

Freedom of Information

Volume 2, Issue 1

September / October 2005

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BBC spends over £400,000 on FOI compliance

The BBC has revealed it has spent almost half a million pounds on processing requests under the new Freedom of Information Act 2000, but admitted the total cost to the corporation could be much higher.

Figures reveal that between January and July this year, the BBC spent £415,000 on staff dedicated to working on requests for information.

But the BBC said “much of the work involved in answering FOI requests is dealt with by staff across the BBC, in addition to their normal workload.”

It said it would not be a good use of licence fee payers’ money to work out how much that costs so no figures were available.

But it is estimated that costs could have run into thousands following the deluge of requests in January, when the Act came into force.

Since the legislation was introduced on 1st January, the corporation has had to deal with 746 requests. The bulk of them came in January and February, when the corporation received 192 and 122 respectively.

Sources said that at one

point earlier in the year over 50% of the BBC's governance and accountability unit was working on FOI requests. Some extra staff were taken on temporarily to help with the workload.

The amount has levelled off as the year progressed, falling to a low of 51 in July.

The BBC head of information, policy and compliance, James Leaton Gray, pointed out, “Of course the number of requests is not necessarily a good indicator of the workload, as one request can involve hundreds of hours of

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Complaints—the state of play

The Information Commissioner has now made 46 decisions on complaints against public authorities’ handling of freedom of information requests. 21 were upheld, seven were partly upheld and 18 were rejected.

With one exception, none of the complainants was identified, so the nature of the complainants is unknown. The one exception is a journalist, Mr David Brown of *The People*, who requested, from the Home Office, information about the entry into the UK of suspected Nazi war crimi-

nals. His complaint was upheld, the Home Office having failed to deal with his request within the prescribed time scale of 20 working days.

The most common complaint against public authorities (over half of the total number of complaints) was that they had either failed to deal with the request at all or had failed to do so within 20 working days.

There were a few complaints about the size of fees being charged (none of which were upheld) and

a few more of a procedural nature.

According to Keith Mathieson, FOI expert at Reynolds Porter Chamberlain, the most interesting complaints have been those which concerned the possible misapplication of exemptions. In general, the Commissioner found that the exemptions had been properly applied. Two examples illustrate the Commissioner’s approach.

A request was made of Hampshire Police for infor-

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