



## GUIDE TO FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

Getting information from a public body can sometimes be hard work.

The Freedom of Information Act – FOI – provides us with some rights that can help us get what we are looking for.

This guide outlines how these rights work, highlights any limitations, and shows you how to make the most of your right to know.

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# WHAT IT IS

## Freedom of Information rights

Ireland's Freedom of Information Act 2014 (FOI) gives all members of the public three important legal rights of access to:

- records held by public bodies containing personal information – and to have these amended if they are incomplete, incorrect or misleading
- the reasons for decisions taken by public bodies that directly affect us
- general records held by public bodies – with some important exceptions, both in terms of the bodies and the types of records

The law also requires public bodies to proactively publish information about their main activities and functions. The extent to which they do this varies.



### Anyone can use FOI

*Anyone, anywhere, is entitled to ask for information using their right to know under FOI. There are no restrictions on your age, nationality or where you live.*

## Organisations you can ask for information using FOI

You can use FOI to ask for records held by most public authorities. Here are some of the main public bodies that our FOI rights apply to:

- Central government – all 16 government departments and all the various bodies that come under government departments, like advisory boards and agencies.
- Local authorities delivering front line services – including the 31 county and city councils.
- The Health Services Executive (HSE) which runs hospitals and health facilities and also provides various social services.
- The 29 voluntary public hospitals that are funded by the HSE.
- The 33 publicly-funded universities, colleges and institutes of technology.
- An Garda Síochána (the police) – but only for certain records, starting in October 2015.

## Organisations you *cannot* ask for information using FOI

Not every public body is obliged to release information under our FOI law.

Organisations that are totally excluded from FOI include commercial State bodies like An Post, Dublin Bus, Bus Éireann, Coillte (Irish Forestry Board) and the port and airport authorities.

For some other public bodies, our FOI rights apply only to particular types of records that they hold, such as records to do with general administration. These include the offices of the Attorney General, the Director of Public Prosecutions and the courts.

While FOI was extended to An Garda Síochána in 2015, the right to access only applies to administrative records to do with human resources, finance or procurement. (Ireland is unusual in Europe in that its police force is not required under FOI to release records in relation to operational matters.)

For more information on the public bodies which come under our FOI laws, see the government's Freedom of Information Central Policy Unit website – [What Bodies are Covered by FOI?](#)



### Unsure about whether a public body is an FOI body?

*If you are not sure about whether a public body's records can be requested using the FOI system, just ask them!*

## Types of records you can ask for

FOI is not a tool for general inquiries. And it is not the same as an open-ended right to ask questions or seek information. Instead, it is a right to access records.

This is unlike how FOI works in some other countries, notably in the UK. As such, it is important to know what records, or kind of records, exist in order to work out what ones might be interesting to request.

The types of records that you can ask for under FOI include:

- emails
- electronic or handwritten documents like books, minutes of meetings, briefing notes, speaking points or memorandums
- maps, plans, drawings, video and audio recordings and images

## How you can access records

You can ask to access the records in various ways. For example, you may wish to:

- inspect the originals
- receive photocopies by post
- receive 'soft' or electronic copies

*If you ask for information in electronic format, it will generally get to you faster – provided that it is held in that format by the FOI body.*



## FOI is only as good as the records that exist

*FOI only works efficiently when public bodies have good record-keeping practices. A record will generally not be created just to answer an FOI request.*

*While it is an offence under our FOI law to destroy records in order to deceive, there is no legal duty on public officials to create records in the first place.*

## Other limits to the right to know

Our right to access information under FOI is limited in several important ways. For a start, FOI does not apply to every organisation across the entire public sector (see page 2). Here are some other important limitations:

**Administrative refusals:** You can be refused access to records for a variety of administrative reasons, including that the records do not exist or cannot be found, as long as the public body can establish that it has taken 'reasonable steps' to locate them. You will also be refused access to records under FOI if they are already available for purchase or public inspection.

**Confidential records:** There are particular categories of records that are never available for release under FOI. These include records to do with confidential information about law enforcement, or the office of the President.

**Personal privacy:** FOI law also gives very strong protection to privacy rights, so you may not be entitled to access the personal information of someone else.

**Public interest:** There are several types of records which *may* be released, but only if the public authority considers that it is in the 'public interest' to do so. The public interest here generally means the well-being of society as a whole, rather than just something that the public might be interested in. The types of records which may be released once the public interest has been taken into account include those to do with deliberations of public bodies and the financial and economic interests of the State.



## Access to records as a right

*If you ask for information under FOI, it is the public body's legal duty to release to you the records that are required under law and within specific time limits.*

*More than 8 in 10 of all FOI requests are granted either in full or in part, according to the official figures for 2014. This means that most requesters were given access to all the records they requested, or to some of the records. For example, a full document may be released but with parts of the text blacked out.*

# HOW IT WORKS

## How FOI rights work in practice

How FOI requests work depends on the kinds of records you want to access. It is useful to think of two separate categories of records:

**Personal records:** You can ask for any records relating to you as an individual, whenever created. This would include things like medical files or interview notes.

**General records:** You can ask for all other records held by FOI bodies. This would include things like policy documents, correspondence and meeting notes.

This section of the guide outlines how to use FOI to get personal information and more general information.

## Using FOI to get personal information

You can ask for personal records that public bodies hold on you, no matter when they were created. Personal records means records that are about you, including:

- Medical files – for example, if you have been treated in a State-funded hospital
- Exam notes – for example, if you are a student at a State-funded university
- Interview notes – for example, if you are going for a job or a promotion in a public body
- Case notes – for example if you have made a social welfare claim or a housing application with your local authority

### How to request personal records

You must make your request directly to the public body which holds the records.

You must include some proof of your identity with your application, like a photocopy of your passport. Requests for personal records are generally free-of-charge.

As well as allowing you to access your personal records, FOI gives you two additional rights:

- to have your personal records corrected or amended where they are incomplete, incorrect or misleading
- to see reasons for an act or decision of a public body that affects you and in which you have a material interest

## Amending your personal records

If you find that personal information in a record held by a public body is incomplete, incorrect or misleading, you have the right to request to have it amended. You can seek to have the record altered, including by deleting the information or adding a statement.

The sorts of information you may wish to amend could relate to your membership of a trade union, your financial affairs, or your educational and medical history. You will generally need to show information to support your request for personal information to be amended.

## Using FOI to see reasons for decisions that affect you

If an act or decision of a public body affects you personally, you can use your right under FOI to ask to see the reasons and facts behind it.

For this kind of request, you must show that you have a 'material interest' in the FOI body's act – this means that you have been individually affected in a way that other people in general are not affected. This is different to how FOI normally works, where you do not need to state why you are making a request.

Using FOI in this way can be useful if you are concerned about what kind of information a public body has taken into account in making a particular decision that affects you.

For example, someone whose social welfare claim has been unsuccessful might want to find out why it was turned down. Or a college lecturer who applied for an internal promotion and did not get it might wish to get a statement of reasons as to why he or she was not successful.

The answer you receive in writing by using FOI in this way could be different to the answer you would be given if you simply inquired informally.

## Asking for personal information on behalf of someone else

You can use FOI to ask for personal records on behalf of another person. You must show that the person has given you permission to do this. You can do this by asking them to sign a letter of consent. You may also have to supply a copy of the person's passport or driving licence, signed by him or her.

Parents or guardians can make FOI requests to see records relating to relatives with disabilities, or children. In deciding whether to release these kinds of records, public bodies must consider the best interest of the person who the records relate to.



## Most FOI requests are for personal information

*Most FOI requests are from people seeking information about themselves – these are usually clients of public bodies. The Health Service Executive, which provides health and social services throughout the country, receives the most FOI requests of all public bodies.*

## Using FOI to get general information

FOI allows you to request any record that a public body holds in order to view it yourself – subject to the limitations already outlined.

FOI requests for general or non-personal records can be really useful if you want to find out about the activities and approach of public bodies in relation to particular issues to do with public policy or public spending.

This could be anything, from statistics on the availability of services for people with learning disabilities to the reasons for certain funding decisions made by central government.

For example, a typical request in a policy area might be for “all the records in relation to building project X, including correspondence, notes and minutes of meetings with Minister Y and department officials.”

This is the kind of FOI request that journalists make routinely. It helps them to track in detail how a particular public funding or policy decision was reached, and who may have influenced or tried to influence it. Businesses and parliamentarians also regularly use FOI to request non-personal information.

For most public bodies, you can use FOI to access general records dating back to 1998 (when our first FOI law was introduced).

However, for about 70 public bodies that were brought into the FOI system in 2014, you can only access records dating back to April 2008.

These new bodies include An Garda Síochána, the Central Bank and the National Assets Management Agency (NAMA). For more details on this, check on the public authority's website, or contact them directly.



## Are you looking for environmental information?

*If you are looking for information in relation to environmental issues, you may find that it is easier to request it under a different system called Access to Information on the Environment (AIE).*

*AIE is similar to FOI, as it also allows you to access a wide range of environmental information from certain public authorities. For more on your right to environmental information under AIE, see the [Toolkit Guide to Citizens and the Environment](#).*

## Charges for FOI requests

There is no charge for making an FOI request. However, if your request involves a significant number of records, the public body can charge you for the time it takes to identify and copy them. These are known as 'search and retrieval and copying fees'.

In most cases there are no such charges where the request relates to your own personal records. This is because these records are generally easy for a public body to find and copy.

Fees for requests for non-personal information – general records – can sometimes be significant. Some FOI requests for non-personal information have attracted fees running to thousands of euro.

If you are to be asked to pay fees for your request, you will be told this in advance and given the opportunity to refine your request to reduce or eliminate the fees. You may also be asked to pay a deposit.

If your FOI request is unsuccessful and you end up appealing the original decision, you will be charged fees for this. There is more information about this in the Do-It-Yourself section of this guide.



### Asking someone else to make an FOI request on your behalf

*You can make an FOI request for non-personal information from a public body yourself. Or you can ask someone else to make the request for you, like your local TD, councillor or community group.*

## DO-IT-YOURSELF

### When to use your right to know under FOI

As a starting point for someone wanting to find out more about policy-related issues or non-personal information, the first thing to do is *just ask*.

Many public bodies have press officers, information officers and public relations staff who should be your first port of call.

Often these people will help channel information to the public about what the organisation does and why decisions are made. It is useful to keep in mind that it is their role to present information positively on behalf of the organisation.

Likewise, if you are looking for personal information, it is worth inquiring in writing first to see if you can obtain the information without making an FOI request. This sort of request for personal information held by a public body is often referred to as 'administrative access'. Naturally, the usual protections for privacy, confidentiality and the public interest still apply.

Where FOI comes into its own is if officials are unwilling or unable to give you information – or if you are concerned that you are not seeing the full picture.

## Things to consider before making an FOI request

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Making an FOI request is straightforward, but there are some things to consider before you take this step.

### Decide what you want to know

Write down the policy area, topic or issue that you wish to find out more about. This will help you to work out what sort of official records might contain the information you want. These could include things like emails, memorandums or notes of meetings. For personal information, they could include records concerning your dealings with the public body.

### Ask yourself if there is any other way to get this information

Remember, FOI should only be used to access information that is not routinely available. Before you make an FOI request, always check whether the information is already published or whether you can get it by simply asking for it. Most public bodies have information offices or other staff who should be able to help. Their websites should contain details about the kinds of information that they routinely publish.

However, there may be times when you decide to go straight to submitting a FOI request. This could include where:

- You have reason to believe that you won't get the information unless you use the formal legal route of FOI.
- You have already tried other ways of getting the information and been unsuccessful.
- The information you want is so sensitive that it can only be released under FOI. This type of information could include sensitive personal information relating to suspected child abuse or to testing for HIV/AIDS.
- You want to get personal records and the FOI is the only appropriate way to do this.

### Make sure you know which public body to make your request to

It can often be hard to navigate the complicated structure of government and public bodies, and to work out who has the information you want. Some public bodies have dedicated FOI sections. The people working there should help you identify whether they have what you want. If they don't have a specific FOI section, you should just ask for the FOI officer.

Some national public bodies have several regional FOI offices for handling different requests, so it is a good idea to check which one to send your request to.

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## How to make an FOI request

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### Put it in writing

You must make FOI requests in writing. This can be by letter, email or fax. Always use language appropriate to professional communication and follow these tips:

#### Mention FOI

- You must state in your letter that you are making your request under the FOI Act 2014.

## Be specific

- Your request should include sufficient information to allow the appropriate records to be identified. It is a good idea to spend a bit of time working on the wording of your FOI request.
- If your request is for personal records, you should name these (i.e., a medical report). You should also include proof of your identity, like a photocopy of your passport.
- Avoid asking general questions, like "Why are you doing X?" or "What were you thinking when you closed playground Y?" This makes it much less likely that you will get the information you want.
- Instead, you should focus on the records you want and/or that the public body might hold. So, for example, if you want to find out why your local playground was closed down you could request access to: "All reports, correspondence, procedural guidance, notes and memos relating to the decision to close playground Y."
- If your request relates to a project that has been going on for many years, avoid looking for 'all records'. These kinds of 'catch all' requests, without dates or any other specifics to narrow their scope, risk being refused on the grounds that they would require retrieval of so many records that the work of the body would be disrupted.

## Be succinct

- The more succinct your request is, the better chance you have of getting a quick answer.
- Don't bundle too many requests into the same letter. You can always build upon one FOI request with a follow up request and looking for one piece of information might throw up a lead that will bring you to another piece of information. For example, a copy of an email exchange released to you under FOI might refer to a certain report or other document that you could also request.

## Don't get emotional

- You may feel strongly about the issue you are asking for information about. But you should always be polite and avoid abusive language as this could lead to your request being refused. Remember you do not have to give reasons why you want to see any records (apart from when you are looking for 'reasons for decisions' that directly affect you – see the How it Works section for information on this).

## Say how you would like to receive the information

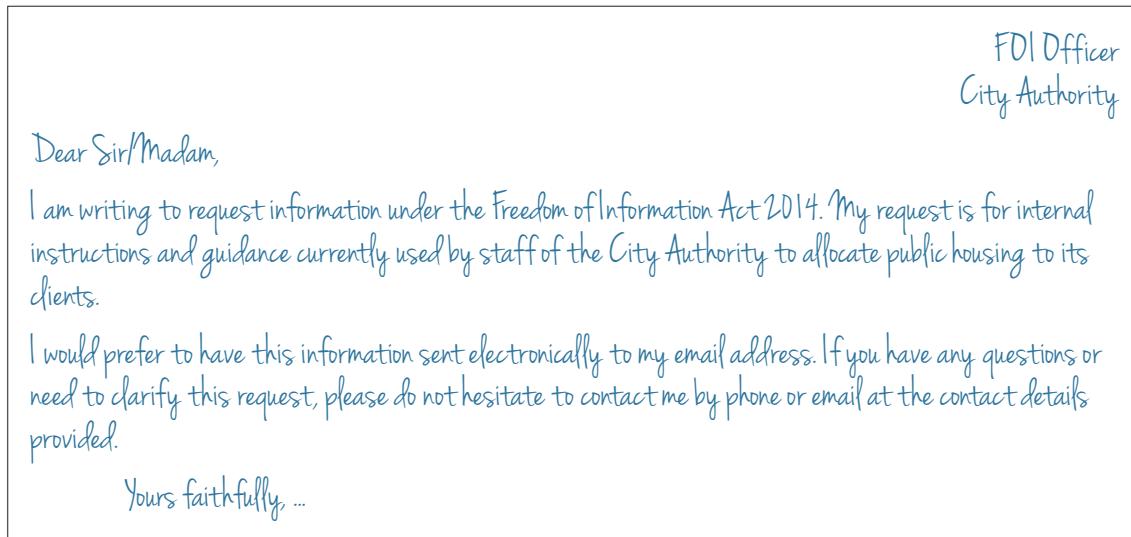
- Be sure to say what format you want to receive the information in. This could be a hard paper copy of the record, an electronic file, or even a request just to inspect the record. Public authorities generally have to give you the records in the format you seek. If you don't specify the format that you want, you will probably receive hard copies. If you are asking for data that is held in more than one electronic record, the public body must take reasonable steps to search and extract the records.

## Sample FOI request letter

Most public bodies publish FOI request forms on their websites. You can download these and fill them in and then post, scan, or email them to the public body.

Alternatively you can write a request letter yourself.

For guidance, here's a sample FOI request letter:


<p>Dear Sir/Madam,</p> <p>I am writing to request information under the Freedom of Information Act 2014. My request is for internal instructions and guidance currently used by staff of the City Authority to allocate public housing to its clients.</p> <p>I would prefer to have this information sent electronically to my email address. If you have any questions or need to clarify this request, please do not hesitate to contact me by phone or email at the contact details provided.</p> <p>Yours faithfully, ...</p>

## Getting help with your FOI request

If you are not clear about what exactly you are looking for, don't be afraid to ask the public body for help in making your FOI request. They have a legal duty to assist you and to help ensure that your request is clear and sufficiently focused, so that you will get the information you want.

The official handling your FOI request may contact you by telephone or email to help you clarify your request so that they can identify the right records. This may mean that you end up revising the wording of your request and resubmitting it. The quality of the assistance you receive may depend on the experience or attitude of the individual you deal with, as well as the available resources within the public body.

Public bodies must also cater for people with disabilities. This could include accepting oral requests from people who are unable to read, write or type due to their disability.

## What to expect – how FOI requests are handled

An FOI request is a formal procedure which sets off a legal process. This comes with fixed times and deadlines for your request to be acknowledged and decisions made. In practice these timelines are not always met, and you may face delays.

Here are the main steps – these are also summarised in the graphic on page 14.

### You receive a response acknowledging your request

Within two weeks (10 working days), you should receive an acknowledgement of your request from an FOI officer. You will generally be told the name and contact details of the public official who will make a decision on your FOI request – called the deciding officer.

## You are notified of the decision on your request

Within four weeks (20 working days) of your request being made, you should receive a decision on your application (this can be extended by up to another four weeks, for example if the request relates to a large number of records).

If your request is partly or fully successful, you will be sent the relevant records, along with a summary document called a 'schedule'. This should list in tabular format each of the records identified and the decision taken in relation to it – that is whether to grant your request and release the record in full or in part, or whether to refuse your request and withhold the record.

If some records or parts of records are not released to you, the public body must inform you of the legal reasons for its decision. The schedule document should cite the relevant part of the Freedom of Information Act 2014 that the refusal decision is based upon.

If your request was to amend personal information, you will be informed whether your request is upheld or refused.



## Unhappy with the response to your FOI request?

First of all, don't give up! Your request could be unsuccessful for a range of reasons. It is worthwhile trying to understand these. You can look up the particular section of the [Freedom of Information Act 2014](#) that is cited in the schedule of records that you should have received along with the decision letter.

You might find that while you are not happy with the response, you understand why it is the correct legal decision. Sometimes, however, records are refused for incorrect reasons.

In any case, you are entitled to ask for an internal review of the original decision if you are unhappy with it, or if you have had no reply to your request within the 20 working day time limit.

## Reviews of FOI decisions

### Seeking an internal review

If you are not satisfied with a decision on your request, the first step is to ask the public body to carry out an internal review. This means that a more senior decision-maker within the same organisation will reconsider your application. You should be told the result of this review within 3 weeks (15 working days).

You can also go straight to the internal review stage if you do not receive a reply to your request within four weeks (20 working days).

You must submit your request for an internal review within 20 working days of being notified of the initial decision.

### Seeking an external review – the Information Commissioner

You can appeal further to the external Office of the Information Commissioner if you are not happy with the outcome of the internal review, or you received no reply to your request for an internal review within the 15 working day time limit.

The Information Commissioner is an independent body set up to review decisions on FOI requests. The Information Commissioner has the power to force the release of information where it considers that it should not have been refused in the first place.

First of all, the Commissioner decides on whether your application for a review is valid. If it is considered valid, an investigator will be assigned to carry out the review. You and the public body will be invited to make a written submission.

Some applications for reviews to the Information Commissioner are settled informally, following negotiations by the Commissioner's officials with the person who made the FOI request and the public body.

The Information Commissioner is required to make a formal decision within four months. In reality, this can take longer. The [Information Commissioner's website](#) explains in more detail how to apply for a review. It also has an [online form](#) that you can submit. You can also appeal a decision on your FOI request by letter or email.

## Taking a case to the High Court

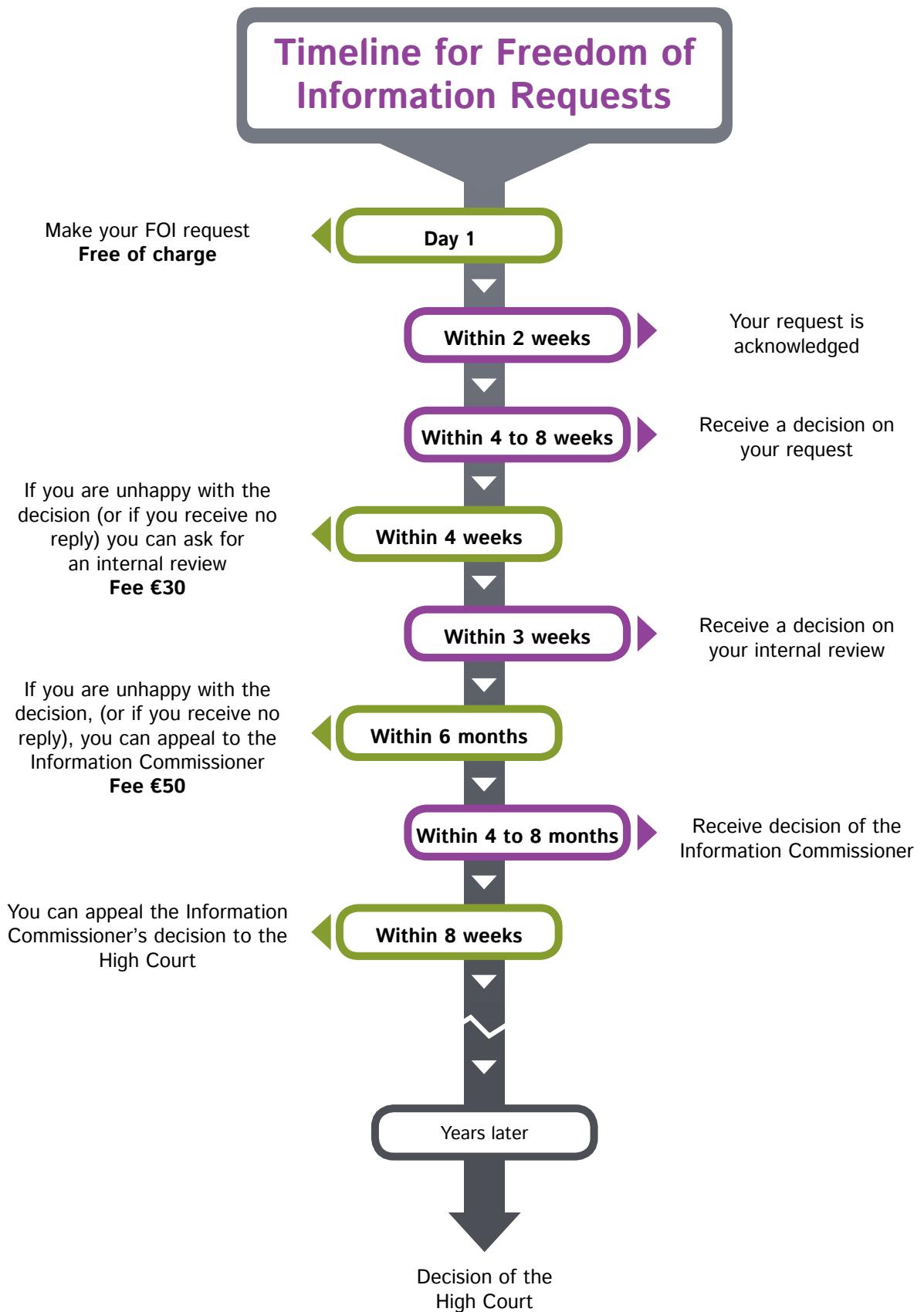
If you are not happy with a decision of the Information Commissioner, there is only one option left to you. That is to make an appeal to the High Court. You can only appeal on the grounds that the Information Commissioner interpreted the law incorrectly in deciding on your review.



## Charges for reviews

- If your FOI request is for personal information, there are no charges for internal reviews or external reviews to the Information Commissioner.
- If your request is for non-personal information, you will be charged up-front fees for reviews.
- An internal review costs €30 (€10 for medical card holders). The fees must be paid before the internal review will begin.
- A review by the Information Commissioner costs €50 (€15 for medical card holders). The Information Commissioner will not accept your application until the fee is paid.
- Payment can generally be made by bank draft, money order, postal order, personal cheque, or electronically.

[More on fees for applications for review by the Information Commissioner.](#)

*Timeline for processing FOI requests*



## FOI can be a long haul

*While many FOI requests are straightforward and are dealt with promptly, pursuing some records can take a very long time, with delays and hurdles along the way. If you end up having to apply for a review by the Information Commissioner, and then taking a case to the High Court, the process could last several years. This can be a very long haul!*

## It can pay to be persistent

Sometimes, it takes a bit of trial and error to find the exact records that contain the information you want. But persistence can pay off.

If your FOI request has been unsuccessful but you believe that the public body holds records containing the information you want, here are some other options for you to explore:

### Make a new FOI request

You might need to refine your request, change the wording, or ask for some other documents that might be related to your original request.

### Make the same FOI request to a different public body

Work out whether any other public bodies could also hold the records that you want to see. For example, if there has been an exchange of letters between two public authorities, you could submit an FOI request to both of them. Sometimes, different public bodies interpret and apply the rules differently, so it is always worth considering making more than one FOI request for the same material.

## PEOPLE'S STORIES

### Helping people to help themselves

The charity Crosscare regularly uses FOI as a tool to help people who come to it seeking assistance with social needs.

"FOI is a very useful tool and it's a simple tool and simple to operate," says Noel Neenan, Crosscare's Information and Advocacy Officer. "We help people to use FOI to explore how decisions have been taken by public authorities, for example by the Department of Social Protection or a local authority."

"People find it very useful to see the documents that are on file about them, because it allows them to get some evidence base for decisions that have been made by the public body," says Noel. "You might ask for reasons for decisions taken and you might find that the reason you receive is not a valid reason in law. If you ask outside the FOI Act, you often get the standard answer that an authority gives. If you ask using FOI you get the answer that they are required to give you under the law."

Crosscare helps people to use FOI in two main ways:

- to see a copy of any records relating to them that are held by a public body
- to obtain information about decisions made or actions taken by a public body that directly affect them

### **Crosscare's FOI case studies**

Here are two cases identified by Crosscare where FOI helped people to help themselves:



### **How FOI helped John to get the proper social protection supports**

John applied for Jobseeker's Allowance, a weekly unemployment payment. But before a decision on his application was made, his claim file was closed by the Department of Social Protection. The reason given for this decision was that John had failed to provide documents requested. John was sure he had handed the documents into his local social welfare office. But he did not get a receipt at the time, and the officials said they were not on file.

John then gave in more copies of the same documents. His claim was successful. But the Department then refused to pay him arrears dating back to when he first applied for the benefit. This was because he was unable to prove that he had submitted the documents originally. Because of this situation, John faced losing weeks of badly needed support.

John was unhappy about this. Using his rights under FOI, he requested a copy of all records relating to his Jobseeker's Allowance claim.

When he got the records he saw that his original documents were indeed not in his file. However, he found an email from one official to another which referred to these documents. This proved that the Department had in fact received John's documents the first time round.

As a result John was able to get the decision on his claim revised and he received his arrears payment.



## How FOI helped Anna get a step closer to finding affordable housing

Anna could not afford to buy her own home. So she put her name on her local authority's housing list. The local authority allocates affordable housing to people whose names are on the list, which is based on fixed eligibility requirements or rules.

Anna met an official in her local county council who looked through her application and told her she didn't qualify for the housing list. When she asked why this was the case, the official just said that she didn't satisfy the rules. Anna wrote to the council using her right under FOI to seek reasons for a decision that directly affected her.

She explained what had happened and asked for the reasons for the decision to keep her off the housing list, any findings of fact relevant to it, and how it was reached. The council responded that the application was refused because Anna did not have a record of having worked in Ireland.

Once she saw this, Anna realised that the official she had spoken to had not fully recorded the details of her application. She had in fact worked in Ireland for many years after moving from Poland, but had lost her job during an economic downturn. She wrote to the council to point this out and have her file corrected. As a result, her housing application was reassessed and she was accepted onto the council's housing list.

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As the case studies show, our right to know under FOI can help us ensure that we get what we are entitled to, and that public bodies that we deal with take the right decisions based on proper facts.

*While these examples are based on real life experiences, John and Anna are alias names.*

## RESOURCES

### Official information on your FOI rights

#### Guidance from the FOI Central Policy Unit

The government's Freedom of Information [Central Policy Unit](#) has detailed information and guidelines about the Freedom of Information Act 2014. This includes an FOI request [application form](#) that you can print off and fill in in hard copy. It also contains official guidance for public bodies on how to best process requests, including a [Code of Practice](#) and [Guidance Notices](#). You can also contact the policy unit with queries.

The [Freedom of Information Act 2014](#) is available on the Irish Statute Book website.

#### Guidance and decisions of the Office of the Information Commissioner

The website of the [Office of the Information Commissioner](#) contains information about its role in reviews of FOI decisions, as well as online forms for you to apply for a review.

The Information Commission also publishes its [past decisions](#) in FOI reviews that the office has handled. While some of these decisions are quite complex, they provide useful insights into how the Commission interprets key parts of FOI law.

The Commission also publishes [guidance notes](#) which show how it interprets and applies various aspects of the law – and what it expects of public bodies in handling FOI requests.

There are also summaries of interesting decisions in the Commissioner's Annual Reports.

## Public bodies' FOI disclosure logs

Public bodies that come under FOI should publish lists detailing the FOI requests they have handled for records that are not personal. These lists are called FOI Disclosure Logs. They may be useful if you wish to see how frequent FOI users, like journalists, compose their requests, and also the types of records that are requested. Some, but not all, public bodies also publish the non-personal records that they have released under FOI, here are some examples of government department disclosure logs:

[The Department of Education and Skills](#)

[The Department of Social Protection](#)

[The Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources](#)

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## FOI users and activists

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[Thestory.ie](#) is a website run by journalists that shares documents and datasets that have been released following Freedom of Information requests. These include Ministerial diaries and records relating to how public money is spent.

[The Freedom of Information Advocates Network \(FOIANet\)](#) is an international information-sharing network of organisations and individuals working to promote the right of access to information. FOIANet runs a discussion list for news and debate on the right of access to information. There are currently more than 700 people on this list, including civil society representatives, lawyers, academics, information commissioners and others with a specialised interest in the right to information. It is open to individuals and organisations to join.

[Access Info Europe](#) is a human rights organisation dedicated to promoting and protecting the right of access to information across Europe. It runs training for FOI users including journalists.

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## Publications

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[Secrets of the State and How to Get Them](#) is a practical guide on how to use the Freedom of Information Act to obtain information, how to avoid the pitfalls associated with making applications and how to appeal decisions to refuse or to limit information being released. The book also explores and highlights lesser known laws such as the Access to Information on the Environment regulation and the Data Protection Acts, and details how they can be used to extract information from the State. The book is written by RTÉ journalist Richard Dowling.

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## Listen to our podcasts

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For more information on topics covered in the Toolkit guides, you can listen to our six-part podcast series – How to be an Active Citizen. These educational programmes aim to help listeners become active citizens in their own lives. The series was broadcast on RTÉ Radio 1 Extra in May/June 2016. The podcasts are available on [www.tasc.ie/activecitizen](http://www.tasc.ie/activecitizen)

