

Cost of the Freedom of Information Act to central government departments

Initial analysis of spring 2006 costing exercise

Overall cost of the Freedom of Information Act to central government

Notes

23 bodies participated in the process costings data collection exercise, all but two of which (Northern Ireland Assembly and Office for Government Commerce) are included in FoI central government monitoring. All results from this exercise have been "grossed-up" to represent the FoI workload of all monitored bodies, plus these two additional participants.

Detailed notes

A – Derived from FoI central unit cost data. Responses from 19 of 23 participating bodies, with adjustment for non-response.

Time spent processing requests

Average time spent processing initial FoI requests was **6 hours 46 minutes** across all surveyed bodies. Looking solely at Departments of State, the average was 1 hour higher at **7 hours 46 minutes**. Where a request was either partially or fully refused by applying an exemption, the average time was markedly higher at **13 hours 31 minutes**.

The following table shows the overall average time spent on each stage of the request answering process

Grade profile of officials working on Fol cases

The following shows the overall average time spent by officials of various grades, split by Departments of State and other surveyed bodies. It also shows the derived estimates of the "hourly rate" for Fol work. These draw on assumed hourly rates for staff in various Grade bands. These are based – approximately - on current DCA pay ranges, and include employers' National Insurance and estimated pension overheads. As in the preceding table, time spent by Ministerial and Board-level officials is not shown.

| | Departments of State | Others | Overall | Assumed hourly rate |
|---|-----------------------------|---------------|----------------|----------------------------|
| Administrative | 44 | 31 | 40 | <i>£10.50</i> |
| EO | 84 | 71 | 80 | <i>£13.40</i> |
| HEO / Fast Stream | 110 | 39 | 90 | <i>£16.40</i> |
| SEO | 59 | 47 | 55 | <i>£21.50</i> |
| Grade 7 / Grade 6 | 84 | 33 | 69 | <i>£34.70</i> |
| Grade 5 and above | 20 | 7 | 17 | <i>£46.80</i> |
| Other Government Department contribution | 47 | 32 | 43 | <i>£34.70</i> |
| [Unknown / Other] | 18 | 0 | 13 | <i>£34.70</i> |
| TOTAL | 466 | 261 | 406 | |
| Derived "cost per hour" for Fol work | <i>£23.12</i> | | | |

Searching and Reading Time

The following graph shows the cumulative distribution of searching and reading time for FOI requests in this exercise.

The graph is based on all case types where substantive searching would have taken place (i.e. all those except those which were resolved through “advice and assistance” or those which refused on vexatious, repeated or cost limit grounds). There were over 400 such cases in the sample. One extremely large case has been excluded since it would have signific