



Freedom of Information

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- ICO orders disclosure of asylum seekers information p.19
- BBC contracts subject to FOI p.19

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Coalition to extend FOI legislation

Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg, has spoken out about plans to extend the scope of the UK Freedom of Information Act.

Under the current legislation, councils, government departments, NHS bodies, charities and the police are covered, but the intention is to extend this to include more bodies, such as the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, the Financial Services Ombudsman and the Association of Chief Police Officers.

Another proposal is to make the Information

Commissioner's Office independent of the Ministry of Justice, because although it is an independent public body, it is currently dependent on funds from the Ministry of Justice for its FOI activities.

The coalition government also wants to cut the length of time that government records can be kept secret, from 30 years to just 20.

The deputy PM said: "It is a fundamental right of all citizens to be able to hold their government to account. The coalition government is committed

to making this the most open government ever.

"We want to make it easy for people to find out information that is relevant to them, to ensure that public bodies are acting in the public interest and providing good value for money.

"The goal is the greater transparency we desire and the public deserves."

In response to the plans, Information Commissioner Christopher Graham, said: "I welcome the proposals that the

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UEA first to sign FOI Undertaking

The University of East Anglia is the first organisation in the UK to sign an Undertaking for the Information Commissioner, Christopher Graham, for the purposes of improving its freedom of information practices. Previously such commitments have been reserved for organisations that breach the UK Data Protection Act.

It follows the disclosure of emails from the University's Climate Research Unit in

November 2009, where it was evident that there was some reluctance to respond to valid FOI requests made to the Unit.

The purpose of the Undertaking served by the Commissioner's Office is to ensure that the University continues to show a commitment to fulfil its obligations under the Freedom of Information Act, the Environmental Information Regulations and the associated Codes

of Practice.

The Commissioner said: "This is the first occasion on which we have sought formal Undertakings to secure compliance with the Freedom of Information Act. Our tougher enforcement strategy makes it clear that public authorities will face similar action if they fall short of their responsibilities to promote openness and transparency."

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