



**REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA**

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**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, ARTS AND CULTURE**

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NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF NAMIBIA RECORDS MANAGEMENT SECTION

**TO: EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TO THE PRESIDENT  
SECRETARY TO CABINET  
DEPUTY AUDITOR GENERAL  
DIRECTOR: NAMIBIA SECURITY INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
SECRETARIES: NATIONAL ASSEMBLY/NATIONAL COUNCIL  
DIRECTOR: ELECTIONS  
ALL PERMANENT SECRETARIES: O/M/As  
ALL DEPUTY PERMANENT SECRETARIES (MoEAC)  
ALL DIRECTORS (HEAD OFFICE AND REGIONS)**

NATIONAL ARCHIVES CIRCULARS OF 2017

**CIRCULAR 1 OF 2017: COMPILATION OF FILE PLAN**

## THE ORIGIN OF FILE PLAN

As soon as any organisation starts to function, records are formed. Letters are received and copies of outgoing letters preserved; evidence is kept of financial transactions concluded; records are kept to account for the obtaining and expenditure of moneys; minutes of meeting and decisions are kept, etc.

These records form the “memory” of the organisation, for it is impossible for officials to remember everything. The documents also serve as evidence that certain steps have been taken or transactions concluded. Even if someone was capable of remembering everything, there is still the problem that staff changes and that later arrivals must know what occurred previously in order to carry on sensibly and purposefully. There has to be evidence of what was done and how it was done.

The information in such files must therefore be accessible. Where the organisation is small and the records are few, it goes without saying that it will be easy to trace a particular document. The larger the organisation and the more voluminous the records, the more difficult the process will be. It is therefore necessary for the documents to be stored according to a specific logical system so that they can be retrieved, not only by the person who filed them, but also by anybody else. Organisation dealing, for example, mainly with people, will be able to keep all documents concerning each person in a separate cover. If such covers are then arranged alphabetically according to the names of the persons, the cover for any one particular person can be traced easily. If the documents within each cover are further kept in chronological order, it will also be easy to find a specific document in the cover.

This is an example of a very simple method of filing or file plan. Its use is however limited for it can be used effectively only in particular instances, such as when all documents refer to specific persons, places, etc., with fixed names. As soon as less exact elements enter the picture, as when for example “matters” or “subjects” occur in which a particular idea may be expressed in different words by different persons, the effective use of an alphabetical system is badly hampered.

The file plan in general use in offices of O/M/As and SOEs in the Republic of Namibia today is the functional subject file plan in which additional use is made of the alphabetical, numerical and chronological methods of filing. It should, however, be pointed out that filing methods have undergone various stages of development before reaching the stage where they are today. The progress of that development in Namibia can easily be determined merely by studying a number of records dating from various periods and administrations.

In the earliest stage incoming letters were, for example, kept together in chronological order, or in groups according to the person or office of origin. Copies of letters despatched were first copied by hand in a letter book, and later printed mechanically in press copy books. In the course of time, covers were used in which all incoming letters and memoranda about a particular matter were collected. In this would be references to the numbers of outgoing letters in the letter book or press copy book. Subsequently

copies of outgoing letters were also included in the covers and finally the use of separate letter books was discontinued.

Such covers were usually numbered by starting at 1 and each subsequent file numbered consecutively. Later, when it became obvious that the numbers would become too large, a system of numbering by year was devised, 1/1950, 2/1950 and 451/1950 and 1/1951, 2/1951 and so on. The problem inherent in this file plan was to discover whether a cover had already been opened for a specific subject, particularly if there were already some hundreds or thousands of covers in existence, and thus various covers were crated for the same subject. In consequence it was very difficult to collect together all documents on the same subject.

## 2. NECESSITY OF AN EFFECTIVE FILE PLAN

The establishment and maintenance of an effective file plan is essential for the following reasons:

### 2.1 IT IS ESSENTIAL FOR EFFICIENT ADMINISTRATION

The smooth and efficient functioning of any administrative organization is dependent on the speed with which documents required can be traced and delivered and on the completeness of all the documents furnished in connection with a particular subject. It is obvious that no matter can be dealt with expeditiously and satisfactorily if to start off, a search has to be conducted to trace the relevant documents, nor if the documents are stored or filed in such a way that all documents on a given matter are together and can be found with the least loss of time.

### 2.2 THE EPHEMERAL CAN BE SEPARATED FROM THE IMPORTANT

It is essential to destroy all documents not justifying permanent preservation as soon as possible since they fill storage space unnecessarily when kept longer than need by, and also because they hamper effective control over and custody of those documents which do justify permanent retention. It should be borne in mind that files are preserved or retained as entities and that individual documents may not be removed from a file. If important and ephemeral documents are stored in the same file, it means that the ephemeral documents will be permanently preserved together with the important or in any case for a very long time. By the systematic creation of files the important can be separated from the ephemeral, merely by making provision for different files for different types of documents. **Moreover, ephemeral documents can be periodically and systematically destroyed since standing disposal authority**

may be obtained if an effective file plan is in use and is maintained while for an unsatisfactory file plan disposal authority must be repeatedly applied for.

### 2.3 IT ENSURES THAT THE FILES BEING TRANSFERRED TO AN ARCHIVES REPOSITORY WILL BE CLASSIFIED MORE SATISFACTORILY

If a file plan is poor, the product which eventually arrives in the archives repository will also be poor, i.e., information about a particular subject will not easily be collected from it. Furthermore, it will be difficult to establish whether the information which has been obtained is complete because everything has not necessarily been kept together. This causes considerable work for the staff of the repository and makes the task of the researchers more difficult.

## 3. BASIC REQUIREMENTS OF A GOOD FILE PLAN

The fundamental requirement for filing documents is that they should be grouped together in such a manner that those requiring to be read together should in fact be filed together. Therefore all documents concerning a certain matter should be filed together so that the background of the matter may be established with the greatest certainty and the least possible loss of time.

The basic requirements, with which a good file plan must comply, are that it:

- **Must be logical and consistent;**
- **Must be flexible;**
- **Should be as simple as possible.**

- 3.1 By logical and consistent is meant that the file plan should be arranged logically and not merely compiled without purpose or sense. When a particular method of arrangement has been decided upon, it must be adhered to consistently and deviations should not occur without sound reasons. It implies that the file plan should be such that anyone and not only the compilers must be able to understand and apply it as soon as the principles on which it is based have been grasped.
- 3.2 The file plan must be flexible so that any further additions can be introduced in the future without disturbing the original pattern and without requiring major amendments to the file plan itself. Obviously, in compiling a file plan provision can be made for files only expected to be required. No file plan remains static and provision must therefore be made for later additions. It should be possible to make additions as though they were known at the time when the file plan was drawn up, in other words, at the place where provision would have been made if their necessity had existed when the file plan was compiled. This is ensured by the use of so-called "umbrella headings" and by applying the correct method of numbering.
- 3.3 The file plan should be as simple as possible, that is to say, it should not be made complicated without rhyme or reason. Preference should always be given to the

simple method rather than the complicated one, where both may achieve the same object. This does not mean that the basic principles, e.g. the flexibility of the file plan, should be abandoned for the sake of simplicity. A subject file plan is never so simple that it may be applied automatically or without being approached intelligently. For example, continual decisions have to be taken on the correct placement of documents, i.e. whether they should be placed on existing files, if so, on which, or whether any particular document should be the first on a new file.

**Apart from the above basic requirements, the following points are also of importance:**

### **3.4 PROVISION SHOULD BE MADE FOR FILES ON POLICY MATTERS, DECISIONS AND DIRECTIVES, ON WHICH ALL DOCUMENTS DEALING WITH SUCH MATTERS CAN BE STORED**

The first file of series should, where possible, be the policy file. Everything bearing on policy and procedure should be placed on it, as also all directives and circular letters. Where a decision of policy arises from a matter dealt with on another file, a copy of that decision should be placed on the policy file.

Such files help to bring together all documents dealing with decisions of policy and procedural instructions and may be of inestimable value in briefing someone who is not well informed on such matters within a short space of time.

A suitable and concise description should be chosen as the title for the file, but it should not be called "Main File", for such a description is too vague and can cause too many "general" documents to find their way to the file.

Policy files are numbered by adding a capital letter "P" as the last component of the reference number allocated to the files.

In this way policy files for which no provision was made originally can be inserted easily at a later stage without renumbering the other existing files. To distinguish policy files from the alphabetical P-group case files, the capital letter "P" should always be preceded by a forward slash (/) while the letters of the alphabet on case files are not preceded by a diagonal stroke.

### **3.5 DESCRIPTIONS SHOULD BE CONCISE AND UNAMBIGUOUS**

The description of any subject or subdivision in a file plan should preferably consist of as few words as possible. Frequently it is possible to manage this in just one word e.g. "transport". Occasionally more words are necessary. **While as few words as possible should be used, the description should be chosen in such a way that a specific area is delimited and that there can be no doubt as to what is included or excluded by it.**

Under no circumstances should descriptions such as General, Various or Miscellaneous be chosen as headings. Such descriptions lead, without fail, to

correspondence which should have been filed elsewhere or requiring new files, coming to rest on the General (etc.) file without any effort to classify it properly. Moreover, standing disposal authority is never granted for files with such descriptions.

### **3.6 THERE MAY BE NO DUPLICATION OR OVERLAPPING OF SUBJECTS**

**Subjects should be so chosen and described that documents about the same subject cannot be placed on two or more files.** In cases where there is a possibility of incorrect filing of documents, as when provision has been made in different places in the file plan for two aspects of the same matter, attention should be drawn to this by means of **cross references**.

### **3.7 FILE SUBJECTS SHOULD BE SO CHOSEN THAT IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS TO BE RETAINED PERMANENTLY ARE NOT INCLUDED IN THE SAME FILE AS EPHEMERAL DOCUMENTS**

In determining file subjects, constant endeavours should be made to ensure that ephemeral documents are filed on separate files so that the maximum advantage can be drawn from their destruction. Consequently, as few ephemeral documents as possible should be placed on files which will be earmarked for permanent preservation. (Documents dealing with matters of policy and the application of the policy in general are generally considered for permanent preservation while those dealing with routine matters are generally ephemeral).

**The matters dealt with above are the most important points to be noted in a good file plan.** Further requirements will be referred to when the compilation of the file plan is considered.

## **4. THE FUNCTIONAL SUBJECT FILE PLAN**

Various methods of filing documents exist. The most general and the simplest, as mentioned above, is probably the alphabetical. In this file plan a file is opened for each person, institution, place, etc. and all correspondence dealing with that individual or body is placed on that particular file. The files are not numbered but are kept in strictly alphabetical sequence.

It is obvious that the alphabetical filing system is very suitable when it is used for cases where individual bodies with constant names only are concerned. As soon as subjects or concepts arise to which various people attach different names, which are difficult to express in one or two words, a purely alphabetical system cause problems and when thousands of files are involved, it becomes unmanageable. This is the case with the filing systems of most governmental bodies and it is therefore necessary to use a filing system tailored to particular circumstances. Practice has shown that the subject filing system, with the addition of the alphabetical, numerical and chronological methods where required, gives the most satisfactory results.

By a subject file plan is meant the division of the functions and activities of the particular body into a number of main subjects; the division of each main subject into a number of subjects; the further division of each subject, etc., until the subdivision has been taken far enough to justify a file for that aspect of the particular matter.

The file plan can be compared to an orchard where the orchard represents the body as a whole. Each tree represents a main subject and its branches the various subjects. Just as each branch has in turn smaller twigs, so each subject can be subdivided into even smaller entities.

By means of this procedure a subject index is compiled on all matters dealt with by the body, and that all correspondence stored according to the subject index. The main subjects form the guides under which the actual file subjects are to be found. Instead of appearing on cards the file subjects appear on file covers inside of which the individual documents are usually arranged chronologically. When, therefore, a document is to be retrieved or filed, the first step is to ascertain under which main heading the subject with which the document deals, falls. When the correct main heading has been found, the subject under that main heading is examined to determine under which specific subject it falls, and so on, until the correct file on which it should be placed has been found.

The framework for the subject index is worked out on foolscap paper and files are opened according to this plan, which is called the file plan; it provides the key to which file a document should be stored on, or whether a new file should be opened, etc.

## 5. THE COMPILATION OF A NEW FILE PLAN

Where a file plan is already in existence, a thorough investigation should be conducted as soon as possible into its nature in order to determine whether it fulfils the stated requirements. Such an inquiry is usually delegated to the Records Management Unit/Registry/General Services/Auxiliary Services, or whichever one the records management activities are assigned to. A complete report should be compiled setting out the principles on which the file plan is based, as well as the defects which have been found. Finally, recommendations should be made, viz. whether the existing file plan should be revised as a whole. The argument so frequently advanced that the file plan works well is no reason to retain the existing file plan. The deciding factor is whether it conforms to the stipulated requirements. The report should be directed to the head of the governmental body concerned and a copy of it to the Chief Archivist.

Should the investigation reveal that the present file plan is deficient and that increasing difficulties in its application may be expected, the compilation of a new and effective file plan should be undertaken as soon as possible. A fact to bear in mind is that, depending on various circumstances, **three years** may elapse before a new file plan can be approved and introduced. Unnecessary delay should therefore be avoided.

Once the decision has been taken to introduce a new file plan it should be borne in mind that the new file plan will have to be approved by the Chief Archivist before it may be

taken into use. It is therefore absolutely essential to collaborate very closely with the National Archives of Namibia throughout the whole process to ensure that the new file plan will conform to the necessary requirements. Consultation can take place at any stage, of course, but is particularly essential at the following stages:

- before commencing the compilation of a new file plan;
- when the main subjects have been selected;
- when the draft file plan and instructions have been completed;
- when the file plan in its final form has been completed; and
- when amendments and additions are to be made.

## 5.1 PRELIMINARY STUDY

Before someone compiles a file plan for an Office, Ministry, Agency or an SOE, it is essential for her/him to make a thorough study of the organisation and functions of the particular body, for the file plan will be based on this framework and requirements. The final file plan will thus have to reflect the structure and functions of the particular body. The assumption is thus that a suitable and stable structure exists. Should this not be the case, this aspect should be corrected before a file plan is compiled.

When clarity has been obtained about the structure of the body, those subjects for which provision will have to be made, will have to be determined, as well as the extent to which the subjects should be split into file units to comply with requirements and to promote the efficient performance of duties. In the process solutions will have to be found for existing defects so that they can be prevented or eliminated in the new file plan.

The customary method, and usually the only one to establish for which files provision must be made, is to systematically go through all the files in use and to keep notes of the subjects about which correspondence were conducted. Here it should be remembered that file headings are frequently unreliable and even misleading, particularly when an inefficient file plan is in use. For example, documents may have been placed on the wrong files, or files may contain documents which really require their own new files. Particularly the general files so frequently found should be meticulously analysed to determine which subjects should be provided for in the new file plan, since vague descriptions such as General, Miscellaneous, etc. will not be permitted in the new system.

While conducting the survey, notice should be taken of whether the existing files are too thick or too thin. Should it transpire, for example, that there are hundreds of thin files; the indication is that the division is too fine and that the new file plan should follow a more practical division. If on the other hand a file is far too thick and runs to several parts, thereby hampering efforts to trace previous correspondence, it is obvious that a finer division is required to expedite tracing previous correspondence.



Particular notice should also be taken of documents of ephemeral nature which accumulate rapidly on files so that an attempt can be made in the new file plan to split up the files in such a way that those types of documents are stored separately and may be destroyed as soon as is practically possible. As a rule, ephemeral documents are those bearing on trivial matters of passing importance and do not justify permanent retention, as for example claims for reimbursement for expenses incurred, routine arrangements for meetings, etc. In this latter case the minutes of the meeting will usually be important and separate files must therefore be provided for minutes and routine arrangements.

It is absolutely essential to keep notes during the survey of abuses encountered, as well as helpful hints and cases to which attention should be drawn. Such information can later come in useful in drawing up instructions, explanatory notes, cross references, and the like.

Usually this stage of the task cannot be undertaken by more than one person for it is absolutely essential that one person should have an overall view as well as a thorough knowledge of the details. This is essential in compiling a new file plan.

The tendency exists to appoint a committee to compile a file plan or to assist in doing so. This generally does not work, because where more than one person is concerned it is not always possible to attend to the matter as a body. A better result is usually achieved by appointing a specific person to compile the file plan and then to submit it for comment. Of course, at all stages consultation with the National Archives and officials of the sections concerned can and must take place to determine precisely what is required and which method will provide the best results. Registry and other members of the staff will usually be able to indicate which defects in the existing file plan cause problems and should be rectified.

## **5.2 COMPILATION OF SERIES**

Once the subjects to be provided for have been determined, a start should be made on planning the various series.

Firstly the main subjects should be determined. By this stage the preliminary study should have made it possible to divide the activities of the Office, Ministry, Agency or State Owned Enterprise under a number of headings. The organisational structure will usually already imply a number of headings, as there will be sections dealing specifically with those aspects, e.g. accounts, personnel, etc.

A list of main subject should be compiled and should be such that the main subjects together cover all activities of the body about which correspondence is conducted, but at the same time they should have been so chosen and described that they exclude one another. (By exclude one another is meant that when a

particular subject is known no doubt should exist under which main heading it ought to be found). Each description should be concise and the particular field it is to cover should clearly be delimited. Two or more main subjects should not be created if one main subject will cover the field adequately. On the other hand, one main subject should not be made of what is in reality two or more, for unrelated subjects should not be included under the same heading.

The number of main subjects should be as few as possible, for the more there are the more difficult it will be to describe them mutually exclusive and consequently the more difficult it will be to place a document correctly.

The descriptions of main subjects will by their nature be very wide since they have to cover wide-ranging fields, e.g. Transport or Financial Matters. For this reason descriptions of main subjects may not be used alone for the description of a file, and a further subdivision is always required to obtain a suitable file description.

Each file plan **must** necessarily make provision for main subjects for support functions such as accommodation, buildings and sites, supplies and services and so on, as well as for main subjects referring to the line functions performed by the particular office. Although main subjects for support matters, and their subdivision can to a large extent be uniform in all file plans, the main subjects in line matters will differ from file plan to file plan because each office has its own specific functions - other, of course, than in cases where a uniform file plan is compiled for a number of offices performing the same function, as for example magistrate's offices.

When the main subjects have been determined, each main subject is in turn split up into various subjects. Just as the main subjects cover various aspects of the activities of a body as a whole, so the subjects under each main subject cover different aspects of the main subject, and they should delimit definite fields which are mutually exclusive. Circular 2 is an example of main subjects for support functions and indicates how they can be subdivided.

If it should be necessary to subdivide subjects further, the descriptions of the subjects should be such that they may serve as umbrella headings, i.e. they should be composed in so wide a way that sub-subjects bearing on the subject may fall under them. When subjects are further subdivided, the description of the subject may serve either as a heading to provide for further subdivision, or as a file for correspondence on the subject as a whole, thus being unsuitable to be placed on a sub-file.

In some cases it will be sufficient to divide the main subjects into subjects to obtain the file description, while in others it will be necessary to subdivide the subjects into subdivisions, or even to subdivide the subdivisions. The decisive factor in determining how minute the division will be is the amount of correspondence conducted on the matter. Should correspondence be voluminous, the subject will have to be subdivided so that different aspects of

it may be dealt with on different files, for should everything be placed on one file the tracing of previous documents is hampered. Then, too, it happens that more than one person is dealing simultaneously with various aspects of the same matter, and delay would result if only one file existed for the matter. Subdivision is then necessary. The question of the separation of ephemeral documents should also not be forgotten.

The most minute subdivision is usually achieved when provision is made for a file for each person, place, institution, etc. They are the so-called "case files". It is very seldom necessary to open sub files for case files.

**It should be borne in mind that, although it is undesirable to place too much correspondence on one file, it is as undesirable to have too many sub-files.**

As far as the descriptions are concerned, it will have become clear that the descriptions of main subjects are extremely wide and that the further they are subdivided, the narrower the field becomes, until the description of the case file is so narrow that it indicates only one particular person or institution. Thus, one always proceeds from the general to the particular and not vice versa.

The following is an example of how a main subject can be subdivided to various levels:

- 1        FINANCIAL MATTERS (Main Subject)
- 1/P     Policy        )
- 1/1     Budget         ) Subdivision according to
- 1/2         Revenue        ) various aspects dealt with.
- 1/3         Expenditure    )

It may transpire that correspondence in connection with Expenditure (1/3) is comprehensive enough to justify a further division of the subject. This can be done as follows:

- 1/3        Expenditure
- 1/3/1        Advances
- 1/3/2        Salaries
- 1/3/3        Accounts etc.

Should it prove necessary to subdivide, accounts 1/3/3, even more closely, it could be done as follows:

- 1/3/3        Accounts
- 1/3/3/1        Water and electricity accounts
- 1/3/3/2        Telephone accounts
- etc.

An even finer subdivision of telephone accounts (1/3/3/2) could for example be done as follows:

1/3/3/2      Telephone accounts  
 1/3/3/2/1      Windhoek  
 1/3/3/2/2      Swakopmund      etc.

Whenever a subject is sub-divided, it is usually based on the basis of a sub-subject, name, place, time, etc. For e.g.:

SUB-SUBJECT	NAME	PLACE	TIME
<u>Publicity</u>	<u>Salaries</u>	<u>Branch offices</u>	<u>Annual reports</u>
Radio Talks	J. Prinsloo	Otjiwarongo	1989
Publications	F. Potgieter	Swakopmund	1990
Film Shows	T. Smit	Tsumeb	1991

Subdivisions should be kept on the same level. Here it should be borne in mind that subject descriptions and the names of persons or bodies may not appear on the same level, for this invariably causes overlapping. It would for example be wrong to subdivide Education as follows:

‘      Education  
 ‘      Khomas Region  
 ‘      Primary school education  
 ‘      Secondary school education  
 ‘      Otjozondjupa Region

The correct subdivision would be:

Education  
 ‘      Primary school education  
 ‘      ‘      Khomas Region  
 ‘      ‘      ‘  
 ‘      ‘      ‘  
 ‘      ‘      ‘  
 ‘      Secondary school education  
 ‘      ‘      Otjozondjupa Region  
 ‘      ‘      ‘  
 ‘      ‘      ‘

### **5.3 ORDER OF SERIES**

When compiling the file plan, that is when the subjects have been arranged in series and are being written down; it is advisable to start each main series on a new page. No numbers need then be allocated to main series at the start so that they can be readily re-arranged, either when the plan has been completed or at any intermediate stage. This also means that a whole series may easily be replaced later, if required.

The main series should not be arranged alphabetically. An alphabetical arrangement prevents related matters from being grouped together, and moreover, the arrangement cannot be kept alphabetical because new additions will not fit into the alphabetical order. It can also be a source of confusion if a portion of a file plan is alphabetical and another portion not. In addition, key words for the same concept frequently differ from person to person.

The arrangement of the series (main as well as sub-series) should, as far as possible, be in order of importance – in other words, a logical arrangement. This of course presents problems, for no two persons will place a series of subjects in the same order. Nevertheless, an attempt must be made to obtain a logical order. Anybody using the file plan would hardly expect to find an important subject at the end thereof. No one would, for example, place organisation last and supplies first.

In the same way the order of importance is maintained throughout the file plan as far as possible and, in addition, the general is always placed before the particular.

In determining the order of the main series it is advisable to place those main subjects dealing with support matters first and thereafter the main subjects dealing with line matters. The reason for this is that support matters are largely stereotyped and that additions of new main subjects are seldom, if ever, necessary. Line function matters, however, require additions and amendments from time to time and when main subjects referring to them are placed at the end, additions can be made without being forced to muddle main subjects for line and support matters.

### **5.4 LAY-OUT**

As already explained, the descriptions of main subjects and in some cases, of the subjects themselves, are of too general a nature for use as file titles. Their sole use as headings is to permit further sub-division to yield more specific subjects. Such general subjects should be underlined in the file plan and should

go together with a clearly stated instruction in the introduction that subjects which are underlined do not represent files.

In order to prevent the unnecessary repetition of main subjects and subjects in the subject classification, such subjects should appear once only above the particular series, and should not be repeated again and again.

Should this method not be followed, the use of large sheets of paper becomes necessary and the lay-out of the file plan will be involved and difficult to take in at a glance. Such a document will always be clumsy and difficult to handle. If the method indicated is followed, any file plan can be set out on normal foolscap paper and is therefore easier to consult and handle. Sub-division should therefore take place vertically and not horizontally.

## 5.5 NUMBERING

Files are numbered mainly because the number is a simple and easy symbol for reference purposes and to maintain the sequence of files in storage.

As no file plan can remain static, provision has to be made for later additions and extensions in such a way that additions can be made at the correct place without dislocating the numbering. By correct place is meant that place where the subject fits or where it would have been placed had it been known when the file plan was compiled. To achieve this, use is made of stroke numbers (e.g. 2/2/3/4). The more stroke numbers used, the more flexible will be the file plan.

It is in fact rarely necessary to use more than five stroke numbers, but should they be required there should be no hesitation about using more when really necessary. The objection that a long number is confusing is not always valid for if the file plan is logical and each number represents a subject, it can usually be remembered very easily. The problems integral in a file plan which is insufficiently flexible are more and greater than those accompanying long numbers.

Subjects are numbered in the following manner:

A number is allocated to each main subject, subject etc., by starting from one at each series or sub-series. A file number is then obtained by combining the numbers of all the series, separating them by means of diagonal strokes, e.g. 5/2/3/1. Each figure in such a number thus represents a particular subject and the sequence of a figure in the number indicates that the subject represented is subordinate to, or an aspect of, the subject represented by the previous figure. Each file number must therefore be able to be analysed so that each figure represents a subject or an aspect of one. Should the file number for example be 5/1/2/1, it could be analysed as follows:

5	=	Liquor
1	=	Sale of liquor
2	=	Hours of sale
1	=	Safari Hotel

In some cases it is possible not to allocate case files case numbers but merely to stipulate that files should be stored alphabetically according to name, place, etc. All the case files in a particular series will therefore bear the same number but correspondence will be placed on the file of the particular case. A great advantage of this is that the alphabetical and numerical index is not unnecessarily enlarged and that the time required to refer to the right number is saved.

In many cases it is unnecessary to have case files for every case, but they can be grouped by for example placing all cases which begin with the same letter of the alphabet on the same file or even by grouping them according to groups of letters, e.g. A – C, D – F, etc.

In numbering files the use of reference letters should be avoided if possible, as in for example E.T.3/1/8/2 where E.T. merely stand for Environment and Tourism. This merely causes more writing and typing and lengthens file numbers unnecessarily. Its sole purpose might be to indicate that it is the file number of a particular office, but this is unnecessary in any case, since the address on the correspondence already indicates the origin of a document or its destination.

The test to determine whether such reference letters should be used or not is to establish whether they are really required, in other words, whether they will serve any useful purpose.

## 5.6 INSTRUCTIONS AND EXPLANATIONS

It is absolutely essential for instructions and explanatory notes concerning the use and application of the file plan to form part of it. The principle to be applied, is that explanations and instructions concerning the plan as a whole should be summarised in the form of an introduction to the plan (i.e. the general instructions). Those referring only to a specific series are placed at the beginning of the series, and those referring to a specific file only are placed immediately under the title. In the latter case it should appear between brackets and the introduction should state clearly that explanations between brackets do not form part of file titles and should not be entered on file covers.

Cross-references where required should be incorporated in the file plan by the same means. It may for example be necessary to draw attention at one file title to another in cases where doubt or confusion may exist. In such cases a note should be appended to each file description, as for example: (For accounts see file 3/4/7/1) and at the other file: (For orders see file 5/1/6). The precise file or series number should always be given because it eliminates unnecessary searching.

The reason why instructions, explanations and cross-references should be incorporated in the prescribed manner is that it is essential for them to be read. A long, broad introduction mentioning all possibilities is unlikely to contribute much to bringing to a person's notice points requiring attention when the plan is in use, since people simply do not have time to start searching elsewhere for instructions or explanations. If they are on the spot they simply cannot be missed.

Model general instructions (National Archives Circular 3) to a file plan are available as a guide. A very important aspect which must be dealt with in the general instructions is the question of who will be responsible for creating the files not already catered for in the file plan. If sufficient provision is not made for additions and amendments to be undertaken by someone who understands the file plan and its working, and all and sundry are permitted to create files, the file plan will deteriorate rapidly.

Other aspects deserving attention are, for example, explanation concerning the arrangement and working of the plan, keeping the index (es) to the plan up to date. Care should be taken that the introduction refers only to the plan and its application. Other matters not directly concerned with it, for example opening post, should rather be contained in separate instructions.

## **5.7 ALPHABETICAL INDEX**

An alphabetical index to the numerical classification is sometimes required when the file plan is of relatively large proportions. The compilation of the index is a task to be undertaken only by a qualified official with both a thorough knowledge of the file plan and methods of indexing. It is obvious that as far as possible only one person should undertake the task, and that it cannot be compiled and kept up to date by various people at the same time unless each entry is checked by one particular person.

The alphabetical index should, however, serve only as an aid, (i.e. an attempt should first be made to file a document with the aid of the file plan before relying on an alphabetical index). This will assist officials in familiarizing themselves with the file plan. The better the file plan the less the need for an alphabetical index or the need to use such an index.



If an alphabetical index is required for good reasons after all, it should be compiled as complete as possible with a proper system of cross-references. The reference number is used once only, opposite the main entry. The cross-reference will then refer only to the main reference. For example, it might be necessary to index the caption "Board for the Promotion of Trade and Industry", and it might fall under the subject "Trade and Industry", with the file number 43/3/5. The index entries would then be compiled as follows:

## **TRADE AND INDUSTRY**

Board for promotion of 34/3/5

## **BOARDS**

Trade and Industry: Board for the promotion of – see TRADE AND INDUSTRY

The fact that a reference number is given once only avoids numbers being left unaltered when amendments are made and avoid repetition of entries.

Although cross-references should be complete, they should not be overdone. In the above case it would be superfluous to index the subject under the word Advancement as well, since the average person would not expect to find it there. Thus only the key idea(s) need to be indexed.

The use of adjectives as keywords should be avoided except where they have become an inseparable part of the noun. So for example Visible index system would not be entered under the heading VISIBLE but under INDEX SYSTEM, while on the other hand Provincial Secretary should be considered as one word and consequently used as a key idea.

A properly defined subject will facilitate indexing. In the case of Visible index system provision should be made first of all for the subject Index systems and thereafter for the various types.

### **5.8 COMPOSITION OF FILE PLAN**

The general instructions, list of main series, subject classification and the annexures have been mentioned and discussed. All the above-mentioned, together, form the file plan. Since each of these parts is directly concerned with at least one of the other parts, it cannot be permitted that any of the components be used independently or in combination without all the others. To prevent the file plan from being divided up physically, it should be provided with a table of contents. The table of contents should be provided as indicated in the "Instructions for use of file plan" in Circular 3.

## **5.9 LIST OF SERIES OF SEPARATE CASE FILES**

Series of case files which are not linked to a reference number in the file plan stand separately from the plan. An example of these is personal staff files which are kept under the reference: SP, surname and initials. To exercise the necessary control over these series, a list in which the existence of the series, the nature of the references, the purpose and use thereof and the disposal instructions applicable is compiled and added to the file plan. Although this list of series of separate case files (N.B. not individual files) does not form part of the subject classification in practice, it is attached as an integral part of it to centralise control over all correspondence files in an office.

## **6. OBTAINING APPROVAL FOR THE FILE PLAN**

When a file plan has been completed to the satisfaction of the officials concerned and has been compiled in its final draft form, the necessary approval for its implementation should be obtained. This should be done by sending a copy of the file plan to the Chief Archivist, applying for approval of the file plan and for its implementation. It is advisable that the file plan be as complete as possible and include all the necessary instructions. This is necessary to enable the Chief Archivist to make a decision and, if necessary, to deliver constructive advice and criticism. An explanatory letter should accompany the file plan, giving reasons why certain methods were used in compiling the plan. This prevents unnecessary correspondence.

If the Chief Archivist has any further comments/suggestions, these should be incorporated in the revised and two copies of the final file plan sent to the Chief Archivist. As soon as approval has been obtained from the National Archivist the date of implementation may be decided upon and the necessary arrangements made.

## **7. THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A NEW FILE PLAN**

As soon as the proposed new file plan has been approved and the date for implementation decided upon, the necessary arrangements must be made, e.g. the obtaining of new file covers and their preparation. It is advisable to prepare beforehand those file covers which may reasonably be expected to be required soon, otherwise the preparation of file covers may cause delay if everything is left until the date of the implementation.

At the implementation all correspondence received on the previous day should be placed on the old files. From the date of implementation all incoming documents and all documents despatched should be dealt with on the new files.

All the old files should then be terminated and removed from the registry as soon as possible. It may be necessary to refer to the old files for a while yet, but such files should be appended loosely to the new files until they are no longer required and then

placed with the other old files. No further correspondence should be carried out on the old files and no original documents should be transferred from the old files to the new ones.

In order to ensure continuity the numbers of the old and new files should appear jointly on the file covers. This too facilitates reference.

Sufficient copies of the file plan should be available for each official concerned with correspondence to receive a copy. It is then the duty of every official to ensure that the file numbers allocated by the registry staff are correct and, when files are requested from registry, the file number should be quoted and not merely the description. All amendments to the file plan should be circulated from time to time so that each official may keep his copy up to date.

## **7.1 REGISTER OF FILE OPENED**

When the file plan has been implemented it is necessary to know precisely which files have in fact been used, as the file plan usually provides for all files which are expected to be required at some stage in the future. In reality the files commence and are utilised at the time when the first documents are file on them.

If possible a copy of the file plan may be used to mark off the files actually opened. In the majority of cases, however, this will not be possible, for case files, for example, for which the file plan does not make detailed provision, cannot be indicated in this way. In such cases a loose leaf register should be employed in which the number and the title of each file opened is entered. The loose leaf register should be compiled in the same form as the file plan and enough space should be allowed for files to be opened later. The first page of the register should indicate which office uses it and when it was commenced.

The use of index cards for this purpose is not recommended for they will not indicate at a glance whether new files should be opened or not, with resultant duplication of files or files created in the wrong place in the file plan. Moreover instructions for the use of the file plan cannot be placed on index cards and, in addition, index cards can be lost very easily.

## **7.2 THE MASTER COPY**


In order to maintain the file plan properly it is important for the person whose task it is, to keep a master copy of the file plan on which all additions and amendments are noted. No file may be opened before the approval of the Chief Archivist has been obtained and the description entered on the master copy. Individual case files are, however, not entered on the master copy. The master


copy should therefore always reflect the correct state of affairs as far as approved file plan is concerned.

**8. SUMMARY**

From the above it is clear that there are certain basic principles on which a good file plan is founded and that there are certain basic requirements with which all effective file plans must comply. It is, however, not possible to draw up and prescribe a cut and dried file plan for all offices. Each office has its own character, individualities and functions and the file plan should be such that it complies with the requirements of those particular individualities. Thus each file plan has its own characters which differentiate it from all other file plans.

Your cooperation in this regard will be highly appreciated.

  
Sanet L. Steenkamp  
**PERMANENT SECRETARY**



14.7.17.  
**DATE**

## ANNEXURE A

### **National Archives of Namibia**

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