

Reference: IR800

Date issued: 10 January 2022

Malicious email volume

1. How many malicious emails have been successfully blocked?

We do not hold information which fully matches this description, in terms of the date range you have requested. In respect of the information we hold that falls within scope of your request, I am withholding this information from disclosure on the basis of two exemptions under the Freedom of Information Act 2000:

- Section 36(2)(c) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000

I have sought the view of the qualified person, the Auditor General for Wales (section 36(5)(k) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000) who is of the view that disclosure would prejudice the effective conduct of public affairs. This is because cyber criminals are active and email-borne threats are a common route for criminals to gain initial access to an organisation's systems. Putting information about the effectiveness of email and ransomware defences in the public domain would help cyber criminals to access information that assists their understanding of Audit Wales' security defences in order to compromise those systems in an attack against Audit Wales' systems. The disclosure of the withheld information to the public could compromise the cybersecurity position of the organisation, as this could help inform the thinking of hackers planning an attack.

Having taken into account the opinion of the Auditor General as the qualified person, and having considered the ICO Guidance 'Prejudice to the effective conduct of public affairs'

https://ico.org.uk/media/fororganisations/documents/1175/section_36_prejudice_to_effective_conduct_of_public_affairs.pdf, I have applied the public interest test. Although the public may have a genuine interest in understanding what public bodies are doing to prevent cyber security incidents, when balanced against the risks in full transparency of publicising information about the efficacy of defences, it is my view that the public interest weighs in favour of maintaining the exemption to disclosure.

- Section 31(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000

Further, the information requested is exempt under section 31(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act. I have applied the public interest test and whilst noting the arguments in favour of transparency, I have concluded that the balance lies in favour of maintaining the exemption to prevent crime. This is on the basis that disclosure could make our IT systems more vulnerable to crime. In coming to this conclusion, I have considered the potential 'mosaic effect' of disclosure of requested information combined with information potentially in the public domain from other public bodies, and the harm this could cause.

2. What percentage of malicious emails were opened by staff?

As per answer to Q1.

3. What percentage of malicious links in the emails were clicked on by staff?

As per answer to Q1.

4. How many ransomware attacks were blocked by the department?

We are not holding information matching this description.

5. How many ransomware attacks were successful?

We are not holding information matching this description.

If you are dissatisfied with the handling of your request, you can request an internal review. Requests for internal reviews should be addressed to Martin Peters, Head of Law and Ethics, by email to martin.peters@audit.wales or by post to Audit Wales, 24 Cathedral Road, Cardiff, CF11 9LJ.

I must also refer you to section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act under which you may apply to the Information Commissioner for a decision on whether or not your request has been dealt with in accordance with the Act. The Information Commissioner's contact details are:

Information Commissioner's Office

Wycliffe House

Water Lane

Wilmslow

Cheshire SK9 5AF

email : casework@ico.gsi.gov.uk

Tel: 01625 545745

Fax: 01625 524510

You should note, however, that the Information Commissioner will not ordinarily investigate a complaint until the internal review process has been exhausted. Further guidance may be found on the Information Commissioner's website: <https://ico.org.uk/>

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Information Officer