

26 September 2024

## **IC-330763-Z0M1**

### **Request**

You asked us:

*"I am requesting a copy of the ICO's provisional decision to fine the Advanced Computer Software Group over £6m."*

We have handled your request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the FOIA).

### **Our response**

I can confirm that we hold the information that you have requested, however it is being withheld at this stage as it relates to an open case. I have explained before the reasons for this.

### **FOIA section 31**

The information you have requested is exempt from disclosure under section 31(1)(g) of the FOIA. We can rely on section 31(1)(g) of the FOIA where disclosure:

*"would, or would be likely to, prejudice... the exercise by any public authority of its functions for any of the purposes specified in subsection (2)."*

In this case the relevant purposes contained in subsection 31(2) are 31(2)(a) and 31(2)(c) which state:

*"(a) the purpose of ascertaining whether any person has failed to comply with the law..."*

*(c) the purpose of ascertaining whether circumstances which would justify regulatory action in pursuance of any enactment exist or may arise ..."*

Section 31 is not an absolute exemption, and we must consider the prejudice or harm which may be caused by disclosure. We also have to carry out a public interest test to weigh up the factors in favour of disclosure and those against.

Our investigation into Advanced Computer Software Group is still ongoing. To release the information you have requested could prejudice the ICO's ability to conduct the investigation in an appropriate manner. Disclosure at this stage would discourage our ongoing discussions between the ICO and Advanced Computer Software Group and may damage our ability to conduct and conclude the investigation fairly and proportionately.

Disclosure is likely to result in other parties being reluctant to engage with the ICO in the future.

Any information released at this stage could be misinterpreted, which in turn could distract from the investigation process.

With this in mind, we have then considered the public interest test for and against disclosure.

In this case the public interest factors in disclosing the information are:

- increased transparency in the way in which the ICO conducts its investigations and decision making.

The factors in withholding the information are:

- the public interest in maintaining organisations' trust and confidence that their replies to the ICO's enquiries will be afforded an appropriate level of confidentiality;
- the public interest in organisations being open and honest in their correspondence with the ICO without fear that their comments will be made public prematurely or, as appropriate, at all; and
- the public interest in maintaining the ICO's ability to conduct the investigation into complaints as it thinks fit,

Having considered these factors, we are satisfied that it is appropriate to withhold the information at this stage.

Our needs to withhold the information will change over time, and whilst the information is being withheld at this stage, the same request may be handled differently in the future.

This concludes this response.

## Next steps

You can ask us to review our response. Please let us know in writing if you want us to carry out a review. Please do so within 40 working days.

You can read a copy of our full review procedure [here](#).

If we perform a review but you are still dissatisfied, you can complain to the ICO as regulator of the FOIA and EIR. This complaint will be handled just like a complaint made to the ICO about any other public authority.

You can [raise a complaint through our website](#).

## Your information

Our [Privacy notice](#) explains what we do with the personal data you provide to us, and set out your rights. Our retention schedule can be found [here](#).

Yours sincerely

Senior Information Access Officer



Information Access Team  
Risk and Governance Department, Corporate Strategy and  
Planning Service  
Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water  
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