



Governance & Security

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Our Ref 1788/08
Your Ref

www.hmrc.gov.uk

Dear Mr Jackson

Thank you for your request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) for information about the use of pseudonyms by HMRC staff. HMRC has now completed its search for the information.

You asked;

I am trying to find information on the use of pseudonyms by HMRC Staff when dealing with the public (or, in modern parlance, "customers"), whether in oral or written dealings, under what circumstances this is allowed, and how records of this are kept.

Can you please tell me if there is a policy regarding this, and if so provide information on it (e.g. copies of policy documents, manuals or the like). If the use of pseudonyms is allowed, can you please also explain how information on such use is tracked (e.g. a simple list of names used by each staff member vs. full database of every usage).

HMRC Customer Contact guidance to contact centre advisers states that it is policy to give your first name within the greeting. This is one of a number of measures to make our Department more welcoming to customers and remove any perceived barriers around contacting us. It is also consistent with best practice across a number of other departments in both the public and private sector. Exceptionally, the guidance states that if the adviser feels that providing their full name places them at risk, they may, with the approval of their line manager, provide a pseudo name to the caller. Any use of pseudonyms is monitored by the line manager concerned.



Similarly, our Enquiry Centre staff are required to wear a name badge displaying their forename when dealing with customers. Once again, exceptionally, and with management approval, they are allowed to use a pseudonym. Again, any use of pseudonyms would be monitored by the relevant line manager.

This policy is consistent with a number of organisations who allow the use of pseudonyms on an exceptional basis.

In relation to local management arrangements for tracking the use of pseudonyms I am unable to confirm whether such information is held because I estimate the cost of contacting all areas within the Department and asking them to make a search would exceed the appropriate limit of £600. The appropriate limit is specified in regulations and for central government is set at £600 based on staff time of £25.00 per hour. This represents the estimated cost of one person spending 3½ working days determining if the department holds the information. This includes locating, retrieving and extracting the information. Under section 12(1) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 the department is not obliged to comply with your request and we will not be processing it further.

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If you are not happy with this reply you may request a review by writing to HMRC FOI Team, Room 4/52, 100 Parliament Street London SW1A 2BQ. You must request a review within 2 months of the date of this letter. It would assist our review if you set out which aspects of the reply concern you and why you are dissatisfied.

If you are not content with the outcome of your complaint, you may apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Generally, the Information Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted the complaints procedure provided by HMRC. He can be contacted at: The Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 5AF.

Yours sincerely

John Sharpe