

## Submitting a FOI or EI Request

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### 1. What are my rights?

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 has created a general right of access to information held by public authorities. This includes the right to be told whether the authority holds the information which you have requested, and a right of access to information held by the authority, subject to certain exemptions.

The Environmental Information Regulations 2004 have created similar rights of access to information about the environment. The definition of 'environmental information' is broad, and includes information about the elements of the environment (such as land, water, biological organisms, etc); factors which affect the environment, such as emissions or discharges; policies, plans, activities and other measures which affect any of these elements and factors; economic analyses of measures and activities; and human health and safety, food contamination, living conditions, built structures or cultural sites, to the extent that they are affected by environmental factors or elements.

The RVC is a public authority which is covered by Freedom of Information Act and the Environmental Information Regulations. This means that the RVC has to respond to requests for information in accordance with the Act and the Regulations. Requests can be submitted by anyone within or outside the UK. The Freedom of Information Act also requires the RVC to produce and maintain a publication scheme describing the information which the RVC routinely makes available (see [What is the publication scheme?](#)). The RVC's publication scheme and associated policies and other documents was approved on 26th November 2007 and will be reviewed and re-approved in November 2009.

Further information about your rights under the Freedom of Information Act and the Environmental Information Regulations is available on the websites of the Information Commissioner, the Department for Constitutional Affairs (Freedom of Information), and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Environmental Information Regulations).

## 2. What are the exemptions?

The Freedom of Information Act and the Environmental Information Regulations contain a number of exemptions (known as 'exceptions' in the Regulations), which specify the circumstances in which public authorities are not obliged to provide access to information. Many of the exemptions are not relevant to higher education institutions. The types of information held by the RVC which are most likely to be subject to exemptions are set out below:

- Information about yourself. This is exempt under the Act and Regulations, because a right of access to information about yourself already exists under the Data Protection Act. For information on how you can gain access to your personal data held by the RVC, see Data Protection Act: Requesting Access to Personal Data.
- Information about other people. Personal information about other people (e.g. RVC staff or students) is exempt if its disclosure would be contrary to the data protection principles set down in the Data Protection Act. The RVC will follow the guidance issued by the Information Commissioner on the circumstances in which it is permissible to release third party personal data under the Freedom of Information Act.
- Information provided in confidence where disclosure of the information would constitute an actionable breach of confidence (i.e. one for which the RVC could be sued).
- Commercially sensitive information whose disclosure would prejudice the commercial interests of the RVC or another body.
- Information whose disclosure would endanger the health and safety of other people.
- Information whose disclosure would prejudice law enforcement, the apprehension or prosecution of offenders, the administration of justice and similar functions.
- Information which is readily accessible by other means. This applies to Freedom of Information requests which ask for information covered by the RVC's publication scheme (see What is the publication scheme?).

Many exemptions are subject to a public interest test. This means that before it can apply the exemption, the RVC has to determine that the public interest in withholding the information outweighs the public interest in releasing it. Further information about the exemptions to the right of access under the Freedom of Information Act and the Environmental Information Regulations is available on the website of the Information Commissioner.

Public authorities may also refuse to comply with a Freedom of Information request if the cost of locating or extracting the information is estimated to exceed an "appropriate limit". This has been set at £450 for bodies like the RVC, or 18 hours of staff time at the rate of £25 per hour. The RVC will not normally provide information in response to FOI requests which exceed the appropriate limit. This limit does not apply to Environmental Information requests, but the Regulations allow authorities to refuse requests which are "manifestly unreasonable" or "too general". In the latter case, the authority must first attempt to refine or narrow down the request by providing the applicant with reasonable advice and assistance.

We will inform you in all cases where information has been withheld because of an exemption or because your request exceeds the statutory limit.

## 3. What is the publication scheme?

The Freedom of Information Act requires each public authority to produce, maintain and make available a publication scheme in the interests of openness and accountability. The purpose of a publication scheme is to describe the information which the authority routinely makes available, including the manner in which the information is published and whether any charges apply.

RVC has adopted the model publication scheme which has been approved for the higher education sector. Our [Publication Scheme](#) link to the publication scheme within Policy and Legal” outlines the classes of information which the RVC publishes or intends to publish, and is a commitment by the RVC to make available the information described. In many cases, the Scheme includes links to information which is available on-line.

We recommend that you consult our [Publication Scheme](#) link to the publication scheme within Policy and Legal” before submitting a Freedom of Information or Environmental Information request, for the following reasons:

- The Scheme is broad ranging, covering many aspects of the RVC's activities and administration.
- Information which is included in the Scheme is held in formats which can be sent out readily on request. You are likely to receive information more quickly if you request it under the Publication Scheme than if you submit a Freedom of Information or Environmental Information request.
- Under the Freedom of Information Act, information covered by a publication scheme is exempt from FOI requests because it is already accessible under the scheme. This means that if you submit a Freedom of Information request for information which is included in the RVC's Publication Scheme, you will be directed towards the Scheme.

Further information on the RVC's Publication Scheme is available in the Scheme's Introduction.

#### 4. How do I submit a request?

Although requests can be sent to any the RVC staff member, we recommend that you send your Freedom of Information or Environmental Information request to the following address to ensure that it will be dealt with promptly:

FOI Officer  
Library and Information Services Division  
Royal Veterinary College  
Hawkshead Lane  
North Mymms  
Hatfield  
AL9 7TA  
United Kingdom

Telephone: +44 (0)1707 666384

Email: [FOI@RVC.ac.uk](mailto:FOI@RVC.ac.uk)

Please include the following information in your request:

- Your name.
- An address which we can use for correspondence, and the address to which you wish us to send the information (if different).
- A description of the information which you are requesting.

Freedom of Information requests must be submitted in writing (this can include email or fax). Environmental Information requests do not have to be in writing, but we recommend that you send a written request to avoid ambiguity.

You do not have to state that you are submitting your request under the Freedom of Information Act or the Environmental Information Regulations. However, we recommend that you do so, particularly if you choose to send your request to an address other than that given above. Do not be concerned if

you are uncertain whether your request is covered by the Act or by the Regulations: public authorities like the RVC have a duty to ensure that requests are processed according to the appropriate legislation. We will inform you if we process your request under different legislation than the one under which you submitted it.

## 5. What happens next?

We will send you an acknowledgement of your request as soon as possible. This will indicate the deadline by when we will send you a response, and whether we will process your request as a Freedom of Information or Environmental Information request. If this is different from the legislation under which you submitted your request, we will explain why the other legislation applies. We may also ask you to provide further information or clarification if we require this to process your request, and may contact you again for additional information or clarification if necessary.

After the RVC receives your request, we must consider it and respond to it. Our response will confirm or deny whether the RVC holds the information which you have requested. If we hold the information, we will either provide it, explain how you can gain access to it, or explain why we cannot provide the information, quoting the relevant exemption in the Freedom of Information Act or the Environmental Information Regulations. If the exemption involved a public interest test, we will explain why we decided that the public interest was in favour of withholding the information (see [What are the exemptions?](#)). Our response will also outline your right to appeal if you are unhappy with our handling of your request (see [Can I appeal?](#)).

The Act and Regulations require us to respond to your request within 20 working days, commencing on the day after receipt of your request. This period can be extended in the following circumstances:

- Any period when we are waiting for you to pay a fee which we have communicated to you in a fees notice (see [What are the charges?](#)) does not count towards the deadline. This applies to both Freedom of Information and Environmental Information requests.
- If we require further information or clarification from you to enable us to process your Freedom of Information request, and we communicate this to you, the 20 working day deadline starts on the date when we receive the information from you. This only applies to Freedom of Information requests.
- The Freedom of Information Act allows public authorities to extend the deadline for a "reasonable" period if they need extra time to decide whether the public interest in upholding an exemption outweighs the public interest in releasing the information. This only applies to Freedom of Information requests.
- The Environmental Information Regulations allow the deadline to be extended to 40 working days if the information requested is so extensive or complex that compliance within 20 days would be impractical. This only applies to Environmental Information requests.

The RVC will notify you as soon as possible (and in all cases within 20 working days) if we determine that your request is likely to exceed the "appropriate limit" set by the Freedom of Information legislation, or if your Environmental Information request is likely to be refused because it is "manifestly unreasonable" or "too general" (see [What are the exemptions?](#)). We will provide you with reasonable advice and assistance to help you to refine or narrow down your request. If we conclude that the information which you have requested is held by another authority, we will provide you with that authority's contact details and can send your request to them if you ask us to.

When processing your request, we may need to consult other organisations or individuals who could be affected by the release of information to you. This may involve passing on some details of your request to those organisations or individuals.

## 6. Can I appeal?

You can ask for an internal review of your case if the RVC refuses your request or you are dissatisfied with the handling of your request. Appeals should be submitted promptly, and within 12 months of our response to your request.

Appeals should be sent in writing to the Assistant Principal, Academic Support and Development, at the following address:

Assistant Principal and College Secretary  
Royal Veterinary College  
Hawkshead Lane  
North Mymms  
Hatfield  
AL9 7TA  
United Kingdom

Fax: +44 (0)1707 666322

Email: [FOI@RVC.ac.uk](mailto:FOI@RVC.ac.uk)

The Assistant Principal will acknowledge your appeal within seven working days, and will convene a panel to investigate it. A response will be sent to you within 40 working days of receipt of your appeal. If it includes a decision that information should be released to you, the information will be provided to you as soon as possible.

If you are dissatisfied with the RVC's response to your appeal, you can apply to the [Information Commissioner](#) for a decision on whether your request has been dealt with in accordance with the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act or the Environmental Information Regulations. The Commissioner will normally require you to have gone through our internal appeal process first before he considers your appeal. If the Commissioner finds in your favour, the Commissioner can require the RVC to release the information to you. The Commissioner can be contacted at the following address:

Information Commissioner  
Wycliffe House  
Water Lane  
Wilmslow  
Cheshire SK9 5AF  
United Kingdom

Further information about your right to appeal to the Information Commissioner is available on the Commissioner's [website](#)

## 7. What formats can I receive?

When you submit your request or any time before we have responded to it, you can specify a preferred method by which the information should be communicated to you. This can include asking us to prepare a digest or summary of the information; asking for the information in a particular format (e.g. in electronic form or on paper); or asking for the opportunity to inspect records containing the information. A public authority must provide the information in the form which you have requested if it is reasonably practicable to do so.

The RVC will make reasonable efforts to match your preferred format, but applicants should note the following:

- We are unable to digitize information which is only held in paper form unless you are prepared to pay the full costs of the digitization.
- If you are allowed to inspect original records, this will be done by appointment in the RVC Library and will be subject to the Library's rules.

In all cases, you will receive an explanation if we are unable to provide the information in your preferred format.

If you do not indicate a preference as to how the information should be communicated to you, we will choose the method which involves the least cost to you and to the RVC (see What are the charges?).

## 8. What are the charges?

If your request is a Freedom of Information request and the cost of locating the information is below the "appropriate limit" (see What are the exemptions?), we can only charge you for postage and for costs associated with reproducing the information, such as printing and photocopying. We will charge for printing and photocopying at the rate of £0.10 per page. Charges may be waived at the discretion of the FOI Officer.

The Environmental Information Regulations allow authorities to levy a "reasonable" charge for the provision of information. As long as the cost of locating the information is likely to be below the "appropriate limit" set by the FOI legislation, we will only charge you for printing, photocopying and postage, at the same rate as for FOI requests. Charges may be waived at the discretion of the Freedom of Information Officer.

Where charges apply, we will send you a fees notice as soon as possible specifying what you have to pay. We must receive payment from you before we can supply you with the information which you have requested. If we do not receive payment from you within 60 working days for Environmental Information requests, or 3 months for Freedom of Information requests, we will treat your request as having been withdrawn.

Separate charges apply to requests for information under the RVC's Publication Scheme: see Publication Scheme: Ordering Copies for further information.

## 9. Can I submit multiple requests?

You can submit more than one request. However, if you submit Freedom of Information requests relating to the same or similar information within 60 working days of each other, we can treat them as if they were one request for the purpose of determining whether the cost of locating the information exceeds the "appropriate limit" (see What are the exemptions?). This does not apply to Environmental Information requests.

## 10. Can I re-use the information?

The copyright of any information which is supplied to you will be owned by the RVC unless otherwise indicated. The supply of information under the Freedom of Information Act or the Environmental Information Regulations does not give the person or organisation who receives it an automatic right to re-use the information in a way which would infringe copyright, for example, by making multiple copies, publishing and issuing copies to the public.

Brief extracts of any material which is supplied to you may be reproduced under the fair dealing provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (sections 29 and 30) for the purposes of research for non-commercial purposes, private study, criticism, review and news reporting. More extensive re-use must only be carried out with prior written permission from the RVC.

Enquiries about the re-use of material should be directed to the RVC's FOI Officer: see [How do I submit a request for contact details](#).

## 11. Where can I get advice?

Public authorities have a legal duty to provide applicants with reasonable advice and assistance in relation to their Freedom of Information and Environmental Information requests. For example, the RVC can help you to narrow down your request to one which will fall within the "appropriate limit" set by the Freedom of Information legislation (see [What are the exemptions?](#)). If you require advice or assistance, please contact the FOI Officer: see [How do I submit a request?](#) for contact details.

Other organisations, such as the Citizens Advice Bureau, may also be able to assist you in developing your request. Information about your rights and how to submit a Freedom of Information and Environmental Information request is available on the website of the [Information Commissioner](#).