

Section Seven

Controlling File Movement

7. Controlling File Movement

7.1 Recording File Movements

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

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

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

7.2 File Transit Sheet

The file transit sheets show the location, at all times, of all the files opened by the Records Office. File movement must be recorded promptly to enable the Records Office to provide an efficient and reliable file retrieval service. The following must be included:

- Security grading (if relevant)
- File reference number
- File title
- Indexing headings (taken from the File Index)

- Any previous or subsequent file numbers
- The file's location (to whom sent and on what date).

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

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

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

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

(See Chapter 12: Forms- Fig. 8)

7.3 File Movement Slip

Files are frequently passed backwards and forwards between officers for short periods as a part of everyday business. Short-term file movements, for example, when an action officer passes a file to another officer to read

a document on the file, need not be recorded in the Records Office. However, as a general rule, when an officer completes an action on a file and passes the file to another officer, even if only temporarily, the action officer should inform the Records Office.

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

The Head of the Records Office should ensure that action officers, always have an adequate supply of file movement slips.

As soon as Records Office staff receives the file movement slip, the information must be recorded on the transit sheet.

Completed file movement slips should be kept on file for six months and then destroy.

(See Chapter 12: Forms- Fig. 9)

7.4 File Transit Ladder

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

7.5 File Census

It must be accepted that sometimes an officer will pass a file to another officer when he/she has finished using it, without the file's transfer being recorded in the Records Office. In order to confirm the location of files which are not in the Records Office's custody, records staff should carry

out a regular census of every file outside the Records Office. If no discrepancies are found the frequency of file censuses can be reduced.

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

(See - Chapter 12: File Forms-10)

7.6 Recording the Return of Files to Records Office Custody

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

7.7 Requests for Files

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

7.8 Tracing Missing Files

If a file is missing, the Records Office must proceed as follows.

- The Head of the Records Office must contact the action officer to whom the file was last recorded in the file's transit sheet and ask him or her to trace it.

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

7.9 Temporary Files

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

When the original file is found, all papers on the temporary file must be transferred to the original file (in proper date sequence) and must be renumbered in folio order. Mark the front cover of the temporary file with the date the original was found. The printed area and transit ladder of the temporary file cover should then be cut away and placed on the original file. The temporary file's transit sheet and all index sheets must similarly be marked with the date that the original was found and then struck through, but retained in the same place in the respective books.

Also amend the transit sheet for the original file and update the list of missing files to show that the file has been found.

7.10 Working Files

Administrative staff may wish to maintain their own personal set of working files in their offices or close to their work area. Such files may be organized according to any method that the staff member may find useful; for example, alphabetical, chronological, numerical, etc.)

Working files should never contain any original documents or official file copies which fall within the definition of a Government record.





Filing Tracking