

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION POLICY

REVIEW DATE:	SPRING 2023
NEXT REVIEW DATE:	SPRING 2025

Introduction

The Freedom of Information Act (2000) gives the general right of access to all types of recorded information held by public authorities. All Academies are obliged under the Freedom of Information Act to have in place a Publication Scheme similar to that relating to all maintained schools. This legislation gives the public the opportunity to find out what the School does and how we do it, and makes us more accountable.

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 provides public access to information held by public authorities.

It does this in two ways:

- public authorities are obliged to publish certain information about their activities; and
- members of the public are entitled to request information from public authorities.

3.2 The Act covers any recorded information that is held by a public authority in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and by UK-wide public authorities based in Scotland. Information held by Scottish public authorities is covered by Scotland's own Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002.

3.3 Recorded information includes printed documents, computer files, letters, emails, photographs, and sound or video recordings.

3.4 For a request to be dealt with according to the Freedom of Information Act, the requester must:

- contact the relevant authority directly;
- make the request in writing, for example in a letter or an email. They can make a verbal or written request for environmental information;
- give their real name; and
- give an address to which the authority can reply. This can be a postal or email address.

A requester does not have to:

- mention the Freedom of Information Act or Environmental Information Regulations, although it may help to do so;
- know whether the information is covered by the Freedom of Information Act or the Environmental Information Regulations; or
- say why they want the information.

Freedom of Information Principles

The main principle behind freedom of information legislation is that people have a right to know about the activities of public authorities, unless there is a good reason for them not to.

This means that:

- everybody has a right to access official information. Disclosure of information should be the default – in other words, information should be kept private only when there is a good reason and it is permitted by the Act;
- an applicant (requester) does not need to give you a reason for wanting the information. On the contrary, you must justify refusing them information;
- you must treat all requests for information equally, except under some circumstances relating to vexatious requests and personal data
- The information someone can get under the Act should not be affected by who they are. You should treat all requesters equally, whether they are journalists, local residents, public authority employees, or foreign researchers; and
- because you should treat all requesters equally, you should only disclose information under the Act if you would disclose it to anyone else who asked. In other words, you should consider any information you release under the Act as if it were being released to the world at large.

This policy covers:

- Scope
- Responsibilities
- Relationships

Scope of the policy

The Freedom of Information Act applies to all recorded information held by the Trust, the schools within the Trust and the SSF SCITT and its staff, regardless of format, storage medium and age.

The Act places the following requirements on the Trust:

- Information which is routinely published by the Trust is made available in accordance with the Trust's Publication Scheme
- Information which is not covered by the Publication Scheme is made available to enquirers on request, within 20 working days, unless a valid exemption or limit applies
- Exemptions under the Act and Regulations are applied appropriately, and in accordance with the legislation
- A fair and efficient internal appeal system is administered
- A properly structured approach to managing records is in place to ensure that essential records of the School's activities are maintained in appropriate detail

The Trust is obliged to produce a publication scheme setting out:

- The classes of information which will be published or which the school intends to publish
- The manner in which the information will be published
- Whether the information is available free of charge or on payment

Responsibilities

The Trust has a legal responsibility to comply with the Act and is accountable to the Information Commissioner. The person with overall responsibility for this policy is the CEO.

The CEO is responsible for the day-to-day management of compliance with the Act. This includes the development of procedures, guidance and standards of good practice; their promotion to staff through training and outreach; the maintenance and periodic review of the Freedom of Information Publication Scheme; the co-ordination of responses to more difficult or complex information requests; and the provision of advice and assistance on Freedom of Information issues.

All staff have a responsibility to respond to requests for information in accordance with the Act and to provide all the necessary assistance when requested to do so for the purpose of responding to requests for information.

Relationship with existing policies

This policy has been formulated within the context of the following Trust documents:

- Management and retention of records policy
- GDPR Data protection policy
- Secure data handling policy

Compliance with this policy will in turn facilitate compliance not only with information-related legislation (specifically DPA 2018 and the GDPR data protection laws that came into force on 25 May 2018) but also with other legislation or regulations (including audit, equal opportunities and research ethics) affecting the school.

The Trust Board are responsible for maintenance of this policy and will review it every two years.