

Our Reference: RFI:2202-09

BY EMAIL ONLY

Mr John Walker

29 June 2009

Dear Mr Walker

Request for Information – Common Purpose

Thank you for your recent email, in which you requested information in pursuance of the Freedom of Information Act. For clarification, you requested the following information:

1. The names and ranks / grades of all employees in your organisation who at Common Purpose "graduates"
2. The total expenditure by your organisation on Common Purpose courses since its creation together with a copy of the invoice for each Common Purpose course paid for by your organisation.

We have now completed our investigations into your request for information, and are able to respond as follows.

The Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) was formed on 1 December 2008, by virtue of the Housing and Regeneration Act (2008). HCA is the successor body to Commission for the New Towns and the Urban Regeneration Agency (which were previously trading under the name "English Partnerships"), as well as the investment functions of the Housing Corporation (the regulatory functions having been transferred to the new Tenants Services Authority). Furthermore, a number of delivery programmes from Communities and Local Government were transferred into HCA, along with the Academy for Sustainable Communities.

You have submitted a similar request for information to English Partnerships. As this organisation has now been succeeded by HCA, we have combined our response to you as set out below.

We have considered your request for the names and grades of Common Purpose "graduates" employed by HCA, and are unable to provide this information in response to your request. This is due to the following reasons.

The HCA was formed in December 2008 and is therefore a new organisation. We do not hold a central register of staff attending Common Purpose courses. This is because staff may have completed the programme prior to joining the organisation, during their employment at a predecessor organisation from which we have not inherited the records, or attended a course independently and without sponsorship from their employer. To compile

such a list now would require individual consultation with all HCA employees and as such would involve the creation of new information. Not only would this exceed our obligations under the Act, but this would also present an unreasonable burden on the resources of HCA.

Furthermore, even if HCA did possess a comprehensive list of Common Purpose “graduates”, to provide this information in response to a Freedom of Information Act request would, in our opinion, contravene the first Data Protection Principle (which requires all processing of personal data to be fair and lawful) and therefore be exempt under Section 40 of the Freedom of Information Act.

You have also requested copies of invoices relating to Common Purpose training. Having checked our records, we cannot trace any Common Purpose invoices having been received by HCA to date and therefore our expenditure is nil. We confirm that we do hold some information relating to invoices and costs incurred by nine members of staff from the former organisation known as English Partnerships, a predecessor organisation to the HCA. These total £20,115 excluding VAT over a five year period.

We are unable to ascertain from these invoices whether attendance at one or more of these courses qualifies as Common Purpose “graduate” status; however, we provide copies containing the date and amount of each invoice and the content of the course supplied.

You will note that we have redacted the names of the staff members who received the training. As outlined above, this is in accordance with the exemption at Section 40 of the Freedom of Information Act. This exemption permits us to withhold information if disclosure would contravene any of the principles of the Data Protection Act (1998). We feel that, on this occasion, disclosure of the names listed on these invoices would contravene the first Data Protection Principle, as it would constitute the unfair processing of personal data.

We confirm that four invoices relate to Technical Staff grades, two invoices relate to Management Staff grades and three invoices relate to former employees no longer working for the HCA. For the avoidance of doubt, none of the invoices relate to Corporate, Regional or Non-Executive Directors of the HCA.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions regarding this response or any further queries. If you are unhappy with the way Homes and Communities Agency has handled your request you may ask for an internal review. You should contact

Head of Legal Services
Homes and Communities Agency
110 Buckingham Palace Road
London
SW1W 9SA

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

Yours sincerely

Catherine Moran
Information Access Officer
Homes and Communities Agency