



Information Commissioner's Office
Promoting public access to official information
and protecting your personal information

Press Release

Date: Wednesday 19 December 2007

Department of Health found in breach of data protection

The Information Commissioner's Office has found the Department of Health in breach of the Data Protection Act following an investigation into a security breach on the Medical Training Application Service (MTAS) website.

The ICO was alerted in May 2007 to the security breach which allowed for the sensitive personal details relating to junior doctors, including religious beliefs and sexual orientation, being accessible to anyone accessing the site.

In order to protect against unauthorised access the Department of Health has been required to encrypt any personal data on their website which could cause distress to individuals if disclosed. Regular penetration and vulnerability testing must also be carried out on developing applications and systems to minimise unauthorised access. The Information Commissioner has also ruled that staff are trained on compliance with the Data Protection Act.

The ICO has required the Department of Health to sign a formal undertaking to comply with the principles of the Data Protection Act. Failure to meet the terms of the undertaking is likely to lead to further enforcement action by the ICO and could result in prosecution by the Office.

Mick Gorrill, Assistant Commissioner at the ICO, said: "This is an unacceptable breach of security. Organisations must ensure that the personal information they hold on us is secure – this is an important principle of the Data Protection Act. Individuals must feel confident that their personal details cannot be accessed by another party. Research by the ICO shows that nine out of ten individuals are

concerned that organisations are failing to keep their information secure so it is essential that the Department of Health takes the appropriate measures that we have outlined in order to protect individuals' personal information.”

ENDS

If you need more information, please contact the Information Commissioner's press office on 020 7025 7580 or visit the website at: www.ico.gov.uk

Notes to Editors

1. The Information Commissioner promotes public access to official information and protects personal information. The ICO is an independent body with specific responsibilities set out in the Data Protection Act 1998, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, Environmental Information Regulations 2004 and Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations 2003.
2. For more information about the Information Commissioner's Office subscribe to our e-newsletter at www.ico.gov.uk
3. Anyone who processes personal information must comply with eight principles, which make sure that personal information is:
 - Fairly and lawfully processed
 - Processed for limited purposes
 - Adequate, relevant and not excessive
 - Accurate and up to date
 - Not kept for longer than is necessary
 - Processed in line with your rights
 - Secure
 - Not transferred to other countries without adequate protection