

Freedom of Information Policy

1. Background

1.1 The Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) gives the public a general right of access to information held by public authorities, subject to the conditions and possible exemptions of the Act. We (the University) are defined under Schedule 1 S53 of the FOIA as a public authority and therefore the activities we undertake as a public authority are subject to the Act.

1.2 Anyone, anywhere, may request information from a public authority subject to the Act, for any reason. It does not have to be specified as a request under FOIA to be a valid freedom of information request. The FOIA covers all information held by a public authority in any form or format. The aim of the FOIA is to foster a culture of openness and accountability across the public sector.

1.3 We are fully committed to compliance with the FOIA and its principle of public access to official information, wherever lawful, feasible and in the public interest.

2. Scope and Requirements

2.1 The FOIA applies to all information held by us and our associated bodies e.g. the University of Westminster Students' Union, in whatever format, both current and historical.

2.2 The FOIA imposes on us several requirements, which we endeavour to ensure are met to the best of our capabilities:

2.2.1 To adopt and maintain a Publication Scheme. A Publication Scheme is a commitment to publish categories of information proactively into the public domain. This includes information made readily available on our website.

2.2.2 To provide advice and assistance to anyone seeking information about the University.

2.2.3 On receipt of a written request with return name and address, to provide access to information which has not been published or otherwise made available. The request should accurately describe the information required.

2.2.4 To acknowledge the receipt of any written request and to raise any need for clarification or other aspects of the request that may require discussion with the requestor as soon as possible.

2.2.5 To inform the requestor, in writing, whether we hold the information requested. If we do hold it, subject to any applicable exemptions or fees, to communicate the requested information to the requestor before or no later than 20 working days from the receipt of the request.

2.2.6 If information is exempt from disclosure, to send to the requestor a notice which specifies any exemption applied and explaining the reason why.

2.2.7 If we have sought clarification, to issue the requestor with a refusal notice if no clarification has been received within a reasonable period.

2.2.8 If any fee is deemed chargeable, to send to the requestor a fees notice stating the amount required.

2.2.9 To internally review any complaint or appeal made in relation to our decisions on the FOIA disclosure.

2.2.10 To inform the requestor of the Information Commission (IC) appeals process.

3. The FOIA in Practice

3.1 We will ensure that appropriate management systems and procedures are in place to enable these policy requirements to be met in practice. In support of which, we will:

3.1.1 Establish and maintain a records management program which will strive to be compliant with the requirements of the IC's Section 46 Code of Practice – Records Management, made under the FOIA.

3.1.2 Manage requests for information in accordance with the Lord Chancellor's Code of Public Authorities' Functions, also made under the FOIA, and in keeping with any relevant guidance issued by the IC and the Ministry of Justice.

4. FOIA Awareness and Training

4.1 The Information Compliance Team will provide guidance, support and training on the FOIA to all colleagues¹.

5. Reviews and Continuous Improvement

5.1 We will periodically review processes for managing FOIA requests and any associated complaints. We will implement any recommendations as part of a continuous process of improvement.

5.2 The Information Compliance Manager will monitor compliance with the FOIA quarterly, recording appropriate metrics. The Information Governance Advisory Group (IGAG) will review the metrics at each meeting.

5.3 When requested, and if necessary resources are available, we will supply metrics, information and views to external bodies such as Jisc or Committees of Parliament, to support the understanding and impact that the FOIA has on the higher education and wider information management sectors.

6. Policy Roles and Responsibilities

6.1 This policy is subject to the approval of the University Secretary and Chief Operating Officer on the recommendation of IGAG.

6.2 The Records and Archives Team, reporting to the Head of Library and Archives Service, is responsible for maintaining our records management program and associated policies and training.

6.3 The Information Compliance Team, reporting to the Head of University Governance, are responsible for:

6.3.1 Maintaining this policy.

6.3.2 Maintaining our Publication Scheme.

6.3.3 Managing and reporting FOIA requests.

6.3.4 Managing the process of a complaint and appeal against its decisions on FOIA requests and information disclosures.

6.3.5 Applying any relevant exemptions

6.3.6 Providing guidance, support and training on the FOIA.

6.3.7 Liaising with the IC on FOIA matters.

6.3.8 Supplying metrics, information and views to internal and external bodies in relation to FOIA as appropriate.

¹ All references to colleagues in the policy means the employees of the University of Westminster.

6.4 The Senior Information Risk Officer (SIRO) is responsible for conducting Internal Reviews.

7. Wider FOIA Roles and Responsibilities

7.1 All colleagues must:

7.1.1 Ensure that requests for information are handled in accordance with this policy and any associated guidance and procedures.

7.1.2 Promptly pass on requests for information that either name the FOIA, or are such that public disclosure is not usual, to the Information Compliance Team at foi@westminster.ac.uk.

7.1.3 Provide advice and assistance to requestors in line with this policy and any associated guidance or refer any enquiries to the Information Compliance Team at the above email address.

7.2 If you are involved in an FOI request, you should ensure requested information is accurate and made available to the Information Compliance Team in a timely manner.

7.3 Mishandling of requests for information could lead to a disciplinary investigation and additionally could be a breach of the law. If you have any concerns relating to information requests, you are advised to seek assistance and guidance from the Information Compliance Team at the above email address.

7.4 Additionally, you should be aware that it is a criminal offence to intentionally conceal, destroy or alter information that is the subject of an FOI request, to prevent it from being released.

8. Disclosures for senior management and those in public facing roles

8.1 If you are in senior management or a public facing role, you can reasonably expect more personal information to be disclosed about you due to the nature of your role in a public authority. We will consider current data protection legislation before making any such disclosures.

9. Digital accessibility

9.1 We are committed to ensuring our websites and content is digitally accessible according to the Public Sector Bodies Accessibility Regulations (2018). This policy is published on our website; and can be requested in a range of formats e.g. Word, PDF, plain text, alternative formats such as large print or Braille.

9.2 This policy is published on our website at <https://www.westminster.ac.uk/about-us/our-university/corporate-information/policies-and-documents-a-z>.

10 Version Record

Version	Date	Author	Description
1.0	26/03/2014	M. Bacon - Information Compliance Manager	UIGG Approved Version 1.0
2.0	16/11/2017	Information Compliance Team	Draft
2.0	10/01/2018	Information Compliance Team	IMBG (IG) Approved Version 2.0
2.1	22/01/2019	Information Compliance Team	Draft update of internal group names
2.1	17/04/2019	Information Compliance Team	IMBG(IG) Approved Version 2.1
2.2	14/12/2022	Information Compliance Team	Review and Draft update of internal group names
2.2	12/01/23	Information Compliance Team	IGAG Approved – Review January 2026

2.3	25/03/2025	Information Compliance Team	Updates agreed by IGAG (February 2025) Approved by USCOO and reported to UEB (March 2025) Review January 2026
2.4	17/03/2026	Information Compliance Team	Updates agreed by IGAG (February 2026) Approved by USCOO and reported to UEB (March 2026) Review January 2028