

Freedom of Information Act: Three Years On

Topline summary report

1. Method

A total of 522 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 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 10 December 2007 to 11 January 2008, excluding a break over Christmas from 22 December 2007 to 1 January 2008.

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. A second wave of research was conducted in 2006, two years after the Act came into force. Fieldwork was conducted from 30 November to 21 December 2006. Both waves used the same method and sample structure as the 2007 survey. Results of the three research stages are compared throughout this report.

Throughout this report significant differences between samples are shown with a red circle or red bracket.

- For year on year results, significance is shown for differences between 2006 and 2007 (with the higher percentage circled).
- For large and small/medium authorities, results are compared for large vs. small/medium (not vs. total 2007) (with the higher percentage circled).

- For Wales and Northern Ireland, results are compared to all UK (not Wales vs. NI) (with the percentage that is significant vs. all UK circled).

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

2. Sample

The main sample categories were defined by sector and type of organisation as follows:

	Large public authorities	Small/Medium public authorities
Central government	Central government dept NDPBs	-
Local government	Local authorities NI district councils Fire authorities Welsh local authorities	Internal drainage boards Port health authorities Magistrates courts committee Passenger transport execs National parks Parish/community councils
Police	Police authorities Police forces	District Policing Partnerships
NHS	Primary care trusts Strategic health authorities Mental health trusts Special health authorities	Independent practitioners (GPs / opticians / pharmacists / dentists) Acute trusts Ambulance trusts Local health boards Trusts (Wales) Health regulators HSS boards Community health councils HSS trusts, agencies & councils
Education	Higher education	FE colleges Secondary schools Primary schools
Publicly owned companies	-	Publicly owned companies

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	51	-	51
Local government	91	72	163
Police	40	10	50
NHS	50	64	114
Education	52	55	107
Publicly owned companies	-	37	37
England	209	160	369
Wales	39	40	79
Northern Ireland	36	38	74

Respondents had a wide range of different job titles, similar to the 2005 and 2006 research. The most commonly held posts were information managers or officers (for large authorities) or clerical officers or clerks (for small/medium authorities). The table below shows all job titles mentioned by 2% or more of the total sample in 2007.

Respondent job title					
	2005	2006	2007		
	Total	Total	Total	Large	Small / medium
Base: all respondents	500	564	522	284	238
Information manager / officer / head of information	19%	16%	17%	22%	10%
Freedom of Information manager / officer	5%	7%	9%	13%	4%
Clerk/clerical officer / clerk to council / parish clerk	11%	9%	8%	0%	16%
Records manager / officer / archivist	6%	7%	7%	7%	6%
Head teacher / principal	3%	5%	6%	1%	12%
Administrator / admin officer / office manager	6%	4%	5%	4%	5%
Head of legal services / corporate solicitor etc.	4%	5%	4%	5%	3%
Corporate services/corporate affairs officer/head of corporate services	6%	4%	4%	4%	3%
Bursar / finance manager / officer	4%	4%	4%	5%	3%
Secretary / PA	3%	4%	4%	4%	4%
Communications manager / officer	4%	3%	4%	3%	5%
Policy officer	1%	2%	2%	3%	1%
Business manager/business development manager	-	1%	2%	2%	2%

Most respondents have had day-to-day responsibility for freedom of information within their organisation for over a year, with 43% having responsibility since the Act came into force. As shown in the following table, significantly more of those in small/medium authorities have had responsibility for the Act for more than three years.

Length of time with day to day responsibility for Freedom of Information within organisation			
	Total sample	Large	Small/medium
Base: all respondents	522	284	238
Less than one year	14%	15%	13%
One to two years	15%	18%	11%
Two to three years	28%	34%	21%
More than three years	43%	32%	54%

3. Summary

Overall the results of the 2007 wave of research are positive and fairly consistent with those in 2006.

Taking into account both information published as a matter of course and information released in response to requests from members of the public, 62% of 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 and 2006.

Virtually all organisations (97%) released some information to the public as a matter of course for any reason. While there was no significant difference in the release of annual reports or audited accounts there was a significant decrease in many other types of information being released to the public as a matter of course. This may be due to organisations becoming more aware of what needs to be published in order to comply with the Act.

As in 2005 and 2006, two thirds (70%) 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.

While the proportion of organisations having to turn down requests from the public in the last year is similar in 2007 to previous years there was a significant increase in 2007 of information being turned down due to the information already being available by other means and because the cost of providing the information is above the threshold. This may be due to increased familiarity and confidence in applying the Act, leading to organisations being more pragmatic about meeting requirements.

Respondents' attitudes to the Freedom of Information Act were generally positive, similar to 2005 and 2006. The majority (80%) of respondents felt the Act was a very good thing or a fairly good thing for their organisation, with a significant increase in those rating it as a very good thing compared to 2006. It is widely viewed 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 over the last three years. There was a slight increase in 2007 of people claiming the Act increased

the public's trust in them. While this increase was not significant against 2006, it was significant compared to 2005.

Conversely, as seen in previous years, there was some agreement that compliance with the Act led to extra costs for the organisation (65%) and put a strain on staff resources (63%). Furthermore, around a third of respondents (36%) felt that they wasted time on pointless requests from the public. There was a significant increase in 2007 of respondents spontaneously mentioning that the Act is open to abuse by people and interest groups (10% in 2007 vs. 1% in 2006).

Almost three quarters (71%) of respondents said the Act had at least some impact on their organisation, but only a minority (12%) described its impact as substantial.

Around half (52%) of organisations felt that complying with the requirements of the Act had not changed over the last year. There was a fairly even split between those who felt that complying with the Act had got easier (26%) compared to those who felt that it had got more complicated (21%).

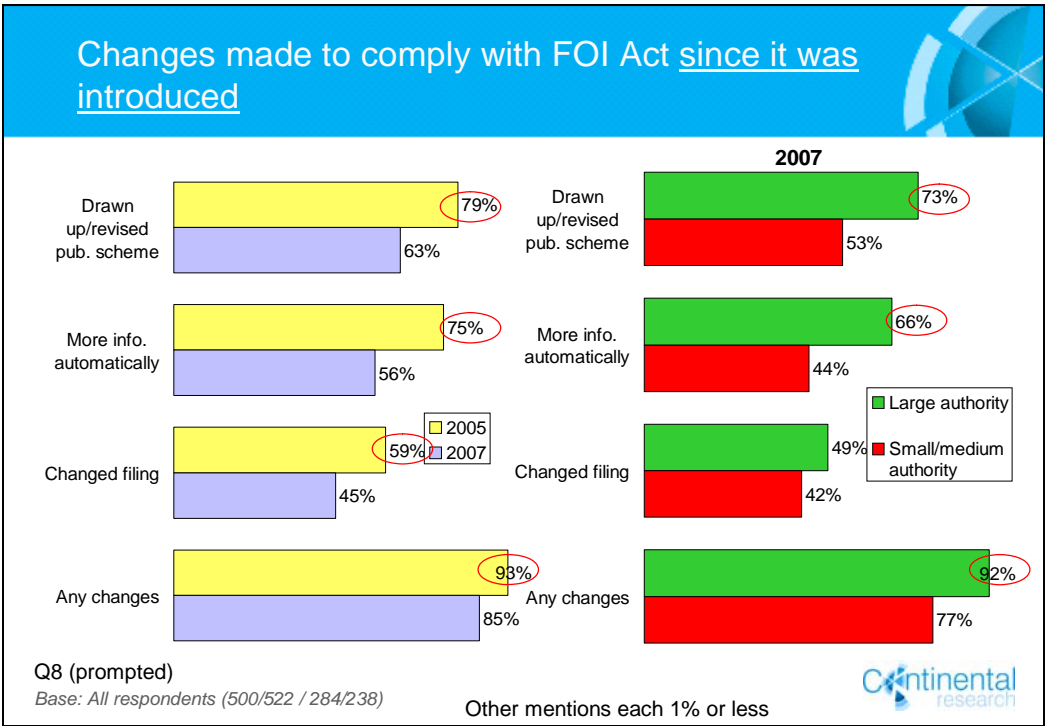
As was seen in 2006, information available online about decisions made by the ICO and appeals made to the Information Tribunal were regarded as useful information resources by the vast majority of those aware this information was available. More respondents were aware that information about ICO decisions 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 remain positive among authorities of both sizes, with large authorities holding stronger opinions about both the advantages and the disadvantages of the Act than the small/medium ones.

4. Main findings

4.1. Compliance with the Act

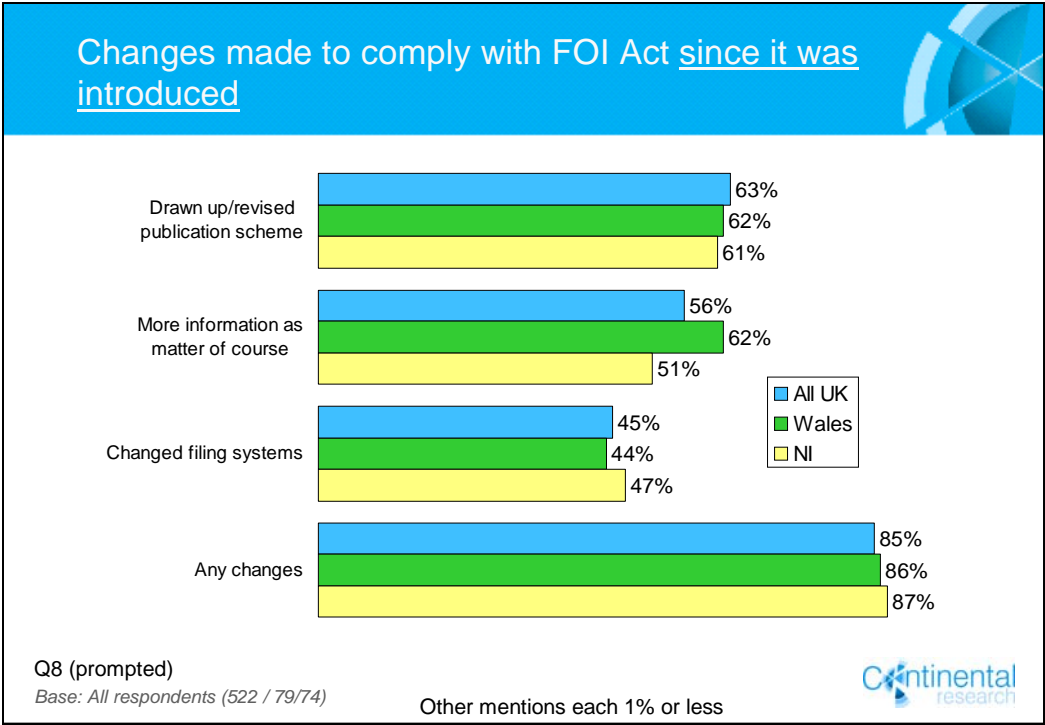
The vast majority (85%) of respondents in 2007 said their organisation had made some changes to comply with the Act since it was introduced, most commonly drawing up or revising a publication scheme (63%) or increasing the amount of information provided or released to the public as a matter of course (56%). Furthermore, as shown in the chart below, 45% said they had made changes to filing or record management systems. Significantly fewer respondents claimed to have taken any of these steps since the Act was introduced in the 2007 survey than in the 2005 survey. This is possibly due to some of these changes being made before the current staff member took over responsibility for the Act or that the Act is becoming more embedded in organisations.



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

As shown in the following chart, there were no significant differences between organisations in the UK versus those in Wales and Northern Ireland making these changes. Those in

Wales were slightly more likely to have released more information to the public as a matter of course, but this difference was not significant.



4.2. 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. Virtually all organisations (97%) released some information to the public as a matter of course for any reason. As shown in the following table (showing all responses given by 5% of respondents or more in 2007), most organisations released annual reports/audited accounts (89%) and future strategies and objectives (72%) as a matter of course. However, while the types of information released were similar to 2006, significantly fewer organisations in 2007 claimed to automatically release a number of types of information including future strategies and objectives, information about decisions made by the company, internal policies, details of what public money is spent on, statistics about the organisation, information about the organisation’s performance, meeting minutes, details of consultations and research and personal information about staff. This may be due to organisations becoming more aware of what needs to be published in order to comply with the Act. Decreases in 2007 were seen for both large and small/medium authorities.

Types of information published or released as a matter of course (prompted)			
	2005	2006	2007
Base: all respondents	500	564	522
Annual reports / audited accounts	91%	89%	89%
Future strategies / objectives	85%	85%	72%
Information about decisions made by organisation	84%	77%	70%
Internal policies (eg equal opportunities)	81%	76%	66%
Details of what public money is spent on	83%	79%	63%
Statistics about organisation (eg staff numbers)	80%	71%	62%
Information about the organisation's performance	78%	81%	47%
Meeting minutes	74%	75%	45%
Details and results of consultations / research	60%	62%	36%
Details of contracts awarded	36%	34%	33%
Personal information about staff	12%	15%	5%
None/don't know	2%	2%	3%

The types of information released to the public as a matter of course in 2007 were generally similar for organisations in Wales, Northern Ireland and the UK as a whole. However, as shown in the table below, significantly more organisations in Wales released information about decisions made by the organisation, internal policies and details of what public money is spent on.

Types of information published or released as a matter of course (prompted)			
	Total sample	Wales	Northern Ireland
Base: all respondents	522	79	74
Annual reports / audited accounts	89%	88%	92%
Future strategies / objectives	72%	80%	68%
Information about decisions made by organisation	70%	81%	62%
Internal policies (eg equal opportunities)	66%	73%	56%
Details of what public money is spent on	63%	70%	52%
Statistics about organisation eg staff numbers	62%	68%	61%
Information about organisation's performance	47%	53%	44%
Meeting minutes	45%	47%	34%
Details & results of consultations / research	36%	40%	37%
Details of contracts awarded	33%	30%	27%
Personal information about staff	5%	3%	1%
None/don't know	3%	2%	3%

4.3. Public requests

Around seven in ten (71%) respondents said they had received requests from the public for information under the Act in the last year. This is a slight decrease, albeit not significant, from 2006 (73%). Large authorities (94%) were significantly more likely to have received requests than small/medium authorities (44%).

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

Types of information requested by the public (prompted)			
	2005	2006	2007
Base: all receiving requests from public	376	417	377
Information about decisions made by organisation	65%	73%	70%
Stats about organisation (eg staff numbers)	70%	68%	67%
Details of what public money is spent on	64%	66%	65%
Details of contracts awarded	58%	63%	62%
Information about organisation's performance	47%	48%	54%
Annual reports / audited accounts	46%	56%	51%
Internal policies (eg equal opportunities)	51%	53%	51%
Future strategies / objectives	43%	51%	46%
Personal information about staff	53%	48%	46%
Details and results of consultations / research	41%	45%	37%
Meeting minutes	51%	59%	33%

Those receiving requests for information from the public most frequently said they were asked for information about decisions made by the organisation, statistics about the organisation or details of what public money is spent on. Almost half (46%) were asked for personal information about members of staff.

The types of information requested in 2007 were mostly similar to those mentioned in 2005 and 2006, although there were significant decreases in the proportions saying they were asked for details and results of consultations and research and for minutes of meetings.

As shown in following table, 21% of those who received any requests for information from the public had received only ten requests or less, and just over half (53%) had received no more

than 50 requests. The average number of requests received in a year by authorities receiving any in 2007 was 104, due to a relatively small number of organisations receiving a high volume of requests (8% had received over 300 requests). The average of 104 requests received in 2007 was similar to previous years (with 110 in 2006 and 95 in 2005).

Those in large authorities who received any requests received around double those of small / medium authorities, as shown in the table below.

Number of requests received from public over last year					
	2005	2006	2007		
	Total sample	Total sample	Total sample	Large authorities	Small / medium authorities
Base: all receiving requests	376	417	377	268	109
Up to 10	25%	23%	21%	18%	29%
11 to 50	34%	31%	32%	28%	41%
51 to 100	15%	16%	15%	15%	18%
101 to 300	16%	17%	19%	24%	7%
Over 300	8%	12%	8%	10%	4%
Average number	95	110	104	122	62

As shown in the following table, authorities in Northern Ireland which 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	377	53	44
Up to 10	21%	18%	28%
11 to 50	32%	38%	33%
51 to 100	15%	6%	23%
101 to 300	19%	20%	10%
Over 300	8%	13%	3%
Average number	104	131	75

A high proportion of authorities which had received requests for information from the public had turned requests down in the past year. As shown in the following table, similar to 2005 and 2006, over two thirds (70%) 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 (62%). When these figures are re-percentage on the total sample, results suggest that around half (49%) 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 (68%).

Proportion having to turn down requests for information from public in past year		
	Based on all receiving requests	Re-percentage on total sample
All respondents 2005	68%	51%
All respondents 2006	68%	51%
All respondents 2007	70%	49%
Large authorities	73%	68%
Small/medium authorities	62%	27%

Authorities in Wales were significantly more likely to have turned requests from the public down (55% of the total sample) than those in Northern Ireland (35%), 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 (64%). The other most commonly cited reasons for turning down requests for information from the public were requests for commercially sensitive information (38%), information already available by other means (22%) and where the cost was above the threshold (21%). There was a significant increase in requests being turned down in 2007 due to the information being available by other means and the cost of providing the information being above the threshold. This could be due to respondents having more familiarity and confidence in the Act leading to them being more pragmatic about meeting requirements. A range of other reasons was given for turning down requests, but each only by a minority of respondents, as shown in the following table (which shows all mentions of 3% or more in 2007).

Types of information turned down			
	2005	2006	2007
Base: all having turned down requests for information	256	285	266
Personal information about staff	53%	57%	64%
Commercially sensitive information	33%	33%	38%
Information already available by other means	14%	11%	22%
Cost of providing information above threshold	8%	12%	21%
Information we don't have / hold / record	8%	7%	5%
Investigations / ongoing investigations	4%	7%	4%
Legally sensitive / legally privileged information	9%	5%	4%
Mention of specific section eg Section 1 / 41 etc	-	6%	3%
Other personal information / third party personal information	2%	11%	3%
Private / confidential information	9%	4%	3%
Information intended for future publication	-	2%	3%

4.4. Additional information released to the public because of the Freedom of Information 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. Over six in ten respondents (62%) felt their organisation released a lot or a little more information than they would have done without the Act. Encouragingly, there has been a significant increase in those who claimed they release a lot more information because of the Act between 2005 (19%) and 2007 (27%). Significantly more large authorities (78%) claim they released a lot or a little more information than they would have done without the Act than small/medium authorities (46%). Only one in five respondents (20%) said they did not release any more information at all than they would otherwise have done, with results similar to those in 2005 and 2006, as shown in the following table.

How much more information released to public because of the Freedom of Information Act					
	2005	2006	2007		
	Total sample	Total sample	Total sample	Large authorities	Small / medium authorities
Base: all respondents	500	564	522	284	238
A lot more	19%	24%	27%	38%	15%
A little more	39%	35%	35%	40%	31%
Not much more	18%	15%	15%	11%	18%
No more than before	21%	24%	20%	7%	35%

There was no significant 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 Freedom of Information Act			
	Total sample (All UK)	Wales	Northern Ireland
Base: all respondents	522	79	74
A lot more	27%	25%	28%
A little more	35%	32%	37%
Not much more	15%	16%	13%
No more than before	20%	25%	20%

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 information about decisions made by the organisation, internal policies and details of contracts awarded, as shown in the following table.

While there was a significant increase in 2007 of annual reports and audited accounts being made available now that would not otherwise be, there were significant decreases in meeting minutes, details and results of consultations and research and personal information about staff being made available. This is consistent with the significant decreases in 2007 for requests made by the public for details and results of consultations and research and meeting minutes. There was also a significant increase in 2007 of those who said they did not know what types of information were available now that the public would not have had access to before the Act. This is possibly due to new staff taking responsibility for the Act.

Types of information available that the public would not have had access to before the Freedom of Information Act (prompted)			
	2005	2006	2007
Base: all releasing more info due to Freedom of Information Act	379	414	401
Information about decisions made by organisation	34%	39%	39%
Internal policies (eg equal opportunities)	30%	39%	37%
Details of contracts awarded	39%	41%	36%
Statistics about organisation eg staff numbers	26%	34%	34%
Future strategies / objectives	24%	35%	33%
Details of what public money is spent on	26%	30%	31%
Information about organisation's performance	20%	28%	30%
Meeting minutes	31%	37%	24%
Annual reports / audited accounts	13%	16%	23%
Details and results of consultations / research	21%	27%	19%
Personal information about staff	10%	17%	9%
Don't know	23%	10%	15%

Similar to 2006, almost two thirds (61%) of authorities in 2007 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. As shown in the following chart, those in large authorities were slightly more likely to actively promote the information available (65%) than those in small authorities (57%) but the difference was not significant. Those in Northern Ireland were more likely to claim to actively promote this information (63%) compared to those in Wales (55%) but this difference is not significant compared to the total UK (61%).

Proportion who actively promote publication scheme & public's right to access information

33

2006 63%

2007 61%

2007: Large authority 65%

Small/medium authority 57%

Wales 55%

NI 63%

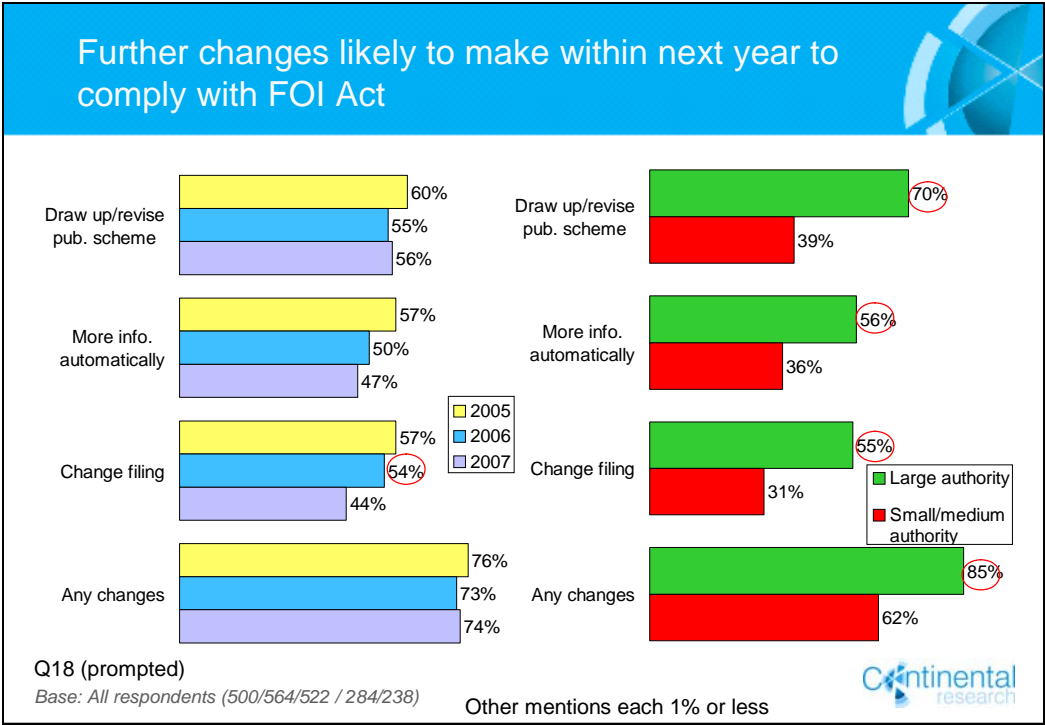
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Base: All respondents (564/522 / 284/238 / 79/74)

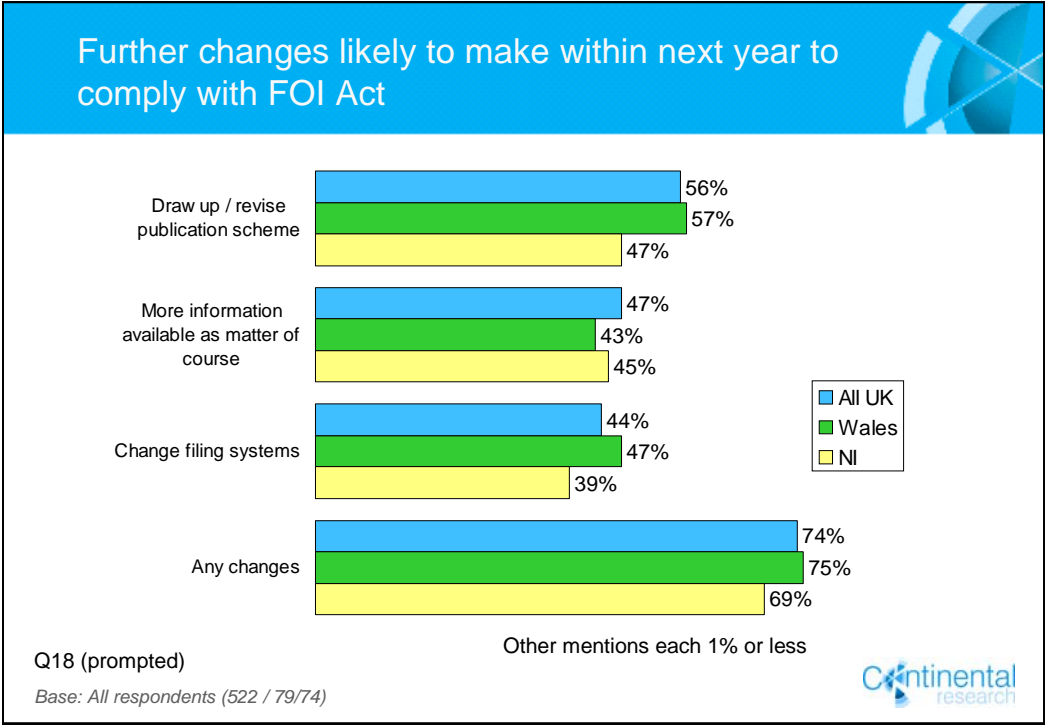
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4.5. Future changes

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 following chart, 74% of all respondents planned to make further changes, a similar level to 2005 and 2006. Significantly more of those in large authorities (85%) than in small/medium authorities (62%) said they might make changes in the future. Respondents were most likely to say they might draw up or revise a publication scheme (56%), followed by making more information available to the public as a matter of course (47%), and making changes to filing or record management systems (44%). There was a significant decrease in 2007 of respondents claiming that they are likely to change their filing system in the next year to comply with the Act, probably because the Act is more embedded and there is less need to alter systems.



While not significant, respondents in authorities in Northern Ireland were slightly less likely than the UK as a whole to say they might make further changes to comply with the Act in the next year as is illustrated in the following chart.



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 following table, annual reports/ audited accounts, details of future strategies/ objectives, and information about decisions made by the organisation were most frequently mentioned. All mentions other than those listed in the table were 5% or less and are not shown in the table. There were significant increases in 2007 in several types of information likely to be made available in the future: annual reports/ audited accounts, information about decisions made by the organisation and internal policies. There was a significant decrease in respondents claiming that meeting minutes were likely to be made available in the future.

Types of information likely to make available in the future (spontaneous)			
	2005	2006	2007
Base: all likely to publish more information as a matter of course	283	293	247
Annual reports / audited accounts	19%	18%	27%
Future strategies / objectives	20%	19%	26%
Information about decisions made by organisation	23%	18%	25%
Internal policies (eg equal opportunities)	24%	17%	24%
Information about organisation's performance	19%	19%	23%
Statistics about organisation (eg staff numbers)	18%	16%	21%
Details of contracts awarded	20%	15%	18%
Details of what public money is spent on	18%	15%	18%
Meeting minutes	27%	23%	16%
Details and results of consultations / research	14%	15%	15%

4.6. Attitudes to Freedom of Information Act

When asked how they felt about the Act overall, respondents were positive. As shown in the following table, similar to 2005 and 2006, four in five respondents (80%) felt the Act was a very good thing or a fairly good thing from the point of view of their organisation.

Furthermore, there was a significant increase in 2007 of respondents claiming that the Act is a very good thing. Those in large authorities were significantly more likely than those in small / medium authorities to say the Act was a good thing (87% vs. 72%), but both groups were highly positive. 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	2007		
	Total sample	Total sample	Total sample	Large authorities	Small / medium authorities
Base: all respondents	500	564	522	284	238
A very good thing	36%	32%	38%	42%	34%
A fairly good thing	45%	49%	42%	45%	38%
Not affected by Freedom of Information Act	14%	9%	11%	4%	18%
A very/fairly bad thing (net)	3%	6%	5%	5%	6%

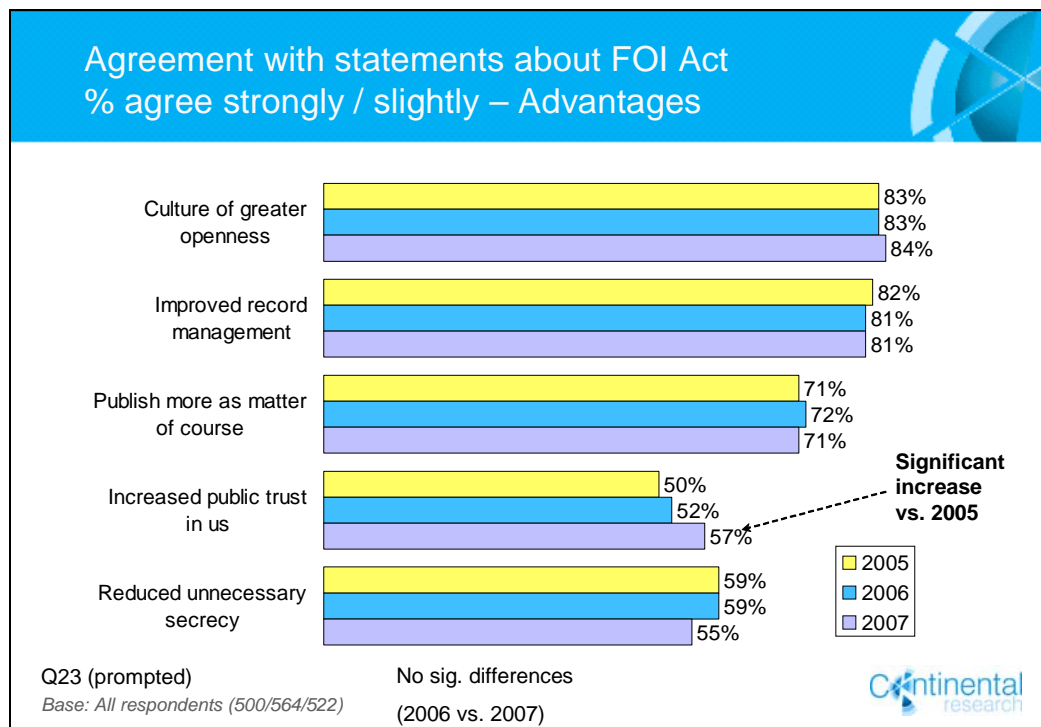
When asked to say, spontaneously, what they felt were the benefits of the Act from the point of view of their organisation, all but 16% of respondents in 2007 mentioned at least one positive aspect, as shown in the following table. The most commonly mentioned benefits, particularly by large authorities, were increased openness or transparency as a result of the Act, or the fact that it led to improvements in record management, more accountability or improved relationships with the public. Significantly more respondents in 2007 than in 2006 mentioned that the Act had led to them providing a better quality of service and that it allowed them to publish more information.

Perceived benefits of the Act for organisation (spontaneous)					
	2005	2006	2007		
	Total sample	Total sample	Total sample	Large authorities	Small / medium authorities
Base: all respondents	500	564	522	284	238
Openness / transparency	35%	37%	39%	40%	38%
Better record management / more organised records	27%	18%	14%	21%	7%
Accountability	18%	16%	14%	19%	9%
Improved relationship with public / public understanding	17%	17%	13%	13%	12%
Improved public access to info / helps us respond to public	16%	12%	9%	11%	7%
Improved quality of service / ensures best practice	5%	5%	8%	10%	6%
Allows us to publish more/ we publish more information	-	2%	6%	8%	4%
Agree with Freedom of Information Act / right for public to have info	4%	3%	5%	7%	4%
Staff more aware of their responsibilities	3%	4%	3%	4%	1%
Consistency of release of information/good to have set rules	-	2%	3%	4%	2%
Ability to demonstrate how decisions are made	3%	4%	3%	3%	3%
Raised public awareness of what can obtain	2%	3%	3%	2%	4%
No benefits / don't know	15%	15%	16%	11%	21%

When asked what they felt the disadvantages of the Act were for their organisation, 26% could not think of any. Significantly more respondents in small/medium authorities (36%) than in large authorities (18%) 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 around one in five respondents (21%, significantly less than in 2006). Other disadvantages of the Act are problems with workload (15%), and having to respond to commercial, research or media requests (12%). There was a significant increase in respondents claiming that the Act is open to abuse by people and interest groups (10% vs. 1% in 2006). There was a significant decrease in respondents mentioning issues with cost or finance from 2006 to 2007.

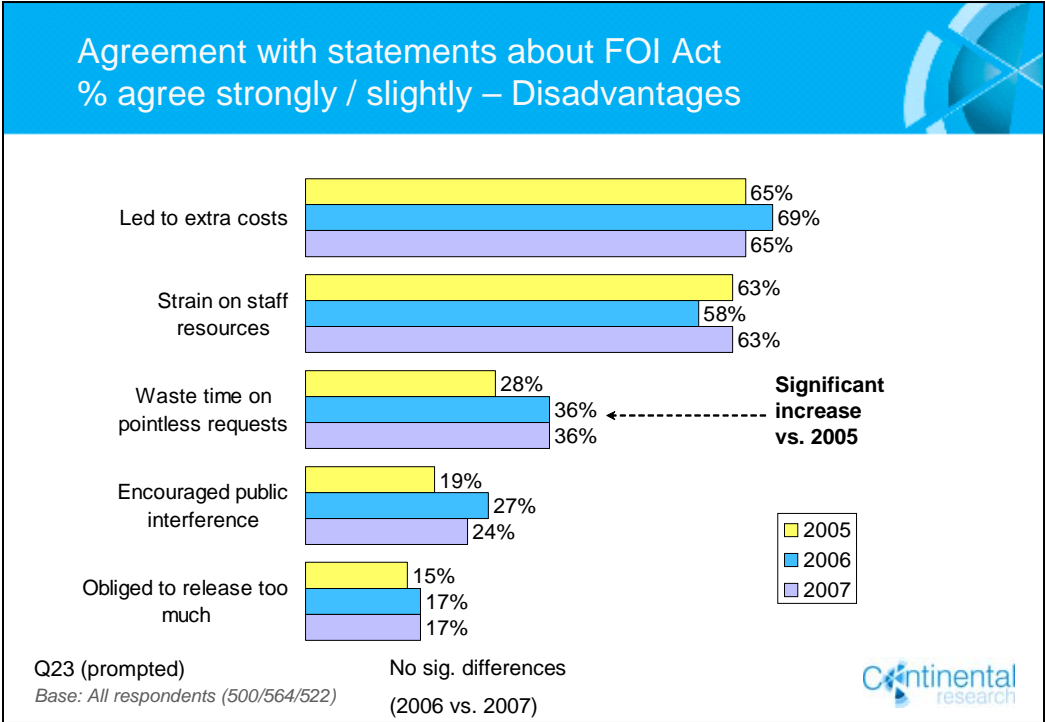
Perceived disadvantages of the Act for organisation (spontaneous)					
	2005	2006	2007		
	Total sample	Total sample	Total sample	Large authorities	Small / medium authorities
Base: all respondents	500	564	522	284	238
Time / time consuming	22%	29%	21%	25%	16%
Workload	13%	15%	15%	16%	14%
Have to respond to commercial / research / media requests	8%	11%	12%	15%	7%
Act is open to abuse by people/interest groups	-	1%	10%	14%	5%
Cost / finance / no funding from government	13%	13%	8%	11%	6%
Resource element / resource implications	9%	11%	8%	10%	7%
Malicious/ vexatious requests eg by competitors	6%	4%	6%	8%	3%
Administrative burden / bureaucracy	10%	7%	5%	5%	7%
Having to disclose personal/confidential information	2%	3%	5%	5%	5%
None/don't know	25%	21%	26%	18%	36%

Reactions to the Act were positive too across a range of attitude statements read to respondents. As shown in the following chart, 84% of all respondents agreed strongly or slightly that the Act promoted a culture of greater openness and 81% agreed that it had encouraged them to improve their record management systems. Almost three quarters (71%) of respondents agreed that the Act meant they published more information as a matter of course now, and over half agreed that it had increased the public's trust in them (57%) and that it reduced unnecessary secrecy about the way they worked (55%). These positive results were very similar to those seen in 2005 and 2006. While there were no significant differences in 2007 compared to 2006 there has been a gradual increase in respondents agreeing that the Act has led to an increase in the public's trust of their organisation and the result in 2007 is significantly higher compared to 2005.

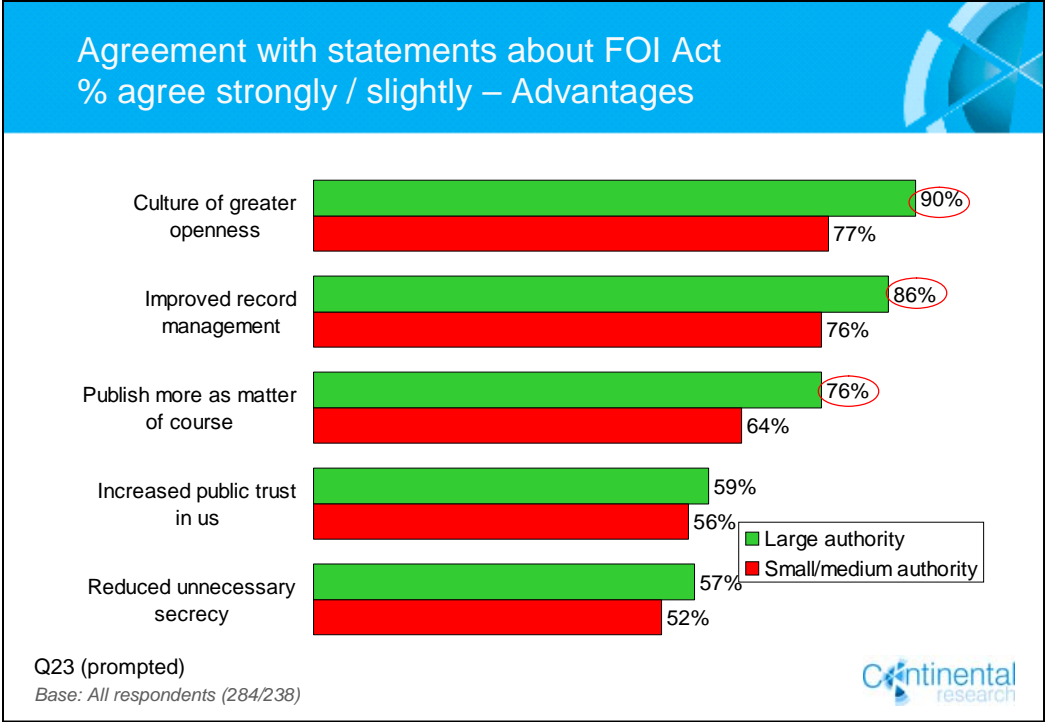


On the negative side, around two thirds (65%) of respondents agreed that the Act had led to extra costs and that it had put a strain on staff resources (63%). Over a third (36%) felt that the Act meant they had to waste time responding to pointless requests from the public and around a quarter (24%) agreed that it encouraged the public to interfere too much, although only one in six (17%) said it obliged them to release too much information.

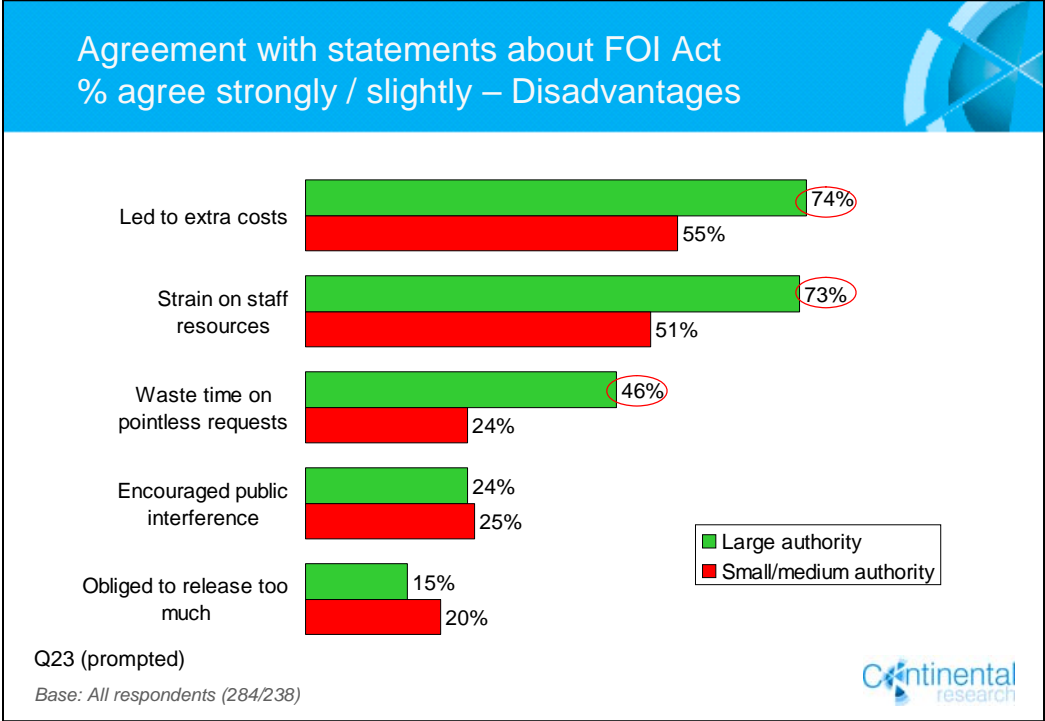
While there were no significant differences in 2007 compared to 2006 in disadvantages of the Act, significantly more respondents agreed that the Act led to them wasting a lot of time responding to pointless requests from the public compared to 2005.



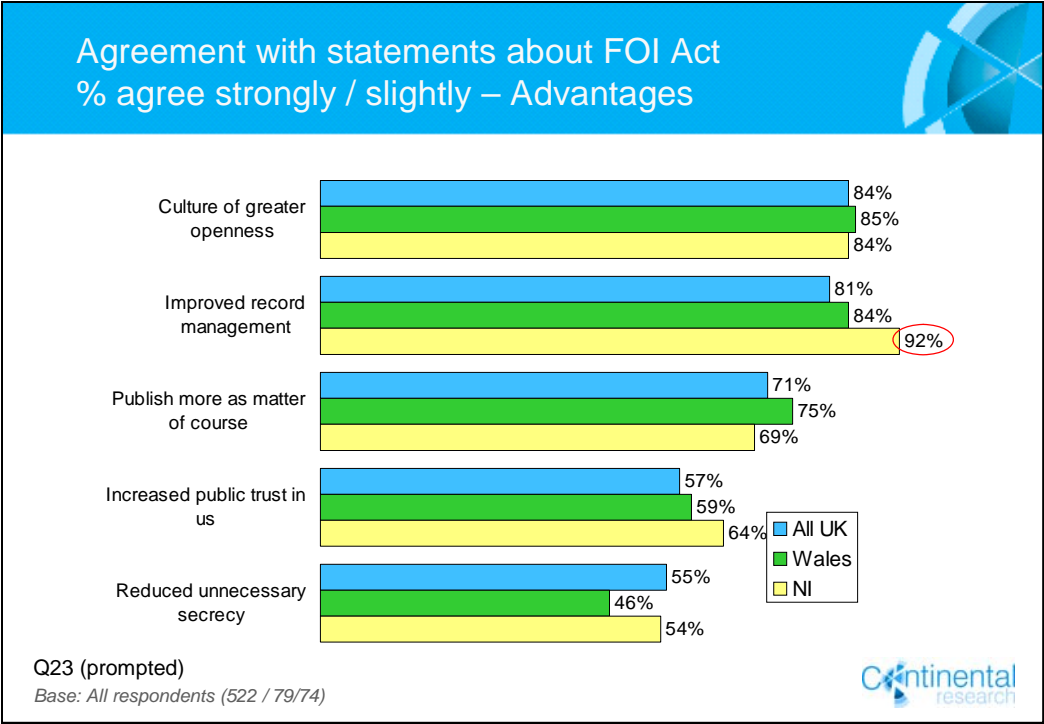
As shown in the following chart, respondents in large authorities were more likely to agree with each of the positive statements about the Act, and significantly more likely to see the benefits of the Act in terms of increasing openness, improving record management and leading them to publish more information as a matter of course. This is encouraging as those in large authorities tend to be more involved with the Act.



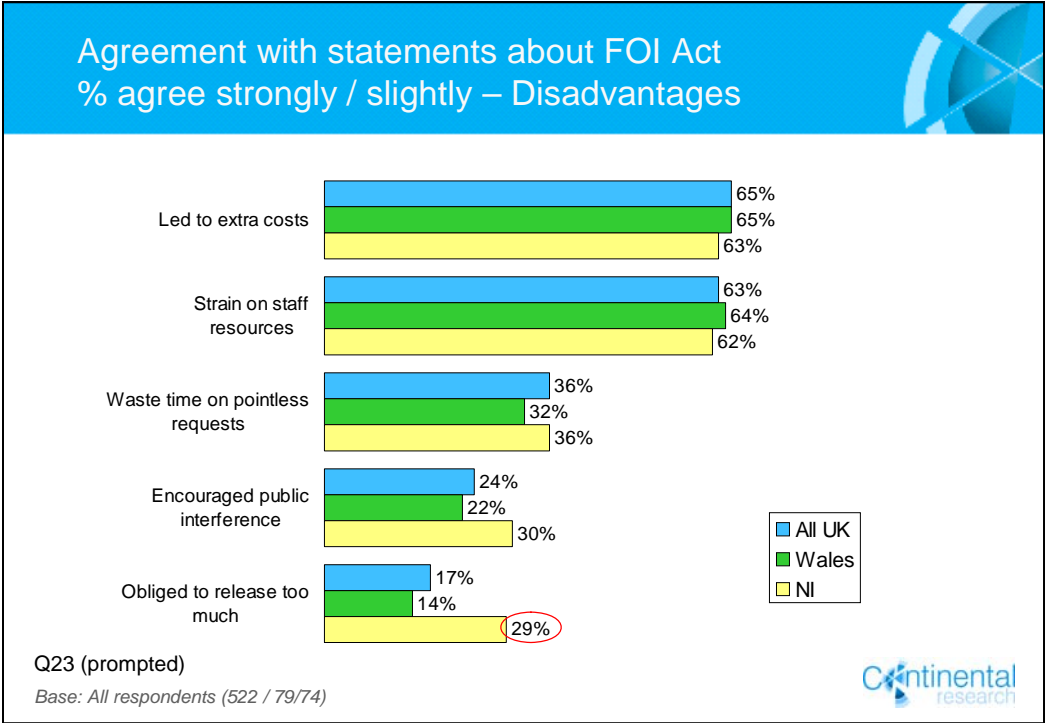
Larger authorities were also more likely to perceive disadvantages of the Act, including suffering strains on financial or staff resources, and to feel time is wasted dealing with pointless requests, as is illustrated in the following chart.



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 of the advantages of the Act by region.



Respondents in Northern Ireland were also significantly more likely than the UK as a whole to agree that the Act had meant they were obliged to release too much information, as shown in the following chart.



4.7. 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 (59%) than a substantial impact (12%). These results were very similar to 2005 and 2006. 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 Freedom of Information Act had on organisation					
	2005	2006	2007		
	Total sample	Total sample	Total sample	Large authorities	Small / medium authorities
Base: all respondents	500	564	522	284	238
A substantial impact	12%	14%	12%	17%	6%
Some impact	58%	57%	59%	68%	48%
Not much impact	23%	23%	23%	12%	34%
No impact	7%	5%	6%	1%	11%

For the majority of organisations, the Act has meant additional workload. As shown in the following table, in 2005, 2006 and 2007 over three quarters of all respondents (77% in 2007) 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 (86%) than in small/medium authorities (66%).

How much additional workload Act has meant for organisation					
	2005	2006	2007		
	Total sample	Total sample	Total sample	Large authorities	Small / medium authorities
Base: all respondents	500	564	522	284	238
A lot	27%	32%	29%	40%	17%
A little	51%	47%	48%	46%	49%
Not much	14%	15%	16%	9%	25%
None at all	6%	5%	5%	2%	9%

There was a fairly even split between those who claim that complying with the Act had got easier over the past year (26%) compared to those who claim that it had got more complicated (21%). Around half (52%) of respondents felt things had not changed. The proportion of respondents who felt that complying with the Act had got easier decreased in 2007, this is due to a significant increase in those perceiving that there has been no change. As shown in the following table, large authorities were significantly more likely to feel that things had got easier, while those in smaller authorities were the most likely to feel things had not changed. Those in large authorities were also more likely to feel things had got more complicated but this was the minority view regardless of organisation size.

Changes in difficulty of complying with requirements of Act over past year (2007)				
	2006	2007		
	Total sample	Total sample	Large authorities	Small / medium authorities
Base: all respondents	564	522	284	238
A lot easier	6%	5%	5%	4%
A little easier	31%	21%	24%	17%
A little more complicated	15%	16%	20%	11%
A lot more complicated	5%	5%	8%	2%
Things have not changed	41%	52%	41%	65%

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 (25%), followed by making information available online (13%). While overall a similar proportion of respondents in 2007 (55% vs. 54% in 2006) could think of at least one idea that might help their organisation implement the Act, there were significant increases in several of the suggestions made in 2007 compared to 2006. This may be due to respondents becoming more aware of what types of assistance would be useful to them as they become more familiar with the Act.

Additional help or support ICO could provide (spontaneous)				
	2006	2007		
	Total sample	Total sample	Large authorities	Small / medium authorities
Base: all respondents	564	522	284	238
Guidance	18%	25%	29%	20%
Information available online	6%	13%	12%	15%
Quicker response time to enquiry	4%	9%	8%	11%
e-bulletins	4%	9%	9%	9%
Training courses	6%	8%	9%	7%
Raise public awareness / understanding of Act	5%	8%	8%	7%
Case law	1%	5%	6%	4%
Seminars	2%	5%	5%	4%
Clarity / clearer / simple advice	4%	2%	3%	1%
Improved website/easier to navigate/ more information	1%	2%	3%	1%
More consistent advice	1%	2%	3%	1%
Helpline	3%	2%	2%	1%
Advice on specific areas eg data sharing	2%	2%	1%	2%
Nothing / don't know	46%	45%	41%	50%

4.9. Awareness and use of information available on ICO Website

Similar to 2006, when prompted, over two thirds of respondents (71%) 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 (83%) than small/medium ones (56%). By region, awareness was significantly lower in Northern Ireland (53%) compared to the UK as a whole (71%).

The vast majority (83%) 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 following table, 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				
	2006	2007		
	Total sample	Total sample	Large authorities	Small / medium authorities
Base: all aware decisions are published	385	377	239	138
Very useful	46%	43%	48%	34%
Fairly useful	42%	40%	41%	39%
Not very useful	7%	7%	6%	9%
Not at all useful	3%	4%	1%	10%
Don't know	2%	6%	4%	7%

Similar to 2006, over half (57%) 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 (71%) than small/medium ones (41%) and by region, awareness was significantly lower in Northern Ireland (37%) than the UK as a whole (57%).

The vast majority (81%) 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 significantly more likely than those in smaller authorities to find this information useful.

Usefulness of Information Tribunal appeals on website as information resource				
	2006	2007		
	Total sample	Total sample	Large authorities	Small / medium authorities
Base: all aware appeals are published	294	305	206	99
Very useful	45%	40%	45%	32%
Fairly useful	43%	41%	42%	39%
Not very useful	7%	8%	6%	11%
Not at all useful	2%	5%	2%	11%
Don't know	3%	5%	5%	6%

Appendix of abbreviations

eg	for example
etc	etcetera
Exec	Executive
FE	Further education
FOI	Freedom of information
GP	General practitioner
HSS	Health and Social Services
ICO	Information Commissioner's Office
info	information
IT	information technology
NDPBs	Non-Departmental Public Bodies
NHS	National Health Service
NI	Northern Ireland
PA	Personal Assistant
vs.	versus