



Society for the Social History of Medicine

Response to the 30-year rule review consultation

On behalf of the Society for the Social History of Medicine (SSH M), I would like to respond to the 30-year rule review consultation. SSH M is a UK-based society with over 400 international members, whose interests lie in a variety of disciplines including history, medicine, public health, demography, anthropology, sociology, social administration and health economics. It publishes a journal, *Social History of Medicine*, a series of edited volumes, and arranges at least two conferences a year.

In limiting the access to recent government records, the 30-year rule has a detrimental impact on the research undertaken by many of our members. It restricts the historical questions that can be asked, and the degree of analysis applied to a whole range of issues relating to health and health policy, fields which potentially have much to gain from a deeper understanding of the past.

In practice, the restriction applies to much material that is older than 30 years, since files are only released 30 years after the latest-dated item on file.

While the FOI Act has, to a certain extent, made the 30-year rule obsolete, inconsistencies do arise. Files are released only in response to specific requests for information. Without prior knowledge of a file's contents it can be difficult to make such requests. Indeed, historians frequently come across the unexpected in their perusal of government records.

We propose that, subject to the cataloguing resources of the National Archives, records should be routinely made available after 15 years, with the FOI Act continuing to apply to more recent material.

Best wishes

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