

# Freedom of Information Statistics in Central Government for 2020

This bulletin presents statistics on Freedom of Information (FOI) requests in central government for 2020, including key breakdowns by monitored body.

## Key statistics:

In 2020 there were **44,195 FOI requests received** across all monitored bodies\*. This is a decrease of 5,244 (-11%) on 2019. This represents the lowest number since 2010 (43,921).

Across all monitored bodies, **87% of requests were responded to in time**, down from 93% in 2019. This is lowest figure since 2009 (86%).

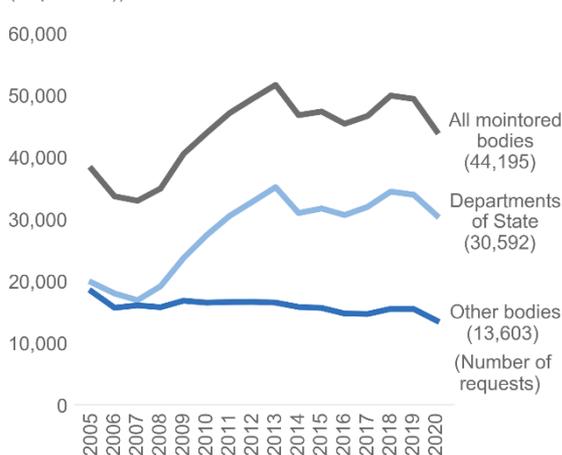
Of the 44,195 FOI requests received, 31,600 were resolvable. Of these, **41% were granted in full**, down from 43% in 2019 - the lowest figure since recording began in 2005. **38% of requests were withheld in full**, down from 39% in 2019. The remaining resolvable requests were not yet processed or were partially withheld.

Of the 17,197 requests withheld in full or in part, 29% were withheld due to the cost of response exceeding the statutory limit, 3% were withheld as vexatious or repeated, and the remaining 68% fell under other exemptions.

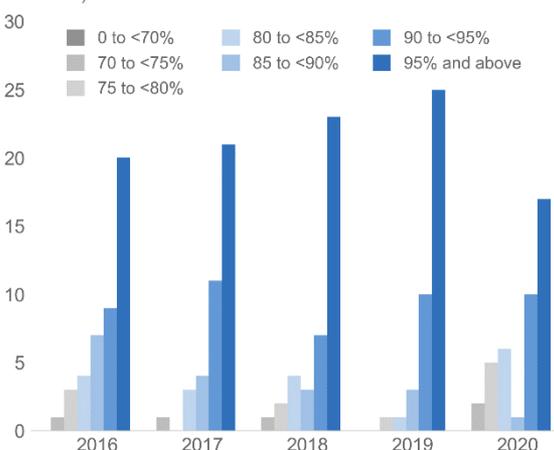
## Coronavirus (COVID-19)

*These data are affected by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in the UK. Take caution when interpreting these data and comparing them with previous time periods. More information is available in the notes section on page 22.*

Number of FOI requests by year since 2005 (see Table 1 (Expanded))



Number of monitored bodies by their percentage of responses to request in time since 2016 (see Table 5 and dataset)



\* A full list of monitored bodies included in these statistics is provided on page 20



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# Introduction

The FOI Act 2000<sup>1</sup> and the associated Environmental Information Regulations<sup>2</sup> 2004 allow individuals to request information from public bodies.

This bulletin presents FOI statistics for 41 central government bodies, including all major Departments of State, and a number of other bodies with significant regulatory, policy-making or information handling functions. A listing of all monitored bodies and associated acronyms is included in the section on scope at the end of this bulletin.

The annual statistics report on:

- The initial handling of FOI requests
- The number received during the quarter
- The timeliness of issuing a substantive response
- The rates of disclosure of requested information
- The exemptions applied when withholding information
- The outcome of internal reviews and external complaints

## Corrections and Revisions

Monitored bodies review the figures provided in the quarterly monitoring, and may make internal revisions to the statistics after publication. The revised figures are then included in the annual end of year monitoring. As a result, the quarter to quarter statistics will not always sum to the annual figures. Where departments have made revisions to quarterly figures these will be noted in the statistical tables published in the annual report.

## Further analysis and methodology

Summary information on the scope and methodology of monitoring is available at the end of this bulletin, with full details available in the quality and methodology information document published on the gov.uk website, along with previous versions of this bulletin: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/government-foi-statistics>

## National Statistics

Freedom of Information statistics are designated National Statistics in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007. National Statistics status means that official statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality, and public value.

All official statistics should comply with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics<sup>3</sup>. They are awarded National Statistics status following an assessment by the UK Statistics Authority's regulatory arm. The Authority considers whether the statistics meet the highest standards of Code compliance, including the value they add to public decisions and debate. FOI statistics were most recently assessed by the Authority during 2016, with continuing designation granted in June 2017.

## Request for Feedback

We always welcome user feedback on our publications. We can be contacted at: [foistatistics@cabinetoffice.gov.uk](mailto:foistatistics@cabinetoffice.gov.uk)

<sup>1</sup> Full text of the FOI Act: [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/36/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/36/contents)

<sup>2</sup> Full text of the EIR regulations: [www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2004/3391/made](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2004/3391/made)

<sup>3</sup> Code of Practice for Official Statistics: <https://code.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/>



# Volumes

- There were 44,195 FOI requests received across all monitored bodies in 2020
- The number of requests has decreased by 5,244 (-11%) from 2019
- There were 1,914 requests treated under the Environmental Information Regulations

## The number of requests in 2020 was 44,195

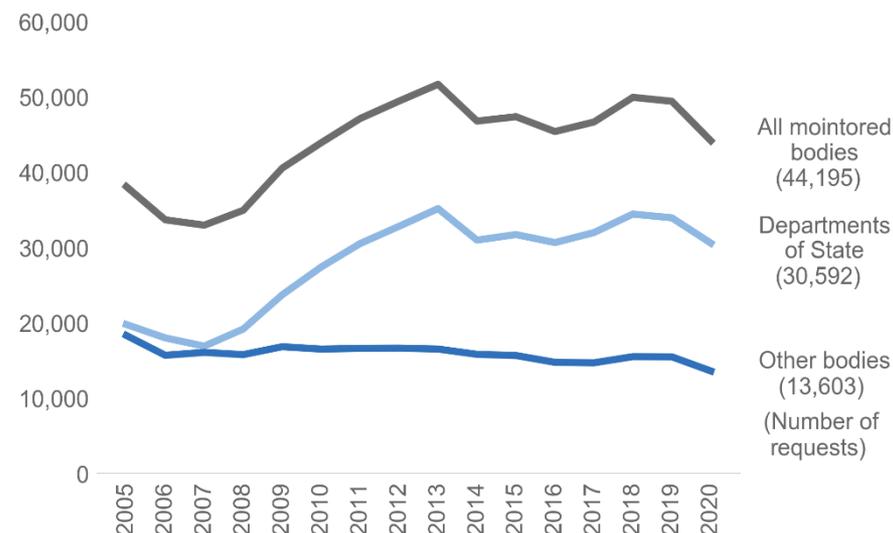
- During 2020 there were **44,195 FOI requests received** across all monitored bodies. This is a decrease of 5,244 (-11%) from 2019.
- Over two thirds of these (30,592) were at Departments of State
- The remaining 13,603 were received by other monitored bodies.

### 'Non routine' requests <sup>1</sup>

The statistics in this bulletin relate to 'non-routine' information requests where:

- It was necessary to take a considered view on how to handle the request under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act, and
- Freedom of Information officers were informed of the request and logged it in their case management systems.

Number of FOI requests by year since 2005 (see Table 1 (Expanded))



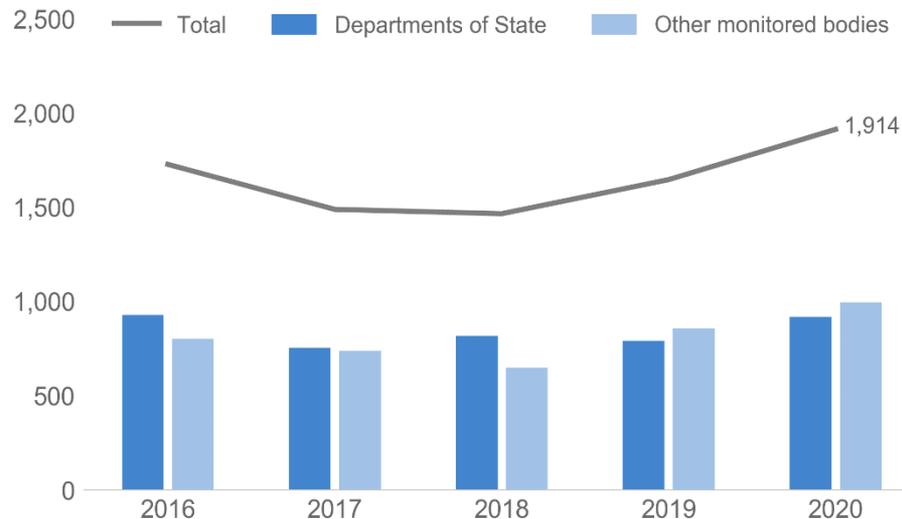
## The number of requests handled under EIRs has risen by 16%

### Environmental Information Regulations requests (EIRs) <sup>1</sup>

Any recorded information that falls within the definition of 'environmental information' will be subject to the regulations in addition to the FOI act.

- Since 2019, the number of FOI requests handled under EIRs has increased by 267 (+16%).
- Departments of State handled 920 requests under EIRs. An increase of 130 (+16%) on 2019.
- Over 2019, the number of requests handled under EIRs for other monitored bodies rose by 137 (+16%) since 2019.

Number of requests handled under EIRs since 2016 (see Table 2 and dataset)



<sup>1</sup> Please see the FOI Statistics quality and methodology information document for more information: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/foi-statistics-supporting-documents>

## Four departments received almost half of FOI requests made to Departments of State

- During 2020, DWP, MOD, MOJ and HO made up the four largest Departments of State in terms of number of FOI requests for the seventh year in a row.
- Combined, they make up almost half (48%) of FOI requests made to Departments of State.
- The Health and Safety Executive and The National Archives account for almost half (46%) of requests to other monitored bodies.

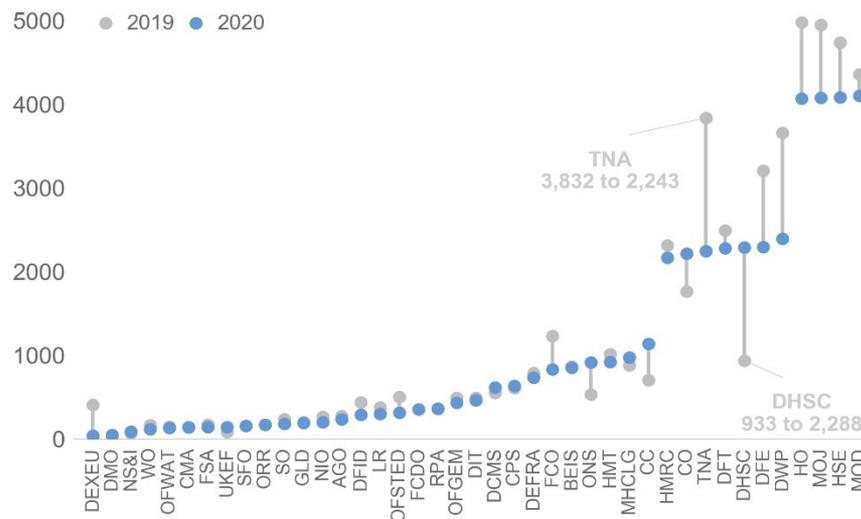
Proportion of FOI requests across all monitored bodies in 2020 (see Table 2)



## The number of requests received decreased for 26 bodies and increased for 14

- For most bodies, the proportion of requests accounted for by each monitored body has remained fairly stable over time.
- The largest decrease in requests amongst all monitored bodies since 2019 occurred at the National Archives (-1,589).
- The Department of Health and Social Care saw the largest increase on 2019 (+1,355).

Volume of FOI requests across all monitored bodies in 2020 compared to 2019 (see Table 3 and dataset)





# Timeliness

- 87% of FOI requests were responded to in time
- 41% of monitored bodies responded to 95% or more of requests in time
- Across all monitored bodies the percentage of requests responded to in time ranged from 72% to 100%

# 87% of requests were responded to in time, down from 93% in 2019

## Timeliness

The FOI Act requires public bodies to respond to requests for information in a timely manner.

'In time' responses are those processed within the statutory deadline (20 working days) or subject to a permitted deadline extension, including:

- Additional time for public interest tests under the FOI act.
- Extensions under the Environmental Information Regulations for complex requests.
- 10 additional working days for archival records from The National Archives.

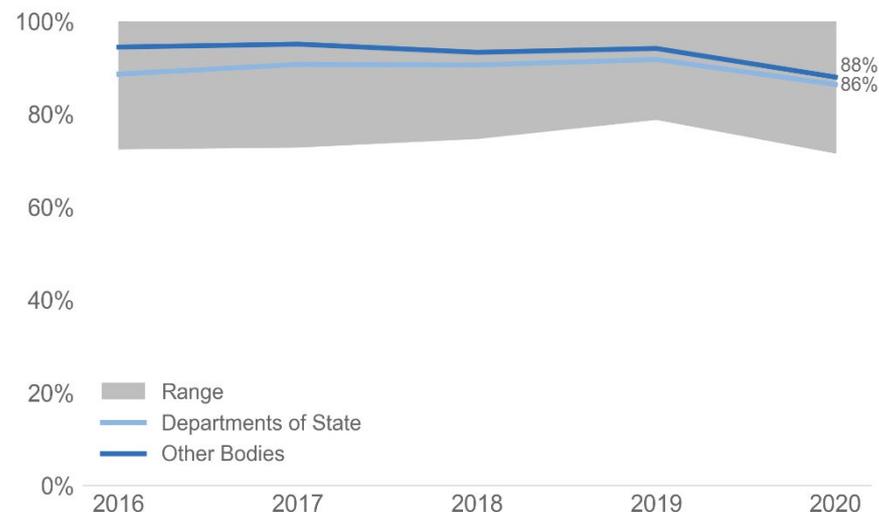
**Across all monitored bodies, 87% of requests were responded to in time, down from 93% in 2019.**

- Across all Departments of State 86% of requests were responded to in time, down from 92% in 2019. This represents the lowest figure since 2009 (81%).
- Across all other monitored bodies 88% of requests were responded to in time, down from 94% in 2019. This represents the lowest figure since recording began in 2005.
- Across all monitored bodies the percentage of requests responded to in time ranged from 72% to 100%.
- 17 monitored bodies responded to 95% or more of requests in time, down from 25 bodies in 2019.
- Many monitored bodies showed large changes in timeliness between 2019 and 2020 (see next page).

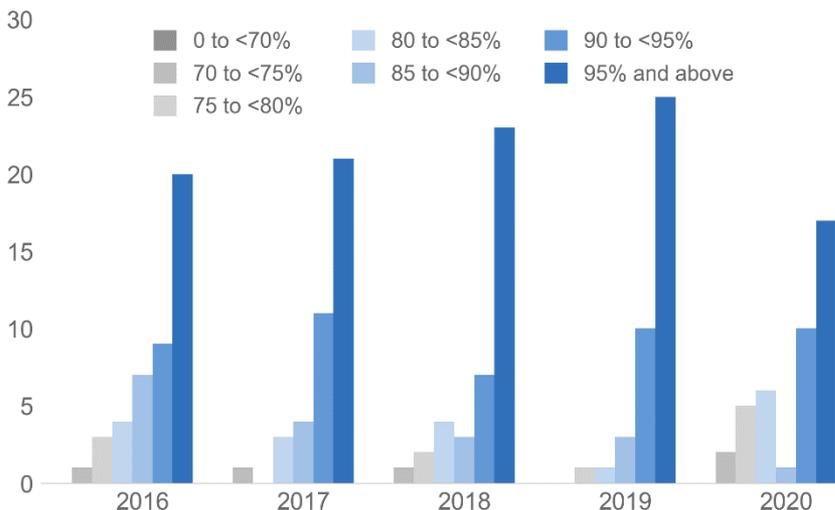
## Statistical Note

Where monitored bodies only receive a small number of requests they can demonstrate higher variability in their statistics.

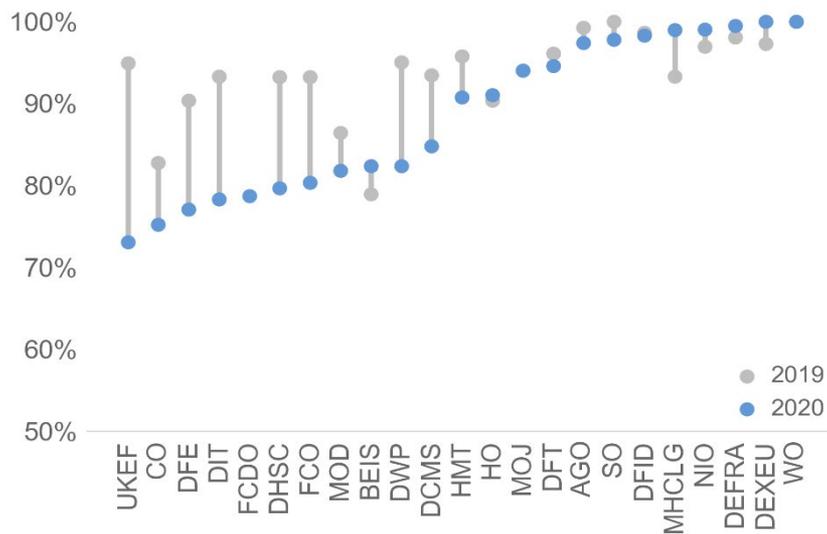
Percentage of responses to FOI requests in time across all monitored bodies since 2016 (see Table 5 and dataset)



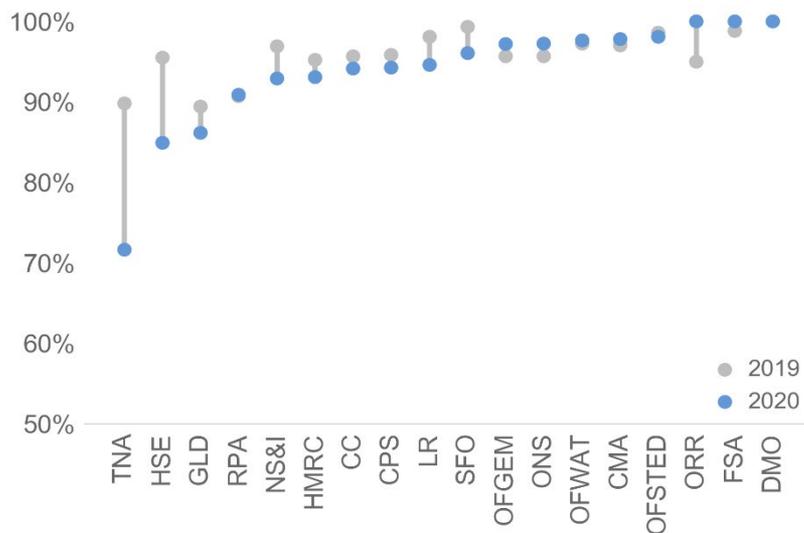
Number of monitored bodies by their percentage of responses to requests in time since 2016 (see Table 5 and dataset)



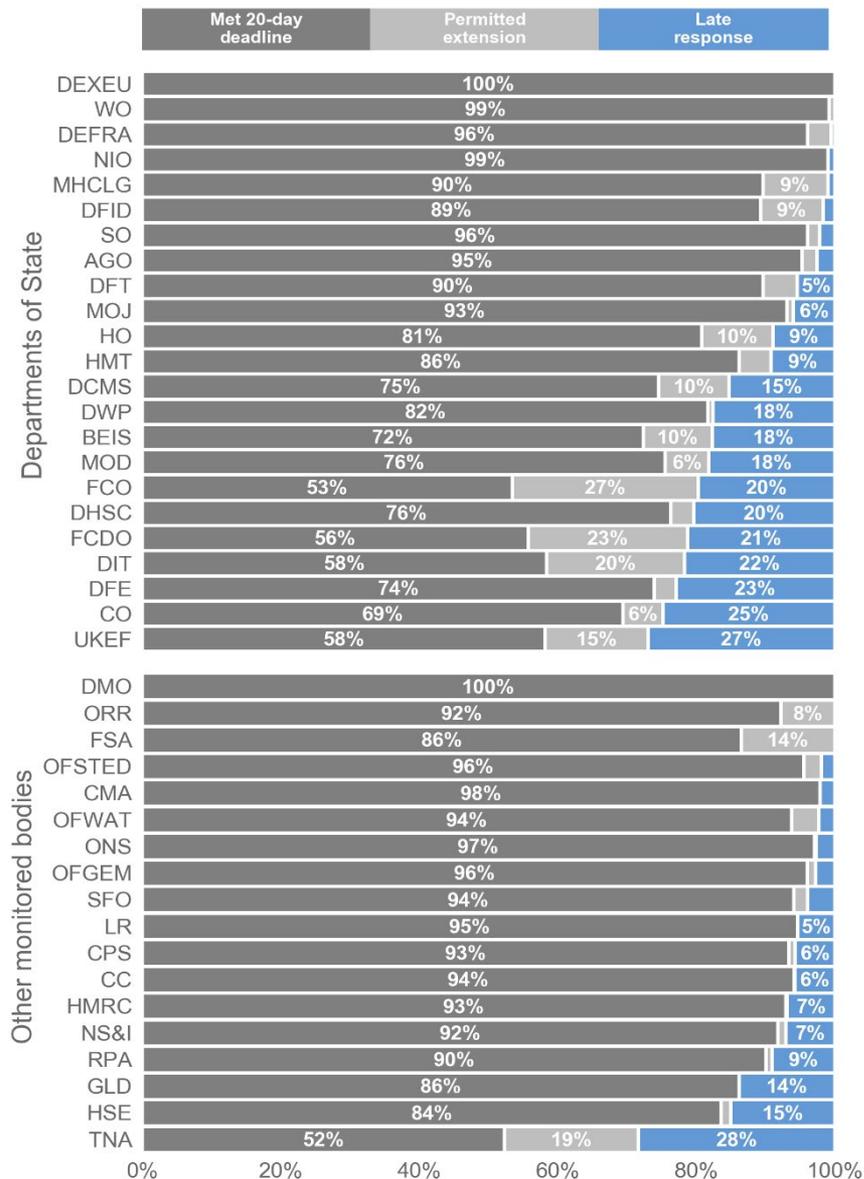
Departments of State: Percentage of requests responded to in time by department in 2020 and 2019 (see Table 5 and dataset)



Other monitored bodies: Percentage of requests responded to in time by department in 2020 and 2019 (see Table 5 and dataset)



Timeliness of response to FOI requests in 2020 (see Table 4)





# Outcomes of FOI requests

## Important Note: Additional measures for FOI outcomes

This bulletin provides additional statistics on FOI request outcomes.

Prior to the Q4 2018 bulletin only the headline measure was presented where 'procedural refusals' within the statistics are classified as resolvable requests that have been fully withheld. 'Resolvable requests' are defined as all those where it is possible to make a substantive decision on whether to release the requested information. They exclude requests which are lapsed or 'on-hold', where the information is not held, and where it was necessary to provide advice and assistance since in each of these cases it would not have been possible to resolve the request in the form it was asked.

FOI requests that have been refused for being vexatious or repeated, along with those refused on cost grounds are treated and included in these statistics as resolvable requests that have been 'fully-withheld'. These types of refusals are referred to as 'procedural refusals' in these statistics.

To better understand the impact on the statistics of classifying 'procedural refusals' as resolvable requests that have been 'fully-withheld', additional statistics are now presented on pages 12 & 13 that excludes 'procedural refusals' from resolvable requests and requests that have been 'fully-withheld'.

**The headline statistics for 'resolvable' requests and their outcomes continues to include 'procedural refusals' as requests that have been 'fully-withheld'.**

## Almost three quarters of the 44,195 requests received in 2020 were resolvable, of which 41% were granted in full

44,195 requests were received in 2020. Of these:

### 31,600 (72%) of requests were resolvable.

Resolvable requests are those where it was possible to give a substantive decision on whether to release the requested information.

Of these:

- 12,994 were granted in full.
- 17,197 were withheld in full or in part, where:
  - 266 were vexatious, as defined in Section 14 of the Act.
  - 190 were repeated, as defined in Section 14 of the Act.
  - 5,030 had a cost of response which exceeded the statutory limit as defined in Section 12 of the Act.
  - 11,711 involved information subject to one of the exemptions and exceptions listed under Sections 22-44.
- 1,409 were not yet processed.

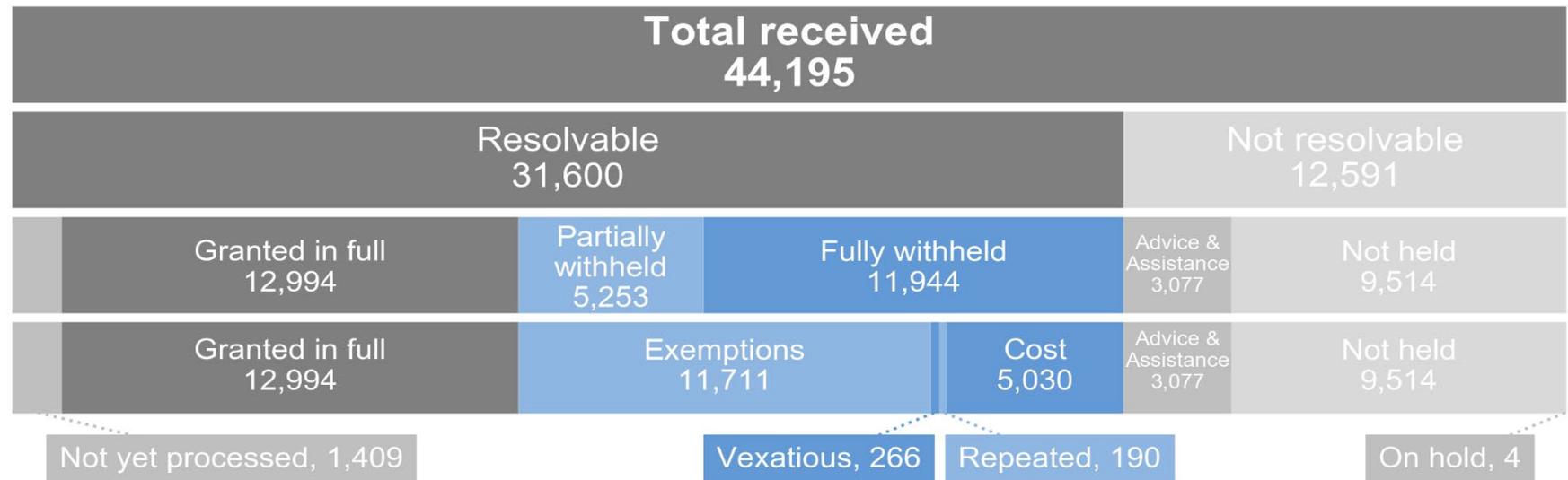
### 12,591 (28%) of requests were not resolvable.

Of these:

- 3,077 requests required further clarification prior to responding, and monitored bodies provided “advice and assistance” on how to reformulate the request.
- 9,514 involved information not held by the responding body.

**4 (0.01%) were on hold** at the time of monitoring.

Outcomes of FOI requests received in 2020 (see Table 2, 6, 8 and dataset)



# There is wide variation in the outcome of FOI requests across monitored bodies

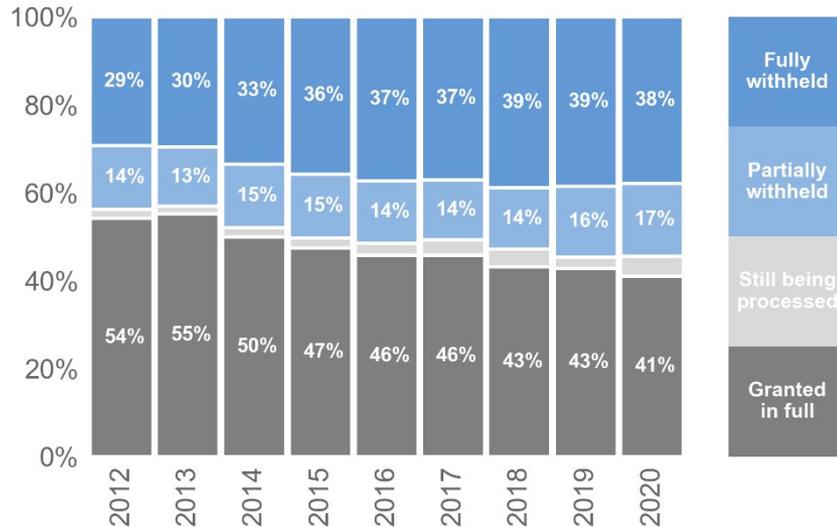
Of resolvable requests:

- 41% were granted in full, down from 43% in 2019. This is the lowest figure since recording started in 2005.
- 17% were partially withheld, up from 16% in 2019.
- 38% were fully withheld, down from 39% in 2019.

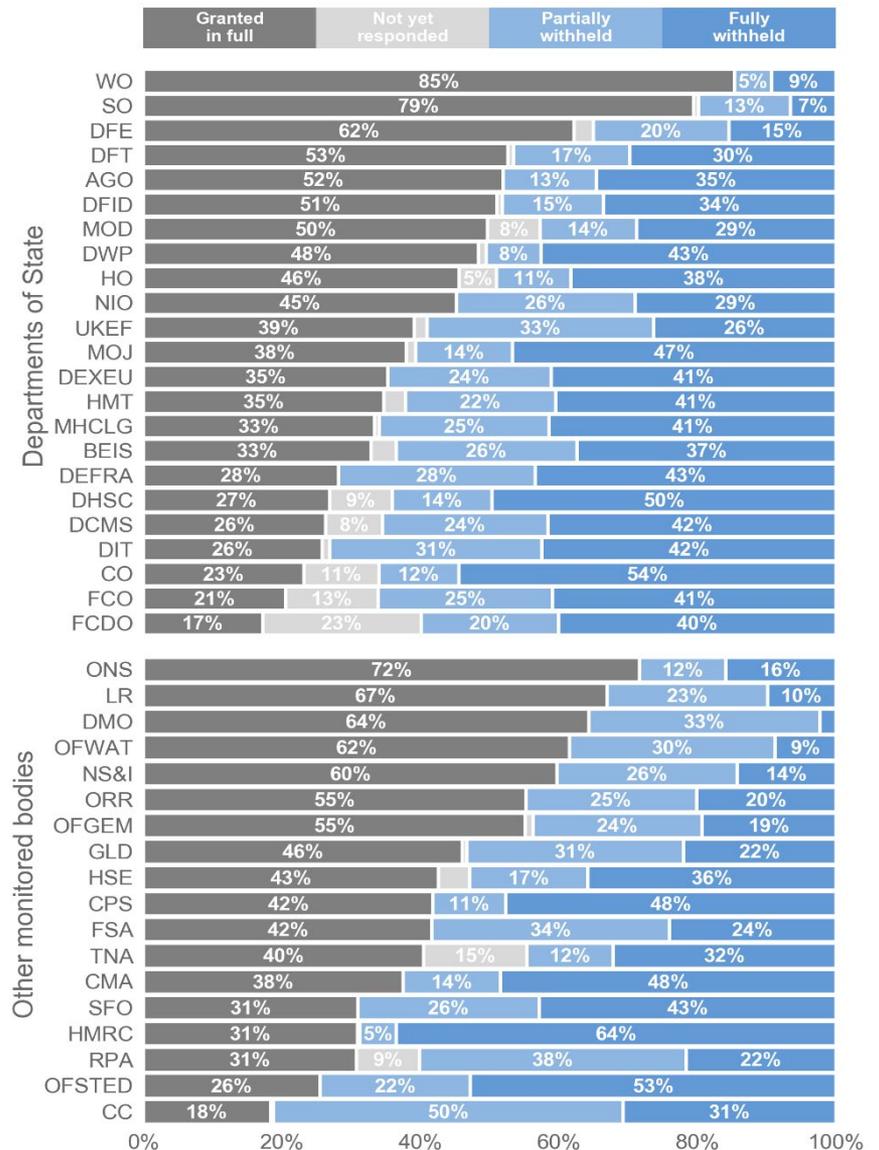
These outcomes varied across monitored bodies:

- Requests were granted in full 75% or more of the time at two bodies, down from three bodies in 2019.
- Four monitored bodies granted 25% or fewer requests in full, unchanged from 2019.

Outcomes of FOI requests as a percentage of resolvable requests since 2012 (see Table 7a and dataset)



Outcomes of FOI requests as a percentage of resolvable requests in 2020 (see Table 6)



## 59% of the 44,195 requests received in 2020 were resolvable excluding procedural refusals, of which 50% were granted in full

44,195 requests were received in 2020. Of these:

### 26,114 (59%) of requests were resolvable excluding procedural refusals.

Of these:

- 12,994 were granted in full.
- 11,711 were withheld in full or in part, involving information subject to one of the exemptions and exceptions listed under Sections 22-44.
- 1,409 were not yet processed.

### 5,486 (12%) of requests were procedural refusals.

Of these:

- 266 were vexatious, as defined in Section 14 of the Act.
- 190 were repeated, as defined in Section 14 of the Act.
- 5,030 had a cost of response which exceeded the statutory limit as defined in Section 12 of the Act.

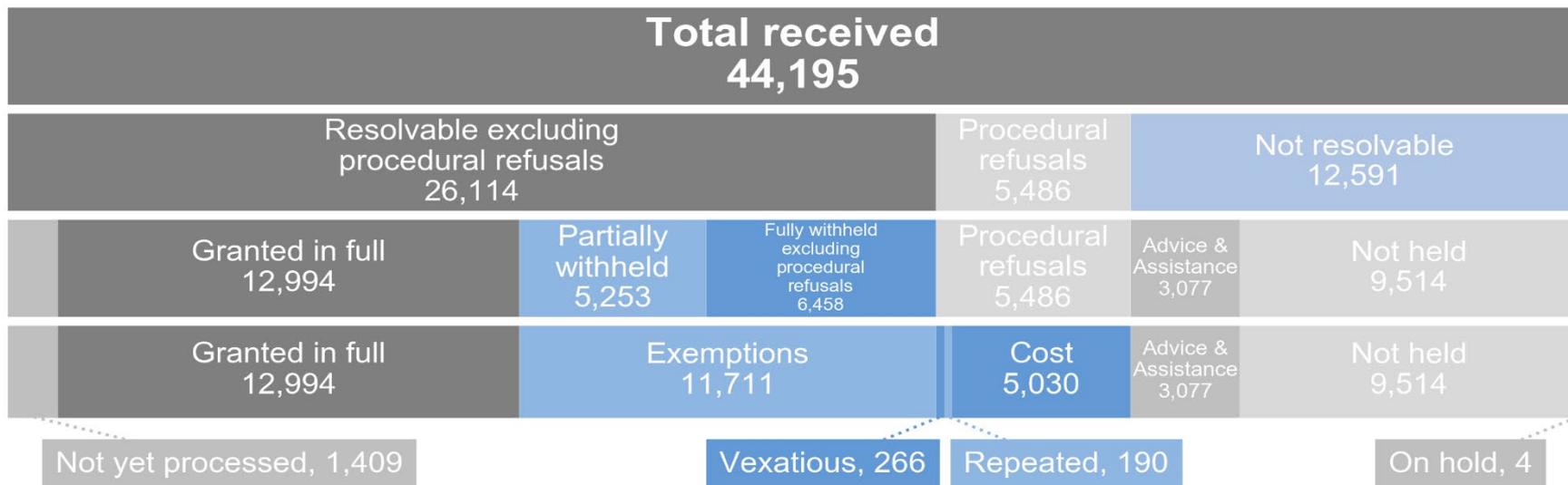
### 12,591 (28%) of requests were not resolvable.

Of these:

- 3,077 requests required further clarification prior to responding, and monitored bodies provided “advice and assistance” on how to reformulate the request.
- 9,514 involved information not held by the responding body.

4 (0.01%) were on hold at the time of monitoring.

Outcomes of FOI requests received in 2020 (see Table 2, 6, 8 and dataset)



## There is wide variation in the outcome of FOI requests across monitored bodies

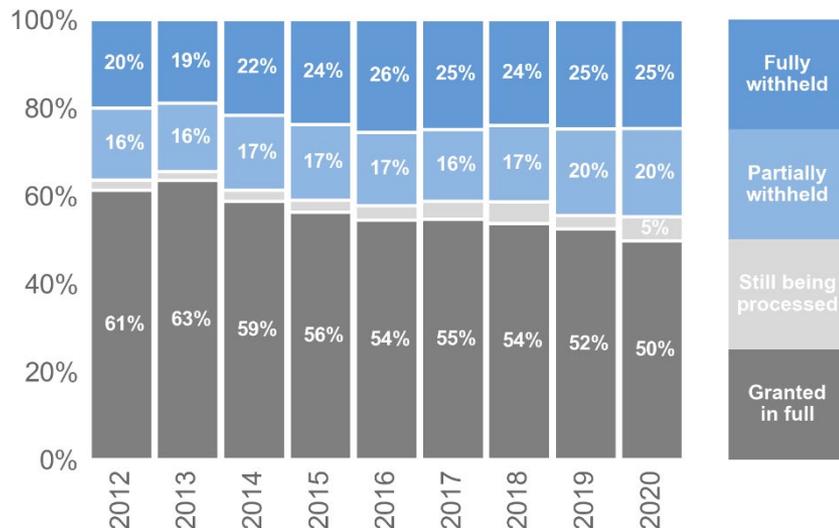
Of resolvable requests excluding procedural refusals:

- 50% were granted in full, down from 52% in 2019.
- 20% were partially withheld, unchanged from 2019.
- 25% were fully withheld, unchanged from 2019.

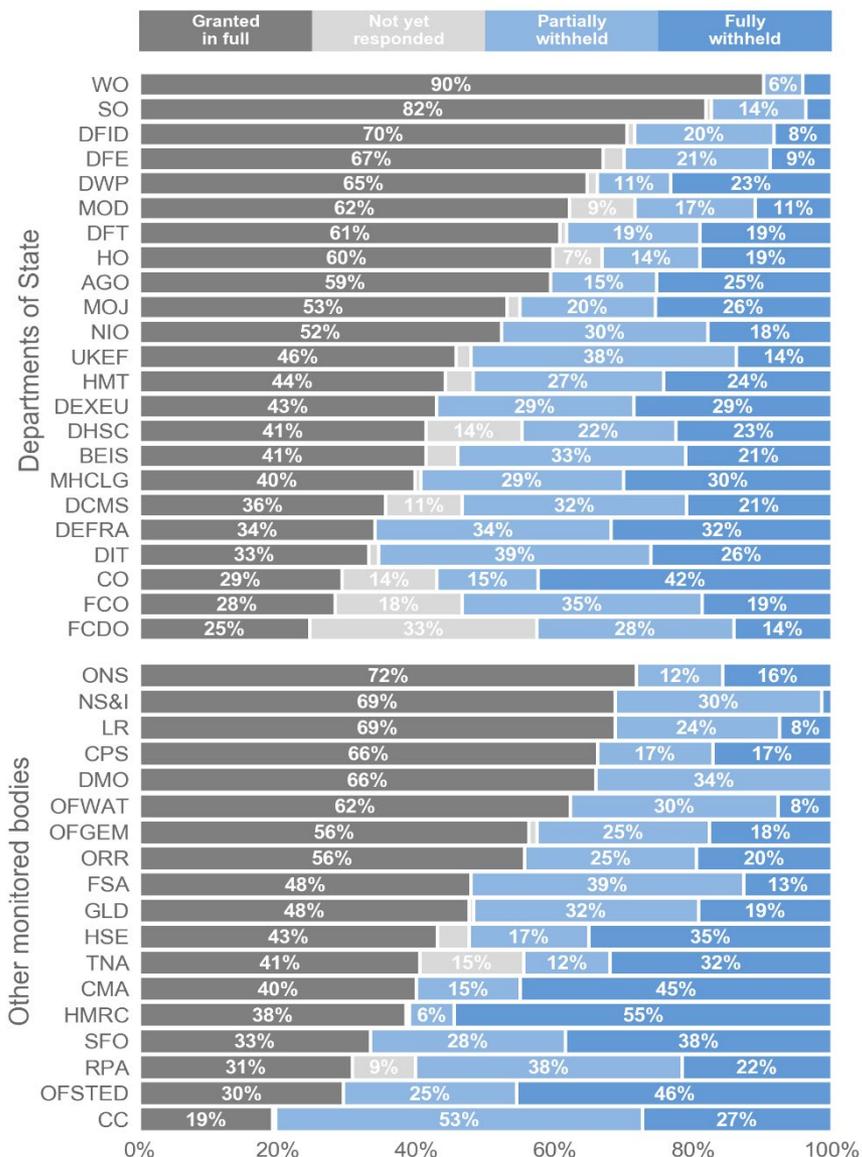
These outcomes varied across monitored bodies:

- Requests were granted in full 75% or more of the time at two bodies, down from five bodies in 2019.
- Only one monitored body granted 25% or fewer requests in full, unchanged from 2019.

Outcomes of FOI requests as a percentage of resolvable requests excluding procedural refusals since 2012 (see Table 7b and dataset)



Outcomes of FOI requests as a percentage of resolvable requests excluding procedural refusals in 2020 (see Table 6)





# Use of exemptions

- Section 40 (personal information) was cited in almost half of exemptions
- 2,945 requests were exempted under Section 21

# Section 40 (personal information) was cited in 44.8% of exemptions

## Exemptions

Under the FOI Act, public bodies can only refuse to provide requested information that they hold if the information falls under one of the specific exemptions within the Act.

Of the 17,191 requests withheld in full or in part in 2020, 11,711 cited exemptions relating to the nature of the requested information as a cause for withholding the information, as listed under Sections 22-44 of the FOI act.

- Section 40 (covering personal information) was by far the most commonly cited exemption as in previous years, listed in 44.8% of exemptions.
- Section 22 (information intended for future publication) was cited in 10.6% of exemptions.
- Overall, no other exemption was cited in more than 10% of exemptions.

Use of exemptions differed across monitored bodies, reflecting the nature of the requests received (see the next page for a graph of the most frequently cited exemption for each body):

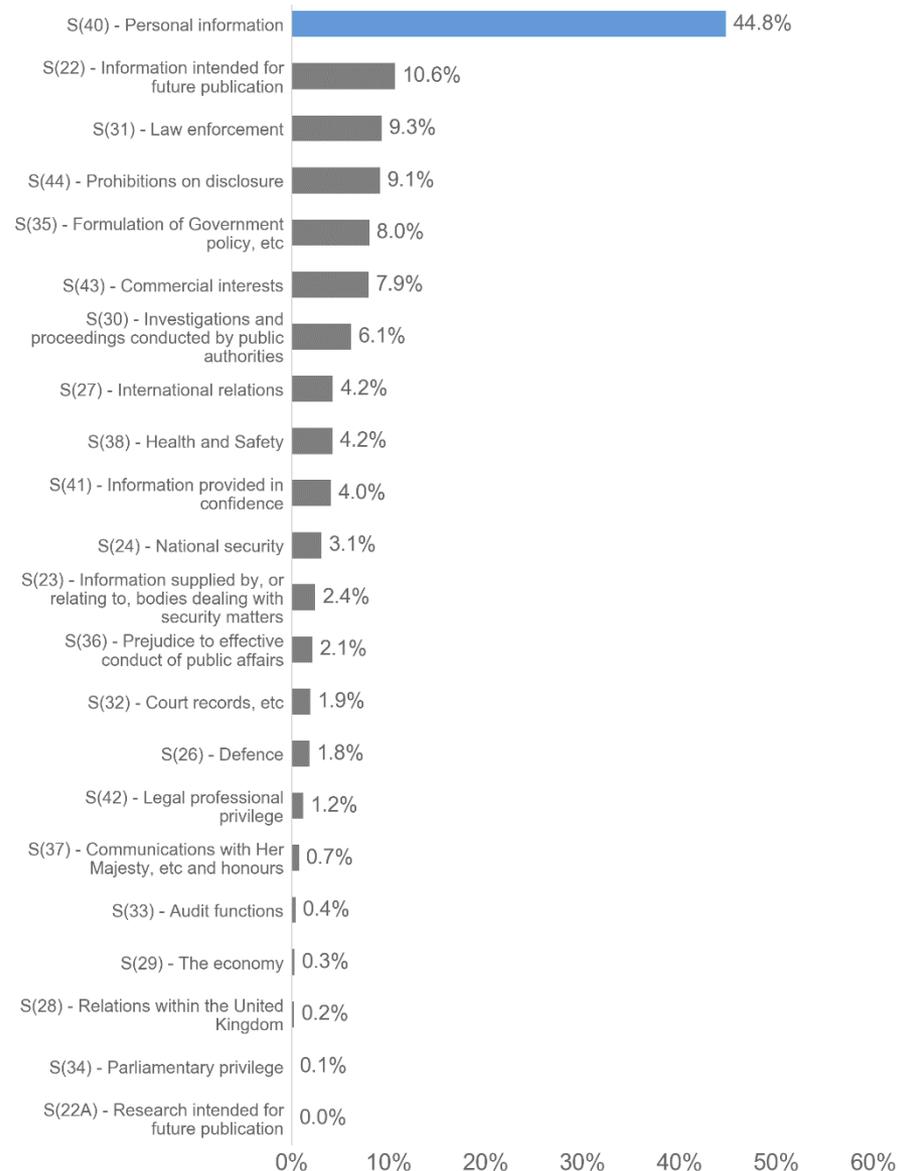
- Section 40 was the most commonly used exemption for 19 Departments of State and 11 other monitored bodies, including those with the largest volume of requests.
- Three Departments of State most frequently cited Section 35, covering formulation of government policy.
- Three other monitored bodies most frequently cited Section 44, covering prohibitions on disclosure.

## Statistical Note

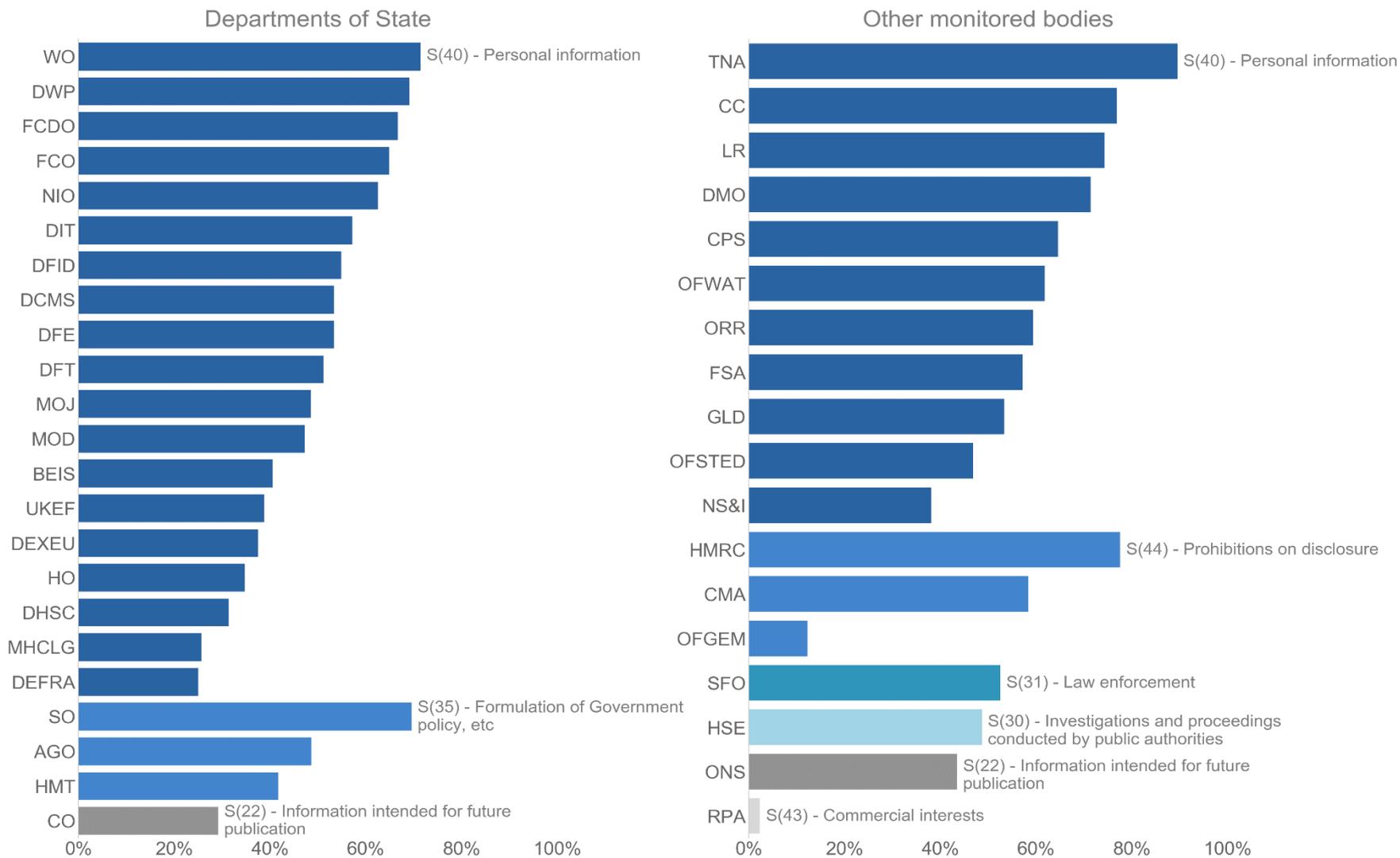
Percentages for exemptions may sum to more than 100 as each request may cite multiple exemptions.

<sup>1</sup> Note that exceptions under EIRs are not included here

Use of exemptions<sup>1</sup> in 2020, as percentage of exempted requests (see dataset)



Most commonly used exemption<sup>1</sup> in 2020, as a percentage of exempted requests (see dataset)



<sup>1</sup> Note that exceptions under EIRs are not included here

# 2,945 requests were exempted under Section 21

## Section 21

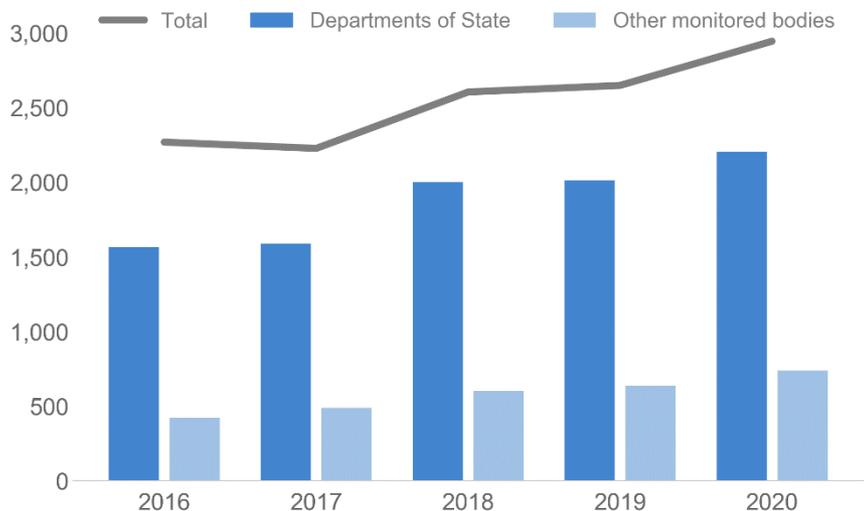
A Section 21 exemption can be used under the FOI Act when information is reasonably available by other means. Requests where a Section 21 exemption was the sole exemption used are reported separately because the FOI Act is not meant to act as a means to access data in the public domain.

- Across all monitored bodies 2,945 requests subject to a Section 21 exemption were reported.
- The number of reported Section 21 exemptions has continued to rise, increasing from 2,649 in 2019 to 2,945 in 2020.

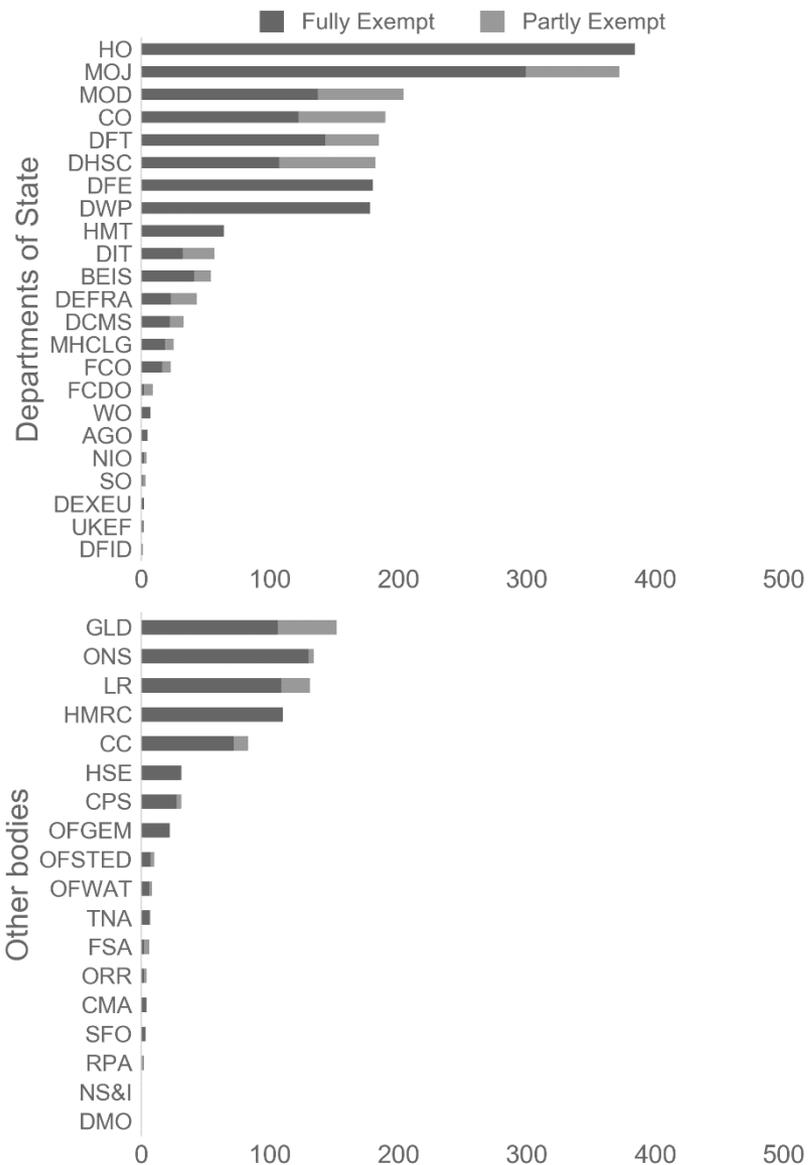
## Statistical Note

Requests exempted under Section 21 are not counted in any other figures.

Number of requests subject to a Section 21 exemption in 2016 – 2020 (see Table 10 and dataset)



Number of requests subject to a Section 21 exemption in 2020 (see Table 10)





# Internal reviews and known complaints to the ICO

Prior to 2019 the following section referred to “ICO appeals”, this was amended in 2019 to “known complaints to the ICO”

This change was made so that the description of what is being reported on in these annual statistics is now more clearly defined and accurate. This is because:

- Statistics for how many complaints are referred to the ICO about the handling of requests is held by the ICO and reported on in their annual report (a parliamentary paper).

- Departments are not necessarily always aware of all the cases about them that are referred to the ICO. This is because the ICO has the discretion whether or not to accept a case and some of those will be ineligible for investigation (e.g. they are premature/or out of scope) or will be withdrawn before a department is made aware.

- The figures that departments report on are the number of cases where a complaint has been made to the ICO and the departments are made aware of that complaint. They are not therefore a complete picture of all possible complaints.

- The terminology used in the revised wording is that used in legislation and by the ICO. Decisions made by the ICO may be appealed to the upper tribunal and as such it is important to keep this legal distinction.

Outcomes data is now reported one year in arrears to ensure that the proportion of complaints with a reported outcome are higher and more meaningful than in previous years. As such, outcomes data for complaints received in 2019 are presented in the following section alongside the total number of complaints for 2020. The outcomes for 2020 complaints will then be reported on in next years 2021 publication.

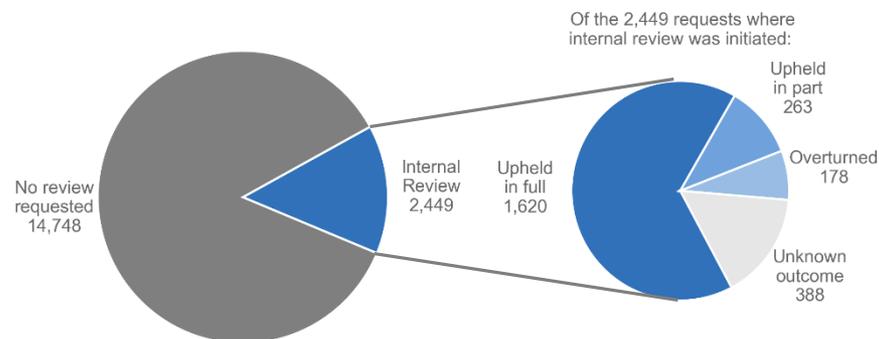
## 14% of withheld requests were internally reviewed

### Internal reviews

Requesters are able to ask a public authority for an Internal Review if they are not content with the public authority's initial decision on whether or not to release requested information, if their request was not dealt with within 20 working days or if they felt a fee was wrongly charged.

- An internal review was initiated for 2,449 (14%) of the 17,197 requests where information was initially withheld in 2020.
- Of these, the decision was overturned fully or partially in 441 cases (21% of those with a known outcome).
- Of reviews with a known outcome, 52% were completed within 20 days.
- Of the 288 internal reviews with an unknown outcome at the time of end of year monitoring in 2019, 70 were still incomplete at the time of end of year monitoring in 2020 (see Table 13).

Internal reviews of FOI requests where information was initially withheld in 2020 (see Table 11)



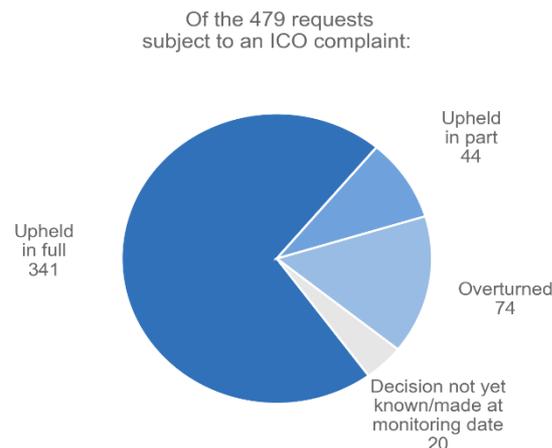
## 385 of known complaints in 2019 were upheld in full or in part

### Known complaints to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)

Requesters who remain dissatisfied with the outcome of a public authority's Internal Review can apply to the Information Commissioner for a decision on whether or not a public authority has handled their request properly.

- Of the 479 known complaints to the ICO in 2019, 459 have known outcomes. Of these: 341 complaints saw the original decision upheld in full, 44 were upheld in part and 74 were overturned.
- There were 361 known complaints to the ICO in 2020. Outcomes data for these complaints will be collected and reported in the 2021 annual publication.
- For further details, and how to make a complaint: [www.ico.org.uk](http://www.ico.org.uk)

Outcomes of known complaints to the ICO received during 2019 (see Table 15)



# Scope of monitoring

## Bodies included in centrally monitored statistics

Key					
Departments of State (N=22)	Bodies included in monitoring by parent department (N=23)	Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)	Rural Payments Agency (RPA)	Ministry of Defence (MOD)	Defence Electronics and Components Agency
Other Monitored bodies (N=13)	Bodies monitored separately from parent department (N=5)		Animal and Plant Health Agency		Defence Equipment and Support
	Unmonitored bodies (N=22)		Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Rural Affairs		Defence Science and Technology Laboratory
		Veterinary Medicines Directorate	Submarine Delivery Agency		
Attorney General's Office (AGO)	Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)	Department for Exiting the European Union (DEXEU)		UK Hydrographic Office	
	Serious Fraud Office (SFO)	Department for International Development (DFID)		HM Courts and Tribunals Service	
	Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate	Department for International Trade (DIT)		Legal Aid Agency	
Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS)	Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service	Department for Transport (DFT)	Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency	Ministry of Justice (MOJ)	HM Prison and Probation Service
	Companies House		Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency		The Office of the Public Guardian
	Insolvency Service		Maritime and Coastguard Agency		Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority
	Met Office		Vehicle Certification Agency		
	UK Intellectual Property Office				
	UK Space Agency	Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)	Health and Safety Executive (HSE)	Northern Ireland Office (NIO)	
Cabinet Office (CO)	Crown Commercial Service	Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC)	Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Authority	UK Export Finance (UKEF)	
	Government Equalities Office		Public Health England	Scotland Office (SO)	
	Government Property Agency	Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO)	FCO Services	Wales Office (WO)	
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)	Planning Inspectorate		Wilton Park Executive	HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC)	Valuation Office
	Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)*	FCDO Services	Charity Commission (CC)	Competitions and Marketing Authority (CMA)
Department for Digital, Culture Media and Sport (DCMS)			Wilton Park Executive	Food Standards Agency (FSA)	Government Legal Department (GLD)
Department for Education (DFE)	Education and Skills Funding Agency	HM Treasury (HMT)	Debt Management Office (DMO)	The National Archives (TNA)	Office for National Statistics (ONS)
	Standards and Testing Agency		Office for Budget Responsibility	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Service and Skills (OFSTED)	Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (OFGEM)
	Teaching Regulation Agency		Government Internal Audit Agency	Office of Rail and Road (ORR)	Land Registry (LR)
	Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education		National Infrastructure Commission	Water Services Regulation Authority (OFWAT)	National Savings and Investments (NS&I)

\*FCO and DFID merged to form FCDO in September 2020 and are reported in these statistics separately as FCO and DFID prior to 2 September 2020 and as FCDO from 2 September 2020.

# Notes

See the [quality and methodology information document<sup>1</sup>](#) for further detail

## Defining the scope of FOI monitoring

Section 1 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000<sup>2</sup> states that (subject to certain conditions):

'Any person making a request for information to a public authority is entitled—

- (a) to be informed in writing by the public authority whether it holds information of the description specified in the request, and
- (b) if that is the case, to have that information communicated to him'

Regulation 5 of the Environmental Information Regulations 2004<sup>3</sup> states that (subject to certain conditions):

'A public authority that holds environmental information shall make it available on request.'

Following their introduction on 1 April 2005, the above provisions apply to all relevant requests for information made to public authorities, no matter how routine and straightforward they may be.

Government departments supply large amounts of information, both on request and proactively, as an established and routine part of their business. This includes information released in the form of leaflets, correspondence exchanges, reports and other published material, and through websites and departmental FOI Publication Schemes. All information released on request is covered by the Freedom of Information Act, however it would be both uninformative and fundamentally unfeasible to count all such activity in departmental FOI monitoring returns.

The statistics in this bulletin therefore relate to all 'non-routine' information requests that government departments have received, and those routine information requests that are handled under Section 21. Essentially, this means that departments' statistics should only count those requests where:

1. It was necessary to take a considered view on how to handle the request under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act, and
2. Departmental Freedom of Information officer(s) were informed of the request and logged it in their case management systems.

More information can be found in our quality and methodology information document:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/foi-statistics-supporting-documents>

## Defining a request

The full definition of an 'information request' for the purposes of inclusion in the Cabinet Office's monitoring returns is shown below:

'[An information request for monitoring purposes is one ...]

1. Which meets the criteria in section 8 of the Freedom of Information Act and if the request falls under the Environmental Information Regulations it includes requests made in any form or context, including oral requests; and
2. Which is a request for information that is not already reasonably accessible to the applicant by other means; and
  - (i) Which results in the release of one or more documents (in any media) or inclusion of extracts of documents in the information released; or
  - (ii) Results in information being withheld under an exemption or exception from the right of access (either the Freedom of Information Act or the Environmental Information Regulations); or
  - (iii) The request is not processed because the department estimates the cost of complying would exceed the appropriate limit in accordance with section 12 of the Freedom of Information Act; or
  - (iv) The request is not processed because the department is relying on the provisions of section 14 of the Freedom of Information Act; or
  - (v) Where a search is made for information sought in the request and it is found that none is held.'

## Consistency of the statistics

The definition shown above has been widely disseminated to FOI officers in government. It is necessary to apply a definition of this sort to set a clear boundary to the coverage of our monitoring, and thereby obtain meaningful information from the process.

However there is considerable variation in the way these bodies are structured and managed, and in the mechanisms that they have put in place to meet their

<sup>1</sup> Quality and Methodology Information Document: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/609515/FOI\\_Statistics\\_Quality\\_and\\_Methodology\\_Information\\_document.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/609515/FOI_Statistics_Quality_and_Methodology_Information_document.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Full text of the FOI Act: [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/36/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/36/contents)

<sup>3</sup> Full text of the EIR regulations: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2004/3391/made>

# Notes (continued)

See the quality and methodology information document<sup>1</sup> for further detail

obligations under the FOI Act. For example, some bodies operate a centralised Freedom of Information secretariat that co-ordinates responses to all information requests received. Others give a greater degree of autonomy to individual work areas in the handling of information requests.

Because of these differences, there could be a degree of inconsistency in the way in which bodies have interpreted and applied the definition of an 'information request' for monitoring purposes. However, the statistics effectively count those requests which have been dealt with by each monitored body formally under the FOI Act. As such, the statistics report on how many such requests for information each monitored body has received and how they have implemented the Act's requirements in providing responses. Direct comparisons between the statistics for different monitored bodies can therefore be made on this basis.

In summary:

- (i) These statistics cover both 'non-routine' information requests, and 'routine' information requests which are answered under a Section 21 exemption. This does not give a representative picture of all requests for information received in government.
- (ii) There is likely to be a degree of inconsistency between monitored bodies' interpretations of the definition of an 'information request' for monitoring purposes. This should be borne in mind when using these statistics.

## Coverage

The statistics in this bulletin have been derived from monitoring returns completed by Freedom of Information officers in government departments during February 2020.

The formal monitoring work covers a total of 41 central government bodies, including major Departments of State. The monitored bodies which are not Departments of State nonetheless have significant policy-making, regulatory or information-handling functions.

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 applies in England and Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland (with exceptions, see below).

The Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 applies to public bodies over which the Scottish Parliament has devolved jurisdiction, and as such lies outside the scope of the monitoring work on which this bulletin is based. However, Scottish parts of UK-wide bodies which are ordinarily under the remit of the Scottish Parliament act (such as the Forestry Commission) are subject to the UK-wide 2000 act rather than Scottish Government's 2002 Act. A full list of the bodies covered by the monitoring statistics in 2019 can be found on page 8.

The Northern Ireland Office, Scotland Office and the Wales Office are included in these statistics as they fall under the jurisdiction of the UK-wide 2000 act. However, data is not collected from the Welsh Government or Northern Ireland Executive.

Statistics on FOI requests made to the Scottish Government can be found here: <http://www.gov.scot/About/Information/FOI/Reporting>. Note that there are several differences in the UK and Scottish FOI Acts which mean that the figures are not directly comparable.

## Users and uses of the statistics

The main users of these statistics are departmental FOI teams responsible for coordinating responses and requests, Ministers and officials with responsibility for developing information access policy, and other non-governmental bodies and individuals with an interest in the accessibility of government information. The statistics are used to monitor the implementation of the FOI Act by central government, both as a whole and by each individual body included in the figures

## Coronavirus (COVID-19)

**The impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic will have affected a number of the statistics captured in this annual bulletin and in particular those on 'Timeliness' and 'Volumes'. These impacts will vary by organisation. Caution is advised when interpreting these statistics and in comparing them with previous time periods.**

<sup>1</sup> Quality and Methodology Information Document: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/609515/FOI\\_Statistics\\_Quality\\_and\\_Methodology\\_Information\\_document.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/609515/FOI_Statistics_Quality_and_Methodology_Information_document.pdf)