

Mr Liam Rye

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30 July 2020

Dear Mr Rye

Ref: FOI2020/26654

Freedom of Information Act 2000

Thank you for your enquiry of 2 July 2020, which we have considered under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the FOI Act).

You asked for the following information:

"Please would you provide me with a copy of the EQI (Equality impact) statement you developed before finalising the SEISS scheme as per your public sector duty under the 2010 Equality Act."

In your request, you ask for the Equality impact statement that was developed for the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme. I can confirm that the equalities impacts of the SEISS were considered and noted by the Chancellor of the Exchequer when designing the scheme, in line with the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). The PSED applies to protected characteristics, which include: age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, and sexual orientation.

The information in scope of your request for the equalities impact assessment engages section 35(1)(a) of the FOI Act. Section 35(1)(a) is engaged because the information relates to the formulation and development of government policy. This is a qualified exemption and we are required to balance the public interest between disclosure and non-disclosure.

In relation to the release of this information, we recognise that there is an inherent public interest in transparency and accountability of public authorities. We also recognise the broad public interest in furthering public understanding of the issues with which public authorities deal. There is a clear public interest in the work of government departments being transparent and open to scrutiny to increase diligence.

Balanced against this, with regard to section 35(1)(a) is the public interest in protecting the government's ability to discuss and develop policies and to reach well-formed conclusions. The Information Commissioner has recognised that policy development needs some degree of freedom to enable the process to work effectively and we consider that there is a strong public interest in protecting information where release would be likely to have a detrimental impact on the ongoing formulation and development of policy.

We therefore consider that the public interest lies in favour of withholding this information.

More information about the Self Employment Income Support Scheme can be found in the published guidance online, the link to this is copied below:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/claim-a-grant-through-the-coronavirus-covid-19-self-employment-income-support-scheme>

If you have any queries about this letter, please contact us. Please quote the reference number above in any future communications.

Yours sincerely

Information Rights Unit

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Email: foirequests@hmtreasury.gov.uk

It would assist our review if you set out which aspects of the reply concern you and why you are dissatisfied.

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The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: The Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 5AF (or via their website at: <https://ico.org.uk>).

