

17 April 2025

Case reference: IC-369581-S9D6

Review of response to information request

I write further to your email of 1 April, in which you requested a review of the handling of your information request dealt with under reference IC-369581-S9D6.

Section 45 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) requires the publication of a code of practice, designed to assist public authorities handle requests under the FOIA.

This guide recommends that public authorities put in place an internal review process for FOIA responses, which our guide suggests should be triggered whenever a requester expresses dissatisfaction with the outcome of a request they have made.

The purpose of an internal review is to look again at your request, at our response, and to check that any exemptions applied were appropriate.

As a result, we have conducted an internal review of our response to your information request. I am a Senior Information Access Officer in the Information Access Team and I can confirm that I have had no prior involvement in the handling of this request.

Request and response

On 12 March, we received a request from you which sought the following information:

"For each NHS Trust on this list: [\[link\]](#)

Please release the relevant email address to make Freedom of Information Act 2000 requests. If you hold multiple such emails the generic team one rather than an individual within the department is preferred and the most recent version of the email only is sought. I would like the data in CSV or excel spreadsheet format with a column for providers and another for the email address, ie one row per provider and two columns please."

On 1 April, we responded by advising that we were refusing your request under section 14(1) of the FOIA. This was because the amount of work involved in complying with your request would be disproportionately burdensome on our resources.

Review

I have reviewed the response to your request. I consider that the response was appropriate and I do not uphold your internal review. Below I have sought to expand on the points made in the original response and address some of the issues you raised as part of your request for an internal review.

Burden on our resources

As explained in the response of 1 April, we do not hold a list of the email addresses for the FOI teams of all NHS Trusts in England. We will hold some of these email addresses within our casework management system as part of our FOI complaint casework as regulator. It would take a significant amount of time to locate, collate and check this information.

Section 14 (1) FOIA states that: '14.—(1) Section 1(1) does not oblige a public authority to comply with a request for information if the request is vexatious.'

The ICO's [section 14 guidance](#) explains that, "A single request taken in isolation, ...may be vexatious solely on the grounds of burden. That is, where complying with the request would place a grossly oppressive burden on your resources which outweighs any value or serious purpose the request may have."

The information you are seeking is likely to be held on the account contacts and FOI complaint cases in our casework management system.

Our system contains named 'Accounts' which are the organisations we have inputted on to the system. These are created at the point we need them. For example, if we receive an FOI complaint about an organisation. It can also include other types of cases, such as data protection complaints, personal data breach and information request cases. If we have had no prior reason to add a specific Account, it will not be added to the system. It is therefore possible that some NHS Trusts will not have an Account on our system.

Attached to these Accounts are 'account contacts'. These are contact details that are linked to the Account in order for us to correspond with the specified email address. These can be email addresses for individuals, teams or general inboxes.

They are typically sourced from information provided by the complainant, searches of online information (organisation website, privacy notice), or as advised by the organisations themselves.

If there is a new email address that we need to correspond with, it will be added to the account contacts. This is a new record and does not delete or override any previous account contact that may then be out of date. There is no date shown of when the account contact was added to the system so we are not able to identify the 'most recent' email address. It is therefore likely that some of the account contact email addresses will be incorrect and potentially no longer in use by the organisation.

We will also hold contact email addresses within the individual FOI complaint cases. On the occasions where we have been advised of an alternative email address, this should have been added to the account contacts. Whilst less likely, we may hold additional or more recent email addresses within the correspondence held on the complaints that are not contained within the account contacts.

In your request, you provided a link to [NHS England's](#) list of the NHS Trusts. At the time of your request there were 214 NHS Trusts. You asked that the requested information be collated into a .CSV file (two columns) and that the most recent email be added. This should be a general email address, not for a named individual.

As part of this review, I conducted two searches of a sample of the NHS Trusts from the list. The first search was for the information held on the account contacts (what we held), and the linked FOI complaints in date order (most recent email where we held multiple email addresses).

The initial searches took 5 minutes and 42 seconds (10 NHS Trusts). This exercise identified some of the issues highlighted above as well as additional ones. For example, no FOI specific email address (data protection teams only), multiple FOI contacts or other non-FOI team/data protection email addresses and more than one Account.

For the second, I searched the FOI complaint cases in date order for those Accounts where we held more than one FOI related email address (5 NHS Trusts). These searches took 7 minutes and 54 seconds. This took considerably longer as multiple FOI cases required searching. We do not always contact public authorities as part of a complaint. This time is additional to the initial searches of the account contact records described above.

The above two types of search provide an estimate of 2 hours for initial searches and 5.6 hours for crosschecking these with FOI complaints for all of the 214 NHS Trusts. Not all of the Accounts will have multiple FOI related email addresses but it occurred in half of the sample.

It should be noted that this time does not include the additional tasks of extracting and collating, and considering the information for disclosure. The total time it would take to comply with your request would be significantly longer than 7.6 hours.

A disclosure under FOIA is to the wider world. As a public authority subject to FOIA, we have a duty to conduct checks that the information requested can be disclosed. Some of these email addresses may be internal only and not in the public domain. For example, an internal FOI or information governance team. In that instance, the exemption at section 44 of the FOIA would be engaged (by virtue of section 132 of the Data Protection Act DPA 2018). We would have to crosscheck the email addresses with those publicly available.

The above additional detail has been provided to demonstrate how we hold the information, and the types of searches and considerations that we would need to undertake. For the reasons given above, the time it would take to comply with the request whilst under the appropriate limit at section 12 of the FOIA (18 hours) would place a grossly oppressive burden to our resources.

Purpose and value of the request

You have provided your arguments for the purpose and value of your request. This can be summarised as complying with your request to compile a list of FOI email addresses for 214 NHS Trusts will enable you to contact them and conduct research on the topics you are interested in.

The right of access under section 1 of the FOIA aims to promote openness and transparency by public authorities in order to foster public trust. It is not the purpose of the FOIA to have staff employed by public authorities carry out administrative tasks on behalf of members of the public.

The response explained that the list of email addresses would be of limited value to you as it would likely contain incorrect and out of date information. This would mean you would have to verify the email addresses yourself. Not doing so would run the risk of your FOI requests not being received if they were sent to a redundant email address.

We consider that the burden imposed on our resources to comply with the request outweighs any purpose or value the request may have.

Publicly available information

The information you are seeking is available to you outside of FOIA. NHS Trusts will typically publish the relevant information on their website or provide the means to obtain it via their contact details. You have stated that you would be unable to complete online searches to obtain the FOI email addresses.

In the response we identified alternative ways in which you could access this information. For example, the use of an advocacy service. You could also consider contacting the public authorities via telephone to enquire about the correct contact email address. We do not consider that making an information request under FOIA is the correct way to obtain the information you are seeking.

It should also be noted that you can make an information request to any email address you have for an NHS Trust and ask them to forward it to the appropriate department. The statutory deadline for responding to an FOI request starts when the request is received by the public authority, not when it is received by the FOI team.

Mitigation

You have offered to mitigate the amount of work the ICO would need to undertake to comply with the request, thereby reducing the burden on our resources. You have stated that you do not require us to verify the email addresses held on our records against the current published email addresses on the respective NHS Trust websites.

There is not a requirement under FOIA for us to verify the accuracy of the information held against public sources. This point was raised to highlight the limited value of the information you were seeking. This mitigation would not reduce the amount of time it would take for us to comply with the request.

We would still need to check which was the most recent email address where we held multiple addresses, and if the email addresses could be disclosed under FOIA. We appreciate the number of instances for the latter category would be small, but we would need to satisfy ourselves that we were not making an unlawful disclosure.

For the reasons given above, I consider that the response provided was appropriate and I do not uphold your internal review. I hope the additional information provided in this response has been helpful.

Complaint procedure

If you are dissatisfied with the outcome of this review you can make a formal complaint with the ICO in its capacity as the regulator of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Please follow the link below to submit your complaint:
<https://ico.org.uk/make-a-complaint/>

Your information

Our [privacy notice](#) explains what we do with the personal data you provide to us, and sets out [your rights](#). Our [Retention and disposal policy](#) details how long we keep information.

Yours sincerely,

Claire Elliott
Senior Information Access Officer



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**For information about what we do with personal data
see our [privacy notice](#)**