

FILE MANAGEMENT

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Introduction

These instructions outline the processes and procedures for file management and have ensured that best practice prevails and the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000 have been adopted throughout. This section should be read in conjunction with Asylum Instructions on Considering The Asylum Claim, Implementing Substantive Decision, Minute Writing, the Immigration Directorate Instructions (IDIs).

Importance of Good File Management

Every application or written enquiry made to the New Asylum Model (NAM) or the Asylum Casework Directorate (ACD) is kept and considered on a file relating to the person or subject. When dealing with such applications/enquiries, it is essential that officers 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 or those of family members handled consistently
- a clear record is maintained of the movements of valuable documents (for example passports) and
- those to whom a case is referred, or who have to deal with subsequent correspondence on a case, can clearly see and understand all aspects of the preceding action including the proposals or decisions made.

Public Right of Access to Information Acts

Data Protection Act 1998

The provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998 cover case files. Under the Act, data must be:

- accurate, relevant and up-to-date;
- not excessive for the purpose;
- not retained for longer than necessary; and
- protected against loss or damage.

For more information see Immigration Directorate Instructions on [Disclosure Data Protection \(Chapter 24\)](#).

Freedom of Information Act 2000

Case files are covered by the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Under the Act, UK Border Agency is obliged to provide, on request, any of the information contained in their files (subject to limited exemptions). Staff should ensure that all paper or electronic documents are written in a professional manner and that inappropriate opinions are avoided.

For more information see Immigration Directorate Instructions on [Freedom of Information Act \(Chapter 25\)](#).

Organising Papers on a File

Minute Sheets

Minute sheets should be filed on the left-hand side of the case file. For more information on consideration minute sheets see Considering The Asylum Claim.

For more information on file minute sheets see Minute Writing.

For more information on instructional minute sheets see Implementing Substantive Decision,..

Correspondence and Documents

- Correspondence, call notes and all other documentary evidence should be neatly filed on the right hand side of the case file.
- All documents should be filed in chronological order (of date received) for ease of reference, with the most recent papers uppermost and the earliest to the rear of the file.
- When attaching correspondence to the file, any internal cover sheets should be removed and no documents should be left inside the envelope.
- All documents from the same envelope (except originals – see Passports and other original documents) should be stapled together, with the envelope to the rear, in the top left-hand corner. Staff should ensure that postmarks and Recorded or Special Delivery stickers remain visible on the envelope and are not stapled through.
- The whole document, not just the envelope or top sheet, should be hole-punched a third of the way down the page when it is attached to the file.
- When correspondence relates to more than one family member, where there are separate files travelling together in a taped group, photocopies should be made of each document and envelope (to record postmarks and Recorded or Special Delivery stickers).
- Staff should ensure that original documents are attached to the correct file, with the photocopies attached to the other file(s) in the group.

Passports and other original documents

- Passports and other original documents submitted by claimants (such as Home Office status documentation, birth certificates, identity cards, photographs and newspapers) which are to be retained **must never** be hole punched, stapled or pinned.
- In ACG (South) and the New Asylum Model these documents are to be placed in a clear plastic wallet attached to the right hand side of the file, and the file should be flagged with a white 'Documents Enclosed' sticker in. This sticker will show that the passport/documents are within. Documents placed in the wallet should be recorded on CID in the 'Documents Submitted' screen and on the 'Document Retention Spreadsheet'. In ACG (North) the documents should be hand delivered to the Valuable Document Bank in ACU 11 and the retention of the documents recorded on CID. For detailed instructions see Document Retention.
- Documents that are to be returned on completion of action should be photocopied and the photocopies should then be numbered ('docketed') on file. The original documents should never be 'docketed'. For further guidance on 'docketing' see Document Numbering on File ('Docketing').

Document Numbering On File ('Docketing')

Best practice is that all Home Office files should be 'docketed'.

- Documents on the right hand side of the file should be numbered in sequence using a procedure known as 'docketing', excluding those kept in a clear plastic wallet as detailed previously in Passports and other original documents. Under this system, when a case file is opened for action, each document relating to the case will be endorsed on the top right hand corner with a number (the docket number) running in sequence from 1 onwards.
- Every docket number should be copied onto the minute sheet (on the left-hand side of the file) together with a brief description and the original date of the document to which it refers. The person who makes the entry should sign and date it, and also print their name. Thereafter this process should be repeated whenever papers are linked to the file, with each new document being allocated the next available docket number.

Handling Case Files

This section outlines the procedures to be followed when handling case files.

Blue and white taped case files

When two or more case files need to be tied together it is important that the correct colour of tape is used. Tape is supplied in the following colours:

White tape – used when tying together sub-numbers of the same file (for example regarding the same person: A1234567, A1234567/2, A1234567/3); and

Blue tape – used when two or more files from different series are being tied together (for example regarding individual claims made by different family members or related persons: A1234567, B1357911, C1471014).

On the front of the file there is a box for noting the number of related files. This should be kept up to date when handling a file. The officer should ensure that the number on the front matches the actual number in the group. See *File Tracking User Guide*.

Staff should ensure that the contents of white and blue tape groups are accurately recorded on the file tracking system.

Amalgamating files

Where it is discovered that two files of different numbers exist for the same person they should initially be tied together with blue tape. The files should, at the earliest opportunity, be sent to the File Creation Unit to be amalgamated, at which time they will be tied together with white tape and updated on file tracking.

File bundles

Where a bundle of several files contains some in the same series, the like numbers should be tied together with white tape and the whole bundle secured with blue tape. It is important that staff comply with this procedure. When correctly taped, the relationship to each other of all the files within the bundle can be readily identified. This makes it easier for case owners to assimilate all the available information when considering the case(s) and helps registry staff avoid errors when putting files away after action has been completed (for example placing files in the wrong bundle in the paper room).

If a bundle of files is too bulky to be tied securely with tape, a white strap should be used and blue tape tied prominently around the strap. Elastic bands **must never** be used to secure files or file bundles, because they damage file covers.

Where an attached file is of smaller dimensions (e.g. from another government department) it should be enclosed in a clearly identifiable envelope and tied securely to the main file with blue tape. When action is complete, any blue tape should be removed before the files are sent to Layby. Any notes held against the file on the File Tracking System should be deleted by the originating location before the file is sent to Layby. See *File Tracking User Guide*.

File movement

When sending files to a new destination staff should ensure that the next available row of the file destination ladder is completed legibly (name/unit/date) and that the file tracking system is updated accurately (see *File Tracking User Guide*). If the destination ladder is full, a new ladder should be securely attached on top of the old one. Where no barcode is attached to the front cover of the Home Office file the File Creation Unit should be contacted immediately.

Files on which action is complete

Once it is certain that a case requires no further action, the case owner should send the file to Layby. He should write a file minute which he should sign and date to that effect and then mark "Layby" on the front of the file cover. To reduce the possibility of a file being sent to an incorrect destination, no abbreviation or form of direction other than "Layby" should be used.

A file with outstanding intermediate action should **not** be 'double-routed' on the file cover (such as "1. Registry / 2. Layby"). Instead, both destinations should be clearly indicated on the minute sheet and the file cover marked to the initial destination only. This procedure will ensure that no outstanding action is overlooked.

Particular care should be taken to ensure that no document remains on file that rightly should have been returned to its sender. Where it is necessary for a passport or other document to be retained on a file which is being sent to Layby, a clear indication to this effect should be made by the case owner in the final minute. This should however only take place when a passport/travel document has been impounded. If this action does not appear to have been followed, the file will be returned by the General Registry to the originating unit.

Files may not normally be sent to Layby with any loose enclosures tied up behind them such as a ring binder, folder, and envelope. There is no longer any provision for 'long papers' to be made up and all such enclosures are to be dealt with as detailed in 'Long Papers'. The only exception to this rule is where an appeal is outstanding and the hearing has been adjourned. In these circumstances, when a lack of storage space at the Presenting Officers' Units requires the file to be sent temporarily to Layby pending resumption of the hearing, miscellaneous material of the type described may be left tied up behind the file. In all such cases, the file is to be clearly flagged that the 'Layby' is temporary – otherwise the file will be returned to the originator.

Files for 'Almanacking'

Personal files, including those protectively marked 'Restricted', which are to be brought forward for action or review at a later date (for example two months or more hence) should be recorded on the file tracking system for recall ('almanacked') and sent to Layby. Personal files with a security classification of 'Confidential' or above, files with a privacy marking and all general series (i.e. those prefixed with "IMG" or "IMO") should be sent to the General Registry for 'Almanacking'.

Files should be clearly minuted, "Almanac to [group/case owner] on [date] and file tracking".

Care of files

It is most important that file covers and their contents are maintained in good condition. Files and papers should never be allowed to become tattered, nor should file covers reach a state where they are overfull with documents. For guidance on what to do when receiving a file in bad condition see File cover maintenance. If a file or sub-file is more than about one inch thick and/or contains more than 100 documents, it should be sent to the appropriate sub-registry for the opening of a continuation file.

Protecting file contents

Most files have an outer flap on the right hand side to protect the papers within. Full use should be made of this, to safeguard the minute sheets, as well as other contents of the file. Documents should, where possible, be placed on files in line with preceding documents. Documents should be hole-punched one-third from the top on the left so that they do not protrude at the top or bottom of the file cover. File flags, which may protrude at the top of the file, should be replaced if damaged, or removed if no longer applicable.

File cover maintenance

Where a file (or sub-file) cover becomes worn or damaged it should be sent to the File Creation Unit (FCU) for repair. (The FCU is currently located on the 11th Floor, Lunar House). The case owner should minute the case file with instructions for the FCU and request it be returned to him/her.

'Long papers'

There is no longer any provision for bulky enclosures to be made into what were formerly termed 'long papers'. Case owners should exercise the maximum restraint over what is to be retained on a claimant's file once a case has been completed, and where it is essential to retain bulky enclosures which exceed the maximum capacity of the sub-file, action should be taken as above.

Methods of Attaching Documents

Attach:	To:	With:
Minute Sheets	File	Treasury Tag
Correspondence and other papers	Correspondence and other papers	Staple
Correspondence and other papers	File	Treasury Tag
Clear plastic wallet (containing passports and other original documents)	File	Treasury Tag
Documents to be despatched	Correspondence and other papers	Paper clip
Documents to be despatched	File	Paper clip
Temporary messages	File	Pin
Flags	Correspondence and other papers	Pin
Flags	File	Pin

NB: Pin points should be buried in paperwork to avoid injury

Document Control

Change Record

Version	Authors	Date	Change Reference
1.0	RB	15/02/07	New web style implemented
2.0	JC	13/11/08	Re-branding only