

The Freedom of Information Act and Records – Guidance for Staff

The Freedom of Information (FOI) Act is one of the three main pieces of legislation by which members of the public can request information from the School. The others are the Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) also discussed in this guidance, and the Data Protection Act, covered in the associated guidance.

What the Act entails

The Freedom of Information Act gives a general right to information held by the School, unless it falls under one of the exemptions. Requests should be made in writing, and we need to respond within 20 working days.

Records Management and FOI

In order to meet the 20 working days deadline, information should:

- Be filed by subject matter. Bringing as much as possible on a subject together will make locating all that information much easier. It also means that easier decisions on when to destroy this information can be made.
- Be available to more than one member of staff. If a request is received while a member of staff is not present, we still need to respond. Where information is stored and how to retrieve it needs to be shared with your team.
- Be accurate and reliable. Freedom of Information is based on recorded information, that is, information written down or filmed or voice recordings. If these records are not accurate or have been tampered with, we might still need to release them, which could give a false picture of the School.

Publication Scheme

We make some information publically available through the Publication Scheme. To update versions of information in the scheme please contact the Records Manager.

Dealing with a Freedom of Information request

When a request under FOI is received, the Records manager will communicate with those in possession of the information, and collate and assess the information, as required. All FOI requests are signed off by a Pro-Director as a matter of course. If you receive an FOI request, please forward it to the Records Manager.

Exemptions

Certain information is exempt from the FOI. Sometimes an exemption will be obvious from the initial request, for example if it concerns information already made publically available. Usually, however, it will be necessary to begin the process of collating the information before any such assessment about any exemptions can be made. Even if information is exempt, we have a duty to confirm that it exists.

A requester has the right to request an internal review if they are not satisfied with the response to a request. If, after the outcome of this, they are still not satisfied, they can make a complaint to the Information Commissioner's Office.

Working with External Institutions

The School has recently received a number of requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act, which have concerned work that academics have been doing for external organisations, such as other Higher Education Institutions or government departments. Further guidance on this subject is available [here](#).

The Environmental Information Regulations 2005

The purpose of the Environmental Information Regulations is to allow the general public to find out the School's impact on the environment. As such, information relating to energy and water use, refurbishment, recycling and waste management all falls under the Environmental Information Regulations. Like Freedom of Information, we have 20 working days to respond to an EIR request. We will also make some information publically available through the Publication Scheme.

The main difference between Environmental Information Regulations and Freedom of Information is that a request can be made verbally. If you receive a verbal request under the EIR, please contact the School's Records Manager.