



An Chartlann Náisiúnta
National Archives

Guidance on using capstone method for managing email

Guidance Note

Contents

Document Control	4
1. Introduction	5
2. Pilot project with the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media	6
2.1 Methodology	7
3. Guidance for operational and supporting administration grades	8
3.1 Mailboxes within scope	9
3.1.1 Service Officer/Head Service Officer	10
3.1.2 Clerical Officer and Temporary Clerical Officer	10
3.1.3 Executive Officer	11
3.1.4 Staff Officer	11
3.1.5 Generic mailboxes	11
3.1.5.1 Generic mailboxes (external)	12
3.1.5.2 Generic mailboxes (internal)	12
3.1.5.3 Generic mailboxes (Contractors)	12
4. Promotion of staff to higher grades	13
5. Equivalent grades: professional and technical staff	13
6. Departmental mailbox policy	14
7. Compliance with GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation)	14
8. Appraisal of mailboxes and departure of staff	15
9. Next steps	15
Appendix 1	16
Mailboxes to be retained for transfer to the National Archives	16
Non-standard grades	16
Appendix 2	17
National Archives Appraisal Request: Application for Disposal of Electronic Mailboxes	17

Document Control

Document title	Guidance on using the capstone method for managing email
Reference number	Guidance Note 03/2025
Version	1.0
Date	April 2025
Status	Approved
Contributors to this version	Keepers and Senior Archivists, Digital Management Division and Archives and Government Services Division
Document objectives	To provide guidance on the management of email mailboxes using grade as an appraisal tool.
Intended recipients for final document	Departments and agencies subject to the National Archives Act, 1986
Approving body for final document	National Archives
Date approved	May 2025
Date of issue	May 2025
Review date	Ongoing
Contact for review	Keepers and Senior Archivists, Digital Management Division and Archives and Government Services Division

1. Introduction

Capstone is a policy developed by the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in the United States¹. This policy uses hierarchical structures evident across the American Civil Service to manage email, which has proliferated over the past 30 years. This approach applies a logic of grade and overall role profile to the appraisal of a mailbox and classifies the mailbox as a class of records for the purpose of retention or disposal. While this process will not overcome all of the challenges posed by the management of email, it is intended to identify mailboxes, based on grade, that can be assessed at a macro level, which in turn allows focus of resources on mailboxes more likely to contain evidential records and records worthy of permanent preservation as archives².

Traditional filing mechanisms are not suited to email management, and in many instances, email is no longer filed with associated documents within a structured filing system. Print to file policies have broken down as email and digital recordkeeping have proliferated. Regardless of whether such a system is in place, print to file policies are unsustainable and create risk of loss of evidential value as technical and administrative metadata is lost in the process of removing records from their associated digital systems.

This guidance note relates to general service grades from Service Officer (SO) to Executive Officer (EO), and to certain classes of generic mailboxes (excluding project or contractor mailboxes).

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1. <https://www.archives.gov/files/records-mgmt/email-management/final-capstone-white-paper.pdf>
 2. <https://www.archives.gov/files/records-mgmt/resources/capstone-implementation-assessment-report.pdf>

2. Pilot project with the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media

In 2024, the National Archives carried out a pilot project to test proof of concept and implementation of a Capstone approach to email management within an Irish context using the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (D/TCAGSM). This Department is the parent department of the National Archives, and ICT systems infrastructure, including mailboxes, is supported by D/TCAGSM.

No departmental records, including email, can be disposed of without authorisation of the Director of the National Archives. In order to determine whether records are worthy of permanent preservation as archives, section 7 of the National Archives Act, 1986 permits officers of the National Archives to access records held by a Department of State or body subject to the National Archives Act. In order to facilitate appraisal, the provisions of section 7 were used to access a sample of mailboxes and email management systems across various grades within D/TCAGSM.

2.1 Methodology

A large sample of mailboxes of retired staff across relevant grades were appraised as part of the pilot project. Access was also provided to the D/TCAGSM email management system. Clear patterns in content were evident and all mailboxes within scope of this guidance contained routine operational records that reflected the relevant competencies and role profiles defined by the Public Appointments Service.

The nature of the official content of the mailboxes included organisation of meetings, management of staff rotas, office supplies and room bookings, routine administration, internal and external correspondence on routine matters, requests from more senior colleagues for support. None of the mailboxes surveyed contained records that would be classed as policy or decision-making, or records that are unlikely to be captured elsewhere in more senior colleagues' mailboxes.

Authorisation for disposal should also be contingent on the clear identification of mailboxes of the grades set out below. Where an individual has been promoted above the grade to which disposal authorisation applies, the Department should ensure the mailbox is wiped within a specified period of time or is retained permanently in line with the Capstone approach³. Where such demarcation and identification is not possible, including for legacy mailboxes, such authorisation should not apply and mailboxes should be retained until appraised by the National Archives.

3. For further details see: 4. Promotion of staff to higher grades

3. Guidance for operational and supporting administration grades

This document will focus on grades from Service Officer to Executive Officer (EO). Further refinement beyond EO grade will require a more nuanced assessment of roles and functions within Departments of State, which is outside scope of this current guidance.

It is the view of the National Archives at this time that mailboxes of all grades from Higher Executive Officer (HEO) and equivalent professional and technical grades upwards **should be retained** permanently.

Further refinement of HEO (and equivalent professional and technical grades) as a starting point for the implementation of a Capstone approach within the Irish civil service is likely, particularly for entry-level positions at specialist and technical grades.

However, to test these concepts and their application within an Irish context, initial emphasis is placed on grades that are unlikely to contain records of evidential value or those that contribute to policy development and implementation. These grades are also more numerous and constitute the majority of mailboxes held by Departments (Service Officer to Executive Officer).

There are exceptions to every rule, however, and there is no obligation on Departments to implement disposal authorisation, even where a disposal certificate is issued by the National Archives. In such instances, decisions on further retention are solely for each Department to make and the National Archives plays no role here. This may be necessary within specialised areas of a Department where the role of the CO or EO has evolved beyond the generic role profile, or where mailboxes of individuals with long service, including detailed institutional knowledge, is deemed to warrant further retention to support business or operational needs. This may also be the case in instances of 'acting up' roles that did not result in permanent promotion to the requisite archival grade (i.e. Higher Executive Officer (HEO) and equivalent).

3.1 Mailboxes within scope

- Head Service Officer
- Service Officer
- Clerical Officer
- Temporary Clerical Officer
- Executive Officer
- Staff Officer
- Generic mailboxes (with the exception of project or contractor mailboxes)

In carrying out this assessment of mailboxes the following assumptions have been made:

- The contents of the mailboxes align with overall role profiles and duties assigned to the grades in question as set out in the Public Appointments Service guidance⁴.
- Mailboxes relevant to the grades in scope are identifiable based on information available through reliable sources such as HR records.
- The assessment did not consider specialist roles that may align with grades lower than HEO. In such instances, disposal authorisation would be contingent on further assessment and information of the roles and duties.

4. <https://www.publicjobs.ie/en/information-hub/capability-framework>

3.1.1 Service Officer/Head Service Officer

In accordance with general guidance issued by the Public Appointments Service, the duties of a Service Officer include:

- Reception desk duties, including dealing with queries and deliveries from colleagues and visitors both in person and by telephone.
- Security duties, including supervision of reception areas, entrance gates, car parks, doors, alarms.
- Collection, sorting and delivery of internal and external mail to include letters, parcels, newspapers and periodicals.
- Key-holder duties, including opening and locking of offices.
- Van driving duties.
- Other duties as assigned by line management from time to time as appropriate to the role.

The duties of a Head Service Officer include the duties above, as well as management of staff leave and rotas.

3.1.2 Clerical Officer and Temporary Clerical Officer

In accordance with general guidance issued by the Public Appointments Service, the duties of a Clerical Officer and Temporary Clerical Officer⁵ include:

- Administrative support and general office duties supporting colleagues across all business areas, including customer service, finance, HR, marketing, IT, recruitment, policy and communications.
- Administrative support and general office duties in support of professional and technical specialist areas of operation.

5. <https://www.publicjobs.ie/en/information-hub/capability-framework/clerical-officer>

3.1.3 Executive Officer

In accordance with general guidance issued by the Public Appointments Service, the duties of an Executive Officer⁶ include:

- Drafting proposals relating to policy issues and legislation.
- Managing teams and projects in government departments and agencies.
- Dealing directly with the public to deliver services and initiatives.
- Many other roles and activities to support the work of the organisation.

The Executive Officer role is a first-level management role in all government departments and agencies. This role encompasses both project management and staff management across a wide range of business areas including customer service, finance, HR, marketing, IT, recruitment, policy, compliance, communications, and administration, amongst many other areas.

3.1.4 Staff Officer

In accordance with the aims of the Civil Service Renewal Plan and the Haddington Road Agreement (2014), the grade of Staff Officer amalgamated with Executive Officer in 2017. Although this grade will not arise for new entrants or promotions post-2017, legacy mailboxes of Staff Officers who retired prior to this change will exist. This amalgamation occurred because the role of Staff Officer aligned over time with that of Executive Officer, however, Staff Officers were paid at a lower rate.

The content of mailboxes of Staff Officers mirrors that of Executive Officers.

3.1.5 Generic mailboxes

Generic mailboxes used across Departments by various sections to centralise routine correspondence or for circulation of emails. These mailboxes should be used for administrative and operational purposes only.

6. <https://www.publicjobs.ie/en/information-hub/capability-framework/executive-officer>

3.1.5.1 Generic mailboxes (external)

External mailboxes are used for public engagement, routine queries and dissemination of information. The contents of these mailboxes are normally administrative and operational in nature. Normally queries that require escalation or further investigation are assigned to a designated staff member and removed from the generic mailbox, thereby generating a further record where necessary. In these instances, the email will form part of the relevant file and the appropriate retention period applied at that point.

Examples of external mailboxes include info@, specific schemes or grant application processes etc.

3.1.5.2 Generic mailboxes (internal)

Internal mailboxes are frequently used to disseminate circulars or general information across a Department, as well as for internal routine queries between staff in different units or sections. The documents themselves usually form part of records created and held by the originating section or external Department, such as the Department of Finance. In these instances, email is used as a mechanism to facilitate widespread communication or dissemination of information and not for any other purposes. For mailboxes specific to a functional area, their contents are similar to that of external mailboxes in that they are dealing with routine administrative and operational queries. Like external mailboxes, queries that require escalation or further investigation are assigned to a designated staff member and removed from the generic mailbox, thereby generating a further record where necessary.

Examples of internal mailboxes include Learning & Development, Office Services, Wellbeing, Finance Helpdesk, ICT, Records Management, and Press Office.

3.1.5.3 Generic mailboxes (Contractors)

Mailboxes assigned to contractors as part of defined project work are outside scope and should be retained until further appraised. These mailboxes may also be required for auditing purposes to comply with public funding requirements. The retention period applied should reflect this.

4. Promotion of staff to higher grades

Records management procedures and retention policies within Departments should reflect the Capstone approach to email management and retention of mailboxes. This should include procedures for the promotion of individuals from non-archived grades to archived grades (e.g. a prescribed retention period for a mailbox prior to promotion in line with business needs). Where such demarcation is not clear, the mailbox should be retained until further appraised by the National Archives. In the case of 'acting up' roles, it is a decision for the Department whether a temporary role that did not result in a permanent promotion warrants retention. A risk assessment may be required by the Department to determine whether the manual input required to identify such mailboxes is appropriate and proportionate.

5. Equivalent grades: professional and technical staff

This guidance focuses on general service grade staff. Where an equivalent grading occurs for professional and technical staff, it is recommended that the National Archives are contacted to discuss the duties of this role and how it aligns with the duties of the relevant grade. Over time it is envisaged that a list of professional and technical grades will be made to facilitate disposal as appropriate.

6. Departmental mailbox policy

An email management policy should be developed as part of an overall records management strategy. Staff across all grades should be routinely reminded of their obligations in this regard and the potential for retention of non-work related correspondence in mailboxes as part of a Department's obligations under the National Archives Act, 1986.

The use of work mailboxes for personal purposes should be actively discouraged.

Regardless of any further refinement of the Capstone approach, Departments should incorporate an archiving-by-design approach to the management of mailboxes of senior personnel, especially all heads of Divisions and Management Board⁷.

7. Compliance with GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation)

Mailboxes surveyed as part of the proof of concept contained substantial amounts of non-official and personal correspondence, including personal data and special category personal data, which is retained on Departmental servers. This included personal photographs of children and other third parties with no connection to the Department, and who are unlikely to have any knowledge of their image and personal information having been shared and stored on a government network.

These records are not generated in connection with the official functions of a Department and would not fall within derogations for retention beyond business use in article 5(e) of GDPR for archiving purposes in the public interest, historical, scientific or statistical research in accordance with article 89 of GDPR. The continued retention of such data by the Department may constitute a breach of GDPR and the Data Protection Act, 2018.

7. 'Archiving by Design' is a principle of European Information Governance developed under the European Commission to address the challenges of digital transformation. The definition of 'Archiving by Design' by the European Archives Group states that 'During the design or adjustment of information systems, the appropriate measures are taken to ensure that the information becomes, and stays, sustainably accessible'. In essence, it requires a collaborative approach by information and data specialists to define and future proof information systems and records series before they are created. See [Whitepaper AbD_en.pdf](#).

8. Appraisal of mailboxes and departure of staff

Prior to the departure of staff from a Department, through retirement or other means, where mailboxes are to be retained permanently, staff should remove personal emails. Further appraisal of all mailboxes will be required before the transfer of mailboxes to the National Archives. Once an individual has ceased employment, the mailbox should be closed and made read only. No further alterations or additions to the mailboxes should take place. The mailboxes should be stored in accordance with accepted digital preservation standards to ensure they remain authentic, reliable and accessible over time.⁸

9. Next steps

Disposal authorisation is required from the National Archives prior to the deletion of mailboxes. Please complete the attached appraisal form and return to query@nationalarchives.ie marked for the attention of the Head of Current records.

8. For basic guidance on digital preservation please see [Digital Preservation | The National Archives of Ireland](#)

Appendix 1

Mailboxes to be retained for transfer to the National Archives

- Minister
- Minister of State
- Secretary General or equivalent grades
- Assistant Secretary General or equivalent grades
- Ministerial advisor
- Private Secretary
- Secretary to the Secretary General
- Director
- Principal Officer or equivalent grades
- Assistant Principal Officer or equivalent grades
- Higher Executive Officer or equivalent grades
- Professional and technical grades from HEO equivalent
- Project mailboxes assigned to contractors

Non-standard grades

- Chief Executive Officer
- Chief Financial Officer
- Ambassador
- First Officer
- Third Officer

Appendix 2

National Archives Appraisal Request: Application for Disposal of Electronic Mailboxes

[Please download and complete a Word version of the form here.](#)

Please complete the questionnaire to provide the National Archives with as much information as possible to support your application for a records disposal certificate.

Please refer to the National Archives Guidance note on using capstone method for managing email.

Part 1: General information	
Contact details:	
Name of department/office/body:	
Division/section/unit:	
Name and grade of applicant:	
Name and contact email of Certifying Officer :	

Part 2: Overview of disposal application	
Mailboxes for disposal (mark as many as applicable):	
☐ Head Service Officer	☐ Service Officer
☐ Temporary Clerical Officer	☐ Staff Officer
☐ Generic mailboxes (please give details below)	☐ Clerical Officer
☐ Equivalent grade (please give details below)	☐ Executive Officer
Details:	
Date:	
Please indicate earliest date of records for which disposal authorisation is being sought (e.g. From 2004 onwards). This disposal application is for ongoing disposal.	
From (yyyy):	

Part 3: Systems
System:
What software systems are/were in use (e.g. MS Outlook, MS 365, Lotus Notes) and are back-up systems in use (e.g. MailMeter)?
Details:

Part 4: Extent and storage	
Series volume	
Please provide an approximate number of mailboxes per grade:	
Head Service Officer:	
Service Officer:	
Clerical Officer:	
Temporary Clerical Officer:	
Staff Officer:	
Executive Officer:	
Generic mailboxes:	
Equivalent grades (please specify):	
Please provide an approximate quantity of overall storage space being used for mailboxes identified for disposal:	
Estimate of extent (MB, GB, TB):	
Please provide an estimate of how many mailboxes will be disposed of annually per grade:	
Head Service Officer:	
Service Officer:	
Clerical Officer:	
Temporary Clerical Officer:	
Staff Officer:	
Executive Officer:	
Generic mailboxes:	

Storage:	
Where are the electronic records stored?	☐ Cloud storage ☐ Local servers ☐ External servers ☐ Other
Please give details of storage providers and back-up services:	

The National Archives
Bishop Street, Dublin 8,
D08 DF85, Ireland

www.nationalarchives.ie

Phone: +353 (0)1 407 2300
Lo Call: +353 1890 252424
Email: query@nationalarchives.ie

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