

1. The Data Protection Act

The [Data Protection Act](#) controls how your personal information is used by organisations, businesses or the government.

Everyone responsible for using data has to follow strict rules called 'data protection principles'. They must make sure the information is:

- used fairly and lawfully
- used for limited, specifically stated purposes
- used in a way that is adequate, relevant and not excessive
- accurate
- kept for no longer than is absolutely necessary
- handled according to people's data protection rights
- kept safe and secure
- not transferred outside the [European Economic Area](#) without adequate protection

There is stronger legal protection for more sensitive information, such as:

- ethnic background
- political opinions
- religious beliefs
- health
- sexual health
- criminal records

2. Find out what data an organisation has about you

The Data Protection Act gives you the right to find out what information the government and other organisations stores about you.

Write to the organisation and ask for a copy of the information they hold about you. If you don't know who to write to, address your letter to the company secretary.

The organisation is legally required to give you a copy of the information they hold about you if you request it.

When information can be withheld

There are some situations when organisations are allowed to withhold information, for example if the information is about:

- the prevention, detection or investigation of a crime
- national security or the armed forces
- the assessment or collection of tax
- judicial or ministerial appointments

An organisation doesn't have to say why they're withholding information.

How much it costs

Some organisations may charge you for providing the information. The cost is usually no more than £10 but it can be more if the information is contained within either:

- certain types of records, such as health or education records
- a large number of paper records held in an unstructured way by a public authority

3. Make a complaint

If you think your data has been misused or that the organisation holding it hasn't kept it secure, you should contact them and tell them.

If you're unhappy with their response or if you need any advice you should contact the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).

ICO helpline

Telephone: 0303 123 1113