



Information Rights Team
Post Office Limited
Ground Floor
Finsbury Dials
20 Finsbury Street
London EC2Y 9AQ

Your reference:
Our reference: FOI2021/01104

John O'Sullivan
request-815384-2adb944b@whatdotheyknow.com

13 January 2022

Dear John O'Sullivan,

Freedom of Information Request – FOI2021/01104

I am writing in response to your email received by Post Office Limited (“**Post Office**”) on 12 December, which has been dealt with under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (“**FOIA**”).

In your email you have requested the following information in bold as below:

Can you say how many current SPM are:

- 1) Failed coppers?**
- 2) Retired Publicans**
- 3) LLB's Historically**

What % of the SPM population do these three groups make up?

I can confirm that we may hold information relating to previous employment on postmaster applications.

However, after a further review of your request, Post Office believes that to determine the information that you require, in relation to previous employment, would significantly exceed the cost limit set out under Section 12(1) of the Act. The appropriate limit for Post Office is set at £450. This represents the estimated cost of one person spending 18 hours in determining whether we hold the information, and in locating, retrieving and extracting the information.

I can confirm that whilst Post Office requires potential new postmasters to go through a structured application process which requires applicants to provide a work and education history on their application, Post Office does not transfer this level of detail on to its systems. Therefore, to establish a current postmaster's former employment along with their academic awards would necessitate the individual review of each application which we estimate would take at least 30 minutes per record to locate, retrieve and extract the information. With over 11,000 branches, this would significantly exceed the 18 hours' time limit and therefore the exemption is engaged.

Whilst Post Office has an obligation under Section 16 of the Act to provide advice and assistance to requesters, we do not envisage any way that you may narrow your request to bring it within the limit set by the Act.

I would also like to address the issue of your multiple recent requests for information under the Act.

Given the frequency of your recent requests as well as their contents, we wish to remind you of the points made in our letter of 12 April 2021 which refused certain of your requests on the grounds that they were vexatious (attached again for reference). You will recall that in that letter we explained the rules and guidance on vexatious requests, drawing particular attention to the burden on a public authority such as Post Office Limited ("Post Office") and the references to frequent or overlapping requests.

That letter also drew your attention to the Information Commissioner's webpage titled "How to access information from a public body" (located here: <https://ico.org.uk/your-data-matters/official-information/>). This webpage includes a list of 'Dos and Don'ts' to assist members of the public with making effective requests under FOIA. In particular, please note that this section advises giving the public authority "ample opportunity to address any previous requests you have made before submitting new ones" as well as advocating against "disrupt[ing] a public authority by the sheer weight of requests or the volume of information requested". It advises that requesters, "Use straightforward, polite language; avoid basing your request or question on assumptions or opinions, or mixing requests with complaints or comments."

Despite that letter we note that your recent requests are again detailed, frequent and a number of them relate to the same issue or issues in circumstances where we have not yet had the opportunity to address previous requests on the same topic. There have been 7 requests in the month of December alone totaling 31 questions, of which the last received on 31 December repeated points made in the 22 December request to which we had not yet had an opportunity to respond. Many of the requests are lengthy and mix comments with requests for information. For example, a communication received from you on 12 December contained comment mixed with questions which did not appear to have any significant or serious value or purpose. This is placing significant strain on Post Office's resources.

Any future requests will be considered on a case by case basis. However, we would ask that you bear in mind the Information Commissioner's guidance when preparing any further requests to minimise the chances of future requests being refused on the grounds of vexatiousness.

If you have any queries about this response, please contact me. Do remember to quote the reference number above in any future communications.

I am sorry I could not provide you with the information you requested on this occasion, however if you are dissatisfied with the handling of this response, you do have a right to request an internal review. You can do this by writing to the address above stating your reasons for your internal review request.

If, having requested an internal review by Post Office, you are still not satisfied with our response you also have a right of appeal to the Information Commissioner at:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF
Telephone: 0303 123 1113
<https://ico.org.uk>

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Chris Russell".

Chris Russell
Head of Data Protection & Information Rights & DPO
information.rights@postoffice.co.uk
<http://corporate.postoffice.co.uk/secure-corporate/about-us/access-to-information/>

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