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06/05/2026

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST REFERENCE NUMBER: 2791/2026

Thank you for your request for information regarding a report produced by the National Physical Laboratory (NPL), which has now been considered.

Applicant Question:

I am writing to request information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

I would like to request a copy of the report produced by the National Physical Laboratory (NPL), dated August 2024, concerning the testing and performance of Retrospective Facial Recognition (RFR) technology.

This specific report is referenced on page 11 of the NPCC document titled "Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) – Retrospective Facial Recognition in the Police National Database (PND)", dated 14 August 2025. The EIA quotes this August 2024 NPL report – for example, it states: "For lower quality images from CCTV and of people in the background of pictures, searches including a match were 8.2% and 56.2%, respectively."

Please note that this request specifically pertains to the August 2024 report containing these operational performance metrics, and not the NPL demographic equitability reports published on GOV.UK in late 2025. If this information is held in an electronic format, I would prefer to receive it as a PDF attachment.

If you require any further clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me.
I look forward to hearing from you within the statutory 20 working days.

NPCC Response:

The NPCC does hold information captured by your request.

I have attached the draft report 'FaceVACS-DBScanID_5.5_draft4' dated August 2024. It has been subject to redaction citing Section 31(1) Law Enforcement and Section 40(2) Personal Information. For more details on the legislation and the risk of harm, please see Annex A below.

Please note that the draft report features data regarding the performance of the Cognitec algorithm for both

Retrospective Facial Recognition (RFR) and Operator Initiated Facial Recognition (OIFR).

The data specifically relating to OIFR was not included in the October 2025 report as it was not relevant to policing, noting that policing has never used the Cognitec algorithm for OIFR and there is no intention to use the Cognitec algorithm for OIFR, the algorithm has exclusively been used for RFR.

Yours sincerely

Freedom of Information Officer & Decision Maker

www.npcc.police.uk

COMPLAINT RIGHTS

Internal Review

Any request for an internal review will be acknowledged and responded to, based on the specific wording of your initial request only.

We ask that any rationale to request an internal review, does not include any requests for new information and ask that these be submitted by separate email. We will acknowledge as a new request and may aggregate to your initial request in compliance with the legislation.

If you are dissatisfied with the response you have been provided with in compliance with the Freedom of Information legislation, you can lodge a complaint with NPCC to have the decision reviewed within 40 working days of the date of this response.

The handling of your request will be looked at by someone independent of the original decision and a fresh response provided.

It would be helpful, if requesting a review, for you to articulate in detail the reasons you are not satisfied with this reply.

If you would like to request a review, please write or send an email to NPCC Freedom of Information, c/o PO Box 481, Fareham, Hampshire, PO14 9FS.

Annex A

Section 17 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 requires the NPCC, when refusing to provide information by way of exemption in question and (c) states why the exemption applies. In accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 this letter acts as a refusal notice to those aspects of your request.

Legislation – Section 16

- (1) It shall be the duty of a public authority to provide advice and assistance, so far as it would be reasonable to expect the authority to do so, to persons who propose to make, or have made, requests for information to it.

Legislation - Section 31 Law Enforcement

- (1) Information which is not exempt information by virtue of section 30 is exempt information if its disclosure under this Act would, or would be likely to, prejudice -
 - (a) the prevention or detection of crime
 - (b) the apprehension or prosecution of offenders

Section 31 is a qualified and prejudice-based exemption. This requires the production of evidence of what prejudice may be caused and consideration as to the public interest in disclosure.

Disclosure of this information would have the likelihood of identifying potential vulnerabilities related to facial Recognition technology, which would ultimately compromise police tactics, operations and future prosecutions. Any information identifying the focus of policing activity could be used to the advantage of terrorists or criminal organisations. Information that undermines the operational integrity of these activities will adversely affect public safety and have a negative impact on law enforcement. Public safety would be put at risk if criminals were able to counteract police tactics.

Any information that could impact or undermine ongoing investigations or any future investigations would enable targeted individuals / groups to become tactically aware of the police capabilities. This would help subjects and avoid detection, and inhibit the prevention and detection of crime.

The NPCC will not disclose information which may hinder the effective management of law enforcement or place staff or officers at risk. Whilst there is a public interest in the transparency of policing operations and in this case providing assurance that the police service is appropriately and effectively managing Freedom of Information requests, there is a very strong public interest in safeguarding the tactical abilities.

The prevention and detection of crime is the foundation upon which policing is built and the police service have a clear responsibility to prevent crime and arrest those responsible for committing crime or those that plan to commit crime. Disclosure of information captured by this request could directly influence the stages of that process, and jeopardise current investigations or prejudice law enforcement.

Disclosing information which may place the public at risk, or make it easier for crime to be committed cannot be in the public interest.

The police service primary performance indicator is the reduction of crime, and disclosure which has a negative impact on that agenda affects public trust in policing and in this case may make it more difficult to police.

With regard the evidence of harm itself, there is a threshold that requires the predicted issues to be 'more than likely'. In the case of an offender identifying full investigative techniques or gleaning information which would assist in offending behaviour can be difficult to establish and evidence the harm without actually disclosing exempt information. However, the principles are well established in terms of Freedom of Information legislation that to a certain extent the professional opinion of the police must be taken into account.

The NPCC is committed to demonstrating proportionality and accountability however in this case, in this case we believe that the balance falls on the side of withholding the exempt information.

Legislation - Section 40 Personal Information

(1) Any information to which a request for information relates is exempt information if it constitutes personal data of which the applicant is the data subject.

(2) Any information to which a request for information relates is also exempt information if

- (a) it constitutes personal data which does not fall within subsection (1), and**
- (b) the first, second or third condition below is satisfied.**

(3A) The first condition is that the disclosure of the information to a member of the public otherwise than under this Act—

- (a) would contravene any of the data protection principles, or
- (b) would do so if the exemptions in section 24(1) of the Data Protection Act 2018 (manual unstructured data held by public authorities) were disregarded.

(3B) The second condition is that the disclosure of the information to a member of the public otherwise than under this Act would contravene Article 21 of the GDPR (general processing: right to object to processing).

Any information to which a request for information relates is also exempt information if it constitutes personal data which do not fall within subsection (1), and either the first or the second condition is satisfied.

Section 40(2) applies to third party personal data. Any release would breach the data protection principles contained within the Data Protection Act 2018. Section 40(2) has been engaged by virtue of Section 40(3)(a)(i). Any disclosure of withheld information would breach the first data protection principle of fair and lawful processing.

This is an absolute exemption and there is no requirement to apply the public interest test.