

MANAGEMENT OF ACTIVE RECORDS

REGISTRY SYSTEM

Most government ministries and departments operate with centralised registry systems. When a central registry is used, all the organisation's records are maintained in that registry. However, as some departments and units of the ministry or department can be found in physically separate locations, each of these units might have its own registry within its locality.

Functions of the central registry

The functions of the Central Registry are to:

- receive and process incoming mail;
- process and despatch outgoing mail;
- maintain a filing system and file mail that is received or generated internally;
- distribute mail and other information as required;
- retire semi-current and non-current information;
- store and maintain the non-current records;
- conserve and preserve archives.

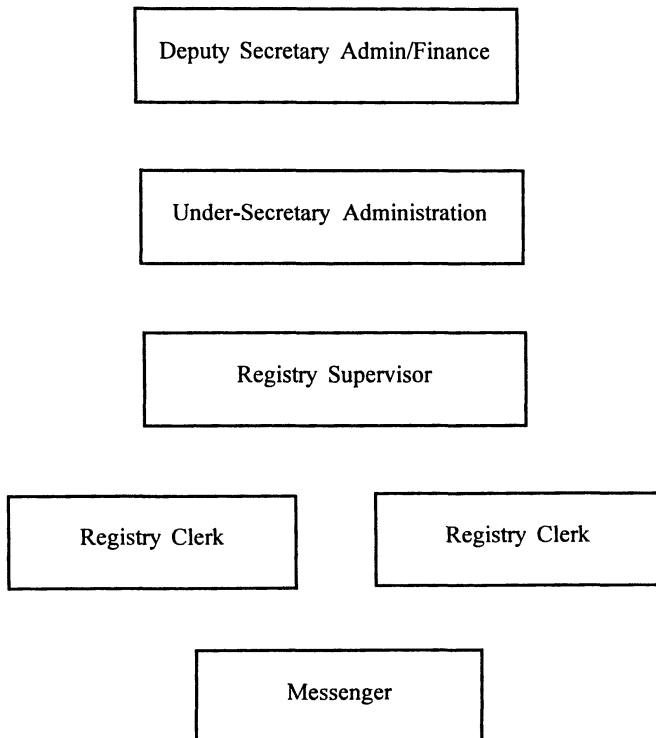
Location

The Central Registry is usually located within or in close proximity to the main administrative block and close to the offices of the Chief Executive Officer, i.e. the Permanent Secretary or Head of Department.

The registry is a distinct office with counters which control access. The windows of the registry have to be burglar-proofed to prevent unauthorised entry. Fire extinguishers have to be installed within each Central Registry and all staff in the Central Registry trained to use the fire extinguishers. Smoking in the registry is strictly forbidden and "No Smoking" signs must be installed in all Central registries.

Organisational structure

The staffing and organisational structure of the Central Registry is determined by the size of the ministry or department. The diagram below shows the structure of a small central registry in a government ministry.



The above structure, the duties and responsibilities of the staff of the Central Registry are as follows:

Job Title	Quantity	Duties and Responsibilities
Registry Supervisor	1	To be the head of the Central Registry. Duties include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning and managing of the registry system • Receiving and opening mail • Classifying mail • Opening and closing files • Handling confidential mail • Referring mail to Head of Ministry • Staff supervision • Staff development • Maintaining the registry computer system
Registry Clerks		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receiving and filing correspondence • Retrieving and issuing files • Compiling and circulating running files • File-tracking • Mail despatch • Maintaining the semi-current and non-current records • Scheduling and disposal of files • Maintaining equipment • Data input
Messenger/ Office Attendant		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Routing communications to offices • Moving communications from office to office • Keeping registry neat and tidy

Registry equipment

Filing Cabinets are the primary unit of records storage in the registry. The filing cabinets are arranged in the order of the file classification system. Each drawer must have a label to show the contents. Within each drawer there are guides and dividers to indicate contents and to assist with retrieval. The files are stored vertically and hung in suspension files.

Some registries prefer using open shelving which is able to achieve higher storage densities per given floor area.

Other vital registry equipment includes the following:

- paper punches
- staplers
- date stamp

Departmental registries

There are cases where it is not practical to have one central registry. This often arises when the operational units are physically separated. In these circumstances, there is need to create departmental or unit registries. The major requirement is that, if departmental registries are created, then their systems should be formalised. What should be avoided is the creation of office registries which are not part of the registry system and yet which often end up undermining the central registry system through the retention of records that should be filed in the central registry. At regular intervals, it is necessary to check all offices to ensure that they are not maintaining their own individual registries.

HANDLING OF MAIL

Processing of incoming mail

- Mail is collected in a mail bag by a messenger or office attendant from the Post Office. Some is hand delivered. Mail is collected at least twice a day.
- The mail bag is handed over, by the messenger, to the Registry Supervisor. It is advisable that the bag is opened in the presence of a witness, i.e. one of the registry staff.
- Mail is sorted by the Registry Supervisor into two categories, i.e. official and personal. The personal mail is sent to the addressee. The official mail is further sorted into top secret, secret, confidential, remittances and ordinary.
- Remittances or registered mail are identified, recorded in a Remittances Register and handed over to Finance/Treasury. The latter sign the register to acknowledge receipt. The Remittances Register contains the following information:
 - Date received;
 - Remittance type;
 - Details of sender;
 - Officer handed over to;
 - Date handed over;
 - Signature of receiver.
- Official mail, which is ordinary, is opened by the Registry Supervisor or one of the Registry Clerks and date stamped. Secret or confidential mail

is opened only by the Registry Supervisor or by the head of ministry or department.

- The ordinary or confidential mail is registered in the mail register.
- The mail is classified by the Registry Supervisor. In classifying, the Registry Supervisor determines the appropriate file into which the incoming communication must be filed. The file number is endorsed next to the date stamp or on the top left hand corner.
- Ordinary mail is passed on to the registry clerks who retrieve the relevant file. An outcard is filled and left in the place where the file has been retrieved from. At all times, the outcard must be filled in so that, either the file is in the cabinet, or, in its place, there is an outcard. The alternative to using an outcarding system is to have a register where the files being issued are recorded.
- The mail is put on the file and folioed and either sent to the head of the ministry/ department or to the officer who should deal with the issue. Folioing is that process by which each item being put onto a file is given a number starting at one with the first item filed and rising as other items are added.

Confidential, secret and top secret files

The higher that one goes up into the ministry, the likelihood that there will be highly confidential matters to be dealt with. The main requirements of dealing with these items is to make sure that they are easily distinguishable and that their confidentiality is protected. It is usual practice to designate the files so that, for instance, Confidential files are green in colour, the Secret files are dark blue and the Top Secret are red.

If the confidential, secret and top secret files are kept in separately designated filing cabinets within the registry, the cabinets should have security locks and the keys should be kept by the Registry Supervisor. The Registry Supervisor should be security vetted to the highest level.

Handling of out-going mail

- Three or more signed copies of the outgoing mail are received in the registry.

- The original is identified and despatch details recorded in the Despatch Register/Book. These details include:
 - Details of outgoing communication
 - Despatch date
 - Name and address of addressee
 - Signature of recipient (for hand deliveries)

The original is then put in an envelope and sent out.

- The Despatch Register/Book can be used as a delivery book, although as much as possible, this should be avoided. The delivery book should be separate.

The second copy is filed in the relevant file.

The third copy is put into a flimsy or running file. At the end of each week, the Flimsy File is assembled. While the Flimsy File often provides a back-up in case the file copy cannot be located, its primary role is to inform officers of the communications that have been generated in a given period. Thus, the Flimsy File should be put together regularly, preferably at the end of each week. It should then be circulated to designated members of staff. A circulation list is used as follows:

Flimsy File Circulation List

FLIMSY FILE CIRCULATION LIST			
MINISTRY/DEPARTMENT	WEEK ENDING		
	Date In	Date Out	Signature
Head of Ministry/Department			
Dept Head			
Dept Head			
Officer			
Officer			
Officer			

The date-in and date-out columns are designed to speed up the circulation of the files by showing the date the officer received the file and the date he/she sent it out. The date-in column is completed by the messenger/office attendant who takes the file from office to office.

The flimsy files are usually retained and disposed of after one year.

Performance Indicators for mail handling system

The following are the performance indicators that will be assessed when a systems audit is undertaken on the mail handling system. Their fulfilment or otherwise will constitute a measure of the operational efficiency of the system.

- Mail is being collected from the Post Office at least twice a day.
- Mail is being processed and routed within two hours of receipt.
- All mail received is being recorded in the mail book.
- All mail is being date stamped and folioed.
- Mail is being filed before routing.
- All files on issue have an outcard.
- Despatch register has entries of all outgoing mail.
- Delivery book has signatures to evidence receipt.
- File copies are being accurately placed.
- Flimsy files are being circulated each week.

FILE CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

Classifying

Classifying is the identification of the file into which a communication must be put. The person whose job it is to decide on to which file a letter, memorandum or circular should go must:

- be familiar with the filing system in use in the organisation;

- be able to read and understand what the letter or communication is all about;
- be able to open a new file if none exists, and to keep an eye on areas that may need change – and to be able to implement that change without altering the structure of the system.
- Be able to converse with various levels of management, so as to be informed and kept in the picture of the policies of the organisation.

File classification system

There are several types of file classification systems that can be used. The most popularly used are the alpha numeric and numeric systems. The essence of a filing system is that it must mirror the functions and activities of the organisation because it is these that give rise to the documentation which needs to be filed. An example of a numeric filing system is at Appendix 1.

The system illustrated is basically numeric with each distinct activity/function of the organisation constituting a subject/function/activity division. Each division is allocated a number being a series at intervals of fifty as shown in the appendix. The divisions are not structured in alphabetic sequence because such a sequence would collapse with the addition of new activities and functions. The divisions are, however, indexed alphabetically for ease of access.

Within each division, file and file sub-divisions are created as illustrated and given numbers within the subject division. The numbers, e.g. 101, 102 can be files by themselves or they can be the headings for a sub-grouping of files. For example:

100	Finance
101	Accounting Instructions
101/1	Handling of Cash in Transit
101/2	Accounting for Donor Funded Projects
101/3	etc.

There is flexibility in the creation of the sub-divisions within each filing division and users can select subject categories of relevance and make additions as necessary. The divisional structure, however, should not be altered without the prior authorisation of the Registry Supervisor.

The provision of 50 spaces for files and file sub-divisions within each major division is meant to provide for the creation of new files and file sub-divisions as functions change or expand.

File titling and numbering

- File titles must be precise and must mean exactly what the contents of the file contain.
- If there is more than one subject in a letter then a copy/copies must be made so that the correspondence goes on to both or more files.
- The words miscellaneous and general, should be avoided, as this leads to omnibus files, i.e. files containing many unrelated subjects.
- File titles must be in simple language and abbreviations must not be used. Abbreviations sometimes have more than one meaning, and office abbreviations mean nothing to the newcomer.
- File titles should be altered to meet the need of the correspondence, especially if the subject/activity grows.
- The file numbers should remain simple.
- Folioing is useful. This is the numbering of each piece of paper on the file from bottom upwards.

INDEXING SYSTEM

Scope of the indexing system

The main objective of the indexing system is to provide a tool that will facilitate the identification and retrieval of records and information required for the execution of Government duties and business, wherever that information may be held within the ministry and department. The indexing system must be designed in a way that makes it possible to index the files and records in both the formalised and structured Central Registries in the ministries and departments as well as the files and records in the subsidiary, formal and informal filing systems as may be found in other units and offices.

The indexing system is meant to facilitate the retrieval of information. The purpose of creating records is not only to document the activities of the organisation but to

provide a body of information which can be used by the organisation for the carrying out of its duties and functions. Organising information without a means of retrieving the information serves no purpose. One of the mechanisms that facilitates the retrieval of this information is the index which can be described as a pointer, indicator or systematic guide to the items or information contained in a filing system or database.

The structure of the indexing system must be such as to facilitate the retrieval of the information. Different people wishing to retrieve information will have different reasons for retrieving the information and are likely to approach the retrieval process differently. There is also the likelihood that they will specify their requirements differently. While some of the users will know what they are looking for, others will have only vague notions of what information sources are most useful to meet their needs. The indexing system must be designed so that it is able to support both types of users.

The indexing system should cover various categories of current records including:

- Files contained in both the formal registries as well as the subsidiary systems
- Registers
- Personal Files

Index to the file list

The major instrument for the identification and retrieval of information is the Main Index to the Current Files in the ministry and department. The index embraces all the current files held in the ministry and department.

One type of indexing system which can be used is based on the titles of the files and documents in the ministries and departments and on the KEYWORD indexing concept.

It involves the indexing of the file titles and descriptors of the documents or records, and gives information on the whereabouts of the information being sought, leading the searcher to the required document. The system is developed on the premise that file, document and record titles, and specifically the words in the titles, convey the subject content of the document to which the title pertains.

The Keyword Indexing System that can be used by registries is a simplified version of indexing systems which are commonly used by librarians to index information

on book titles. Keywords comprise those words within a file title or records descriptor that can be used by someone seeking information on a particular issue or subject.

Each word that could be used by a searcher seeking information becomes a keyword that is indexed, with a card being created under it. The card also contains information about the other aspects of the file title or records descriptor, thus enabling the person seeking information to be directed to the relevant file or document. The index does not give the user the actual information contained in the document but merely directs the person to the document.

The following example illustrates how the indexing is done.

<u>File Reference Number</u>	<u>File Title</u>
HD/O1	Training of Staff

For the above file, two index cards would be created as follows:

Index card 1

<u>TRAINING,</u> of Staff
File Ref. No. HD/O1 Location: Personnel Dept Registry

Index card 2

<u>STAFF,</u> Training of Staff
File Ref.No. HD/01 Location: Personnel Dept. Registry

Notice that on each of the cards, the title of the file is indicated. In the case of the first file, the file title was indicated by merely completing the remaining parts of the file title. On the second card, after putting the main entry, the full file title is then repeated. In all cases, the file reference number is shown in full, so that, whichever of the cards a user consults, he/she is guided back to the same file. The

location of the file is also shown. This is because, the index cards may cover the records in several offices and sections within the ministry/ department and it is thus necessary to indicate the place where the records are physically located.

The word of is not indexed as it is not a keyword. What this means is that it is not expected that a user will come and look for information under "of". It is expected that the user will think either of TRAINING or STAFF, not "of".

The following rules should be observed in determining what should be indexed:

Files: The file titles should be indexed. File is used here to denote various types of file covers including, file folders of the manilla type, lever arch files, box files and accessible files.

Registers: The name of the register constitutes the title. Examples are:

- Incoming Mail Register
- Personal File(PF) Register
- Indents Register
- Advances Register
- Cheques Received Register

The titles of the above registers are the ones that would be indexed. It is again important to draw attention to the fact that the index is an index to the file/record titles and not to the inside contents. Thus, there may exist other indexes specific to the contents of a register.

Books: Books such as are used in some ministries and departments should also be indexed. The books referred to here are those that are used to record information, not published books. Examples of such books are Vote Books and Voucher Books.

Other types of records: There are other types of records which do not have titles as such. These include financial records of various types and their identification is usually according to what they are. Examples include vouchers, cheque stubs, goods received notes, requisitions, and ledgers. It is these descriptors that are indexed.

When the indexing exercise has been completed, covering all offices and records in the ministry or department, all the cards are put together and rearranged in the

alphabetical order of the first word on each card. The cards are arranged alphabetically.

The above indexing system, based on file and document titles, has the advantage that it is simple and easy to understand and can be produced relatively cheaply and quickly, whether manually or by computer. The index entries are based on the words in the title itself, thereby removing the necessity for human interpretation of the indexing terms. The language of the index therefore mirrors the terminology of the filing system itself. The integration and cumulation of the entries from different filing units is also relatively simple.

There are, however, some limitations which must be understood and appreciated. The title index is really a crude form of indexing and can demand a great deal of imagination and searching skills on the part of the users. The file titles do not always constitute an accurate summary of the contents of a file or document. The title is also a summarisation at the highest aggregated level and does not represent the sub-themes and other subjects represented in the file or document. The lack of control over indexing language can also be a drawback.

Indexes to personal files

The following rules can be used when creating alphabetic indexes for personal files:

- A register or index cards should be used. The names are then arranged in alphabetic order within the register or the cards. It is preferred that cards be used, since registers are inflexible in arranging the names within each alphabetic section. There are also problems in that it is difficult to forecast the rate at which each of the alphabetic sections will grow and therefore to leave sufficient room for each section.
- If a register is used, each letter of the alphabet should be allocated a separate section of the register with empty pages left in between sections to provide for expansion as new employees come on board.
- Within each alphabetic section, the names are then arranged in alphabetic sequence. In arranging the names within the section, the sequence of the names is decided by the alphabetic sequence of the letters coming after the first one.

In this way, the second letter of the surname determines the precedence of the name. Thus, Jeffers comes before Jenkins, while the latter comes before John. If the first two letters are the same, then the sequence is determined by the third letter.

Where these are again similar, the fourth letter is considered and so forth until a sequence can be determined.

- If the surnames are exactly the same, then the sequence is determined by the first names or the initials. Those whose names therefore start with a, b or c would come before those whose first names begin with x, y or z. If only the initials are available, the sequence of the first initial would also be the determining factor.

The personal files index can be simple or sophisticated depending on the administrative requirements of the ministry or department. At the minimum, it should cross-reference to the employee number. A remarks column is useful to record comments on the employee, such as maiden or married name, and termination of employment. To standardise the information to be contained, the following format can be adopted when registers are used.

NAME	Employee Number	Employment Date	Marital Status	STATUS			
				Retired	Retrenched	Dismissed	Other
Johnson Victor	1724	01.01.82	Divorced		x		
Jones Hazel	2883	30.04.59	Married			x	

In the case of cards, the above details would also be recorded but in a different format.

Indexes to registers

Each ministry and department should also decide on other indexes that can be created to facilitate the retrieval of information. The number of indexes created depends on the functions of the ministry/department and on the number of registers in use. Each register is amenable to indexing, the only limitation being the validity or usefulness of the resulting index. Consider the following registers and books that are found in some Establishment Registries.

- Register of Incoming Correspondence
- Register of Outgoing Correspondence
- Establishment Register
- APFL Register
- PFL Register
- PF Register
- Establishments Division Registered Slip Record Book
- Documents for Delivery by Hand
- Establishments Division Equipment Book
- Public Service Commission Mail Book
- Establishment Division Mail Book
- Appointments Book

Taking the above into account, several indexes could be constructed. The following are a few examples.

- Index to Incoming Correspondence by Name of Sender
- Index to Incoming Correspondence by Name of Addressee
- Index of Outgoing Correspondence by Name of Addressee
- Index of Appointments by Name of Official

As can be seen from the above examples, the number of indexes that can be put together is large. The main consideration is the use to which the indexes will be put, compared with the amount of labour required to make the index entries. Each ministry and department is required to assess its requirements for specialised indexes.

Computerised indexes

The indexes shown above are largely for manual records management systems. While in many Commonwealth countries, most ministries and departments are operating with manual records management systems, there are many who have automated their systems or are in the process of doing so. This offers the opportunity to apply automated processes to indexing.

One option that can be considered is the acquisition of records management software that is ready made. There are many packages available off the shelf. Some of the software packages already incorporate automatic indexing facilities so that as the file and record titles are entered, they are automatically indexed for retrieval.

Another option available is the creation of database systems, with the file classification systems being input and with facilities for sorting information according to several possible parameters. Such a development would also make it possible to incorporate indexing mechanisms.

In applying computer technology to indexing, there is need to take cognisance of major developments that have already been pioneered.

- The concept of the THESAURUS was developed to facilitate and control indexing languages so that there could be uniformity and consistency.
- The Key Word In Context (KWIC) is a subject-type title indexing system in which all the words in the titles of documents are compared by the computer against a preselected stopword or stoplist. This stoplist is input into the computer before indexing commences and contains all those words which may appear in the titles but which have no value and should not be indexed. Examples of such words are "of", "the", "this" etc. This is very similar to the words that we do not index in terms of the indexing system outlined above.
- The Key Word Out of Context (KWOC) indexing system is meant to be an improvement on KWIC. It is constructed in exactly the same way although there are some minor differences.

FILE RETRIEVAL, ISSUE AND TRACKING

Files leave the registry for the following reasons:

- A communication is received, filed and routed for action;

- An officer requests the file.

File issue system

There are two principal methods used to record the issuing of files. First, a register can be used to record the details of the file being issued. The details recorded include the file reference number, the file title, the date of issue and the person to whom it is being issued. There will also be provision to indicate the date that the file is returned.

Alternatively, an outcarding system can be used to control file issues. A set of outcards is kept in the registry. No file should leave the registry unless an outcard has been filled. Below is an example of an outcard.

File Outcard

FILE OUTCARD				
File Ref. No.	Title	Date issued	Person issued to	Date Returned

File retrieval

The retrieval procedures are as follows:

- A communication is received for filing or the file is requested for reference or use.
- An outcard is taken and the following issue details are recorded:
 - File reference number
 - File title
 - Date issued
 - Person issued to
- The file is retrieved.

- The outcard is put in the filing cabinet in the place from which the file is being removed.
- The file is issued.
- On return, the outcard is retrieved and the file put back.
- The date of file return is endorsed on the outcard.

File tracking

One of the biggest problems facing organisations is the tracking of files as they move from office to office. While the registry staff may do their work assiduously, and faithfully record the file issue details, this serves little purpose in that, if they go to the office where the file has been issued, at times the file is no longer there, having been passed on to another officer. In order to overcome this problem, there are basically two possible solutions. One is to insist that files moving from one officer to the next must be routed through the registry so that the issue details are amended accordingly. This works well if there is a good messenger service and the messenger regularly and frequently visits each office. The other solution is to use File-Pass-On-Slips.

Each officer is issued with a pad of file pass-on slips. If an officer wishes to send a file to another officer without the file going back to registry then the file pass-on-slip should be used. It is completed and given to the messenger to take back to registry. Registry then amends the outcard as necessary. Officers violating this procedure should be reported and sanctioned as appropriate.

FILE PASS-ON SLIP	
Name:	Date:
File Ref No.: File Title: Officer passed to: Date passed:	