



## Valuation Office Agency

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#### Freedom of Information Team

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Durham  
DH1 3UW

Email: [foi@voa.gov.uk](mailto:foi@voa.gov.uk)

Our Reference: 11809809.1/CEO

Date: 2 December 2021

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To: Rebecca Moody

Email: [request-806051-a3acc3e3@whatdotheyknow.com](mailto:request-806051-a3acc3e3@whatdotheyknow.com)

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Dear Rebecca Moody

### Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA)

Thank you for your request for information under the FOIA received on 11 November 2021.

#### Your request:

*"Please find below my FOI request regarding malicious emails sent to the department.*

*The date range for the requests is from 2018 to present day. The data shall include a breakdown by year and by individual departments (e.g. separate departments, agencies, or public bodies within the main government agency), if applicable.*

- 1. How many malicious emails have been successfully blocked?*
- 2. What percentage of malicious emails were opened by staff?*
- 3. What percentage of malicious links in the emails were clicked on by staff?*
- 4. How many ransomware attacks were blocked by the department?*
- 5. How many ransomware attacks were successful?"*

#### Response to your request:

##### Question one

As required by section 1(1)(a) of the Act I confirm that we hold some information in scope of this question.

From 1 January 2018 to 31 March 2019, the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) blocked 470 malicious emails.

For the period 1 April 2019 onwards, information is not held. The VOA is an Executive Agency of HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC). On 1 April 2019, responsibility for VOA's Digital and IT department transferred to HMRC.

You may wish to submit your request to HMRC to be answered for the period 1 April 2019 to present. You can do so by email to: [foi.request@hmrc.gov.uk](mailto:foi.request@hmrc.gov.uk).

##### Questions two to five

As IT security is now managed by HMRC as a shared service, the following response relates to the period between 1 January 2018 to 31 March 2019.

The information is withheld due to Section 31 of the FOIA, the detailed reasoning is set out below.

Section 31 applies because disclosure of such information, would be likely to prejudice the prevention or detection of crime. In this case section 31(3) also applies, which removes the obligation in section 1(1)(a), to confirm whether or not we even hold the information sought, where doing so would or would be likely to prejudice any of the matters in section 31(1).

Disclosure under FOIA is, in essence release to the world and disclosure of the information sought could potentially be used by individuals for criminal activity. Departmental systems could be exposed or left vulnerable to interference or attack. Section 31 is a qualified exemption which means we must consider whether the public interest favours maintaining the exemption.

There is a public interest in ensuring the public have confidence that the VOA has robust IT security measures in place, and ensuring our IT systems are fully protected and provide the least cost to the public purse.

There is also a clear public interest in avoiding likely prejudice to the prevention of crime and the safeguarding of sensitive customer information.

The public interest does not lie in the release of any information which would reveal data on any incidences or investigations, that could be misused.

We have considered all factors and we consider the public interest in maintaining the exemption would outweigh the public interest in the knowledge of whether information was held, and any potential disclosure.

I have attached an appendix setting out the law.

You may ask for a review of the handling of your request, within 2 months of the date of this letter, by writing to us at: [foi@voa.gov.uk](mailto:foi@voa.gov.uk) or Valuation Office Agency, FOI Team, Wycliffe House, Green Lane, Durham DH1 3UW. To assist our review, please set out which aspects of the reply concern you and why you are dissatisfied.

If you are unhappy with the outcome of our review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner (ICO) for a decision. Generally, the ICO won't make a decision unless we have reviewed our handling of your request. You may apply directly to them by email at: [icocasework@ico.org.uk](mailto:icocasework@ico.org.uk). Alternatively, you can do this by writing to: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF.

Yours sincerely

Freedom of Information Team  
Valuation Office Agency

## Appendix

### Freedom of Information Act, 2000 (request)

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/36/contents>

#### Section 31 Law enforcement

- (1) Information which is not exempt information by virtue of section 30 is exempt information if its disclosure under this Act would, or would be likely to, prejudice—
  - (a) the prevention or detection of crime,
  - (b) the apprehension or prosecution of offenders,
  - (c) the administration of justice,
  - (d) the assessment or collection of any tax or duty or of any imposition of a similar nature,
  - (e) the operation of the immigration controls,
  - (f) the maintenance of security and good order in prisons or in other institutions where persons are lawfully detained,
  - (g) the exercise by any public authority of its functions for any of the purposes specified in subsection (2),
  - (h) any civil proceedings which are brought by or on behalf of a public authority and arise out of an investigation conducted, for any of the purposes specified in subsection (2), by or on behalf of the authority by virtue of Her Majesty's prerogative or by virtue of powers conferred by or under an enactment, or
  - (i) any inquiry held under the [F1Inquiries into Fatal Accidents and Sudden Deaths etc. (Scotland) Act 2016] to the extent that the inquiry arises out of an investigation conducted, for any of the purposes specified in subsection (2), by or on behalf of the authority by virtue of Her Majesty's prerogative or by virtue of powers conferred by or under an enactment.
- (2) The purposes referred to in subsection (1)(g) to (i) are—
  - (a) the purpose of ascertaining whether any person has failed to comply with the law,
  - (b) the purpose of ascertaining whether any person is responsible for any conduct which is improper,
  - (c) the purpose of ascertaining whether circumstances which would justify regulatory action in pursuance of any enactment exist or may arise,
  - (d) the purpose of ascertaining a person's fitness or competence in relation to the management of bodies corporate or in relation to any profession or other activity which he is, or seeks to become, authorised to carry on,
  - (e) the purpose of ascertaining the cause of an accident,
  - (f) the purpose of protecting charities against misconduct or mismanagement (whether by trustees or other persons) in their administration,
  - (g) the purpose of protecting the property of charities from loss or misapplication,
  - (h) the purpose of recovering the property of charities,
  - (i) the purpose of securing the health, safety and welfare of persons at work, and
  - (j) the purpose of protecting persons other than persons at work against risk to health or safety arising out of or in connection with the actions of persons at work.
- (3) The duty to confirm or deny does not arise if, or to the extent that, compliance with section 1(1)(a) would, or would be likely to, prejudice any of the matters mentioned in subsection (1).