

Data protection

A guide to ICO advisory visits



Introduction to advisory visits

Advisory visits involve a one day, informal visit, from the ICO to look at how your organisation works, what kind of personal information you hold and what you do with it. We can then give you practical advice about how you can make improvements to comply with the Data Protection Act.

Advisory visits are aimed at small to medium sized businesses, charities and not for profit organisations and public authorities. We are happy to work with organisations in the public and private sectors and will prioritise those that will benefit most from a visit.

An advisory visit is quick and easy to arrange. The benefits include:

- identifying good practice;
- helping to raise awareness of data protection;
- providing an opportunity to use the ICO's resources at no expense;
- helping identify your data protection risks and provide practical, pragmatic advice on how to avoid getting it wrong; and
- allowing you to share knowledge with trained, experienced, qualified staff.

An advisory visit will typically look at your procedures, systems, records and activities in order to:

- ensure that appropriate procedures are in place;
- verify that procedures are being followed; and
- provide practical advice.

There are three main areas that we will look at, however, the review will be tailored to your organisations and concentrate on the most relevant issues:

Security

We will review how you keep electronic and manual personal data secure. This might involve looking at physical security, IT network security, access to IT systems, training and reporting incidents.

Records management

We will review how you process records containing personal data including their creation, maintenance, and eventual destruction. For example, how you collect data, keep this information up to date, how you long you keep records and then dispose of them.

Requests for personal data

We will review how you handle individuals' requests for copies of their personal data and how you manage routine and one off disclosures to other organisations. For example, this could include what training you provide, how you record requests and how you respond.

Before the visit

An advisory visit is informal and we will talk to you about what we will be able to cover and what is relevant to your organisation. We will give you an information sheet to explain what you can expect from our visit. We will also ask you to complete a short questionnaire to return to us before our visit. We will discuss which members of your staff it would be beneficial for us to meet and what would be useful for us to see.

On the day

We will start with a short discussion around the questionnaire that you have completed. We will then meet with your chosen staff to discuss their work and how they process personal data. You will also have a chance to ask questions about processing personal data in your organisation.

After the visit

We will send you a short report within five days of our visit, which includes:

- the background to the visit;
- the areas we reviewed;
- a summary of findings identifying good practice and areas for improvement; and
- detailed observations and recommendations.

We will publish on our website that we have conducted an advisory visit with you which will remain on our website for one year.

Applying for an advisory visit

If you would like to apply for an advisory visit, please go to the 'How can I apply' section on the [Advisory visits page](#) of our website and follow the links.