

Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA)

Decision notice

Date: 16 December 2020

Public Authority: Department for Education
Address: Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

Decision (including any steps ordered)

1. The complainant requested information from the Department for Education (DfE) about the National Careers Service's "Discover your skills and careers" and "Skills health check" assessment tools. The DfE had failed to provide a substantive response by the date of this notice.
2. The Commissioner's decision is that the DfE failed to respond to the request within 20 working days and has therefore breached section 10 of the FOIA.
3. The Commissioner requires the DfE to take the following steps to ensure compliance with the legislation.
 - Issue a substantive response, under the FOIA, to the request.
4. The DfE must take these steps within 35 calendar days of the date of this decision notice. Failure to comply may result in the Commissioner making written certification of this fact to the High Court pursuant to section 54 of the FOIA and may be dealt with as a contempt of court.

Request and response

5. On 9 October 2020, the complainant wrote to the DfE and requested information in the following terms:

"Under the Freedom of Information Act I would like to request details relating to the National Careers Service's work with SHL Group Limited to produce the 'Discover your skills and careers' and 'Skills health check' assessment tools. Please provide:

a) Details relating to the 'Discover your skills and careers' website, including how much SHL Group were paid

*b) Details of any licensing costs relating to the website's use of information from the US Department of Labor's O*NET OnLine site*

c) Details of any other consulting costs relating to the 'Discover your skills and careers' website."

6. The DfE acknowledged the request on 9 October 2020 but had failed to provide a substantive response by the date of this notice.

Scope of the case

7. The complainant contacted the Commissioner on 11 November 2020 to complain about the failure, by the DfE, to respond to the request.
8. In line with her usual practice, the Commissioner contacted the DfE on 30 November 2020 to highlight the outstanding response. She requested that the DfE respond to the request within 10 working days. The correspondence was neither acknowledged nor responded to.
9. The scope of this notice and the following analysis is to consider whether the DfE has complied with section 10 of the FOIA.

Reasons for decision

10. Section 1(1) of the FOIA states that:

Any person making a request for information to a public authority is entitled –

(a) to be informed in writing by the public authority whether it holds information of the description specified in the request, and

- (b) *if that is the case, to have that information communicated to him.*

11. Section 8(1) of the FOIA states:

In this Act any reference to a "request for information" is a reference to such a request which –

- (a) *is in writing,*
(b) *states the name of the applicant and an address for correspondence, and*
(c) *describes the information requested.*
12. The Commissioner considers that the request in question fulfilled these criteria and therefore constituted a valid request for recorded information under the FOIA.
13. Section 10 of the FOIA states that responses to requests made under the Act must be provided *"promptly and in any event not later than the twentieth working day following the date of receipt."*
14. From the evidence presented to the Commissioner in this case, it is clear that, in failing to issue a response to the request within 20 working days, the DfE has breached section 10 of the FOIA.

Right of appeal

15. Either party has the right to appeal against this decision notice to the First-tier Tribunal (Information Rights). Information about the appeals process may be obtained from:

First-tier Tribunal (Information Rights)
GRC & GRP Tribunals,
PO Box 9300,
LEICESTER,
LE1 8DJ

Tel: 0300 1234504

Fax: 0870 739 5836

Email: grc@justice.gov.uk

Website: www.justice.gov.uk/tribunals/general-regulatory-chamber

16. If you wish to appeal against a decision notice, you can obtain information on how to appeal along with the relevant forms from the Information Tribunal website.
17. Any Notice of Appeal should be served on the Tribunal within 28 (calendar) days of the date on which this decision notice is sent.

Signed

**Ben Tomes
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Information Commissioner's Office
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SK9 5AF**