

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION COMPLIANCE REPORT - 2014

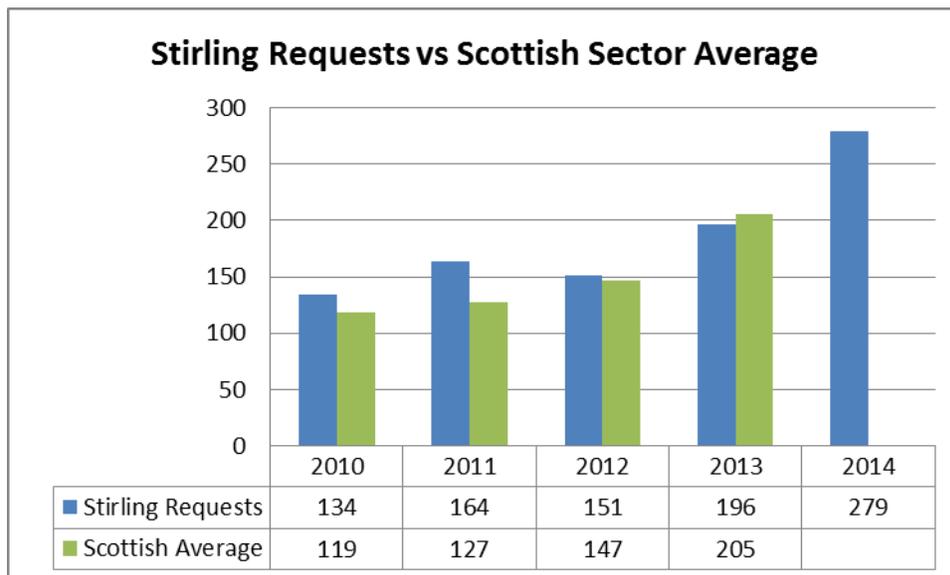
Introduction

1 The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of activity during the calendar year 2014 in relation to information requests received and dealt with by the University under the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002. (FOISA). The report also covers activity in relation to the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA) and the Environmental Information (Scotland) Regulations 2004 (EIRs).

Analysis of requests received

2 The University had a total of 279 Freedom of Information requests in the period 1 January 2014 to 31 December 2014. This compares to a total of 196 in 2013. This is the highest ever number of requests in a single year beating last year's previous high. This represents a 42% increase in the number of requests since 2013 and an increase of 310% since the first year of FOI in 2005 when there were only 68 requests received.

3 The number of requests received at Stirling is broadly in line with other Scottish HEIs. The graph below shows number of requests Stirling has received over the past five years against the average requests received by other Scottish HEIs.

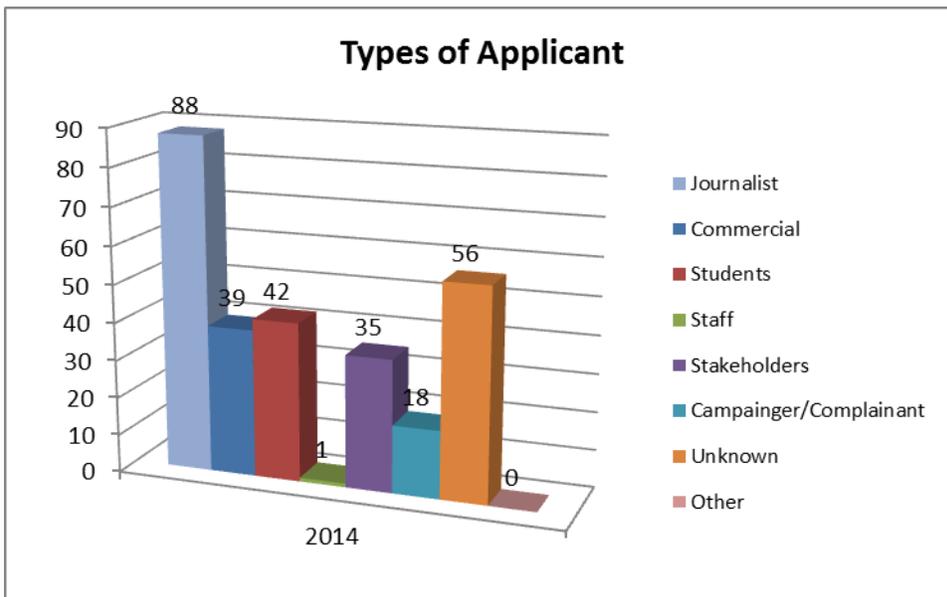


4 Contained within the 279 requests were 1440 individual questions i.e. an average of 5.2 separate questions per request.

Requestor Details

5 It can be seen from the following chart that the single largest identified requesting group in 2014 was Journalists with 88 requests (32% of the total). Journalists have been consistently the largest applicant group since FOI was introduced. However there is a large group of applicants who do not declare what their backgrounds are so they are recorded as unknown.

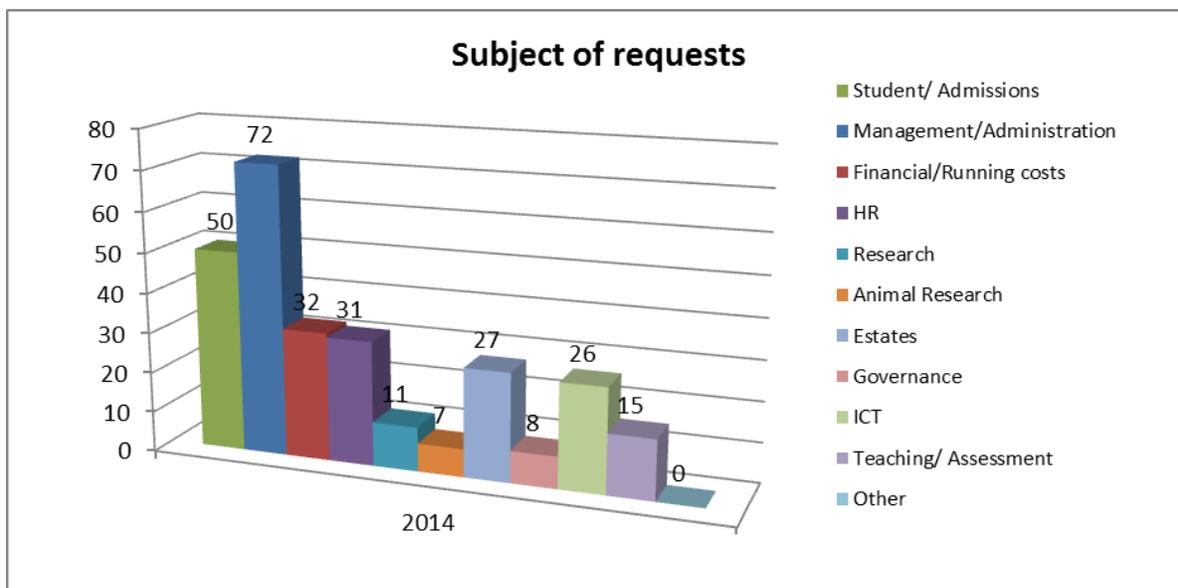
6 In 2014 there has been a significant increase in the number of requests from students (42 in 2014 compared to 6 in 2013). This was mainly due to two factors, firstly a series of requests from a prospective Students' Union officer, and secondly a journalism module that contained an assignment which involved making an FOI request.



7 In 2014, 105 out of the 279 requests (38%) came from requestors who had previously submitted a request on one or more occasions in the previous 9 years and hence are classified as repeat requestors.

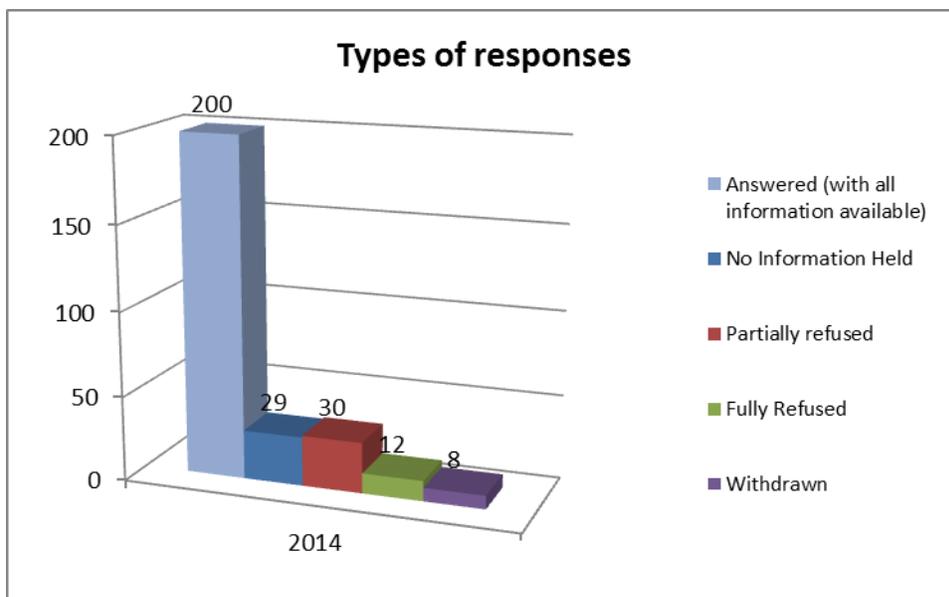
Request Details

8 The following chart shows the breakdown of the types of information requests in broad categories. The largest category is for management/administration, this is often a catch all category used when the request does not fit neatly into another category. In the previous 3 years students/admissions had been the subject of most requests.



Request Outcomes

9 As can be seen from the chart below, the majority (71.7%) of queries were answered with all the information available, which is slightly lower than the figure of 78.1% in 2013. There were 29 responses in 2014 where none of the information requested was held by the University. Refusals, either of the whole request or one of its components, accounted for 15.0% of requests compared to 14.3% in 2013.



10 The most common reason for fully or partially refusing the requested information was on the grounds of data protection (section 38). Some other exemptions used included 'commercial interests' (section 33), 'information otherwise available' (section 25) and 'confidentiality' (section 36).

11 Ten requests were refused on the grounds of excessive costs (i.e. the cost of complying would exceed £600) and there were no cases where fees were requested¹.

12 There was one response during the year which was not sent within the statutory 20 working day time limit.

13 During 2014 there were two requests for internal reviews where the applicant was dissatisfied with the original response to the request. In both cases the original decision was upheld by the review. To date there have been no appeals to the Scottish Information Commissioner relating to requests dealt with during 2014.

Environmental Information

14 The University is also required under the Environmental Information (Scotland) Regulations 2004 (EIRs) to respond to requests for environmental information held by the University. During 2014 there were three requests for information falling under the description of this legislation which related to energy sources, environmental performance and Airthrey Loch.

Data Protection

15 There were a total 29 data protection queries logged during the year, most of these were individuals seeking advice about what was or was not permissible under the Data Protection Act. There were three Subject Access Requests, one from a member of staff and two from former students.

Other activity

16 In addition to dealing with the increased volume of FOI requests other activity during the year has included:

- Assisting the Scottish Information Commissioner (OSIC) with the development of a new Self-Assessment Toolkit in relation to 'Responding on Time' to FOI requests.
- Providing feedback via the Scottish Higher Education Information Practitioners Group (SHEIP) on the new Section 60 Scottish Ministers' Code of Practice was published which was published during the year
- A member of staff has completed the BCS Certificate in Data Protection.

Equality implications

17 There are no equality implications arising from this report.

¹ Fees can be charged where the cost of complying is between £100 and £600 but only 10% of the cost can be recovered and the first £100 of cost can not be claimed. The maximum fee that can be charged is therefore £50. The maximum salary rate that can be used to calculate the costs is £15 per hour.

Resource implications

18 As the number of information requests continue to rise, the burden of complying with the legislation falls not only on the FOI Unit within Policy & Planning but also on those service areas responsible for maintenance and extraction of statistical information from systems, and at times this has necessitated the diversion of resource and effort from key functions.

Policy & Planning
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