

UK Border Agency Instruction

Title	Organisational and Caseworking File, Document and Electronic Information Management Guidance		
Process	Mandatory rules for the Creation, Use, Sharing, Storage and Disposal of Caseworking and Organisational files, records and documents – both paper and electronic. This Instruction does not apply directly to port or CFL files; however, the principles and practices set out are generally applicable to them.		
Implementation Date	23 Sept 2010	Review Date	

CONTAINS MANDATORY INSTRUCTIONS

For Action

All UKBA staff but especially Information Advisers

Author

For Information

Owner

Deputy Director –Information management Team

Contact Point

Records Executive

Processes Affected

All those which require effective information management and compliance with relevant legislation.

Assumptions

All managers and staff will follow these Instructions. The relevant content of these Instructions is to be incorporated into local guidance.

NOTES

This replaces IDI Chapter 36 Section 1 – IND Files (excluding PORTS) and File Management Procedures.

Issued 23rd Sept 2010

This Instruction sets out how the UK Border Agency's information (e.g. its files and records) is to be managed.

The primary focus is on immigration-related files and records together with those needed for the management of the UK Border Agency such as finance, HR, performance monitoring etc.

Subsequent revisions of this Instruction will include specific guidance on the handling of files and records arising from the work of the International Group and those functions of HMRC which transferred to the Agency.

After the introduction the format follows the general progression set out in the Information Lifecycle i.e. Creating information, Using and Sharing it, Storing and finally Disposing of it.

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CHANGE HISTORY

Version No.	Issue Date	Details of Changes included in Update
1.0		First Release
1,1		Contact point changed

INTRODUCTION

All records created, used or held by Government Departments and Executive Agencies are deemed Public Records under the Public Records Acts and must be compliant with the relevant legislation and handled in accordance with the appropriate information management principles.

In the UK Border Agency we create, use and store large amounts of information in both paper and electronic formats - although the clear trend in recent years is towards more electronic working (e.g. e-mail, file-sharing etc) to conduct business which has resulted in growing amounts of important records being held electronically. However all information – however it is recorded - needs to be managed properly to ensure that it provides the greatest benefit to the Agency as well as being protected from loss or unauthorised alteration or disclosure. The Agency has therefore introduced an Information Management Strategy – endorsed by the Chief Executive – to help achieve this.

To have the right amount of control over the information we produce and the records we hold we need to ensure that information management becomes part of everyone's day-to-day work. Our ability to make the right decisions, or deal helpfully with enquiries, depends on the paper or electronic records that we are using being accurate, available and complete.

In addition, the contents of most of our files and records can be made public under either the Data Protection or Freedom of Information Acts. This means that what you write in an e-mail or on a file or enter onto a computer system (such as the Case Information Database (CID)) may be seen by others including the Judiciary, Adjudicators, solicitors and representatives, the police, the press and the applicants themselves.

We are all personally responsible for the quality of the corporate information we work with and for ensuring that it is used properly, kept up to date, shared only with those who have a right to see it, stored in accordance with its sensitivity and protective markings and only retained for as long as it is actually needed. This Guidance sets out how best to do this.

Basic principles of information management

Information that we receive from others, create, use, share and store (either in our work areas or off-site) has a value but it also has a cost. Much of our information is about real people with real lives so using it or handling it in the wrong way can cause them harm or distress and damage the UK Border Agency's reputation as an efficient and effective organisation.

Keeping information for too long can be expensive and may not be allowed under the Data Protection and Freedom of Information Acts. For further information on our responsibilities and obligations under these Acts see:

DPA:

FOI:

Documents and Records

Information can be categorised as either documents or records: it does not matter whether it is held in a physical or electronic form.

- A document is information of short-term importance which can be altered or amended – such as the agenda for a meeting; documents have a maximum life of 12 months after which they should be destroyed or treated as records.
- A record provides an official account of the Agency's work – such as what action or decision was taken and by whom; what policy was drawn up and approved, what invoice paid and when etc. A record must not be altered or amended. It contains information that needs to be kept for a specific period of time, for example, finance records are held for 6 years before being destroyed.

Records can be in any format, not just paper. They can include, for example, electronic material such as e-mails, video clips, audio tapes (e.g. asylum interviews) digital photographs, project plans and process maps.

In looking after our documents and records – including our files - there are basic rules that **everyone** must follow.

1. Treat information as a corporate asset i.e. something of value

- Name files, records and documents in an informative way and store them so that colleagues can find and use them. Never use headings such as "*General Letters*" or similar.
- Ensure that all important information is kept on registered files so that its location can be known at all times.
- Do not store official information in your personal cupboard or your personal computer drive because it cannot be used by others who need it.
- Determine how long the information you have will be needed so that it can be reviewed if necessary and safely disposed of when of no further use (See: Disposal).

2. Make sure you understand what you must and must not do under:

- The UK Border Agency's 10 Golden Rules on handling information
- Data Protection Act 1998
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Lord Chancellor's Code of Practice on the Management of Records
- Public Records Acts 1958 and 1967.
- And other requirements as appropriate to your job.

3. Improve the quality and value of our information

- Keep your files and computer records up to date.
- Only use information when you know it is accurate, complete and up-to-date.
- When creating or using information set out facts clearly, concisely and accurately.
- Remember what you write or type might be seen by the judiciary, the media or the public - so be professional.
- Avoid duplication of effort or information - collaborate with colleagues to avoid keeping the same things.
- Provide the right information at the right time.

4. Prevent unauthorised disclosure & unauthorised destruction

- Apply the right protective marking when you create documents and records
- Handle information in line with all security requirements to protect it from unauthorised access or inappropriate amendment, transmission or destruction
- Only share information with those who need to know it and who can meet the requirements of any protective or security marking it might have
- When sharing information with other government organisations or third parties ensure that any disclosure is lawful; necessary for either their or our functions; proportionate i.e. not excessive for the reason it is required and in line with any existing Memorandum of Understanding or Service Level Agreement that may be in existence. See: PART 3: SHARING INFORMATION
- Consult the Retention and Disposal Schedule so that you know what can be destroyed and when (see Disposal)
- Dispose of information in the proper manner when it is no longer needed.

Paper is the primary record

Within the Agency paper has long been the primary medium for storing records but the rapid growth in electronic information and electronic working means that this is changing and more material is being saved in electronic format. This Instruction therefore applies to information in physical and electronic formats.

PART 1: CREATING INFORMATION

This section deals with the raising of new files as well as creating information in other physical ways such as memos, completed forms, plans etc and in electronic formats such as your e-mails, spreadsheets, database records etc.

Creation is the first part of the Information Lifecycle. Every caseworker, policy maker, front line worker etc who asks for a file to be raised and registered (e.g. by the File Creation Unit or General Registry) or who creates records, must set out how long the material will be needed (otherwise known as the retention period for it) and how it will be stored to ensure those needing access to it have that access.

FILE TYPES

In the UK Border Agency we have two main types of activity:

- dealing with individuals under the various immigration and nationality Acts and
- managing the Agency itself.

These different activities generate different types of files and records; the first uses casefiles, port files, NASS files etc, whereas the second requires us to create files for policy, finance, organisational matters, complaints and so on. These separate activities have led to differences in the way some files and records are created, managed, stored and destroyed. This Instruction therefore refers to these different processes.

a) Casefiles and Case Record Sheets (CRS)

Some business units have been given permission by the File Creation Unit to raise files and records for their own dealings with applicants; however; the majority of new casefiles are raised by the File Creation Unit (FCU). Apart from registered files, two other types of paper based applicant records have been created using different processes and different types of reference numbers. Active applicant records could therefore be in any of:

- 1 million series and associated sub files,
- CRS (600)
- 2 million series.

Historically there has also been:

- HO files with 6 digit reference numbers.

The 1 million file series are files whose registration number is the first letter of the applicant's family name followed by 7 digits; they have white cardboard covers. 1 million series files are created for immigration cases (or correspondence) that require action.

A sub file (or sub) has a white cardboard cover with the same 1 million series reference number as the main file that it is part of. To distinguish the sub file the reference number is followed by a slash (/) and the number of the sub is added e.g. A1234567/2 means that it is a sub file of A1234567. Files can have many subs.

FCU create sub files when:

- the main casefile can not hold any more papers (i.e. when it is 4cm thick)

- the main casefile is in use in another location
- separate (physical) casefiles are required for a family member
- the main casefile cannot be found (this is a serious matter: see Lost Files).

To ask FCU to create a new file or sub file use this form: FCU Pro Forma

Notional (or nominal) files, also known to as Virtual files, can be a source of confusion to staff. Notional files are sub files which do not physically exist i.e. they do not have a cardboard cover or folder of any kind; they cannot be called for and papers (linking) cannot be put on them. They are raised to assist caseworkers and others by cross-referencing:

- an applicant's details, (e.g. family name) where we have a variation of details or spelling
- aliases
- a partner or dependant's details
- a sponsor's details.

Notional subs are usually recorded on the File Tracking System as part of a file group travelling together. They are indicated by a barcode placed on the inside of a white file cover or, rarely now, on a blue 'notional sub sheet' which is filed inside the file on the left hand side.

The CRS 600 is a process designed to store records on granted immigration cases. CRS 600 records are stored in numbered boxes and are not individually bar coded: they cannot therefore be individually tracked via the FTS. CRS 600 records have to be located via the GCID Personal Details screen (the Reference Number page shows the number of the box the record has been put in).

If you have a query that requires the retrieval of a CRS 600 record (either the original or a copy) you must put in a request on CID notes and complete an e-mail pro forma.

In completing the pro forma you must provide the storage contractor (Iron Mountain) with

- Your Name, Unit and telephone number.
- Date of request.
- The full name of the Applicant (NOTE: no other details are to be provided unless the file storage contractor asks for them in order to uniquely identify an applicant),
- The CRS Box Reference Number
- Instruction to provide either a copy or the original CRS

If you have requested a copy of a CRS 600 record it will be retrieved and sent directly to you by the file storage contractor. If you have requested the original it will be retrieved and sent to the FCU where it will be made into a registered 1 million series file. The registered file will then be sent to you and the FTS updated accordingly.

CRS 600 records are currently created by FCU; Sheffield (Leave to Remain Teams); Work Permit UK; Managed Migration Teams; PEO Croydon; PEO Glasgow; PEO Liverpool & PEO Birmingham.

The 2 million series is used to register the paperwork from "quick win" cases where an applicant is granted leave (NOTE: refusals are always recorded on a 1 million series file). The 2 million series records do not have file covers but they are individually bar coded – so they can be specifically identified on FTS. Although in limited use now, 2 million series records are still being created in some areas of the UK Border Agency and can be retrieved from storage and are processed for return to storage by the FCU.

HO casefiles raised before December 1998 have one letter (the first letter of the applicant's family name) and 6 digit reference numbers. These too have cardboard covers but their colours vary e.g. green, pink, blue and according to the activity carried out on them viz. in-country application, appeal and enforcement. These are the only file series to have more than one cardboard file cover i.e. a single applicant can have file covers of several colours (as case consideration progressed).

Until recently there were not strict controls over which business units could create registered files. This meant some Units designed file covers to suit their own needs, without consultation with other business areas and without considering the colours and types already in use within the Agency. This has led to specialised colours such as orange - which is used for protectively marked file covers - being used for unclassified material; it has also led to key information being missed off the file cover.

File cover formats must comply to a strict policy; any part of the UK Border Agency with specific file needs should contact **FCU and the Information Management and Compliance Unit for advice and approval**.

b) Non Casework Files

General Registry create policy and organisational files in the Immigration General (IMG) or Immigration Organisation (IMO) series. They will also arrange for the storage of IMG and IMO files and the destruction of the file covers when action is completed.

General Registry are also responsible for the creation and safe keeping of all personal files with a marking of confidential or above, as well as files marked "RESTRICTED – Staff" and any other RESTRICTED files that are stamped "Return to Gen. Registry". They do not create, process or store unclassified personal files.

To request a new file from General Registry in the IMG or IMO series use the pro forma at: General Registry Pro Forma

General Principles

It is UK Border Agency policy that official information in paper form must be kept in registered files. Business Units which hold records in box files or plain folders must decide whether their information is to be held on registered files in the applicants' or IMG or IMO series. Use of registered files will enable the existence and location of official material to be known to those elsewhere in the Agency who might need it. Additionally, established file series can be given a standard retention period i.e. they are kept for a specific and limited period of time, so that they can be routinely destroyed once they are no longer useful.

Classification

When you create a document or record you are responsible for deciding what, if any, protective marking it merits. This marking is based on the amount of damage that would be done if it were lost or seen by the wrong people; it also determines who can have access to it, how it is to be managed and stored. The marking should be clearly shown at the top and bottom of each page. For more information on Protective Marking – including the new PROTECT marking - see: [Link](#)

Lastly, in creating information you should gauge how long it is likely to be of use to the Agency so that it can be reviewed and either retained (for a limited further period of time and to meet a specific purpose) or disposed of in the correct manner.

c) Electronic Information

To make electronic information easy to find once created, electronic files and documents must be saved in your team's shared folder. For guidance on shared folders see:

Shared Folders

To assist retrieval any documents or records you create need to be titled in a way which is understandable and clearly describes the subject matter. This is done by using the File Naming Convention (FNC). The FNC sets out the structure to be used when naming a document or record; it is:

General Function – Detailed Activity

then any of the optional elements such as date, version, team and author. For more information on the electronic File Naming Convention, see: FNC

and the Frequently Asked Questions at: FNC FAQs

Lastly, just as for paper information, in creating electronic information you should gauge how long it is likely to be of use to the Agency so that it can be reviewed and either retained (for a limited further period of time and to meet a specific purpose) or deleted.

PART 2: USING FILES AND INFORMATION

Once created, information needs to be used and managed in a way which protects it from loss and unauthorised alteration or disclosure, whilst also ensuring that it delivers its value to the Agency.

The Golden Rules

In 2008, following a number of very serious losses of information by Government Departments, new arrangements and rules were introduced by all government departments and executive agencies to improve the way information – and in particular sensitive personal information – was handled. See the Data Handling Procedures in Government Report.

Amongst the changes brought in by the Report was the emphasis on all employees of government departments and executive agencies following the 10 Golden Rules. All staff must therefore make sure they are familiar with these rules for handling personal information; these rules can be seen at: 10 Golden Rules

Although the Golden Rules arose through losses of sensitive personal information many are generally applicable to the handling of all types of information.

Care of files and documents

Our files must be an up to date, accurate and detailed record of all actions and decisions taken. You must never write insulting comments in them, nor must you write assumptions and/or conclusions that you cannot support with the available facts. As stated earlier, the contents of our files may be disclosed to others by means of the Data Protection and Freedom of Information Acts.

It is very important that file covers and their contents are kept in good condition. Files contain valuable information that may be seen by those working for the Agency or the Courts and the public, now and in the future. Guidance on every type of case file cannot be given as our files serve different purposes, but the basic format and handling procedures are the same.

It is vital that you keep every file you handle in good order so that:

- Anyone who reads the file can easily identify all issues, actions, decisions and key papers
- Any issues or decisions that led to a particular action can be easily understood. (This also helps us to process cases consistently)
- If there is a query, we can explain or (if necessary) justify or investigate any action or decision we have taken
- The location of all applicants' valuable papers (e.g. passports, ID cards etc) can be quickly ascertained

We are all responsible for the good maintenance of files. We can do this by:

- Making sure that all relevant papers are on file and in date order with the most recent material on the top of the right hand side (under the passport wallet if there is one) see below
- Not cluttering up the file with copies of material already on them
- Not stockpiling linking or placing files back in a hold (If you are using one) without actioning the linking you have.
- Using the outer flap (found on most files) to protect the minute sheets and the enclosures so they do not become torn or separated
- Not overfilling casefile covers – 4 centimetres (one and a half inches) is the maximum
- Not overfilling IMG and IMO file covers – 2.5 centimetres (one inch) is the maximum
- Using a strap or the right coloured tape to hold files and sub files together – never use elastic bands as they damage the file and its contents.

See also the Guidance at: [Link](#)

Working with files

We have two main file categories in the UK Border Agency – casefiles and Immigration General (IMG) / Immigration Organisation (IMO) files; there are some similarities but also some differences in their contents and handling.

General

A common feature of all properly created files is that they have a left hand side and a right hand side with each side having a specific and understood purpose.

a) Left hand side

The **left-hand** side holds the minute sheets; these record notes or actions taken on a case. The proper use of the left hand side will enable the reader to see the status of a case and, if appropriate, what needs to be done next. You must therefore:

- Keep minutes in date order (with the most recent on top and the oldest nearest to the file cover)
- You must sign, date and write your name and unit after every minute you write on the file
- Any remaining actions which need to be taken should be clearly noted at the end of any minute (and attention drawn to any incomplete actions from previous minutes)
- Punch minute sheets one third of the way down
- Remember to allow approximately 2.5 cm borders to your minute sheet to allow for photocopying and/or possible damage
- Repair damaged minute sheets using hole reinforcements or sellotape

- Remember to add the UK Border Agency Reference number to the new minute sheet
- If you are sending a file to another unit you must minute the file explaining why you are sending it to there and what they should do with it

If the file is a case file the following additional requirement applies:

- Update CID, ASYS etc with the essential facts from the minute sheet(s)
- If you have removed the applicant's passport, identity card or any other official papers, explain in a minute where you sent them, why you did this **and** what they were. This information must be added to the relevant CID pages, too. If you have returned valuable paperwork to the applicant note what you have sent and to which address it has been sent - both on CID and on the file

b) Right hand side

The **right-hand** side is where the case papers or subject matter papers are filed. Depending on the type of file, these can include submissions to Ministers, plans, forms, letters, faxes, interview notes as well as passports or other valuable paperwork – such as birth or marriage certificates - sent in by applicants.

This information is filed in date order, however papers should be kept in the groups they arrive in. For example, for casefiles, if an application form is received with supporting evidence (which could include utility bills covering a long period), the date on the main (top) page is used for filing purposes. Even though some of the supporting material could be older than previous information on the file, they stay in their batches.

For all file types:

- Always place the newest item on the top of the existing papers (but under the passport envelope if there is one)
- When punching holes to put papers on the file they should be punched one third from the top of the page: **never** punch holes in passports or similar original material owned by the applicants and which may be returned to them
- If the destination grid (ladder) on the file cover is nearly full, add a new one
- When sending a file to another business unit, write the name, unit and location on the destination slip. First names and/or the abbreviations for business units are not enough, they can be confusing and cause files to get lost
- You should have a sub (or the next sub) raised before the file (or current sub) becomes too large; casefiles should be no thicker than 4 centimetres (or 2.5 centimetres for IMG/IMO files)
- Ensure that the file always has the correct protective marking (classification) on its front and back covers and is protected – even when in use

If the file is a case file the following additional requirements apply:

- Update CID, ASYS etc with any new facts, addresses and/or actions
- Store passports and valuable paperwork in a separate envelope which you must always keep on the top of the right hand side – even when more linking is added
- Do not punch holes in originals that will be returned to the applicant
- If you have removed the applicant's valuable paperwork set out in a minute where you have sent it, why you did this **and** what they were. This information must be added to the relevant CID pages
- If you have returned valuable papers to the applicant say which ones and to which address they have been sent - both on CID and on the file

We receive many complaints about lost passports and other personal papers of value to applicants:

- **Keep the passport and other valuable papers in an envelope at the top of the right hand side of the file or in a registered passport bank**
- **List every passport and any other personal and valuable papers on CID and in the file minutes**

This helps us to track down missing valuables - saving us considerable amounts of time and compensation money.

Taking files and papers out of the office

The loss of files and papers is all too common so avoid carrying official files and records out of the office as much as you can – especially those bearing protective markings. Consider whether you need to carry them at all: they can often be sent ahead by a more secure method, or your hosts may be able to provide a copy in-house.

When attending meetings away from your normal place of work, take only the information you actually need on that occasion and carry it in an approved security briefcase. Any papers marked PROTECT and above should be recorded out and back or if passed by hand the final destination must be noted.

Download your laptop regularly so that it does not contain all the work you ever did. Ensure that security fobs etc. are not carried with the laptop. Be highly selective about what to take. Keep names and phone numbers as anonymous as possible. Unencrypted memory sticks present high risks because of the amount of information they contain and the ease of downloading and carrying it. They must not be used.

Do not leave your case or rucksack unattended; keep it with you at all times. Be particularly wary at transport hubs and eateries – buying your ticket or a newspaper, or having a meal, is a real opportunity for a thief because you are distracted when doing it.

Remember that your car is not secure and protectively marked assets should not be left in it.

Using Casefiles

Paper Files

A number of issues and problems can be experienced when using physical casefiles; the most common of these are listed below.

a) Double/Duplicate files

In caseworking double or triple files can arise for various reasons e.g. when there are slight differences in the spelling of an applicant's name, or a different date of birth, the person creating the (newest) file mistakenly believes the information refers to another individual or if the naming conventions are not followed.

It is therefore essential that all names are checked against our IT and paper systems and, only if the name is not found, is a new record to be created. Any errors are to be corrected promptly.

If you find that an applicant has more than one file send them to FCU **once all action on the files in question has been completed**. The files should both be minuted to say they are double files that need amalgamating and each one should state the other file's reference number. The files should be sent in a blue tape group which must be created on File Tracking so they can be sent together.

FCU will amalgamate the references and update FTS and CID. Thereafter only one reference number, (with sub files) will be used.

b) Amendments (to personal details, not to HO file numbers)

To help keep our records of personal information accurate, files can be amended, renumbered and/or amalgamated. This is done when:

- Two or more files exist for the same person (known as double files - see above)
- A person changes their name by deed poll
- The true identity is discovered of someone who has previously used an alias and who has a registered file in that alias
- Two people with separate HO files marry
- A person marries and their family name changes

Information on file covers (including personal details and HO references) must only be added to or changed by the FCU.

c) Passports and Valuables

Unless impounded, passports and originals of ID cards, birth/marriage certificates, membership cards of political parties etc belong to the applicant and must be returned once case consideration has been completed – unless they are retained for a specific purpose.

Experience has shown that passports and valuable papers can become lost or difficult to find when people do not keep the registered file and CID up to date. So you must note any action involving valuables on CID and the registered file.

Passports and valuable papers can be stored:

- On applicants' files whilst those files are in action,
- Off file in registered passport banks.

When storing passports or valuable personal papers on a registered file you should make sure that:

- You do not use staples or put pins/holes in applicants' property
- Passports are always the top enclosure on the right hand side of the file
- Passports (Travel Authorisations etc) are kept in a pouch or in a strong envelope
- You write the applicant's name and file reference clearly on the front of the envelope (or wallet)
- The wallet or envelope is securely attached to the file
- You have updated **CID** and the FTS so that the current passport location is recorded

Remember to return to the applicant **all** papers that belong to them (unless they have been impounded) when you despatch their case. Also remove notes still on FTS about the – now out of date – location of the passport etc.

Do not attempt to send a file with an unimpounded passport or travel authorisation to Lay By – it will not be accepted and returned to you.

d) Pre 1980 Case Files

There are over a million pre 1980's files that are not barcoded and are not on File Tracking System (FTS). These cannot be searched for on Warehouse or on FTS. Usually these files are only needed for status enquires or when applicants write in with any previous reference numbers when making an application. A guide to the identification and availability of files is at Annex A.

e) Blue and White tape groups

Files are grouped together for various reasons, (these include applications for family members or related applicants). Creating a white/blue tape group tells file tracking that those barcodes are all physically together. If you do not link them, then FTS will think you are only moving one barcode whenever you scan it, rather than the group. Equally when unlinking files - you must separate them on file tracking. 'Blue tape groups' and 'white tape groups' have different purposes and are processed differently:

For rules on taped groups see: Taped Groups

f) Dummy Files

A dummy file is a **copy** file that is not formally registered on an approved UKBA file registration system and is not barcoded. It may contain copies of the information on the main sub and/or new information. When the dummy file is no longer needed, the information on it which is new or not copied from the original file, is to be added to the main (registered) file; what papers remain after doing this are to be securely destroyed.

Dummy files will not be accepted by the file storage contractor for storage.

g) Maintenance

When a file cover is damaged/torn/missing it should be repaired or replaced by staff at its current location. It is the responsibility of all staff to maintain the Agency's files in good condition until they are no longer needed and can be securely disposed of. When replacing a badly damaged old file cover, all enclosures, minute sheets (and the original file cover front if available) are transferred into the new file cover in their original order. The new cover will have the same details and barcode number as the cover it is replacing. See:
Paper file maintenance

Almanacking Casefiles

If you have a file (including those classified 'Restricted'), which:

- you do not currently need and which
- you don't need to keep in your office but
- which you will need for action or review at a later date (for example 2 months from now), then

you can arrange for it to be stored by the record services contractor to be re-called on a pre-determined date. This is called almanacking and is particularly useful in limiting the amount of material you have to store in your working area.

How to Almanack a casefile on File Tracking

For casefiles:

- Enter the bar code of the file in the relevant box
- Enter the return date the file is required by in the date box
- (In the text box enter the name of the person who has requested the file to be almanacked)
- Press F12 to commit the transaction

A printout will then be released by FTS on the "required by" date to remind the requesting unit that the file is needed for action.

All files for almanacking should be clearly minuted with the reason for the almanack request, with the same detail entered on FTS e.g. "Almanack to [person/Team] on [date].

Non Casework Files

There are several differences in the way the UK Border Agency's general and organisational files are handled compared to casefiles. The main differences are set out below but for help and advice contact General Registry.

a) Double/Duplicate Files

IMG and IMO files are created using a "theme scheme" whereby file numbers denote specific subjects e.g. the number 3 is used for accommodation matters. This means that there is less likelihood of duplicate files being created. If you believe that a double or duplicate file has been created inform General Registry.

b) IMG and IMO file maintenance

General Registry provide information on the handling of these file types or check their records for papers that are held on old IMG and IMO files. These files, whose registration is on a subject basis, are closed in either their 2nd year or when they become 1 inch thick.

IMG and IMO files that reach a thickness of 1 inch are automatically closed. **Note:** this is less than the accepted thickness for casework files but arises from the different contractual arrangements concluded with the file storage provider for IMG and IMO files - TNT. General Registry return the file to the unit that had the file raised:

- advising them that the file is too large to be stored and
- asking them to review and either dispose of part of / or all / of the file, or
- split the contents into a second sub file, which General Registry will raise on their behalf if requested to do so.

c) Reclassifying files containing protectively marked papers

Staff who have unclassified IMG or IMO files that have Restricted, Confidential or Secret papers on them should send the file(s) by secure means to General Registry which will stamp the file cover with the appropriate security classification.

Staff who have unclassified applicants' personal files with RESTRICTED papers attached should send them to the creating business unit (usually FCU or NPU (Nationality Policy Unit)).

d) RESTRICTED STAFF files

General Registry mark files as RESTRICTED - STAFF when we employ the holder, their close relative or a sponsor and where the holder has access to our files; this may include staff employed by an other government department which was formerly part of the Home Office Group.

How to get a file marked RESTRICTED - STAFF

An HEO (or above) in the unit who require the file to be upgraded must sign a copy of the RESTRICTED - STAFF file form. The form should then be attached to the file and forwarded to General Registry who will create a record and upgrade the file. General Registry keep the form on the file to help answer any questions about why the file was marked as RESTRICTED - STAFF.

Almanacking Casefiles

If you have a file which:

- you do not currently need and which
- you don't need to keep in your office but
- which you will need for action or review at a later date (for example 2 months from now), then

you can arrange for it to be stored by the record services contractor to be re-called on a pre-determined date. This is called almanacking and is particularly useful in limiting the amount of material you have to store in your working area.

Files with a security classification of "Confidential" or above, those with a privacy marking that are stamped "Return to Gen Registry" and those prefixed with IMG or IMO should be sent to the General Registry for almanacking.

General Registry do not handle other file series e.g. NY or NTY.

Electronic Files

The UK Border Agency does not have the means to manage its electronic information in the way its paper based material is.

Electronic Document and Records Management Systems (EDRMs) provide the type of structure for electronic information which well planned file creation and registration processes give to paper based information e.g. the EDRMs can aggregate information by subject and set up electronic folders to enable it to be easily found and shared with those with a legitimate need to see it.

An EDRMS will also ensure that material scheduled for deletion after a specific period of time is identified and deletion effected.

Until such time as the UK Border Agency has an EDRMs, electronic information will need to be managed through shared folders set up on business units' shared drives, with individual files and records named according to the File Naming Convention.

PART 3: SHARING INFORMATION

Many business processes within the UK Border Agency involve consultation or cooperation with others, as a result information in paper and electronic form moves around. Moving information around has to be done properly if it is to be protected.

E-mailing

Where possible send a link to an electronic file, record or document rather than as an attachment to an e-mail. (This will only be possible where the recipient has access to the same shared area.)

Particular care needs to be taken when e-mailing protectively marked material. **The majority of IT systems currently in use are not intended for the transmission or storage of material above RESTRICTED: if in doubt consult SACU.**

Ensure that you do not send or copy e-mails to those who do not need to see them and that those to whom you e-mail are cleared to the appropriate level to receive, use and store protectively marked material. Ensure that the e-mail warns the recipient of the presence of a classified attachment e.g. by heading it "Covering – PROTECT Personal etc.

Any sensitive personal information* to be sent outside the gsi must be encrypted.

*For the definition of Sensitive Personal Information, see s2 of the Data Protection Act 1998 at: [Definition](#)

Take note of previous markings on e-mails and attachments to them and adopt them when forwarding information or replying. If the first message in the string is protectively marked, any subsequent messages in the string must be similarly marked (or higher if more sensitive information is added).

Do not be tempted to under-mark sensitive information to get round these measures: also, ensure that you have the originator's agreement before circulating their material more widely than the initial distribution list shows. Distribute **only** on a 'Need to Know' basis. Use the correct handling arrangements for the level of protective marking.

Faxing

It has been government policy in the past that fax machines can be used to send information up to RESTRICTED over the public telephone network within the UK - providing a suitably security cleared person was at hand to take possession of it the moment the fax arrived. Although this is still currently the case, it is likely that this will change in the future. It is expected that the policy will be that a **non-secure** fax machine should **ONLY** be used to send non-protectively marked material. This is due to public network operators within the UK frequently diverting calls via non-UK networks before delivery back to the UK.

How to send a file to another unit

Update FTS to show where the file is being sent. Print or write clearly on the file movement grid (destination list) the unit's full name, the building and floor number (wing, if relevant).

When sending classified material to another unit, take account of any special handling necessitated by its security classification.

How to send a file to storage via another unit

If you need to send a file to another business unit before sending it to storage, **do not write the two destinations on the file cover** (for example 1. FCU; 2 Lay by). **Write both destinations, with instructions, on the minute sheet inside the file (on the left hand side)**. Mark the file cover (and FTS) to the first destination only. The first recipient will be responsible for forwarding the file to the second one.

UK Border Agency Files and the Police:

Instructions on the copying of applicants' files by and for the police.

The police will occasionally need to see applicants' case files to enable them to progress their enquiries in criminal cases. Whilst the UK Border Agency must provide all possible assistance to the police, specific procedures have to be followed to ensure that the interests of all parties are properly managed in accordance with the law.

The key principle is that any disclosure of personal information by Agency staff has to be necessary, specific and proportionate to the legitimate aim (i.e. the prevention and detection of crime). This means that, in order to comply with the Data Protection Act (DPA) 1998, the police must tell us why they need the information they have requested from us; a reference just to a "serious offence" is not sufficient for this purpose: at a minimum the police should explain the nature of the offence, what information is sought and how it is expected to assist the investigation.

Except in the most exceptional circumstances and then only with the written approval of the Information Asset Owner, UK Border Agency files must never be:

- Copied in full for the police
- given to the police to take away and copy or
- sent to the police for them to copy.

Proper Procedure

We can allow the police to view our files in our offices and in the presence of a UKBA official.

Files wanted by the police for viewing, which are held off site by the record services provider, must be requisitioned on FTS, tracked into the business unit and then viewed in our offices. The file services provider will not provide photocopies of files or selected contents of files to the police; neither will it provide read-overs or faxes directly to the police or to representatives of other government departments or organisations.

Should the police wish to have copies of specific items on a file, they can have them providing that:

- they complete a disclaimer*
- the photocopying is done by a member of the Agency's staff and
- a detailed record is made by the Agency of the material copied

**By completing a disclaimer, the police are confirming that they require the documentation for their functions and become the data controller for it whilst it is in their possession.*

LOSING AND FINDING FILES

Lost Files

The loss of a registered file is a serious matter and, depending on the contents, could mean that there has been a breach of the Data Protection Act, the Public Records Act or the Security Policy Framework. Serious losses might require the Agency's Information Security Incident Panel to be convened, or for SACU to investigate what happened and why. Remember, under the Data Handling Review all of the Agency's case files are deemed to be classified as PROTECT – PERSONAL so care must be taken to handle and account for them correctly.

If a file (or sub) cannot be found, the file and any attached subs must be marked as 'FSD LOST' on FTS. But, **before** this can be done you must contact the location where the file (or sub) is marked to on FTS and this unit **must** conduct a search for the missing file and let you know the result. If the last unit is your own then you must carry out a thorough search of your own working area(s).

If a casefile is not found:

- Assess the personal and security implications for the person whose file is lost and consider whether any action should be taken by the Agency to manage any risks arising from the loss
- A new sub must be raised to hold further information and progress the case
- You must add a minute to the new sub explaining what happened and the status of the case
- Use the FCU e-mail pro forma to request a new sub. and send it to **FCU Mail**
- Ask Atos to mark the file as FSD Lost on the FTS and lastly
- Update CID with the information that a file has been lost and a sub raised

If an IMG/IMO file is not found:

- Ascertain the security classification and alert SACU if necessary
- A new sub must be raised to hold further information and progress the case
- You must add a minute to the new sub explaining what happened and the status of the case
- Ask General Registry to raise a new file part
- Ask Atos to mark the file as FSD Lost on the FTS

Found files

Should you find a file which is marked as FSD Lost on the FTS then the appropriate records need to be updated. Contact ATOS and tell them:

- your name
- your unit name
- the file reference number
- what subs have been found
- the barcodes of all the subs, and
- the location and barcode of the section the file should be file tracked to

The newly found file will then need to be reunited with any other subs and the file group created/updated on the File Tracking System.

PART 4: STORAGE

The Agency incurs considerable expense (and liabilities) in storing files, records and other information both on and off site. It is important that we reduce the costs of this by ensuring that we only store what we need and for only as long as it is of use to the Agency.

The Agency uses 2 file storage contractors:

- Iron Mountain currently provides long term storage for casework files. Use of the Iron Mountain repository is controlled by the File Services Contract Team. This contract is currently being re-tendered.
- TNT provides long term storage for all non casework files (e.g. policy, finance etc).

a) Case Files

How to prepare a casefile to go into storage

We pay our storage contractor for processing every file we send to storage. Files that are not in the right condition to go into storage are rejected and we are charged for these rejections. (NOTE: the messengers in Croydon have been authorised not to collect case files marked to Lay By, TM Holds or WIPS 199 that do not meet the required file standards for storage). To ensure that your files are acceptable they must meet the following standards:

- The files do not have loose, inappropriate or irrelevant enclosures and attachments e.g. ring binders, folder, video/audio tapes. Neither do they contain personal possessions of the applicant - other than impounded passports (or other evidence of identity); these must be kept in a clearly marked envelope on top of the right hand side of the file (but see below)
- They are not too thick or too heavy
- They are not in such a poor condition that they need repairs
- Files travelling together as a blue tape group must be 'broken down' into separate files or white tape groups as appropriate and the change recorded on FTS
- White tape groups are complete i.e. they do not have sub files missing
- They do not have passports attached. (Only passports that are impounded can stay on a file being sent to Lay By.)

How to send a casefile to storage via another unit

If you need to send a file to another unit before sending it to storage, **do not write two destinations on the file cover** (for example 1. FCU. 2 Lay By). **Write both destinations, with instructions on the minute sheet on the inside left hand side of the file.** Mark the file cover (and FTS) to the first destination only. The first recipient will be responsible for forwarding the file to the second one.

Sending linking to storage

We currently pay the storage contractor for processing every piece of casework linking we send to Lay By; this arrangement is likely to cease with the award of the new record services contract and caseworkers and business units will be required to link papers to the files themselves.

Sending files to TM Holds

The New Holds Structure (NHS) has issued guidance on which TM hold, out of the new WIPS TM holds, to store a file in.

Remember that files have to meet a specific standard before they can be accepted into storage;

b) Non-casework files e.g. policy, finance etc

IMG and IMO files are stored by a different storage company – TNT in Derbyshire – and operate to different contractual terms to those applying to the company storing casework files. To send files to TNT you need to contact General Registry - using the numbers in the 'Home Office Directory of Business', or e-mailing the General Registry Inbox

If units wish to send large numbers of IMG and IMO files for storage they should first contact General Registry to have a date allocated for them to do so. Files will only be accepted by General Registry if a retention period has been set for them (see next section on Disposal).

Storage of files with protective markings

Protective markings are relevant to both UK Border Agency applicants' personal files and to policy files within the IMG and IMO series.

- RESTRICTED applicants' files are stored in the same way as the other applicants' files, unless the file cover is clearly endorsed **"Return to Gen Registry."**
- All other unclassified and RESTRICTED IMG/IMO files are stored in General Registry until their 2nd year. At this point, General Registry transfers them to TNT Swadlincote. Files classified Confidential and above continue to be stored by General Registry.

c) Business unit moves, mergers and closures

What to do when your unit moves to a different working area

If your team or business unit moves office **you are responsible for making sure that all official information you hold e.g. casefiles, reference material, blue coloured staff files etc - are fully protected and their whereabouts controlled during and after the move.**

Every cabinet and container, shelf or rack – even flat surfaces - used by you, your team or business unit for storing your information must be identified and the contents examined, prior to moving; anything which is no longer needed must be destroyed before the move takes place.

Ensure that:

- all furniture, cupboards, containers, boxes, crates etc are properly marked up for the office move with your unit name and new location

- any cupboards, cabinets, pedestals, shelves etc left behind are completely empty
- no files, loose papers or other official material are left out in the former working area or on the floor around it.

Where several business units share storage e.g. a storage room, racks, cupboards/shelves within cabinets, bookcases etc, each must examine the contents, identify their own material and decide whether to take it with them or dispose of it in the proper manner.

Pay particular attention to all cupboards, cabinets, shelves and racks, free-standing piles of information etc which are in your business area but which are not part of your Unit's holdings. These storage facilities and areas must be brought to the attention of the move co-ordinators so that their "owning" business unit can be found and made to take responsibility for them.

Where ownership cannot be established, the situation must be reported to Estates and the Information Management Directorate, who will have the containers forced open (where necessary) and their contents – and all other residual material - examined.

All material left behind after a move will be examined and, if found to be classified or sensitive, the Information Security Incident Panel may be convened and the circumstances investigated.

What to do with files when your unit closes or merges

If your team closes down or merges with another Unit **you are responsible for ensuring that all the information you hold such as: files, folders, box-files, bundles and including your e-mails - is properly processed.** This means tracking all files registered on FTS to your new unit's barcodes or despatching them to a different unit. Otherwise files become lost – which is a serious matter - and the file tracking unit codes (which are limited in number) remain unavailable and cannot be reused when and where they are needed.

In addition, look at the electronic files in your shared drive – and your personal drive(s) – to identify records which will still be needed by the new unit or the Agency in general. These should be transferred to the Shared Drive of the new – merged - unit (checking to ensure that you do not duplicate records that are already in the appropriate shared drive or folder) or forwarded to another business unit which can make good use of them. The remaining electronic material must be deleted.

What to do with your non file records when your unit closes or merges

Business units accumulate a lot of material – some of which will be essential to the effective working of the unit but some is likely to have limited or no value and can be destroyed.

However, if you intend to dispose of any records, you must follow the appropriate rules. If you are unsure about these speak to your line manager, your Information Adviser or the Information Management & Compliance Unit (IMCU).

Any material left behind after a move will be examined and, if found to be classified or sensitive, the Information Security Incident Panel may be convened and the circumstances investigated.

PART 5: DISPOSAL

The final element of the Information Lifecycle is that of disposal. This is the process whereby files and other records (paper and electronic) are either destroyed by the appropriate means or, for exceptionally important material, deposited with The National Archives (or similar authorised repository) for permanent preservation for the Nation.

The bulk of the information created and used by the UK Border Agency will not merit permanent preservation so will need to be destroyed once of no further use.

Disposing of unnecessary information such as files and records helps control the Agency's costs of storage but also helps minimise the amount of material subject to disclosure under the Data Protection or Freedom of Information Acts. For further information on these responsibilities and obligations see:

DPA: FOI:

Retention and Disposal Schedules (RaDS)

A key tool for managing the disposal process is the Retention and Disposal Schedule (RaDS). The RaDS sets out how long each type of record used by the Agency should be kept – taking account of business need, our legal obligations and the costs of storage. The RaDS enables unnecessary and out of date material to be easily identified and disposed of.

Business Units should regularly review their holdings of files and other records and determine which still need to be retained so that the rest can be disposed of.

The Home Office Retention and Disposal Schedule (RaDS) for most non-casework material (i.e. HR records, finance, complaints, projects, health and safety material, policy papers etc

Within the UK Border Agency retention periods are being developed for most other classes of record. Business units considering how long to retain specific records should consult their Information Adviser in the first instance, however, rules for the retention of most types of casefiles are already in place.

Casefiles

The UK Border Agency's current policy is that it will retain principal applicants' files for 15 years from the date of last action ⁽¹⁾, except where:-

(a) The subject is a national of a country that currently requires a visa to enter the United Kingdom and has acquired indefinite leave to remain (ILR), in which case the retention period would be 25 years (reducing shortly to 20 years) from the date of the grant of ILR ⁽²⁾.

(b) The subject has acquired British Citizenship, in which case the retention period would be 25 years (reducing shortly to 20 years) from the date of the grant of Citizenship ⁽²⁾.

(c) The subject has been convicted of, or is suspected of, an offence attracting a sentence of 12 months or more in a United Kingdom or International Court, in which case the retention period would be to age 75 ⁽²⁾ or until death where the sentence was for 30 months or longer.

Note 1: Last action is defined as the grant or refusal of: entry clearance; leave to enter or leave to remain in the United Kingdom; the issue of a Home Office Travel Document. It also covers the initiation and implementation of enforcement action to remove someone from the United Kingdom.

Note 2: In the event of a subject falling within more than one of these exceptions, the retention date will be the longer one.

The time periods in this policy are currently being reviewed, however, caseworkers are to mark the retention period on the casefiles they work on prior to sending them to Lay By.

Additionally, retention periods have been established for the following types of files:

- Work Permit UK (WPUK) files: these are reviewed 5 years after last action and disposed of unless a clear business need is identified for a specific file and for a specific period of further retention;
- NASS files: routine support files are reviewed at 2 years after the last action and NASS prosecution files at 7 years after the last action: they should then be disposed of unless a clear business need is identified for a specific file and for a specific period of further retention.
- Port files: these are reviewed 7 years after the last action and disposed of unless a clear business need is identified for a specific file and for a specific period of further retention.
- Enforcement files: these are reviewed at 7 years after the last action and disposed of unless a clear business need is identified for a specific file and for a specific period of further retention.
- Visa case files: subject to a risk-assessment (which must take account of availability of local storage space) - and at the discretion of the Regional Director - Posts Overseas may dispose of uncontentious, completed Visa case files after a minimum of 13 months instead of the usual 2-3 years.

Audio Tapes

These tapes arise as part of the asylum process and need to be kept until a grant decision has been taken (or all rights of appeal by the applicant have been exhausted); thereafter they must be destroyed.

Casefiles containing audio tapes will not be accepted for storage by the file services contractor; instead the files will be returned to the sender and the UK Border Agency will be invoiced for the return.

Retention periods for other casework-related material can be agreed with the Information Management and Compliance Unit.

IMO/IMG Files

Disposal of files with protective markings

General Registry holds IMG/IMO files that are unclassified or are marked Restricted up until their 2nd year. Personal classified files and IMG/IMO files with markings of Confidential and above are retained until they are reviewed and a decision made on their disposal.

RESTRICTED Staff files and RESTRICTED personal files that are endorsed "Return to Gen Registry" are stored indefinitely or until they are reviewed and a decision made to dispose of them.

Destruction of file covers

At the end of their use, General Registry destroys the covers of the IMG and IMO files that they have created, but not the contents of the file. File contents are securely destroyed by the unit responsible for the subject matter. Procedures in General Registry have recently changed to record the name of the person authorising the secure destruction of the file cover number. This helps ensure comprehensive records of all file creation and destruction.

HOW TO IDENTIFY AND ACCESS OLD CASEFILES

There are over a million 1980's files that are not barcoded and are not on the File Tracking System (FTS). You cannot search for them on Warehouse or on FTS. Usually these files are only needed for status enquires or when applicants write in with their 'old' reference numbers when making an application.

Number ranges of customers files' – as at 10/07/2007.

Date opened	Files opened up to Dec 1979	Files opened up to Dec 1989	Files opened January 1990 onwards
A	> A283950	> A448200 (330100)	A448201 > + 1 million series
B	> B348650	> B481000 (379100)	B481001 > + 1 million series
C	> C260800	> C428400 (287100)	C428401 > + 1 million series
D	> D167450	> D238400 (185100)	D238401 > + 1 million series
E	> E77300	> E107600 (84000)	E107601 > + 1 million series
F	> F154950	> F209500 (168600)	F209501 > + 1 million series
G	> G233500	> G309900 (253000)	G309901 > + 1 million series
H	> H257400	> H355000 (280200)	H355001 > + 1 million series
J	> J155800	> J228300 (174300)	J228301 > + 1 million series
K	> K297900	> K417200 (330000)	K417201 > + 1 million series
L	> L213950	> L294400 (234600)	L294401 > + 1 million series
M	> M423750	> M609200 (472050)	M609201 > + 1 million series
N	> N124600	> N178000 (137340)	N178001 > + 1 million series
O	> O82900	> O135500 (94575)	O135501 > + 1 million series
P	> P257750	> P355300 (278800)	P355301 > + 1 million series
Q	> Q10650	> Q16100 (11800)	Q16101 > + 1 million series
R	> R218800	> R299100 (238400)	R299101 > + 1 million series
S	> S519700	> S741200 (579172)	S741201 > + 1 million series
T	> T158750	> T277100 (175450)	T277101 > + 1 million series
U	> U 26200	> U37900 (28300)	U37901 > + 1 million series

V	> V82600	> V107500 (88800)	V107501 > + 1 million series
W	> W157700	> W217700 (182125)	W217701 > + 1 million series
X	> X1110	> X 2200 (1350)	X 2201 > + 1 million series
Y	> Y30100	> Y60100 (43200)	Y60101 > + 1 million series
Z	> Z57700	> Z76500 (62200)	Z76501 > + 1 million series

How to find out about files created before December 1998

The old Registry records are held in a secure store; to arrange access or request a name check contact: the File Storage Contract Team

A guide to the identification and availability of files

	Identification	Availability
Up to 1979	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FTS name search • Warehouse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only files that are on the FTS (i.e. those that are barcoded) are available. • The remainder have been destroyed.
Up to 1989	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FTS name search • Warehouse • Registry books 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All files above the reference number shown in brackets in the table below should still be available for requisition. • Approximately 40% of those below the number have been destroyed. • Over one million files from this period can only be identified from the Registry books.
1990 onwards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FTS name search • Warehouse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All files should still be available for requisition.