

**HOUSE OF LORDS
APPOINTMENTS COMMISSION**

Room G/39, 1 Horse Guards Road, London SW1A 2HQ

General Enquiries: 020 7276 6794

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Ref: HOLAC FOI 2020/1

7 February 2020

By email: <REDACTED>

Freedom of Information Act

I am replying to your Freedom of Information request, which the House of Lords Appointments Commission (HOLAC) received on 20 January 2020.

You asked:

Please can you disclose, in an electronic format, any handbook, manual or other document setting out the details of the steps you undertake to vet political nominees.

If not covered by the above disclosure, please also disclose:

- 1. A list of 'relevant government departments' with which you check*
- 2. A list of 'agencies and other organisations' with which you check*
- 3. Any recorded information you hold setting out how the 'media search' is undertaken, eg which media outlets you review and how you search them*
- 4. Any recorded information you hold setting out how findings of these checks and searches will be assessed and what happens where concerning material is found.*

Part of the information held by the Cabinet Office within the scope of your request is exempt under section 21(1) of the Freedom of Information Act. Section 21 exempts information if this is reasonably accessible to the applicant by other means. Section 21 is an absolute exemption and the Cabinet Office is not required to consider whether the public interest favours disclosure of this information. You will find information about steps taken to vet political nominees on our [website](#).

All of the information you have requested falls within sections 37(1)(b) (the conferring by the Crown of an honour or dignity). For those elements not also subject to section 21, we have considered your request in relation to section 37(1)(b).

Section 37(1)(b) is not an absolute exemption and is subject to the public interest test which we have considered in relation to your request. We have weighed up whether the public interest is better served by release of this information or withholding it. We appreciate the importance of transparency in government which encourages public interest in and interaction with the work of government. We also recognise that there is a public interest in the workings of the House of Lords Appointments Commission. However, this must be weighed against the importance of confidentiality with regard to peerages, which is essential to protect the integrity of the conferring of a dignity and without which the system could not function.

Having considered all the circumstances of this case, we have concluded that the public interest is better served by withholding some of the information exempt under section 37(1)(b).

If you are unhappy with this response to your request, you may write to the Secretary to the Commission, Helen Ewen, to ask for an internal review by another person not involved with this request. Please note that we will not normally accept an application for internal review if it is received more than two months after the date that the reply was issued.

If you are not content with the outcome of your internal review, you may apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision.

The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

The Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
SK9 5AF

Secretariat to the House of Lords Appointments Commission