

Handling Requests for Information – University of Nottingham Staff Guide

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 gives individuals the right to request access to information held by public authorities, including the University. Any person making a request for information has the right to be informed in writing whether the information requested is held and, where the information requested is held, to have it communicated to them. The University of Nottingham aims to comply fully with its obligations under the Act and to ensure that the service it provides for those wishing to gain access to information is simple, efficient, and effective.

Making Requests

To exercise these rights, a request must be made in writing (letter or email). The request must state the name of the applicant and an address for correspondence – an email address is sufficient in the latter respect.

Requests may be made to any member of staff in the University. If you receive a request for information that you would release routinely, please handle this as normal. If you receive a request for information that would not release routinely or a request which specifically mentions the Act, please forward it to the Governance and Logistics team in the Academic Services Division.

Time to Respond

The University must respond to requests within twenty working days by confirming the information requested is not held, providing the information requested, or issuing a refusal notice/a fees notice (where the information is exempt from release or a fee is payable, etc.). "Working days" here means any day other than a Saturday, Sunday, or public holiday. University close days not falling on a public holiday are still classed as working days.

Exempt Information

There is a presumption in favour of release in the interests of transparency and accountability. However, there are occasions where there are good reasons for not releasing information. The Act makes provisions for these categories of information which are exempt from the general right of access. They include information provided in confidence or covered by legal professional privilege, personal information, and information that is prejudicial to the workings of the University or to commercial interests. If you receive a request about which you have concerns, please contact us for advice.

Vexatious/Repeated Requests

The University is not obliged to respond to requests which are vexatious or repeated. A vexatious request is one which is designed to subject the University to inconvenience or harassment or where responding to the request would impose a significant burden in terms of expense or distraction. A repeated request is one where an applicant is provided with information only to request the same or substantially similar information before a reasonable period of time has passed. If you receive a vexatious or repeated request, please contact us for advice.

Larger Requests

The University is not obliged to respond to requests which would impose an unreasonable burden in terms of expense or staff time. Such requests are described as being above the "appropriate limit". This is defined as the maximum expense/staff time that public authorities are obliged to spend on any request. The limit is set at £450 or eighteen staff hours. If you feel that locating and/or retrieving the information would involve exceeding the appropriate limit, please contact us for advice. We will contact the applicant to see if their request can be refined and brought under the limit. If not, we will decide whether to issue a fees notice (offering to provide the information on payment of a fee) or a refusal notice.

Fees

The University will not normally make any charges for providing information where the costs of doing so are less than £50. In calculating costs the following rates have been agreed for use across the University: copying at 5p per page (black and white) and 10p per page (colour) and postage and packing at actual cost. If it is proposed to charge a fee the University must issue a fees notice to the applicant stating the estimated fee. When a fees notice is issued, the applicant has three months to pay – if no payment is received within that time, the University is not obliged to respond to the request. If you feel it may be appropriate to charge a fee, please contact us for advice.

Complaints

The University has a complaints procedure for any applicants unhappy with the way their request is handled. Full details are available in our *Freedom of Information Complaints – Information Sheet*. Any complaints should be addressed to Academic Services Division in the first instance and must be made within forty days of our original response. Applicants who go through the University's complaints procedure but are still not satisfied with the handling of their request may appeal to the Information Commissioner's Office. The Information Commissioner's Office is the UK's independent authority set up to promote access to official information and to protect personal information. Further details are available from their website at www.ico.gov.uk

Further Advice

If you need further advice regarding requests for information, in the first instance please speak to your School Manager/Office Manager or equivalent. You can also contact the Governance and Logistics Team in the Academic Services Division for more specific advice on exempt information categories, larger requests, etc. The University's Freedom of Information Manual of Office Procedures is available for staff needing detailed advice on handling requests for information.

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