

Freedom of Information Policy

1 Introduction

This Policy forms part of a suite of policies and procedures that support an information governance framework.

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FoIA) gives the public a right of access to information held by public authorities. Under the terms of this legislation the University, as a public authority as defined by the Act, is expected to respond to any request for recorded information (FoI requests) within 20 working days, subject to exemptions and limits on the amount of work to be undertaken. Environmental information regulations (EIR) require similar measures for all environmental information held by the University. The FoIA also requires that the University maintains a publication scheme which lists all recorded information which is routinely made available.

2 Purpose

Compliance with this legislation will be achieved through the implementation of controls (people, process, technology) including measures to ensure that FoI and EIR requests and internal reviews are recognised when they are received by the University, and that they are dealt with appropriately within the time limit.

Measures will also be implemented to ensure that appropriate advice is given by the Information Governance Office (IGO) regarding exemptions and the refusal of requests where necessary, to ensure that this is done in a way which is consistent and in line with the legislation.

A publication scheme will be maintained and kept up to date by the IGO working in consultation with all areas of the University which hold relevant information. Areas of the University which hold commonly requested information will consider proactive publication of relevant data.

3 Scope

This Policy applies to:

- all approved users of University records including all members of staff, as well as individuals conducting work at or for the University and/or its subsidiaries, who have access to University information ("staff"). This includes temporary, honorary, visiting, casual, voluntary and agency workers, students employed by the University and suppliers (this list is not intended to be exhaustive).
- all recorded information (including raw data) held and processed by the University. This includes any information created by the University or its staff in the course of University business. It includes information held in any system or format, electronic or manual.
- information held by third parties where that information is a record of services provided to the University; and
- all locations in which University records are held including off-campus locations and personal devices if they are used to hold or store University data.

4 Responsibilities and compliance framework

The University has a corporate responsibility to maintain its information and records management systems in accordance with the regulatory environment. This responsibility therefore extends to all staff who work with University records.

The IGO has responsibility within the University to provide advice and guidance in respect of Records Management and Data Protection, including FOI policy, practices and compliance.

It is the responsibility of Directors of Professional Services, Heads of Faculty Compliance and Heads of School Operations, or their nominees, to ensure that advice, guidance and policies issued by the IGO are implemented and complied with.

All staff have a responsibility to take up training which is offered to them in order to understand the essential requirements of the university FOI policy which apply to them.

Responsibilities of the Information Governance Office

4.1 The Information Governance Office is responsible for:

- a. ensuring that the University maintains a 'Publication Scheme' which can be easily accessed online by members of the public.
- b. producing and maintaining the University's Freedom of Information Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for use within the University.
- c. maintaining a register of all FOI and EIR requests and internal reviews to the University.
- d. providing FOI and EIR procedures and guidance.
- e. providing advice in support of this Policy and the FOI SOP.
- f. providing relevant FOI Training to staff where necessary.
- g. ensuring that requests and proposed responses are communicated to relevant key University stakeholders (including comms team) where appropriate.
- h. dealing with FOI and EIR requests, which includes co-ordinating the preparation and issue of responses to such requests.
- i. identifying if a previous response has been provided.
- j. communicating the final response to the requester in an appropriate format.
- k. ensuring that an 'Internal Review Process' is established and documented, details of which will be made available to FOI and EIR requestors as well as being published on the University website FOI pages. The Internal Review Process should be used to consider complaints from FOI and EIR requestors who feel that their request has not been dealt with;
 - i. in accordance with the required legislative timescales; or
 - ii. if they feel they have not received information which answers their request.

Responsibilities of Heads of Faculty Compliance, Heads of School Operations and Directors of Professional Services

4.2 Heads of Faculty Compliance, Heads of School Operations and Directors of Professional Services are considered to be the Information Asset Owners (IAO) for data held within the relevant division of the University. These role-holders, or their nominees, are responsible for:

- I. safeguarding the data within their directorate, faculty or school
- II. ensuring that any request by the IGO for information required for either a FOI or EIR response is acknowledged and provided in a timely manner back to the IGO.
- III. ensuring that the FOI SOP is complied with.
- IV. providing appropriate sign off ('Approval'), of all information prior to it being released to the Information Rights Team within the IGO after:
 - a. ensuring that the information provided to the IGO in response to an FOI or EIR request or subsequent internal review is accurate, relevant and not excessive.
 - b. working with the IGO to clarify a FOI or EIR request, when necessary.

- c. working with the IGO to discuss the use of exemptions, when appropriate
 - d. ensuring that the information is in an appropriate format to share
 - e. Raising any other concerns or considerations relating to the request
- V. ensuring that all staff members within the relevant division are aware of their responsibilities in line with the FoI Act as it applies to the University
- VI. ensuring that staff within their respective directorate, faculty or school comply with role-based FoI awareness training.

Responsibilities of the Procurement and Contracts teams

4.3 ensuring that all new contracts issued by the University in respect of their Directorate, faculty or school include a clause causing the parties to the contract to comply with FOI and EIR requests from the IGO where necessary.

All staff

4.4 All staff and other approved users of University held information must:

- I. be able to recognise FoI or EIR requests and know how to deal with them.
- II. Understand where to send FIO or EIR requests upon receipt, and the timescale for doing so.
- III. respond swiftly and as a matter of priority to any request for information received from the Information Governance Office to ensure that the University is able to fulfil its obligations within the prescribed time limits; and
- IV. be aware that any recorded information created by anyone working for and on behalf of the University is subject to FoI legislation, and that its content should be appropriate for public scrutiny. This also includes information recorded/stored on personal devices or notebooks.
- V. complete appropriate FOI training as provided by or via the IGO, when required to do so.

5 Monitoring compliance

Reports on the matters related to this Policy will be provided via regular reports to the Information Governance Committee (IGC).

6 Review of Policy

This Policy will be reviewed biennially or in the event of significant changes being required.

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Version amendment history

Version	Date	Reason for change
1.0	October 2012	Creation and approval by the Board of Governors
1.1	December 2017	Minor amendments: removal of detailed legislation; consistency with other SOPs; links updated – approved by IGC 23 Jan 2018
1.2	24 Jan 2018	Minor amendments requested by OGC – submitted for endorsement by PRC on 6 Feb 2018
1.3	12 Dec 2018	Links updated
1.4	23 March 2021	Minor amendments to clarify additional IGO responsibilities
2.0	09 Oct 2023	Amendments to reflect the need to, a) for Directors and Heads of School to explicitly authorise the release on information to the ‘Rights Team’ within the IGO, b) expand the publication scheme and c) make public, details of the ‘FOI Review Process’, following the recent UNIAC FOI Audit recommendations.

Document control box	
Policy title:	Freedom of Information Policy
Date approved:	28 th November 23
Approving body:	Information Governance Committee
Version:	2.0
Supersedes:	1.4
Previous review dates:	22 March 2021
Next review date:	November 2025
Related Statutes, Ordinances, General Regulations:	Ordinance 14 Intellectual Property Rights, Data Protection and the Use of Information Systems Statute XIII Part III disciplinary procedures for staff
Equality relevance outcome:	Medium
Related policies:	Data Protection Policy: http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/DocuInfo.aspx?DocID=14914 Records Management Policy: http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/DocuInfo.aspx?DocID=14916 Information Security Policy: http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/DocuInfo.aspx?DocID=6525 Acceptable Use Policy: http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/DocuInfo.aspx?DocID=16277
Related procedures:	Related Standard Operating Procedures: http://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/igo/policy-procedures/ University Records Retention Schedule: http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=6514
Related guidance and / or codes of practice:	BS ISO 15489-1:2016 standard for records management Information Governance Guidance: http://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/igo/policy-procedures/ IT Security guidance: http://www.itservices.manchester.ac.uk/secure-it/
Lead contact:	Head of Information Governance
Policy owner:	Director of Compliance and Risk