



Department of  
**Finance and  
Personnel**

[www.dfpni.gov.uk](http://www.dfpni.gov.uk)

# **Freedom of Information POLICY STATEMENT**

Version 1.0

Implementation Date: 1 December 2005

Review Date: 1 December 2006

## DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

# FREEDOM OF INFORMATION POLICY STATEMENT

### Introduction

1. The Department of Finance and Personnel is fully committed to compliance with the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the Act). The aim of the Act is to promote a culture of greater openness and accountability within the Department and facilitate better understanding of how we carry out our duties, why we make the decisions we do and how public money is spent.

### Policy Statement

2. The Act gives members of the public the right to access information held by the Department, subject to some exemptions. The Department supports this culture of openness and will ensure compliance with the Act by:

- putting in place appropriate procedures and practices;
- making as much information as possible available through its publication scheme;
- carrying out regular audits to ensure that all appropriate information is included in the publication scheme;
- making the provision of information a priority by responding to written requests within the 20 working day deadline;
- ensuring that all staff are aware of their responsibilities and that training is an ongoing process;
- continuing to protect personal information entrusted to it by disclosing that information only in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.

### Implementation

3. In the Department, responsibility for ensuring compliance with the Act rests with the Departmental Information Manager who works within the Information Management Unit. The Departmental Information Manager will provide advice and assistance to Business Area Information Managers in dealing with requests for information. He will also have overall responsibility for:

- the provision of Freedom of Information (FOI) training for staff within the Department;
- the development and maintenance of the FOI Staff Handbook;
- carrying out compliance checks to ensure adherence with the Act throughout the Department.

4. Business Area Information Managers have been appointed in all Directorates/Agencies and will be responsible for ensuring compliance with the Act and this policy within these areas. They will also provide staff in their Directorates/Agencies with training and advice in dealing with requests for information. A list of current officials responsible for FOI issues can be found at paragraph 17.

### **Staff Responsibilities**

5. All staff have responsibilities under the Act. They must ensure that any request for information they receive is handled in compliance with this policy and in accordance with the Department's FOI Staff Handbook. In general staff are responsible for:

- familiarising themselves with this policy and the FOI Staff Handbook;
- identifying FOI requests quickly and ensuring they received prompt attention;
- responding to all requests for information promptly and within 20 working days;
- disclosing information, where possible, and only withholding certain information in accordance with the exemptions laid down in the Act;
- supporting members of the public in formulating or expressing requests for information;
- working with any partners and contractors to ensure that the Department can meet its FOI obligations, including the disclosure of any information they hold on the Department's behalf;
- consulting with third parties before disclosing information that could affect their rights and interests. However, as in accordance with the Act, the final decision on disclosure will rest with the Department;
- recording all FOI requests and responses and monitoring their performance in handling requests and complaints;
- contacting their Business Area Information Manager when advice and assistance is required;
- providing input to the publication scheme as required;
- adhering to the [Code of Practice on the Management of Records](#) (Section 46 Code) and Departmental records management policies and procedures.

### **Publication Scheme**

6. To comply with the Act, the Department has a publication scheme in place which sets out:

- the classes of information available
- whether the information is available free of charge or if a payment is required;
- guidance on how information can be obtained.

7. The aim of the scheme is to make information routinely available to the public. It can be viewed on the DFP website at [www.dfpni.gov.uk](http://www.dfpni.gov.uk). A copy of the publication scheme may be obtained from the:

Departmental Information Manager  
Information Management Unit  
Rosepark Annexe  
Rosepark House  
Upper Newtownards Road  
BELFAST  
BT4 3NR

Email: [info.csd@dfpni.gov.uk](mailto:info.csd@dfpni.gov.uk)  
Tel:(028) 90 526747

8. The Departmental Information Manager shall ensure that the publication scheme is approved by the Information Commissioner and is regularly reviewed and maintained.

### **Requests for Information**

9. The Act gives individuals requesting information two rights:

- (i) the right to be informed whether the Department holds certain information; and, if so
- (ii) the right to have that information communicated to them.

A request for information not included in the publication scheme must be in writing, which can include email and fax. Requests can be met in a variety of ways such as providing a copy of the original document either electronically or in hard copy, providing a summary of the information or by arranging for the applicant to visit the Department to read the documents. Where possible, the information will be provided in the format requested by the applicant.

### **Managing Requests for Information**

10. The Act requires the Department to respond to any written request for information promptly and within 20 working days. However, this timescale can be extended to give full consideration to the public interest test. If the deadline is not expected to be met, the applicant will be advised of the reason for the delay and the anticipated reply date.

### **Exemptions**

11. Certain information held by the Department will be classified as exempt under the Act. The Act provides for both absolute and qualified exemptions. Where information is absolutely exempt, there is no obligation under the Act to provide the requested information.

12. Most exemptions under the Act are qualified and are subject to a public interest test. Where information requested falls within the terms of a qualified exemption, a senior member of staff within the Department will assess whether the public interest lies in disclosing the information to the applicant or withholding the information.

13. Detailed information on exemptions and the public interest test can be found in sections 10 and 12 of the Department's FOI Staff Handbook. Further advice can be obtained from the relevant Business Area Information Manager or the Departmental Information Manager.

### **Appeals and Complaints**

14. Any complaints about how the Department has handled requests for information under the Act should, in the first instance, be addressed to:

Departmental FOI Appeals Officer  
Department of Finance and Personnel  
Information Management Unit  
Rosepark Annexe  
Rosepark House  
Upper Newtownards Road  
BELFAST  
BT4 3NR

15. An internal review of how the request was handled will be carried out within 20 working days. Procedures are set out in Section 16 of the DFP FOI Staff Handbook.

16. If the applicant is not content with the outcome of the internal review, they may complain to:

The Information Commissioner  
Wycliffe House  
Water Lane  
Wilmslow  
CHESHIRE  
SK9 5AF

### **Departmental Contacts**

17. Freedom of Information contacts in the Department are:

Information Management Unit	John Morgan	Ext 26747
	Karen McCready	Ext 26276

Business Area Information Managers:

Central Personnel Group	Declan Leonard	Ext 42064
Central Finance Group	Joe Long	Ext 68032

Central Services Group	Lorraine McCaffrey	Ext 26281
Central Procurement Division	Robert Fullerton	Ext 26527
Business Development Service	John Collins	Ext 27427
Rate Collection Agency	Mario Galloway	Ext 52091
Valuation and Lands Agency	Shirley Chambers	Ext 43916
Land Registry for Northern Ireland	Stephen McHugh	Ext 51633
NI Statistics & Research Agency	Gerry McGrath	Ext 67140
Departmental Solicitor's Office/ Office of Law Reform	Anne Sullivan	Ext 51161

### **Policy Awareness**

18. A copy of this policy statement will be given to all new members of staff and interested third parties. Existing staff and relevant third parties will be advised of the policy which will be posted on the Departmental intranet site and will be available through the publication scheme, as will any subsequent revisions. All staff and relevant third parties must be familiar with and comply with the policy at all times.

### **Further Information**

19. Any queries about Freedom of Information in the Department should be addressed to the relevant Business Area Information Manager or the Information Management Unit. Further information can also be found on the websites of the [Information Commissioner](#) and the [Department of Constitutional Affairs](#).