



Freedom of Information: Briefing for Departmental Co-ordinators

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1. Purpose

To outline the roles and responsibilities for School/Departmental FOI Co-ordinators.

2. What is freedom of information?

The Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 and Environmental Information (Scotland) Regulations 2004 provide rights to access information held by Scottish public authorities. Any person and organisation can submit a request and the University has to respond. Access to personal information is dealt with separately under the Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR. In addition, the University must maintain a publication scheme which sets out the classes of information that it holds and how to access it.

3. What does the University have to do?

In response to Freedom of Information requests the University has to provide information held including copies of documents, hand written notes, photographs and statistics in any format. A response must be provided within 20 working days of receipt.

4. How does GCU manage FOI and EI(S)R requests

All requests for information are centrally managed by the Information Compliance Team within the Department of Governance. Information provided by Schools/Departments is co-ordinated to provide a response on behalf of the University.

5. FOI Co-ordinators roles and responsibility

To act as the contact for any FOI requests relevant to the School/Department

To gather responses to questions and prepare a combined School/Departmental response

To provide a response within the required timescale

To ensure that responses are full and accurate, that acronyms are explained and that individuals with no knowledge of the University can understand

Where appropriate, to seek senior management sign off for responses

Where there are concerns about providing the information, to discuss the matter with the Information Compliance Team

To be aware of the FOI regime and promote awareness within the School/Department

To ensure that any request received directly by staff or the School/Department are sent promptly to the Information Compliance Team

To assist with the management of the Freedom of Information publication scheme and guide to information.

6. What information can be disclosed?

FOI aims to ensure public accountability and therefore information which the University may consider confidential sometimes has to be provided. All recorded information can be disclosed. This

includes: statistics, costs, policies, plans, strategies, photographs, recordings, handwritten notes and information contained in emails and minutes.

We may also have to provide inactive or archived information, information about third parties, contract details and information about partners.

7. When can we refuse to provide information?

We can only refuse to provide information if an exemption within the legislation applies. If you believe there is good reason to withhold information you should contact the Information Compliance Team for advice at an early stage.

8. Providing the information will involve a lot of work, can we refuse to disclose it?

The University may be able to decline a request where providing the information would require an excessive amount of resources. To refuse on cost grounds we need to be able to estimate how much it would cost and ensure that the cost exemption applies. If it will cost more than £600 we can refuse but we must demonstrate how we have reached this figure.

Usually staff time makes up most of the costs involved in providing information. The fee regulations set the maximum amount for staff time to be either the actual costs or a maximum of £15 per hour.

9. What is the Publication Scheme and Guide to Information?

The legislation requires the University to publish certain information about the decisions it makes, its performance and use of resources, for example, policies and minutes of certain committees. Coordinators assist with maintaining the Publication Scheme and ensuring that the most up-to-date information is publically available.

10. Training and awareness

Information on FOI is published on the website and online training can be accessed. The Information Compliance Team can deliver sessions for Schools/Departments to raise awareness of FOI.

11. Further information

Further information is available from foi@gcu.ac.uk

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