

Freedom of Information Policy

1. Introduction

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 (“the Act”) and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (“the Regulations”) provide individuals and organisations with the right to request information held by public authorities.

We are fully committed to the provisions of the Act and the Regulations, and support their underlying principles of openness and transparency.

2. Purpose

This policy aims to provide a framework to comply with these provisions, uphold their principles and meet our obligations under these laws.

In particular we want to ensure that:

- We make a significant amount of information about the University available to the public as a matter of course through our website and publication scheme
- We make other information readily available on request and deal with requests in a timely manner and in accordance with the provisions of the Act

3. Publication Scheme

We have adopted the model publication scheme produced by the Information Commissioner’s Office, and this is available on our website (www.ncl.ac.uk/foi).

The publication scheme sets out:

- The types of information we make available to the public as a matter of course
- How we make the information available
- Whether or not a fee must be paid for the information

The scheme will be reviewed and updated as necessary on a regular basis, taking into account any revised guidance from the Information Commissioner’s Office.

4. Requests for Information

Any recorded information that we hold that is not already available to the public through our publication scheme can be requested. Requests must be made in writing, and we must respond to them within 20 working days.

Anyone who submits a written request has the right to:

- Be told whether the information is held
- Receive a copy of the information that is held, subject to exemptions
- Request an internal review if they are unhappy with our response

- Ask the Information Commissioner's Office to investigate if they are still unhappy following the internal review

A request for information may arrive at any part of the University and can be made by anyone, and it does not have to mention the Act to be a valid request.

5. Charges and Fees

We will publish any fees that might be charged for information we make available through our publication scheme, although the majority will be free of charge.

We do not have to comply with requests if the cost of responding would exceed the appropriate limit (as specified in the Fees Regulations). We will offer advice and assistance wherever possible in these instances to help requesters to narrow their requests down.

We may charge for reasonable printing, photocopying and postage costs involved in responding to requests.

6. Internal Reviews

If someone is unhappy with our response to their request for information then they have the right to ask for an internal review.

We will aim to respond to a request for review and to provide a full response within 20 working days of receiving it, unless it is a particularly complex query where extra time is needed. Reviews will be carried out by our appointed reviewer, the University Librarian, unless he was involved in the original request.

If the requester is unhappy with the outcome of the internal review they can ask the Information Commissioner to look into their complaint.

7. Environmental Information Regulations

We will provide access to environmental information through the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 ("EIR"). These regulations set out an access regime that is broadly similar to the FOI Act. There are some small, but significant, differences with the EIR, especially in terms of exceptions from the right of access and charging for information provided.

8. Training

We will provide appropriate training for all relevant staff and will include awareness training at induction.

9. Roles and Responsibilities

University Registrar

The University Registrar has overall responsibility for ensuring that the University's legal obligations are met and has responsibility for internal and external governance and corporate accountability. The University Registrar has been designated as the officer with overall responsibility for policy compliance.

Information Security Officer (Compliance)

- Advise on policy and best practice
- Draw up guidance material in line with best practice
- Promote policy compliance
- Coordinate and respond to freedom of information requests received by the University

Senior Managers

Senior managers all have a responsibility for ensuring that freedom of information issues within their areas are managed in a way that meets the provisions of this policy.

All Staff

- Be aware of the FOI Act and what it means to us
- Follow the policy and procedures for handling FOI requests
- Ensure that all requests are logged with the Information Security Officer (Compliance)

10. Relationship with Existing Policies

Related policies and guidance documents are as follows:

- Records Management Policy
- University Records Retention Schedule
- Email Retention and Usage Policy
- Email Etiquette Guidance
- Managing Emails as Records Guidance
- Data Protection Policy

11. Authority and Review

This policy was approved at a meeting of Council on 12 December 2011 and is effective as of that date. The policy will be reviewed periodically.

A breach of this policy could result in disciplinary proceedings.

Steve Williams, Director of University IT
22 November 2011