

# Learning and Development Survey Report of Findings



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Executive Summary  
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## The survey

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The survey report sets out the Scottish Information Commissioner's findings from her online survey of Scottish public authorities' approach to learning and development (L&D) in relation to freedom of information duties. The survey sought to inform the Commissioner about current practice and existing L&D materials. It is the first step in initiating a wider discussion to explore how the Commissioner can add value to authorities and support them in improving their own practice, enabling them to realise the benefits good FOI practice can bring. The survey explored individual and organisational perspectives; from practitioners and managers. The response rate was good – over 50%. Overall, it showed that there is plenty of L&D activity, and that:

- there is a direct link between the strategic importance afforded to FOI by senior managers and the amount and perceived usefulness of FOI L&D. Where FOI is seen as a strategic objective it is more likely to be embedded in the performance and L&D systems of an authority.
- there is a roughly 70:30 split between those who thought the level of L&D over the last three years was about right and those who didn't. Almost 30% thought there was too little.
- there are sectoral differences in the strategic approach to FOI and the type, scope and adequacy of FOI L&D provided currently and in the future. The HE sector is likely to see it as least strategically important and Central Government likely to see it as the most strategically important.
- the greatest organisational barriers to providing FOI L&D are lack of strategic commitment (42%), and lack of resources (68%). Of the authorities that feature FOI in L&D plans, a quarter have invested over £5,000 compared to just 6% where FOI is not featured. In those authorities that feature it, FOI L&D is delivered to a wider range of staff across a wider range of topics.
- the greatest barrier for individuals is a lack of time. 48% say they are too busy with their day job to find the time for FOI L&D.
- authorities were less likely to provide training for non-FOI managers.
- authorities place equal emphasis on training delivered by in-house staff and attendance at external training events. There was little indication at an organisational level that accredited courses are seen as important. This was in contrast to views expressed by some individual practitioners.
- FOI L&D is most likely to be delivered at induction, and encouragingly between 42-64% of authorities included it in an established training programme. External/ face-to-face events and self-directed learning are the most widely used delivery methods, with learning from peers/on-the-job being the preferred methods of individuals.
- there is a gap in L&D in relation to the Environmental Information Regulations (EIRs) suggesting a gap in knowledge about and the perceived importance of the EIRs.



## What next?

The survey findings suggest a number of ways in which the Commissioner and her staff can contribute. These overlap with current practice but recognise the need to include support to strategic managers and to shift from providing to enabling training:

1. By engaging with authorities at a senior level to encourage them to appreciate the links between FOI and areas such as risk, governance and effective communication so that it gains greater corporate prominence. This would include developing and sharing materials that can be used by authorities in-house to ensure that staff across authorities receive appropriate L&D support to comply with FOI law.
2. By taking a brokerage role – understanding what type of FOI L&D resources are held by what types of authority and putting them in touch with each other. The aim will be to enable authorities to pool and share reliable resources, and facilitate the sharing of good practice.
3. By providing more guidance on what good practice looks like, to enable authorities to develop robust learning materials tailored to their particular organisation. This is different and distinct to the exemptions briefings which focus on technical aspects of FOI.
4. By organising and facilitating affordable events that focus on specific technical FOI issues as well as practice. The shift in emphasis is from directing events to organising in partnership with authorities to pool scarce resources, share experience and make them equally accessible to organisations.
5. By ensuring that lessons learned from decisions continue to be shared.
6. By reviewing the guidance and supporting materials provided in relation to the EIRs, in consultation with authorities.

These six points will be explored in more detail and form the basis of our future work plans. Specific actions, including the consultation about what specific deliverables will add the greatest value, will be reflected in operational plans.

## Thank you

The Commissioner and her staff thank authorities for the time taken to complete the survey and for providing thoughtful and insightful responses.

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