

# FOI and Higher Education: some thoughts

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# HE response to post-legislative scrutiny

- Almost a quarter of submissions from HE
- Range of concerns
  - commercial/media requests
  - cost of compliance
  - competitive advantages
  - effect on funding
  - research information
- Some called for HE to be removed altogether

# Use of FOI by academics

- Not wide use at present; some see it as inappropriate even (eg Cranfield's evidence)
- Examples:
  - John Campbell's (SOAS) evidence to Justice Select Committee
  - PhD students

# SOAS experience

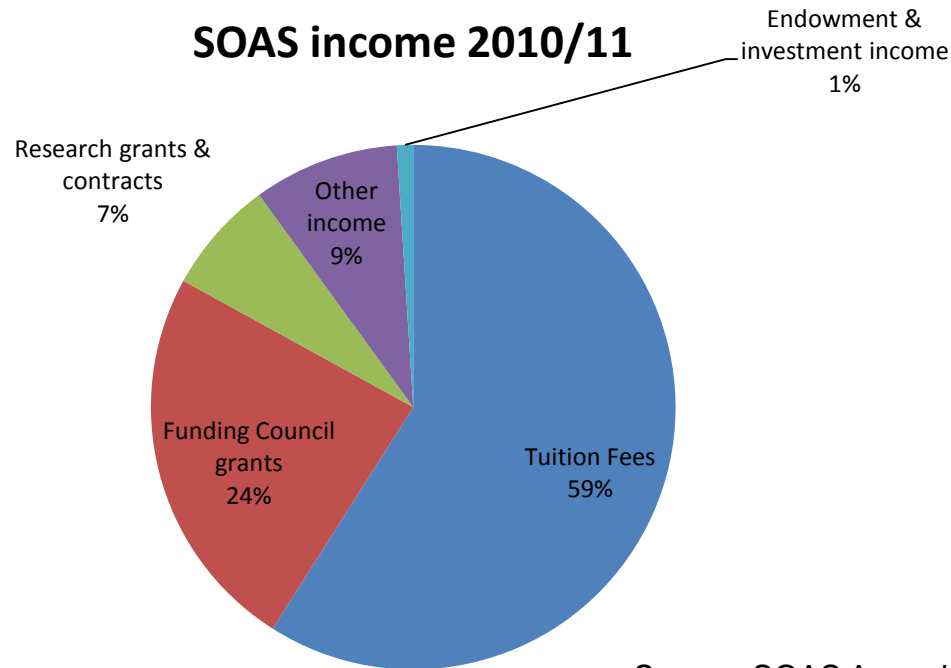
- Numbers have risen in last 2-3 years – but still relatively low volumes
- No requests for research data; requests are around finance, human resources, procurement, student statistics
- Most information goes out but can be withheld where necessary (no ICO complaints as yet)

# Research Data

- Needs to be looked at case-by-case
- Exemptions, well-argued, provide protection – sections 22, 43, 36
- Limited evidence of need for new exemption
- Would not protect climate change research, tree ring data, etc – covered by Environmental Information Regulations

# Should HE be subject to FOI? (1)

- Funding – still significant public funding and public interest



Source: SOAS Annual Review and Financial Statements 2010/11



# Should HE be subject to FOI? (2)

- Civic role of universities
  - professional gateway
  - shaping political thought
  - controversial research
- New environment (eg competition) can be catered for in assessment of public interest

# Summary

- Universities clearly have concerns about FOI
- Sparsity of evidence to support concerns
- Double-edged sword – academics can use FOI as well
- Calls to remove HE from FOI could cause damage to universities' reputation