

# Your rights to your information



# Teacher resources

The briefest glance through any newspaper today will almost certainly reveal at least one story about personal information being lost, stolen or misused in some way, sometimes with painful financial or personal consequences. Perhaps, as we continue to grow into a society that increasingly shops, banks, games, socialises and works online, we need to pause a little to think about our personal information, whom we share it with and how we can make sure that it's accurate and secure.

As the UK's independent authority set up to uphold information rights in the public interest, the **Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)** has commissioned a set of teaching materials to give teachers an introduction to information rights and provide them with a series of lesson activities. The materials will raise some of the



key issues with students, so that at a young age they can become aware of their information rights, understand the potential threats to their privacy, and know how to protect themselves.

## Why worry about personal information?



### News release: 24 January 2013

**The entertainment company Sony Computer Entertainment Europe Limited has received a monetary penalty of £250,000 from the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) following a serious breach of the Data Protection Act.**

**The penalty comes after the Sony PlayStation Network Platform was hacked in April 2011, compromising the personal information of millions of customers, including their names, addresses, email addresses, dates of birth and account passwords. Customers' payment card details were also at risk.**

**An ICO investigation found that the attack could have been prevented if the software had been up to date, while technical developments also meant passwords were not secure.**

Our personal information is valuable – it is the money that makes the world of the cybercriminal go round. Yet every day we will give out our personal information in some form or another – a phone number, an email address, bank details, shopping preferences – perhaps barely giving a thought to whom we are giving this information to, what they will use it for or whether they will keep it safe.

In a survey of over 4,000 young people carried out for the **ICO** in 2011, nearly nine out of 10 (88%) secondary school respondents and four out of 10 (39%) primary school respondents had a social networking site profile where they shared all manner of personal information, news and views. The survey also revealed, however, that 60% of the respondents had not read the privacy policies of the networking sites they used, while 32% didn't know what a privacy policy was, and 23% said they didn't know where to find it.<sup>1</sup>

Consumer research commissioned by Experian CreditExpert in 2012 found that the average person has 26 different online accounts. Worryingly, 24% of users use the same password for most profiles.

By and large, personal information held about us is stored securely and used legitimately, but even the best organisations make mistakes. If our personal information is wrong, out of date or not held securely, it can cause real problems. It's quite possible that inaccurate information could mean being unfairly refused a job, benefits, credit, or a place at college. Young people need to know how to identify the signs of things going wrong and understand how they can take action to put things right.

Anyone who processes personal information must comply with **eight principles of the Data Protection Act**, which make sure that personal information is:

- fairly and lawfully processed;
- processed for limited purposes;
- adequate, relevant and not excessive;
- accurate and up to date;
- not kept for longer than is necessary;
- processed in line with your rights;
- secure; and
- not transferred to other countries without adequate protection.

An important lesson for young people is that **data protection** isn't just about how organisations and companies store and use our personal information; we need to take personal responsibility too. It is estimated that a determined criminal needs only three pieces of personal information to begin to carry out an identity theft,<sup>2</sup> so young people need to learn early the value of their personal information, how to check it is accurate and how to keep it safe.

<sup>1</sup> Information rights should be embedded in schools, says ICO News release: 30 August 2011

<sup>2</sup> Metropolitan Police warning, 2012

### What is personal information?

- Where might my personal information be held?
- What could it be used for?
- What rights do I have over information about me?
- How can I keep my personal information safe?
- What about identity theft?



Experian CreditExpert estimates that more than 12 million pieces of personal data were traded online in the first four months of 2012.

As well as being able to check the personal information organisations hold about us as individuals, we also have rights as citizens under the Freedom of Information Act to request information from public authorities, helping us to better understand what public authorities are doing in our name and with our money. So, as active citizens, young people could use their rights to access information telling them how the country is run and how decisions about local services are made.

The Act gives individuals the right to ask a public authority for any official documents, for example, minutes of council meetings and details of public spending. The authority must then provide the information or explain why the information should not be disclosed. If a public authority refuses to release the information individuals can complain to the **ICO**.

### The role of the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)

The **Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)** is the UK's independent authority set up to uphold information rights. From data protection and electronic communications to **freedom of information** and environmental regulations, the **ICO** exists to uphold information rights in the public interest, promoting openness by public bodies and data privacy for individuals. For individuals that have a complaint that relates to data protection, the **ICO** may be able to investigate and take action on their behalf.

The **ICO** enforces and oversees some key pieces of legislation, which taken together provide a legal framework guaranteeing some key rights.

- All public and private organisations are legally obliged to protect any personal information they hold.
- Public authorities are obliged to provide public access to official information.

The **ICO** is able to respond to enquiries from individuals about how, where and by whom their personal information is held, as well as deal with enquiries from organisations that have to handle data. It is also able to investigate and rule on complaints, some of which may end in criminal prosecution or fines.

The **ICO** website ([ico.org.uk](https://ico.org.uk)) contains a wealth of supportive background information for schools ([ico.org.uk/for-organisations/education](https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/education)); and a useful infographic exploring trends in online activity and some of the risks faced by children aged 5–15 ([ico.org.uk/for-organisations/resources-for-schools/infographic](https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/resources-for-schools/infographic)).

Helpful links are provided in each of the lesson activities, guiding teachers to background information and areas of interest for students.

