

Records Management Handbook

What is records management?

Records Management is the 'field of management responsible for the efficient and systematic control of the creation, receipt, maintenance, use and disposition of records' (BS ISO 15489).

What is a record?

A record is any document created or received in the course of the Office's business that provides evidence that a business activity or process took place. Records can range from rough notes to final reports and can be in any format including paper (text and image), electronic (word/excel documents, emails, scanned documents, web and intranet pages, structured databases, film; video and sound recordings).

What is the official filing system?

The official filing system for the Office, managed by RMU, is paper based using the 'Registered file'. This is the only system currently in operation that is fully compliant with the legislative requirements for managing records of the Public Records Acts, Data Protection Act and Freedom of Information Act. Business records created or received in the Office must therefore be placed on a Registered file; they must not be stored in any form of personal filing system unless they are copies. If records are received or created electronically copies must be taken and placed in a Registered file.

What is a registered file?

A Registered file is a purpose-designed file cover used for storing and managing a collection of records relating to a specific subject. Individual files often form part of a larger file series that relates to a Section/Division of the Office, a specific area of work or legislation. File covers contain metadata which includes the file prefix and number; title; date opened/closed; security classification and the latest location. This information is entered on the RMU database and enables files to be quickly located and searches carried out.

What is the RMU database?

The RMU Database provides information on every Registered file ever created in this Office, dating back to 1973. The database contains all the metadata found on a file cover (file title, number, location etc). With this

metadata RMU staff can conduct searches in a number of ways and print reports on request from members of staff, for instance for any files relating to a particular company or subject; or all files in a specified file series or between specific dates. If you are investigating something or someone, files may already exist covering that subject which could provide you with background information. Contact a member of RMU to conduct a search for you.

Managing records on a file

The following guidelines should be followed in conjunction with any specific guidance relevant to the section or work you carry on:

- All relevant records must be attached to a file using the purple file tag. There should be no loose papers.
- Records should have a hole punched in the top left-hand corner (about an inch from the top and side).
- If a record is too thick or too difficult to punch a hole in place it in an enclosure envelope and attach it as above.
- If the record is too large to fit in an enclosure envelope you may place it in a document enclosure folder and attach it to the file.
- Internal minutes should go on the left-hand side of the file. These minutes are usually from one member of staff to another often asking for advice or action to be approved or completed and usually relate to documents that can be found on the right hand side of the file. These minutes should be dated and numbered consecutively.
- On the right hand side of the file all other records should be placed including letters, notes of meetings, reports, briefing, copies of emails etc. These should be filed in date order of the record (not date order when received for filing) and numbered if appropriate (see below).
- If the file bears a government security classification for example - 'Restricted' or 'Confidential' -the records should be numbered consecutively. Each record should be numbered on the top right hand corner, but not each page, the record should also bear the appropriate security marking on each page. A numbered list of all the records on the file should also be attached on the left-hand side and would include the title of the record etc.
- Do not place more than one copy of the same record on a file. Remove drafts (unless there is a good reason to keep them e.g. to have an audit trail) and only keep the final copy of a record otherwise the file will become unnecessarily bulky.

- Keep the file tidy, documents will be easier to find. Also easier to find documents if you cross refer to other enclosures mentioned. Good idea to include this?
- Do not let the file become too bulky. The maximum permitted thickness is about 1.5 inches or 38mm. Request a new part to the file when required.

Requesting a new file series

A file series consists of files that relate to a similar subject. Each file series has its own prefix and within the file series each file will cover its own particular aspect. The file prefix is usually linked to the Division or Section that is carrying out the work and/or legislation and also the type of work. Please see the File Series/Disposal Schedule on this site for a list of all the file series currently used in the Office.

If you're about to carry out work that doesn't fit into any existing file series, for instance new legislation comes into force, a new department is set up or a new type of work is carried out you will need to set up a new file series and a prefix needs to be allocated for the files. To do this you must first get approval from the DRO who will provide advice on the most appropriate prefix. When agreement is reached the new prefix will be set up on the RMU database. The first file in a file series will usually start at number 0001 and subsequent files will continue in numerical sequence.

Requesting a new registered file

Records should be put on a file straightaway. If there is a current file that covers the subject of the records, use it. If no suitable file exists, arrange for a new one to be opened.

When requesting a new file the following details (metadata) will need to be given:

- the file Prefix The file Number (usually allocated by RMU)
- the file Suffix (if required)
- the file Title
- the Security Classification (if required)
- the Name, Section and Room number of the person requesting the file.

FILE PREFIX - The file prefix is usually linked to the Section that is carrying out the work or the legislation the work is being carried out under. There is a complete list of file prefix currently in use on this site (see the File prefix/ Disposal Schedule). If you are unsure which file prefix to use ask your line manager. If you're carrying out work that doesn't fit into any existing file prefix you will need to set up a new file prefix. To do

this you will need to speak to the DRO who if he approves the request will set up the new series on the RMU database.

FILE NUMBER - The file number is the unique file identifier in a series of files. File numbers consist of at least four digits to accommodate the database searching facilities and usually start at 0001. For file requests received by email RMU staff will add the next number in the file series, requests for files through the CMS will have the number automatically generated (except credit licensing files).

FILE SUFFIX - The file suffix is an additional means to further sub-divide a particular file. For example Unfair Contract Terms Unit files use letters in the suffix to represent a geographical area. Numbers can also be used for instance to identify a particular stage in an investigation while retaining the overall case number. Please speak to a member of RMU for further advice if this is required.

FILE TITLE - The file title should reflect the contents of the file. Try to keep the title short and to the point using words that can be easily searched by databases to find the relevant information (The RMU database file title field can accept a maximum file title length of 250 characters including spaces). Try to avoid using words such as 'general' or 'miscellaneous' as these files will become dumping grounds for papers that are unlikely to either be looked at or found again.

SECURITY CLASSIFICATION - Detailed instructions about the creation, despatch and storage of files/ records possessing protective markings is available on the Intranet under 'Office - Security Handbook' It may however be helpful to outline the options most often used in this Office when choosing a security classification.

- **Restricted and Confidential** markings are used to limit the circulation of records and enforce a 'need to know' principal; only HEO's and above have the authority to classify records as 'Restricted' and SEO's and above to classify records as 'Confidential'. The only exception to this rule is when all files in a series will be classified as 'Restricted' such as the mergers file series and files subsequent to the first one can then be requested by more junior staff. The most common used classification in the Office is the 'Restricted' classification; this classification can be used by itself or with the following additional descriptors:
- **Restricted**

The compromise of information assets marked **RESTRICTED** could:

- hinder or impede the detection or investigation of crime

- cause a low level criminal prosecution to collapse or a conviction to be declared unsafe
 - cause a loss to the public purse of up to £1million
 - undermine the financial viability of a UK business
 - cause significant financial loss of up to £100,000 to any party
 - create risk to an individual's personal safety
 - significantly harm the OFT's reputation
 - disadvantage government in terms of policy or business matters.
- **Restricted - Commercial** - For files that contain information about commercial processes or affairs that may be of commercial value to competitors or speculators. The leaking of such information would damage the trust between the company or individual supplying the information and the Office.
 - **Restricted - Management** - For files that contain information affecting the interests of staff, the early disclosure of which would be against the interests of the Office.
Restricted - Market Sensitive - Alternative marking to Restricted - Commercial but for all intents and purposes the same. For files that contain information about commercial processes or affairs that may be of commercial value to competitors or speculators. The leaking of such information would damage the trust between the company or individual supplying the information and the Office.
 - **Restricted - Personal** - A restriction that is usually placed on an envelope rather than a file where the contents should only be seen by the named addressee. The item in the envelope may or may not itself be restricted. Examples include information about pay, sick certificates, reports, job applications etc.
 - **Restricted - Staff** - For files that contain information about named or identifiable individuals that should not be seen by them or personal confidences entrusted by staff to management.
 - **The 'Confidential'** classification is occasionally used in this Office, but it shouldn't be confused with information sent to this Office by outside organisations/solicitors which is marked confidential. More often than not this information can be classified as 'restricted' under the government security classifications.
 - **The Secret/Top Secret** classifications are rarely used in this Office. Only grade 7 and above can classify 'secret' and grade 3 and above 'Top Secret'. Should you see a need to classify to these markings or should you receive documents with these markings the Departmental Security Officer and Departmental Records Officer must be informed so that registration, handling and storage can be monitored - in line with Cabinet Office instructions.

- **Protect**

This category was introduced in response to the increasing need to protect and transmit data electronically, which requires some level of protection but does not carry National Security sensitivity. This relates mostly to communications with members of the public and businesses that are of personal or commercial sensitivity. PROTECT information attracts less demanding security measures: for example PROTECT data is suitable for transmission over public telecommunications networks without encryption.

The compromise of information assets marked **PROTECT** could:

- cause substantial distress or embarrassment to individuals
- breach undertakings to maintain the confidence of information provided by third parties
- breach statutory restrictions on the disclosure of information
- cause financial loss to the public purse of up to £10,000
- cause minor reputational damage to the OFT.

- **Confidential**

The compromise of information assets marked CONFIDENTIAL could:

- impede the investigation of, or facilitate the commission of, a serious crime
- cause a serious criminal conviction to collapse or be declared unsafe
- cause a loss to the public purse or any party up to £10million
- undermine the financial viability of a major UK organisation
- seriously affect the development or operation of major government policy
- jeopardize individual security
- cause substantial and lasting damage to the OFT's reputation.

How to request a new file

Using email

Send email requests for all files that are not automatically requested by the CMS, for example policy and non-casework files. The email should be addressed to the 'RMU' group found in the group wise address book and not to an individual member of RMU staff. You could be waiting a long time for a file if the member of RMU staff you've emailed is on leave or sick! The email should contain all the required information as set out

above. In addition the Name, Section and Room Number of the person requesting the file must be given on the email so that RMU staff have the correct location to send the file to and for the RMU database to have the correct location of the file. Temporary staff that request files must request the files using the name and location of their manager in the body of the email.

Using the Casework Management System (CMS)

Desk instructions and help pages for using the CMS provide the information required on how to raise a physical registered file through the CMS. If in doubt speak to your line manager or contact the CMS help desk. When requesting additional parts to files originally created using the CMS this must be done by an email request to RMU. **The CMS is not able to request additional new parts to existing files.**

When to use the # symbol

There are a few anomalies with the CMS that should be clarified. When a case is first started a request is automatically sent to the RMU database to create a new Registered file. If however action on a case stops and re-starts at a later date the CMS will automatically send RMU another request for a Registered file which is not required. In these circumstances staff need to place a '#' after the physical file number to indicate to RMU staff not to create a new file or electronic record on the RMU database.

With the file series CCA a # needs to be placed after the file number to indicate that the file was created at Ealing so that RMU staff do not need to create another file, just the electronic record on the RMU database.

Typing over the CMS reference number

In a majority of file series the CMS reference number and the physical file reference number are the same or the physical file reference number is automatically generated by the CMS. However with a few file series they are different. When this is the case staff in the sections will need to overwrite the CMS number with the physical file reference before requesting the physical file. This problem mainly occurs when the file uses a physical file reference number not generated in numerical sequence, for instance CCA-MTR based on Consumer Credit licence numbers.

Requesting a new part to a registered file

It is important files do not become too thick as this makes them difficult to handle, they become too heavy and cause storage problems. The maximum permitted thickness for a file is about 1.5 inches or 38mm. If a file is becoming too thick you must request a new part to be opened.

When RMU send you the new file part cover it will contain a pink 'Closed form', this must be placed as the top document on the file that has just been closed. For bulky items that need to be attached to a file you should request a blue document folder.

How to request a new part to a file

Send email requests for new parts to registered files. This also includes additional parts for files originally created in the CMS. The email should be addressed to the 'RMU' group found in the Outlook address book and not to an individual member of RMU staff.

The following details of the original file will need to be given:

- the file Prefix
- the file Number
- the file Suffix (if required)
- the file Title
- the Security Classification (if required)
- the Name, Section and Room number of the person requesting the file.

By the CMS

The CMS is unable to send automatic request for new parts to files originally generated by the CMS. When a new part is required you will need to send RMU an email request.

Requesting a blue document enclosure folder

There will be occasions when bulky items will need to travel with a file but don't necessarily need to be placed on the file itself. This could for instance be copies of annual reports, questionnaires in response to surveys etc. In these circumstances you will need to obtain a blue document enclosure folder either from stationery or RMU. When you receive the folder you must write in black highlighter the file prefix and number the folder relates to. If there is more than one folder you must also write for instance 1 of 2 or 2 of 2. It is also useful to write a brief description of the contents on the folder.

Please note RMU cannot store ring binders, papers from these will need to be placed on the file or in a blue document enclosure folder.

Use of ring binders

Occasionally information is supplied to the Office in ring binders, often by solicitors. As a general rule ring binders will not be accepted by RMU for storage, if possible the documents should be taken off and placed in a blue enclosure folder (see above). However with the approval of the DRO

and in circumstance where the removal of large numbers of documents/records to blue folders is impractical ring binders will be accepted. The ring binders will need to have written on the front cover the file number of the Registered file they relate to; the binder number, for instance if there are 10 of them the first one would be 1 of 10 and so on; any security classification; a brief description of the contents and most importantly a disposal recommendation. Often these binders will contain information that is soon out of date (witness statements questionnaires etc) and can be destroyed sooner than the main case file. You could for instance put destroy in X years time specifying a date, if in doubt speak to the DRO.

It should be noted that The National Archives have very strict rules for accepting records that have been included in an Operational Selection Policy and do not accept ring binders, Ring binders should not therefore contain information which is likely to be preserved for historic purpose e.g. significant cases and consequently should not contain any Office generated records that should go on the main file.

Notification of file movements

RMU must know the current location of all Registered files at all times. When a file is sent from RMU to a member of staff the new location will be entered on the RMU database. However it is the responsibility of staff to inform RMU of the new owner every time the file is subsequently moved. If this is not done the file can become easily lost and if someone else requires the file a lot of time can be wasted not only by RMU staff double-checking the stores looking for the file but also by staff on the section it was last marked out to. Knowing the location of files will help staff find information quickly, which is important when dealing with FOI and Data Protection requests within the specified time limits.

How to notify a file movement by:

email

Send email notifications of file movements to the 'RMU' group in the address book. Do not send notifications to individual members of RMU staff.

The notification should include the file prefix, number and if applicable the suffix. You should also state the name of the person, section and room number the file has been sent to.

CMS

For files that have been originally created using the CMS you must still notify RMU when you pass the physical file to another person. Notifying

physical file movements cannot be done using the CMS therefore you must send RMU an email notification.

Locating a file/general file search/file lists

If you are searching for a file and want to find out its current location or alternatively if you want to know what files have been created involving a particular business, individual or subject you can either telephone or email a member of RMU giving as much information as possible to carry out a search on the RMU Database. The RMU database can search by file prefix or number or title. RMU staff can also print out lists of all files in a particular file series or those files in a file series opened at a particular time.

Requesting a file held in the RMU file stores

Once you have confirmed the file you require is held in the RMU stores you may request the file by:

telephone

Speak to a member of RMU staff giving the file Prefix, Number, Suffix, Part Number and title of the file required.

email

Send the email to the 'RMU' group found in the address book and not to individual members of RMU staff. You need to specify the file Prefix, Number, Suffix, Part Number and title of the file required. If you are a temp and have logged on to group wise as Temp Temp please also provide your managers name and the room number you want the file sent to.

CMS

You cannot order a file from the stores using the CMS and will therefore need to use one of the alternative methods.

Returning a file from RMU for storage

Only Registered files can be stored with RMU

- Registered files should be returned to RMU as soon as they are no longer needed on the section. Many sections tend to accumulate an unnecessary quantity of files. It's easy to keep files on the section 'just to be on the safe side'. With increasing pressure on valuable

office space in Fleetbank House only essential, active files should be retained on the section.

- The file stores are situated within Fleetbank House and RMU staff retrieve file requests from these stores twice a day at 10am and 2pm. Files required urgently will also be obtained and can be collected directly from RMU.
- Before returning a file for storage you must check that the file:
 - Contains no unnecessary documents such as duplicates or spare drafts. If it does the file may be unnecessarily thick and more difficult to review at a later date.
 - Is not too thick. If the file is more than 38mm thick the file will be returned to the sender to request a new part and to separate the contents.
 - Has no loose papers. All documents on a file must be attached using the purple tag. If files are returned to RMU with loose documents the file will be returned to the sender to attach them.
 - Is not attached to any other files or folders. If files are linked together you must unlink them before returning them to RMU, the reason for this is that files are stored according to their prefix and in strict numerical order. However blue document folders should be attached to the related registered file using a file strap (available from RMU).
 - Has been considered for downgrading or declassifying if it bears a protective marking. Please let RMU staff know if it should be changed.
 - Complete the grid on the front of each file cover to be returned. In the 'referred to' section you should put RMU (P/A) (stands for put away), the room number GS/5 and the date. In addition you should notify the file movement back to RMU.
 - If the file has restricted or a confidential 'protective marking' it must be returned to RMU undercover usually in a sealed envelope (see the security handbook for further instructions on the Intranet) or alternatively it may be brought down to RMU personally.
 - If the file is over 5 years old you will need to carry its first review and complete the 1st file review recommendation form which is available from RMU (see file reviewing section).

Amending file titles, numbers, protective markings

Do not alter file titles, numbers or protective markings on files without first informing RMU staff. RMU will need to amend the database with the new information.

Destroying files

Registered files are Office property and must only be destroyed by authorised RMU staff. If for whatever reason you need to destroy a file please speak to a member of RMU explaining your reasons.

Sending off registered files to another government department

OFT Registered files are the property of this Office and should not be sent outside. If someone from another government department needs to see a OFT file the relevant papers should be copied and sent to them following the usual security procedures or alternatively they could be invited to come and view the files in this Office which is a good way to identify what needs copying.

Taking files outside the office

If at all possible OFT Registered files shouldn't be taken outside the Office. Consider copying the relevant documents you need and taking those instead or alternatively work on electronic documents using a laptop or by remote access. On certain occasions needs will dictate the file is required, for instance at a meeting in another location or when you're taking the file home to work on. While in your custody it's your responsibility to look after the file and follow security guidelines appropriate to the classification of the file. RMU must also know the whereabouts of all files at all times in order to comply with FOI legislation and you should therefore make sure that the current file location is with the person taking the file outside the Office.

Staff moves and section changes

Before a member of staff leaves their job they need to decide whether the files marked out to them and held in their drawers or cupboards will be needed by their successor. If they're not the files should be returned to RMU for storage. If they are required RMU needs to be notified in the same way as for any file movement of the new owner. If staff or sections change location or their branch number etc this information will again need to be sent to RMU in relation to each file so that the RMU database is up to date.