



# Policy: Freedom of information

## Purpose

To set out the Australian National University's approach to meeting its responsibilities under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (Cth) ('FOI Act').

## Overview

The FOI Act gives any person the right to seek access to information held by or in the possession of Commonwealth authorities, including ANU.

The right of access is subject to exemptions necessary to protect a range of public interests (including the protection of personal privacy and commercial in confidence material). It also does not extend to documents that are available for purchase.

The FOI Act also gives every person the right to:

- ask for incomplete, incorrect, out of date or misleading personal information the University holds about them to be amended or annotated; and
- seek review of a decision not to allow access to a document or not to amend their personal record.

This policy aims to ensure compliance with the University's obligations under the FOI Act and promote a consistent approach to the handling of requests for access.

## Scope

This policy applies to all staff and contractors who provide services to the community on behalf of ANU, and governs the University's approach to dealing with applications by any person for access to documents and amendment of personal information under the FOI Act.

## Definitions

**Applicant** means a person who has made a request.

**Contractor** includes a sub-contractor who provides services to the community on behalf of ANU, where the contract was entered on or after 1 November 2010.

**Documents** include but are not limited to paper documents, electronic documents, audio recordings, pictures, plans, photographs and emails. It does not include documents that

are publicly available such as reference material that is otherwise available and documents that can be purchased from or available freely from the University.

**Exempt documents** are documents that the University may refuse to release under the FOI Act on specific grounds, such as breach of confidence. The University may also choose to release documents (including exempt documents) outside of the FOI Act.

**FOI Co-ordinator** is an officer authorised under section 23(1) of the FOI Act to make decisions in relation to FOI requests.

**FOI request** means a request for access or amendment to documents under the FOI Act.

**Freedom of Information Act 1982 (Cth) ('FOI Act')** is Commonwealth legislation that allows the public to seek access to information held by any Commonwealth agency or authority, including the Australian National University.

## Policy

### Principles

1. The University facilitates access by members of the public to documents it holds, subject to those exemptions defined in the FOI Act as being consistent with the public interest, including the preservation of personal privacy and the maintenance of confidentiality.
2. Where reasonable and practicable the University provides access to documents it holds without requiring a person to make a formal application under the FOI Act. In particular, the University does this by:
  - providing an administrative scheme for current and former students and current staff to access their own student or personnel records, and
  - reviewing information that is routinely requested under the FOI Act to ascertain if that information may be published.
3. The University promotes consistency in handling FOI access requests by publishing information about the application process and procedures and by providing a single point of contact for applicants.
4. All staff and contractors providing services on behalf of ANU are to assist the FOI team when requested by promptly conducting searches for, and where necessary providing copies of, records relevant to an FOI request, and indicating to the FOI Co-ordinator any concerns about release of documents.
5. Staff responsible for dealing with FOI access requests are to assist applicants as necessary to make a valid application, including where the scope of the initial request is too large to be processed.

6. The University exercises its best endeavours to make a decision on an FOI request as promptly as possible and within statutory timeframes. The University may seek an extension of time from the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner where the request is complex or voluminous. The FOI Co-ordinator liaises with the applicant where further time is necessary to finalise the response to their request.

7. The University advises applicants of their rights of review when a decision about access to documents or amendment to their personal information has been made. Internal review of a decision will be made by the Chief Operating Officer.

8. The Vice-Chancellor as the principal officer of the University ensures that sufficient staff are appointed as authorised officers under the FOI Act to facilitate the timely handling of FOI requests.

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