



Policy reviewed, updated and ratified by the GB:	Feb 22
Date of next review:	Feb 25

## **Freedom of Information Policy 2022**

## **Contents**

### Freedom of Information Policy

1. Introduction
2. Definitions
3. Related Policies, Procedures and Documents
4. Rationale
5. Core Principles
6. Implementation, Monitoring and Review

### Appendices

Appendix 1      Appeals Procedure

# Freedom of Information Policy 2019

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Northwood School is part of the QED Academy Trust
- 1.2 Staff are employed by Northwood School (and the employer entity is referred to hereafter as "the School") and each entity must comply with the terms of this Policy document.
- 1.3 The School actively seeks and is legally required to share information about itself and its activities, subject to the constraints of the General Data Protection Regulation and certain sensitive matters explicitly addressed by the Freedom of Information Act 2000.
- 1.4 In this Policy, all references to "we" and "our" in this Policy refer to the School, unless distinguished in the text.
- 1.5 The School believes that the freedom of information is a 'fundamental value'.

## 2. Definitions

- 2.1 The main legislation covering freedom of information is the Freedom of Information Act 2000 ("the Act"). Under the Act, each Institution is classed as a "public authority" and has a legal obligation to provide information through an approved publication scheme and in response to valid requests made by individuals to the Institution under the Act.
- 2.2 Information that is held by the School in a recorded (paper or electronic) format can be requested under the Act and, subject to any relevant exemptions, will need to be disclosed. **Disclosures under the Act are disclosures into the public domain.** This includes recorded information, printed documents, computer files, letters, emails, photographs and sound or video recordings.
- 2.3 The Act does not give people access to their own personal data (information about themselves). Access to personal data is covered under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) our separate policy in relation to how the School deals with its obligations under the GDPR is detailed in the Privacy Statement for Parents & Carers which can be found on the Northwood School website:

<http://www.northwood-school.org.uk/Parents/Key-Policies/>

## 3. Related Policies and Documents

- 3.1 Accessing Information under the Freedom of Information Act guidance;
- 3.2 Safeguarding Policy and Child Protection Policy;
- 3.3 Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblowing) Policy;
- 3.4 GDPR Data Protection Policy;
- 3.6 Other policies and documents may be identified from time to time as circumstances change and may be added to this list.

## **4. Rationale**

- 4.1 The School is a separate public authority covered by the Act and has produced this policy to ensure employees and agents of the School comply with their respective obligations under the Act.

## **5. Core Principles**

- 5.1 The School will publish the information set out in the [ICO Model Publication Scheme](#) and will ensure that documents containing the information are available on request.
- 5.2 The School will give access to information not covered by the Model Publication Scheme, except for any exempt information, following a valid request and the payment, where appropriate, of the fee within 20 school days or 60 working days, whichever is shorter.
- 5.3 There will be occasions where the School does not hold the information requested or when it can refuse to give access to the requested information. If a refusal is made the School will give reasons for the refusal and list any applicable exemptions (providing reasons for the public interest test being better served by non-disclosure (than by disclosure) where necessary).
- 5.4 The School will publish details of an appeals procedure against refusal to give access.

## **6. Implementation, Monitoring and Review**

- 6.1 Publication of information listed in the Publication Scheme will be the responsibility of the manager named in the publication scheme.
- 6.2 The Publication Scheme and the materials it covers will be readily available from the School and published on the School website.
- 6.3 In addition to the information listed in the Publication Scheme, the School will share any other information that it holds, as quickly as possible and without charge, unless it is properly exempt under the Act, for example where it:
  - i. Is not held by the School;
  - ii. is information reasonably accessible through another route (i.e. already within the public domain);
  - iii. is information in respect of an investigation that relates to criminal proceedings, either current or potential;
  - iv. relates to the prevention or detection of crime;
  - v. relates to Court records, including information relating to legal proceedings;
  - vi. is personal information;
  - vii. is information provided in confidence;
  - viii. is planned to be publically disclosed in the future;
  - ix. is likely to endanger health and safety;
  - x. is covered by legal privilege;
  - xi. would prejudice commercial interests, or
  - xii. is vexatious or repeated.
- 6.4 This is not an exhaustive list and should a request be received it should be forwarded immediately to the Headteacher. The statutory timescale starts to run as soon as it is received by a school (no matter who within the school received it).

6.5 Access to information held by the School under the Act will be overseen by the Headteacher.

6.6 The Headteacher will:

- i. publish on the School website and in printed form the Model Publication Scheme;
- ii. provide assistance to persons wishing to access information but who are unclear about the process;
- iii. acknowledge access requests within 5 working days of receipt;
- iv. where further details of the information requested are needed before the access request can be dealt with, send a letter or email requesting that information within 5 working days of receipt of the access request;
- v. where a fee is to be paid, send a letter or email setting out details of the fee to be paid within 5 working days of the receipt of the access request or, where applicable, further details of the information request are received;
- vi. make the information accessible in the form which the applicant requests within 20 school days of receipt of the original request (or 60 working days, whichever is shorter) or within 20 school days of the receipt of clarification about the request if it was required (or 60 working days whichever is shorter);
- vii. in some instances, an extension to the timescale may be required either due to the length of time that is required to consider the public interest arguments under the Act in respect of possible disclosure of the requested information. The School is to notify the person requesting the information of the extension which should be completed as promptly as possible and in any event within an additional twenty working days;
- viii. where the information is exempt or the access request is vexatious or repeated, the Headteacher will send a refusal notice to the applicant setting out the reason for refusal with, where necessary, the category of exemption claimed, any public interest test considerations and drawing attention to the appeals procedure;
- ix. where the information is exempt, the Headteacher will decide whether to confirm/deny or not in the refusal notice the existence of the information following the guidance in the Act;
- x. where the refusal is on the grounds that the information is available elsewhere, the Headteacher will, in the refusal notice, guide the applicant on where to access the information;
- xi. the Headteacher will direct appeals to the Chair of Governors within two days of receipt, and
- xii. the Chair of Governors will complete the appeals process.

6.8 The Headteacher will present a termly report to the Chair of Governors and an annual report to the Governing Body detailing access requests received. For each individual request, the report will give:

- i. The date of the request;
- ii. The subject(s) of the request;
- iii. Whether the request was made by an individual or a legal person, such as a company or corporation;
- iv. The School's response to the request;
- v. Where the response to the request was to give access:
  - the time taken to satisfy the request, and

- the marginal cost of providing access and any fee charged.
  - vi. Where the response to the request was to refuse access:
    - the reason for the refusal including the category of the exemption cited where applicable, and
    - the response of the applicant to the refusal.
  - vii. Where an appeal against a refusal has been made and the outcome of the appeal.
  - viii. The report will not give names or other personal details of the applicants, however it will where refusal to give access has been made on the grounds of 'repeated requests' which will then include a note showing which requests were made by the same person.
- 6.9 This Policy will be reviewed every three years and updated, as applicable, to ensure that it remains appropriate in the light of any relevant changes to the law, organisational policies or contractual obligations.

Ratified by the Governing Body: 7<sup>th</sup> February 2019

# Appendix 1

## Freedom of Information - Appeals Procedure

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Act places a duty on public authorities to put a process in place to ensure that applicants are able to appeal to the public authority for an internal review if they are not content with the public authority's decision on the release of information. This provides a first review stage for the applicants.

### 2. Appeal Process

#### 2.1 Principles

If **the School** refuses to supply the information requested, or the applicant is dissatisfied with its response or feels that a fee has been applied unfairly they may ask for an internal review of that decision. The following principles will apply when considering an appeal request:

- i. The review will be undertaken by an individual who was not involved in the original request for information.
- ii. If the applicant has not received a response to a request for information within 20 school days or 60 working days (whichever is shorter) it may be regarded that **the School** has refused the request; the individual therefore has a right of appeal.
- iii. All reviews will make an assessment of the information released against the information requested and make a full review of the information associated with the original application.
- iv. The reviewer will discuss the decisions made with the staff members concerned with the original request in order to gain a full picture of how decisions were made.
- v. The reviewer may contact the applicant at their own discretion.
- vi. The reviewer may obtain advice from external sources including legal advice.
- vii. Conclusion will be summarised and handed to the Headteacher who will log them centrally for future reference.
- viii. An internal review must be completed before an appeal can be made to the Information Commissioner.

#### 2.2 Timescales

- i. The School will aim to deal with complex appeals within 20 working days of the receipt of the appeal.
- ii. If it becomes clear at any stage of the appeal that the above timescales cannot be met the School will inform the applicant in writing and give a revised deadline for completion of the review.

#### 2.3 Outcomes

An internal review may have three outcomes:

- i. The original decision is reversed.
- ii. The original decision is amended.
- iii. The original decision is upheld.

Whatever the outcome of the appeal the complainant will be informed in writing with appropriate information about what will be provided should a decision be reversed or amended.

#### **2.4 Requesting an Internal Review:**

- i. Requests for internal review should be submitted in writing to the Headteacher
- ii. If the applicant is not happy with the outcome of the internal review they have the right to request a review externally to the School. Requests for such an external review should be made in writing to:

The Information Commissioner  
Wycliffe House  
Water Lane  
Wilmslow  
SK9 5AF