

Guideline: Processing freedom of information requests

Purpose

To set out the actions and time frames for the processing of freedom of information requests.

Definitions

Chargeable request is a request for documents other than the applicant's own personal information.

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.

Non-chargeable request is a request for access to an individual's own personal information.

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

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.

Guideline

The following actions are to be carried out by staff within the relevant time frames when processing freedom of information requests. These times represent the maximum times available. For simple requests (including those involving a small number of documents or where it is clear that no exemptions apply), the processing time will be shorter.

Calendar day	Action	Responsibility
	Determine validity of request	

0	<p>Is the request valid?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If Yes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ and sent by email, send return email message to applicant advising that their request has been received by the University ○ and sent by mail or delivered, send acknowledgement letter to applicant on calendar day 13 • If No: clarifies the scope of the request and sends an acknowledgement email or letter to the applicant once a valid request is received • If the request is for access to applicant's own staff or student file refer to either Director Human Resources as a section 15A request or Director Student Administration 	FOI Coordinator
	<p>Informs the Legal Office of the request if required</p>	FOI Coordinator
1	<p>Advises FOI Coordinator which lawyer will be assisting</p>	Legal Office
	<p>Refers the request to the appropriate areas for confirmation that documents exist, estimate of time to locate documents, contact person for the request</p>	FOI Coordinator
	<p>Assess charges</p>	
2-3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chargeable request - estimates time to search for relevant documents • Non-chargeable request – identifies relevant documents 	Responsible area
4	<p>Chargeable request - sends an email to the responsible areas reminding them of estimation and search times</p>	FOI Coordinator

5	Chargeable request - informs the FOI Coordinator of estimated search time	Responsible area
	Chargeable request: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • calculates charges, based on advice of estimated search time • sends applicant notice of preliminary assessment of charges and acknowledgement letter 	FOI Coordinator
	PROCESSING TIMELINE SUSPENDED UNTIL CHARGES ARE ACCEPTED BY APPLICANT	
	Retrieve documents	
6	Receives deposit or full payment of charges from applicant: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes - notifies relevant area to retrieve documents and send to FOI Coordinator • No – resulting from applicant’s action or inaction: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ applicant requests fees to be reduced or waived <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ notifies applicant within 30 days of decision to reduce or waive fees ○ applicant does not respond within 30 days <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ request is taken to be withdrawn 	FOI Coordinator
7-11	Identifies documents and notes any objections to their release	Responsible area
12	Sends an email to the responsible areas reminding them of retrieval of documents	FOI Coordinator
13	Non-chargeable requests – sends acknowledgement letter to applicant	FOI Coordinator

14	Chargeable and non-chargeable requests - sends relevant documents to FOI Coordinator noting any objections to their release.	Responsible area
	Non-chargeable requests - sends acknowledgement letter to applicant	FOI Coordinator
	Examine documents	
15-19	Assesses relevance of documents to request, identifies sensitivities of documents in consultation with responsible area and Legal Office	FOI Coordinator
20	Consults with third parties if necessary	FOI Coordinator
	ADD 30 DAYS TO PROCESSING TIME, IF TIME FRAME IS EXTENDED e.g. consultation with third parties, imposition of a charge, extension granted by the Australian Information Commissioner or by agreement with applicant.	
21	Informs responsible area and any other stakeholders of proposed exemptions and seek comments	FOI Coordinator
	Prepare decision letter	
22-24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • redacts exempt information from document copies • prepares decision notification • prepares statement of reasons • finalises schedule of documents • copies and redacts documents if necessary 	FOI Coordinator
25	Provides final comments about proposed exemptions	Responsible area

	Quality assurance	
26-28	Sends decision letter and documents to alternate FOI delegate for final checking	FOI Coordinator
29	Considers proposed changes and implements if believes they are required	FOI Coordinator
30	<p>Sends decision letter to applicant</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chargeable request - applicant to pay any outstanding fees prior to release of documents • Non-chargeable request - documents sent with the decision letter 	FOI Coordinator
	Informs the Legal Office of decision if required	FOI Coordinator
31-40	Publishes material to the Disclosure Log, if appropriate	FOI Coordinator

Delegations

- **000398**: Make decisions in respect of requests made under the Freedom of Information Act for access to documents.

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