

REVIEW OF THE 30 YEAR RULE: SUBMISSION ON BEHALF OF DCMS

The DCMS welcomes the decision to review the 30 year rule on the opening of files to the public after transfer to the National Archives (TNA) and would support any decision to reduce the period to make it more compatible with the post-Freedom of Information era. Since much Government information is now accessible upon request within 20 days, it seems unsustainable that it is not made routinely available within a shorter period. We do, however need to balance the need for openness against the need for Department to retain information for business purposes, and to consider the security implications and the increased risk that Personal Data, or information exempt under the Freedom of Information Act or Environmental Information Regulations, is made public before the protection upon them has expired.

We believe that a reduction in the 30 year period would result in a short term operational impact upon Departments and other sponsored bodies as they handle the information falling between the present 30 year deadline and whatever replacement is chosen, and consideration should be given to phasing in the new rules. However, longer term there should be a significant reduction in the cost of storage. Likewise, the additional work necessary to identify information covered by unexpired exemptions or Personal Data of living individuals should be counterbalanced by a reduction in the number of requests received under the relevant legislation.

Under present rules there is also a likelihood that this Department and others will require additional Lord Chancellor's Instruments to meet the requirements of those parts of the business which need to keep records on-site beyond the new term and the review team may like to take this into account during their considerations.