

Freedom of Information

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- Daily launches campaign to get back at ‘sloppy’ journalism claims, p.18
- Scottish charity sector: don’t bring us under FOI, p19
- Editor slams council’s ‘dismal’ FOI record over failure to publish responses, p.20

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Accountability is being stealthily chipped away, says analyst

New figures show that Boris Johnson’s government is making coordinated moves to undermine accountability, according to public policy commentator and analyst Richard Vize.

Writing in *the Guardian*, Mr Vize said that FOI and scrutiny of government decisions are under attack:

“Through obstruction and neglect, ministers and civil servants are choking off our right to know what they are doing and how they spend our money. Meanwhile Boris John-

son and his cabinet are replacing rigorous journalistic questioning with shallow social media stunts, creating a mirage of openness and accountability while hiding away from any real interrogation”, he writes.

The piece was published following a Whitehall Monitor report by the Institute for Government showing that adherence to FOIA is on the verge of collapse, with departments ignoring their legal duties to supply information.

The report points out that in the early years of the Act, departments were routinely approving more than half of FOI requests (although the Foreign Office and Cabinet Office have almost always refused 60% or more).

However, since the coalition government came in in 2010, the culture in Whitehall began to change, with departments such as the Treasury, HMRC, Home Office, justice, health, communities, culture and environment becoming increas-

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openDemocracy launches two year investigation into FOIA

Global media platform openDemocracy has launched a two-year investigation into the state of Freedom of Information in the UK, after forcing the government to be transparent about Brexit.

The media group recently won its FOI battle against the Department for Exiting the European Union, which belatedly released documents from an influential lobbyist named Shanker Singham to Brexit ministers and senior civil servants pursuant

to a judge ruling. The ruling, made by a tribunal in London, was the culmination of a two-year battle for what openDemocracy described as ‘basic transparency’. Its original request was made back in October 2017.

Mr Singham, who worked for the think tank Legatum and later joined the Institute of Economic Affairs, has been one of the key players in what the Institute’s Director once called ‘the Brexit-influencing game’. The DExEU said

that telling the public about Mr Singham’s access would ‘weaken and undermine the UK’s negotiating positions’ on Brexit. openDemocracy appealed to the Information Commissioner’s Office. The regulator sided with the government.

However, the Information Tribunal ruled that there was a ‘clear and overwhelming public interest in the disclosure of the material which the Lega-

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