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*Dear Paul*

#### **REVIEW OF THE “30-YEAR RULE”**

Thank you for your letter of 28 December 2007 inviting my Department and its agencies to put forward to your Review of the ‘30 year rule’ any views we may have. I was grateful for this opportunity to comment and I have now had a chance to take the views of senior colleagues here on the issues you raise.

You pose the key question of whether 30 years, in the Freedom of Information era, remains the point at which Government records should normally be made available to the public. In general we think that it should. The Freedom of Information Act has, of course, changed the climate overall in respect of disclosure but, particularly in respect of documents which we would not be likely to release under FOI, we think that 30 years continues to strike a fair balance between the legitimate interest of the public and historians in having access to Government papers and the need for Government to be able to consider and take decisions on sensitive issues in a protected environment .

That said, no particular time period is sacrosanct. If, for example, your review were to recommend a relatively modest reduction in the current 30 year period – say to 25 years – that would be unlikely to have a major impact on DWP business.

We would, however, have more concern if your review were to recommend a much more significant reduction in the 30 year period to, say, 15 years or less. In these circumstances we would need to put in place much more substantial engagement with those DWP officials who are responsible for the policy areas that the files cover in order to consider the sensitivity of the information potentially being released. One likely consequence would be

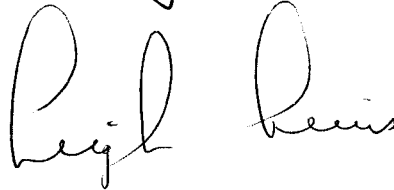


proportionately more files than under the existing arrangements being transferred to the National Archives on a still closed basis.

I hope these initial reactions are helpful to your review. I would be happy to respond to any questions you may have.

*Yours sincerely*

Leigh Lewis

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Leigh Lewis". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the right of the typed name "Leigh Lewis".