# Filing Schemes

RECORDS MANAGEMENT HANDBOOK

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| **GUIDANCE TITLE:** | **04: Filing Schemes** |
| **GUIDANCE PURPOSE:** | **Provide guidance on how to introduce and maintain a filing scheme for records** |
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| **VERSION:** | **1_01: June 2019** |

**Question:** **What is a filing scheme?**
**Answer:** **It is a way of organising records**

A filing scheme provides a framework (structure) for organising records in. This structure will often be obvious, and will usually involve a referencing or indexing system.

**Question:** **Why do we need filing schemes?**
**Answer:** **So we can find records and information**

Filing schemes enable the long term survival and accessibility of records by ensuring consistency and efficiency in the storage of information. The main purposes it serves are:

- It ensures information of the same type is given the same name;
- It serves as a table of contents to help us locate information;
- Helps with compliance with the Records Management Policy;
- Helps compliance with information legislation, e.g. FOI; and,
- It ensures all information relating to a topic is kept together and is a complete set of papers resulting from a particular function/ activity.

**Question:** **What do I need to do prior to initiating a filing system?**
**Answer:** **Find out what records you have**

Before developing a system, an inventory of records is needed- a list of records. The inventory identifies the types of records and functions the records support. Once collected, the information can be sorted into classifications- what you do/ what they are. The inventory is in essence a contents page of information held!

See guidance on *"Record Inventories"* for further information.

**Question:** **Who is responsible for introducing a filing scheme?**
**Answer:** **Each department**

It is the responsibility of individual departments to implement a scheme. It may be practical to assign an owner to the system depending on the department's structure and size.

**Question:** **What filing scheme should we use?**
**Answer:** **One that works for your area- preferably functional**

The most appropriate type of scheme is a functional-based one. A functional approach involves structuring the system based on the functions and activities of the area, e.g. Financial Management/ Budgets or Human Resources/ Recruitment. This is less subjective then a subject-based approach and more sustainable than an organisation-based system, as functions are less likely to change. A function can also be referred to as the *business purpose- what we do!*

Functional schemes need to be based on an analysis of the department; so ask yourself, *'what is your department's function?'*

**Question:** **Why is a functional approach recommended?**
**Answer:** **It is more resilient to change than other options**

An advantage of the system is it allows for amendments without changing the scheme itself, e.g. a function moves or there is a restructure in the Trust, little or no modification is required- it is sustainable and requires less maintenance than other schemes.

Similarly, if the name of a department changes the function remains the same and the file structure is unaffected. It is important, when using a functional scheme that all functions are included and then the next level is activities- what you do to achieve the function.

Example of a functional filing scheme:

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| **(+) Finance** | | |
| **(+) Human Resources** | | |
| | (+) Recruitment | |
| | (+) Personnel Management | |
| **(-) Health & Safety** | | |
| | (+) Policy | |
| | (+) Buildings | |
| | (+) Risk Assessments | |
| | (-) Accidents | |
| | | Accident Prevention-Fire |
| | | Accident Prevention- Equipment |

**Question:** **How do I create a filing scheme?**
**Answer:** **Research & plan!!**

A filing scheme should consist of only the absolute necessary number of levels; the lowest level being the individual record, and the highest being the broad function. The upper levels are the functions and activities of the department.

The key to a good filing scheme is to know what your department does and what information it holds. Departments should ask themselves questions to develop a rapid 'information map':

1. What are your department's responsibilities?

2. What activities (jobs) do you carry out to fulfil these responsibilities?
3. What information do you use to carry out these activities?
4. What information/ records do you create?
5. To whom do you provide this information?
6. What records do you need to keep?
7. What is the best way of organising this information?

The responsibilities (functions) and activities determined from the information will form the top levels of the filing scheme and the others will contribute to setting up individual files at lower levels.

Sometimes it may be worth closing files and storing them, (non-current records) and opening a new volume for further information when it comes to transferring your records into the filing scheme, e.g. old files. However, they should be noted on the inventory. Once a filing system is introduced staff should review existing records and papers, and add them to files in the new system.

**Question**: **How do I maintain a filing scheme?**
**Answer**: **Put one person in charge**

It is advisable to place responsibility of the scheme with one member of staff; although all members have a responsibility for understanding it and keeping it up to date.

For a scheme to remain usable it must be up to date. It is advisable to review the scheme occasionally to check it is still relevant.

- Have the functions changed since the scheme was introduced?
- Have the processes changed?
- Has the type of information used and generated changed?
- Does the scheme meet user needs?

**Question**: **How do I know what is in a filing scheme?**
**Answer**: **Use a referencing system**

Departments may wish to adopt a referencing system to make it easier to find records. Not all record need to be registered; it depends on the need for accountable records, information needs, how many there are, and legal obligations. The most common types are alphabetical, numerical and alpha-numerical. Several principles should be followed for registration:

- The reference assigned to each file must be unique;
- The file title must be unique;
- References and titles must be relevant and easily understood by all;
- The identifier should be a maximum of four elements, e.g. RT02/1106;
    - Each element should relate to a different level of the file title;
    - Details should be recorded on the file cover and in a register.

**Contact Details/ Further Information**

If you have any question regarding the creation/ receipt of files please contact:

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