



Subject Access Request (DSAR) Guide

A practical guide for small businesses, charities and community organisations

A Subject Access Request (SAR) is a request from an individual asking for access to the personal data your organisation holds about them.

SARs are a fundamental right under UK GDPR and can be made by anyone whose personal data you process, including customers, employees, volunteers, members, pupils and parents.

This guide explains the key steps to help you respond confidently and comply with your obligations.

Step 1. Recognise the request

A Subject Access Request does not need to mention UK GDPR, the Data Protection Act or use the words "Subject Access Request".

A request may be made verbally or in writing and can be sent by email, letter, social media message or even made during a telephone call.

Examples include:

- "Can I have a copy of the information you hold about me?"
- "What personal data do you have about me?"
- "I'd like to see my records."

If an individual is asking for their personal data, treat it as a SAR.

Step 2. Record the request

As soon as a SAR is received, record:

- The name of the requester
- The date received
- How the request was received
- The deadline for responding
- Any actions taken

In most cases, organisations must respond within one calendar month.

Step 3. Verify identity

Before disclosing personal data, be satisfied that the requester is who they claim to be.

You may request reasonable proof of identity where necessary.

The response period begins once you have received sufficient information to identify the individual and locate the requested information.

Step 4. Clarify the scope (if necessary)

If the request is very broad, you may ask the individual to clarify what information they are seeking.

For example:

- Specific dates
- Particular departments
- Particular types of records

However, you should not use clarification requests to delay responding unnecessarily.

Step 5. Locate the information

Consider where personal data may be held, including:

- Email accounts
- Electronic filing systems
- Cloud storage
- Paper records
- HR systems
- Customer databases
- Shared drives

Remember that personal data can include opinions, correspondence, notes and photographs as well as obvious records.

6. Review the information

Before disclosure, review the information carefully.

Consider whether:

- The information relates to the requester
- Any exemptions apply
- The information contains personal data relating to other individuals

In some cases, third-party information may need to be redacted before disclosure.

Step 7. Provide the response

Unless an exemption applies, provide:

- A copy of the individual's personal data
- Information about how the data is used
- Relevant information about retention, sources and recipients where required

The information should be provided in a clear and accessible format.

Where possible, provide the response electronically if the request was received electronically.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

- ✗ Ignoring a verbal request
 - ✗ Asking the individual to complete a specific form before processing the request
 - ✗ Failing to search all relevant systems
 - ✗ Missing the one-month deadline
 - ✗ Disclosing information relating to other individuals without appropriate consideration
 - ✗ Charging a fee where one is not permitted
-

SAR Checklist

- Request recognised and recorded
- Identity verified
- Deadline calculated
- Relevant records identified
- Information reviewed
- Third-party data considered
- Response prepared
- Response issued
- Records retained of actions taken

© 2026 Three Counties Data Protection. All rights reserved.

This guide is provided for general information purposes only and does not constitute legal advice. It reflects the law as at the date of publication. You should seek professional advice before making decisions based on this information.

hello@threecountiesdata.co.uk • www.threecountiesdata.co.uk



Practical data protection support for small businesses, charities and community organisations across Worcestershire, Herefordshire and Gloucestershire.