



**Asset Recovery Tools:
a summary of common sources of
public information available in the UK**

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Introduction

This report seeks to summarise the main sources of open information, which are available to members of the public and commercial organisations in the UK, that may be of use when conducting investigations in the UK or overseas, particularly when seeking to trace illicit assets. A large number of the sources discussed in this report are available for use over the Internet at minimal (or no) cost.

'Open source intelligence' can provide valuable leads, information and even evidence which can support an investigation into corruption and the identification and location of the proceeds of such criminality. For instance, due to the exponential growth of the Internet, an increasing amount of sources are becoming publicly available, providing investigators with a wealth of high-quality evidence that can be used to support strategic and operational decisions. Examples of such sources include online media (such as those discussed in this report), directories, government reports and documents, statistical databases, and publicly available databases (such as property and company databases), which can all be easily located using publicly available search engines or analysed using specifically tailored programs.

As a result of the mixture of devolved and unitary government in the UK (with Scotland having a separate legal system), some government websites will provide information relevant to the whole of the UK, whereas some may only cover parts of it. Where possible, it has been made clear in the text which geographical area is covered by a particular service, although the material in this report has sought to cover England and Wales specifically and other areas are covered only where we have expressly indicated. Please note that government websites are prone to frequent change. The website addresses included in this report are correct at the time of writing.

This report includes links to third party websites. These links are used to provide further information and are for illustration purposes only. They are not intended to signify any endorsement of a third party website or its content.

The information provided is by no means exhaustive and nothing in this report should be construed as legal advice. All of the information contained in this report is provided exclusively to assist with investigatory work.

Part 1 - Information about business activity

UK company information

Information available for free on the Internet: the Companies House WebCheck service

Companies House is an Executive Agency of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, and is responsible for:

- (i) incorporating and dissolving limited companies;
- (ii) examining and storing company information delivered under the Companies Act and related legislation; and
- (iii) making this information available to the public.

The website for Companies House provides information on all aspects of company filing requirements. It contains a free, searchable database of registered companies (the **WebCheck service**). To use, click on the icon marked 'Find Company Information' or access the database directly via www.companieshouse.gov.uk/webcheck.

The WebCheck service enables searches to be undertaken by 'Company Name' or by 'Company Number'. It is possible to search for company names according to the following fields: 'Current/recently dissolved names'; 'Dissolved names'; 'Previous names'; and 'Proposed names'.

The WebCheck service search results include the basic details of a company, such as the registered office address, the date of incorporation, previous company names and the due date of the next accounts.

Disqualified directors

There is also a useful service which allows searches to be undertaken for directors who have been disqualified from holding a directorship under the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986. The search results provide basic information about disqualified company directors, such as their address, date of birth and the legal reason for their disqualification.

To use this, go to the 'Disqualified Directors Register' on the WebCheck service homepage.

Paid for information: other specialist information provided by Companies House

Company searches

It is possible to obtain a full company search of a UK company. A search such as this would provide the statutory documents that a company has filed at Companies House.

This can be done in two ways:

- i. first, the WebCheck service, as discussed above, allows for the purchase of certain additional documents. To view the available documents, search for the company that you wish to review and see the 'Order information on this company' section on the company's results page; or
- ii. secondly, Companies House Direct is a subscription service that gives users access to all of the documents that a company files at Companies House, including company accounts and reports. Details of the type of documents available and a free demonstration on how to use Companies House Direct are available at: www.companieshouse.gov.uk/toolsToHelp/chdDirectInfo.shtml.

For a fee of £1, basic company documents can be obtained, such as company accounts, the company record report and the current appointments report. These documents will contain details of the company's directors and shareholders.

A price list for the other types of documents available can be found at: www.companieshouse.gov.uk/toolsToHelp/ourPrices.shtml#Direct.

It should be noted that, due to limited resources, Companies House is not able to devote significant effort to verifying the accuracy of the information that it holds about companies. Therefore, independent checks still need to be undertaken before relying on documents obtained from Companies House.

On 31 October 2013, the UK government declared that it would introduce a public register of beneficial ownership. It is yet to be determined how and where this information will be held, although it will likely be held by Companies House and be made available on its website.

Monitor Service

Subscribers of Companies House Direct can also use a monitoring service which enables the user to register an interest in company documents before they are filed. Once those

documents are filed and processed, a notification is sent enabling you to purchase the document immediately. This service enables subscribers to receive essential up-to-date information on a company as soon as it becomes available to Companies House.

An Information Pack and an Application Form to subscribe to Companies House Direct can be found online at: www.companieshouse.gov.uk/toolsToHelp/chdDirectInfo.shtml.

From this link, access the desired form using the 'Quicklinks' box to the right of the page.

Commercial providers - Companies

In addition, there are a variety of agencies that provide comprehensive company searches of UK companies for a fee via the Internet, by fax or by post. Some of the main companies providing this service include:

- Jordans Limited (www.jordans.co.uk)
- Butterworths (www.rmonline.com/page2.htm)
- ICC Juniper XD Service (www.myicc.co.uk)
- Experian (www.uk.experian.com/business/products/data/234.html)

However, there are many other companies that provide a similar service. Alternatively, other providers can be found by typing "*UK company searches*" into an Internet search engine, such as Google.

Commercial providers - Directors

Similarly, there are several websites that enable users to obtain information on individual directors and sole traders. The majority of these companies require a user to sign up and pay a small fee in order to access its records. The information available generally includes personal details, report summaries and a history of current, resigned and dissolved company appointments.

Some of the main companies that provide this service include:

- Company Check (www.companycheck.co.uk/director/index)
- Company Director Check (www.companydirectorcheck.com)
- Red Flag Alert (www.redflagalert.com)

Foreign company information

All jurisdictions have their own company filing regulations and requirements. Many jurisdictions maintain websites detailing their filing requirements and some of these also give basic information on companies via publicly accessible websites.

A useful portal for jurisdictions that have websites for their company regulators is: www.companieshouse.gov.uk/links/introduction.shtml.

Follow the link marked 'Worldwide Registries'.

The vast majority of the registries have at least a basic search function to enable the user to determine whether a company is registered in the jurisdiction. Some of the registries provide free or relatively inexpensive access to detailed information, such as previous directors, current and previous addresses, and statutory documents filed by a company.

International company searches

Jordans and ICC Juniper provide international company searches; however, prices for services can vary. By way of example, the following link gives some indication of the type of services provided by Jordans:

www.jordans.co.uk/business-information/company-search.html.

It ought to be noted that many international company registries maintain high levels of secrecy and even an international search carried out by a well connected agency can yield a relatively small amount of data.

Other sources of company information

The British Library

The British Library provides access to a range of databases containing information on companies. The list of databases is available at:

www.bl.uk/eresources/business/cd-busin.html.

Due to licensing restrictions, some of the electronic resources can only be accessed on site at the British Library premises.

Lawandtax-news.com

This is a comprehensive (non-governmental) website, which gives a large amount of detailed information on mainly off-shore jurisdictions and their regulatory regimes. Coverage includes the following jurisdictions:

- Australia; Bahamas; Barbados; Bermuda; British Virgin Islands; Canada; Cyprus; Dubai; Gibraltar; Guernsey; Hong Kong; Isle of Man; Ireland; Jersey; Labuan; Liechtenstein; Luxembourg; South Africa; United Kingdom; and the United States.

By way of example, its coverage of the Isle of Man includes the following information:

- a description of the different types of company structures in operation in the jurisdiction;
- a description of the legal system as it affects off-shore issues; and
- a description of the taxation regime.

It is also possible to purchase 'special reports' which purport to cover "*every aspect of 'offshore' and international tax planning, including banking secrecy, the 'unfair tax competition' saga, offshore funds, e-commerce, offshore gaming and a host of other topical subjects*".

This website can be accessed via the following address: www.lawandtax-news.com.

FT.com

The Financial Times is a UK based English-language international daily newspaper which covers business and economic news in considerable depth. The content is split into two sections. The first section covers domestic and international news, editorial commentary on politics and economics, and opinion pieces. The second section consists of financial data and news about companies and markets.

Readers without a subscription can access eight articles per month free of charge, but the full range of articles are available via the online subscription service (costing between £270 and £702 per year, depending on the level of access required), which provides a wide range of benefits including access to the FT archive, which spans the last five years.

The content discussed can be accessed via: www.ft.com.

The Takeover Panel

The Takeover Panel is an independent body in the UK tasked with ensuring fair treatment of the rights of shareholders in takeover bids by administering a set of regulations called the City Code on Takeovers and Mergers.

Its website lists all the companies in which the Takeover Panel has some involvement and the list of companies involved in takeovers is updated daily. It is a useful source of information about companies in transition: www.thetakeoverpanel.org.uk.

Other sources for listed companies

There are a range of other sources of information regarding listed companies, some of which are free (but may require registration):

www.corporateinformation.com.

www.companyintelligence.morningstar.com.

www.hoovers.com.

www.londonstockexchange.com.

Financial service providers

The Financial Conduct Authority and the Prudential Regulation Authority

On 1 April 2013, the Financial Services Authority became two separate regulatory authorities: the Financial Conduct Authority; and the Prudential Regulation Authority. There is a comprehensive regime for the regulation of the provision of financial services in the UK under the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (**FSMA**) (as amended by the Financial Services Act 2012) and the majority of organisations that provide financial services are regulated under this regime. There is a searchable database of all the financial services providers who are registered under this regime. This database can be accessed via: www.fsa.gov.uk/register/firmSearchForm.do.

The search function of the database gives access to:

- the activities that the firm is permitted to carry out (under FSMA);
- regulators;
- appointed representatives/tied agents;
- address details;
- any disciplinary history relating to the firm;
- individuals employed by the firm that are registered under FSMA;
- the regulatory regimes to which the firm was previously subject; and
- principals.

Charities

With few exceptions, all institutions that fall under the English definition of a 'charity', are set up under the laws of England and Wales, and have an annual income in excess of £1,000 are to be registered with and regulated by the Charity Commission (these are often known as 'non-governmental organisations' or 'NGOs' in other jurisdictions). The Charity Commission regime is similar to the Companies House regime for the filing of particulars. In order to maintain public confidence in the charity sector, the Charity Commission has a strict filing regime, with online access to information about all registered charities (such as registered address, charitable purpose, contact details, etc.). There is also a "name and shame" section on the website for charities that have failed to comply with their filing requirements. Reports of investigations carried out by the Charity Commission are also available on the website.

The Charity Commission website is at: www.charity-commission.gov.uk.

In order to search for basic details about a charity:

- click on the 'Find Charities' button on the homepage (or access via www.charitycommission.gov.uk/find-charities); and
- enter the charity name or number in the 'Charity Search' bar, or click on 'advanced search' and search by name, key words, activities, geographical area, income range, and/or classification.

You can also access other potential sources of information such as:

- the register of defaulting charities (i.e. those charities that have failed to submit their annual returns and accounts):
www.charity-commission.gov.uk/about-charities/charities-with-out-of-date-details.
- reports of inquiries carried out into the management of charities ('Inquiry Reports'):
www.charity-commission.gov.uk/our-regulatory-work/reporting-our-regulatory-work/inquiry-reports.
- significant decisions made by the Charity Commission in relation to the registration of particular charities ('Decisions of the Commission');

www.charitycommission.gov.uk/Our_regulatory_activity/Where_we_provide_legal_consults.aspx.

- the register of removed trustees (similar to that of disqualified directors):

www.charitycommission.gov.uk/about-charities/register-of-removed-trustees.

These are, of course, only the documents available over the Internet. Original documents, such as memoranda and trust deeds, are kept by the Charity Commission and can be inspected upon request.

There is also a register of removed trustees, which allows searches to be undertaken for details of anyone who has been removed as a trustee by the High Court or the Charity Commission. For each disqualified person, the Charity Commission holds their name, address at the time of removal, the date on which the order was made and the name of the charity concerned. The register can be found at:

www.charitycommission.gov.uk/about-charities/register-of-removed-trustees/search-for-removed-trustees.

Domain names

There is an array of domain name registries organised on the basis of individual suffixes (e.g. .com, .net and individual country suffixes such as .uk).

Network solutions for .com

For .com, .org, .edu and .co.uk domain names, an effective (though not always the most comprehensive) service is that provided by Network Solutions: www.networksolutions.com/whois/index.jsp.

To search, type in the domain name as required and when prompted retype the individual code as displayed (to prevent automated searching). The following information will be displayed for most domain names:

- details of the registrant (the person who registered the domain name);
- the administrative contact's details;
- the dates of the creation and expiry of records; and
- the domain servers used.

Nominet (for .uk domain names)

Nominet is the main registration service for domain names which have a .uk domain name. Nominet's website states that it derives its authority "*from the UK Internet community, which includes Internet users and Nominet members and are acknowledged by the UK Government as the manager of the UK top level domain*". The 'WHOIS' search service allows a search of a domain name by simply typing the requested domain name into the search box at www.nominet.org.uk. This will reveal information about the ownership of the domain name.

The search should reveal the following information about the website:

- the name of the registrant (and his agent, if relevant);
- the administrative contact's postal address;

- the date that the domain name was registered (under the Nominet rules), the renewal date for the registration and the date on which the domain name was last updated;
- the name servers; and
- the date on which the information on the WHOIS database was last updated.

Please note that it is possible for registrants to elect to withhold certain information (such as the registrant's address) on certain grounds. Full details about this are available on the website:

www.nominet.org.uk/uk-domain-names/about-domain-names/domain-lookup-whois/opt-out.

ICANN

The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (**ICANN**) website is a useful place to start when looking for information about particular website registries. Go to: www.icann.org.

A list of many specific country suffixes (e.g. .co.ar for Argentina) and the appropriate registry is at: www.iana.org/cctld/cctld-whois.htm.

Intellectual property

Trade marks

Trade marks registered in the UK can be searched on the following website:
www.ipo.gov.uk/types/tm.htm.

Click on the 'Trade Marks' link on the left hand side of the page and then choose 'search for a trade mark'. By typing in a word that appears as part of the trademark, it is possible to search for data relating to that particular trademark. A list of all the trademarks that are registered under that name will be shown and it is possible to click on the particular entry. Details supplied will include:

- the 'mark text', i.e. the text used in the trade mark and an image of the trademark (where relevant);
- the trademark registration number, current status and class;
- the dates on which the trademark application was filed, when it was registered and when it is up for renewal;
- the list of goods and services for which the mark is registered;
- the name of the proprietor of the trademark and his agent (e.g. solicitor); and
- publication details.

It is important to note that the main purpose of this facility is to allow prospective trade mark applicants to search for any existing marks which may compromise their application and, as such, the information available is limited to that which serves this purpose. There is also a useful list of glossary terms which might assist in what is a rather complex area of research.

Patents

esp@cenet

This is a portal for comprehensive searches of patent applications. It contains documents filed in Japan, by the World Intellectual Property Organisation and 19 European countries, including the UK. Go to: www.gb.espacenet.com.

It is possible to search by simple text, patent application number and by company name.

The results will contain an abstract for the particular type of patent selected. This will often yield the original documents in PDF format.

Searches of this kind are a useful way of investigating some of the activities that a company is engaged in.

The UK Patent Office

The UK Patent Office's website is: www.IPO.gov.uk/patent.htm.

The European Patent Office

The European Patent Office's website is: www.epo.org.

The site provides links to the European Patent Office Member States IP Offices' websites at: www.epo.org/service-support/useful-links/national-offices.html.

Links to the IP Office websites of non-European Patent Office Member States are provided at: www.epo.org/service-support/useful-links/patent-offices.html.

Insolvency

Company bankruptcy

Official notices relating to bankruptcies and insolvencies are published in one of the UK's three official newspapers of record. These are the London, Belfast and Edinburgh Gazettes. They can be accessed via the following link: www.london-gazette.co.uk.

The London Gazette is a broad range of official regulatory and legal information published in the form of individual notices. It is a free online service.

To search the London Gazette from the archives, use the advanced search at:

www.london-gazette.co.uk/search.

It is possible to purchase a printed copy of the London Gazette, a subscription or a datafeed at: www.london-gazette.co.uk/about/contact-us.

Related information

See page 18 - 'The Companies Court'

See page 30 - 'The Individual Insolvency Register'

Courts in England and Wales

Civil Courts

General

Civil Proceedings in England and Wales are governed by the Civil Procedure Rules. Most civil court proceedings (which take place in the County Courts or the High Court at first instance) are open to the public. Exceptions to this include proceedings involving children or matters of national security.

Documents filed after 2 October 2006

Civil Procedure Rule 5.4C permits the supply of documents to a non-party from the court records. This means that both parties to proceedings and non-parties may be supplied from the court records, without permission or notice, copies of the following documents:

- claim form;
- particulars of claim;
- third party notice;
- defence;
- reply to defence; and
- any other information given in relation to them voluntarily or by court order,

provided that (a) there are no orders or applications outstanding that have the effect of restricting access to such documents, and (b) all defendants have filed an acknowledgement of service or defence, the claim has been listed or a judgment has been entered.

On the other hand, documents, such as witness statements, expert reports and party correspondence are not generally publicly available and can only be obtained by non-parties if the court gives permission.

Documents filed before 2 October 2006

Parties to proceedings may be supplied with a copy of any document relating to those proceedings from the records of the court, provided that the required fee is paid and a written request for the document is filed at court.

A person who is not a party to the proceedings can apply to inspect and copy a claim form, a judgment or order given or made in public, or any other document, providing the court gives permission. An application for permission to inspect any other document can be made without notice to the parties.

The Companies Court

The Companies Court deals mainly with the compulsory liquidation of companies and forms part of the Chancery Division of the High Court. The right to obtain documents from the court file in insolvency proceedings is governed by the Insolvency Rules, the provisions of which apply to corporate insolvency and individual bankruptcy. The Insolvency Rules provide that the insolvency office holder, a creditor, officers of the insolvent company and the bankrupt himself have a right to inspect and obtain a copy of any court document without the need to obtain permission.

Members of the general public can obtain office copies or inspect the file only with permission of the Court. A file request for inspection must be made in writing and requires notice of one day. Both office copies and file requests are obtained from the Bankruptcy Companies Court at the Rolls Building in London.

Court hearings

HM Courts Service website is available at: www.justice.gov.uk/about/hmcts.

From this website it is possible to check the daily court listings of the Royal Court of Justice on the Strand in London (this gives the time and location of most hearings of the High Court, the Court of Appeal and the Companies Court).

During the course of a hearing held in public, members of the public are allowed to inspect certain documents referred to in open court or read by the Judge, such as witness statements, which stand as evidence in chief, and 'skeleton arguments' (the written synopsis of submissions made by Counsel).

An observer attending court is generally free to take written notes of court proceedings in open court (though the use of any audio/visual recording device in court by an observer is strictly forbidden by law).

All hearings in the High Court or a county court are recorded unless the judge orders otherwise. It is therefore possible to request a transcription of a court hearing using a transcript request form (EX107). The original form should be returned to the court specifying which parts of the hearing are required. It is possible to specify the judgment, witness evidence, legal arguments, post-judgment proceedings, or the whole case. The form should be lodged at the court with the relevant fee.

Judgments

Judgments (also known as 'case law') may be useful to investigators where a matter has been litigated previously. Often a judgment will provide a useful and in-depth summary of the facts.

Judgments from the court are generally available from subscription websites, such as Lawtel and Westlaw. However, there are a range of websites that offer access to case law for free:

- www.bailii.org – this website provides general case law; searchable by name, citation, or date.
- www.jcpc.gov.uk/decided-cases - this website provides a list of the decided cases from the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council.
- <http://www.supremecourt.gov.uk/decided-cases/index.html> - this website provides a list of the decided cases from the Supreme Court, as well as judgments and press summaries.
- <http://www.justice.gov.uk/tribunals/employment-appeals/judgments> - this website provides a searchable database of Employment Appeal Tribunal judgments.
- www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld/ldjudgmt.htm – this website provides a list of all House of Lords judgments delivered from 14 November 1996 to 30 July 2009 (from 1 October 2009, the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom assumed jurisdiction in place of the House of Lords).
- <http://www.judiciary.gov.uk/media/tribunal-decisions/immigration-asylum-chamber> - this website provides a searchable database of decisions made by the Immigration and Asylum Chamber.

Tribunals

The UK has a large number of statutory tribunals (effectively courts which hear disputes relating to a narrow range of issues between members of the public and public sector bodies). Tribunals are often held in public and reports of decisions are issued in the same manner as court judgments. Certain tribunals, primarily those that relate to national security, children or where to hear them publicly would be contrary to the interests of justice, are held in closed hearings.

To access a list of the major UK statutory tribunals, see the Council on Tribunals' website at: www.justice.gov.uk/tribunals.

Related information

See page 37 - 'Professional Regulatory Tribunals'

Part 2 - Information about land

The Land Registry

HM Land Registry is the government agency responsible for recording official information on all registered land in England and Wales. The Land Registry can provide a wide range of information to any member of the public and can also provide a range of more specialist information on a discretionary basis.

All documents received by the Land Registry on or after 13 October 2003 are open to inspection and copying by anyone, as of right. It is, however, possible to exempt documents from inspection by application to the Land Registry, and so consequently a limited number of documents registered after 13 October 2003 are not available to the public.

Common information available to all members of the public regarding any property includes:

- the register or caution register of an individual title;
- any title plan or caution plan of an individual title;
- any document referred to in the register, with the exception of leases and charges received before 13 October 2003; and
- any document not referred to in a register which relates to an application, with the exception of those received before 13 October 2003.

The Land Registry online

It is possible to access the Land Registry online at (www.landregistry.gov.uk), which allows instant access (for the payment of a minimal fee) to information on registered titles. This information includes most of the information that would be available were a full Official Copy to be ordered. Information from the following registers is available online:

- the property register (which contains information about the geographical location and extent of the property);
- the proprietorship register (which provides information about the legal owners, the quality of the title and whether there are any restrictions on the power to sell, mortgage or otherwise deal with the property); and

- the charges register (which identifies registered mortgages, notices (such as cautions) or other financial burdens on the property, and any other interests which burden the property).

This is, in effect, the level of information that is available on an Official Copy (previously known as an 'office copy') of the registered title. An Official Copy has special significance in English law to the extent that it is admissible in court as evidence to the same extent as the original register. The information available through the Land Registry online does not have this significance. Therefore, if reliance is to be placed on this information beyond the carrying out of investigations, Official Copies should be ordered.

However, the Land Registry online remains an excellent tool for routine searches.

Ordering an Official Copy

To obtain an Official Copy, an OS3 form must be completed (called "an application for an official search without priority of whole or part of a registered title"). This form is available from the Land Registry's website at:

www.landregistry.gov.uk/media/downloads/forms/OS3.pdf.

Copies of other documents sent to the Land Registry before 13 October 2003

Copies of many other original documents, such as conveyances and transfers, can also be ordered by post. Further documents that are not referred to in the register can also be ordered, such as a simple change of ownership. It is also possible to make a specific request for all documents relating to a particular title, but this could yield irrelevant documents, such as routine correspondence with the Land Registry.

To obtain any of these documents, an OC2 form must be completed (called "an application for official copies of documents only"). This form is available from the Land Registry's website at: www.landregistry.gov.uk/media/downloads/forms/OC2.pdf.

Documents not referred to in the register and sent to the Land Registry before 13 October 2003

Any documents not referred to in the register but filed at the Land Registry prior to 13 October 2003 will be dealt with on a discretionary basis. In order to obtain a copy, a letter must be written to the legal department of the Land Registry office responsible for the particular title specifying the reasons why the Land Registry should allow access to particular documents. The Land Registry has wide discretion in deciding whether such access will be permitted. The addresses of the regional offices are available at: www.landregistry.gov.uk/contact-us/offices.

Unregistered land

There remains land for which title has not yet been registered. This is because such titles have not changed ownership for many decades. The Land Registration Act 2002 (and previous legislation) has made it a requirement for any transfer of a legal title to trigger the first registration, therefore the amount of unregistered land is reducing.

It is important to note that unregistered land is not the responsibility of the Land Registry. The Land Charges Register is the only way in which information can be obtained about unregistered land. It is advisable to seek legal assistance in such circumstances.

Planning applications

As a general rule any 'development' as defined by the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (and subsequent legislation) requires planning permission. 'Development' is given a wide definition and can include seemingly minor proposals to alter the appearance of buildings (such as the erection of signage). Planning law is complex and is administered and enforced by local authorities through a complicated bureaucratic process. In order to maintain public confidence and transparency in the system, all planning applications and proposals have to be open to viewing by the public. There is also a complex set of requirements governing when planning applicants have to give notice in public of their proposed developments.

As a result, there is a vast amount of freely available information open to public inspection relating to the making of planning applications. A proportion of the information is only obtainable at the planning departments of the relevant local authority office, although many local authorities have begun the shift to making this information (or parts of it) available online.

Local authority websites

Some local authorities have their own website services dedicated to planning matters which provide details of each application for planning permission. Some of these are very detailed, for example, Brent Council's website contains PDF images of all documents submitted for a planning application: www.brent.gov.uk/planning.nsf.

For access to other planning authorities' online sites, please go to: www.ukplanning.com/ukp/councilSelect.do?fwe&country=England.

After selecting the country and council (local authority) under which a search is intended to be made, click on 'Search Applications' on the menu on the left hand side of the page.

The websites of local authority planning departments vary, but by using keywords to search in the appropriate fields (e.g. part of the street name) a list of the applications made that match the keywords will be displayed.

A good portal of information about local planning offices can be found at: www.planningportal.gov.uk.

National Land Information Service

This is a portal providing access to all official sources of land information in the UK. The site assists with the sale and purchase of properties, and can be used to obtain property searches. The website can be found at: www.land-data.org.uk.

Private sector land investigation services

There is also an array of private sector services available, which (like company searches) provide a large amount of information in an easy to use format. Most of these searches are designed for the use of those with an interest in property.

Plansearch

A good example of this sort of service is Plansearch, which provides information on residential properties. The information contained in a report produced by Plansearch includes detailed information on planning applications, land use policies, and issues such as flooding.

Publicity material for this service states that the search is undertaken for a radius of 500 meters around the property, which is better than the conventional property searches undertaken by solicitors when conducting a house purchase. The property search is available within 24 hours of ordering. More information can be obtained from: www.sourceforsearches.co.uk.

Landmark.info

Landmark also offers a wide range of tailored information relating to land: www.landmarkinfo.co.uk.

Other private sector suppliers of information regarding land can be found by undertaking a standard search engine search.

Local authorities generally

Local authorities

Local authorities are the local institutions of government in the UK tasked with the delivery of certain local services and enforcement of particular laws.

They are also a good source of information in relation to planning, licensing, and other applications made by residents (both personal and corporate) in a particular area.

To search for UK local authorities, go to: www.gov.uk.

Most local authorities have websites that provide information on whom to contact and the information that is available to the public.

The Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

The Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 allows members of the public to attend meetings of local authorities and to see agendas, reports, minutes and background papers relating to those meetings. This service is subject to exceptions, for example, where personal information is being discussed. Access to such meetings, reports, etc. could also be denied to persons who are themselves being discussed.

Access to local authority accounts

At the time of a local authority's annual audit, a local authority must make available to 'any persons interested' all 'books, deeds, contracts, bills, vouchers and receipts' relating to that audit. Such documents must be available for inspection for 15 days and a public notice of access must be advertised in local newspapers.

Part 3 - Information about individuals

Electoral registers

Electoral registers are used primarily to allow local authorities to issue ballot cards for parliamentary local council and European elections. The electoral register contains the name and address of everyone who is registered to vote in such elections. Under amendments to election laws, contained in the Representation of the People (Amendment) Regulations 2002 SI 1871, there are two versions of the register. The full version contains all the names and addresses of those who have registered to vote. This version is available for inspection at local authority offices in the constituencies to which it relates. An edited version is available for sale for commercial use, such as direct marketing and advertising. It does not include the names of those voters who have opted out of inclusion in the edited version so as to protect their privacy.

In order to ascertain the address of the local authority in which you wish to inspect the electoral register, follow the below link and type in the post code or town name of where your subject is based. This will allow you to find the correct local authority. However, in order to access the full register it may be necessary to visit the particular council offices in person: www.local.direct.gov.uk/LDGRedirect/index.jsp?LGSL=364.

The British Library in London also keeps a full central stock of electoral registers: www.bl.uk/reshelp/findhelprestype/offpubs/electreg/electoral.html.

Individual insolvency register

It is also possible to search the individual insolvency (bankruptcy) register of the UK Insolvency Service (a UK government agency). This can be done via the following link: www.insolvencydirect.bis.gov.uk/eiir.

Credit reference agencies

Credit reference agencies retain a large amount of information relating to individuals which can be accessed easily. These agencies exist primarily for the benefit of financial institutions which use this information to determine whether to offer finance (e.g. mortgages or other loans) to a consumer. The agencies provide credit ratings and information about any county court judgments against a consumer and will also reveal bankruptcy information.

Two of the main credit reference agencies are Experian Ltd (www.experian.com) and Equifax plc (www.equifax.com). Credit reference agencies have a legal obligation to allow consumers to check the information held about them and to allow the correction of inaccurate or incorrect information.

Experian, for example, operates in a wide range of jurisdictions and therefore may be of assistance in investigations being carried out in a foreign jurisdiction. Experian is just one example of a company that offers this service, and there are a large number of other agencies that offer a similar service. A search for “*UK credit reference agencies*” on Google, or another similar search engine, will provide some idea of the market for this service.

It is important to note that these agencies are primarily marketing this information to commercial organisations that provide credit to individuals. It is a prerequisite to obtaining a credit reference check on an individual that the subject's consent is granted in advance of the check being undertaken.

Births, marriages and deaths: the General Register Office

The General Register Office is the government agency responsible for recording all births, marriages and deaths in England and Wales, and maintaining a central archive. It is part of the Office for National Statistics. It is possible to order copies of the following documents for any individual on which the Office holds records:

- birth certificates;
- adoption certificates;
- marriage certificates; and
- death certificates.

Searches can be conducted online. For further information about this service, please see: www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/certificates/default.asp.

Family research link

This is a privately operated service, which allows a user (for the payment of a small membership fee and subsequent search fees) to search the whole of the central index of births, marriages and deaths in England and Wales from 1656 to the current day. After having searched this index, it is possible to order actual copies of certificates relating to individuals.

To use this service, go to: www.findmypast.co.uk.

There are other sites which provide some of this information for free. For example: www.freebmd.rootsweb.com.

However, the freely available sites have a tendency to be less comprehensive and to add material to their database in a piecemeal manner.

Immigration status

Immigration status

It is not possible for a third party to routinely obtain information about an individual's immigration status. Such matters are generally considered to be confidential. However, some information can be obtained from the sources detailed below.

Electoral registers

Electoral registers can give an indication of the immigration status of people registered to vote. Information on voting in UK elections can be found at: www.gov.uk/browse/citizenship/voting.

By looking at the register and ascertaining what particular type of election an individual can vote in, some indication can be gained of the immigration status of an individual voter. It must be noted however that the absence of any mention of an individual on an electoral register may be because they have chosen not to register to vote.

Records of births marriages and death

Records of births, marriages and death could also disclose the nationality of a particular individual.

Immigration records over 30 years old

It is possible to view immigration records of individuals that are more than 30 years old. This can be done through the National Archives (previously known as the Public Records Office) which is the UK state archive: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk.

Information specifically about individuals who migrated to the UK is also available at the National Archives. Information can be obtained from the following link: www.movinghere.org.uk/galleries/roots/intro/gettingstarted/gettingstarted.htm.

The only other way to obtain information under this category is for an individual who is the subject matter of the information to apply personally to view information relating to him or her under the rights granted by the Data Protection Act.

Criminal courts and prisons

Criminal Courts

Most hearings at criminal courts (magistrates' courts and crown courts) are open to the public as of right (although the use of any audio/visual recording devices is strictly prohibited by law). There are public galleries or seating areas in court for this purpose. However, there are strict rules on what can be reported or said about a hearing by attendees while a trial or hearing is ongoing.

It is possible to order the transcripts of criminal court hearings by contacting the court concerned.

Prisons

A full list of penal institutions in England and Wales and their contact details can be found on the Justice website: www.justice.gov.uk/contacts/prison-finder.

It is generally possible to arrange to visit an individual serving a prison sentence by contacting the relevant prison.

Data protection rights

Under the Data Protection Act 1998, individuals have a right to access any information held on them by any organisation which holds information either on a computer system or 'in structured files' (i.e. files or papers which are organised or indexed in a way which makes it easy to find information about a particular individual).

In order to access this information, a member of the public can write to the 'Data Controller' (the person appointed at that particular organisation to deal with Data Protection Act matters) applying under the Data Protection Act for access to any personal data held about themselves. The Data Controller can ask for proof of identity. The fee for an application for general information (not related to school records or credit references) is capped at £10. The Data Controller is generally required to provide this information within 40 days but should, in reality, provide a speedier response.

The Data Controller can refuse to allow an inspection of documents on grounds such as law enforcement, national security, employment references, certain types of negotiations, and adoption records and reports.

Further information about Data Protection Act rights can be found at: www.ico.org.uk/for_organisations/data_protection/the_guide.

Freedom of Information (FOI) requests

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 (**FOIA**) came into force on 1 January 2005 and gives individuals and companies the right to ask public authorities whether they hold certain information and, if they do, the right to be given that information.

The public may ask to see any information held by public authorities and it must be disclosed unless an exemption applies. Therefore, a wide variety of information is accessible under the FOIA. As the FOIA is retrospective, an applicant can ask to see any information that is held by the public authority at the time of the request, even if it was obtained before the FOIA came into force. If a company holds information on behalf of a public authority, that information is regarded as held by the authority and is also subject to the FOIA.

A public authority must normally comply with a FOI request within 20 working days of receiving it, although it does not have to comply with a request if the cost of doing so would exceed the 'appropriate limit' specified by regulations. Public authorities may also refuse requests that are vexatious, for example, because they are frivolous or aimed at causing disruption or distress, or where a particular statutory 'exemption' applies (of which there are 24), e.g. information which may prejudice national security. Similarly, public authorities do not have to respond repeatedly to the same or similar requests from an applicant.

You can contact an organisation directly by letter or by email to make a FOI request.

When making a request, you should include:

- your name;
- an address where you can be contacted; and
- a detailed description of the recorded information you want.

Most requests are free but a public authority may require a small fee for photocopies or postage.

Further information about FOI requests can be found at:

http://www.ico.org.uk/for_the_public/official_information

Professionals

Basic information about professionals and their qualifications is available over the Internet or through contacting the relevant professional body. Some notable bodies which provide instant access to information about their members are:

- the Law Society: www.lawsociety.org.uk.
- the Bar Council: www.barcouncil.org.uk.
- the Royal Institute of British Architects: www.riba.org.
- the General Medical Council: www.gmc-uk.org.

Professional regulatory tribunals

Many professions, in order to maintain professional integrity and high standards have internal procedures for disciplining members, and consequently have their own tribunal services which adjudicate on matters relating to professional misconduct. Often summary reports of the hearing, detailing charges against particular professionals' findings and penalties imposed by the tribunals, are available for inspection either at the offices of the tribunal or regulatory body, or on the Internet.

For example, the Bar Council:

www.barstandardsboard.org.uk/complaints-and-professional-conduct/disciplinary-tribunals-and-findings/disciplinary-findings/?DisciplineID=75521.

Solicitors' Disciplinary Tribunal:

www.solicitortribunal.org.uk/search/JudgementSearch.aspx.

General Medical Council:

www.mpts-uk.org/decisions/1421.asp.

Members of elected bodies

The UK Parliament (in Westminster – comprising the House of Commons and the House of Lords) and the two regional assemblies (one in Cardiff (the Welsh Assembly) and one in Edinburgh (the Scottish Parliament)) all have extensive websites detailing the work they do and the committees that undertake investigations. Each website also has searchable registers of members' interests online. These give substantial information about each member and his or her outside interests which include information on shareholdings and directorships of companies.

The House of Commons (the lower house)

Information about members is available via the following link:

www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/mps.

The House of Lords (the upper house)

Information about members is available via the following link:

www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/lords.

The Scottish Parliament

The Scottish Parliament is unicameral. The general portal of information is available from the following link: www.scottish.parliament.uk.

Members' Interests can be accessed the following link:

www.scottish.parliament.uk/msps.aspx.

The Welsh Assembly

The Welsh Assembly is unicameral. The general portal of information is available from the following link: www.wales.gov.uk.

The Register of Members' Interests is available from the following link:

www.wales.gov.uk/about/cabinet/cabinetm/?lang=en.

There are also other legislative bodies in the UK. The two major ones are the Northern Ireland Assembly and the London Assembly.

The Northern Ireland Assembly

www.niassembly.gov.uk.

The London Assembly

www.london.gov.uk/mayor-assembly/london-assembly.

Local authorities

Local authorities are run by elected councillors and often will have information about individual councillors, the activities that they are involved in and the other interests that they have outside of their public duties.

Related information

See page 28 - 'Local authorities generally'

Motor vehicles

The Driving and Vehicle Licensing Agency (the **DVLA**) is the UK government agency tasked with regulating motor vehicles on the roads. The DVLA will only provide information relating to motor vehicle registration to UK public sector (usually law enforcement) agencies.

However, there are commercial providers of information about cars, one of which is the Experian car data check service:

www.experian.co.uk/business-services/business-services.html.

There is also a similar service provided, for example, by the AA (the Automobile Association) in the UK:

www.autocheck.co.uk/secure/autocheck.asp?homepage=true&&AutoLocateID=CC1F80B904013FE955F0565F.

Related information

See page 43 - 'Informal assistance through UK law enforcement'

Other sources of information about individuals

Information about individual banking and purchasing histories is often difficult to obtain for third parties and even less so without putting the subject on notice. However, there are other methods of obtaining information about individuals which may assist in investigations:

The local press

Even fairly minor towns and villages in the UK will have a local (usually weekly) newspaper relating to and commenting on local news. These newspapers are also vehicles for advertising local businesses and will carry notices about businesses and individuals. They often have supplements advertising houses for sale. Journalists on these papers will have a large amount of local knowledge which they may be willing to share.

Most local newspapers also now have a web presence. The following link is a good portal for the main local newspapers in the UK: www.wrx.zen.co.uk/britnews.htm.

A comprehensive and annually updated directory of media contacts in the UK press (both local and national) entitled 'The Guardian Media Directory' is a useful starting point for contacts in this regard. It is available to purchase online: www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/ASIN/184354041X/ref=sr_aps_books_1_1/202-0501909-0877414.

A far more comprehensive directory (although considerably more expensive) is Willings Press Guide 2013, which comes in UK, European and Worldwide editions: <http://www.cision.com/uk/shop/category/willings>.

Local libraries

The vast majority of towns in the UK have at least one local library which keeps a large amount of local information that is unlikely to be available on the Internet. Reference libraries often hold archives of local newspapers and other local information.

Estate agents

Local estate agents may be willing to provide information on properties or people in their area. A basic Internet search will provide you with the contact details for local estate agents.

Social media

Often bulletin boards, chat rooms and other websites provide a level of anecdotal and incidental information about individuals that is not available elsewhere. For example:

www.friendsreunited.co.uk.

www.facebook.com.

www.twitter.com.

These websites enable a user to register and read postings or blogs by individuals about their life, the people they have been in social contact with over particular periods, and where they may have been travelling, etc. It has been claimed that information on these sites has been used by the police to secure criminal convictions in the past.

Similarly, LinkedIn and other business networking sites can be a rich source of information, as they can provide a detailed insight into an individual's professional contacts and business dealings: www.uk.linkedin.com.

Online Directories

There are various online directories in the UK, such as www.192.com, which contain contact addresses for individuals and businesses within the UK. Limited searches can be made for free which reveal whether information is held about an individual, but to access additional details or listings a user must register on the website and, in some circumstances, may be required to pay a fee in order to access additional information.

Informal assistance through UK law enforcement

Certain types of information can still be obtained informally by foreign law enforcement and investigation organisations through the UK's National Central Bureau of Interpol, which is part of the National Crime Agency (formerly the Serious Organised Crime Agency), a body that specialises in the fight against organised crime. The type of information which can be obtained through this channel includes:

- interviewing witnesses or suspects in criminal investigations where the person willing to be interviewed is prepared to co-operate without the need for judicial intervention;
- sharing of information and intelligence about investigations into offences committed in the UK;
- information relating to asset tracing;
- providing details of previous convictions;
- providing details of UK telephone subscribers (for investigative purposes);
- providing details of keepers of UK registered motor vehicles and driving licences; and
- obtaining medical/dental information where the person concerned has granted consent.

Part 4 - General information

Research

The Deep Web

Companies, such as forensic accountants, can access the 'Deep Web' for a fee. The Deep Web consists of content that does not form part of the indexable Web and cannot be accessed by conventional search engines. Think of searching the Internet as casting a net and dragging it across the surface of the ocean – a great deal will be caught, but much will remain deep under the surface; in the same way content is located in the Deep Web.

ARIS

Asset Recovery Intelligence System (**ARIS**) is a software tool that can be used to screen persons and companies based on the open source data available on the Internet. It was developed by the International Centre for Asset Recovery (**ICAR**) and has been designed to assist both the private and public sector — financial institutions like banks, as well as Financial Intelligence Units (**FIUs**) and other national agencies — in more efficiently handling their compliance or investigative needs. The tool accomplishes this by enabling the analyst, compliance officer or investigator to quickly identify any links in the public domain that relate a given person or company to corruption, money laundering, or terrorist financing.

ARIS uses semantic technologies to search the public Internet and commercial news sources for traces of corruption linked to entities under scrutiny. Essential to the tool is a keyword taxonomy that is tailored specifically to the field of corruption and money laundering.

The tool is currently installed in several FIUs and other institutions in Europe, Africa, and America and rights to use the software can be obtained through contacting the ICAR (at kaspar.fischer@baselgovernance.org).

ASLIB

A major research tool on any aspect of life in the UK is the Association of Special Libraries and Information Bureaux (**ASLIB**) Directory of Information Sources in the UK, a hard copy of which can be purchased at: www.taylorandfrancis.co.uk.

ICIJ Offshore Database

The ICIJ Offshore Database is a searchable database, which shows relationships and networks among people or companies and offshore entities:

<http://offshoreleaks.icij.org/search>.

The database includes entities incorporated in 10 offshore jurisdictions: British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Cook Islands, Singapore, Hong Kong, Samoa, Seychelles, Mauritius, Labuan and Malaysia. The information comes from two offshore service firms: Singapore-based Portcullis TrustNet and BVI-based Commonwealth Trust Limited.

Investigative Dashboard

Investigative Dashboard (**ID**) has been developed by the Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, a cross-border investigative reporting organisation. ID hosts three core tools: a crowd-sourced database of information and documents on persons of interest and their business connections, a worldwide list of online databases and business registries, and a research desk where journalists can go for help in sourcing hard to find information:

<http://www.investigativedashboard.org>.

University libraries

University libraries hold a wealth of detailed information in a multitude of areas. Many universities have their catalogues available on the Internet, meaning particular items can be located with ease. Private researchers are able to consult these for information.