

Subject: Request for information regarding the allocation of appointments in the Historical Search Room.

FOI reference: 202200285103

Date received: 03 March 2022

Date responded: 30 March 2022

Information requested:

Request for information regarding the allocation of appointments in the (temporary) Historical Search Room (HSR) of the National Records of Scotland (NRS).

For the purposes of this request, 'appointment' is used, this refers to a day (or part thereof) of access to a seat in the (temporary) Historical Search Room (HSR) of the National Records of Scotland (NRS). If a person looked at the same documents over two or more days, each day is referred as a separate 'appointment'.

Between 1 October 2021 and 28 February 2022, how many different individuals submitted a request for a seat in the (temporary) Historical Search Room (HSR) of the National Records of Scotland (NRS)?

Between 1 October 2021 and 28 February 2022, how many different individuals were allocated a day's access (appointment) to the HSR?

Between 1 October 2021 and 28 February 2022, how many appointments were allocated in the HSR?

Between 1 October 2021 and 28 February 2022, how many users were granted more than one day of access (appointment) on the grounds that they were visiting from outwith the UK?

In January 2022, how many individuals received more than one day of access (appointment) to the HSR? Of those individuals, how many days of access did each receive?

As the (temporary) Historical Search Room (HSR) of the National Records of Scotland (NRS) has been assessed as COVID safe for 14 people, and it was previously stated that there could be 12 users per day, why were 204 appointments not allocated in January 2022?"

NRS Response:

We have noted below our responses to each of the queries (and repeated the text of each query for ease of reading):

1) Between 1 October 2021 and 28 February 2022, how many different individuals submitted a request for a seat in the (temporary) Historical Search Room (HSR) of the National Records of Scotland (NRS)?

Between 1 October 2021 and 28 February 2022 NRS received a total of 984 enquiries received via any channel, i.e. contact form or email and categorised as 'seat booking', which we logged to our Seat Booking queue. However, as many enquirers send multiple emails, we are not able to say how many individual researchers submitted a Seat Booking request.

2) Between 1 October 2021 and 28 February 2022, how many different individuals were allocated a day's access (appointment) to the HSR?

Between 1 October 2021 and 28 February 2022, NRS sent 934 responses to enquiries logged to our Seat Booking queue. NRS is not able to say how many different individuals received a response over the period 1 October 2021 to 28 February 2022 which allocated them an appointment, as not all responses required the offer of an appointment; for example, if someone requested access to records held elsewhere.

While our aim is to provide information whenever possible, in this instance National Records of Scotland (NRS) does not have some information you have requested on seat allocation for the specified timeframe. This is because our NRS Seat Allocation system was only re-introduced from 4 November 2021. The system allows us to allocate seats as part of the records production process and record how many readers attend on site to view records which they have requested. This is an internal tool which was re-introduced when search room services were widened to include all customers and increasing numbers of our production staff returned to deliver services on-site. Between that date and 28 February 2022, 255 readers made 431 visits to the Historical Search Room.

3) Between 1 October 2021 and 28 February 2022, how many appointments were allocated in the HSR?

NRS does not have the information requested on the seat allocation. The reasons why we do not have this information are explained in the Annex to this letter.

4) Between 1 October 2021 and 28 February 2022, how many users were granted more than one day of access (appointment) on the grounds that they were visiting from outwith the UK?

NRS does not have information on numbers of users outwith the UK who were granted more than one day of access. The reasons why we do not have this information are also explained in the Annex to this letter.

5) In January 2022, how many individuals received more than one day of access (appointment) to the HSR? Of those individuals, how many days of access did each receive?

In January 2022, 72 visitors made a total of 107 visits to the Historical Search Room. The Seat Allocation system does not record the number of visits made by each visitor.

6). As the (temporary) Historical Search Room (HSR) of the National Records of Scotland (NRS) has been assessed as COVID safe for 14 people, and it was previously stated that there could be 12 users per day, why were 204 appointments not allocated in January 2022?

There are a total of 11 public desks in the temporary Historical Search Room, along with two staff desks, making a total of 13 desks. The public desks offer a variety of options for readers; consultation of Virtual Volumes, microfilm/fiche and original records. The nature of research means that one researcher may, on a single day, book a document desk, a Virtual Volumes desk and a microfilm/fiche desk. While staff make every effort to ensure that they have booked all desks each day, it can happen that a planned visit is cancelled at short notice by the enquirer; on many occasions because they have to self-isolate after they, or a family member, tested positive for COVID-19.

We consider physical distancing (in terms of the desks) and also safe ventilation levels in the delivery of search room services so public research desks and staff counter are arranged to support physical distancing levels. The occupancy of the room is monitored on an hourly basis to meet NRS safe ventilation levels. Physical distancing and safe occupancy levels continue to be reviewed by NRS in respect of any change to national guidance.

Annex - Reasons for not providing information

National Records of Scotland (NRS) does not have all the information which you requested

This is a formal notice under section 17(1) of FOISA that National Records of Scotland does not have some of the information you have requested.

3) Between 1 October 2021 and 28 February 2022, how many appointments were allocated in the HSR?

NRS does not have the information you have requested on number of appointments allocated in the HSR between 1 October and 28 February 2022 because we only keep records of booking for 3 weeks for data protection reasons and in line with Test and Protect guidance on retention of personal data.

4) Between 1 October 2021 and 28 February 2022, how many users were granted more than one day of access (appointment) on the grounds that they were visiting from outwith the UK?

NRS does not have the information on number of users outwith the UK who were granted more than one day of access because we do not record these statistics.