

How to complete the guide to information for schools

Introduction

The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requires all public authorities (including schools) to adopt and maintain a publication scheme. The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) is now changing the emphasis in the approval and operation of publication schemes to a generic model which should be adopted and operated by all public authorities from **1 January 2009**.

The model commits a public authority to *'produce and publish the method by which the specific information will be available so that it can be easily identified and accessed by members of the public'*. To help schools meet this obligation we have produced a template guide to information for them to use. This and the model scheme document itself form the basis of your commitment from 1 January 2009.

A school will breach the FOIA if it has not adopted the model scheme or is not publishing in accordance with it by this date.

The model scheme is designed to cover all public authorities and can be obtained from the ICO website. It must be adopted in full, unedited and promoted alongside the guide to information. Schools are not required to inform the ICO that they have adopted the scheme; we will assume they have done so unless we hear otherwise.

Information included in the guide to information

The template lists the information we think that schools should hold and make available within each class. When completed this will provide a list of all the information the school will make routinely available, explain how it can be accessed and whether or not a charge will be made for it. Schools must:

- State how the specific information can be obtained and if there is a cost involved.
- Complete the relevant columns in the template guide.
- Ensure the public can access the completed guide and the information listed in it.

The guide, like the model scheme document itself, does not need further approval by the Information Commissioner.

Completing the Columns

We realise that not schools are the same size or carry out the same functions. Therefore, if a school holds, and can make routinely available, more information than that listed it can be added. Equally, if information listed is not held it can be removed (or crossed out) although the school should keep a note of why this information is not available.

Example:

Curriculum circulars and statutory instruments	Website www.school.sch.uk/cc/docs Hard copy Contact secretary	Free 10p/sheet
Disclosure logs		
Asset register	Inspection only	Free

In this example, the school would be making information about curriculum circulars and statutory instruments available without charge on its website as well as in hard copy. Asset registers are available by inspection only. The school here does not currently have a disclosure log, although if they have previously received freedom of information requests we think that would be good practice to produce one.

Manner of publication

It is important that schools make access to information covered by the scheme as easy as possible.

Where a school does not have a website.

The model scheme document and the guide to information should be made as accessible as possible, eg on notice boards.

Most information will be made available by hard copy from the school (which must provide appropriate contact details).

Where a school has a website.

The model scheme document, the guide to information and a large part of the information covered by the scheme should be made available on the website. If required, information should also be available in hard copy.

In exceptional circumstances schools may need to provide information through means such as allowing visits to the school. How to make arrangements to do this should be clear.

Fees and charging

Information available through a school's publication scheme should be readily available at a low or at no cost to the public. If a school does charge for this information, we expect the charges to be justifiable, clear and kept to a minimum. Providing information under the FOIA should not be done for profit.

Charges may be made for activities such as printing, photocopying and postage as well as information that the school is legally authorised to charge for. Anyone requesting information must be informed of any charge before the information is provided. Schools may ask for payment before providing the information.

The actual charges should be entered in the column on the guide to information. A schedule of charges is attached to the template and this should be used to set out the basis on which the charges are being made. Guidance on our website, [Charging for information in a publication scheme](#), provides more details.

Example:

Annual Report	Website www.school.sch.uk/report Hard copy Contact secretary	Free £2
Staffing structure	Website www.school.sch.uk/staffing Hard copy Contact secretary	Free 10p/sheet

The school in the above example has a website and is therefore able to make information available at no cost online. For hard copies it is only charging for the actual costs incurred. If required they must be able to justify why they have calculated the charge to be 10p per sheet or £2 for the report.

FOI requests and the publication scheme

It is important to note that a publication scheme simply sets out the information that is routinely available. Information that is not listed in the guide to information can still be requested and should be made available unless it can be legitimately withheld.

More information

If you need any more information about this or need assistance with any other aspect of freedom of information, please visit our website or contact us.

Phone: 08456 30 60 60
01625 54 57 45

Email: please use the online [enquiry form](#) on our website

Website: www.ico.gov.uk