

## **Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA)**

### **Decision notice**

**Date:** 30 June 2023

**Public Authority:** The Governing Body of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London

**Address:** Thornhaugh Street  
Russell Square  
London  
WC1H 0WG

#### **Decision (including any steps ordered)**

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1. The complainant requested information in relation to payments made by the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) to specific companies/agencies. By the date of this notice SOAS had not issued a substantive response to this request.
2. The Commissioner's decision is that SOAS has breached section 10(1) of FOIA in that it failed to provide a valid response to the request within the statutory time frame of 20 working days.
3. The Commissioner requires SOAS to take the following step to ensure compliance with the legislation.
  - SOAS must provide a substantive response to the request in accordance with its obligations under FOIA.
4. SOAS must take this step within 35 calendar days of the date of this decision notice. Failure to comply may result in the Commissioner making written certification of this fact to the High Court pursuant to section 54 of FOIA and may be dealt with as a contempt of court.

## Request and response

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5. On 4 April 2023, the complainant wrote to SOAS and requested information in the following terms:

"Dear School of Oriental and African Studies,

I am writing to you under the Freedom of Information Act (2000), to request information held by you.

I request an annual breakdown of the following, for the time period of 1st April 2020 to 1st April 2023 inclusive:

- SOAS's spending on external consultants
- The total number of individuals that held a 'consultancy agreement' or a consultancy contract with SOAS, by year.

If possible, I would also like an annual breakdown of the above information as follows, for the time period of 1st April 2020 to 1st April 2023 inclusive,

- Fees paid by SOAS to KPMG
- Fees paid by SOAS to Advance HE
- Fees paid by SOAS to Studiosity
- Fees paid by SOAS to ClearView Research
- Fees paid by SOAS to recruitment agencies
- Fees paid by SOAS to marketing agencies
- Fees paid by SOAS to IT business partners/ agencies
- Fees paid by SOAS to external consultants or providers as part of Human Resources operations
- Fees paid by SOAS to external consultants or providers for the purpose of grievance and disciplinary investigations

I would like this information in digital spreadsheet format.

Please do not hesitate to get in touch if I can clarify any of the above. I look forward to hearing from you within 20 working days."

6. SOAS wrote to the complainant on 4 April 2023, requesting clarification from the complainant in the following terms:

"Please can I clarify what information you are seeking in relation to "IT business partners/ agencies". The terms are probably too broad for us to provide you with the information you are interested in. Perhaps IT consultants would work better?"

7. The complainant confirmed that the term IT consultants would work well in place of the original request on 5 April 2023. To date, a substantive response has not been issued by SOAS.

## **Reasons for decision**

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8. Section 1(1) of FOIA states that:

“Any person making a request for information to a public authority is entitled –

  - (a) to be informed in writing by the public authority whether it holds information of the description specified in the request, and
  - (b) if that is the case, to have that information communicated to him.”
9. Section 10(1) of FOIA states that a public authority must respond to a request promptly and “not later than the twentieth working day following the date of receipt”.
10. On 7 June 2023 the Commissioner wrote to SOAS, reminding it of its responsibilities and asking it to provide a substantive response to the complainant’s request within 10 working days.
11. Despite this intervention SOAS has failed to respond to the complainant.
12. From the evidence provided to the Commissioner in this case, it is clear that SOAS did not deal with the request for information in accordance with FOIA. The Commissioner finds that SOAS has breached section 10(1) by failing to respond to the request within 20 working days and it is now required to respond to the request in accordance with FOIA.

## Right of appeal

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13. Either party has the right to appeal against this decision notice to the First-tier Tribunal (Information Rights). Information about the appeals process may be obtained from:

First-tier Tribunal (Information Rights)  
GRC & GRP Tribunals,  
PO Box 9300,  
LEICESTER,  
LE1 8DJ

Tel: 0203 936 8963

Fax: 0870 739 5836

Email: [grc@justice.gov.uk](mailto:grc@justice.gov.uk)

Website: [www.justice.gov.uk/tribunals/general-regulatory-chamber](http://www.justice.gov.uk/tribunals/general-regulatory-chamber)

14. If you wish to appeal against a decision notice, you can obtain information on how to appeal along with the relevant forms from the Information Tribunal website.
15. Any Notice of Appeal should be served on the Tribunal within 28 (calendar) days of the date on which this decision notice is sent.

**Signed .....**

**Michael Lea**  
**Team Manager**  
**Information Commissioner's Office**  
**Wycliffe House**  
**Water Lane**  
**Wilmslow**  
**Cheshire**  
**SK9 5AF**