

Nationality Instructions

Procedural section

Minutes and memoranda

1. Introduction

1.1 Every application, and some written enquiries, are kept and considered on files (see FILES). When correspondence relates to a particular individual, it is kept on a personal (IMP) file whilst general correspondence is handled on general (NTY/NY) files. It is vital to keep files in good order so that:

- the action or decision can be explained or justified in the event of a dispute
- the factors leading to the action or decision can be clearly seen and similar cases handled consistently
- a clear record is maintained of movements of valuable documents (e.g. passports)
- those who have to deal with subsequent correspondence on a case see clearly what has happened before

1.2 Records of action taken on the case are kept on the file minute sheets.

1.3 Minute sheets should be filed on the left-hand side of the file whilst call notes, correspondence (both to the Directorate and copies sent out) etc should be neatly filed on the right hand side. As a courtesy to the next minuting officer, a fresh minute sheet should be attached when less than a quarter of the sheet remains after the minute.

1.4 Passports and other original documents which are to be returned should be placed in a buff enclosure pouch and the file should be flagged to show when a passport is enclosed.

1.5 The name and reference number of the file should be clearly written on the front of the pouch, which should be securely tagged on top of all other documents on the right hand side of the file. Photocopies and any original documents which are not to be returned should be attached to the right hand side of the file.

1.6 All documents on the file should be docketed on the minute sheet and numbered (e.g. Doc 1 - "letter dated - from Mr Bloggs requesting priority for his application"). (It is helpful, where possible, to say briefly what the letter is about as this aids information retrieval.)

2. Minutes

2.1 Minutes are important for 2 reasons:

- They record what documents are on the file and thus make information retrieval possible. All documents should be numbered and recorded as they go onto the file (see 1.6 above)
- They explain and comment on action taken or proposed

2.2 A minute, which should, if possible, propose a course of action, should contain 5 elements:

Introduction - i.e.

- a. A concise explanation of what has happened or what the problem is
- b. A summary of the relevant facts
- c. An explanation of the policy, rule or practice which applies

Argument - providing an impartial statement of the argument or problem

Conclusion - based on the introduction and the argument

- Recommendation - e.g. "Refuse naturalisation" or "Wrote as aside". If there are alternative courses of action, these should be reflected in this part of the minute, along with the preferred option (e.g. "1 Request interview 2 Grant application without further enquiries - Proceed as in 1 above")
- Signature and date - These should be legible. A minute should be signed in full and not just initialled. If the signature is not clear the name should be printed underneath. Otherwise it can be very difficult for colleagues in other parts of the office to identify the writer.

2.3 Minutes must be legible. If handwriting is not readable the minute should be typed. If the minute is likely to be more than half a page in length, it should be typed.

2.4 If the senior officer agrees with the recommendation he/she should simply tick over the "?", and sign and date the minute sheet. Where alternative courses of action have been proposed, an indication as to which should be followed will be given.

2.5 Abbreviations should not be used unless you are sure that the reader will understand them (see ABBREVIATIONS for a list of standard abbreviations).

2.6 A minute should not be addressed to a named individual: more than one person may need to see it. If a personal note is needed it should be written on a separate sheet and attached to the right-hand side of the file.

2.7 Temporary notes (e.g. "Mr Bloggs rang and wants you to ring him back") should be pinned to the front of the file and destroyed after action.

3. Flags

3.1 It is a good idea to flag important documents on bulky files but a description of the document should be written on the flag (e.g. "IO's report" or "F/CO letter of" and not A, B, C etc). If the minute refers to flags A, B and C and these are later removed, the minute no longer makes sense. Letters, notes etc on which action is required should be labelled with a yellow "ACTION HERE/ACTION OVERLEAF" flag.

3.2 An "Immediate" flag indicates that papers should be looked at as soon as they are received. It is for the receiving officer then to decide the degree of priority to be given to them.

3.3 A "DO NOT LAYBY" flag should always be attached to a file, on which action is outstanding, if it is forwarded to a location outside the Group/Directorate.

4. Memoranda

4.1 A memorandum or "memo" is a more informal means of communicating a message to another person than a letter, but the rules of letter writing generally apply with the following exceptions:

- It should be used only when writing to another person in the Home Office
- Mutually understood jargon and abbreviations are acceptable
- It should normally be handwritten, unless some degree of formality is required
- A memo should normally be addressed to a specific person, although it is not unusual to address it to the head of an outstation and mark it "for the attention of..." (e.g. the Prison Office, where almost all correspondence to prisons etc is addressed to Governors or Prison Officers)
- Memos should never begin with "Dear" or end with "Yours...", but it is usual to sign them
- The memo should always be dated, and the file reference given where possible
- Memos should always have a heading
- Paragraphs should be numbered, unless the memo is very short

5. Summaries

5.1 There will be cases which are too complicated for treatment in a shortish minute, and there will be others which have developed over months or years whose papers are spread over several files. In such cases, it will be helpful to senior officers if a summary is prepared giving the previous history and/or the important points of the case.

5.2 The summary should be typed and placed on the right-hand side of the file. The corresponding minute should draw attention to the summary and make a clear proposal for action.

5.3 A summary should always be prepared in any case that is destined for the Legal Adviser and in any case that is to be sent to the Director unless the papers are brief enough to be rapidly absorbed.

6. Reference to the Legal Adviser

6.1 A file should not be minuted to Legal Advisers in the plural, nor 'To Mr..... for observations' because all files go to the Legal Adviser, who will, if necessary, refer them to his assistants. If the advice of a particular member of Legal Adviser's Branch is sought, the correct minute is '? To Legal Adviser (Mr) for favour of advice, please'. Otherwise it should be '? To Legal Adviser for favour of advice, please'.

6.2 All files destined for the Legal Adviser should be sent via a Grade 7 unless otherwise authorised.