The UK Freedom of Information Act

Ben Worthy and Gabrielle Bourke
Constitution Unit
University College London
Why FOI in the UK?

• Make government more transparent, accountable, and allow the public to understand and trust government more
• Information revolution
• ‘Secrecy scandals’
• Everyone else was doing it
• Policy for opposition
Whitehall study: which objectives have been achieved?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Has the objective been met?</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transparency</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better decision making process</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public understanding of decision making</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>✗</td>
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</tbody>
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FOI conclusions

- The media has a key influence on the impact of FOI
- FOI never settles down
- Both sides will play games
- Most requests are niche
- A few FOI requests cause most of the trouble and high profile cases cause disproportionate effort, media attention, public controversy and political pain.
MPs and Peers use of FOI

• Small group of MPs use FOI, almost no peers
• FOI is used in different way than PQs
• FOI can and is used to do a variety of things from nuisance to policy
• Majority prefer established accountability mechanisms
• No ‘special measures’? As likely to be speeded up as not but users are suspicious