Speaking at the 4th Freedom of Information Conference in London this spring, the UK Deputy Information Commissioner, Graham Smith, highlighted many of the difficulties faced by public authorities and the ICO when ensuring compliance with the Freedom of Information Act.

Graham Smith said “over time we would like to be able to get some exemplars of good practice rather than just exemplars of bad practice. We have what is fast becoming an FOI regime where everybody’s got their eye on the appeal process and the litigation which might follow, and there is a worry that there is a focus on the bad things and where things go wrong. Instead, the ICO would like to shift the emphasis onto what and where things go right.”

He added, “we have got three years of experience that we can build upon to put right some of the things that appear to be going wrong, and also to praise and recognise where public authorities are doing very well and where the FOI regime is delivering particular results.”

At the conference, Mr Smith said, “we have seen a very high number of requests and many public authorities were a little taken aback, not only by the volume in terms of the numbers but also by the complexity and the demands that they placed on the organisation, when seeking out the information and to turn it around to the requestor.”

Graham Smith commented that the ICO also saw a higher number of complaints than they were anticipating. The biggest surprise for the (Continued on page 15)