



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

Press Release

For immediate release

17 April 2009

ICO takes enforcement action against the British Council for serious data breach

The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) has found the British Council in breach of the Data Protection Act after the loss of an unencrypted computer disc. Details lost include sensitive personal information relating to trade union membership of over 2,000 members of staff. The British Council reported the data breach to the ICO as soon as it was aware it had taken place.

The ICO required the British Council to sign a [formal Undertaking](#) outlining that it will take reasonable measures to keep personal information secure in future. The Undertaking has been signed on behalf of the British Council by the Chief Executive, Martin Davidson.

By signing the Undertaking the British Council agrees to implement a number of security measures to protect personal information more effectively. For example, all portable and mobile devices which are used to store and transmit personal information must be encrypted, with immediate effect.

Mick Gorrill, Assistant Information Commissioner at the ICO, said: "The British Council proactively reported the breach to the ICO and took immediate remedial action which demonstrates its understanding of the seriousness of this data loss. The Data Protection Act clearly states that organisations must take appropriate measures to ensure that personal information is kept secure. The organisation also agrees to ensure that its policies on the transfer and sharing of personal information on portable devices are clear and compliant with government standards."

Failure to meet the terms of the Undertaking is likely to lead to further enforcement action by the ICO. A copy of the Undertaking can be downloaded from [http://www.ico.gov.uk/what we cover/data protection/enforcement.aspx](http://www.ico.gov.uk/what_we_cover/data_protection/enforcement.aspx).

ENDS

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

Notes to Editors

1. The Information Commissioner's Office has ordered a number of organisations to sign undertakings following breaches of the Data Protection Act. Organisations include the Department of Health, Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Orange Personal Communications Services Ltd.
2. The ICO 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.
3. For more information about the Information Commissioner's Office subscribe to our e-newsletter at www.ico.gov.uk
4. 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