

25 October 2022

Dear Simon

Internal review of decision regarding FOI 3999

Our Reference: FOI/2022/3999

I am writing to you in response to your request for an internal review of the decision regarding your Freedom of Information (FOI) request, please accept our apologies for the delay.

Your request and our response are published on our website.¹ In your original request, you asked us for a list of the 'several hundred user groups' and the '8 or 9 that focus on major areas of statistics'.

Our response stated that we do not maintain a central log of this information in the communications division and, therefore, that we did not hold the requested information.

We did, however, link to the National Statistician's Advisory Committees and Panels, as these are the 8 user groups that focus on major areas of statistics.²

As per your request for internal review, I have assessed how your request has been handled, in particular, our statement that the requested information is not held.

Information not held

Our response stated that we do not maintain a centralised list of the 'several hundred user groups' requested. Whilst this remains true, we should have also explained that the time and resource required to compile this list would have exceeded the cost limit for FOI requests.

In order to create a comprehensive list of all the user groups ONS engages with, we would be required to conduct a search of the email accounts and calendars of every member of staff in the ONS to locate and extract the required information. Any engagement lists already held in business areas would also need to be cross-referenced with the calendars and email correspondence of individuals to ensure the information provided is correct and up to date. Further resource would then be required to compile this information into a structured format (for example, arranging the information by business area and function).

¹

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/aboutus/transparencyandgovernance/freedomofinformationfoi/onshorizonsscanninganduksagssusergroups>

² <https://uksa.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/the-authority-board/committees/national-statisticians-advisory-committees-and-panels/>

As the scope of the requested information covers several hundred user groups, the time and resource required to search for, extract, and compile this information would exceed the cost limit for FOI requests. This is £600 or 24-hours work and, in our view, we would need to exceed this to action your request. Therefore, we should have applied Section 12 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA), whereby a public authority is not obliged to answer a request if the cost of complying would exceed the appropriate limit.

We would therefore recommend narrowing the scope of your request so we are able to answer within the appropriate limit. This could focus on a particular area of statistics or topic of interest. Please note, in some cases, we may be unable to share the names of individuals. Should you wish to make a new request, please get back in touch with us at FOI.Team@ons.gov.uk.

You may also be interested to know that as part of our work to build a theme-based engagement model, our Communications Division are planning to create a system that builds a stronger framework and more oversight of user engagement through set calendars of activity, which will include regular stakeholder forums. As part of this work, we will be looking to map out existing stakeholder forums across the Government Statistical Service (GSS) so we can build upon activities that are already successful.

Our response provided a link to a list of the National Statistician's Advisory Committees and Panels, the National Statistician's Statutory Committees and Panels, and the Inclusive Data Taskforce. This is a list of 8 user groups that focus on major areas of statistics.³ Therefore, we appropriately covered this part of your request.

Conclusions

I have found that our original conclusion that the requested information was not held was incorrect. Instead, we should have applied a Section 12 exemption to your request and advised how you could narrow the scope of your request so we are able to respond within this limit.

If you are unhappy with the outcome of this review, you have the right to appeal to the Information Commissioner. They can be contacted by writing to:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

Yours faithfully,

Lois Young

³ <https://uksa.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/the-authority-board/committees/national-statisticians-advisory-committees-and-panels/>

Legal Services

On behalf of:

Robert Bumpstead

Deputy Director - Central Policy Secretariat, UK Statistics Authority