



Received
10/1/08

9th January 2007

Dear Paul,

Thank you for your letter of 28th December regarding the 30 year rule.

It seems to me that the really important point is that people need to know the basis on which they are conducting discussions (i.e. Minutes etc) or the basis on which written material is being produced.

If discussions or minutes are likely to be published during the active lifetime of the participants then they need to know and of course they will conduct themselves accordingly. Similarly civil servants need to know whether their advice or views are likely to be published in their active life time before they express them.

It is clear in these sorts of examples there can be difficulties for good government if the balance is not right.

When I last looked at his question when in government I concluded that 30 years was about right. You may come to a different view but it is very important that any judgement is based upon a balance between the public's right to know and the effectiveness of good government.

You might be amused to know that when I was in Government I gave instructions that my office was never to ask me to sign a letter which would be embarrassing if it appeared on the front page of The Guardian.

Best Wishes

John
