

TEMPLATE FOR APPLYING FOI SECTION 40(2)

DOF/2022-0369

The lawfulness, fairness and transparency test

Business areas are required to carry out a “lawfulness, fairness and transparency test” when considering the disclosure of third party personal data falling within the scope of a FOI or EIR request. **In most cases**, neither of the lawful basis outlined below will apply, however the business area must complete the test as evidence as having considered.

The steps are as follows:-

1. Consider the Personal Data falling within the scope of the request

ICO guidance states that, personal data only includes information relating to natural persons who:

- can be identified or who are identifiable, directly from the information in question; or
- who can be indirectly identified from that information in combination with other information.

The request is for:

- the number of Dignity at Work complaints received for the NICS from 2019 to date, broken down by department
- the number of complaints that were upheld, broken down by department
- the length of time it took to provide the final response for each case upheld, broken down by department

Brief description: Release of the requested information could risk individuals being identified due to the small numbers involved. Some Departments have had less than 5 Dignity at Work complaints in the timeframe requested and to release this information could risk an individual or group of individuals being identified. As Data Controller, The Department cannot not assume that the requester does not hold other information which could be used in conjunction with this to identify individuals.

The Information Commissioner’s Office has also previously agreed to this decision not to release personal information which has the possibility of identifying individuals given the small scale of Northern Ireland and that these individuals are internal employees.

2. Lawfulness

Do either of the two lawful basis below which allow for the disclosure of personal data apply?

- Consent:** We do not have the consent of the employees to share their personal information. To release the requested information would risk identifying the individuals and would therefore contravene the data protection principles.

- ☒ **Legitimate interests:** Disclosure is not necessary for the Department's legitimate interests or the legitimate interests of a third party that overrides the data subject(s) rights and freedoms, particularly their right to privacy. The data subjects involved would have a reasonable expectation that this information would not be shared with the public at large.

The DoF Privacy Notice states that we may process personal information for the purposes of detection and investigation of suspected or actual fraud, loss or crime, data matching under the National Fraud Initiative, staff monitoring and as required by other legislation. This request is based solely on the requester's private interest as opposed to a pressing public interest that would necessitate transparency and disclosure of the information.

Consequently, if NICSHR were to comply with the request, it would, in effect, be making an unrestricted disclosure of personal data to the general public on the strength of the requester's private interests. This could constitute a disproportionate and unwarranted level of interference with the individuals' rights and freedoms – particularly their right to privacy and family life under the Human Rights Act 1998.