

Freedom of Information

The [Information Commissioner \(ICO\)](#) regulates the [Freedom of Information Act \(2000\)](#).

The Freedom of Information Act gives an individual the general right of access to all types of recorded information held by public authorities, although there are exemptions. Public authorities includes councils, schools, Universities, the NHS, the government and the police.

Subject to the exemptions, any person who makes a request to a public authority for information must be informed whether the public authority holds that information. If it does, that information must be supplied, subject to certain conditions.

Every public authority is required to adopt and maintain a publication scheme, setting out how it intends to publish the different classes of information it holds.

The Act gives access to all types of recorded information (not just information held electronically) and includes historical information held on disparate databases. The information also has to be made accessible in a timely, efficient manner; any request must be responded to within two weeks, regardless of where the information is coming from.

The act covers England, Wales and Northern Ireland, Scotland has its own act. There is a full listing of public authorities covered within [schedule 1](#) of the legislation.

The [ICO's website](#) gives a full round up of what authorities are obliged to do and the exemptions that exist.

There is also a MySociety project that is run by volunteers that collates all FOI requests and tracks their progress. The [What do they Know](#) website is searchable.

If you are considering making a request there is more info available on the [government](#) website.

It is not just the UK, there are many countries that have similar acts and [Freedom Info](#) details each country.

This document is for guidance only and should not be used as a substitute for specific legal advice.

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