

Reference: 2026-042

Thank you for your email dated in which you requested the following information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA):

I wish to make an FOI request and would be grateful if you could tell me the following:

The numbers of certificates of sponsorship awarded by your organisation for the years 2021 - 2025 (inclusive) - if possible, please can I have this broken down by in-country and entry visa sponsorship.

If possible, the number of these CoS which resulted in visa issuance. Although I understand this may not be available for all, or any years. If this is the case I would request that you proceed with the rest of the request.

If possible, please could you also provide the annual figures on COS broken down by the occupation code of the roles for which the sponsorship was issued. Also - a break down by nationality of those awarded the certificates of sponsorship.

If any of these results throw up fewer than five results, and you have concerns about 'personal data', then please simply use FOI best practice and enter next to the corresponding field "<5".

Response

The SFO holds this information. We can confirm that the numbers of certificates of sponsorship awarded are below five. Therefore, the specific numbers, annual figures, occupation codes and nationalities data are exempt from release under section 40(2) of the FOIA, as this information constitutes personal data relating to identifiable individuals.

Section 40(2) states that personal data which is not the personal data of the requester (i.e. third-party personal data) should not be disclosed if this would contravene the data protection principles. This would constitute a breach of the first data protection principle outlined in the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which states that "personal data shall be processed lawfully, fairly and in a transparent manner in relation to the data subject".

How the exemption is engaged

The SFO is a relatively small organisation and the pool of people that require such certificates is extremely small. Coupled with the data requested and some other information that could be drawn from your own knowledge of current staff or information in the public domain, we assess that releasing this data could make some of these individuals identifiable.

We also maintain that releasing specific data about certificates of sponsorship and nationalities could not reasonably be interpreted as "fair" processing because the Data Subject would have a reasonable expectation that their personal data would not be disclosed in this way.

Section 40(2) of the FOIA is an absolute exemption and we are therefore not required to consider the public interest in releasing the information requested.