

REPAIRING COLLAPSED PERSONNEL RECORDS SYSTEMS¹

Neglected personnel records systems tend to be congested with files that are not required on a daily basis. These files may relate to individuals who have been transferred to another department or to an executive agency or privatised organisation as well as to staff who have died, resigned, retired or been retrenched. In such overcrowded storage conditions, it is almost impossible to provide the information ministries need.

One of the first and most significant steps in repairing these systems is to identify and physically remove those files that have not been used for a designated period, such as ten years or fifteen years. As these files will still be needed for calculating pensions or entitlements, they should be systemically transferred to secure, low-cost storage.

Once the files have been transferred to a records centre, it will be necessary to create a finding aid capable of bringing together all files relating to a given individual. A number of options are available, including creating a large card index, developing a computerised database using customised software or inputting information into an off the shelf database programme.

One approach to decongestion is described below. This approach works best in instances where it has been decided that the master file will be held by the employing ministry and where the payroll or some other definitive list of staff can be used to identify who works for each ministry. An analysis of the government's precise requirements would need to be undertaken before this method could be introduced.

Step 1

The method divides all personal files into four categories:

- A: staff currently working for the ministry
- B: staff who used to work for the ministry but who have been transferred elsewhere
- C: staff no longer in the service, or those who have been retrenched, have retired, resigned, dismissed or have died. Further appraisal and selection will be required to identify files that could be safely destroyed
- D: staff whose status is unclear and whose files can be progressively eliminated by allocation to other categories.

¹ Quoted from Pages 99-102 of the module on the *Management Personnel Records*, which forms part of the International Records Management Trust's *Managing Public Sector Records: A Training Programme*

This process progressively eliminates duplicate or unnecessary files from the system by:

- decongesting the registries of category C files
- reorganising category A files so that they can be retrieved more easily
- reducing the category B backlog by merging them with the file held by the current employer.

The process is illustrated below in Figure 1.

Step 2

Once the registry area is cleared of files not in active use, the task of repairing the system will seem more achievable. The next stage is to address the issue of duplicate files.

Where the intent is to introduce computerisation, the decongestion exercise should be timed to coincide and support the development of the electronic system. If possible, a records management project should precede the implementation of the computerised personnel systems in any particular order to avoid including data from files relating to employees no longer in the civil service.

Step 3

Improve the quality and completeness of personal files, by:

- clarifying what should be held on the open file and on a confidential file
- separating master files from working files
- encouraging better records management practices by
 - ◇ improving career development of records officers
 - ◇ training
 - ◇ auditing the accuracy and comprehensiveness of personal files.

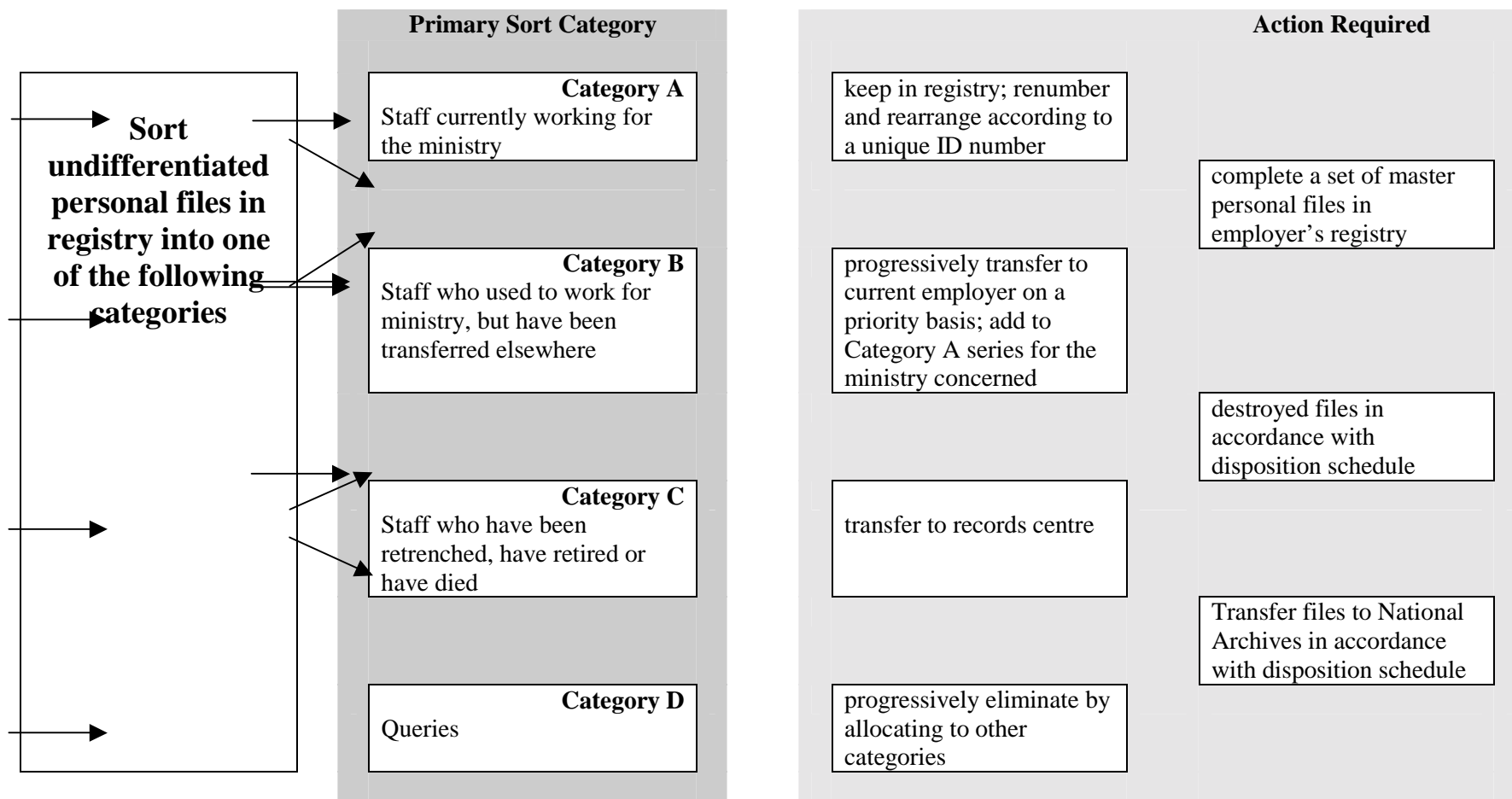


Figure 1: The Decongestion Process