



FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



Request Number: FOI-2021-01154

Keyword: Crime

Subject: Child Sexual Abuse in Schools

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 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

You requested the following information from PSNI:

Request 1

I would like to know how many allegations of sexual abuse of students by teachers were reported to this police force by schools in the local area (including primary, secondary and sixth form colleges) within the last 3 calendar years (2018, 2019, 2020).

Request 2

Of all allegations of sexual abuse of students by teachers within the last three years, how many came from independent/private schools, how many from state/comprehensive schools and how many from other types of establishments (e.g. free schools and academies).

Request 3

How many claims from independent schools led to a charge and of those, how many led to a prosecution? How many claims from state/comprehensive schools led to a charge and of those, how many led to a prosecution? How many claims from other types of schools led to a charge and of those, how many led to a prosecution?

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').

When a public authority is estimating whether the appropriate limit is likely to be exceeded, it can include the costs of complying with two or more requests if the conditions laid out in Regulation 5 of the Fees Regulations can be satisfied. Those conditions require the requests to be:

- made by one person, or by different persons who appear to the public authority to be acting in concert or in pursuance of a campaign;
- made for the same or similar information; and
- received by the public authority within any period of 60 consecutive working days.

Regulation 5(2) of the Fees Regulations requires that the requests which are to be aggregated relate "to any extent" to the same or similar information. This is quite a wide test but public authorities should still ensure that the requests meet this requirement.

Enquiries made in relation to your request has identified that retrieval of information to respond to your request would exceed the FOI legislative cost of 18 hours as set by the Secretary of State. In particular it is the retrieval of information to respond to Request 1 which places your request at an over cost. With regards to Request 1, PSNI cannot identify allegations or reports of sexual abuse based on who made the report to police therefore we would not be able to identify allegations or reports made by schools. Additionally, whilst the information requested is held electronically on the PSNI computer system, it is not held in a readily retrievable format which can be provided without manual intervention.

Therefore, to identify sexual offences relating to sexual abuse of a student by a teacher would require each individual relevant record of sexual abuse to be manually reviewed in order to determine those involved in the offence and the nature of their involvement. There were more than

3,970 sexual offences where the victim was under 18 at the time of the offence recorded by PSNI in the 2018, 2019 and 2020 calendar years. We estimate to examine these sexual offences for those calendar years would take 660 hours for each of them. Additionally, answering requests 2 and 3 are also not possible as they are contingent on being able to provide an answer for request 1.

Therefore to retrieve the information requested it would greatly exceed the statutory limit of 18 hours set by the Secretary of State under the FOI Act.

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. PSNI have considered how your request may be refined to bring it under the appropriate limit and can advise it may be possible for PSNI to assist with your request as follows:

- As a refinement PSNI can provide the number of sexual offences recorded where the Modus Operandi (MO) location is 'school' and the crime outcome where this has been applied.

The following points should also be noted:

- A request made on this basis would provide recorded sexual offences which occurred at school premises or in the vicinity of school premises so therefore the offences provided with these search parameters would not solely provide offences where the sexual abuse was committed by a teacher on a student but sexual offences at school premises more generally.
- The crime outcome would not indicate if anyone was arrested. This information would be based on the victim of the offence, regardless of who made the report to police.
- The 'school' location subtype indicates that an offence occurred at or within the vicinity of school premises. Therefore the offence may have occurred outside of school premises. Additionally, the offences may have occurred on school premises outside of school hours and those involved in the offence may not have any connection to the school.

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.

If following an internal review, carried out by an independent decision maker, you were to remain dissatisfied in any way with the handling of the request you may make a complaint, under Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act, to the Information Commissioner's Office 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. 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 his 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

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