



# HM Passport Office

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Dominik Schade  
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Reference: FOICR 50491/18

22 November 2018

Dear Dominik Schade

## FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST

Thank you for your email of 4 October in which you confirm you require all subject topics from the Registration Handbook relating to how Registrars conduct civil marriages.

Your request has been handled as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

**Please can you reveal an electronic copy of the handbook, manual or whatever that governs how your registrars conduct civil marriage.**

I can confirm the General Register Office (GRO), part of Her Majesty's Passport Office, holds the Registration Handbook regarding civil marriages. As there are a large number of chapters relating to the subject we will need to forward these to you over a number of emails.

Some of the information contained in the Registration Handbook, however, is personal information as it contains the names and contact details of members of staff of the GRO. Her Majesty's Passport Office has obligations under data protection legislation and in law generally to protect personal data. We have concluded that some of the information you have requested is exempt from disclosure under section 40(2) of the FOIA, because of the condition at section 40(3A)(a). This exempts personal data if disclosure would contravene any of the data protection principles in Article 5(1) of the General Data Protection Regulation and section 34(1) of the Data Protection Act 2018.

This information has been redacted due to our obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation and section 34(1) of the Data Protection Act 2018.

Furthermore, after careful consideration, we have decided that some of the information within the Registration Handbook is exempt from disclosure under section 31(1)(a) of the FOIA. This provides that information can be withheld if disclosure of the information could inhibit the prevention or detection of crime and the public interest falls in favour of maintaining the exemption.

Arguments for and against disclosure in terms of the public interest, with the reasons for our conclusion, are set out in the annex below.

If you are dissatisfied with this response you may request an independent internal review of our handling of your request by submitting a complaint within two months to [foirequests@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:foirequests@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk) quoting reference FOICR 50491/18. If you ask for an internal review, it would be helpful if you could say why you are dissatisfied with the response.

As part of any internal review the Department's handling of your information request will be reassessed by staff who were not involved in providing you with this response. If you remain dissatisfied after this internal review, you would have a right of complaint to the Information Commissioner as established by section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act.

Yours sincerely

**P Feakins**  
**Freedom of Information Team**

## **FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST FOICR 50491/18**

### **Public interest test in relation to section 31 (1) (a)**

Some of the exemptions in the FOIA, referred to as 'qualified exemptions', are subject to a public interest test (PIT). This test is used to balance the public interest in disclosure against the public interest in maintaining the exemption. We must carry out a PIT where we are considering using any of the qualified exemptions in response to a request for information.

The 'public interest' is not the same as what interests the public. In carrying out a PIT we consider the greater good or benefit to the community as a whole if the information is released or not. Transparency and the 'right to know' must be balanced against the need to enable effective government and to serve the best interests of the public.

The FOIA is 'applicant blind'. This means that we cannot, and do not, ask about the motives of anyone who asks for information. In providing a response to one person, we are expressing a willingness to provide the same response to anyone.

#### Considerations in favour of disclosing the information

There is a general public interest in disclosure so that the public can have greater reassurance in the processes of formulating policy and the fact that openness in government increases public trust in, and engagement with, the government. In respect of the civil marriage handbooks it allows transparency and openness regarding the process for conducting a Civil Marriage by Registrars.

#### Considerations in favour of maintaining the exemption

Releasing information relating to the technical instructions to GRO staff and Registrars on how to complete the database for civil marriages may release sensitive information to the public and compromise the integrity of the database.

#### Conclusion

We would not release information which could make our systems more vulnerable to crime and have a duty to protect the information on our systems. We conclude that the balance of the public interest lies in maintaining the exemption and withholding the information.