



Freedom of information

The Victoria and Albert Museum

The V&A is Britain's national museum of art and design. Its purpose, deriving from the National Heritage Act 1983, is to enable people to enjoy, learn from, and be inspired by the V&A's collections, knowledge and expertise. The principal aims, and the statutory duties of the Trustees of the V&A under the National Heritage Act are to:

- Care for, preserve, and add to the collections
- Ensure that the collections are made available to the public, both by display and by providing reference facilities
- Add to the body of knowledge relevant to the collections through research
- Disseminate that knowledge

The V&A includes the Museum of Childhood at Bethnal Green, Cambridge Heath Road, London E2 9PA and archive/study collections at Blythe House, 23 Blythe Road, London W14 0QF.

At a senior level, the Director of the V&A has responsibility for Freedom of Information at the Museum. The V&A's Senior Archivist is the Museum's Freedom of Information officer, and takes day-to-day responsibility for compliance with the Freedom of Information Act.

Introduction to the Freedom of Information Act

The Freedom of Information Act became law on 30 November 2000 with the intention of fostering a culture of openness in government and public bodies. The Act established a right of access to all types of recorded information held by public authorities and imposed obligations on public authorities to disclose information, subject to a range of exemptions. In common with other public bodies, the V&A has implemented the Act with effect from January 2005.

Anyone may make a request for information, although the request must be in writing (letter or e-mail). The Act gives applicants two related rights:

- The right to be told whether the information exists
- The right to receive the information, where possible in the manner requested

The Museum must normally respond and provide the information which has been requested within 20 working days, unless access to that information is prohibited by one of the exemptions specified in the Act.

The V&A's publication scheme

One of the aims of the Act is that all public authorities should be clear and proactive about the information they make available. Section 19 of the Act requires each authority to adopt a publication scheme which sets out the classes of information the authority publishes or intends to publish and the manner in which they will be published. The V&A's first publication scheme came into effect on 30 November 2002. From 1 January 2009, this scheme has been superseded by a new model publication scheme, prepared by the Information Commissioner, and adopted by the V&A in line with most other public authorities. A copy of the model publication scheme may be viewed on the [Information Commissioner's website](#).

With a few exceptions, the information which the V&A publishes, and which falls within the broad classes of information in the model publication scheme, is available online via the V&A's website. Most of these classes of information,

such as 'Who we are and what we do' and 'What we spend and how we spend it' may be found in the [About Us](#) section of the website. By contrast, details of 'The services we offer' may be found throughout the whole of the website.

Information in an electronic form can be downloaded from the V&A's website free of charge. For those without access to the V&A's website, a single print-out as on the website is available from the Museum's general enquiry address. However, requests for multiple print-outs, for copies of documents no longer available on the website, or for hard-copy publications which are normally available for purchase only, may attract a charge. Applicants will be informed if a cost is involved at the time a request is made.

Some minutes and papers of internal meetings at the V&A are published as reference copies which may be consulted in the [National Art Library](#) at the V&A, but are not available online. Documents which have been superseded, or which are more than a few years old, and are no longer on the website, may normally be consulted by appointment at the [V&A Archive](#).

Copyright

Information which is generated by the V&A and published on the website, in line with the model publication scheme, may be reproduced for information and personal study only.

Permission to reproduce information on the website does not extend to any material the copyright in which is held by a third party. Authorisation to reproduce such material must be obtained from the copyright holders concerned.

Procedure for making requests for information

The publication scheme is only part of the provision for access to information available under the Act. Any information, of whatever date, which is not covered by an exemption will be made available on request. Requests for information not included on the website should be made in writing (contact information is given below), and should provide as much detail as possible to enable V&A staff

to identify the information sought. If information is required in a particular format, for example, as a photocopy or on computer disk, this should be stated in the application. V&A staff will be glad to advise applicants and help resolve any difficulty they may experience in formulating their requests.

In general, the V&A is required to respond to requests within 20 working days. Some information held by the V&A, such as personal or commercially sensitive data, or information provided to the Museum in confidence, may be exempt from disclosure under the terms of the Act. In some cases where information is exempt from disclosure, the V&A is nevertheless required to consider if there is any overriding public interest in disclosing the information in spite of the exemption. If the V&A is unable to disclose some or all of the information which an applicant has requested, the reasons for non-disclosure will be explained to the applicant.

Find out how to contact the [V&A's departments](#) or send a request to:

Victoria and Albert Museum
Cromwell Road
South Kensington
London SW7 2RL

Tel: +44 (0)20 7942 2000

Email: foi@vam.ac.uk

Fees

The V&A will normally respond to requests for information free of charge. However, the Museum may charge a fee, or refuse to answer the request, where the staff time required to process it would be more than eighteen hours. The cost of providing a significant number of photocopies will be charged for. Payment of fees and costs of photocopying must be received in advance; during the period that the V&A is waiting for payment of its invoice the twenty-day response deadline is suspended.

Complaints procedure

If you are dissatisfied with the response you have had from the V&A in respect of a request for information, you may invoke the complaints procedure. The first step is to seek an internal review of the Museum's handling of your request. Applications for internal review should be submitted in writing either to the department which initially dealt with the information request, or to the V&A's Senior Archivist. The handling of the request will be reviewed internally by a senior member of staff who was not involved in the initial response.

If you are dissatisfied with the outcome or the conduct of the internal review, you may seek an independent review from the Information Commissioner.

Requests for a review by the Information Commissioner should be made in writing directly to:

The Information Commissioner
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire SK9 5AF
Tel: +44 (0)1625 545700
Fax: +44 (0)1625 524510

Transparency

In response to the Government's commitment to greater transparency of public information, the V&A publishes data relating to senior posts, salaries and spending on a bi-annual basis, and monthly information about expenditure over £25,000.