



Public Administration Select Committee

Committee · Office · House of Commons · 7 Millbank · London SW1P 3JA

Tel 020 7219 3284 Fax 020 7219 2681 Email pubadmincom@parliament.uk Website www.parliament.uk/pasc

Paul Dacre
30-year Rule Review
c/o The National Archives
Kew TW9 4DU

12 March 2008

Dear Mr Dacre,

Review of the “30 year rule”

Thank you for your letter of 28 December, inviting me as Chairman of the Public Administration Select Committee to contribute to your review of the 30 year rule. Although the Justice Committee now leads on information rights policy, these are matters that as you rightly identify continue to concern PASC. In particular, having provided pre-legislative scrutiny for the Freedom of Information Act, we have made it our business to monitor its implementation and keep our eye on the issues it causes for government.

This review is a welcome one, and we commend the Prime Minister for instigating it. It is almost always of value to review any policy to ensure that it is achieving the right outcomes. Having said that, we cannot pretend to have been deluged with calls for changes to the 30 year rule.

I will leave the big questions on the overall framework to the Justice Committee. However, I would draw your attention to two recommendations made in the past by PASC which were not implemented:

- We recommended in July 1999 that the exemption from disclosure under Freedom of Information for matters pertaining to honours conferred by the Crown should cease to apply after 30 years. The Government argued that proceedings should remain confidential for the lifetime of individuals concerned. We saw no justification then and see none now.
- Certain categories of information remain exempt from disclosure even after 100 years have passed. We recommended that all the exemptions cease to apply after 100 years, if they have not already ceased to have effect. Again, we hold to that recommendation. Sensitive material held by the security and intelligence services is not in any case covered by the FOI Act, and would not be covered by its exemption and disclosure regimes.

Without having recently taken evidence in this area, we are not in a position to judge whether 30 years remains the correct time period before most information is disclosed. If there is to be a change, however, it should certainly be in the direction of earlier disclosure and of fewer exempt



classes of information. The principle of Freedom of Information, in which exemptions are tested against a public interest in disclosure, should apply in this area too.

I hope this input is helpful, and look forward to seeing the findings of your review.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tony Wright'.

Dr Tony Wright MP
Chair of the Committee