

Our Reference: FOI 1850

By email: [REDACTED]

Date: 11 March 2016

Dear [REDACTED]

## **FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST**

Further to my letter of 22 February 2016 acknowledging your request for information which was received by us on 12 February 2016, I am now in a position to respond.

You requested the following:

***The time frame for my request is from 00:01 1 January 2013 to 23:59 31 December 2015.***

***In line with section 1(1) of the Act please either confirm or deny whether your department holds a database or databases of staff expense claims.***

***By 'staff expense claims' I mean any claim made by staff for any expenditure whatsoever.***

***If a confirmation, please disclose:***

- ***the number of databases held***
- ***the purpose of each database***
- ***a copy of each database***

***For each individual claim on each database, please provide the following fields of information (where available):***

- ***The amount of money claimed for***
- ***The date of the claim***
- ***The name of the vendor***
- ***The description of and/or reason for the claim***
- ***The name and job title of each claimant***

***Any other non-exempt field of information***

I am handling your request under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the Act).

I can confirm that the Food Standards Agency (FSA) holds information falling within the terms of your request.

With regards to the first part of your request, the Food Standards Agency has two recording systems for expenses.

Firstly, where employees incur expenses and then make a claim, the expenses are entered and authorised via a self-service module that forms part of our fully integrated HR and Payroll system.

Secondly, expenses that are incurred by those employees holding a Government Procurement Card are handled separately to the HR/payroll system and are reconciled via the FSA's finance system, which is an interlinked accounting system made up of different modules.

Owing to the technical nature of both of these systems, we are unable to provide a copy. However we are able to extract data from each system.

The second part of the information that you have requested is provided for in the attachment to this this letter.

Please note that in details about the item purchased, there is no requirement to record the vendor/supplier or the service provider for each claim. The date recorded on the payroll system is the date that the expense was claimed by a staff member. The payment may be cumulative (for example, where several claims for car mileage were claimed within a short period).

Accommodation, flights and rail tickets for staff (except in a few limited circumstances) are booked centrally through the FSA's approved suppliers. Staff do not therefore need to claim expenses to cover this expenditure.

Please note that some of the information contained in the attachment relating to the names and job titles of staff is being withheld from disclosure under Section 40(2) and (3)(a)(i) of the Act as disclosure of this information would be in breach of the FSA's obligations under the Data Protection Act (DPA) 1998: the duty to process data fairly and lawfully (the first principle).

The names and job titles of staff below Director level are being withheld as we consider it would be unfair for individual members of staff, including members of staff just below Director level, to be scrutinised for expenditure that is authorised and in accordance with the FSA's rules on expense claims. You may be aware, under section 40(2) of the Act and its interaction with the Data Protection Act 1998, to which

the ICO guidance<sup>1</sup> below refers, in order to disclose personal data, a justification is required for disclosure.

We believe that the legitimate public interest in disclosing information in relation to staff expenses is met without disclosing the names and other personal details of individuals. This is also met through information we routinely publish on the FSA website in relation to Government Procurement Card (GPC) expenditure and Director and Board Member expenses claims. These can be accessed via the following link.

<http://www.food.gov.uk/about-us/data-transparency-accounts>

So you are aware, details of FSA Director (and Board Member) expenses are published regularly every quarter on the FSA website: <http://www.food.gov.uk/about-us/data-and-policies/transparencydata/expenses-gifts-hospitality>. This includes accommodation and travel even where paid for centrally. The published data is current up to the end of quarter 2 of the financial year 2015-16. Data for quarter 3 is currently being collated.

If you have any queries about this letter, please contact me on the details provided in the footer of this letter. Please remember to quote the reference number above in any future communications.

If you are not satisfied with the way the FSA has handled your request for information, you should write within two calendar months of the date of this letter to the Openness Team, and ask for an internal review. They will arrange for the Complaints Coordinator to conduct the review.

Their address is Food Standards Agency, Room 2C Aviation House, 125 Kingsway, London, WC2B 6NH (email: [Openness.team@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Openness.team@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk)).

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you may apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Generally, the ICO cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted the complaints procedure provided by the FSA. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF or through the website at: [www.ico.gov.uk](http://www.ico.gov.uk).

Yours sincerely

[Redacted signature]

[Redacted name]

FOI Advisor

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<sup>1</sup> [ICO guidance on requests for personal data about public authority employees](#), p6