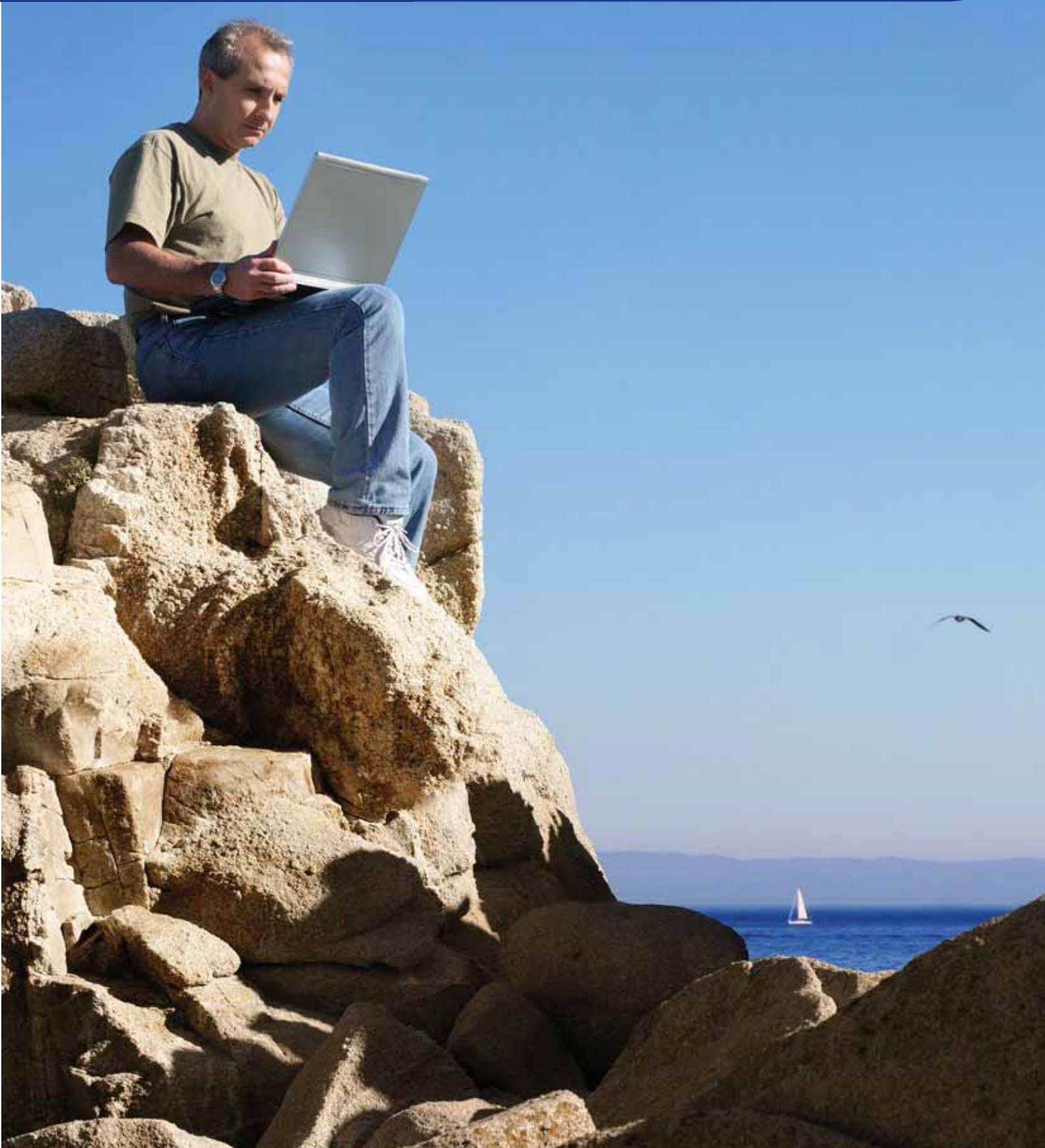


Freedom of Information: two years on

February 2007



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Topline summary report

1. Method

A total of 564 telephone interviews were conducted with the person with day-to-day responsibility for freedom of information across a range of types and sizes of public authority in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

For most sectors, lists of organisations were provided by the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). Telephone numbers were then sourced through a combination of directory enquiries and internet searches. Sample for schools and independent practitioners was drawn from the Yell Business Database. Quotas were set by size and type of public authority, as well as region (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) to achieve a spread.

Interviewing was conducted from 30 November to 21 December 2006.

A benchmark wave of research was conducted in 2005, one year after the Act came into force. Fieldwork was conducted from 17 November to 6 December 2005 and used the same method and sample structure as the 2006 survey. Results of the two stages are compared throughout this report.

A list of abbreviations used in this report is appended at the end of the document.

2. Sample

The final number of interviews achieved with each type of public authority is shown below.

	Large Public Authorities	Small/Medium Public Authorities	TOTAL
Central Government	61	-	61
Local Government	85	79	164
Police	42	10	52
NHS	53	67	120
Education	56	68	124
Publicly owned companies	-	43	43
England	219	171	390
Wales	38	54	92
Northern Ireland	40	42	82

Respondents had a wide range of different job titles, similar to the 2005 research. The most commonly held posts were information managers or officers (for large authorities) or clerical officers or clerks (for small/medium authorities). The following table shows all job titles mentioned by 2% or more of the total sample in 2006.

Respondent job title				
	2005	2006		
	Total sample	Total sample	Large authorities	Small/medium authorities
Base: all respondents	500	564	297	267
Information Manager / Officer / Head of Information	19%	16%	22%	10%
Clerk / Clerical Officer / Clerk to council / Parish Clerk	11%	9%	1%	18%
Records Manager / Officer / Archivist	6%	7%	8%	6%
FOI Manager / Officer	5%	7%	12%	2%
Head of Legal Services / Corporate Solicitor etc.	4%	5%	7%	2%
Head Teacher / Principal	3%	5%	-	12%
Administrator / Admin Officer / Office Manager	6%	4%	4%	4%
Corporate Services / Corporate Affairs Officer / C S Head	6%	4%	5%	3%
Bursar / Finance Manager / Officer	4%	4%	4%	3%
Secretary / PA	3%	4%	4%	4%
Communications Manager / Officer	4%	3%	4%	3%
IT Manager / IT Officer	2%	2%	2%	1%
Compliance Manager / Officer	2%	2%	2%	2%
Chief Executive	1%	2%	2%	3%
Data Protection Officer	1%	2%	3%	2%
Policy Officer	1%	2%	3%	1%
Services Manager / Customer Services Manager	-	2%	3%	1%

3. Main findings

3.1. Understanding of and compliance with the Act

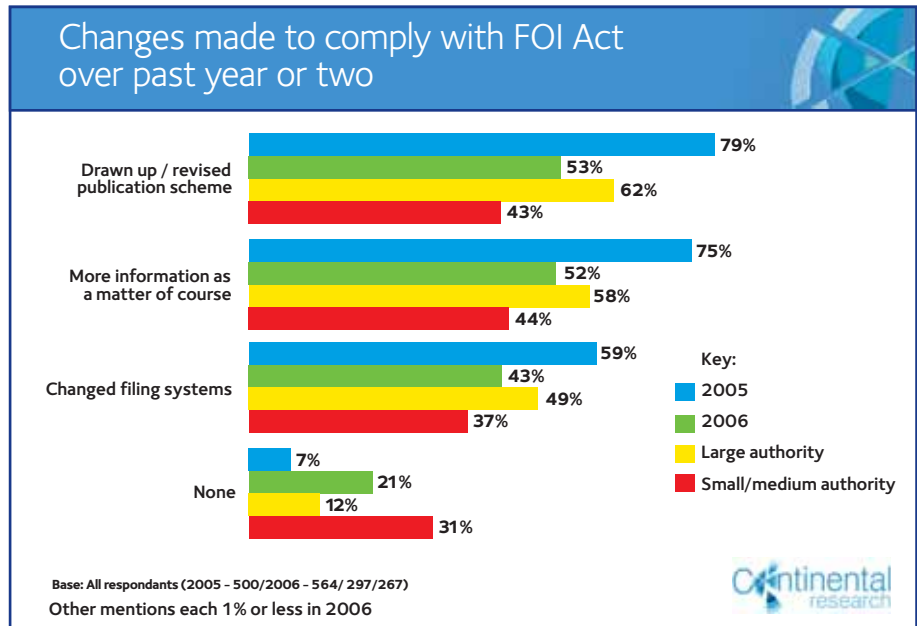
Respondents almost universally said they were very or fairly clear about the implications of the Freedom of Information Act for their organisation, and results were very similar to 2005. As shown in the table below, those in large authorities were significantly more likely than those in small/medium authorities to say they were very clear about the implications.

How clear respondent feels about implications of the Act for their organisation				
	2005	2006		
	Total sample	Total sample	Large authorities	Small/medium authorities
Base: all respondents	500	564	297	267
Very clear	66%	66%	76%	55%
Fairly clear	32%	31%	22%	41%
Not very clear	2%	2%	1%	4%
Not at all clear	-	1%	*	-

(* = less than 0.5%)

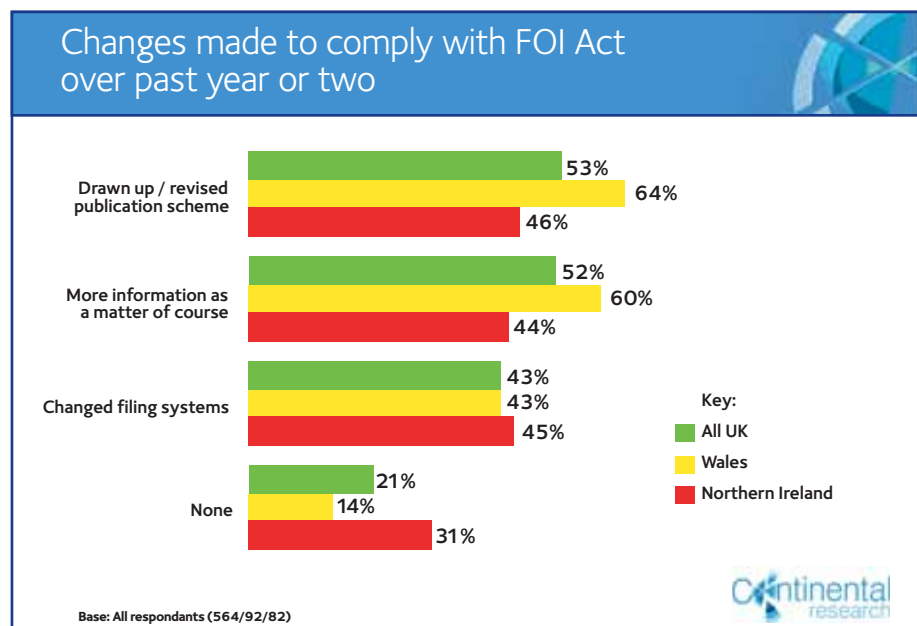
Respondents in Wales were significantly more likely than the UK as a whole to say they were very clear about the implications of the Act for their organisation (74% vs 66%), while those in Northern Ireland were less likely to be very clear about this (56%).

Four in five respondents in 2006 said their organisation had made some changes over the past year or two to comply with the Act, most commonly drawing up or revising a publication scheme or increasing the amount of information provided or released to the public as a matter of course. As shown in the following chart, around half of respondents said their organisation had taken these steps, while two in five said they had made changes to filing or record management systems. Significantly fewer respondents had taken any of these steps in 2006 than in the 2005 survey, perhaps because action was taken by many in 2005 and earlier and further action was not considered necessary in 2006.



Large authorities were significantly more likely than small/medium authorities to have made any of these changes.

As shown in the chart over the page, organisations in Wales were significantly more likely than those in the UK as a whole to have drawn up or revised a publication scheme. They were also somewhat more likely to have released more information to the public as a matter of course, but this difference was not significant. In 2005 organisations in Northern Ireland were the most likely to say they were releasing more information as a matter of course, so it may be that those in Wales are now catching up with actions taken earlier by their counterparts in Northern Ireland.



3.2. Information released automatically

All respondents were asked what types of information they published or released to the public as a matter of course for any reason, whether related to the Freedom of Information Act or not. As shown in the table below (showing all responses given by 1% of respondents or more in 2006), most of the types of information listed were released automatically by three quarters of organisations or more. Information released was generally very similar to 2005, although significantly fewer organisations at the latest wave said they automatically released information about decisions made by the company, internal policies, and statistics about the organisation (but still, around three quarters released each of these).

Types of information published or released as a matter of course		
	2005	2006
Base: all respondents	500	564
Annual reports / audited accounts	91%	89%
Future strategies / objectives	85%	85%
Information about organisation's performance	78%	81%
Details of what public money is spent on	83%	79%
Information about decisions made by organisation	84%	77%
Internal policies (e.g. equal opportunities)	81%	76%
Meeting minutes	74%	75%
Statistics about organisation (e.g. staff numbers)	80%	71%
Details and results of consultations / research	60%	62%
Details of contracts awarded	36%	34%
Personal data about staff	12%	15%
Information about services e.g. council services	5%	1%
None/don't know	2%	2%

There were no significant differences in the proportions of respondents in Wales, Northern Ireland and the UK as a whole who said their organisation released any information to the public as a matter of course (98% in Wales, 94% in Northern Ireland, 98% in the UK as a whole).

3.3. Public requests

As in 2005, three quarters of all respondents said they had received requests from the public for information under the Act in the last year, with large authorities (93%) significantly more likely to have received requests than small/medium authorities (53%).

The table below shows the types of information (from a prompted list) respondents said was requested by members of the public.

Types of information requested by the public (prompted)		
	2005	2006
Base: all receiving requests from public	376	417
Information about decisions made by organisation	65%	73%
Statistics about organisation (e.g. staff numbers)	70%	68%
Details of what public money is spent on	64%	66%
Details of contracts awarded	58%	63%
Meeting minutes	51%	59%
Annual reports / audited accounts	46%	56%
Internal policies (e.g. equal opportunities)	51%	53%
Future strategies / objectives	43%	51%
Personal data about staff	53%	48%
Information about organisation's performance	47%	48%
Details and results of consultations / research	41%	45%

Those receiving requests for information from the public most frequently said they were asked for statistics about the organisation, information about decisions made by the organisation, or details of what public money is spent on. Almost half were asked for personal information about members of staff, perhaps indicating some lack of public understanding of the scope of the Freedom of Information Act.

The types of information requested in 2006 were similar to those mentioned in 2005, although there were significant increases in the proportions saying they were asked for information about decisions made by the organisation, meeting minutes, annual reports and audited accounts, and future strategies and objectives. Results suggest that those requesting information may now be requesting a wider range of information, as higher proportions of authorities in 2006 reported requests for most of the different types of information, and yet the overall proportion of authorities receiving any requests from the public has not changed.

As shown in the following table, almost one in four of those who received any requests for information from the public had received only ten requests or less, and just over half had received no more than 50 requests. The average number of requests received in a year by those receiving any was boosted to 110, due to a relatively small number of organisations receiving a high volume of requests (12% had received over 300 requests). The average of 110 requests received in 2006 was slightly higher than the average of 95 received in 2005. This increase in the number of requests may be a result of growing public awareness of their rights under the Act, leading to a higher number of requests.

Those in large authorities who received any requests received around 50% more than those in small / medium authorities, as shown in the table below.

Number of requests received from public over last year				
	2005	2006		
	Total sample	Total sample	Large authorities	Small / medium authorities
Base: all receiving requests	376	417	277	140
Up to 10	25%	23%	17%	35%
11 to 50	34%	31%	30%	33%
51 to 100	15%	16%	17%	13%
101 to 300	16%	17%	19%	12%
Over 300	8%	12%	15%	7%
Average number	95	110	126	80

As shown in the following table, authorities in Northern Ireland who received requests for information from the public tended to receive fewer requests than across the UK as a whole, while the number of requests received in Wales was particularly high. However, base sizes are relatively low so differences should be treated with some caution.

Number of requests received from public over last year			
	Total sample	Wales	Northern Ireland
Base: all receiving requests	417	63	55
Up to 10	23%	19%	32%
11 to 50	31%	34%	34%
51 to 100	16%	5%	22%
101 to 300	17%	18%	11%
Over 300	12%	22%	-
Average number	110	154	41

A high proportion of authorities who had received requests for information from the public had turned requests down in the past year. As shown in the following table, as in 2005, over two thirds of all respondents said public requests had been turned down in the past year, with significantly more in large authorities saying this (73%) than in small authorities (57%). If these figures are re-percentage on the total sample, results suggest that half of all public authorities have received requests for information from the public that they have had to turn down in the past year, and among large authorities this figure rises to over two thirds.

Proportion having to turn down requests for information from public in past year		
	All receiving requests	Re-percentage on total sample
Base: all receiving requests from public (376)		
All respondents (2005)	68%	51%
All respondents (2006)	68%	51%
Large authorities	73%	68%
Small/medium authorities	57%	31%

Authorities in Wales were significantly more likely to have turned requests from the public down (75%) than those in Northern Ireland (49%), which is perhaps not surprising given the higher number of public requests received by Welsh authorities.

Where requests for information from the public were turned down, the most frequent reason for this was that personal information about staff had been asked for. Over half of those turning down requests had done so for this reason. One in three turned down requests for commercially sensitive information, one in eight were unwilling to provide information where the cost was above the threshold, and one in ten refused to provide information that was already available elsewhere. A range of other reasons was given for turning down requests, but each by fewer than one in ten, as shown in the table below (which shows all mentions of 3% or more in 2006).

Types of information turned down		
	2005	2006
Base: all having turned down requests for information	256	285
Personal information about staff	53%	57%
Commercially sensitive information	33%	33%
Cost of providing information above threshold	8%	12%
Information already available by other means	14%	11%
Other personal information / third party personal information	2%	11%
Information we don't have / hold / record	8%	7%
Investigations / ongoing investigations	4%	7%
Information exempted under Data Protection Act	6%	6%
Mention of specific section e.g. Section 1 / 41 etc	-	6%
Legally sensitive / legally privileged information	9%	5%
Exempted information / FOI Act exempted	8%	5%
Private / confidential information	9%	4%
Information prejudicial to prevention of crime	2%	4%
Health & safety exemptions e.g. officer whereabouts	3%	3%

3.4 Additional information released to the public because of the FOI Act

All respondents were asked how much more information, if any, they felt their organisation released to the public now because of the Freedom of Information Act that would not otherwise be provided. Almost three in five respondents (59%) felt their organisation released a lot or a little more information than they would have done without the Act, with significantly more large authorities (72%) saying this than small/medium authorities (44%). Just under one in four respondents said they did not release any more information at all than they would otherwise have done, and results were similar to 2005, as shown in the table below.

How much more information released to public because of the FOI Act				
	2005	2006		
	Total sample	Total sample	Large authorities	Small / medium authorities
Base: all respondents	500	564	297	267
A lot more	19%	24%	33%	14%
A little more	39%	35%	39%	30%
Not much more	18%	15%	12%	17%
No more than before	21%	24%	12%	37%

There was no regional difference in the proportion saying they released a lot or a little more information than they would have done without the Act, as shown in the following table.

How much more information released to public because of the FOI Act			
	Total sample (All UK)	Wales	Northern Ireland
Base: all respondents	564	92	82
A lot more	24%	31%	20%
A little more	35%	26%	37%
Not much more	15%	21%	13%
No more than before	24%	20%	30%

The types of information respondents were most likely to say that the public has access to now because of the Freedom of Information Act were details of contracts awarded, information about decisions made by the organisation, meeting minutes and internal policies, as shown in the table below. Around two fifths of those releasing more information said these types of information were available purely because of the Act, similar proportions to 2005.

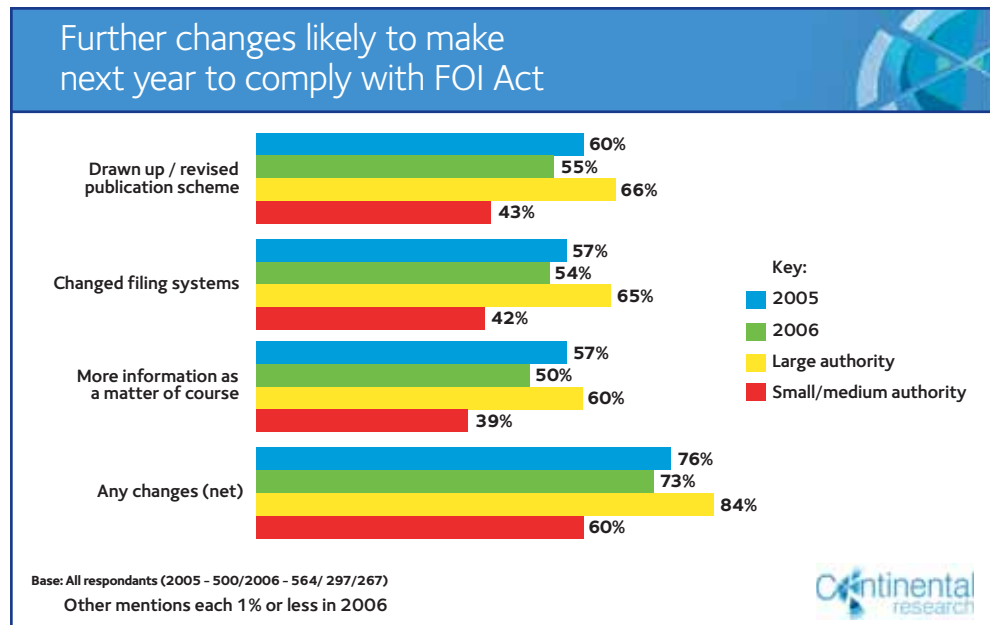
Types of information available that the public would not have had access to before the FOI Act		
	2005	2006
Base: all releasing more info. due to FOI Act	379	414
Details of contracts awarded	39%	41%
Information about decisions made by organisation	34%	39%
Internal policies (e.g. equal opportunities)	30%	39%
Meeting minutes	31%	37%
Future strategies / objectives	24%	35%
Statistics about organisation e.g. staff numbers	26%	34%
Details of what public money is spent on	26%	30%
Information about organisation's performance	20%	28%
Details and results of consultations / research	21%	27%
Personal information about staff	10%	17%
Annual reports / audited accounts	13%	16%

Although similar proportions of respondents at the two waves felt that the public has access to more information because of the Act, results suggest an increase in the types and range of additional information available. Compared to 2005, significantly more respondents in 2006 felt that, due to the Act, the public now had access to internal policies, details of future strategies, organisation statistics, information about the organisation's performance, details of consultations and research, and personal information about staff.

Almost two thirds (63%) of authorities in 2006 said they actively promoted their publication scheme and the public's right to access information, while just over a third (36%) said they left it to people to find out about these for themselves. Those in large authorities were slightly more likely to actively promote the information available (66%) than those in small authorities (60%) but the difference was not significant. There was little difference by region - 63% of those in Wales and 61% in Northern Ireland actively promoted this information.

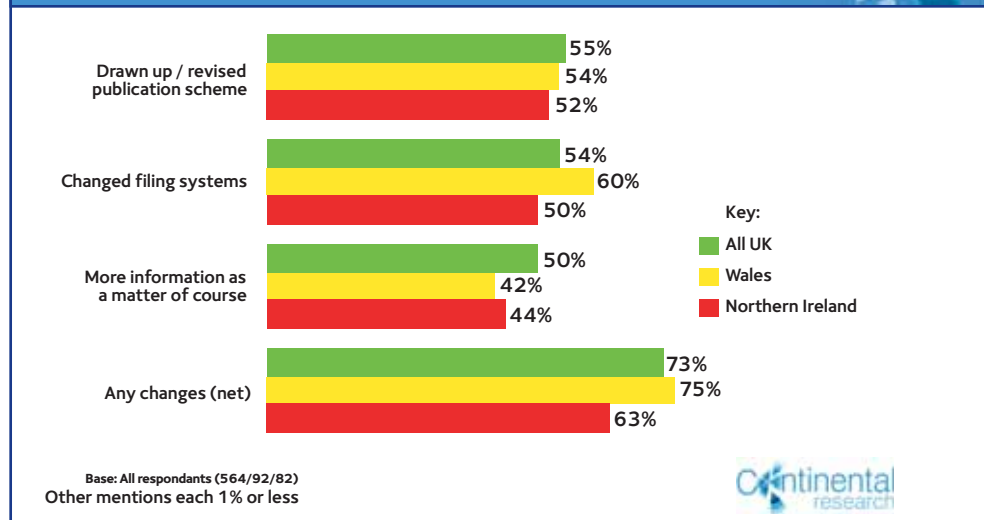
3.5. Future changes

Respondents were prompted with a list of changes their organisation might make within the next year to comply with the Freedom of Information Act. As shown in the chart below, 73% of all respondents planned to make further changes, a similar level to 2005. Significantly more of those in large authorities (84%) than in small/medium authorities (60%) said they might make changes in future. Respondents were most likely to say they might draw up or revise a publication scheme, closely followed by making changes to filing or record management systems, and making more information available to the public as a matter of course.



As shown in the following chart, respondents in authorities in Northern Ireland were significantly less likely than the UK as a whole to say they might make further changes to comply with the Act in future, perhaps because they were the most likely to have planned further changes in the 2005 research, which they may have subsequently made.

Further changes likely to make next year to comply with FOI Act



Those who said they were likely to make more information available as a matter of course in the future were asked to say (spontaneously) what types of additional information they might release. As shown in the table below, meeting minutes, information about the organisation's performance and details of future strategies were most frequently mentioned. All mentions other than those listed in the table were 5% or less and are not shown in the table. Results were similar to 2005, with the only significant difference being a decrease in the proportion likely to release details about internal policies.

Types of information likely to make available in the future (spontaneous)		
	2005	2006
Base: all likely to publish more information as a matter of course	283	293
Meeting minutes	27%	23%
Information about organisation's performance	19%	19%
Future strategies / objectives	20%	19%
Information about decisions made by organisation	23%	18%
Annual reports / audited accounts	19%	18%
Internal policies (e.g. equal opportunities)	24%	17%
Statistics about organisation (e.g. staff numbers)	18%	16%
Details of contracts awarded	20%	15%
Details and results of consultations / research	14%	15%
Details of what public money is spent on	18%	15%

3.6. Attitudes to Freedom of Information Act

When asked how they felt about the Act overall, respondents were positive. As shown in the table below, as in 2005, four in five respondents felt the Act was a very good thing or a fairly good thing from the point of view of their organisation. Those in large authorities were more likely than those in small / medium authorities to say the Act was a good thing (84% vs 78%), but both groups were highly positive and the difference was not significant. Only a small minority described the Act as a bad thing, with the remainder saying they were not really affected by the Act.

Overall rating of Freedom of Information Act				
	2005	2006		
	Total sample	Total sample	Large authorities	Small/medium authorities
Base: all respondents	500	564	297	267
A very good thing	36%	32%	35%	29%
A fairly good thing	45%	49%	49%	49%
Not affected by FOI Act	14%	9%	6%	12%
A very/fairly bad thing (net)	3%	6%	7%	6%

When asked to say, spontaneously, what they felt were the benefits of the Act from the point of view of their organisation, all but 15% of respondents in 2006 mentioned at least one positive aspect, as shown in the following table. The most commonly mentioned benefits, particularly by large authorities, were increased openness or transparency as a result of the Act, or the fact that it led to improvements in record management or improved relationships with the public. Significantly fewer respondents than in 2005 mentioned better record management as a benefit of the Act, perhaps having improved their record management systems when the Act first came into force so no longer associating the improvements with the requirements of the Act.

Perceived benefits of the Act for organisation (spontaneous)

	2005	2006		
	Total sample	Total sample	Large authorities	Small/medium authorities
Base: all respondents	500	564	297	267
Openness / transparency	35%	37%	42%	32%
Better record management / more organised records	27%	18%	22%	14%
Improved relationship with public / public understanding	17%	17%	20%	13%
Accountability	18%	16%	16%	16%
Improved public access to info. / helps us respond to public	16%	12%	9%	16%
Improved quality of service / ensures best practice	5%	5%	6%	4%
Makes us think about what should / should not release	5%	4%	5%	3%
Staff more aware of their responsibilities	3%	4%	4%	4%
Ability to demonstrate how decisions are made	3%	4%	5%	3%
Agree with FOI Act / right for public to have information	4%	3%	3%	2%
Improves decision making	2%	3%	5%	2%
Raised public awareness of what can obtain	2%	3%	2%	4%
Improved staff access to information	-	3%	3%	3%
No benefits / don't know	11%	10%	7%	14%
Don't know	4%	5%	3%	6%

When asked what they felt the disadvantages of the Act were for their organisation, one in five respondents could not think of any, fewer, but not significantly so, than the one in four unable to think of disadvantages in 2005. Significantly more respondents in small/medium authorities (31%) than in large authorities (13%) did not mention any disadvantages. As shown in the following table the most frequently mentioned issue with the Act was that it was time consuming, mentioned by almost three in ten respondents (more than in 2005). One in six said that they experienced problems with workload, and one in eight mentioned cost issues or said that the Act resulted in staffing or staff resource problems. A range of other issues were mentioned, but each by only one in ten respondents or fewer.

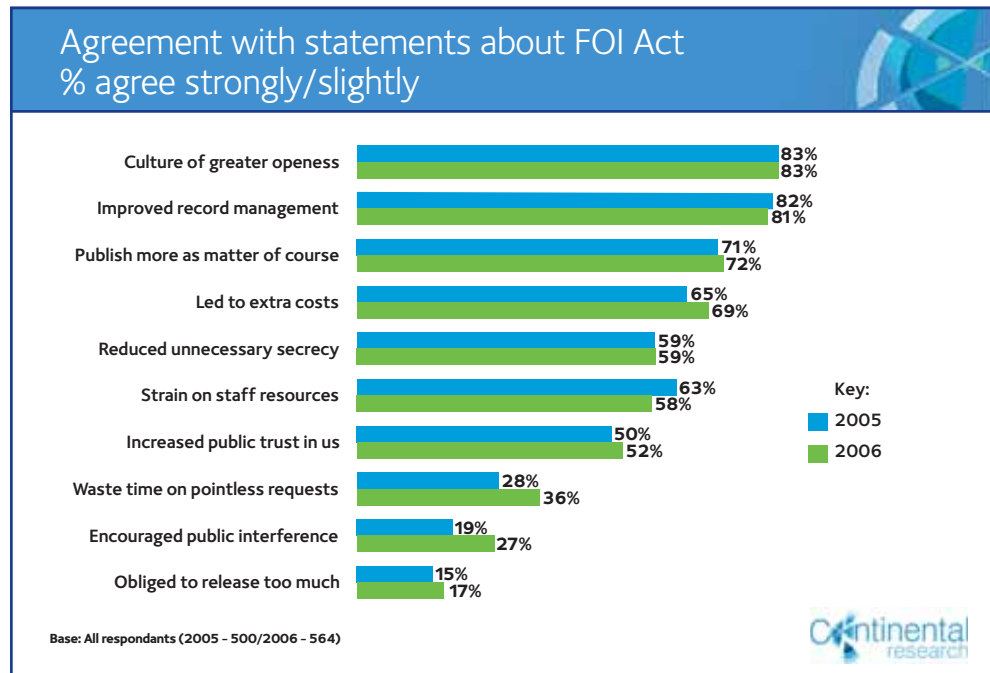
Perceived disadvantages of the Act for organisation (spontaneous)

	2005	2006		
	Total sample	Total sample	Large authorities	Small/medium authorities
Base: all respondents	500	564	297	267
Time / time consuming	22%	29%	35%	23%
Workload	13%	15%	17%	12%
Cost / finance / no funding from government	13%	13%	17%	9%
Staffing / staff resource	8%	13%	16%	9%
Resource element / resource implications	9%	11%	13%	9%
Have to respond to commercial / research / media requests	8%	11%	15%	7%
Administrative burden / bureaucracy	10%	7%	6%	9%
Malicious / vexatious requests e.g. by competitors	6%	4%	4%	4%
Inappropriate / trivial requests	4%	4%	5%	3%
Dealing with large / difficult / time-consuming requests	4%	4%	6%	1%
Lack of public understanding of Act / unrealistic expectations	3%	4%	5%	3%
None/don't know	25%	21%	13%	31%

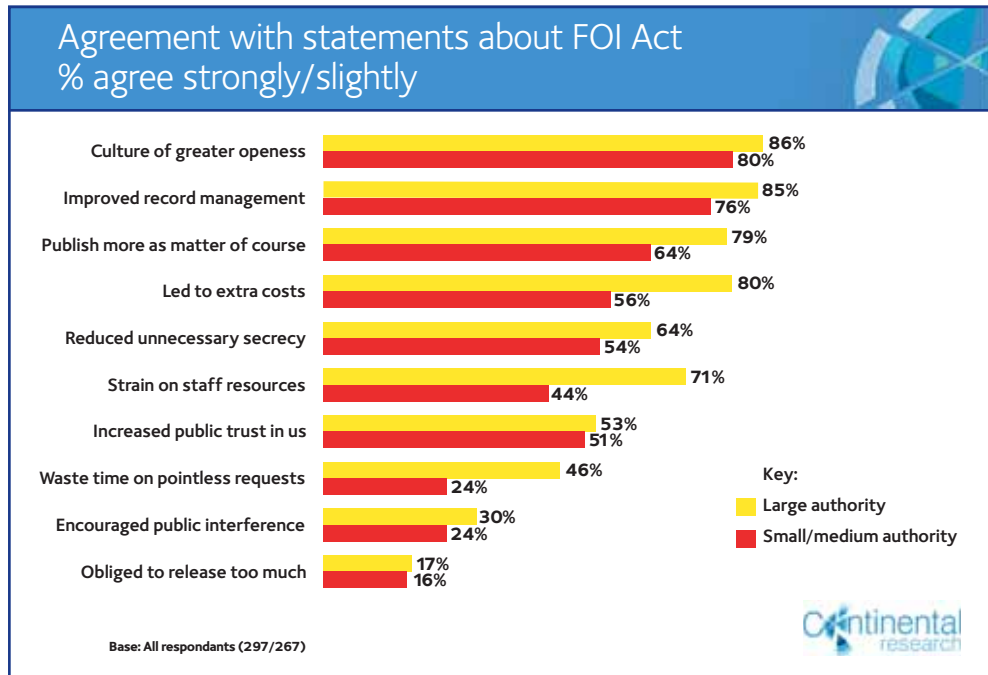
Reactions to the Act were positive too across a range of attitude statements read to respondents. As shown in the following chart, over four fifths of all respondents agreed strongly or slightly that the Act promoted a culture of greater openness and that it had encouraged them to improve their record management systems. Almost three quarters of respondents agreed that that Act meant they published more information as a matter of course now, three in five said that it reduced unnecessary secrecy about the way they worked, while half agreed that it had increased the public's trust in them. Levels of agreement with these positive statements were very similar to 2005.

On the negative side, over two thirds of respondents agreed that the Act had led to extra costs and three fifths felt it had put a strain on staff resources. Over a third felt that the Act meant they had to waste time responding to pointless requests from the public and over a quarter agreed that it encouraged the public to interfere too much, although only one in six said it obliged them to release too much information.

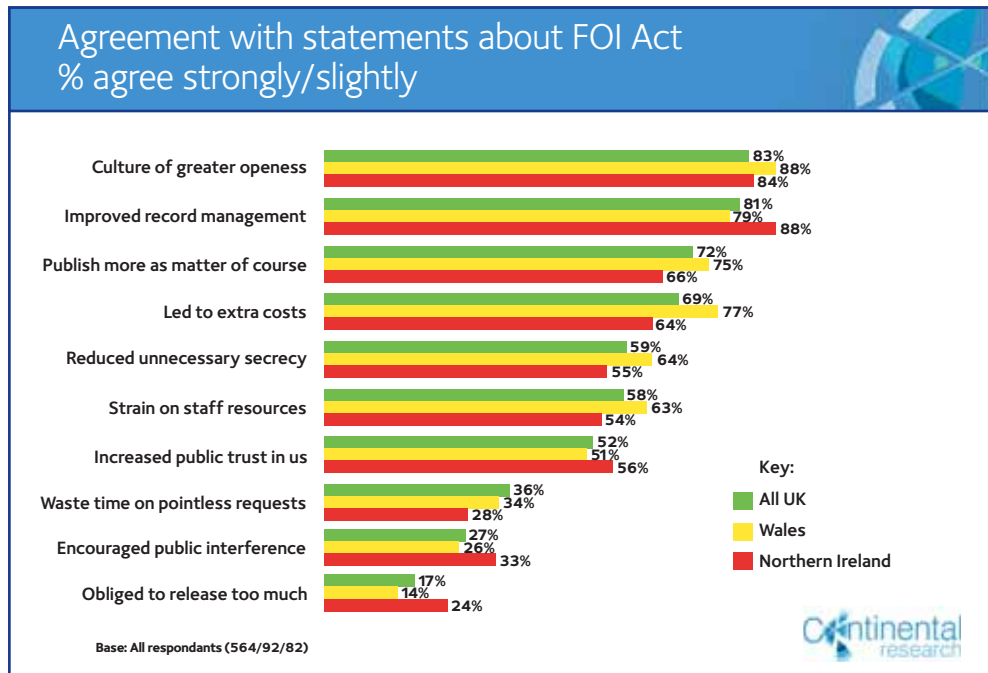
Compared to 2005, significantly more respondents agreed this year that the Act encouraged the public to interfere in the way they work and that it led to them wasting a lot of time responding to pointless requests from the public, perhaps suggesting that the public's use of their rights under the Act has increased with greater familiarity. Slightly more respondents than in 2005 felt that the Act led to extra costs for the organisation, but this increase was not significant.



As shown in the following chart, respondents in large authorities were significantly more likely to agree with each of the statements about the Act, other than that it increased public trust in the organisation or obliged them to release too much information (where levels of agreement were similar between large and small/medium authorities). Larger authorities were, therefore, more likely to see the benefits of the Act in terms of increasing openness, improving record management and so on, but were also more likely to suffer strains on financial or staff resources, and to feel time is wasted dealing with pointless requests.



By region, as shown in the following chart, respondents in Northern Ireland were significantly more likely than the UK as a whole to agree that the Act had encouraged them to improve their record management systems. There were no other significant differences in levels of agreement by region.



3.7. Impact of Freedom of Information Act on organisation

As shown in the following table, the majority of respondents (71%) felt the Act had at least some impact on their organisation, but many more said it had some impact (57%) than a substantial impact (14%). These results were very similar to 2005. Those in large authorities were significantly more likely than those in small/medium authorities to say the Act had an impact on them.

Amount of impact FOI Act had on organisation				
	2005	2006		
	Total sample	Total sample	Large authorities	Small/medium authorities
Base: all respondents	500	564	297	267
A substantial impact	12%	14%	20%	7%
Some impact	58%	57%	60%	54%
Not much impact	23%	23%	17%	30%
No impact	7%	5%	*	9%

(* = less than 0.5%)

For the majority of organisations, the Act has meant additional workload. As shown in the table below, in both 2005 and 2006 over three quarters of all respondents (79% in 2006) said the Act had meant a lot or a little additional workload for their organisation, and significantly more of those in large organisations said this (87%) than in small/medium authorities (70%).

How much additional workload Act has meant for organisation				
	2005	2006		
	Total sample	Total sample	Large authorities	Small/medium authorities
Base: all respondents	500	564	297	267
A lot	27%	32%	43%	19%
A little	51%	47%	44%	51%
Not much	14%	15%	8%	22%
None at all	6%	5%	3%	8%

Over a third of respondents said that over the past year complying with the requirements of the Act had got easier and a further two-fifths felt things had not changed. One in five said compliance had got more complicated. As shown in the table below, large authorities were significantly more likely to feel things had got easier, while those in smaller authorities were the most likely to feel things had not changed. Similar proportions of both groups felt things had got more complicated and this was the minority view regardless of organisation size.

Changes in difficulty of complying with requirements of Act over past year (2006)			
	Total sample	Large authorities	Small / medium authorities
Base: all respondents	565	297	267
A lot easier	6%	7%	4%
A little easier	31%	36%	26%
A little more complicated	15%	16%	14%
A lot more complicated	5%	6%	4%
Things have not changed	41%	32%	50%

All respondents were asked (spontaneously) what additional help or support the ICO could provide to make implementing the Act easier for respondents. As shown in the following table (showing all mentions over 1%), guidance was by far the most commonly mentioned, by almost a fifth. A range of other suggestions were made by respondents but each by only 6% or less. Almost half of all respondents could not think of anything that might help them implement the Act.

Additional help or support ICO could provide (spontaneous)			
	Total sample	Large authorities	Small / medium authorities
Base: all respondents	564	297	267
Guidance	18%	23%	11%
Training courses	6%	8%	4%
Information available online	6%	6%	5%
Raise public awareness / understanding of Act	5%	4%	5%
Quicker response time to enquiry	4%	4%	5%
e-bulletins	4%	3%	4%
Clarity / clearer / simple advice	4%	5%	2%
Helpline	3%	3%	3%
Fact sheet / guidance documents / checklists	2%	1%	3%
Funding / more money	2%	2%	2%
Seminars	2%	4%	*
More advice on exemptions	2%	3%	1%
Advice on other specific matters (e.g. data sharing)	2%	2%	2%
Nothing / don't know	46%	38%	55%

(* = less than 0.5%)

3.8. Charging for information

Respondents were asked whether they were aware that, in future, authorities might be permitted to charge for time spent considering whether information should be provided to the public, as well as for the costs of collating the information. Half of all respondents (52%) were aware of this, significantly more so among large authorities (64%) than small and medium ones (39%). Awareness was similar in Wales (56%) to the UK as a whole, while significantly fewer respondents in Northern Ireland (40%) said they knew of the potential change.

Almost three quarters of respondents felt that charging for time in this way was very or fairly appropriate, while one in five felt it would be inappropriate. As shown in the following table, large authorities were more strongly in favour than small and medium organisations, but overall levels of approval were similar.

How appropriate would it be to charge for consideration time			
	Total sample	Large authorities	Small / medium authorities
Base: all respondents	564	297	267
Very appropriate	33%	37%	28%
Fairly appropriate	39%	37%	42%
Not very appropriate	16%	15%	16%
Not at all appropriate	10%	8%	12%
Don't know	3%	3%	2%

Levels of agreement with this potential new charging structure were similar in Wales (67%) and Northern Ireland (73%) to the UK as a whole (72%).

If permitted to charge for consideration time in this way, a third of respondents felt their organisation would release less information under the Act in future, significantly more in large authorities (41%) than small to medium ones (26%), as shown in the following table.

Whether charging for time would change amount of information released by the organisation			
	Total sample	Large authorities	Small / medium authorities
Base: all respondents	564	297	267
A lot less	5%	6%	5%
A little less	29%	36%	21%
Would not change amount released	63%	56%	71%
Don't know	3%	3%	4%

3.9. Awareness and use of information available on ICO website

When prompted, over two thirds of respondents (68%) said they were aware that details of the ICO’s decisions about complaints made against organisations under the Act are published on the ICO website. Awareness was significantly higher among large authorities (79%) than small/medium ones (55%). By region, awareness was lower in Northern Ireland (55%) than in Wales (67%) or the UK as a whole (68%).

The vast majority of those aware that details of the ICO’s decisions are available online said they found this a useful information resource for their organisation. As shown in the table below, those in large organisations were significantly more likely than those in smaller authorities to find this information useful.

Usefulness of ICO decisions on website as information resource			
	Total sample	Large authorities	Small / medium authorities
Base: all aware decisions are published	385	238	147
Very useful	46%	50%	39%
Fairly useful	42%	42%	41%
Not very useful	7%	5%	9%
Not at all useful	3%	1%	6%
Don't know	2%	1%	5%

Just over half (52%) of all respondents said they were aware that details of appeals made to the Information Tribunal against the ICO’s decisions are published on the Information Tribunal’s website. Again, awareness was significantly higher among large authorities (67%) than small/medium ones (35%) and by region, awareness was lower in Northern Ireland (40%) than in Wales (54%) or the UK as a whole (52%).

The vast majority of those aware that details of appeals made to the Information Tribunal are available online said they found this a useful information resource for their organisation. As shown in the following table, those in large organisations were more likely than those in smaller authorities to find this information useful, but differences were not significant due to base sizes of those aware.

Usefulness of Information Tribunal appeals on website as information resource			
	Total sample	Large authorities	Small / medium authorities
Base: all aware appeals are published	294	200	94
Very useful	45%	47%	39%
Fairly useful	43%	43%	43%
Not very useful	7%	7%	8%
Not at all useful	2%	1%	4%
Don't know	3%	2%	6%

4. Summary

Taking into account both information published as a matter of course and information released in response to requests from members of the public, three in five respondents said their organisation released a lot or a little more information to the public as a result of the Freedom of Information Act that would not otherwise be provided. This level was similar to 2005.

Results suggest some persisting lack of public understanding of the scope of the Act. As in 2005, two thirds of organisations who had received public requests for information under the Act had had to turn some requests down, most commonly because the requests were for personal information about members of staff.

Respondents' attitudes to the Freedom of Information Act were generally positive. It was widely viewed as a good thing from the point of view of the organisation, to have promoted a culture of greater openness and to have encouraged organisations to improve their record management systems. There was little change in agreement with these positive attributes of the Act from 2005 to 2006. However, there was some feeling that compliance with the Act led to extra costs for the organisation and put a strain on staff resources. Furthermore, significantly more respondents this year said that they wasted time responding to pointless requests from the public and that the Act encouraged the public to interfere in the way they worked. Results suggest that members of the public requesting information may be requesting a wider range or greater volume of information than in 2005, and this increase may in part explain the increased perceptions of time wasted by authorities responding to requests.

Despite this perception, as in 2005, almost three quarters of respondents said the Act had at least some impact on their organisation, but only one in seven described its impact as substantial. More felt complying with the requirements of the Act had got easier over the past year or so (37%) than that it had got more complicated (20%).

Around half of respondents were aware that they might be permitted to charge in future for time spent considering whether a request should be responded to. This potential change was widely approved of – almost three quarters felt it would be appropriate. A third said they would be likely to release less information under the Act in future as a result.

Information available online about decisions made by the ICO and appeals made to the Information Tribunal were regarded as useful information resources by the vast majority of those aware this information was available. More respondents were aware that information about ICO decisions are published than that details of appeals are published.

Overall, both large and small/medium public authorities had experienced some impact of the Act, but on most measures, the impact was greater on large public authorities than on the small/medium ones. Despite this, attitudes to the Freedom of Information Act were positive among authorities of both sizes, and, in fact were often more positive among the large authorities than small/medium authorities.

Appendix of abbreviations

CS Head	Head of Corporate Services
eg	for example
etc	etcetera
FOI	Freedom of Information
ICO	Information Commissioner's Office
IT	information technology
NHS	National Health Service
PA	Personal Assistant
UK	United Kingdom
vs	versus

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