

## Why can't the University just search emails for my Subject Access Request? (Short version)

When you make a Subject Access Request (SAR), we cannot run an automated search of all staff emails. Email content is unstructured and inconsistent, and automated tools cannot reliably identify what is genuinely *your* personal data. Instead, **we must contact the relevant staff directly, and carry out manual, targeted searches.** This is because:

### 1. Automated searches are inaccurate

Emails don't use consistent identifiers (like full names or ID numbers). People may be referred to by first name, initials, or not named at all, so automated searches return large numbers of irrelevant results.

### 2. Most email references are not personal data

Routine comments about meetings, tasks or updates are not "about" an individual. Automated searches can't distinguish between genuine personal data and ordinary internal communication.

### 3. High risk of revealing someone else's data

Searching by full name would produce little to no results. Searching by first name would pick up emails about many different people with the same name, creating a real risk of disclosing another person's personal information.

### 4. It would be intrusive and disproportionate

Automated searches would require broad access to staff inboxes, exposing large amounts of sensitive, confidential or legally privileged material that is unrelated to your request, particularly as we would need to search by first name only.

### 5. Automated results are unmanageable

Email duplication (through replies and forwarding) multiplies irrelevant results, making it impossible to review safely or proportionately.

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### Why searches must be targeted

Data protection law requires searches to be **reasonable and proportionate**. It does not require organisations to carry out excessively broad or intrusive email searches, especially within unstructured information like email content.

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### How you can help us locate your data

To process your request effectively, please tell us:

- **Who** is likely to hold the information (up to five named staff or a specific team)
- **What** the communication relates to (topic or issue)
- **When** it happened (a clear date range)

This allows us to carry out focused manual searches and provide you with the correct information.