

Freedom of information creates more confidence, research reveals

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Source: Office of the Information Commissioner

The Freedom of Information Act is clearly increasing people's confidence in public authorities, according to new research published by the Information Commissioner's Office.

The findings show that 72% of individuals have more confidence in public authorities because of freedom of information, compared with only 55% in spring 2005, when the Act had only just come into force. Around three quarters of individuals (74%) questioned felt the Freedom of Information Act helped to promote accountability and transparency in public authorities, a significant rise from just over half in 2005. The research also shows that 76% of individuals believe the Act has increased their knowledge of public authorities, a jump from 62% in 2005.

Public authorities continue to have a positive attitude towards the Act. Some 82% of public authorities believe the Freedom of Information Act is needed.

Commenting on the research, Information Commissioner, Richard Thomas, said: "It is extremely encouraging to see the positive impact the Freedom of Information Act is having on individuals. A great deal of information has been released over the past 18 months, which would not otherwise have been in the public domain. Almost every day, the phrase "released under the Freedom of Information Act" appears in both national and local newspapers, reporting the wide range of information that has been disclosed, from restaurant hygiene inspections, and university examination pass rates, to details of politicians' expenses, European Union farm subsidies and hospital mortality rates. Increased confidence in public authorities is clearly of benefit to both individuals and organisations, showing that greater openness is starting to change the culture of government at all levels"

In the Commissioner's recent annual report he signalled that he will take a more robust approach toward the small number of public authorities that repeatedly fail to meet acceptable timescales, and that where he finds systemic non compliance with the Act he will take formal action. ENDS Notes to Editors The research, using a sample of 1000 interviews, was conducted by SMSR Ltd of Kingston upon Hull. A full breakdown of the methodology is available.

See also: <http://www.egovmonitor.com/node/7243>