



**ADVISORY GUIDELINES ON THE PERSONAL DATA PROTECTION ACT  
FOR SELECTED TOPICS**

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## **PART I: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW**

### **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 The Personal Data Protection Act 2012 (the “PDPA”) establishes a general data protection law in Singapore which governs the collection, use and disclosure of individuals’ personal data by organisations. The Personal Data Protection Commission (the “Commission”) is established under the PDPA with the key functions, amongst others, of promoting awareness of data protection in Singapore and administering and enforcing the PDPA.
- 1.2 These Guidelines should be read in conjunction with the document titled “Introduction to the Guidelines” and are subject to the disclaimers set out therein.<sup>1</sup>
- 1.3 It should be noted that the examples in these Guidelines serve to illustrate particular aspects of the PDPA, and are not meant to exhaustively address every obligation in the PDPA that would apply in that scenario.

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<sup>1</sup>Available at <http://www.pdpc.gov.sg/legislation-and-guidelines/advisory-guidelines>

## PART II: SELECTED TOPICS

### 2 Analytics and Research

How does the PDPA apply to organisations that want to conduct analytics and research activities?

- 2.1 Where the research activities carried out by the organisation require the collection, use or disclosure of personal data, the organisation is required to comply with the PDPA. In particular, under the PDPA, individuals have to be informed of and consent to the purposes for which their personal data are collected, used, and disclosed by organisations, unless any exception under the PDPA applies. Please see the sections on “The Consent Obligation” and “The Notification Obligation” in the Key Concepts Guidelines for more details.
- 2.2 In respect of the Notification Obligation, an organisation may specify research itself as a purpose and an individual can give consent specifically for the use of his personal data for research.
- 2.3 Alternatively, an organisation may rely on consent given by an individual for a purpose that does not explicitly cover analytics and research if the purpose of the analytics and research falls within the original purpose for which consent was given.

2.4	<p><b>Example:</b></p> <p>John signs up for a mobile service with a telecommunications service provider. John consents to his personal data being collected and used by the service provider for the purposes of providing him the mobile service. The service provider collects and analyses some of John’s personal data for the purposes of managing its network and short term planning enhancements to improve the quality of mobile services provided to him. Such activities would likely fall within the original purpose John consented to.</p> <p>An adventure camp company requires all camp participants to provide emergency contact information of an individual, which includes personal data like name, telephone number and address, with consent from the individual. The purpose stated was to use that personal data to contact the individual in the event of an emergency relating to the camp participant. The company subsequently analyses the personal data for the purpose of determining if the individual(s) listed would be a potential participant for adventure camps. This purpose would not fall within the original purpose for which the consent was obtained.</p>
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- 2.5 Organisations may also use personal data without consent for a research purpose under paragraph 1(i) of the Third Schedule to the PDPA, if all the conditions referred to in that paragraph are fulfilled. Paragraph 1(i) says that an organisation may use personal data about an individual without the consent of the individual if the personal data is used for a research purpose, including historical or statistical research, subject to the conditions in paragraph 2. Paragraph 2 sets out that Paragraph 1(i) shall not apply unless:
- a) the research purpose cannot reasonably be accomplished unless the personal data is provided in an individually identifiable form;
  - b) it is impracticable for the organisation to seek the consent of the individual for the use;
  - c) the personal data will not be used to contact persons to ask them to participate in the research; and
  - d) linkage of the personal data to other information is not harmful to the individuals identified by the personal data and the benefits to be derived from the linkage are clearly in the public interest.
- 2.6 Alternatively, organisations could consider using anonymous data to conduct research. Anonymised data is not personal data and thus would not be governed by the PDPA. Please refer to the section on “Anonymisation” in these Guidelines for more details.



### 3 Anonymisation

#### What is anonymisation?

- 3.1 In general, anonymisation refers to the process of removing identifying information such that the remaining data cannot be used to identify any particular individual. The terminology that has been used to refer to this process varies across different jurisdictions and sectors. For instance, some jurisdictions use ‘anonymisation’ and ‘de-identification’ interchangeably to refer to the process of converting personal data into data that can no longer be used to identify an individual, whether alone or in combination with other available information. Others use ‘anonymisation’ to refer to de-identification that is irreversible.<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of these Guidelines, the term ‘anonymisation’ refers to the process of converting personal data into data that cannot be used to identify any particular individual, and can be reversible or irreversible. The reversibility of the specific process used would be a relevant consideration for organisations when managing the risk of re-identification.
- 3.2 Anonymisation is a set of risk management controls and has to be understood in the context of the following definition of personal data under section 2(1) of the PDPA: “data, whether true or not, about an individual who can be identified — (a) from that data; or (b) from that data and other information to which the organisation has or is likely to have access”. Please see the section on “Personal Data” in the Key Concepts Guidelines for more details.
- 3.3 Data would not be considered anonymised if there is a serious possibility that an individual could be re-identified, taking into consideration both:
- a) the data itself, or the data combined with other information to which the organisation has or is likely to have access; and
  - b) the measures and safeguards (or lack thereof) implemented by the organisation to mitigate the risk of identification.
- 3.4 Data that has been anonymised is not personal data, and the Data Protection Provisions in Parts III to VI of the PDPA do not apply to the collection, use or disclosure of such data.

#### Why anonymise personal data?

- 3.5 Anonymisation of personal data is carried out to render the resultant data suitable for more uses than its original state would permit under data protection regimes.

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<sup>2</sup> National Institute of Standards and Technology, *De-identification of Personal Information (NISTIR 8053)* <http://nvlpubs.nist.gov/nistpubs/ir/2015/NIST.IR.8053.pdf>

For example, anonymised data may be used for research and data mining where personal identifiers in the data are unnecessary or undesired. Anonymised datasets could also be a protection measure against inadvertent disclosures and security breaches.

- 3.6 Where individuals need not be identifiable for the purposes in question, it is usually good practice to collect, use and disclose data in an anonymised form.
- 3.7 In circumstances where an organisation must cease to retain personal data under section 25 of the PDPA, the organisation may anonymise the data. By doing so, it will have ceased to retain personal data, since anonymised data is not personal data.

#### Anonymisation techniques

- 3.8 The following is a non-exhaustive list of commonly used anonymisation techniques, and examples of how each technique can be used.

3.9	<p><b>Examples of Anonymisation Techniques:</b></p> <p>a) <i>Pseudonymisation</i>: replacing personal identifiers with other references. For example, replacing an individual's name with a tag or reference number, which is randomly generated.</p> <p>b) <i>Aggregation</i>: displaying values as totals, so that none of the individual values which could identify an individual is shown. For example, given a dataset with the ages of eight individuals (i.e. 33, 35, 34, 37, 42, 45, 37, 40), displaying the sum of the individual ages of the total number of individuals in a group (i.e. 303), rather than the age of each individual represented discretely.</p> <p>c) <i>Replacement</i>: replacing values or a subset of the values with a computed average or a number derived from the values. For example, replacing the individuals with ages of 15, 18 and 20 with an age value of 17 to blur the distinction, if exact age is not required for the desired purposes.</p> <p>d) <i>Data suppression</i>: removing values that are not required for the purpose. For example, removing 'ethnicity' from a dataset of individuals' attributes.</p> <p>e) <i>Data recoding or generalisation</i>: banding or grouping of categories into broader categories. For example, the grouping of exact education level (e.g. K1, Primary 3, Secondary 2) into broader categories (e.g. pre-primary, primary, secondary etc.), or hiding the value within a given range (e.g. replacing age '43' with the range '40-50').</p>
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	<p>f) <i>Data shuffling</i>: mixing up or replacing values with those of the same type so that the information looks similar but is unrelated to the actual details. For example, the surnames in a customer database could be sanitised by replacing them with those drawn from another database.</p> <p>g) <i>Masking</i>: removing certain details while preserving the look and feel of the data. For example, representing a full string of NRIC numbers as '#####567A' instead of 'S1234567A'.</p>
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- 3.10 The Commission does not recommend or endorse the use of any particular technique. Organisations should make their own assessment of their situation(s) and operational context, and adopt the most appropriate anonymisation technique.

Considerations for anonymising data

- 3.11 When deciding whether to anonymise data for use or disclosure, organisations should keep in mind that not all datasets can be effectively or meaningfully anonymised. The following section elaborates on some relevant considerations.

*Nature and type of data*

- 3.12 The nature of the dataset affects how much identifying information needs to be removed so that it no longer can be used to identify individuals. Some data types are inherently 'rich' and full of information (e.g. portrait photographs taken for facial recognition purposes), such that any alteration to anonymise the data might render it useless for its intended purposes.
- 3.13 The uniqueness of a record or data point within a sample dataset or population also contributes to the challenge of anonymisation. There are instances where the use of particular methods may not anonymise the dataset, because data points for certain individuals remain unique. For example, a dataset containing the ages of individuals has one outlier of age 89 while the other ages are below 50. No matter how the ages are generalised or recoded into ranges, the data point for the 89-year-old stands out. Where there are records or data points that are unique to the population or sample (i.e. population unique or sample unique)<sup>3</sup> the risk of re-identification increases. Organisations must be careful to manage these risks, and ensure that the dataset is effectively anonymised.

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<sup>3</sup> "Population unique" refers to a record within a dataset which is unique within the population on a given key. "Sample unique" refers to a record within a dataset which is unique within that dataset on a given key. Source: OECD Glossary of Statistical Terms

*Potential impact on individuals*

- 3.14 When deciding whether to anonymise personal data for use or disclosure, organisations should also consider any potential negative impact on the individuals if they were to be re-identified. This is particularly important if the personal data involved is of a highly sensitive nature, (e.g. records of individuals with HIV, records of adopted children and their biological parents). In such circumstances, even if the organisation assesses that there is a less than serious possibility of an individual being identified from the data, the organisation should carefully consider whether using or disclosing such data would be appropriate.

Assessing the risks of re-identification

- 3.15 Re-identification can occur as a result of combining separate datasets. When determining whether a dataset is anonymised, the organisation should consider whether there is a serious possibility that an individual can be identified from the dataset when it is combined with other information, by carrying out an assessment of the risk of re-identification. In general, factors affecting the risk of re-identification include the extent of disclosure, the amount of alteration the data has been subjected to in the course of anonymisation, the availability of other relevant information, and the recipients' ability and motivation to re-identify the data. Some of the considerations are discussed in the following paragraphs.

*Nature of use and extent of disclosure*

- 3.16 Organisations should consider how the nature of use and extent of disclosure of the anonymised data can affect the risk of re-identification. In general, where an organisation intends to use the anonymised data within the organisation itself, or where the organisation intends to disclose anonymised data only to a restricted group (or groups) of users (e.g. a closed community of researchers), re-identification risks can be managed better, compared to the situation where the organisation discloses the anonymised data to any users by publishing it.

*Public knowledge and personal knowledge*

- 3.17 Organisations should consider the types of information that could enable re-identification if combined with the anonymised data, as well as the ease with which such information can be accessed. It is necessary to understand the intended use and recipient of the anonymised data to perform this assessment and tailor an appropriate set of risk management controls for the intended use and recipient. For example, the risk of re-identification in a disclosure of data to a single entity for research and development of new products and services under a non-disclosure

agreement, would likely differ from the risk of re-identification in publishing the data to the world at large.

- 3.18 Even after the risks of re-identification have been assessed and appropriate controls implemented, the risk of spontaneous re-identification of data by persons with special knowledge of a particular individual can occur. For example, a patient’s attending physician, who is also conducting medical research using datasets containing the patient’s data, may be able to recognise the patient’s medical profile from the data (even if such data may be assessed to be anonymised if the recipient did not have such special knowledge). If it is known or foreseeable to the organisation that the data might be accessed by any persons with special knowledge that could be used to re-identify any individual from the data, such risk must be accounted for in the risk assessment exercise.

*Disclosing multiple datasets*

- 3.19 If an organisation intends to disclose multiple anonymised datasets (e.g. by publishing seemingly unrelated datasets as part of an open data initiative), organisations should carry out a careful assessment of the risk of re-identification from such a disclosure, particularly if those datasets are extracted from the same database. Organisations would have to take particular care to ensure that risk management controls are adequate to prevent re-identification of individuals by the recipient organisation, particularly when the datasets are combined with each other or with additional datasets previously released by the organisation. Organisations could consider maintaining a centralised record to track datasets that have been disclosed or published.

3.20	<p><b>Example: Publishing multiple datasets</b></p> <p>As part of an open data initiative, two divisions in Company WXY have independently decided to release related datasets, unaware of the other division’s intentions. Both divisions then carried out assessments with incomplete and inaccurate information about the datasets being released by other divisions in the company.</p> <p>If each division then proceeds to publish their own datasets, this may increase the risk of re-identification where the two datasets are related.</p>
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*Data recipient’s ability and motivation to re-identify*

- 3.21 The risk of re-identification is likely to differ depending on the ability and the motivation of the data recipient to re-identify individuals from the dataset. A data

recipient in possession of complementary information, specialised skills or technologies would more likely be capable of re-identifying individuals from the data than one that does not, assuming both have similar motivations.

3.22	<p><b>Example:</b></p> <p>Anonymised dataset Y contains complex genome sequencing, a specialised type of data not easily understood by the layman.</p> <p>If the data recipient is an expert in genome sequencing, and understands how to identify individuals from such a dataset, the risk of re-identification may be higher. In contrast, if the data recipient has no knowledge of that data type, the risk re-identification would be comparatively lower.</p>
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- 3.23 Even if the data recipient has the requisite skills and information for re-identification, it does not necessarily mean the risk of re-identification is high. The motivation to re-identify must also be considered. The motivation to re-identify an individual may be low if there are barriers to re-identification, such as legal (e.g. via contractual obligations) or regulatory consequences (e.g. pursuant to government regulations or legally binding industry codes issued by regulators), for the data recipient, or if there is simply no incentive or benefit for a data recipient to re-identify individuals.

*Changing environment*

- 3.24 While a dataset may be anonymised at a particular point in time, it is not guaranteed that the dataset will stay anonymised permanently. The likelihood of re-identification for any given anonymised dataset is likely to increase over time, due to greater ease of access to and volume of other relevant information, increase in computing power, and improvements in data-linking techniques. A dataset that is sufficiently anonymised based on current technology might be more easily re-identified with technological advancements.
- 3.25 The adequacy of anonymisation techniques and risk management controls would have to be assessed in relation to the current state of technology. However, it is also important to build in robust organisational, legal and non-technical measures to manage the risks of re-identification, taking into account the possibility of technological developments over the period for which the data may be retained. Therefore, organisations should consider whether periodic re-assessment of re-identification risks should be included as a safeguard, particularly where there are developments that would significantly affect the risk of re-identification, or where anonymised data is disclosed and available over an extended period of time, for example in an ongoing relationship. For example, if the encryption used for

anonymisation of a particular dataset has been compromised, organisations should re-assess the risk of that anonymised dataset being re-identified and put in place additional safeguards to mitigate such risk.

#### General test for assessing risks of re-identification

- 3.26 As a general test for assessing the risks of re-identification and the robustness of the anonymisation, a useful starting point is the ‘motivated intruder’ test highlighted in the ICO’s Code of Practice *Anonymisation: Managing Data Protection Risk Code of Practice*, which we adapt to our vernacular.
- 3.27 The ‘motivated intruder’ test considers whether individuals can be re-identified from anonymised data by someone who is motivated, reasonably competent, has access to standard resources (e.g. the Internet and published information such as public directories), and employs standard investigative techniques (e.g. making enquiries of people who may have additional knowledge of the identity of the data subject).
- 3.28 As anonymisation is a package of risk control measures tailored to the purpose of disclosure and the recipient, the ‘motivated intruder’ test has to accommodate the features of the intended recipient organisation.<sup>4</sup>
- a) The assessment should include the totality of the risk management controls that are applicable to the recipient organisation. This refers to both technical measures as well as legal, regulatory or organisational measures. For example, the risk assessment could take into account the kind of safeguards accorded to the data, or how long the data is to be retained, among others.
  - b) The ‘motivated intruder’ test assumes that no particular individual has been targeted for identification and that the intruder does not resort to criminality or any specialist equipment or skills.
  - c) Where disclosure of a particular dataset is to a specific recipient whose motivations, re-identification capabilities, and other information available to that recipient are known or can be reasonably inferred, these known characteristics should also be accounted for.
  - d) In addition, the risk assessment for re-identification should also consider the other factors (not specific to anonymised data) that subject the anonymised data to re-identification risks. This includes all other ‘residual’ risks that are

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<sup>4</sup> This can include disclosures to the public in cases where the dataset is published as part of open data efforts or in a publication that is freely available.

not directly related to a recipient's motivation and capability to re-identify or the risk management controls for the disclosed anonymised data; for example, risk of the data being compromised or mistakenly disclosed to unintended recipients.

#### Managing the risks of re-identification when using or disclosing anonymised data

- 3.29 Before using or disclosing anonymised data, the organisation should apply the appropriate anonymisation techniques to ensure robust anonymisation of the data. In general, the Commission would consider an organisation to have anonymised data if there is no serious possibility that a data user or recipient would be able to identify any individuals from the data.
- 3.30 When determining which anonymisation technique to adopt, some relevant considerations could include:
- a) the nature or type of data to be anonymised; and/or
  - b) international best practices for anonymisation of the given data type.
- 3.31 Organisations may consider hiring anonymisation experts, statisticians, or independent risk assessors, to aid in their assessment of the appropriate anonymisation techniques to apply, particularly where the anonymisation issues are complex; for example, large datasets containing a wide range of personal data.
- 3.32 To further manage its risks, organisations may also consider putting in place other appropriate controls to lower the risk of re-identification, like:
- a) limiting the number of data recipients to whom the information is disclosed and the number of persons that can access the information;
  - b) imposing restrictions on the data recipient on the use and subsequent disclosure of the data;
  - c) requiring the data recipient to implement processes to govern the proper use of the anonymised data in line with the restrictions; and/or
  - d) requiring the data recipient to implement processes and measures for the destruction of data as soon as the data no longer serves any business or legal purpose.
- 3.33 In addition, organisations may put in place controls to limit the data users' or recipients' access to "other information" that could re-identify the anonymised data. Depending on the circumstances, controls could be implemented through:



- a) organisational structures;
- b) legally binding agreements, administrative rules, or policies;
- c) technical measures (e.g. using encryption to restrict access to the original dataset, limiting access to only authorised users, and controlling access through passwords); and/or
- d) physical measures (e.g. restricted access areas).

3.34 It is not necessary that the most technically sophisticated anonymisation technology be used all the time. Rather, what is required is one that is sufficiently robust to manage the risk of re-identification, given the circumstances (e.g. the extent of disclosure, the intended recipient(s) and existing controls).

3.35 In the event that an organisation intentionally re-identifies an individual, such deliberate actions will constitute collection of personal data, for which consent is required from the relevant individual. There may be situations where the re-identification is unintentional. Generally, unintentional re-identification is not considered collection of personal data. However, the organisation should immediately delete the personal data or re-identifying information and should evaluate whether the risk management controls in place are adequate. If the organisation uses or discloses such unintentionally re-identified personal data, its actions will be considered to be use or disclosure of personal data. Generally, where such collection, use or disclosure is carried out for a purpose to which the relevant individuals did not consent<sup>5</sup>, the organisation will have breached its PDPA obligations.

3.36 Given that management and assessment of re-identification risks is dependent on the circumstances of the use or disclosure, the following scenarios illustrate how re-identification risks can be assessed and managed in certain circumstances.

*Use of anonymised data within the organisation*

3.37 In general, if the departments within an organisation have, or are likely to have, access to other information (e.g. the decryption key or algorithm to reverse the anonymisation process) that can be combined with the data to re-identify individuals, the data will be considered personal data. and the Data Protection Provisions in Parts III to VI of the PDPA will apply.

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<sup>5</sup> And no relevant exception under the PDPA applies.

- 3.38 Conversely, if anonymisation techniques and risk mitigation measures have been applied such that there is no serious possibility that the data can be used to identify any individual, the Commission would consider such data anonymised. The Data Protection Provisions of the PDPA would not apply. For example, deploying one-way encryption in order to anonymise customer data for long term archival purposes.
- 3.39 There may be circumstances where an organisation wishes to convert personal data into anonymised datasets to be used for a particular purpose. However, the organisation may need to retain the original dataset or other information that can re-identify the individuals from the anonymised datasets for other purposes. In such situations, anonymisation can be relevant to the safe use of data for a particular purpose within an organisation. Organisational structures should establish effective barriers to access, by a group (or groups) of users within the organisation, to other information (e.g. the decryption key or algorithm that could reverse the anonymisation) held by the organisation that could be used to re-identify an individual.

3.40	<p><b>Example:</b></p> <p>Department A and Department B are two departments within Organisation JKL. Department A manages personal data collected by the organisation for the purpose of customer relations. Department B wishes to use the data for business analytics purpose but does not require individually identifiable data. Department A proceeds to anonymise the data such that the anonymised dataset can no longer identify any individual.</p> <p>Organisation JKL puts in place controls on Department B to prevent re-identification of the anonymised dataset. This includes access restrictions to prevent data users in Department B from gaining access to other information held by Department A that can lead to re-identification, as well as administrative restrictions to prevent Department B from attempting re-identification. Organisation JKL also makes the unauthorised attempt to re-identify individuals from the anonymised dataset a breach of the terms of employment.</p> <p>Department B could be considered to be using anonymised data given that effective controls are imposed on Department B to prevent re-identification.</p>
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- 3.41 Once data is anonymised, in general, organisations must not be able to, in effect, use the same data as personal data (e.g. the data cannot be used to make a decision about, or in a manner that has a targeted impact on a specific individual). If

organisations are, in effect, using the data as personal data, then organisations must ensure that consent has been obtained for such use, unless any exceptions apply.

- 3.42 Organisations must also be mindful of subsequent actions in respect of the anonymised data that could increase the risk of re-identification. For example, the Commission would consider there to be a serious possibility that an individual could be identified, if there are any subsequent disclosures of the anonymised data or information relating to the anonymised data to persons outside of Department B (e.g. where no effective controls are imposed on the recipients), and no further risk-mitigation measures are taken. Given that Department A holds the decryption key or other information (e.g. master database) that could be used to re-identify individuals from the anonymised data, the organisation must ensure the robust anonymisation of the dataset before any further disclosure (e.g. this may include further scrambling of the data).

*Disclosure of anonymised data to a specific group (or groups) or data recipients*

- 3.43 There may be instances where an organisation converts personal data into anonymised data in order to disclose it to a specific group (or groups) of recipients outside the organisation for other purposes, while the organisation continues to have access to other information that can re-identify the individuals (e.g. the decryption key or algorithm to reverse the anonymisation process). The risks of re-identification can be better managed where the recipients are limited to a specific group known to the disclosing organisation, compared to a disclosure to the world at large.
- 3.44 The Commission will consider its use or disclosure of anonymised data where the data is used by or disclosed to a specific group (or groups) of data users or recipients such that there is no serious possibility that any data user or recipient would be able to identify any individuals from the data. The Data Protection Provisions in Parts III to VI of the PDPA would not apply to such use and disclosure. In such instances, the recipients of the data cannot use it to make a decision about, or otherwise use in a manner that has an impact on, any specific individual.
- 3.45 Where disclosure of anonymised data is restricted to specific data recipients (e.g. a closed group of researchers) for their own use, without any further disclosure, the disclosing organisation may consider adopting legal measures to discourage any attempts by the data recipients to re-identify individuals from the anonymised data. For example, the disclosing organisation could put in place contractual safeguards, or require an undertaking from the data recipients not to attempt to re-identify the anonymised data. The disclosing organisation could also require that the data recipients put in place additional measures, such as governance frameworks,

processes, and controls, to ensure the proper handling of the dataset and further reduce the risk of re-identification.

- 3.46 Further considerations when disclosing anonymised data are discussed in the previous section on *“Managing the risks of re-identification when using or disclosing anonymised data”*.

3.47	<p><b>Example:</b></p> <p>Organisation JKL (disclosing organisation) intends to disclose an anonymised dataset to Organisation XYZ (data recipient). As part of its contractual agreement, Organisation XYZ has committed not to attempt re-identification of the dataset or to further disclose the anonymised data to another organisation.</p> <p>Organisation JKL also contractually requires that Organisation XYZ puts in place governance frameworks and controls to ensure the proper handling of the dataset, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) limiting the number of Organisation XYZ’s employees who can access the anonymised dataset;</li> <li>b) requiring Organisation XYZ’s employees authorised to access the dataset to be trained on data protection practices; and</li> <li>c) applying appropriate technical solutions to ensure better access controls (e.g. technical measures that limit employees’ access to the dataset and the copying of or number of copies of the dataset).</li> </ul> <p>Organisation JKL follows through with periodic reviews of the governance frameworks and controls that Organisation XYZ has put in place.</p>
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- 3.48 In assessing the anonymisation and risk of re-identification of any dataset, the Commission will take a holistic view, not restricted to the measures discussed above, and include any other relevant facts of the case. For example, even if a disclosing organisation has employed robust anonymisation techniques and put in place legal safeguards to prevent attempts to re-identify and further disclose the anonymised data, if there are serious doubts about the reliability or reputation of the receiving organisation (e.g. in ensuring the proper use and handling of anonymised datasets), the Commission may consider the risk of re-identification significant, and the disclosure to be of personal data. On the other hand, the disclosure of anonymised data to a group of recipients with demonstrated reliability in ensuring the proper use and handling of anonymised datasets may be assessed to be of lower risk.

- 3.49 If there is no serious possibility that individuals could be identified from the disclosed dataset, the Commission would consider it a disclosure of anonymised data, and the Data Protection Provisions in Parts III to VI of the PDPA would not apply to that disclosure.

3.50	<p><b>Example:</b></p> <p>Organisation JKL (disclosing organisation) discloses an anonymised dataset to Organisation XYZ (data recipient), referred to as the Initial Disclosure. Organisation JKL lowers the risk of re-identification at the point of disclosure by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Ensuring that the anonymisation techniques applied to the data set are robust;</li> <li>b) Contractually requiring Organisation XYZ not to attempt re-identification or further disclosure of the anonymised data to another organisation;</li> <li>c) Contractually requiring Organisation XYZ to put in place governance frameworks and controls to ensure proper handling of the dataset;</li> <li>d) Ensuring that Organisation XYZ is a reliable organisation and has a good track record of adequate data protection.</li> </ol> <p>After receiving the dataset, Organisation XYZ decides that there is good reason for it to publish the dataset, and decides to do so (referred to as the Subsequent Disclosure), with the knowledge that this would constitute a breach of contract with Organisation JKL. An individual is subsequently re-identified from the published dataset.</p> <p>Generally, when determining whether Organisation JKL disclosed personal data or anonymised data during the Initial Disclosure, the Commission would consider whether Organisation JKL had implemented appropriate measures and safeguards, such that there was no serious possibility that individuals would have been identifiable, at the time of the Initial Disclosure.</p> <p>When investigating whether Organisation XYZ disclosed personal or anonymised data during the Subsequent Disclosure, the Commission will assess the measures and safeguards, taking into account that the Subsequent Disclosure was not limited to a specific data recipient but published to a wider audience.</p>
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## 4 Photography, Video and Audio Recordings

- 4.1 Photography, video and audio recordings are increasingly ubiquitous with such capabilities being included in more devices. While not all photographs, video and audio recordings capture personal data, some clearly do.
- 4.2 An image of an identifiable individual captured in a photograph or video recording is personal data about that individual. An audio recording may comprise personal data if an individual can be identified from that audio recording, or from that recording and other information that the organisation has or is likely to have access to. For example, an individual may be identified from his voice<sup>6</sup>, or voice and other information disclosed in or related to the audio recording, or from his voice coupled with his image captured in a video recording of the individual.
- 4.3 The Commission does not expect that the PDPA will greatly affect adoption of such technologies. Nevertheless, the Commission considers it useful to provide guidance on certain applications of the Data Protection Provisions in the PDPA to photography, video and audio recordings, including those recorded through the use of Closed-Circuit Television Cameras (“CCTVs”) and drones.
- 4.4 The following sections and examples outline certain concepts and the application of some of the Data Protection Provisions in the PDPA to photography, video and audio recordings. It should be noted that the scenarios provided address particular aspects of the PDPA, and are not meant to exhaustively address every obligation in the PDPA that would apply in that scenario.

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<sup>6</sup> An individual may be identified from his voice, for example, where the voice clip is sufficiently clear and of a sufficient duration.

## Photography and Videography

### Does a photographer or videographer need to obtain an individual's consent to take a photograph or video recording of the individual?

- 4.5 Among other obligations, the Data Protection Provisions require consent from the individual to be obtained for the purposes of the collection, use or disclosure of his personal data. Exceptions to this Consent Obligation may apply depending on the circumstances, for example where the photographer is acting in his personal or domestic capacity, such as when he takes photographs or video recordings for his own personal purposes at a gathering for family and friends.
- 4.6 A professional photographer or videographer who takes a photograph or video recording of an identifiable individual in the course of his business will be required to obtain consent unless he is taking the photograph or video recording on behalf of and for the purposes of another organisation pursuant to a contract in writing. In such a situation, the other organisation will be required to comply with the Data Protection Provisions. Similarly, if the photographer or videographer is an employee acting in the course of his employment with an organisation, he will not be required to comply with the Data Protection Provisions and instead his employer will be required to comply<sup>7</sup>. In this regard, it would be advisable for employers to put in place systems and processes to prevent employees from engaging in conduct that could cause the organisation to breach the Data Protection Provisions.

4.7	<p><b>Example: Photo-taking by an individual acting in a personal or domestic capacity</b></p> <p>Diana, an employee of Organisation XYZ, attends Organisation XYZ's corporate social responsibility event. At the event, she meets her friend Dawn. During a break in the programme, they have a personal chat and catch up on each other's personal lives. During the chat, Diana takes a photograph of the two of them to update her friends of the encounter via social media. Diana then uploads the photograph and displays it on her personal social media page.</p> <p>In this instance, Diana would likely be considered to be an individual acting in a personal or domestic capacity, and would not be required to comply with the Data</p>
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<sup>7</sup> Section 53(1) of the PDPA provides that any act done or conduct engaged in by a person in the course of his employment shall be treated as done or engaged in by his employer as well as by him, whether or not it was done or engaged in with the employer's knowledge or approval. In reality, whether the individual is acting in the course of employment may not always be clear and may require a factual inquiry.

	<p>Protection Provisions in respect of the photo-taking and subsequent disclosure of the photograph via her social media account.</p> <p>Notwithstanding the above, the Data Protection Provisions may apply in other contexts where Diana is not acting in a personal or domestic capacity. For example, if the photograph is subsequently published for Organisation XYZ’s publicity purposes (such as in Organisation XYZ’s corporate brochures or website) instead of for Diana’s personal purposes, the Data Protection Provisions are likely to apply to Organisation XYZ in respect of the collection, use and disclosure of the photograph. For example, Organisation XYZ will have to obtain Dawn’s consent before publishing her photograph for Organisation XYZ’s business purpose.</p>
4.8	<p><b>Example: Video recording by an individual acting as an employee</b></p> <p>Eric, another employee of Organisation XYZ, is tasked by the management of Organisation XYZ to take video recordings at the corporate social responsibility event and make them available on Organisation XYZ’s webpage. In this instance, as Eric is an employee acting in the course of his employment with Organisation XYZ where he takes video recordings for his assigned purpose, the PDPA does not impose the Data Protection Provisions on him directly. Organisation XYZ would be required to comply with the Data Protection Provisions instead. As a practical measure, Organisation XYZ may assign Eric to ensure its compliance with certain obligations, such as obtaining consent from the individuals that Eric takes video recordings of. In this regard, please refer to subsequent sections of these guidelines for information on obtaining consent.</p>

Does a photographer or videographer need to obtain an individual’s consent to take a photograph or video recording of the individual in a public place?

- 4.9 The PDPA sets out various exceptions to the Consent Obligation. An organisation may wish to evaluate whether any exception applies in respect of its particular circumstances. In particular, there is an exception for the collection, use and disclosure of personal data that is publicly available<sup>8</sup>. For example, when the individual appears at an event or location that is open to the public, taking a photograph of the individual would likely be collection of personal data that is publicly available for which consent is not required. In this regard, the Commission has set out that a location or event would be considered “open to the public” if members of the public can enter or access the location with few or no restrictions,

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<sup>8</sup> Under the PDPA, “publicly available”, in relation to personal data about an individual, means personal data that is generally available to the public, and includes personal data which can be observed by reasonably expected means at a location or an event at which the individual appears and that is open to the public.



and generally a location would less likely be considered “open to the public” if there are more restrictions to access. Further, there can be private spaces within public spaces, and a location is not open to the public merely because members of the public may look into the premises or location. As good practice, an organisation that collects, uses or discloses personal data that is publicly available may still wish to obtain consent from the individuals in question. Please refer to the Key Concepts Guidelines for a more detailed discussion on this exception.

How may an individual’s consent be obtained for photo-taking or video recording at a private event/space?

- 4.10 The Data Protection Provisions do not prescribe the ways in which consent may be obtained for photo-taking or video recording. As set out in the Key Concepts Guidelines, consent can be obtained in various ways. Generally, as good practice, an organisation should obtain consent that is in writing or recorded in a manner that is accessible for future reference, for example, as the organisation may be required to prove that it had obtained consent.
- 4.11 In addition, consent may be deemed to have been given by an individual in situations where the individual voluntarily provides his personal data to an organisation for a purpose, and it is reasonable that he would voluntarily provide the data. In the context of photo-taking or video recording, deemed consent may apply where the individual voluntarily permits a photograph or video recording to be taken of him for the organisation’s intended purpose, and it is reasonable that he would do so.
- 4.12 Please refer to the Key Concepts Guidelines for further elaboration on the Consent Obligation.

4.13	<p><b>Examples: Consent for photo-taking at a private function</b></p> <p>Organisation ABC holds a private function for a select group of invited clients and wishes to take photographs of attendees for its internal newsletter with their consent.</p> <p>In fulfilling its obligation to obtain consent, the measures that Organisation ABC may take to better ensure that the attendees are aware of the purpose for which their photographs are collected, used and disclosed, could include:</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">a) Clearly stating in its invitation to clients that photographs of attendees will be taken at the function for publication in its internal newsletter; or</p>
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	<p>b) Putting up an obvious notice at the reception or entrance of the function venue to inform attendees that photographs will be taken at the event for publication in its internal newsletter.</p> <p>Alternatively, Organisation ABC may obtain consent from the attendees by clearly indicating that photographs will be taken at the event for its corporate purposes on the confirmation of attendance form which guests would sign and return to the organisation. In this case, Organisation ABC would be considered to have obtained consent from the guests who signed and returned the form.</p>
4.14	<p>Kevin attends Organisation DEF’s private function. During the function, Organisation DEF’s photographer informs Kevin that she is taking photographs for publication in Organisation DEF’s internal newsletter, and asks Kevin if he would like to have his photograph taken. By allowing his photograph to be taken, Kevin would be considered to have given consent for the photograph to be collected, used or disclosed for the stated purpose.</p> <p>To better ensure that guests are aware of the purpose of photo-taking, Organisation DEF may wish to take actions such as those in paragraph 4.13.</p> <p>For avoidance of doubt, Organisation DEF’s photographer would not need to separately obtain consent from attendees if their consent had already been obtained by Organisation DEF for such photo-taking at the function, e.g. in the circumstances described in paragraph 4.13 above.</p>

Is a photographer or videographer required to obtain consent from individuals in the background when a photograph or video recording is taken?

- 4.15 As noted above, consent will generally be required for taking a photograph or video recording of an identifiable individual although consent may be deemed to have been given, or an exception may apply, depending on the circumstances. This is true as well for identifiable individuals who are in the background when a photograph or video recording is taken. It should also be noted that where an individual in the background is not identifiable from the photograph or video recording (such as if the image is too small or obscured), the photograph or video recording will not constitute personal data of that individual.

Do professional photographers or videographers<sup>9</sup> need to sign contracts with the event organiser before they can provide photography or videography services at an event?

- 4.16 The PDPA does not prescribe the contractual arrangements that organisations may wish to enter into in order to ensure that they comply with their obligations under the PDPA. Where they do enter into such a contract, the PDPA provides that the performance of a contractual obligation shall not be an excuse for contravening the PDPA<sup>10</sup>.
- 4.17 The PDPA does not require a professional photographer or videographer to enter into a contract with an event organiser. However, it would be a good practice for the parties to enter into a contract. Generally, if a professional photographer or videographer is engaged by an organisation to take photographs or video recordings of identifiable individuals, and wishes to be considered a data intermediary processing personal data on behalf of and for the purposes of the organisation pursuant to a contract that is evidenced or made in writing<sup>11</sup>, the photographer or videographer should enter into such a contract, which may set out (among other things) each party's responsibilities and liabilities, including the scope of the photographer's or videographer's obligation to process personal data on behalf of and for the purposes of the organisation that engaged him. The organisation on whose behalf the photographer or videographer is acting may also wish to stipulate in a contract security and other data protection obligations on the photographer or videographer in order to ensure that the organisation does not contravene its obligations under the PDPA.
- 4.18 Where the photographer or videographer is not a data intermediary processing personal data on behalf of and for the purposes of the organisation pursuant to a contract that is evidenced or made in writing, he would be subject to all the obligations under the Data Protection Provisions, unless any relevant exception applies. For example, the photographer or videographer would be required to obtain consent on or before taking a photograph or video recording of an identifiable individual, unless an exception to the Consent Obligation applies.

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<sup>9</sup> The term "professional photographer or videographer" in this section encompasses self-employed individuals as well as organisations that provide professional photography or videography services.

<sup>10</sup> Section 4(6)(a) of the PDPA.

<sup>11</sup> In such instances, the professional photographer or videographer would only be required to comply with the Protection Obligation and Retention Limitation Obligation, and would not be required to comply with the remaining obligations under the Data Protection Provisions (including the Consent Obligation).

4.19	<p><b>Example: Whether a professional videographer is a data intermediary processing personal data on behalf of and for the purpose of another organisation pursuant to contract evidenced or made in writing</b></p> <p>Abel, a freelance videographer, is hired by Organisation ABC to be its videographer at its private function. Abel and Organisation ABC sign a contract that clearly states (among other things) that Abel will be taking video recordings at the function on behalf of and for the purposes of Organisation ABC, and that Organisation ABC will obtain consent from the attendees. In such an instance, Abel will be considered a data intermediary processing personal data on behalf of and for the purposes of another organisation pursuant to a contract that is evidenced or made in writing, and Abel need not obtain consent from the individuals he takes video recordings of at the event.</p> <p>After the function, Abel selects some of the video recordings and publishes them on his webpage to promote his work. Abel will not be considered a data intermediary and will be required to comply with the Data Protection Provisions, including obtaining consent from the individuals in the video recordings in order to use or disclose the video recordings for this purpose.</p> <p>In another engagement, Abel is hired by Alice, an individual acting in her personal or domestic capacity, to be her videographer at her private function. Abel will be considered a data intermediary subject only to the Protection and Retention Limitation Obligations where he processes personal data on behalf of and for the purposes of Alice, pursuant to a contract that is evidenced or made in writing. In the absence of such contract, Abel will be required to comply with all the Data Protection Provisions.</p>
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Does the exception for collection of personal data “solely for artistic or literary purposes” apply to the taking of photographs or video recordings of individuals?

- 4.20 In accordance with paragraph 1(g) of the Second Schedule, an organisation is permitted to collect personal data about an individual without the individual’s consent if the personal data is collected solely for artistic or literary purposes. Such collected data may also be used or disclosed for purposes consistent with the purpose of collection.
- 4.21 The terms “artistic” and “literary” are not specifically defined in the PDPA. The Commission is of the view that it would likely be in line with the purpose of the PDPA for these terms to take their ordinary meanings. However, the Commission notes that the parameters as to what would constitute “artistic” purposes may be strongly

subjective. Accordingly, while organisations taking photographs or video recordings solely for artistic or literary purposes may rely on the exception, where it is feasible for organisations to obtain the individual’s consent before taking a photograph or video recording of the individual or where it is uncertain that an organisation’s purpose would be considered solely “artistic” or “literary”, the Commission would advise organisations to obtain the individual’s consent as best practice.

Is an individual who submits a photograph or video recording taken when acting in a personal or domestic capacity for a competition, still acting in a personal or domestic capacity?

4.22 An individual’s submission of a photograph or video recording for a competition is, on its own, insufficient to determine whether he is acting in a personal or domestic capacity. Such a determination would have to be made based on all the material facts of the case.

<p>4.23</p>	<p><b>Examples: Submission of photographs for a competition</b></p> <p>Alan is a professional photographer. He takes a photograph of his aunt Betty at a family event, and subsequently submits it for a competition for professional freelance photographers organised by Organisation ABC. The winner of the competition will receive a contract to provide services as the official photographer at an event conducted by Organisation ABC. Alan is unlikely to be considered to be acting in a personal or domestic capacity, and the Data Protection Provisions will apply to his use or disclosure of the personal data unless any other exceptions apply.</p>
<p>4.24</p>	<p>Alan submits the same photograph of his aunt Betty for a photography competition organised by Social &amp; Recreational Club DEF on the club member’s favourite family member. The competition is open to all members of the social and recreational club and the prize is a free holiday for the winner and his favourite family member. Alan is likely to be considered to be acting in a personal or domestic capacity, and the Data Protection Provisions will not apply to his use or disclosure of the personal data.</p>

Can individuals withdraw consent for the publication of photographs or video recordings, or request under the PDPA for the removal of photographs or video recordings that have been published?

4.25 The PDPA provides that individuals may at any time withdraw any consent given or deemed to have been given under the PDPA for the collection, use or disclosure of their personal data for any purpose by an organisation by giving reasonable notice

to the organisation<sup>12</sup>. An organisation that receives notice of the withdrawal of consent must (among other things) cease, and cause its data intermediaries and agents to cease, to collect, use or disclose the photographs or video recordings, as the case may be (unless an exception applies).

- 4.26 Where an organisation has already collected the personal data, the withdrawal of consent will only apply to its continued use or future disclosure. However, this does not affect an organisation's collection, use and disclosure of personal data without consent where this is required or authorised under the PDPA or other written law. In such cases, organisations may consider refraining from any future collection, use or disclosure of the personal data as a matter of discretion. Paragraph 4.30 below provides an example of how an organisation may give effect to an individual's withdrawal of consent when it relates to a photograph or video recording of a group of individuals.
- 4.27 Where photographs or video recordings of an identifiable individual have been taken (for example, where the photographs or video recordings are taken for marketing purposes) but have yet to be published in a publicly available manner, the individual may withdraw consent for the collection, use or disclosure of the photographs or video recordings in accordance with the PDPA. The withdrawal of consent would affect all continued use and future disclosure. For avoidance of doubt, the withdrawal of consent would not affect any requirement or authorisation under any written law to collect, use or disclose personal data without consent. For example, under the PDPA, organisations are not required to obtain consent for the collection, use or disclosure of publicly available personal data. In such cases, an organisation that receives a withdrawal of consent may wish to cease further use or disclosure of the photographs or video recordings in question as good practice.
- 4.28 The PDPA does not provide a right for individuals to request that an organisation ceases to retain their personal data per se. Thus, an organisation which receives a notice of withdrawal of consent for publication of a photograph or video recording is not necessarily required to delete that photograph or video recording from all its records and documents, and may retain personal data in accordance with the Retention Limitation Obligation (e.g. where retention is necessary for legal or business purposes). However, where the organisation's activities involving the personal data are in breach of the Data Protection Provisions, the organisation may be directed by the Commission to (among other things) cease retaining such personal data.

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<sup>12</sup> Please refer to the sections in the Key Concepts Guidelines relating to withdrawal of consent for more details.

4.29	<p><b>Example: Withdrawal of consent for publication in an annual report</b></p> <p>Organisation ABC publishes a photograph of a client, Mr Y, in its annual report distributed to shareholders and clients. Mr Y subsequently withdraws his consent to the publication of the photograph. Organisation ABC is required under the PDPA to cease future publication of the photograph, unless such disclosure without Mr Y's consent is required or authorised under the PDPA or other written law, for example, if the photograph is already publicly available. However, it is not required to recall copies of its annual report, which had been circulated prior to the withdrawal, so as to remove the photograph. It may also be able to continue to retain the photograph subject to the Retention Limitation Obligation.</p>
4.30	<p><b>Example: Withdrawal of consent by an individual in a group photograph</b></p> <p>Organisation ABC obtains consent from and takes a photograph of a group of individuals at a private event, for publication in its internal newsletter. A member of that group, Mr Z, subsequently withdraws his consent for the publication of the photograph. Organisation ABC is required under the PDPA to cease future publication of the photograph, unless such disclosure without Mr Z's consent is required or authorised under the PDPA or other written law, for example, if the photograph is already publicly available, or Organisation ABC is able to effect the withdrawal of consent (e.g. by masking the image of the individual) before publishing the photograph.</p>
4.31	<p><b>Example: Collection in breach of Data Protection Provisions</b></p> <p>Jessie informs Organisation XYZ that it had collected her personal data without her consent by taking an identifiable video recording of her, and asks it to destroy the video recording. Organisation XYZ determines that its collection (and any subsequent use or disclosure) of Jessie's personal data may have been in breach of the Data Protection Provisions. In this case, Organisation XYZ should cease any further use or disclosure of Jessie's personal data. Where the purpose for which the personal data was collected is no longer being served by the retention and retention is no longer necessary for legal or business purposes, Organisation XYZ should also cease such retention<sup>13</sup>.</p>

<sup>13</sup> To be clear, Organisation XYZ's ceasing to retain Jessie's personal data does not necessarily absolve Organisation XYZ of any breach of the Data Protection Provisions, nor preclude the Commission from taking action against Organisation XYZ if the Commission determines that Organisation XYZ had indeed breached the Data Protection Provisions.

Does the PDPA affect the copyright in a photograph or video recording?

- 4.32 The Data Protection Provisions do not affect any right conferred or obligation imposed by or under other laws, including the Copyright Act. In particular, the PDPA does not affect copyright subsisting in a photograph, video recording or other item in respect of which copyright is protected under the Copyright Act (“copyright item”). Hence, organisations which collect, use or disclose personal data in a copyright item must comply with the Data Protection Provisions in respect of that personal data, except to the extent of any inconsistency between the Data Protection Provisions and other written law. For example, an organisation that seeks to take a photograph or video recording of an individual would need to comply with the Notification Obligation and Consent Obligation, unless an exception under the PDPA applies (as discussed above).

**Closed-Circuit Television Cameras (“CCTVs”)**

- 4.33 CCTVs are commonly used to capture video recordings, and some of them may also be equipped with audio recording capabilities. The paragraphs below pertain to the use of CCTVs, and generally apply regardless of whether the CCTVs record video only or both video and audio.

Do organisations always have to provide notifications when CCTVs are deployed?

- 4.34 The PDPA requires organisations to inform individuals of the purposes for which their personal data will be collected, used or disclosed in order to obtain their consent. Organisations should thus provide notifications in order to fulfil their obligation to obtain consent for the collection, use or disclosure of CCTV footage. Please see the sections on the “Consent Obligation” and “Notification Obligation” in the Key Concepts Guidelines for more details.
- 4.35 However, where consent is not required (e.g. if the collection, use or disclosure falls within an exception in the Second, Third or Fourth Schedules respectively), the PDPA does not require organisations to provide notification (except for collection, use or disclosure for the purpose of managing or terminating the employment relationship between the individual and the organisation, which requires notification). Where notification is not required, organisations may still wish to provide notifications in such instances as good practice.

Where should notices be placed?

- 4.36 Notices or other forms of notifications should generally be placed so as to enable individuals to have sufficient awareness that CCTVs have been deployed for a particular purpose. For example, it may be appropriate to place a notice at points of



entry to a building or prominent locations in a venue or a vehicle, where individuals are able to read the notice prior to collection of their personal data.

What should such notices state?

- 4.37 The PDPA does not prescribe the content of notifications. To be clear, the notice should not just contain an image or graphic of a CCTV. Generally, organisations should indicate that CCTVs are operating in the premises, and state the purpose of the CCTVs (e.g. the CCTVs are installed for security purposes) if such purpose may not be obvious to the individual. Further, where CCTVs deployed record both video and audio, organisations should indicate that both video and audio recordings are taking place.

Is notification still required if CCTVs are there to covertly monitor the premises for security reasons, and notification of the CCTV's location would defeat the purpose of using the CCTVs?

- 4.38 The Commission does not require the placement or content of notifications to reveal the exact location of the CCTVs. Organisations may provide notice that CCTVs are deployed in the general locale instead of indicating the specific points where the CCTVs are installed. Where personal data may be collected without consent and notification of purposes will not be required by the PDPA (e.g. where the personal data is publicly available<sup>14</sup>), organisations are nevertheless advised to provide notification as good practice.

4.39	<p><b>Example:</b></p> <p>Organisation XYZ deploys CCTVs for security purposes at the entrance to its office premises. It provides a notification at the entrance to its office which clearly and prominently states the use and purpose of video surveillance. Such notification would be considered sufficient for Organisation XYZ's purpose.</p>
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If my organisation installs CCTVs that also capture footage beyond the boundaries of our premises, is that allowed?

- 4.40 The PDPA requires that an organisation consider what a reasonable person would consider appropriate under the circumstances in meeting its obligations under the PDPA. An organisation is not prohibited by the PDPA from having CCTVs that collect footage beyond the boundaries of its premises. Organisations should, however,

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<sup>14</sup> Please refer to Chapter 12 of the Key Concepts Guidelines for more information on the concept of “publicly available”.

consider the extent of coverage that is reasonable for the purpose of installing the CCTVs. Organisations should put in place appropriate notification in all areas where personal data would be collected by the CCTV, and obtain consent for such collection, as well as any use and disclosure of personal data unless consent is not required because one of the exceptions in the respective Second, Third or Fourth Schedule of the PDPA applies.

- 4.41 However, the organisation should bear in mind that there may be other considerations that may affect its ability to collect CCTV footage of areas beyond its premises (e.g. limits on filming of restricted areas).

Is an organisation required to provide access to CCTV footage if it also reveals the personal data of other individuals?

- 4.42 Generally, an organisation is required to provide the individual access to personal data requested, unless the request falls within one of the prohibitions under section 21(3) of the PDPA or any exception under the Fifth Schedule.

- 4.43 For example, one of the prohibitions in section 21(3)(c) is in respect of providing access to an individual's personal data or other information if that provision could reasonably be expected to reveal personal data about another individual. However, the Commission is of the view that this prohibition would not apply in circumstances where:

- a) the other individual has given consent to the disclosure of his personal data; or
- b) any of the exceptions under the Fourth Schedule of the PDPA apply to the extent that the organisation may disclose personal data of the other individual without consent (e.g. the personal data of the other individual is publicly available); or
- c) the organisation is able to provide the individual access to the requested personal data without revealing the personal data of the other individual. For example, the organisation should consider if it is able to mask out the personal data of the other individual in order to provide access to the requested personal data.

- 4.44 Please refer to Chapter 15 of the Key Concepts Guidelines for more information on the Access Obligation.

Must an organisation provide access to CCTV footage if it doesn't have the technical ability or it is too costly to mask the other individuals whose personal data are captured in the footage?

- 4.45 Generally, an organisation is required to provide for access requests. In the case of CCTV footage, this would include being able to provide access to CCTV footage where the personal data of other individuals present in the CCTV footage are masked as required (e.g. where consent of the individuals for such disclosure is required, but has not been obtained).
- 4.46 The organisation may charge an individual a reasonable fee to recover any incremental costs of responding to the access request<sup>15</sup>. The organisation should provide access to the CCTV footage with the personal data of other individuals in the same footage masked as required, so long as the applicant agrees to pay the fee for the organisation to respond to the access request, unless a relevant exception or prohibition applies.
- 4.47 For example, organisations are not required to provide access if the request is frivolous or vexatious, or if the burden or expense of providing access would be unreasonable to the organisation or disproportionate to the individual's interest. If an organisation intends to rely on this or other exceptions from the requirement to provide access provided for in the Fifth Schedule, it should be able to provide supporting evidence to justify its decision.

Is an organisation required to provide a copy of CCTV footage pursuant to an access request for the footage?

- 4.48 Organisations should provide a copy of the CCTV footage and have the option of charging the individual a reasonable fee for providing the copy.
- 4.49 If the CCTV footage resides in a form that cannot be provided to the individual in physical or electronic copies, (e.g. the data cannot be extracted from a special machine owned by the organisation), or if it is prohibitively costly to provide the footage in the aforementioned formats, then the organisation may provide the individual a reasonable opportunity to examine the requested data in person, with appropriate masking of the personal data of other individuals where required.

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<sup>15</sup> If an organisation wishes to charge an access fee, the organisation must give the individual a written estimate of the fee. If the organisation wishes to charge a fee higher than the original written estimate, it must inform the individual in writing of the increased fee. The organisation may refuse to provide access to the individual's personal data until the individual agrees to pay the relevant fee.

Can compromising an organisation's security arrangements or competitive position be sufficient reason to deny access to CCTV footage?

- 4.50 The Commission's view is that, depending on the specific facts and circumstances, compromising an organisation's security arrangements or harming an organisation's competitive position could be a sufficient basis to deny access to CCTV footage if there is an applicable exception in the Fifth Schedule or prohibition in providing access in section 21. An example would be where the provision of the personal data in the CCTV footage could reasonably be expected to threaten the safety of another individual. However, where an organisation denies access on this basis, the Commission expects the organisation to be able to provide strong justifications as to why it is unable to accede to the access request. The Commission will have to make a determination based on the facts of the particular case, should a complaint be received.

Can two or more individuals make an access request for the same CCTV footage containing their personal data, if they consent to their own personal data being revealed to the others making the access request?

- 4.51 Yes. It would be reasonable for certain groups of individuals (e.g. a married couple, parents of a class of students etc.) to make an access request for the same footage containing their personal data. Organisations may apply the same considerations in determining whether to provide access as they would for a request made by a single individual. Organisations may provide access without masking out the other individuals in the footage if the other individuals have given consent to the disclosure of their personal data<sup>16</sup>. Please refer to Chapter 15 of the Key Concepts Guidelines.

Is an organisation required to accede to requests to delete CCTV footage?

- 4.52 No. The PDPA does not require an organisation to delete personal data upon request from an individual. Section 25 of the PDPA requires an organisation to cease to retain its documents containing personal data, or remove the means by which the personal data can be associated with particular individuals, as soon as it is reasonable to assume that the purpose for which that personal data was collected is no longer being served by retention of the personal data, and retention is no longer necessary for legal or business purposes.
- 4.53 Nonetheless, individuals may at any time, upon giving reasonable notice, withdraw any consent given or deemed to have been given under the PDPA in respect of the collection, use or disclosure of their personal data for any purpose by an

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<sup>16</sup> Organisations should consider if any other prohibitions may also apply with respect to providing access to personal data requested.

organisation. Section 16 of the PDPA sets out a number of requirements that the organisation must comply with in relation to a withdrawal of consent. This does not affect any legal consequences arising from a withdrawal of consent. Please refer to Chapter 12 of the Key Concepts Guidelines for more information on withdrawal of consent.

Is there a requirement that CCTV footage or video stills be of minimum resolution when provided to individuals upon request?

- 4.54 The PDPA does not prescribe any minimum resolution. However, given that the requirement is for the organisation to provide the personal data in its possession or under its control, the organisation should provide the CCTV footage in the form and of the resolution it holds for its purposes.

Can the organisation require that the individual sign a contract to agree not to disclose to any third party the CCTV footage to be provided to him?

- 4.55 The PDPA does not prohibit this. However, such a contract would not override any rights or obligations under the PDPA. Organisations should also note that individuals acting in a personal or domestic capacity are not subject to the Data Protection Provisions of the PDPA.

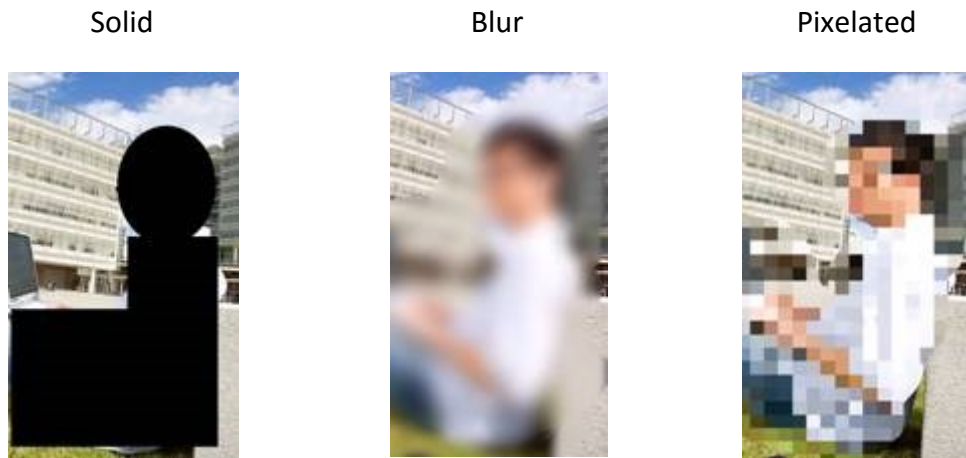
Where an organisation is providing a copy of the CCTV footage upon request of an individual, must the copy be a video or can it be provided in other formats?

- 4.56 The PDPA does not specify the format of the personal data to be provided in relation to an access request made by an individual. In the case of personal data captured in CCTV footage, organisations may respond to access requests for CCTV footage by providing either still frames of the footage or the actual footage itself, with appropriate masking of the personal data of other individuals, unless a relevant exception under section 21 applies.

What does “video masking” or “masking” refer to?

- 4.57 “Video masking” of images refers to the process of concealing parts of the video from view. This may include masking certain body parts or inanimate objects that could potentially disclose the personal data of an individual. The common types of masking include (i) solid colour masked areas; (ii) blurred masking; or (iii) pixelated masking. Where solid colour masking is used, no details or movement in the scene covered by the masked area can be viewed. However, when pixelated or blurred masking is used, the resulting image enables a partial outline to be seen but with detailed features obscured. This may be a less foolproof method as it is possible for pixelated or blurred images of individuals to still be identifiable. Examples of the different

masking techniques are shown below. These can be applied to both video and still imagery.



### Drones

- 4.58 Increasingly, organisations are making use of drones that may be equipped with photography, video and/or audio recording capabilities. The subsequent paragraphs pertain to the use of drones by organisations, and generally apply regardless of whether the drones are equipped with photography, video and/or audio recording capabilities. To be clear, the Data Protection Provisions do not impose any obligation on an individual acting in his personal or domestic capacity.

#### What should organisations consider when using drones?

- 4.59 Organisations will need to consider whether the drones they deploy are likely to capture personal data of individuals, and may wish to evaluate whether any exception under the PDPA applies in respect of its particular circumstances.
- 4.60 The use of drones with photography, video and/or audio recording capabilities are generally subject to the same considerations and obligations under the PDPA as that of other equipment with similar capabilities. Organisations should also be mindful that the operation of drones is subject to the guidelines and requirements of other authorities. For instance, organisations should not operate a drone within the boundaries of any prohibited area (i.e. protected area or special event area)<sup>17</sup>. Enquiries may be made to the Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore.

#### What should organisations do if the drones used are likely to capture personal data?

- 4.61 Among other obligations, the Data Protection Provisions require organisations to inform individuals of the purposes for which their personal data will be collected,

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<sup>17</sup> See Division 4 of the Air Navigation Act (Cap 6) and Part III of the Public Order Act (Cap 257A).

used and disclosed in order to obtain their consent. An organisation must thus provide notification of the purposes for the collection, use or disclosure of personal data captured by its drones, in order to fulfil the obligation to obtain consent<sup>18</sup>. The notifications should specify if photography, video and/or audio recording is taking place and should generally be placed so as to enable individuals to have sufficient awareness that drones are in operation in the general locale. For example, it may be appropriate to place a notice at points of entry to the area of operation, where individuals are able to read the notice prior to entry.

- 4.62 The PDPA sets out various exceptions to the Consent Obligation. In particular, there is an exception for the collection, use and disclosure of personal data that is publicly available<sup>19</sup>. For example, when the individual appears at an event or location that is open to the public, a photograph, video or audio recording taken of the individual at such an event or location would likely be personal data that is publicly available, and organisations may collect, use or disclose such personal data without consent. In such instances, organisations may still wish to provide notifications as good practice. Some possible methods of providing notification include placing signages at entrances to the spaces where the drone is flown, at prominent locations along the approved flight path (or carried/worn by safety marshals), or at the launch site, etc. Please refer to the Key Concepts Guidelines for more details on the Consent Obligation, Notification Obligation and publicly available exception.

What should organisations do if personal data was unintentionally collected by the drones?

- 4.63 The Commission would encourage organisations to ensure that they adhere to the pre-determined flight path of drones and adopt policies restricting or prohibiting the use of any personal data that is unintentionally collected (e.g. when drones accidentally veer off-course from the pre-determined flight path and collect personal data without consent)<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Where a drone operator is capturing photographs, video and/or audio recordings on behalf of and for the purposes of another organisation pursuant to a contract in writing, the other organisation is required to comply with the Data Protection Provisions. If the drone operator is an employee acting in the course of his employment with an organisation, he will not be required to comply with the Data Protection Provisions, instead his employer will be required to comply.

<sup>19</sup> Under the PDPA, “publicly available”, in relation to personal data about an individual, means personal data that is generally available to the public, and includes personal data which can be observed by reasonably expected means at a location or an event at which the individual appears and that is open to the public.

<sup>20</sup> To be clear, the deletion of the personal data does not necessarily absolve an organisation of any breach of the Data Protection Provisions, nor preclude the Commission from taking action against the organisation if the Commission determines that the organisation had indeed breached the Data Protection Provisions.

## 5 Employment

### Does an organisation need to seek the consent of a job applicant for the collection and use of his personal data?

- 5.1 Organisations may receive personal data from job applicants who provide it voluntarily through a job application, either in response to a recruitment advertisement or otherwise.
- 5.2 When an individual voluntarily provides his personal data to an organisation in the form of a job application, he may be deemed to consent to the organisation collecting, using and disclosing the personal data for the purpose of assessing his job application. If the individual is subsequently employed, it would be reasonable for the organisation to continue to use the personal data provided by the individual in the job application form for the purpose of managing the employment relationship with the individual, if required. If the organisation wishes to use the personal data for purposes for which consent may not be deemed or to which there is no applicable exception under the PDPA, the organisation must then inform the individual of those purposes and obtain his consent, unless relevant exceptions apply. Please see the section on The Consent Obligation in the Key Concepts Guidelines for more details.

### Can organisations collect and use personal data on the job applicant from social networking sources (e.g. Facebook or Twitter)?

- 5.3 The PDPA does not require organisations to obtain the consent of the individual when collecting personal data that is publicly available. Examples of publicly available sources are newspapers, telephone directories and websites containing content which is generally available to the public. Where social networking sources are publicly available, the PDPA does not prohibit organisations from collecting personal data about the individual without his consent. Please refer to the section on “The Consent Obligation” in the Key Concepts Guidelines for more explanation of the ‘publicly available data’ exception.

### Can organisations or recruitment agencies collect and use personal data on individuals from social networking sites or publicly available sources to contact them for prospective job opportunities?

- 5.4 The PDPA does not require organisations to obtain the consent of the individual when collecting or using personal data that is publicly available. Where the personal data is not publicly available, but is voluntarily made available by the individual on a job-search portal for being contacted for prospective job opportunities, the individual may be deemed to have consented to the collection, use and disclosure of his personal data for such purpose.



Can organisations use the information in business cards for recruitment?

5.5 The Data Protection Provisions in the PDPA do not apply to “business contact information”, which is defined in the PDPA as:

*“an individual’s name, position name or title, business telephone number, business address, business electronic mail address or business fax number and any other similar information about the individual, not provided by the individual solely for his personal purposes”.*

5.6 If the individual provided his business card for purposes other than solely for personal purposes, then the organisation is not required to comply with the Data Protection Provisions of the PDPA in respect of the contact information set out in the business card.

5.7	<p><b>Example:</b></p> <p>At the registration booth of a corporate seminar, Sharon drops her business name card into a glass bowl by the side of the registration booth as she wishes to be on the seminar organiser’s mailing list for future invitations to similar seminars.</p> <p>Sharon’s business name card contains her name, position, business telephone number, business address, business electronic mail address and business fax number. As Sharon did not provide her business name card solely for personal purposes, the information on it will be considered business contact information. The PDPA does not apply and the seminar organiser does not need to seek Sharon’s consent to use the information on her business name card.</p>
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How long can an organisation keep the personal data of job applicants who are not hired?

5.8 After an organisation has decided which job applicant to hire, the personal data that the organisation had collected from the other job applicants should only be kept for as long as it is necessary for business or legal purposes. Organisations should note that job applicants have the right to obtain access and request corrections to their personal data held by the organisation. Please see the section on “The Access and Correction Obligation” in the Key Concepts Guidelines for more details.

Can job applicants ask the organisation to reveal how much information the organisation has on them or find out why they were not selected?

5.9 Under the PDPA, individuals have the right to obtain access and request corrections to their personal data held by organisations. Upon request, the organisation must also inform the individual of the ways in which the personal data had been used for

the past year. Thus, organisations must reveal to the job applicant who requests so, the personal data the organisation has on them. There are however exceptions to this obligation to provide access to personal data, including several mandatory exceptions. Please refer to the section on “The Access and Correction Obligation” in the Key Concepts Guidelines for more details.

- 5.10 For example, if the personal data in question is opinion data kept solely for an evaluative purpose, organisations are not required to provide the requested information to the individual. This means that organisations will not need to inform a job applicant of the opinions which were formed about him in the course of determining his suitability and eligibility for the job.

How does the PDPA apply to recruitment agencies?

- 5.11 Recruitment companies, employment agencies, head-hunters and other similar organisations (henceforth ‘recruitment agencies’) are subject to the Data Protection Provisions of the PDPA. Accordingly, unless an exception under the PDPA applies, recruitment agencies will have to inform job applicants of the purposes for which they are collecting using or disclosing their personal data, and obtain consent before doing so.
- 5.12 Recruitment agencies that are acting as data intermediaries are required to comply with fewer obligations under the PDPA. The PDPA provides that a data intermediary that processes personal data on behalf of and for the purposes of another organisation pursuant to a contract which is evidenced or made in writing will only be subject to the provisions in the PDPA relating to the safeguarding and retention of personal data in respect of such processing. In certain circumstances these recruitment agencies could qualify as data intermediaries. For more information on data intermediaries, please refer to the section on “Excluded Organisations” in the Key Concepts Guidelines.
- 5.13 Recruitment agencies should also note that a message sent solely to promote an employment opportunity would not be regarded as a specified message and would not be subject to the Do Not Call Provisions. Please refer to the section on the “Do Not Call Provisions” in the Key Concepts Guidelines for more information.

**Personal Data of Employees**

How does the PDPA apply to employment records of employees?

- 5.14 Most organisations maintain some form of employment records on their current employees, which may include contact information, resumes, performance indicators and remuneration histories. Organisations should inform the employees

of the purposes for the collection, use and disclosure of their personal data and obtain their consent prior to the collection, use and disclosure (as the case may be).

- 5.15 In many cases, consent could be obtained at the point of appointing the new employee. It may, however, also be necessary to obtain consent at various points during the employment relationship when the organisation requires more personal data or intends to use or disclose the employee's personal data for other purposes. Please also note that even if consent is given, employees may withdraw that consent under the PDPA.
- 5.16 Employers should also note that even if an exception applies such that consent need not be sought, the exception does not affect rights or obligations arising under any other law. Hence, even if an exception applies under the PDPA, employers are required to comply with their other legal obligations, for example, to protect confidential information of their employees or under the employment contract.

Collecting, using and disclosing employee personal data for evaluative purposes

- 5.17 Organisations may collect, use and disclose personal data without consent where this is necessary for evaluative purposes. (This is set out as exception 1(f) in the Second Schedule, 1(f) in the Third Schedule and 1(h) in the Fourth Schedule respectively). The term "evaluative purpose" is defined in section 2(1) of the PDPA and includes, amongst other things, the purpose of determining the suitability, eligibility or qualifications of an individual for employment, promotion in employment or continuance in employment.
- 5.18 Hence, the evaluative purpose exception allows employers to collect, use and disclose personal data without the consent of the individual or employee concerned for various purposes that are common in the employment context, for example:
- a) Obtaining a reference from a prospective employee's former employer to determine his suitability for employment; or
  - b) Obtaining performance records or other relevant information or opinions to determine the performance of an employee.

Collecting, using and disclosing personal data for the purpose of managing or terminating an employment relationship between the organisation and the individual

- 5.19 Under the PDPA, the collection by organisations of personal data from their employees that is reasonable for the purpose of managing or terminating their employment relationships, and the use or disclosure of such personal data for consistent purposes would not require the consent of their employees. This is

pursuant to exception 1(o) in the Second Schedule, 1(j) in the Third Schedule and 1(s) in the Fourth Schedule respectively. While consent is not required, employers are required to notify their employees of the purposes of such collection, use or disclosure.

- 5.20 The PDPA does not prescribe the manner of notification and organisations should determine the form and manner that would provide the individual with the required information that allows him to understand the purposes for which his personal data would be collected, used and disclosed. For example, organisations may determine in the particular circumstances if it would be appropriate to inform their employees of these purposes through employment contracts, employee handbooks, or notices in the company intranet. Organisations should also keep their employees updated about new purposes for which an employee’s personal data may be collected, used and disclosed without consent. For the avoidance of doubt, where an organisation has sufficiently provided a general notification to employees on the purposes for which their personal data may be collected, used and disclosed, for example for performance appraisals, the Commission does not expect organisations to notify employees of the same purpose prior to each time that the organisation engages in such activities. Please refer to the section on “The Notification Obligation” in the Key Concepts Guidelines for more details.
- 5.21 Purposes that could fall within the purpose of managing or terminating an employment relationship can include:
- a) Using the employee’s bank account details to issue salaries;
  - b) Monitoring how the employee uses company computer network resources;
  - c) Posting employees’ photographs on the staff directory page on the company intranet; and
  - d) Managing staff benefit schemes like training or educational subsidies.
- 5.22 Employers would need to seek consent for purposes that are not related to, or the collection of personal data that is not relevant to the management or termination of an employment relationship (unless any other exception under the PDPA applies). In particular, employers would need to obtain consent when collecting, using or disclosing employee personal data for business or client purposes not related to managing or terminating an employment relationship.

5.23	<p><b>Example:</b></p> <p>Organisation ABC engages a courier company to deliver a parcel to organisation XYZ. XYZ requires the full name and NRIC number (personal data) of the employee which will be dispatched by the courier for this delivery for the purposes of allowing the courier to enter XYZ’s office premises. Before disclosing the personal data of its employee, the courier company should obtain the employee’s consent to do so.</p> <p>Such consent can be obtained on a case by case basis, or once-off through the employment contract or other appropriate means.</p>
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What is the difference between the exception for evaluative purposes and the exception for the purpose of managing and terminating an employment relationship?

- 5.24 There are instances where employers have to collect the same set of personal data for both the purposes of (i) managing or terminating the employment relationship and (ii) evaluation. The difference between the two purposes lies in the requirement to notify individuals for purpose (i) but not for purpose (ii). In other words, employers need only inform employees of the purpose for managing and terminating the employment relationship, and not of the evaluative purpose.

5.25	<p><b>Example:</b></p> <p>An employer collects information about the projects an employee has worked on to determine whether to promote him (an evaluative purpose), and to conduct audits on his finance claims (a purpose for managing and terminating an employment relationship).</p> <p>The employer need only notify the employee that his personal data is being collected for audit purposes. The employer does not need to obtain consent from the employee for the collection of his personal data or inform him that he is being evaluated for promotion to a higher job grade.</p>
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- 5.26 Employers should note that even though some exceptions in the PDPA can apply in the employment context, organisations should still act based on what a reasonable person would consider appropriate in the circumstances. Please see the section on “Reasonableness” in the Key Concepts Guidelines.

How long can organisations continue to hold personal data of former employees?

- 5.27 Section 25 of the PDPA requires an organisation to cease to retain its documents containing personal data, or remove the means by which the personal data can be associated with particular individuals, as soon as the purpose for which that personal data was collected is no longer being served by retention of the personal data, and retention is no longer necessary for legal or business purposes. The Retention Limitation Obligation does not specify a fixed duration of time for which an organisation can retain personal data as each organisation has its own specific business needs.
- 5.28 Organisations may continue to retain personal data about the former employee that was collected during his employment period for as long as there is a valid business or legal purpose. For example, organisations that have a policy of retaining personal data of former employees for the purpose of considering them for future job opportunities can continue to do so as a valid business purpose. However, organisations should not retain personal data without a clearly defined purpose. Organisations should note that holding personal data for an indeterminate duration of time increases the risk of a contravention of the Data Protection Provisions, as organisations have other obligations in relation to the personal data held. Please see the section on the “Retention Limitation Obligation” in the Key Concepts Guidelines for more information.

Are organisations responsible if their employees do not comply with the PDPA? Are volunteers considered employees?

- 5.29 Under the PDPA, an organisation is responsible for the personal data in its possession or under its control, including for any breaches of the PDPA caused by their employees acting in the course of their employment. In particular, any act done or conduct engaged in by an employee in the course of his employment shall be treated as done or engaged in by his employer, whether or not it was done or engaged in with the employer’s knowledge or approval.
- 5.30 In relation to offences under the PDPA by an employee of an organisation, the organisation will not be liable if it took such steps as were practicable to prevent the employee from doing the act or engaging in the conduct that constitutes the offence. Organisations should develop and implement policies and practices that comply with the PDPA, and communicate such policies and practices to their employees.
- 5.31 Organisations should note that the PDPA defines “employee” to include a volunteer, and “employment” to include working under an unpaid volunteer work relationship.

Do the exceptions to the Consent Obligation for the collection, use and disclosure of personal data of employees also apply to individuals that may act on behalf of an organisation, but are not the organisation's employees?

- 5.32 The exception relating to “managing or terminating an employment relationship” only apply when there is an employment relationship. Where an organisation is collecting the personal data of individuals that are not its employees for a specific purpose, this specific exception would not apply. However, other exceptions may apply, for example where the organisation is required under written law to collect personal data of such individuals in order to assess whether the qualifications of such individuals comply with regulatory requirements.

## 6 Online Activities

### Are IP addresses personal data?

- 6.1 IP addresses of networked devices are automatically captured whenever a connection is made over the Internet. An IP address, or any other network identifier such as an IMEI number, may not be personal data when viewed in isolation, because it simply identifies a networked device. However, IP addresses have the potential of identifying unique individuals through their activities, especially when combined with traces of information that individuals leave on these networked devices as they interact with the Internet. Depending on how a device is used, the traces of information are collected and the presence of other available information affects the possibility of identifying an individual from his device's IP address.
- 6.2 For instance, a shared computer may be used by several individuals in an office or home with the same login account and it is therefore unlikely for the IP address to be connected to a single individual. However, if each individual has separate login accounts, then the online activities will relate to that login identity. Along with other information such as cookies (addressed below), IP addresses can identify individuals, and are likely to be personal data in such context.
- 6.3 The Commission notes that organisations do engage in the collection of data points tied to an IP address for various purposes. For example, such purposes could include determining the number of unique visitors to a website in a month, or the number of unique responses to a once-off online survey about consumer preferences, organisations may track activities tied to an IP address. Such tracking may not result in the collection of personal data, if the organisation is unable to identify an individual from the data collected or from that data and other information that the organisation has or is likely to have access. However, organisations should note that the more data points associated to a unique IP address an organisation collects, the more likely that the data may be personal data. For example, if an organisation profiles the websites visited by an IP address, the items purchased by the same IP address and other online activities associated to the IP address for a long period of time, and is able to ascertain that the particular IP address is associated with a unique person with a specific surfing profile, the organisation may be found to have collected personal data.
- 6.4 For more details on what constitutes personal data is, please refer to the section on "personal data" in the Key Concepts Guidelines.



Must consent be obtained for the use of cookies?

- 6.5 Cookies are text files created on a client computer when its web browser loads a website or web application. Often encrypted for protection against unauthorised access, they are used to store information for performing certain functions such as completing forms, facilitating website navigation, authentication, and enabling advertising technology. Depending on the purpose(s) for which they are used, the durations which cookies are stored differ. Session cookies typically expire at the end of a browser session, while persistent cookies can be stored for some duration in a browser folder until they are deleted, either manually, or upon browser exit. Also depending on the purpose of the cookies is the type of information that they store. The PDPA applies to the collection, use, or disclosure of personal data using cookies.
- 6.6 Many Internet activities today are dependent on the use of cookies, such that unnecessarily restricting the use of cookies will impede the usability of the Internet. However, because cookies can potentially collect personal data, organisations should be mindful of the concern surrounding the use of cookies for individuals' online activities. It is thus important to strike a balanced approach on the need for consent in the use of cookies.
- 6.7 First, not all cookies collect personal data. For example, session cookies may only collect and store technical data needed to play back a video on a website. Consent is not needed for cookies that do not collect personal data.
- 6.8 Second, for Internet activities that the user has clearly requested, there may not be a need to seek consent for the use of cookies to collect, use, and disclose personal data where the individual is aware of the purposes for such collection, use or disclosure and voluntarily provided his personal data for such purposes. Such activities include (but are not limited to) transmitting personal data for effecting online communications and storing information that the user enters in a web form to facilitate an online purchase. For activities that cannot take place without cookies that collect, use or disclose personal data, consent may be deemed if the individual voluntarily provides the personal data for that purpose of the activity, and it is reasonable that he would do so. Please refer to the section on "The Consent Obligation – Deemed Consent" in the Key Concepts Guidelines for more details.
- 6.9 Consent may also be reflected in the way a user configures his interaction with the Internet. If the individual configures his browser to accept certain cookies but rejects others, he may be found to have consented to the collection, use and disclosure of his personal data by the cookies that he has chosen to accept. For example, if the individual has configured his browser settings to reject all cookies except those from his online banking website and his email websites, it is clear that he has consented

to the collection, use and disclosure of his personal data by his banking and email websites for their stated purposes, but not other websites. However, the mere failure of an individual to actively manage his browser settings does not imply that the individual has consented to the collection, use and disclosure of his personal data by all websites for their stated purpose.

- 6.10 For avoidance of doubt, the obligation to obtain the individual's consent for the collection of his personal data rests with the organisation that is collecting such personal data, whether by itself or through its data intermediaries. Where an organisation operates a website which a third party uses to collect personal data, and the website operator itself is not collecting such personal data, the obligation is on the third party organisation to obtain the consent required to collect such personal data.

Are organisations allowed to use cookies for behavioural targeting?

- 6.11 Where behavioural targeting involves the collection and use of personal data, the individual's consent is required.

## 7 Data Activities Relating to Minors

### When can a minor give valid consent on his own behalf under the PDPA?

- 7.1 The PDPA does not specify the situations in which a minor (that is, an individual who is less than 21 years of age) may give consent for the purposes of the PDPA. In general, whether a minor can give such consent would depend on other legislation and the common law. In this regard, organisations should keep in mind that Parts III to VI of the PDPA do not affect any legal rights or obligations under other laws<sup>21</sup>.
- 7.2 It is noted that the ages at which minors may conduct different types of activities on their own or are accorded certain legal protections vary across various local legislation<sup>22</sup>.
- 7.3 For situations where there is no legislation that affects whether a minor may give consent, the issue would be governed by the common law. In this regard, the Commission notes that there is no international norm on when minors may exercise their own rights under data protection laws. The Commission understands that in some countries, some kind of test of maturity is applied, taking into account factors such as the level of maturity of the minor, the minor's capacity to understand the nature of legal rights and whether there is any undue influence exerted on the minor, to determine if a minor can exercise legal rights. In addition, some countries have enacted legislation to specifically protect minors below a certain age. For example, in the United States, the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act ("COPPA") requires certain organisations to obtain verifiable parental consent to collect personal data from children under 13 years of age<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> Section 4(6)(a) of the PDPA.

<sup>22</sup> Provisions that set out age thresholds for the purpose of according certain legal protections to minors include:

- a) section 35(1) of the Civil Law Act (Cap. 43) which provides that, except as otherwise provided in that section or any other written law, a contract entered into by a minor who has attained the age of 18 years has effect as if he was of full age (that is, 21 years of age);
- b) section 67A of the Employment Act (Cap. 91), which defines a child as one below 15 years of age and a young person as one between 15 and 16 years of age for the purposes of according varying protections in respect of the different age groups; and
- c) section 2 of the Children and Young Persons Act (Cap. 38), which defines a child as one who is below 14 years of age and a young person as one that is between 14 and 16 years of age for purposes of according varying protections under that Act.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example: <http://www.ftc.gov/news-events/press-releases/2012/12/ftc-strengthens-kids-privacy-gives-parents-greater-control-over>

- 7.4 The Commission understands that the applicable test under English common law for when a minor can consent on his own behalf in matters relating to medical treatment (and several other areas)<sup>24</sup> would be the *Gillick* test. In brief, the *Gillick* test sets out that a minor may provide consent if he has sufficient understanding and intelligence to enable him to understand fully what is proposed. To-date, the *Gillick* test has not yet been expressly approved by a Singapore court<sup>25</sup>.
- 7.5 The Commission notes that the age threshold of 13 years appears to be a significant one in relation to according protection to minors. For example, under the Employment Act, a child 13 years of age or older may be employed in light work suited to his capacity in a non-industrial undertaking and no child who is below the age of 13 years shall be employed in any occupation (with a limited exception)<sup>26</sup>. Similarly, some film and video classification ratings set out age thresholds for audiences for such content, including Parental Guidance 13 (“PG13”)<sup>27</sup>. In addition, organisations that face exposure to COPPA (e.g. companies that provide online services to individuals in the US) may also already have policies and procedures that are premised on the age threshold of 13 years in relation to consent to the collection, use and disclosure of their personal data.
- 7.6 The Commission is of the view that organisations should generally consider whether a minor has sufficient understanding of the nature and consequences of giving consent, in determining if he can effectively provide consent on his own behalf for purposes of the PDPA. It is also noted that, as a practical matter, some organisations may already have policies or practices providing for an age threshold of 13 years in relation to consent. Bearing this in mind, the Commission will adopt the practical rule of thumb that a minor who is at least 13 years of age would typically have

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<sup>24</sup> While the holding in *Gillick v West Norfolk and Wisbech Area Health Authority* [1986] AC 112 may be argued to only apply narrowly in the context of consenting to medical treatment and advice, later UK cases have applied the *Gillick* principle to other areas. For instance, it was applied in determining if a minor was able to make a decision on divulging information about herself to the press. The Commission is however not aware of any UK cases which expressly applies the *Gillick* principle in the context of UK’s data protection laws and in particular, in determining whether a minor can consent to the sharing of his personal data.

<sup>25</sup> To-date, there are no Singapore cases that have expressly applied *Gillick*, whether in the context of a minor consenting to receiving medical treatment, or in any other context. It therefore remains an open question whether or not the Singapore court will find the *Gillick* principle to have any relevance in determining whether a minor can exercise his legal rights, especially in the context of Singapore’s own data protection framework.

<sup>26</sup> Please see section 68(3) of the Employment Act and Regulation 3 of the Employment (Children and Young Persons) Regulations.

<sup>27</sup> PG13 is an advisory rating that means “suitable for persons aged 13 and above but parental guidance is advised for children below 13”. More details of the film and video classification system are available at: <http://www.mda.gov.sg/RegulationsAndLicensing/ContentStandardsAndClassification/FilmsAndVideos/Pages/default.aspx>.

sufficient understanding to be able to consent on his own behalf. However, where, for example, an organisation has reason to believe or it can be shown that a minor does not have sufficient understanding of the nature and consequences of giving consent, the organisation should obtain consent from an individual, such as the minor's parent or guardian, who is legally able to provide consent on the minor's behalf.<sup>28</sup>

- 7.7 Overall, an organisation should take appropriate steps to ensure that the minor can effectively give consent on his own behalf, in light of the circumstances of the particular case including the impact on the minor in giving consent.

Can a minor's parents or other legal guardians provide valid consent on behalf of the minor under the PDPA?

- 7.8 Section 14(4) of the PDPA provides that consent given or deemed to have been given by an individual for the collection, use or disclosure of the individual's personal data includes consent given or deemed to have been given by any person validly acting on behalf of that individual for the collection, use or disclosure of such personal data. In situations where a minor does not have the requisite legal capacity to give consent for purposes of the PDPA, the minor's parents or other legal guardians may give consent on behalf of the minor. In general, the rights of parents in respect of their children are derived from the common law but there may be legislation that affects how and if they may exercise such rights<sup>29</sup>.

- 7.9 Where an organisation requires the consent of a minor for the collection, use or disclosure of his personal data, the organisation should consider whether it would be appropriate for the organisation to obtain consent given on behalf of the minor from an individual who can legally give consent on behalf of the minor. As a general guide, where the minor is under the age of 13 years, organisations may wish to obtain consent for the collection, use and disclosure of the minor's personal data from an individual that can legally give consent on behalf of the minor, such as the minor's parent or guardian.

When is a minor deemed to have given consent on his own behalf under the PDPA?

- 7.10 Under section 15(1) of the PDPA, an individual may be deemed to have consented to

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<sup>28</sup> For avoidance of doubt, the Commission's position does not affect any right of a parent or legal guardian of a minor to exercise any right or power conferred on the minor under the PDPA on behalf of the minor. Thus, if a parent or legal guardian is empowered to provide consent or refusal on behalf of a minor, an organisation should generally rely on such consent or refusal given by the parent or legal guardian.

<sup>29</sup> For example, Singapore legislation such as the Guardianship of Infants Act and Women's Charter may affect whether an individual has custody over a minor.

the collection, use or disclosure of his personal data for a purpose if he voluntarily provides his personal data for that purpose (without actually giving consent) and it is reasonable that the individual would voluntarily provide the data. In the case of a minor, the Commission is of the view that whether a minor provides his personal data for a purpose voluntarily would depend on various factors including the following:

- a) the minor's understanding of the purpose for which his personal data is provided;
- b) the minor's understanding of the effect of giving his personal data for that purpose; and
- c) whether there was any undue influence on the minor with respect to the provision of his personal data.

7.11 As noted in the preceding section, the Commission will, as a general guide, take the view that a minor who is at least 13 years of age would typically have sufficient understanding to be able to consent on his own behalf. This will similarly apply to deemed consent. In view of the potential difficulties of establishing whether deemed consent applies, the Commission is of the view that organisations that wish to rely on deemed consent in certain situations should take extra care to establish whether a minor has sufficient understanding of the purposes for which the organisation is collecting, using and disclosing personal data and the consequences of giving his personal data in such situations. Organisations should also refrain from exercising any undue influence to obtain personal data from minors.

Should organisations adopt a different treatment for the collection, use or disclosure of personal data about minors?

7.12 The PDPA does not contain provisions that specifically address the collection, use or disclosure of personal data about minors. However, given that there is generally greater sensitivity surrounding the treatment of minors, it may be prudent for organisations to consider putting in place relevant precautions if they are (or expect to be) collecting, using or disclosing personal data about minors. For example, organisations that provide services targeted at minors could state terms and conditions in language that is readily understandable by minors, or use pictures and other visual aids to make such terms and conditions easier to understand. Other good practices could include placing additional safeguards against unauthorised disclosure of, or unauthorised access to, personal data of minors, or anonymising personal data of minors before disclosure, where feasible.

Should organisations take extra measures to verify the accuracy of personal data about minors?

- 7.13 When establishing measures to comply with the Accuracy Obligation under the Data Protection Provisions, organisations should also consider taking extra steps to verify the accuracy of personal data about a minor, especially where such inaccuracy may have severe consequences for the minor.

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