



Information Commissioner's Office

Promoting public access to official information  
and protecting your personal information

## **Data Protection Good Practice Note**

### **Publication of examination results by schools**

This good practice note aims to explain to boards of governors, head teachers and school data protection officers how the Data Protection Act (the Act) affects the publishing of examination results. The Information Commissioner's Office regularly receives enquiries from schools about this. Publication can be done in a variety of ways, including posting lists of results on publicly accessible noticeboards, or providing examination results to the media.

#### **Should examination results be published?**

Publishing examination results is a common and accepted practice. Many students enjoy seeing their name in print, particularly in their local press and the Act certainly does not stop this happening. However, the Act does mean that schools have to act fairly when publishing results, and where people have concerns about their or their child's information being published, schools must take those concerns seriously.

#### **Fairness**

Organisations that collect information about people should do this in a fair and open manner. This means that people should be told about how the information about them will be used and who will be allowed to see it.

Schools should make sure that all pupils and their parents or guardians are aware as early as possible whether examination results will be made public and how this will be done. This information should be repeated at regular intervals, for example, at the start of each school year, or each examination term. Regularly providing this information is particularly important in schools with a rapid turnover of pupils. Schools should not assume that all pupils and parents will know about this.

Schools should also explain how the information will be published. For example, will results be listed alphabetically, or in grade order. Some pupils, parents and guardians might object if results are published in grade order.

#### **Objections**

In general, because a school has a legitimate interest in publishing examination results, pupils or their parents or guardians do not need to give their consent to publication. However, in a small number of cases publication may cause distress or harm. Objections should be considered before making a decision to publish. A school would need to have a justifiable reason to reject someone's objection to publication of their exam results.

#### **Pupils or parents?**

The Act does not specify an age at which a child can independently make a request about their information, such as a request to withhold publication of their examination result.

When a child makes a request, those responsible for responding should take into account whether:

- the child wants their parent (or someone with parental responsibility for them) to be involved; and
- the child properly understands what is involved.

The ability of young people to understand and exercise their rights is likely to develop or become more sophisticated as they get older. As a general guide, a child of 12 or older is expected to be mature enough to understand the request they are making. A child may, of course, be mature enough at an earlier age or may lack sufficient maturity until a later age, and so requests should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

### **Timing**

Sometimes there will be rules in place about the timing of the release of examination results. It is good practice for schools to contact their local authority to make sure they have the latest information and guidance on the release of results.

### **More information**

Please see our good practice note: Individuals' right of access to examination records.

### **More information**

If you need any more information about this or any other aspect of data protection, please contact us.

Phone: 08456 30 60 60  
01625 54 57 45

E-mail: please use the online enquiry form on our website

Website: [www.ico.gov.uk](http://www.ico.gov.uk)