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Department has no list of companies that received investments from €1.25bn scheme



The warning about the 'golden visa' scheme was set out in a private note for Minister for Justice Helen McEntee.

[Arthur Beasley](#)
Thu Jan 02 2025 - 06:00

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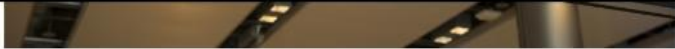
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The warning about the 'golden visa' scheme was set out in a private note for Minister for Justice Helen McEntee

[Arthur Beesley](#)
Thu Jan 02 2025 - 06:00


[Department of Justice](#) officials warned of the need to guard against potentially "unlawful" and "unethical" practices when granting Irish visas to millionaire immigrants before the Government scrapped the scheme.


The warning about the "golden visa" scheme was set out in a private note for Minister for Justice [Helen McEntee](#) which was released in part to [The Irish Times](#) after a Freedom of Information (FOI) case that lasted 25 months.

At the time officials were developing a code of conduct for the Immigrant Investor Programme (IIP) which collected €1.25 billion from mainly Chinese millionaires who received Irish visas in return for company investments or charitable endowments.

"This code will be a public declaration of the principles and standards of behaviour which shall apply to all stakeholders involved in the IIP process and will be aimed at ensuring to the greatest extent possible, that the programme and the Minister are safeguarded from potentially unprofessional, unethical, inappropriate or unlawful practices," the Minister was told.

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The note was issued by Department of Justice officials in September 2022, five months before the IIP was shut to new entrants with one day's notice in early 2023. Ms McEntee was on maternity leave when the scheme closed and [Simon Harris](#), now Taoiseach, was minister for justice.

The scheme will still take years to wind down because applications already in train remained

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The scheme will still take years to wind down because applications already in train remained open and some approved projects have yet to reach their target number of investors.

[The records sought do not exist: 'Golden visas' granted under €1.25bn scheme but no list of investment beneficiaries]

But despite serious concern being expressed repeatedly about weak controls, a detailed ruling on the FOI case shows the department lacks a basic searchable list of investment and endowment beneficiaries who received golden visa money.

The determination was handed down by the Office of the Information Commissioner, which reviews FOI decisions by public bodies, when dismissing key strands of the appeal from The Irish Times for access to IIP records.

At issue were the names of scores of private Irish companies, charities and public bodies such as universities and hospitals that received many millions of euro from investors and benefactors. The State has never disclosed their names.

The appeal to name them was rejected on the basis that the department holds no list of beneficiaries.

"The records sought do not exist," the Information Commissioner said, noting some files contained "incorrect or out of date" information.

"I am satisfied that while the information sought by the applicant may exist on individual records or separate systems, the information is filed in various formats which do not facilitate the use of an electronic search or extraction facility that was used ordinarily by the department."

The IIP provided residency in the State to non-Europeans with "at least €2 million" in personal wealth and came to be dominated by Chinese millionaires. In return for Irish visas, they were required to invest €1 million in an Irish business or make a philanthropic donation.

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Questions about controls and checks were raised by the department’s internal auditors in 2019 and accountants EY in 2020. Although rules were tightened, the note for Ms McEntee shows concern persisted for years.

Citing “personal and commercial information”, the department blanked out key parts of the note when releasing papers The Irish Times after a FOI request in November 2022.

The department later rejected an internal appeal against such redactions, prompting a further appeal to the Information Commissioner in March 2023.

The commissioner’s ruling did not issue until mid-December, two years and one month after the original FOI request. The department was directed to release part of the note to Ms McEntee, which it did on December 23rd. The appeal for the names of visa recipients was rejected on privacy grounds.

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