent use.

Activity 40

Describe the various ways that records are stored in your organisation. Write down at least four suggestions for actions you might take to improve the storage of records.

IDENTIFYING AND RETRIEVING FILES

To facilitate their identification and retrieval, files should be stored by the series, sub-series and file number: that is, in the order corresponding to that of the classification and coding scheme. As already noted, filing cabinets, cupboards, shelves and boxes should be clearly labelled to indicate their contents.

Files should be stored in the order that corresponds to their classification and coding.

With some types of files, the identification codes may be visible on the spines when the files are stacked vertically. Other systems use colour coding to identify series and even individual files. Where the supply of covers in particular colours is unreliable, colour coded systems are not advisable.

A recommended method of storing files is on their 'spines'. The file code or reference number is found along what becomes the top left-hand corner of the file cover when stored using this method. An example of a file cover is shown in Figure 19 below.

More information about file covers is provided in Managing Current Records: A Procedures Manual.

NUMBER

OFFICE OF THE HEAD OF THE CIVIL SERVICE

Number pages serially at top outer corner in blue pencil. Number minutes serially beginning a new series for each page. Write minutes on the last page of the last enclosure, if there is space, or on the last page, if the paper is suitable otherwise, insert a minute sheet in the file.	**FILE NO.** **PB –** **Vol**

NAME

To	Page	Date	To	Page	Date	To	Page	Date
						AUTHORITY TO SEND FILE TO RECORD ROOM		
						Signature of Authorising Officer		Date

Figure 19: Sample File Cover

A record of the issue of the file to the officer (name and date) should be entered on the grid or ladder on the front of the file cover. This grid also acts as the address for delivery of the file. When the grid is full (or if the cover is damaged), a new cover should be fitted around the original cover. Alternately, the front portion may be detached and annexed to the new file cover.

Finding a specific file in a long, unboxed run may require much trial and error. In such cases, dividers with protruding flags, appropriately labelled, may be inserted within cabinets or along the shelves of cupboards or open racking to indicate the beginning of each series or subseries and at intervals (such as at every twenty-five files) within it to facilitate the location of individual files. Dividers may also serve the purpose of supports to prevent files slipping down when stored.

Where the storage area is large or where files are stored in a number of different places, a storage plan and key (or index) may be maintained. The key may take the form of annotations on the file transit sheets or file dockets.

CONTROLLING FILE CIRCULATION

The movement of files outside the records office should be strictly controlled. Rules and procedures should be drawn up, widely distributed and enforced. The co-operation of action officers and file users is essential if file movement records are to be accurate and reliable.

The rules and procedures will cover such matters as

- who has authority to access and use files, including any special restrictions on particular categories of files (such as classified files and other confidential files, including personnel files)
- how the circulation of files is to be recorded and who is responsible for ensuring that the documentation is kept up to date
- when files may pass directly from one action officer to another and when they must pass through the records office
- how long an action officer may retain a file without reconfirming the withdrawal.

Documenting Circulation

To be effective, a records office should know the location at all times of every file for which it is responsible. Hence, a system to record each file movement must be established and strictly implemented. This system may be manual or computerised.

A manual file circulation control system will require as a minimum a file transit sheet. Other controls may include a file request form, an in-use sheet and a file movement form.

A records office should know the location of all files for which it is responsible.

File Transit Sheet

A file transit sheet (sometimes known as a 'tracer card') is created for each file at the time of the opening of the file. Figure 20 shows an example.

> *Use of the file transit sheet is described in more detail in* Managing Current Records: A Procedures Manual.

File transit sheets are in loose-leaf form so that they may easily be arranged in file transit books in the same alphanumerical order as the file codes. Their purpose is to show the location at all times of all files opened by the records office. All file movements must be recorded promptly to enable the records office to provide an efficient and reliable service.

When a file is closed, the closure must be indicated on the transit sheet. When the file is destroyed or transferred to the records centre or the archival repository, this fact should be noted on the sheet, and the sheet should be transferred to a transit book covering files that are no longer held in the records office. These sheets should be scheduled for preservation; they provide a record of the disposal of the file.

File Request Form

A file should leave the records office only in response to a specific request, except when it is passed to an action officer in association with inward correspondence. A request may be originated by a personal application, by telephone (or on-line in a computerised system), by a 'bring-up' request (described later in this lesson) or by an appropriately completed file request form (see Figure 21 for an example). The file request form may be combined with the file movement form (see below).

In-Use Sheet or Card

An in-use sheet is completed within the records office and placed on the shelf or in the filing cabinet in place of a removed file. It could be kept within the file when the file is in place and removed when it is issued. Alternatively, use a duplicate of the file request form or the latest file movement form (see Figure 22).

Another alternative is to create a set of in-use cards, each the size of a normal sheet of paper, and to place one on the shelf or in the drawer when a file is removed. The cards can be ruled in columns showing the required information: the file number, the title, the officer to whom the file is sent and his or her location. The information can be crossed out when the file is returned and the card reused many times, saving stationery. There will also be less likelihood that the sheet will become bent or inadvertently mixed with the contents of the file.

SECURITY GRADING (Upgrade as Necessary)		**FILE NUMBER**			
FILE TITLE					
INDEX HEADINGS					
PREVIOUS FILE NUMBER			**SUBSEQUENT FILE NUMBER**		
Sent To	**Date**	**Sent To**	**Date**	**Sent To**	**Date**

Figure 20: File Transit Sheet

File Request Form

(Please complete this form and send it to the records office whenever you request a file.)

File number: _____

File title: _____

_____

_____

Requested by/Passed to: _____

_____

_____

Location: _____

_____

_____

Date: _____ Signature: _____

Figure 21: File Request Form

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

Figure 22: File Movement Slip

The person completing the form should also enter the name of the new addressee in the grid on the file cover. On receipt of the file movement form, the records office will update the file transit sheet and in-use sheet (if one is used). As already noted, the file movement form may be combined with the file request form.

Because the movement of files should be tracked, it is important to complete file movement slips and other documentation accurately and completely.

Consistent use of file movement slips requires a high degree of discipline on the part of file users who must be made aware of the importance accurate file movement records.

More information about file movement slips is provided in Managing Current Records: A Procedures Manual.

When finished with the file, the last action officer to have charge of it will return the file to the records office, remembering to enter the records office as the addressee on the file cover. Its return will be recorded on the file transit sheet, the file itself will be reshelved, the in-use sheet will be replaced with the file and the file request form and any file movement forms (and duplicates used instead of an in-use sheet) will be destroyed.

Note that a computerised system will follow much the same sort of process, but the individual steps will usually be on-line amendments to a database. The only physical actions required will be addressing the grid on the file cover and placing a computer-generated in-use slip on the shelf in place of the file and retrieving it on the file's return.

Activity 41

How are records identified, retrieved and circulated in your organisation? What forms or systems are used? Can you prepare at least four suggestions for actions you might take to improve these processes?

HOUSEKEEPING

The records office will perform a number of housekeeping activities in order to maintain its current records systems. These include

- conducting file censuses
- tracing missing files
- recalling outstanding files.

Conducting a File Census

A file census should be undertaken at regular intervals. In systems where there is doubt about the accuracy of the file movement records, censuses may need to be carried out as frequently as once a week or fortnight. One method is to ask each action officer to complete a file census form (see Figure 23), though on the first occasion the census may be more complete and accurate if the form is completed by a member of the records office staff in collaboration with the action officer. The census data should then be compared with the records office's own census of the files in storage. Any discrepancies should be investigated.

Tracing Missing Files

Where it appears a file has been mislaid, it is the responsibility of the action officer to whom the file was last charged out to initiate a search. If the search is unsuccessful, the records office should circulate a note to all officers in the organisation asking them to check whether they have the file. If this request is also unsuccessful, a physical search throughout the organisation should be instituted.

While the file is missing, the charge-out document should be endorsed 'file missing', and a temporary file (clearly marked as such) should be opened for any papers accruing pending the discovery of the original file. When the original file is recovered, the temporary file should be merged with it.

> *An up-to-date list of missing files should be maintained by the records office.*

File Census Form

Date _____

File Ref Number	File Title	Location/Officer

SIGNED _____ INITIALLED _____

Figure 23: File Census Form

Recalling Outstanding Files

When a file has been charged out to an action officer for longer than the permitted period, a file recall or chase-up note should be sent, asking the officer to return the file to the records office or to confirm that it is still required for current business.

To discourage action officers from retaining files because they may need them again at some future date, the records office should operate a 'bring-up' (BU) system, also known as a 'bring-forward' (BF) or 're-submit' system. The action officer returns the file to the records office and specifies the future date on which he/she would like to be sent the file.

Bring-up action is inaugurated when the action officer returns the file to the records office together with a BU request, providing details of the file and the date when it is to be returned to the action officer.

Within the records office the request is entered in a BU diary. This may be in the form of a desk diary. When the file is to be returned, the need is confirmed with the action officer and the file is located and charged out.

The BU system and BU diary are described in more detail in Managing Current Records: A Procedures Manual.

Activity 42

How are missing records traced in your organisation? What forms or systems are used? Can you prepare at least four suggestions for actions you might take to improve these processes?

COPYING RECORDS

In certain circumstances, it is necessary to copy current records. Copying should be done only after a careful consideration of the purpose for which the copies are required and an assessment of the most appropriate and cost-effective form of copying.

Copying can be a valuable process for the management of current records and for access to and dissemination of information. Copying or reprography is also a tool used for the purposes of preservation, that is the processes and operations involved in the physical protection of records against damage or deterioration. Copy management, aimed at preventing excessive copying and the proliferation of paper, is an important constituent of an organisation's records management system.

A variety of copying processes are available to the records manager. These include

- electrostatic copies (photocopies or hard copies)
- microform copies
- digital copies.

Electrostatic Copies

Electrostatic copies ('photocopies' or 'hard copies') are the easiest types of copy to produce within an office. They are suitable for duplicating short runs of individual documents.

Equipment for producing photocopies ranges from the simple to the complex. The best copiers print on plain paper and do not involve any special chemical preparation. When the equipment is properly maintained and the correct materials are used, such copies are virtually permanent.

> *Because they are often difficult to distinguish from the original documents, copies should be stamped 'COPY', especially where legal admissibility is likely to be an issue.*

Microforms

Microforms (roll microfilm or microfiche) are more suitable for duplicating multiple documents (complete files or even whole series).

Equipment for producing microforms is complex and expensive. It must be maintained and operated by skilled operators. Special microfilm or microfiche readers are also required to read microforms.

There is a comprehensive range of relevant international standards in the field of microfilming. Consequently, microforms that have been properly filmed and processed on silver-gelatin stock, preserved in the correct environment and handled with care will be very stable and will last a long time.

Digital Copies

Digital copies are produced using a process called document image processing (DIP), whereby images of documents are converted into digital form on optical disks and then handled and retrieved electronically.

This process should be distinguished from optical character recognition (OCR), which converts the individual characters of a text into their standard (usually ASCII)

electronic codes for computer processing but does not reproduce the image of the source document.

The equipment required for operating DIP systems is expensive, and there is as yet no adequate range of international standards in the field. DIP systems are most likely to be of value in automating the office and its workflow. Access to information is faster than in microform systems. However, where information is bulky, is accessed infrequently and speed is not vital, microforms are likely to be more cost effective.

Conversely, information that has been created and maintained in electronic form may be printed out. The printouts may range in quality from low resolution dot-matrix printing on poor quality computer paper to high resolution ink-jet or laser printing on permanent paper. Electronic information may also be produced as a computer output microform (COM).

The issue of digitisation is discussed in more detail in Managing Electronic Records *and* Automating Records and Archives Services.

Reasons for Copying

In deciding whether copying is appropriate, it is necessary to consider what purposes are to be served by the conversion and whether the cost is justified.

Those purposes may include any or all of the following, separately or in combination:

- to ease storage problems
- to secure or preserve records
- to make records available at various locations.

Conversion for Storage Purposes

Many manufacturers and suppliers of equipment will suggest substitution microfilming or image processing and the subsequent destruction of the original documents, as a solution to an organisation's storage problems.

Any such proposal should be carefully examined. Microfilming can be quite costly, so the costs should be compared with those of operating a sound records management system that includes appropriate and timely appraisal and disposal procedures and off-site storage of semi-current records.

Converting records to other formats for storage purposes should only be done if the process is cost effective and the records and information they contain will not be damaged or compromised as a result.

The decision to convert records in order to save space must be based on a number of considerations, including the following:

- *The cost of microfilming or image processing.* Costs are not confined to equipment, materials, staff and accommodation but also include preparation, storage, maintenance and retrieval.
- *The nature of the records.* If documents are not of a standard size, shade or colour, the filming or scanning process may be slower and the unit cost may be higher. Further, the quality of the copies may suffer.
- *The legal requirements for keeping originals.* If the documents are of archival value or if they are likely to be required for legal purposes and only the originals are admissible as evidence, destruction is not an option and so there is no resultant saving.

Conversion for Security or Preservation Purposes

Security microfilming of essential records or the backup copying of electronic records is a form of insurance against the loss of the originals and the information they contain.

Security copies of records should be stored separately from originals to ensure their protection in the event of a disaster.

Preservation copying of documents may be necessary to ensure their survival for as long as they have continuing value to the organisation or archival value for other potential users. Reasons for preservation copying may include the following.

- *Copying damaged documents:* Copies can be made by electrostatic or micrographic means and subsequent consultation may be confined to the copies (or surrogates) to prevent further damage to the originals.
- *Copying records that may fade or deteriorate:* It is wise to make electrostatic file copies of fax messages or other copies printed on coated paper, from which the image soon fades.
- *Printing electronic documents:* Electronic records, including e-mail messages, may be printed and filed on the relevant paper files where there is no adequate assurance of long-term protection for the electronic record. In the long term, as electronic filing systems begin to meet the full range of records management requirements and electronic documents become legally admissible, such conversion will cease to be necessary.
- *Copying for diffusion:* Records may be copied for simultaneous use at different locations. Such copying protects originals and may improve efficiency and speed in decision making and action. Diffusion may be done by making paper copies, microfilm copies or electronic copies of records.

Copying for the purposes of preservation is dealt with in Preserving Records.

Converting records to other formats for security or preservation purposes can prolong the life of the information, if the copying or conversion is of high quality.

Activity 43

When are records copied in your organisation? What criteria is used to determine if copies should be made? Is the process formalised or not? Describe the processes followed and then prepare at least four suggestions for actions you might take to improve them.

SUMMARY

Lesson 8 has examined issues related to file maintenance and use. It has established procedures for the following:

- storage and security
- records office equipment
- file identification and retrieval
- controlling and documenting file circulation
- housekeeping.

It has also addressed the issue of media conversion.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What types of equipment are best for storing records?
2. Why should storage containers be clearly labelled?
3. How should confidential or security classified records be stored?
4. What other equipment will be needed in a records office, aside from storage equipment?
5. Why should semi-current files be kept in containers and not loose on shelves?
6. How should files be kept to facilitate retrieval?
7. What information should be on a file cover?
8. What rules should be established to control file circulation?
9. What information should be included on a file transit sheet?
10. What information should be included on a file request form?
11. What information should be included on a file movement form?
12. What is the purpose of a file census?
13. Why should missing files be traced?
14. How can missing files be traced?
15. How can outstanding files be recalled?
16. Why might current records have to be copied?
17. Describe three copying processes available to the records manager.
18. What is the purpose of converting records to another format?
19. What issues must be considered when deciding whether to convert records?

ACTIVITIES: COMMENTS

Activities 40-43

As with other activities in this module, these activities are designed to help you examine your own organisation's practices and compare these with the suggestions offered in this module. You are encouraged to take careful notes of the situation in your institution so that you may compare your findings as you proceed through this study programme.

LESSON 9

WHAT TO DO NEXT?

Organising and Controlling Current Records has focused on the principles and practices of organising and controlling current records. It has addressed the following issues:

- the concepts of records, their importance as evidence and their essential characteristics
- the general principles of records management and record keeping
- how current records are controlled at the primary level by the records series
- how current records are controlled at the secondary level by registering, classifying, indexing and tracking records and by managing their appraisal and disposition
- the infrastructure for a records management system: policy, legislation, responsibility, staffing, resources and other essential requirements
- the requirements for sound record-keeping systems
- file classification and coding systems
- the creation and control of files
- the maintenance and use of files
- document management.

ESTABLISHING PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

The principles and practices outlined in this module are fundamental to the effective management of current records. They provide a sound theoretical and practical grounding in the processes of establishing or improving records management systems. But in considering improvements to systems in your own organisation, what should be done first? Each situation will differ. In some cases, a complete restructuring of the whole records management system throughout the organisation may be required. In others, some parts of the system may be working well and only certain specific areas need improvement.

Activity 44

Based on the work you have done for this module, what priorities would you establish for yourself in order to study more about records and archives management and implement various recommendations found in this module? What would you do first? What next? Why?

It is possible to offer some broad recommendations. The first step is to establish a plan of action that can receive senior management support. Consider the following list of priorities as some suggestions for the steps that should follow. Some of the activities outlined may overlap and may be able to take place simultaneously.

Priority 1: Assess the Current Situation

The current records management system will need to be assessed to identify its strengths and weaknesses. This initial assessment should consider the infrastructure of the system. In the case of complete restructuring, it will need to consider the following questions.

- What is the legislative and regulatory framework, or in non-government organisations, the policy framework? Does, for example, the legislation cover all categories of records? Does it assign responsibility for records throughout their life cycle?
- Does the unit responsible for records management have sufficient authority to influence corporate policy and practices in records management? Does it have direct links to the organisation's executive authority? Does is have adequate professional skills and support?
- Are there sufficient records staff? Are they properly trained? If not, what training is required? Are new manuals and guidance materials needed?
- Is the office and storage accommodation adequate to meet needs? Is it secure and well-maintained? Is there an adequate supply of equipment and stationery, and sufficient funding, to enable the records office or unit to perform its functions effectively?
- Is records management taken seriously and given a high enough priority within the organisation? If not, is a programme required to 'sell' it as a service and to explain the benefits of good practice?

Priority 2: Conduct a Needs Analysis

This is an extension of Priority 1. What is the need for change? Change may be required for a variety of reasons: a new awareness in the organisation for improved records systems; an external requirement to make changes or improvements, for

example, a new requirement to document certain activities or to make certain records more easily accessible. Frequently a need for change arises because of new functions or activities, new organisational structures or new information requirements.

The perceived need must be analysed and understood before new records management systems can be designed and introduced. The scope of the 'needs analysis' will depend upon the extent of the issue or problem to be addressed. At the broadest level, it may be necessary to look at the records management programme and policy for the whole organisation. What are its objectives and overall goals? Is there a need to define and agree a new records management policy? If improvements are required only to a specific part of the records management system, what are the new requirements to be met, how can they be achieved and how will the changes be incorporated into the work patterns of the organisation?

Other factors to be considered include the following:

- The records systems required, that is, the processes, in broad terms, that are required to capture and maintain adequate records. For example, a function-based file classification scheme, based on current activities, may be needed; or a more reliable file or document tracking system. To establish system requirements, stakeholders will need to be asked about their objectives and views.
- The personnel and organisational structure required to meet the identified needs.
- The financial support and resources required, such as equipment and storage facilities.

Priority 3: Plan Improvements

If records office systems have collapsed, a complete restructuring programme will be required. The first step will be to conduct a business systems analysis so that the functions and activities of the organisation, and its information flows, are understood. Details of how action officers create, access and use records will need to be known. Decisions about records series, classification and coding systems, and retention and disposal requirements must be based on the business systems analysis.

> Analysing Business Systems *provides detailed guidance on this topic.*

If full-scale restructuring is needed, a wide range of background information must be gathered; a records survey should be conducted and key staff and stakeholders interviewed.

> Records Office Restructuring: A Procedures Manual *gives a step-by-step description of the processes involved in restructuring.*

However, even if the improvements to current record-keeping systems are limited, a functional analysis will still be required so that the new systems will match the business functions and activities of the organisation.

Priority 4: Determine the Points of Control

To be effective, a record-keeping system must control the processes of creating, receiving, distributing, using and disposing of records. Control is exercised through a range of documentation, such as registers, indexes or file movement records. If controls are not in place or are not working effectively, the record-keeping system will break down. The information gathered in the assessment of needs and the business systems analysis will be vital when deciding where controls need to be placed and how they should operate. For example, how do officers need to access files or individual documents? What controls are needed so that records may be identified quickly from the information provided by the officers? When files move between officers, how should the records office be informed of the new location of the file?

Priority 5: Choose an Appropriate Record-keeping System

The needs of records officers must be known, information flows mapped and points of control must be identified before record-keeping systems are designed. However, other factors determine the choice of system. Again, the knowledge gained from the earlier business systems analysis will be of vital use here. How does information flow through the organisation? How do action officers need to access records and the information they contain? Is it necessary to register individual documents so that they may be identified and retrieved quickly when required? If so, in- and out-registers and a foliating system may be required. Or is a file-based system sufficient if the need for access can be met by identifying and retrieving at the same time all the records that relate to a specific subject or activity?

If a new classification and coding scheme is required, it will need to be able to cope with predicted expansion as well as the possibility of organisational change. For example, can the records relating to self-contained functions be separated easily if there is the possibility of a reorganisation of responsibilities? At a more fundamental level, will the 'rules' of the classification and coding scheme enable reference numbers to be assigned that are logical and unique?

It is only at this stage that decisions can be made about whether automated or paper systems, or a mixture of both, may provide the solution.

Priority 6: Training and Awareness

Before improvements are implemented, both records staff and users must have a full understanding of the new systems and procedures. The new systems cannot work unless all the staff concerned are familiar with them and can undertake the actions required. However, training must not focus purely on the technical aspects of the new procedures. Change is not always welcomed. The reasons for change and the benefits

that will result must therefore be explained, otherwise there is the risk that officers will not co-operate fully in the new systems.

Training programmes must be carefully planned. Fundamental changes, such as a new filing system, will have to be explained and discussed with all file users. This can be done through a series of awareness seminars in which an overview of the new system, the reasons for its introduction and the requirements of action officers can be covered. Question and answer sessions to follow a more formal presentation are particularly useful.

Training for records staff should concentrate more on the details of the new procedures, while at the same time explaining the context of and reasons for change. Manuals documenting the new system will need to be prepared. It is essential that a manual and any other necessary guidance material (such as desk instructions) are available during the training programme.

GETTING HELP

Many institutions, particularly in countries with limited resources, have little access to resources for archival and records work. However, there are places you can go to get more information or to obtain assistance. Following are names and addresses of 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.*

International 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
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.

Australian Society of Archivists Inc.

PO Box 83
O'Connor ACT
Australia 2601
Website: http://www.archivenet.gov.au/asa

The Australian Society of Archivists (ASA) is the professional body for archivists in Australia. It was formed in 1975 in response to the growing number of archivists in Australia and to the increasing demand for archival skills. The Society is administered on a national basis by an elected Council, Branches and Special Interest Groups are active in the states and territories.

The Australian Society of Archivists aims to

- promote a professional identity amongst archivists
- promote the keeping care and use of archives and encourage research and development in all areas of archival practice
- establish and maintain standards of archival practice and professional conduct amongst archivists, including standards of archival qualifications and professional training
- encourage the responsible use of archives including cooperating with other organisations and groups with common interests and concerns
- encourage communication and cooperation amongst archivists, their institutions and the users of archives
- publish and disseminate information relevant to the archival profession.

International Council on Archives Committee on Electronic and Other Current Records (ICA/CER)

60, rue des Francs-Bourgeois
75003 Paris, France
Tel: +33 0 1 40 27 63 06
Fax: +33 0 1 42 72 20 65
email: 100640@compuserve.com
website: http://www.archives.ca/ICA/

This ICA committee studies and drafts guidelines and directives concerning the creation, preservation, selection, access, treatment, description, authenticity and reliability of electronic and other current records from an archival perspective. The Committee also provides professional advice on relevant training programmes and promotes the exchange of views and experiences in this area. The ICA is the primary international agency for archival work around the world.

International Organization for Standardization (ISO)

Case postale 56
CH-1211 Geneva 20, Switzerland
Tel: +41 22 749 01 11
Fax: +44 22 733 34

Website: http://www.iso.ch

The ISO has established many standards that affect current records care. Of particular note is ISO/TC46/SC11: Information and Documentation: Archives and Records Management, which is drawing up an international standard for records management. Details of SC11 secretariat should be in ISO literature at www.iso.ch.

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
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 45

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 many publications available about current records 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.*

Textbooks

The standard introductory books on records care are:

Couture, Carol and Jean-Yves Rousseau. *The Life of a Document: A Global Approach to Archives and Records Management.* Montreal, CAN: Vehicule Press, 1982.

Emmerson, P, ed. *How to Manage Your Records: A Guide to Effective Practice*. Hemel Hempstead, UK: ICSA Publishing Ltd, 1989.

* Kennedy, Jay and Cherryl Schauder. *Records Management: A Guide for Students and Practitioners of Records Management.* Melbourne, AUS: Addison, Wesley, Longman 1998.

Maedke, W *et al*. *Information and Records Management*. 3rd ed., Encino, USA: Glencoe Publishing, 1989.

Penn, Ira A, Gail B Pennix and J Coulson. *Records Management Handbook.* 2d ed. Aldershot, UK and Brookfield, US: Gower, 1994. (For some purposes the 1989 edition may be as useful.)

Penn, Ira, Gail Pennix, Anne Morddel and Kelvin Smith, *Records Management Handbook.* Aldershot, Hants., UK: Gower, 1989.

* Robek, Mary F, Gerald F Brown and David O Stephens. *Information and Records Management.* 4th. ed. New York, NY: Glencoe/McGraw-Hill,1996.

Wallace, Patricia, Jo Ann Lee and Dexter R Schubert *Records Management: Integrated Information Systems*. 3d ed. New York, NY: Prentice-Hall, 1992.

Other Sources

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

Doyle, Murielle and Andrè Frèniére. *The Preparation of Records Management Handbooks for Government Agencies: A RAMP Study*. (RAMP Study PGI-91/WS/18). Paris, FR: UNESCO, 1991. Available electronically through the UNESCO website.

Durance, Cynthia J, ed. *Management of Recorded Information: Converging Disciplines.* München, Germany, KG Saur, 1990.

Duranti, Luciana. *Diplomatics: New Uses for an Old Science*. Metuchen, NJ: Society of American Archivists, Association of Canadian Archivists and Scarecrow Press, 1998.

Gregson, A, ed. Introducing records management. RMC12. London, UK: Society of Archivists, 1991.

International Council on Archives. ISAD(G): *General International Standard Archival Description.* Ottawa, CAN: International Council on Archives, 1994.

Mazikana, Peter C. *Archives and Records Management for Decision Makers: A RAMP Study*. (RAMP Study PGI-90/WS/8). Paris, FR: UNESCO, 1990. Available electronically through the UNESCO website.

Morelli, J. 'Building Design, Filing Systems and Records Management.' *Records Management Bulletin* 70 (October 1995): 15-16.

Parker, Elizabeth. *Records Management Software Survey*. Issue 4, Princes Risborough, UK: Records Management Society, February 1998.

* Rhoads, James B. *The Role of Archives and Records Management in National Information Systems: A RAMP Study*. (RAMP Study PGI-89/WS/6). Paris, FR: UNESCO, 1989. Available electronically through the UNESCO website.

Scott, M. 'Developing RM strategies. Raise the Profile – Don't Go the Way of the Dinosaur.' *Records Management Bulletin* 66 (February 1995): 6-8.

Southwood, G. 'Record Creation: The Key to Successful Records Management'.' *Records Management Bulletin* 56 (June 1993): 8-12.

Standards Australia. *AS 4390 Australian Standard: Records Management. Parts 1-6.* Homebush, NSW, AUS: Standards Association of Australia, 1996.

Thurston, A and P Cain. 'Speaking a New Language: Advocating Records Management in the Developing World.' *Records Management Bulletin* 72 (February 1996): 11-18.

Wallace, Patricia, Jo Ann Lee and Dexter R Schubert *Records Management: Integrated Information Systems*. 3d ed. New York, NY: Prentice-Hall, 1992.

Wiggins, B. *Records Management Information. Information Management.* London, UK: Records Management Society, n.d.

Wilson, J. 'The Records Manager as an In-house Consultant.' *Records Management Bulletin* 68 (June 1995): 21-22; and 69 (August 1995): 15-16.

Winterman, Vivienne. 'Records Management Software Survey.' *Records Management Bulletin* 72 (Feb 1996): 23-26. *Check for more recent versions as this is published periodically.*

Activity 46

Check your institution's library or resource centre. What books or other resources do you have about current records care? 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 preservation library. Devise a plan outlining how you could realistically obtain copies of these.

SUMMARY

This lesson has provided an overview of the entire module, *Organising and Controlling Current Records.* 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: assess the current situation
- Priority 2: conduct a needs analysis
- Priority 3: plan improvements
- Priority 4: determine the points of control
- Priority 5: choose an appropriate record-keeping system
- Priority 6: training and awareness.

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

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 44

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

Activity 45

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

Activity 46

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.