



## FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



**Request Number:** F-2022-01483

**Keyword:** Crime

**Subject:** Fraud and Blackmail Linked to Dating Apps

### Request and Answer:

Your request for information below has now been considered. In respect of Section 1(1) (a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) we can confirm that the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) does hold the information you have requested however it is estimated that the cost of complying with your request for information would exceed the “appropriate costs limit” under Section 12(1) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. We have explained to you below that when PSNI estimates whether the appropriate limit is likely to be exceeded, it can include the costs of complying with two or more requests if certain conditions are met. In this case those conditions are met and complying with all of your requests would in our estimation exceed that appropriate limit set out in Regulation. We have explained this further below but also we followed the Information Commissioner’s Office guidance ‘*Requests where the cost of compliance exceeds the appropriate limit*’ in relation to this request, which also provides further detail on the application of Section 12 (1) of the FOIA. This guidance is available on the ICO website at the following link:

[https://ico.org.uk/media/for-organisations/documents/1199/costs\\_of\\_compliance\\_exceeds\\_appropriate\\_limit.pdf](https://ico.org.uk/media/for-organisations/documents/1199/costs_of_compliance_exceeds_appropriate_limit.pdf)

You requested the following information from PSNI:

### Request

I am a reporter for the Telegraph. I am writing to request information under the Freedom of Information Act. I would like to know:

#### Request 1

The number of reported cases of fraud linked to dating apps from January 1, 2017, until the most recent date figures are available.

#### Request 2

During the same period, the number of reported cases of blackmail in which users have been threatened with having explicit photos published if they do not perform some kind of sexual favour.

- In both cases, I would like a breakdown of:

- the specific app used (such as Tinder, Grindr, or Hinge)
- the nature of the fraud or blackmail

- the sexes/ages of the victims
- the dates of the reports
- what the result of the report was

I would appreciate it if the information could be presented in a spreadsheet format - preferably in Excel or Google Sheets.

### **Answers**

Section 17(5) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 requires the Police Service of Northern Ireland, when refusing to provide such information (because the cost of compliance exceeds the appropriate limit) to provide you the applicant with a notice which states that fact.

It is estimated that the cost of complying with your request for information would exceed the "appropriate costs limit" under Section 12(1) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Section 12 of FOIA allows a public authority to refuse to deal with a request where it estimates that it would exceed the appropriate limit to either comply with the request in its entirety or confirm or deny whether the requested information is held. The estimate must be reasonable in the circumstances of the case. The 'appropriate limit' is currently £600 for central government and £450 for all other public authorities including PSNI. The relevant Regulations which define the appropriate limit for section 12 purposes are The Freedom of Information and Data Protection (Appropriate Limit and Fees) Regulation 2004 SI 2004 No 3244. These are known as the 'Fees Regulations' for brevity.

Regulation 4(3) of the Fees Regulations states that a public authority can take into account the costs it reasonably expects to incur in carrying out the following permitted activities in complying with the request:

- (i) determining whether the information is held;
- (ii) locating the information, or a document containing it;
- (iii) retrieving the information, or a document containing it; and
- (iv) extracting the information from a document containing it.

Under those regulations PSNI can calculate the time spent on each of these permitted activities at £25 per hour (thus if the activity(s) takes more than 18 hours PSNI will be in excess of the 'appropriate limit').

PSNI can advise that enquiries made in relation to your Requests have identified that retrieval of this information would exceed the 18 hour cost limit set under the FOI Act by the Secretary of State. This information is not held in a retrievable format that provides the information without manual intervention and a comprehensive search would need to be conducted to retrieve this information. In terms of Request 1, to retrieve the information relevant to you Request would require examination of each individual fraud report on the PSNI database. In order to quantify the figures involved, over the last 5 years, there have been approximately 30,000 occurrences recorded. At a conservative estimate of 5 minutes to examine each occurrence would equate to 2,500 hours of work. This time would be further increased once the relevant occurrences have been identified, in order to provide the additional information, regarding the breakdown requested.

In relation to Request 2, individual reports of blackmail would require manual examination to retrieve relevant information and identify if the data meets the criteria of your Request. PSNI can advise that there have been over 2,000 offences of blackmail recorded since January 2017. At an estimate of 10 minutes to manually examine each record, this would take an excess of 333 hours.

As a result, in order to retrieve information relevant to your Request is estimated to take 2,833 hours, thus grossly over the appropriate cost limit of 18 hours as set by the Sectary of State.

In accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, this letter should be considered as a Refusal Notice, and the request has therefore been closed

## **Advice and Assistance**

Under Section 16 of the FOIA, PSNI will always try to assist you to refine your request and provide advice where we can. Unfortunately, on this occasion as a manual trawl of records would be required for retrieval of any relevant information, it is not possible to offer any refinement to assist your request.

For information, data surrounding fraud, including dating scams, is recorded by Action Fraud. Action Fraud provide PSNI with figures relating to fraud and cybercrime occurring in Northern Ireland and these are included in the published police recorded crime monthly updates, accompanying excel spreadsheet Table 8. For convenience we have provided the relevant link below.

<https://www.psni.police.uk/inside-psni/Statistics/police-recorded-crime-statistics/>.

Submission of a refined request would be treated as a new request, and considered in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, including consideration of relevant Part II exemptions.

If you have any queries regarding your request or this decision please do not hesitate to contact me on 028 9070 0164. When contacting the Corporate Information Branch, please quote the reference number listed at the beginning of this letter.

If you are dissatisfied in any way with the handling of your request, you have the right to request a review. You should do this as soon as possible or in any case within two months of the date of issue of this letter. In the event that you require a review to be undertaken, you can do so by writing to the Head of Corporate Information Branch, PSNI Headquarters, 65 Knock Road, Belfast, BT5 6LE or by emailing [foi@psni.pnn.police.uk](mailto:foi@psni.pnn.police.uk).

If, following an Internal Review carried out by an independent decision maker, you remain dissatisfied with the handling of your request, you may make a complaint to the Information Commissioner's Office, under Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act, and ask that they investigate whether the PSNI has complied with the terms of the Freedom of Information Act. You can write to the Information Commissioner at 'Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF', or use the ICO self-service portal available at [www.ico.org.uk/make-a-complaint/officialinformation-concerns-report/official-information-concern/](http://www.ico.org.uk/make-a-complaint/officialinformation-concerns-report/official-information-concern/)

In most circumstances, the Information Commissioner will not investigate a complaint unless an internal review procedure has been carried out however, the Commissioner has the option to investigate the matter at their discretion.

Please be advised that PSNI replies under Freedom of Information may be released into the public domain via our website @ [www.psni.police.uk](http://www.psni.police.uk)

Personal details in respect of your request have, where applicable, been removed to protect confidentiality.