

Information Released under Freedom of Information Act

Subject: Questionnaire regarding the sharing of data

Date Released: 7 December 2007

Summary of request: The enquirer requested clarification of data and information sharing by Companies House via a questionnaire.

Information released:

Questionnaire:

1. Do you share any type of data or information on companies with any form of public body in the UK? If so which ones and what do you share?
2. Do you share any type of data or information on companies that you receive with any form of public body in the European Union? If so which ones and what do you share?
3. Do you share any type of data or information on companies that you receive with any form of public body in foreign countries? If so which ones and what do you share?

Companies House doesn't share data; it receives data and makes it available for public inspection. Companies file information with the Registrar which they are obliged to make public under company law. The Registrar provides access to this information through the companies' register, which is open to public inspection by anyone, including other government departments, from anywhere in the world. The mechanisms he uses to do this and the fees he charges to recover the cost of providing these services are published on the Companies House website see <http://www.companieshouse.gov.uk/toolsToHelp/productPriceListCompare.shtml> . Other government departments pay the same fees as commercial companies. However, Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs are entitled to a limited amount of directors' information for free.

We process a large number of searches each year, there were over 3 million for 2005/06. Requests are received via the internet, through the post or via the telephone. People can also walk into one of our search centres and pay cash to purchase or view information. We do not keep a record of all transactions and those that we do keep are usually in the form of a bank account or credit card details. Consequently, we are not able to compile a complete record of whom or how many people have accessed our information. In many cases the identity of a searcher would be impossible to find particularly if the search was paid for in cash. Therefore we cannot tell you which public bodies search our information.

4. Could you explain us the nature of your relations and data exchange with the *Business Registries Forum*?

I think you mean the European Commerce Registrars Forum, which is not a mechanism for data exchange but is an informal grouping of registrars in the EU. CH is a member and takes part in meetings organised by ECRF members. For more information I suggest you see their website at <http://www.ecrforum.org/> . ECRF has developed a system for notifying branch registries when companies close in their home registry see more details at [http://www.ecrforum.org/presentations2006/08%20Pres%20Farrell%20new%20ECRF%202006.ppt#269,13,User Experiences – BOLS](http://www.ecrforum.org/presentations2006/08%20Pres%20Farrell%20new%20ECRF%202006.ppt#269,13,User%20Experiences%20-%20BOLS)

We are also involved in the Corporate Registries Forum whose website is at <http://www.corporateregistersforum.org/> .

5. Could you explain us the nature of your relations and data exchange with the *European Business Registry*?

EBR acts as a portal for people wishing to search the companies registers of members. From Spring next year searchers will be able to use EBR to access information on British companies for which there is no statutory fee at Companies House. More details on EBR can be found at <http://www.ebr.org/> .

6. Do you have any kind of agreement or joint initiative with other foreign administrations in order to facilitate data exchange, or even common registering of companies? If so, which ones?

No.

7. The company formation agents or register agents are probably legally obligated to register themselves officially in order to have the right to act as intermediary in company formation and registration. Could you shortly explain us the regulation/rules regarding this registration? Do you have any website that explains those regulation/rules?

Company formation agents are not required to register officially. However, from 15 December 2007 company service providers will have to register with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs under money laundering legislation. Details of this system of registration can be found at <http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/mlr/regs.htm> .