

**What the Public Wants to Know:
A Text-as-Data Study of Information Requests Sent to the UK
Central Government through the WhatDoTheyKnow Platform**

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Access to information (ATI) policies are perceived as serving predominantly a government oversight function, utilized by investigative journalists and activists to reveal political corruption or misconduct. In this study, I apply text-as-data methods to 37,356 information requests submitted to the UK central government through the online participation platform WhatDoTheyKnow over a decade to explore public information demand. I analyze what information citizens seek and categorize it based on the probability of specific topics within the sample of requests. Citizens use online participation platforms such as WhatDoTheyKnow because it lowers the barriers to interacting with the state, and it is often the only way to obtain information, as, based on access to information laws, bureaucracies are legally obliged to respond. In line with previous research, the findings show that submitted requests are heterogeneous. By focusing on one of the identified topics—UK Welfare Reform—I also demonstrate that information requests can serve as an indicator of public reactions to recently adopted or reformed policies. Citizens use them to share their experiences, voice concerns about how these policies impact their lives, and seek clarification.

Keywords: access to information, transparency, information demand, online participation platforms, WhatDoTheyKnow, text-as-data, NLP

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What are the crime statistics in the neighborhood where you plan to live? Your child was rejected at the public kindergarten nearby, and you are curious about the acceptance rate and criteria. How do elected representatives use public resources? Who do they meet with, and how does it affect the policies they adopt? Thanks to access to information laws (ATI laws), state and local administrations are obliged to answer similar questions submitted through information requests². The importance of access to information (ATI) for the benefit of our societies has long been recognized as a matter of fact. Without access to information, it would be impossible to ascertain whether political representation acts in the public interest or transgresses the norms.

Scholars across diverse social science disciplines have produced abundant research on ATI. It has been recognized as instrumental for democracy and development (Sen, 1999; Stiglitz, 1999). As a result of transnational advocacy and domestic political pressures, legislation governing ATI has been adopted globally. The predominant scholarly focus has been on ATI as a tool for government oversight, helping to reveal political corruption or misconduct and strengthen accountability. Research has thus focused more on the effects of the laws and less on the actual content of citizens' information requests. Regarding information demand, Michener and Worthy (2018) have provided a useful conceptual framework that categorizes the requested information into four overlapping categories based on the orientation of the request (public vs. private) and the politicization of the request (political vs. non-political). In their study, they have provided examples for each of the categories from different jurisdictions and argued that the political use of information requests, which is the predominant scholarly focus, might be overestimated. However, only a few studies have tested this assumption empirically and explored the content of a large number of requests. For instance, Berliner and colleagues (2018) have shown that the majority of ATI uses in Mexico are private and not directly related to politics. Applying Michener and Worthy's framework, a substantial share of information requests could presumably be categorized as private and non-political. Also, in Albania, requesters

² ATI laws usually specify exemptions from disclosure, such as national security, personal information, and certain parts of the policy-making process.

demanded basic information, such as information about drugs and medicine, procedures to get diploma accreditation, and deadlines for university application (Dokeniya, 2013).

The present study contributes to this strand of research by exploring information demand in the UK, which, as one of the oldest democracies (Boix et al., 2013), is well-placed for examining what information the public seeks. Despite several successive UK governments' reluctant approach to adopting ATI legislation (Worthy, 2017; Žuffová, 2023) and a lack of a centralized government-run platform for submitting information requests, ATI legislation has been widely used in the UK since it became effective in 2005. From a comparative perspective, despite the Brexit constraints on the civil service, the UK public administration continues to handle information requests at a satisfactory level. In 2024, 76% of information requests across all monitored central government bodies³ were responded to on time⁴, reflecting a 5-percentage point decrease from 2023. Conditions for the effective use of ATI laws are favorable on both the demand and supply sides. WhatDoTheyKnow, an online participation platform run by the not-for-profit group MySociety, makes submitting a request accessible with just a few clicks.

In this study, I apply Natural Language Processing (NLP, or text-as-data) methods to an original corpus of 37,356 information requests sent to the UK central government bodies through the civil society-led online participation platform WhatDoTheyKnow from

³ The Cabinet Office monitors the following bodies: Attorney General's Office, Department of Business, Department of Energy and Industrial Strategy, Cabinet Office, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, Department for Education, Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs, Department for International Trade, Department for Transport, Department for Work and Pensions, Department for Health and Social Care, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, HM Treasury, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Justice, Northern Ireland Office, UK Export Finance, Scotland Office, Wales Office, HM Revenue and Customs, Charity Commission, Competitions and Marketing Authority, Food Standards Agency, Government Legal Department, The National Archives, Office for National Statistics, Office for Standards in Education, Children's Service and Skills, Office of Gas and Electricity Markets, Office of Rail and Road, Land Registry, Water Services Regulation Authority, and National Savings and Investments. Please note that the names might not correspond to actual names, as new bodies have been established since then.

⁴ See Freedom of Information statistics regularly published by the Cabinet Office and the Ministry of Justice at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/freedom-of-information-statistics-annual-2024/>.

2008 to 2017 to explore public demand for information and its potential to reveal citizens' reactions to policy changes. Information requests are real-world (rather than lab-based) interactions between citizens and bureaucracy, which come with many benefits for researchers, especially high external validity. They do not suffer from measurement error (Prior, 2009), social-desirability bias (Arnold & Feldman, 1981), and low reliability (Chaffee & Frank, 1996) – issues that can arise when using other methods exploring civic engagement or public opinion, such as surveys that ask respondents about their past information requests or experience with adopted policies, which they might no longer recall accurately.

The study's findings support the emerging evidence that the implications of ATI use are more far-reaching than facilitating government oversight, narrowly constructed as a way of holding public actors accountable for their actions. Although ATI laws were primarily adopted for this purpose, the results demonstrate that citizens use them to achieve many other and predominantly personal goals. While achieving these, information requests often point out issues of broad public interest, such as systematic violations of citizens' rights or the harmful impact of specific policy changes on their lives. The case study focusing on the UK Welfare Reform in information requests confirms that citizens observed introduced policy changes and experienced them in a negative way. They struggled to orient themselves to these changes. Information requests represented a way to ask for further clarification or raise concerns, even though this is not an intended use of the ATI law, and many of these requests could not be *de jure* classified as information requests. Overall, the study shows that everyday interactions between citizens and the bureaucracy that information requests represent have the potential to empower citizens in several ways and serve as a valuable indicator of public reactions to policy changes. Policymakers could use them strategically, not only to monitor the impact of policies but also to improve their legitimacy by including the feedback received through ATI requests, among other means of policy feedback, in decision-making processes.

Access to information in the UK

Before proceeding to the study, I briefly introduce the context in which ATI operates in the UK.

The UK Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) came into force in 2005 after decades of unsuccessful attempts to legislate the right of access to public-sector information despite domestic and international pressures (Worthy, 2017; Žuffová, 2023). Soon after its passage, the law attracted significant attention in connection with the MPs' expenses scandal, which revealed MPs' abuse of additional cost allowance payments. The first time MPs' expenses caught some media attention was in 2004, after the Parliament published basic figures on MPs' expenses (Worthy, 2014b). When FOIA 2000 came into force in 2005, several journalists followed up on these cues. They submitted information requests to the House of Commons, which set off a four-year-long legal battle reaching the High Court, which eventually ruled in their favor and ordered the House of Commons to disclose all but personal information. However, before it could have released the redacted expenses, their unredacted version was leaked to the Daily Telegraph (Worthy, 2014b). The scandal had severe political and criminal consequences for several MPs. This example from British politics only further illustrates that it was the misuse of taxpayers' money and other misconduct of elected representatives that have given prominence to ATI laws. Media, motivated by the public interest, but also political disputes (Waisbord, 2004), growing economic pressures (Strömbäck & Esser, 2009), or their own ideological or partisan positions (Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2010; Groseclose & Milyo, 2005; Puglisi & Snyder, 2011) are interested in these types of stories.

However, the continuously growing number of information requests submitted to the central government has indicated that their use is likely to go beyond seeking accountability. Goodall and Gay (2010) reported that public authorities received over half a million requests in the first years of the law's existence. According to the latest ATI statistics published by the Cabinet Office, which is responsible for ATI policy in England,

Wales, and Northern Ireland, 83,041 requests were sent to the central government only in 2024⁵, an 18-percentage increase from 2023 and represents the largest number of requests during a year since monitoring began in 2005.

The UK has favorable preconditions for the wide use of ATI legislation. The country has a robust and lively civil society that enjoys independence from the state and can freely pursue a variety of political and civic aims without fearing repercussions⁶ (Coppedge et al., 2021). The British media environment is diverse, representing a wide range of perspectives that are important in society⁷, including those critical of the government⁸. As mentioned above, despite a deterioration since 2016 linked to the administrative burden increased due to Brexit, the civil service is evaluated as competent and effective, enjoys autonomy, and is generally free from political pressure, which has set expectations that information requests would be treated in a professional manner.

Finally, information demand can be studied thanks to the spread of online participation platforms for submitting information requests. In the UK, information requests can be filed through the WhatDoTheyKnow platform run by a not-for-profit group, MySociety. It publishes all communication between the requesters and the bureaucracy, enabling research of the requests' content. Although similar platforms using Alaveteli software are available in more than 25 jurisdictions across the world and the European Union bodies, the UK platform is, by far, the most popular. In countries with similar populations, such as France, public authorities have received fewer than 50,000 information requests since 2020, compared to over 200,000 in the UK over the same period.

⁵ See Freedom of Information statistics regularly published by the Cabinet Office and the Ministry of Justice at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/freedom-of-information-statistics-annual-2024/>.

⁶ CCSI is an interval variable ranging from 0 (weak civil society) to 1 (robust civil society). The UK has uninterruptedly received a score over 0.9 since 1950, and 0.96 in 2020.

⁷ See V-Dem variable Print/broadcast media perspectives (v2merange), which is an ordinal variable ranging from 0 (major media represent only the government's perspective) to 3 (major media represent a variety of perspectives). The UK has uninterruptedly received a score of 3 since the end of World War II.

⁸ See V-Dem variable Print/broadcast media critical (v2mecrit), which is an ordinal variable ranging from 0 (no media outlet is critical) to 3 (all media outlets are critical at least occasionally). The UK has uninterruptedly received a score of 3 since the end of World War II.

The government or public authorities rarely operate these kinds of platforms. Exceptions are Mexico⁹, Argentina¹⁰, and Paraguay¹¹, which have an official system in place allowing information requests' submission and public access to their archive. Altogether, the factors mentioned above add to the widespread use of ATI legislation in the UK.

Studying information demand on online participation platforms

This study builds on and combines two strands of literature: literature on the politics of transparency, ATI laws, and online participation platforms as a low-barrier tool that enables citizens to engage with ATI. In the first section, I provide an overview of research conceptualizing ATI and its relationship to accountability. In the second section, I shift the focus to online participation platforms and what caveats come with their use for research, focusing on the case of WhatDoTheyKnow.

Transparency for accountability?

ATI has been widely studied across social science disciplines. Legal research has concentrated on the evolution of laws, the positive obligations they place on selected public authorities, the scope and proportionality of exemptions from disclosure, available appeal mechanisms, oversight bodies (Dragos et al., 2019), and how these laws fulfill their intended oversight purposes (Kwoka, 2016, 2018a). Political scientists and public administration scholars have studied when and why governments worldwide adopt legislation that constrains their choices (Berliner, 2012; Berliner & Erlich, 2015; Michener, 2010; Schnell, 2014), what role international non-governmental organizations play in the design of these laws (Berliner, 2016), how investigative journalists and political competitors engage with them (Crepaz & Kneafsey, 2021; Worthy, 2014a; Žuffová, 2023), and what their impact is on politics and bureaucracy (Vadlamannati & Cooray, 2016;

⁹ <https://www.infomexdf.org.mx/InfomexDF/Default.aspx>

¹⁰ <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/solicitar-informacion-publica>

¹¹ <https://informacionpublica.paraguay.gov.py/#/>

Worthy & Hazell, 2014). A popular strand in transparency research has focused on ATI as a tool for tackling political corruption and strengthening public accountability (Costa, 2013; Peisakhin & Pinto, 2010; Vadlamannati & Cooray, 2017; Žuffová, 2020).

While ATI laws are contemporary, the idea of embedding *publicity*¹² into institutional (and architectural) design to improve popular oversight goes back to the political thought of Jeremy Bentham (Bruno, 2017; James et al., 1999; Quinn, 2010; Schofield, 2006). Just as he argued that *publicity* could serve preventative and corrective functions for the 18th century, so contemporary empirical research on the effects of political scandals and corruption charges on voting behavior (Winters & Weitz-Shapiro, 2013) argues for today that media are instrumental for citizens accessing information about political corruption and demanding accountability, as they amplify messages and mobilize the public. Already, Bentham presumed that isolated critical voices might be weak in demanding accountability or quickly suppressed. The contemporary research also demonstrates that the media, especially their independence, have an impact on accountability (Besley & Burgess, 2002; Brunetti & Weder, 2003; Camaj, 2013; Ferraz & Finan, 2008; Leeson, 2008; Norris, 2008; Reinikka & Svensson, 2005; Žuffová, 2020). Without free media, stories that raise questions about public reputations and reveal corrupt behavior would be “out of reach, out of sight, out of mind” for the public (Lippmann 1997, 18). The MPs’ expenses scandal in the UK is a good case in point. Therefore, treating information requests as predominantly serving accountability-enhancing goals is not surprising, and several researchers made an argument that this, in fact, should remain their main role (Kwoka, 2016, 2018c, 2018a; Pozen, 2017). However, those few studies that explored information demand in the US and Mexican context show that this is not necessarily the case. For example, in the US, a substantial share of ATI requests was found to represent requests submitted for commercial purposes and ‘the first-person requests,’

¹² Bentham used the term *publicity* instead of transparency or access to information. The underlying principles and values of both concepts are broadly the same. However, as Lindstedt and Naurin (2010) and Naurin (2006) rightly argued, they have nuances that can lead to different outcomes. Transparency means that the information is made available. Publicity, in addition, requires that the information has an audience that engages with it.

which requesters use to seek information about themselves, most often to put the record straight in pending or expected administrative disputes (Kwoka, 2016, 2018a). Toward this end, Michener and Worthy's (2018) Information-gathering matrix – a conceptual framework categorizing requests into four overlapping categories – is extremely useful: (1) requests keeping government accountable (political in nature and oriented toward the public interest), (2) requests ensuring fairness (political in nature but oriented toward private interests), (3) requests informing to empower (non-political and oriented toward the public interest) and (4) requests securing benefits (non-political oriented toward private interests). This study empirically tests this framework on the decade of ATI requests sent to the UK central government. Thus, its contribution is both empirical and geographical, as it complements the available research by broadening its geographical focus.

Online participation platforms: The case of WhatDoTheyKnow in the UK

Political representation is about making citizens present in policymaking processes (Pitkin, 1967). Being able to ask questions and receive answers is its basic prerequisite. Online participation platforms represent democratic innovations that have facilitated communication between the political elite, bureaucrats, and the public (Nelmarkka et al., 2014; Rainie et al., 2012). Predominantly, these interactions, not their content, have attracted research attention (Bagozzi et al., 2019; Kovarek, 2024; Sjoberg et al., 2017). The public element of these interactions increases reputation risks for the political elite and bureaucrats and, thus, encourages responsiveness as opposed to other communication means, such as emails that cannot be publicly scrutinized and that were found to leave citizens without response often (Vaccari, 2014). In addition to the public-facing design of online participation platforms that facilitates responsiveness, the design of ATI laws also does so by legally mandating public administration to respond. This is important, as responsiveness is positively associated with further civic engagement (Sjoberg et al., 2017). Citizens who have experience with agencies being responsive are likely to re-engage.

However, while online participation platforms come with many benefits, they also have significant drawbacks, especially regarding who is being heard. First, a certain level of political knowledge and interest is necessary to know about ATI rights and the laws in place, and these differ based on gender, socio-economic status, early childhood socialization, achieved education, and media use, among other individual and societal-level factors (Abendschön & Tausendpfund, 2017; Barabas et al., 2014; de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006; Grönlund & Milner, 2006). Second, citizens who use online participation platforms to interact with their political representation or public administration are unrepresentative of the population. White, better-educated, high-income social groups that have likely been politically engaged prior to their use of these platforms are substantially over-represented (Baykurt, 2012; Escher, 2011, 2013; Gibson et al., 2014; Pak et al., 2017), possibly due to a variety of reasons, including access to and the cost of technology necessary to use these platforms and skills.

The WhatDoTheyKnow platform, established in 2008 by mySociety as a platform for submitting ATI requests, is no different in this respect. Research into its users revealed that, on average, they belong to a highly educated group of white citizens in their fifties, generally interested in politics (Gibson et al., 2014). Only 5.7% of its users belonged to an ethnic minority group. Most had ample experience with other types of political engagement and activism, including signing a petition, participating in a protest, boycott, or buycott, and volunteering for the local community. More than half of its users (60.4%) said they used the platform for personal reasons. Less than 10% of its users stated that their platform use is professional (ibid).

Another caveat that needs to be taken into consideration when analyzing requests submitted to the platform is that they represent only a fraction of all requests. Most ATI requests to the central government were sent by other (and private communication) means, including by email, post, or dedicated institutional online forms. For example, in 2018, only 17.38% of all requests to the central government were sent through

WhatDoTheyKnow. Nonetheless, there is an increasing trend in its use (Parsons, 2016, 2019).

Data and method

To evaluate what information citizens are interested in, I apply text-as-data methods to an original corpus of 37,356 information requests sent to the UK central government bodies through the civil society-led platform WhatDoTheyKnow from 2008 to 2017.

WhatDoTheyKnow Data

The dataset includes all information requests ($n = 37,356$) submitted to selected central government bodies¹³ through WhatDoTheyKnow from 22 February 2008 to 29 December 2017. The full list of all included central government bodies is available in the Appendix. In addition to the requests' full texts, the metadata contains the date the request was made. Figure 1 shows the distribution of ATI requests across government bodies that received more than 500 requests during the study period – equivalent to roughly one request per week.

While this data represents the population of information requests sent to selected central government bodies through WhatDoTheyKnow in the period studied, it is important to mention that it does not include information requests sent to these bodies submitted through other channels, such as emails or by post¹⁴. Despite this limitation, it is a valuable

¹³ Although the Home Office has steadily been a central government body with the highest number of ATI requests on WhatDoTheyKnow since 2014, it was excluded from the analysis for a variety of reasons, first and foremost due to a risk of exposing requesters' personal data if it were mistakenly disclosed on WhatDoTheyKnow. Parsons (2016, 2019) documented that many requests sent to the Home Office were under the Data Protection Act 2018 rather than under FOIA 2000. Requesters often send their personal data through WhatDoTheyKnow despite being advised not to do so.

¹⁴ The UK government does not have a centralized archive of all received information requests. Therefore, scholars have to rely on alternatives provided by civil society. In the UK, a civil society organization, MySociety, launched WhatDoTheyKnow, a platform for submitting information requests, in 2008. While it

source of citizens' interest in specific topics and reported experiences, as it is not self-reported. As mentioned above, information requests represent real-world interactions between citizens and bureaucracy and thus are free from many biases that other self-reported measures have.

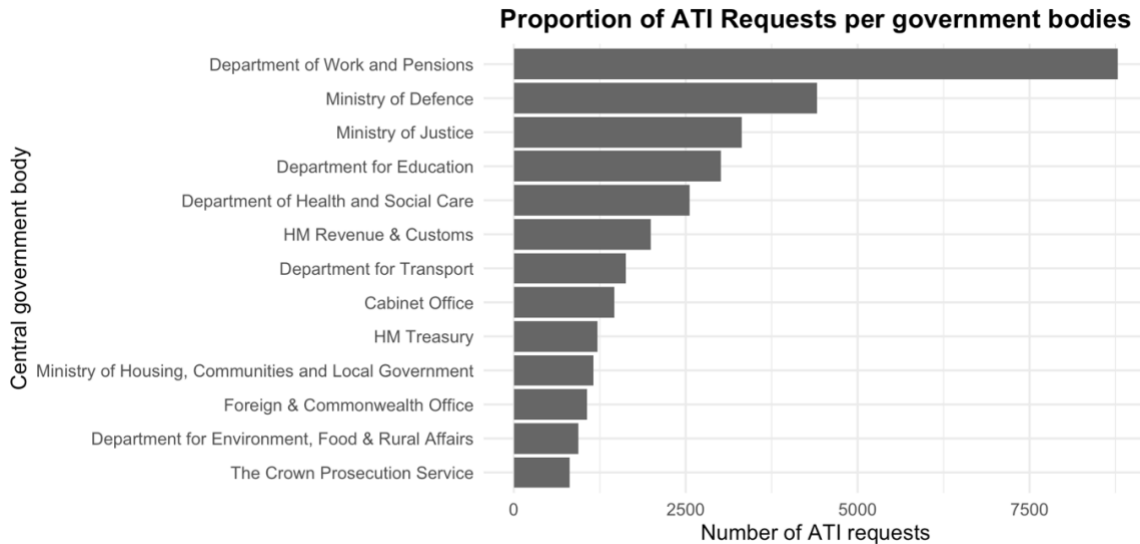


Figure 1. Proportion of requests received by government bodies.

Estimating a topic model

As my main interest lies in the content of citizens' information requests and how (if) they relate to the concept of public accountability, I draw on NLP methods that use text-as-data. Treating information requests as textual data, I can present an unsupervised topic model to estimate the probability of finding specific topics within analyzed data, i.e., information requests. Topic models are generative statistical models used in modeling large text corpora. While no automated method can fully capture the complexity of language, they have enormous advantages. They make it possible to study large corpora of textual

provides access to, so far, over 1,200,000 requests submitted to nearly 47,000 British authorities and counting, it represents only a fraction of all requests, as citizens might use other means for submitting them.

data at low cost and limit biases that could be introduced through the researcher's prior assumptions if the texts were hand-coded. Prior to estimating the topic model, I pre-processed the dataset of information requests (Roberts et al., 2019). Words were converted to lowercase and stemmed, and numbers and punctuation were removed. Words shorter than three letters and 'stopwords,' which represent overly common and used words, were removed. In addition, for the dataset of information requests, I created a character vector containing words, which I expected would occur in the text frequently but would not add any informational value. For example, since information requests represent an official communication between a public servant and a requester, they are likely to include greetings and titles (hello, dear sir, dear madam, yours sincerely, etc.) and the full name of government agencies – addressees of the requests. However, these words say nothing substantive about the content and nature of the requests, so I excluded them from the analysis. After all pre-processing steps, the corpus consisted of 37,356 documents. All analyses were conducted in R (2024.04.2).

The topic model requires a researcher to choose the number of topics k to be estimated. Given that quantitative text analysis is a relatively new field, there is no conclusive guidance on how to select the right number of topics k . Nonetheless, scholars agree that this choice cannot be made arbitrarily; it requires justification. Choosing an appropriate k affects the quality of topics. As Greene, O'Callaghan, and Cunningham (2014) rightly point out, if the number of topics is too low, the topics are likely to be very general, and if it is too high, the topics are likely to overlap. The structural topic model (stm) package used for the analysis (Roberts et al., 2014) contains a metric that assists in the k selection, in particular, a measure of semantic coherence and exclusivity. The topic model is semantically coherent when the topic's most probable words co-occur in the documents. However, as Roberts et al. (2014) found, justifying the k selection only by the measure of semantic coherence is not sufficient because it can be relatively easily reached by selecting a few topics where the most common words in a language are very frequent. Therefore, semantic coherence should be analyzed in combination with exclusivity, which calculates the share of top topic words that are different for a particular topic (ibid).

Following Roberts’ et al. (2014) guidance, I analyzed both semantic coherence and exclusivity to select the right number of topics k . I computed diagnostic values for models with k values from two to 50 (see Figure 2) (Roberts et al., 2019). Based on these values, I considered the k values equal to 6, 15, 17, 20, 22, 27, 34, 38, and 39 topics. I estimated the model for each of these k numbers of topics and plotted semantic coherence and exclusivity for each of these models to establish the final k . For the results of each model, see the Appendix. The topic model with 22 topics has both high semantic coherence and exclusivity for most topics (see Figure 3). Exceptions are topics 10 and 18, which have low exclusivity, and topic 12, which has low semantic coherence.

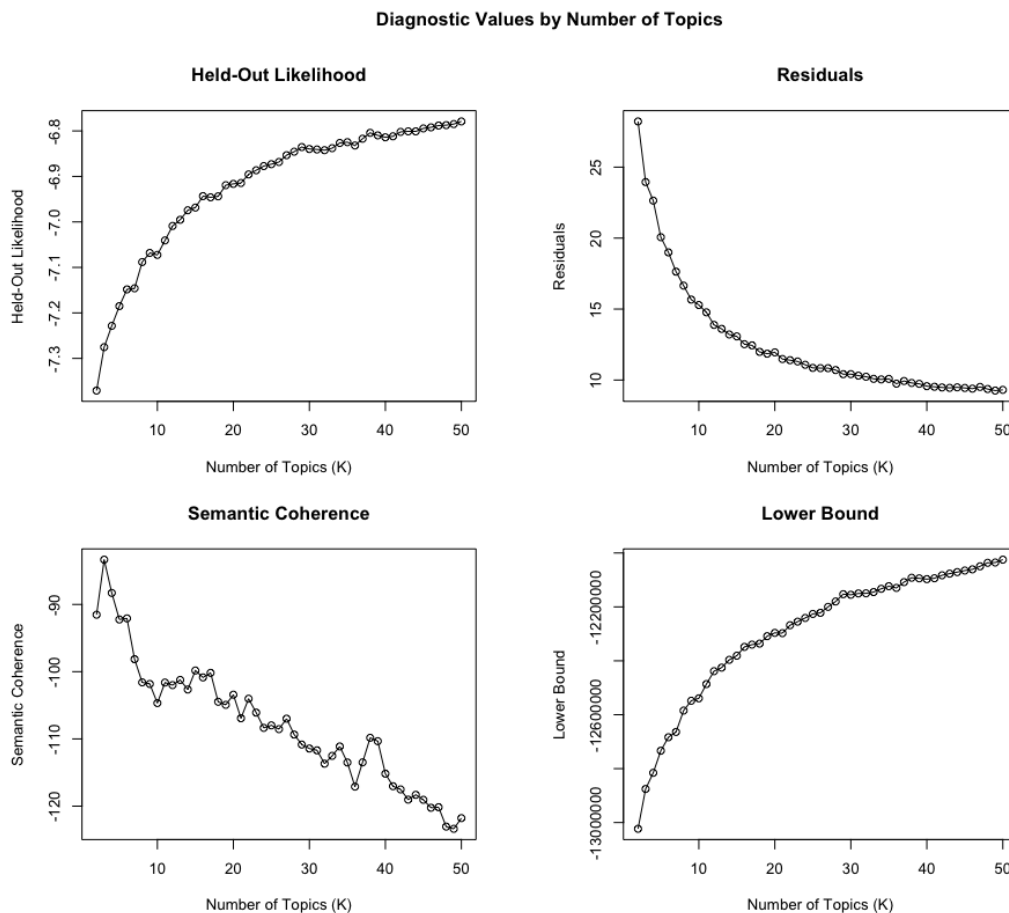


Figure 2. Diagnostic values by the number of topics k equal from 2 to 50.

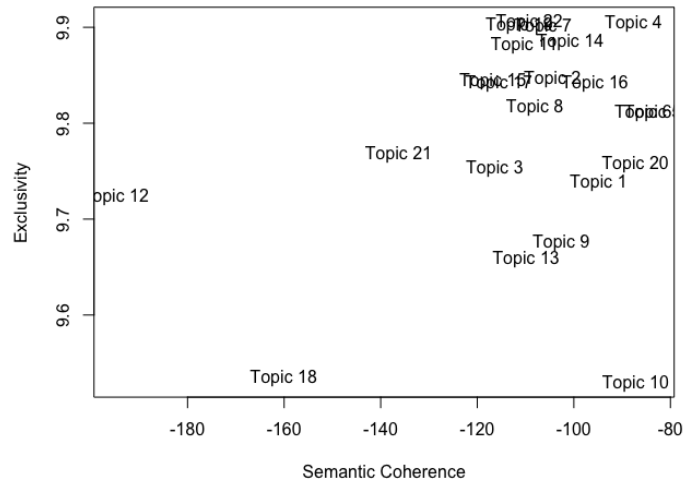


Figure 3. Quality of each topic in a model with k equal to 22 topics.

Using the processed corpus, I adopted the approach of Roberts and colleagues (2014) to estimate a topic model. Before estimation, several data operations had to be performed (Roberts et al., 2019). These steps, how they were applied to my data of information requests sent to the UK central government, are detailed in the Appendix. In addition, the Appendix includes details of the robustness checks conducted to validate the results.

Results

The usefulness of topic models in studying public demand for information is conditional on their effectiveness in estimating meaningful topics. The model presented below identifies 22 topics within information requests submitted to the UK central government through the platform WhatDoTheyKnow from 2008 to 2017. For the proportion of these topics in the corpora of information requests, see Figure 4 and Table 1. The overall results show that requests are heterogeneous, and all types of requests introduced in Michener and Worthy's (Roberts et al., 2019b) theoretical framework for conceptualizing ATI laws are, to different extents, represented in the data.

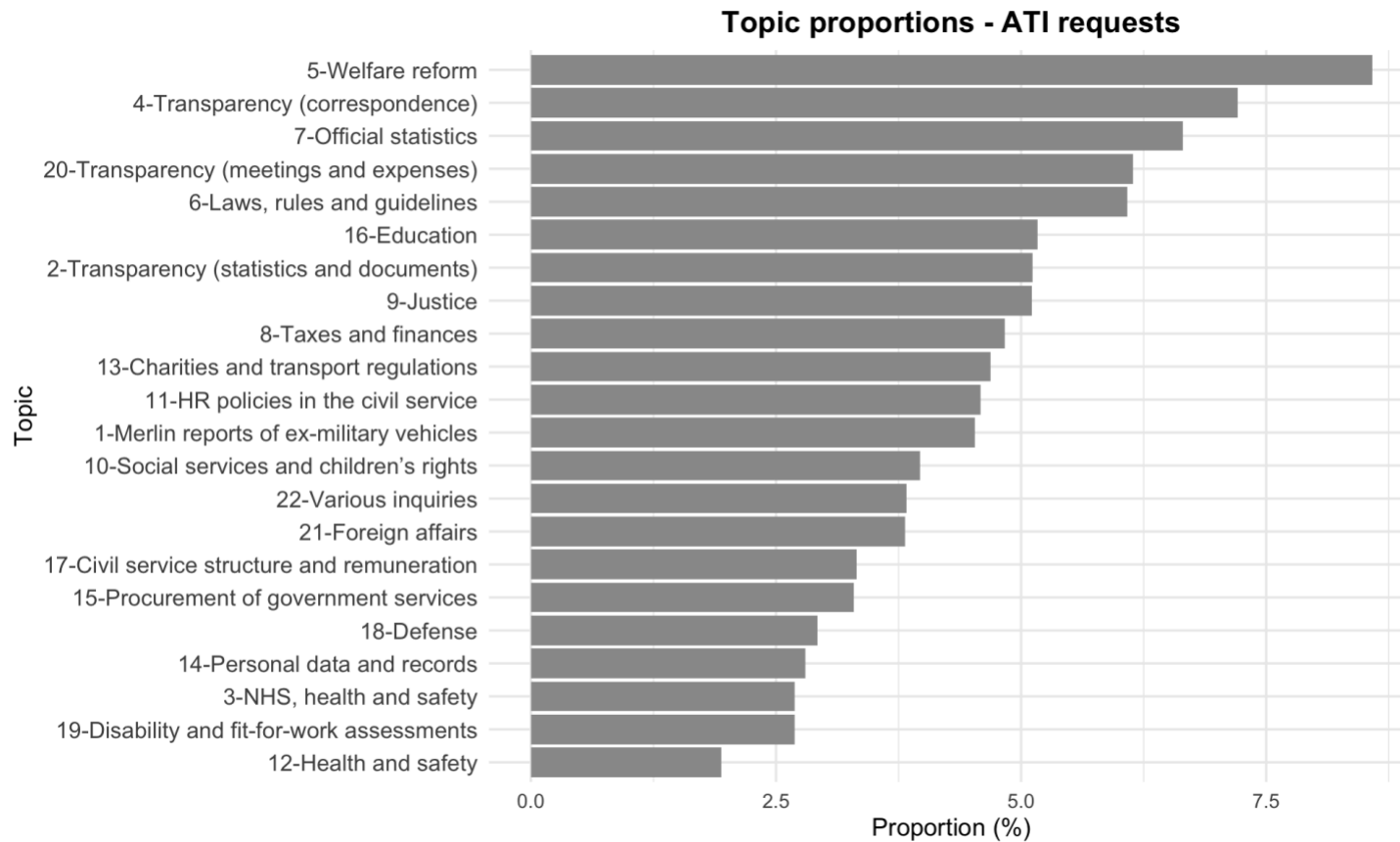


Figure 4. Expected topic proportions for the model with 22 topics.

Beyond oversight: Accountability-seeking requests matter, but ATI uses are much broader

Although the adoption of the ATI legislation was driven by accountability-seeking requests in many jurisdictions, they represented only a third of the studied dataset. Requests that can be seen as both political and submitted in the public interest, aimed at holding political representatives accountable for managing public goods, are predominantly present in topics 2, 4, and 20, which all could be labeled as pertaining to government transparency. Requests within topic 4 – labeled as ‘Transparency (correspondence)’ – focused on various meetings’ minutes and official correspondence between political representatives and different actors from the business and civil society sector who could have had an interest in influencing government decisions and policies. Lobbying transparency clearly is a public interest topic, and access to information about interactions between public institutions and outside interests allows scrutiny. Topic 20 – labeled as ‘Transparency (meetings and expenses)’ – included predominantly requests asking about political representatives’ expenses. Finally, requests within topic 2 – labeled as ‘Transparency (statistics and documents)’ – demanded public administration’s performance statistics and internal documents.

Other topics that could broadly fit into the accountability-seeking requests category are topics 15 and 17. Requests within topic 17 dealt with the organizational structure of the government departments and the remuneration of civil servants and external advisors. Topic 15, labeled as ‘Procurement of government services’, as requesters were interested in the procurement process and costs of specific goods and services obtained by the government, particularly information technologies. At first sight, this topic is of public interest, as requesters investigated if public resources were spent reasonably, i.e., delivered the best possible value for money to the public. However, as was already emphasized, interpreting the findings from unsupervised learning techniques requires human judgment. Reading a sample of requests within this topic reveals that many were round-robin requests, i.e., identical requests sent by a requester to several government departments

simultaneously. The requester still might have been a journalist or an engaged citizen interested in comparing contracting practices between departments. Nonetheless, the level of detail in which goods and services were specified suggests private companies made these requests to explore their business opportunities and learn about their competitors, as previously evidenced in the US context (Kwoka, 2016, 2018c). Therefore, based on this closer investigation, the topic rather fits the category of requests securing benefits, as Michener and Worthy conceptualized it (2018).

Requests falling into the public-interest accountability-seeking category were also identified in topics 11 and 6. Topic 11 included requests enquiring about human resources management in civil service, selection, and disciplinary procedures, the expertise required for the positions filled vs. the skills of selected candidates, pay scales, and others. Requests within topic 6 asked for copies of laws, rules, and internal guidelines. Figure 5 below shows the proportion of accountability-seeking requests relative to other categories, as defined by Michener and Worthy (2018) in their Information Gathering Matrix.

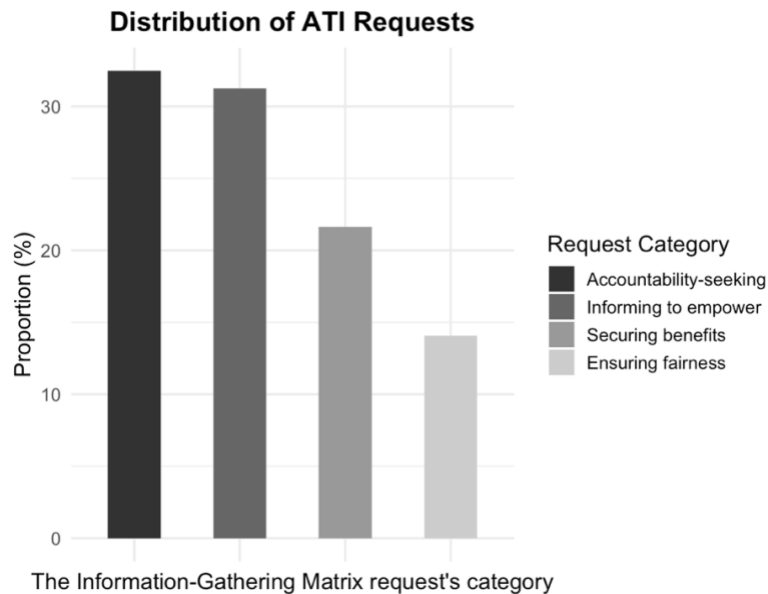


Figure 5. UK ATI requests categorized based on the Information-Gathering Matrix.

Similarly, as accountability-seeking requests, requests filed in public interest but not political in nature represented another third of requests. Michener and Worthy (2018) labeled this type of requests as ‘Informing to empower requests.’ For instance, topic 3 labeled as ‘NHS, health and safety’, topic 12 that focused exclusively on health and safety-related requests, and topic 10 labeled as ‘Social services and children’s rights’ all dealt with issues of public interest. These included requests for leading causes of death statistics or pointed to bad practices in children and young people’s social care, lack of services for diagnosing Asperger’s syndrome in children, etc. These are all topics where improved access to information can lead to the empowerment of affected patients, workers (in the case of health and safety measures), parents, and children.

Requests within Topic 21 labeled as ‘Foreign affairs’ enquired, among other issues, about British engagement in the military operation in Afghanistan, visas being denied to people with a specific nationality, or the death of Dr David Kelly, a British expert on biological warfare who was identified as a source claiming that the invasion to Iraq was not justified, as the threat of weapons of mass destruction was exaggerated. Requests under Topic 18 labeled as ‘Defense’ are somewhat interrelated and deal with defense and security issues. Also, requests within topic 7, labeled as ‘Civil service structure and remuneration,’ topic 9 on ‘Justice’ and 13 on ‘Charities and transport regulation,’ asked for various statistics, guidance, cases, or documents pertaining to the public interest.

The smallest share of requests has fallen into the category of ‘Ensuring fairness requests,’ i.e., requests that are political in nature but oriented toward private interests. It comprises three topics labeled ‘Welfare reform,’ ‘Disability and fit-for-work assessments,’ and ‘Personal data and records.’ However, all of them were in one way or another linked to the Welfare reform, and as will be discussed in the separate dedicated section below, requests within these topics demonstrated that the public was confused about the introduced changes, and overall, the reform received substantial opposition.

Finally, non-political requests submitted in private interest represented around a fifth of the dataset. They encompassed requests seeking tax advice (topic 8), information about educational institutions (topic 16), or very technical requests about governmental procurement contracts for various products and services (topic 15). Topic 1 represents perhaps the most illustrative and interesting example of requests filed in private interest. In the UK, it is possible to request the so-called Merlin report, which provides information to ex-British Army, Navy, and Royal Air Force vehicle owners about the history of their vehicles. Most requests within topic 1 demanded these reports. Finally, topic 22 entailed a variety of inquiries that were challenging to put under one umbrella label.

Temporal shifts in information seeking: ATI requests as indicators of political salience

The exploration of temporal trends clearly shows that there have been shifts in information-seeking patterns, with some topics getting more attention and others vanishing. For someone familiar with British politics, the trends in some topics' prevalence over time can be easily spotted and linked to major political events or specific pieces of legislation that were discussed at the time. For instance, as will be discussed in greater detail in the following section, the peak in requests within the topic labeled 'Welfare reform' coincided with the adoption of the Welfare Reform Act 2012 and the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2015.

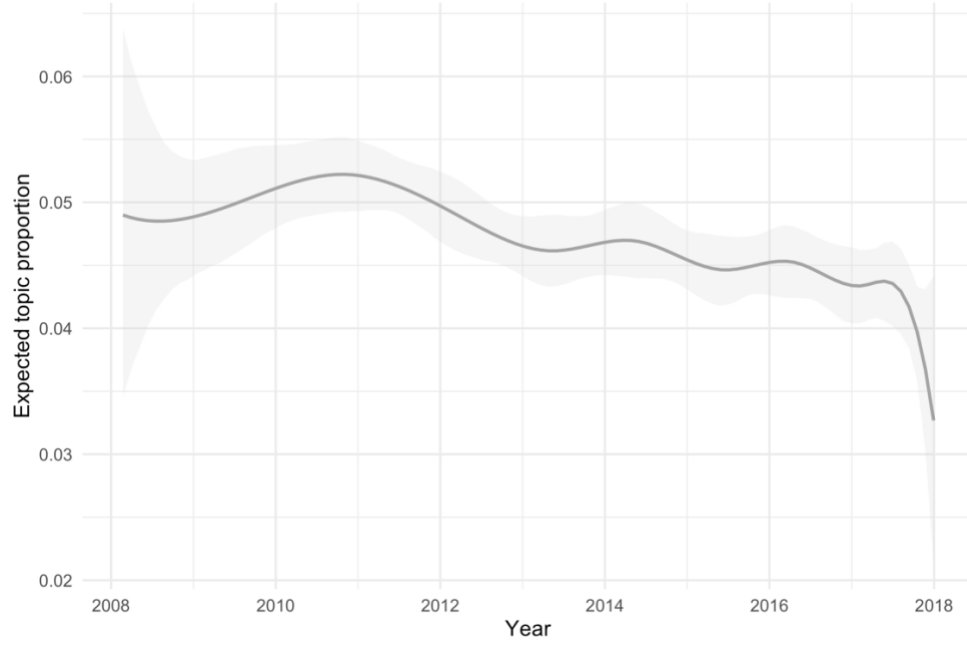
Interesting patterns can also be observed in the evolution of topics related to transparency over time, i.e., accountability-seeking requests. As can be seen in Figure 6, the prevalence of requests seeking statistical information or specific documents has been relatively stable, although there has been a drop toward the end of the studied period (2017). However, requests for correspondence between government members, public officials, and other influential actors, such as businesses, represented in topic 4 peaked in 2010 and then faded out. Similarly, in 2009, there was an increase in requests demanding

information about politicians' expenses and meetings, which was followed by a steady decline.

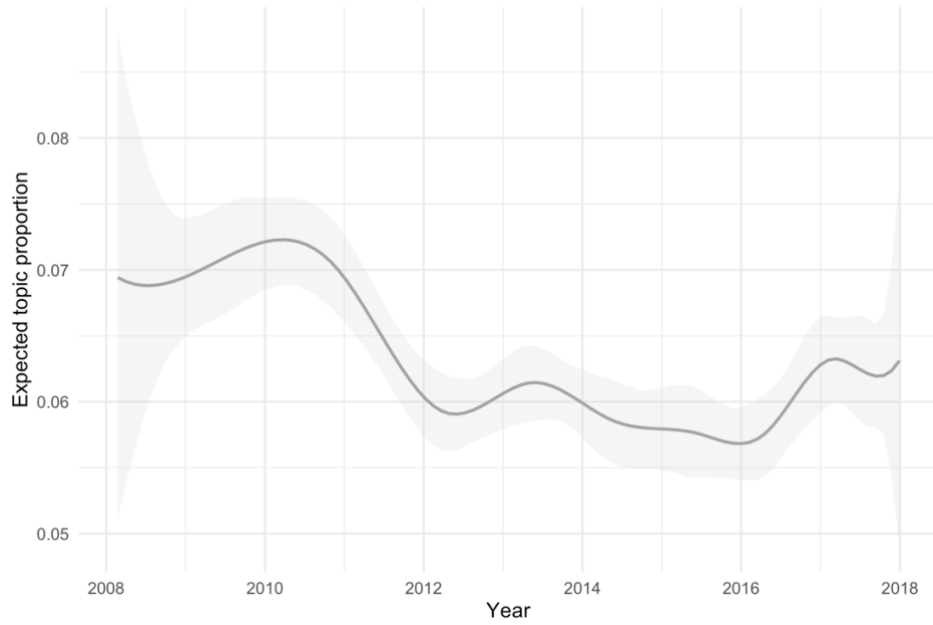
The major political events during that time can explain these patterns. 2009 was the year when the MPs' expenses scandal broke. After a four-year-long legal battle, the House of Commons was ordered to disclose MPs' expenses to journalists who requested this information through the recently enforced ATI law. The public and media took a great interest in the scandal, which was reflected in the increase in information requests on this topic. Both Labour and Conservative MPs were implicated in the scandal, but Labour MPs faced more scrutiny, as they represented the party in government at the time and had a greater share of MPs in parliament. The Conservative Party, led by David Cameron at the time, instrumentalized the scandal for political gains and built their election campaign on transparency as the key topic, with success. After winning the 2010 general elections, the 2010-2015 Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government pledged to make the British government "the most transparent and accountable government in the world." British Prime Minister David Cameron argued on several occasions that transparency would create new opportunities for public participation, but also for businesses and boost enterprise¹⁵. While transparency as a topic was reflected in information requests around the election and in the first year or two of the new government, the interest gradually declined.

¹⁵ For more examples of the transparency rhetoric in the United Kingdom (UK), see the following commentaries by the representatives of the Conservative Party: Francis Maude, the then Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General's editorial in the Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/nov/19/francis-maude-government-data-published>, or David Cameron, the then Prime Minister's opinion in the Daily Telegraph: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/david-cameron/8621560/David-Cameron-We-are-creating-a-new-era-of-transparency.html>.

Topic prevalence: Transparency (statistics and documents) over time



Topic prevalence: Transparency (correspondence) over time



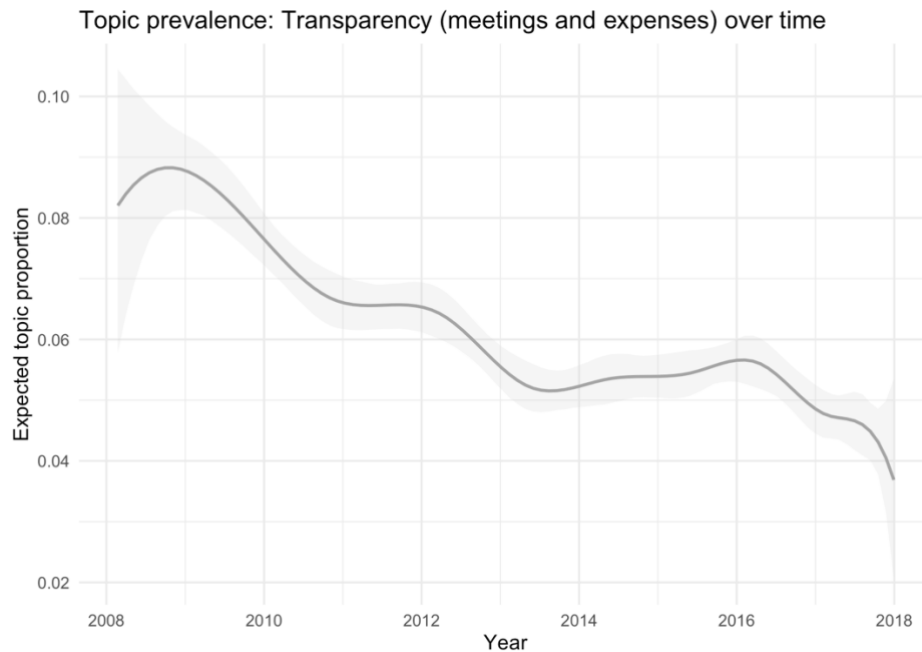


Figure 6. The prevalence of topics related to transparency over time.

Another interesting topic that can shed more light on temporal shifts in information-seeking and demonstrate that ATI requests can serve as indicators of political salience is topic 3, labeled as ‘NHS, health and safety’, which observed peaks in information requests in 2009, 2012, and between 2016 and 2017. In 2009, following the financial crisis, concerns about funding cuts and NHS sustainability were growing and were reflected in the media coverage¹⁶ on NHS performance, waiting times, and staff wellbeing. In the same year, several reports were published that could have triggered greater public and media interest in the topic, such as the NHS Pay Modernization in England – Agenda for Change report¹⁷. In 2012, the NHS Health and Social Care Act 2012 came into effect and faced wide public, professional, and academic opposition¹⁸. The 2016 to 2017 spike in requests could have been linked to the Brexit debate, where the NHS dominated. The Leave campaign, with

¹⁶ See <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/8207801.stm>.

¹⁷ See <https://www.parliament.uk/business/news/news-by-year/2009/06/report-looks-at-nhs-pay/>.

¹⁸ For major criticism of the reform, see <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/health-social-care-act-2012>.

one of its key slogans, ‘We send the EU £350 million a week, let’s fund our NHS instead’¹⁹, could have triggered the interest of the media in how these pledges have been reflected in reality and what the situation was for the NHS post-Brexit.

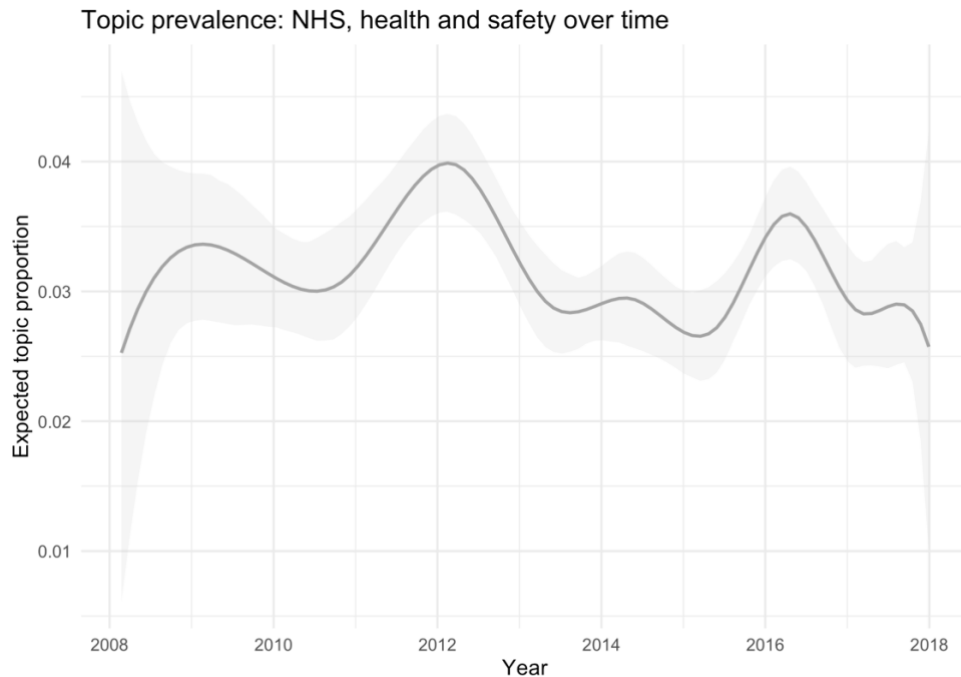


Figure 7. The prevalence of the NHS-related topic over time.

Information requests as indicators of policy acceptance: The case of the UK Welfare Reform

Topic 5, with the highest expected proportion (8.58% of requests), was predominantly linked to the UK Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) Welfare Reform, and thus, it was labeled as such. Two major welfare laws were adopted in the studied period – the Welfare Reform Act 2012 and the Welfare Reform and Work Act

¹⁹ See the Leave campaign leaflet here: <https://digital.library.lse.ac.uk/Documents/Detail/we-send-the-eu-350-million-a-week-lets-fund-our-nhs-instead/125774>.

2015. As claimed by the government, one of the main aims of the reform was to “make provision enabling disabled people to be given greater control over the way in which certain public services are provided for them”²⁰. The act introduced a new welfare benefit called Universal Credit (UC), which merged six of the main means-tested benefits and tax credits into one payment, and Personal Independence Payment (PIP), which substituted Disability Living Allowance (DLA). Moreover, Work Capability Assessment (WCA) started to focus on the functional effects of an individual’s condition (i.e., ability to work) rather than the condition itself. The reform was meant to encourage job-seeking. The government introduced a cap on the total amount of benefits that working-aged people could receive, in no case more than the average wage for working families. In the same spirit, the receipt of Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) was conditioned by a continuous commitment to get back into work at the earliest opportunity. If a claimant failed to provide evidence of such commitment, sanctions followed.

The increase in information requests within topic 5 between 2012 and 2016, with its peak in 2014, indicates that the requests were linked to the reform (see Figure 8). In-depth analysis of selected requests has, indeed, demonstrated that policy beneficiaries were confused about changes. They did not fully understand or did not receive them well. They used ATI legislation to raise criticism of the reform or seek clarification on how it would affect their individual cases. Some requesters enquired about the method for calculating pension age or about the newly introduced PIP. Others claimed that the new policy, in particular, WCA, which, in some instances, concluded severely disabled people with lifelong conditions were fit to work, was ill-conceived. They argued that the reform had left vulnerable and disadvantaged groups behind, stigmatized them, and further deepened their marginalization. In addition to topic 5, these types of requests were also represented in topic 19, labeled as ‘Disability and fit-for-work assessment’, which represented 2.69% of all requests, and in topic 14 labeled as ‘Personal data and records’, which represented 2.8% of all requests.

²⁰ See the law at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/24>.

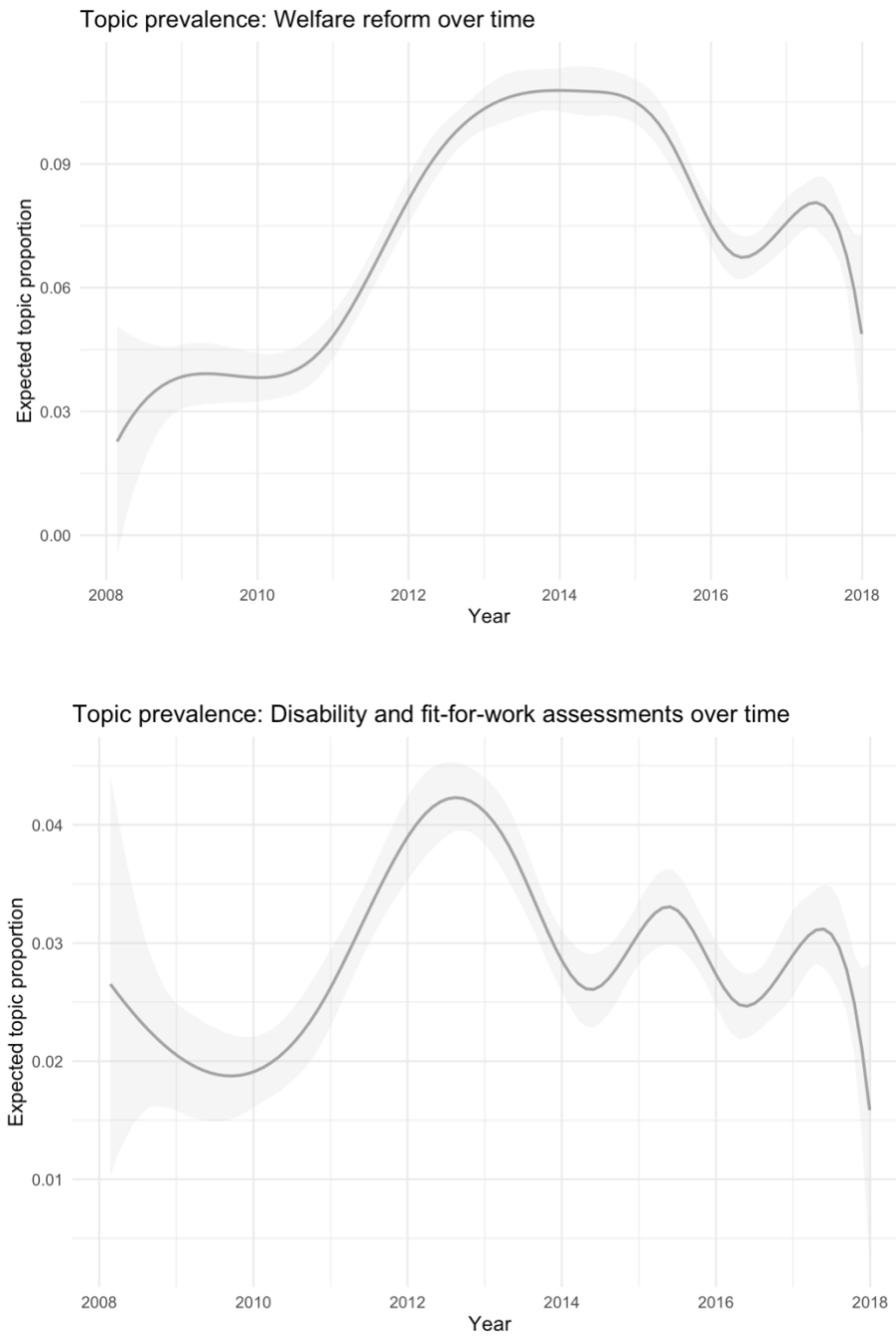


Figure 8. The prevalence of topics related to the UK welfare reform' in ATI requests.

Some of these requests did not meet the legal definition of an information request. Under certain conditions, public authorities can decide not to respond to such requests (refuse them as vexatious) or deal with them outside the ATI law as general inquiries or complaints. For instance, one requester sent a lengthy list of published cases in which DWP sanctioned, in his view, unjustly, benefits claimants. By providing stories of several people who were punished despite following government guidance and expressing their interest in finding a job, he argued that some of the introduced rules do not make sense and have dire effects on the policy beneficiaries. He also asked if the DWP had been investigating any of these cases. Although this request did not include necessary information (personal data linked to these cases) for DWP to be able to check and provide the information, DWP still had additional exchanges, beyond those required by law, with the requester to explain the procedures in such cases.

This shows three important things. First, as was explicitly mentioned in some of the requests, some requesters resorted to ATI laws to communicate with bureaucracy, as they claimed to be unheard on other platforms, which they used to raise their concerns.

Second, these requests are far from serving the watchdog function. By applying Michener and Worthy's Information-gathering matrix, they would likely be categorized as political requests submitted in private interest, i.e., requests ensuring fairness. By echoing the findings of the research into the impacts of the UK welfare reform (Fletcher, 2011; Garthwaite, 2011, 2014; Hancock & Mooney, 2013; Roulstone, 2015), these requests demonstrate ATI legislation's usefulness for the study of politics more broadly, but especially for understanding public opinion regarding their policy acceptance.

The confidence in requests' utility as a litmus test of public support for new laws and policies also comes from the fact that during the studied period, the parliament adopted other salient pieces of legislation. However, in contrast to the Welfare reform, these were widely accepted and did not lead to a significant number of information requests. For instance, in July 2007, a few months before the start of the studied dataset, the Health Act

2006 came into effect, which prohibited smoking in all enclosed public spaces, workplaces, and vehicles used for public transportation. The public has widely perceived it as a positive public health measure that protects workers and vulnerable people. The legislation also triggered minimal political opposition. As a consequence, the topic was not featured in the studied dataset. Another salient piece of legislation that came into effect around the same time when welfare policies were reformed was the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013. It allowed same-sex couples to marry legally and provided them with the same legal protection and rights as heterosexual couples. Similarly, as smoke-free legislation, this law had broad public and political support and also did not generate information requests. At the same time, welfare reform generated thousands of information requests, raising concerns. Therefore, I feel confident to conclude that information requests can serve as a valuable test of policy acceptance. If the public supports a specific policy, they are less likely to seek clarification and complain. Satisfaction is often less explicitly expressed than dissatisfaction, as people tend to voice concerns or complaints more readily than positive feedback and praise.

Lastly, as ATI requests are used differently than intended, their functions and goals could also be repurposed. Bureaucracies could use ATI to get informed about the issues constituents face with newly adopted policies, use this knowledge to modify them, or clarify ambiguities and counterbalance the spread of misinformation.

Discussion and conclusions

The predominant approach to studying ATI policies focused on them as transparency policies, serving monitorial functions. Only very few studies explored the substantive aspects of ATI requests to determine if they are used for other than accountability-seeking purposes. This study, exploring the topics of 37,356 information requests submitted to the UK central government through the platform WhatDoTheyKnow over a decade (2008-2017), advances our so far limited knowledge of what information people seek from public administration.

The results show that the uses of ATI laws are manifold, and public demand for public-sector information is heterogeneous. Contrary to the initial expectation when passing ATI laws that information requests will be submitted predominantly with the aim of holding those in power accountable, accountability-seeking requests, even if approached more broadly, represented a minority in the studied dataset of information requests to the UK government. These are clearly represented in topics 2, 4, and 20, but also 6, 11, 15, and 17 (adding up to 32.43% of the requests). Within topic 15, it was not always clear if the requests were submitted to monitor how the public money is spent or to explore procurement opportunities. Requests within the topic with the highest expected proportion, linked to the UK DWP Welfare Reform, demonstrated that people use information requests to raise their concerns about new policies and seek clarification on how they will impact their lives. They claimed to resort to ATI laws when they are not listened to on other platforms for communicating with public administration and their elected representatives.

Some scholars have seen the use of ATI laws for purposes other than initially intended as problematic, reducing public resources for private interests (Kwoka, 2016, 2018c, 2018b; Pozen & Schudson, 2018). There are indeed situations in which ATI laws cannot react to people's demands with the required flexibility and promptness, and other means to address these demands would be more appropriate. However, the wide use of information requests, as evidenced in this study, goes beyond accountability seeking, suggesting that for ATI laws to benefit from their full potential, different actors should engage with them in different ways. For policymakers, information requests could serve as a litmus test for newly adopted policies. It can provide them with insightful information on how citizens see and experience these policies and use this information as feedback to be incorporated into modifying these policies. The interactions through ATI laws also represent a useful opportunity to explain and clarify any ambiguities that citizens have. All in all, the study shows that information requests represent for people a vital communication channel with bureaucracies.

This study does not come without limitations. First, information requests submitted to civil society-led online participation platforms, such as WhatDoTheyKnow, represent only a share of all requests sent to public administration through other means. If public administration published its internal records of information requests, researchers could conduct analyses of the requests' population. This collaboration between the public administration and academics would be mutually beneficial, as the results could inform the administration's proactive publication. Second, as mentioned above, online participation platforms might amplify voices that are already participating in politics in one way or another, leaving marginalized communities unheard.

Future research into information demand would benefit from comparative analyses of the content of information requests and news coverage to explore who informs whom.

Table 1. Topic names, highest probability words, frequent and exclusive words, and topic proportions.

Topic	Topic name	Top word stems	Topic proportion
5	Welfare reform	Highest Prob: work, pension, claimant, benefit, claim, job, allow FREX: jobcentr, jsa, jobseek, jobmatch, mwa, jobsearch, wrag	8.58 %
4	Transparency (correspondence)	Highest Prob: inform, freedom, follow, request, receiv, within, suppli FREX: hesit, write, inform, esx, clarif, freedom, unmanag	7.21 %
7	Official statistics	Highest Prob: mani, year, tell, month, time, sinc, period FREX: statist, mani, tell, past, figur, age, period	6.65 %
20	Transparency (meetings and expenses)	Highest Prob: offic, document, meet, govern, relat, correspond, cabinet FREX: email, anguilla, correspond, ministeri, meet, e-mail, minut	6.14 %
6	Laws, rules and guidelines	Highest Prob: decis, issu, public, reason, made, regul, respons FREX: legisl, regul, repli, disclosur, amend, iwm, ico	6.08 %
16	Education	Highest Prob: school, educ, name, academi, primari, england, children FREX: school, educ, teacher, pupil, headteach, nurseri, gcse	5.17 %
2	Transparency (statistics and documents)	Highest Prob: report, state, publish, chang, review, new, see FREX: impact, publish, survey, announc, gmp, consult, implement	5.12 %
9	Justice	Highest Prob: court, justic, case, prosecut, law, polic, order FREX: convict, magistr, suprem, judgment, hmp, juvenil, remand	5.11 %
8	Taxes and finances	Highest Prob: tax, custom, money, revenu, payment, pay, paid FREX: loan, repay, borrow, taxat, tax, levi, bank	4.83 %
13	Charities and transport regulations	Highest Prob: local, council, author, transport, communiti, commiss, chariti FREX: chariti, highway, logo, byelaw, pedestrian, arun, southeastern	4.69 %
11	HR policies in the civil service	Highest Prob: cost, staff, total, financi, employ, amount, spent FREX: spent, cost, salari, fte, scs, expens, staff	4.59 %
1	Merlin reports of ex-military vehicles	Highest Prob: defenc, servic, vehicl, forc, militari, histori, inform FREX: rover, merlin, cadet, chassi, medal, landrov, vrnregistr	4.53 %
10	Social services and children's rights	Highest Prob: children, child, famili, right, social, parent, abus FREX: cafcass, nobl, tortur, child, abus, lie, foster	3.97 %
22	Various inquiries	Highest Prob: use, individu, one, call, answer, form, nation FREX: call, individu, differ, identifi, one, mail, phone	3.83 %

21	Foreign affairs	Highest Prob: british, land, food, foreign, countri, offic, commonwealth FREX: union, cull, embassi, republ, slaughter, ambassador, commonwealth	3.82 %
17	Civil service structure and remuneration	Highest Prob: name, organis, fund, manag, public, busi, project FREX: sport, nominet, strategi, sector, structur, cultur, media	3.32 %
15	Procurement of government services	Highest Prob: contract, servic, use, support, current, system, agenc FREX: supplier, contract, printer, vendor, softwar, hardwar, sap	3.29 %
18	Defense	Highest Prob: defenc, oper, site, incid, safeti, war, aircraft FREX: weapon, nuclear, bomb, saudi, radioact, hms, mpgs	2.92 %
3	NHS, health and safety	Highest Prob: health, nhs, trust, care, hospit, patient, mental FREX: nhs, patient, surgeri, therapi, oxlea, captivitydetent, goddington	2.69 %
19	Disability and fit-for-work assessments	Highest Prob: assess, train, disabl, medic, ato, esa, condit FREX: journey, cmep, disabl, hcps, lima, analyst, easement	2.69 %
14	Personal data and records	Highest Prob: record, person, access, process, protect, right, confirm FREX: consent, access, audio, record, caseman, born-digit, complianc	2.8 %
12	Health and safety	Highest Prob: use, secur, test, build, facil, trial, vaccin FREX: scanner, winter, temperatur, heathrow, hpv, spray, mercuri	1.94 %

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Appendix

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- 1.1. Central government bodies included in the analysis
- 1.2. Additional details on methods (selecting number of topics k)
- 1.3. Robustness checks – training a classifier to predict topics
- 1.4. Exploration of topics

1.1. Central government bodies included in the analysis

AGO	Attorney General's Office
CC	Charity Commission for England and Wales
CMA	Competition and Markets Authority
CO	Cabinet Office
CPS	Crown Prosecution Service
BEIS	Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
DCLG	Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
DCMS	Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
DExEU	Department for Exiting the European Union
DfE	Department for Education
DfID	Department for International Development
DfT	Department for Transport
DHSC	Department of Health and Social Care
DIT	Department for International Trade
DMO	UK Debt Management Office
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
FC	Forestry Commission
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
FSA	Food Standards Agency
GAD	Government Actuary's Department
GLD	Government Legal Department
HMRC	Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs
HMLR	Her Majesty's Land Registry
HMT	Her Majesty's Treasury
HSE	Health and Safety Executive
MOD	Ministry of Defense
MOJ	Ministry of Justice
NA	The National Archives
NCA	National Crime Agency
NIO	Northern Ireland Office
NSI	National Savings and Investments
OAG	Office of the Advocate General for Scotland
OLHC	Office of the Leader of the House of Commons
OLHL	Office of the Leader of the House of Lords
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
OFGEM	Office of Gas and Electricity Markets

OFQUAL	Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation
ORR	Office of Rail and Road
OS	Ordnance Survey
ONS	Office for National Statistics
OFWAT	Water Services Regulation Authority
RPA	Rural Payments Agency
SCUK	Supreme Court of the United Kingdom
SFO	Serious Fraud Office
SO	Scotland Office
WO	Wales Office

1.2. Additional details on methods

1.2.1. List of stopwords and other words excluded from the dataset

Commonly used *stopwords* for the English language:

a, about, above, after, again, against, all, am, an, and, any, are, aren't, as, at, be, because, been, before, being, below, between, both, but, by, can, can't, cannot, could, couldn't, did, didn't, do, does, doesn't, doing, don't, down, during, each, few, for, from, further, had, hadn't, has, hasn't, have, haven't, having, he, he'd, he'll, he's, her, here, here's, hers, herself, him, himself, his, how, how's, i, i'd, i'll, i'm, i've, if, in, into, is, isn't, it, it's, its, itself, let's, me, more, most, mustn't, my, myself, no, nor, not, of, off, on, once, only, or, other, ought, our, ours, ourselves, out, over, own, same, shan't, she, she'd, she'll, she's, should, shouldn't, so, some, such, than, that, that's, the, their, theirs, them, themselves, then, there, there's, these, they, they'd, they'll, they're, they've, this, those, through, to, too, under, until, up, very, was, wasn't, we, we'd, we'll, we're, we've, were, weren't, what, what's, when, when's, where, where's, which, while, who, who's, whom, why, why's, with, won't, would, wouldn't, you, you'd, you'll, you're, you've, your, yours, yourself, yourselves

Additional words excluded from the dataset:

dear, sir*, madame, madam, provide, provid*, requir*, require, request*, request, best wishes, kind regards, get*, get, full, detail, list, address, know, version, yours sincerely, yours faithfully, inform*, inform, faithfully, department, foi, london, ministr*, offic*, will, year, mr, mrs, question, email, e-mail, can, act, document, please, number, also, like, http*, much, january, february, march, april, may, june, july, august, september, october, november, december, [1-9], avail, available, websit*, last, copi*, copy, never, even*, happen*, thing, cant, sure*, just, unit, data, people, week, attorney general's office, beis, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, cabinet_office, Charity Commission for England and Wales, cma, Competition and Markets Authority, cps, Crown Prosecution Service, dcms, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, deeu, Department for Exiting the European Union, defra, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, dfe, Department for Education, dfid, Department for International Development, dft, Department for Transport, dhsc, Department of Health and Social Care, dit, Department for International Trade, dwp, Department for Work and Pensions, fco, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Food standards agency, Forestry Commission, gad, Government Actuary's Department, Government legal department, hm_treasury, Her Majesty's Treasury, hmrc, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, hse, Health and Safety Executive, Land registry, mhclg, ministry, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, mod, Ministry of Defence, moj, Ministry of Justice, National archives, nca, National Crime Agency, nio, Northern Ireland Office, nsi, National Savings and Investments, Office of the advocate general for scotland, Office of the leader of the house

of commons, Office of the leader of the house of lords, ofgem, Office of Gas and Electricity Markets, ofqual, The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation, ofsted, The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills, ofwat, The Water Services Regulation Authority, ons, Office for National Statistics, Ordnance Survey, orr, Office of Rail and Road, Rural payments agency, Scotland office, Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland, sfo, Serious Fraud Office, Debt Management Office, Supreme Court, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales, To whom it may concern.

1.2.2. Selecting number of topics k

As mentioned in the manuscript, I followed Roberts et al.'s (2014) guidance to select the number of topics k . Using searchK function in the stm package (Roberts et al., 2019), I computed diagnostic values for models with k values from two to fifty. Based on these values, I considered the k values equal to 6, 15, 17, 20, 22, 27, 34, 38 and 39 topics. I estimated the model for each of these k numbers of topics and plotted semantic coherence and exclusivity for each of these models to establish the final k . See figures 1 to 6 for all models. As can be seen, the topic model with 22 topics has both high semantic coherence and exclusivity for most topics. Exceptions are topic 10 and 18, which have low exclusivity, and topic 12, which has low semantic coherence.

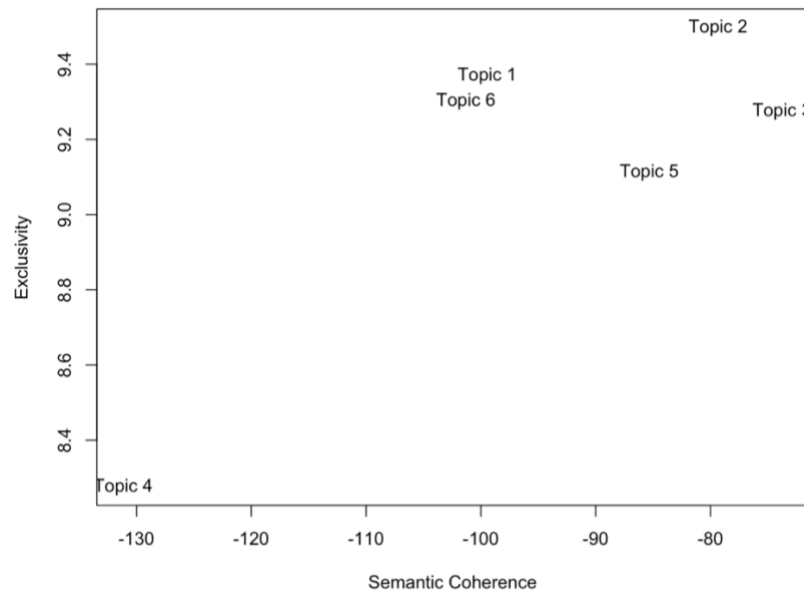


Figure 1. Quality of each topic in a model with k equal to 6 topics.

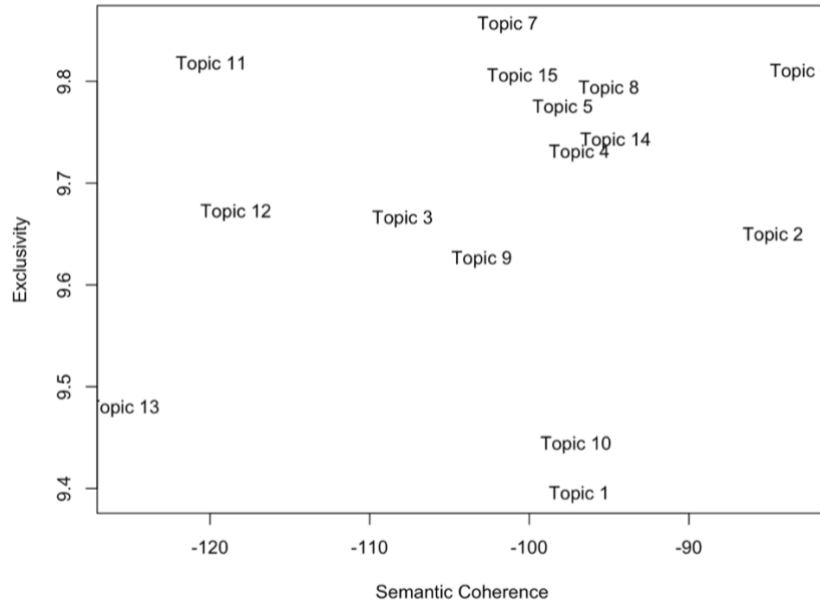


Figure 2. Quality of each topic in a model with k equal to 15 topics.

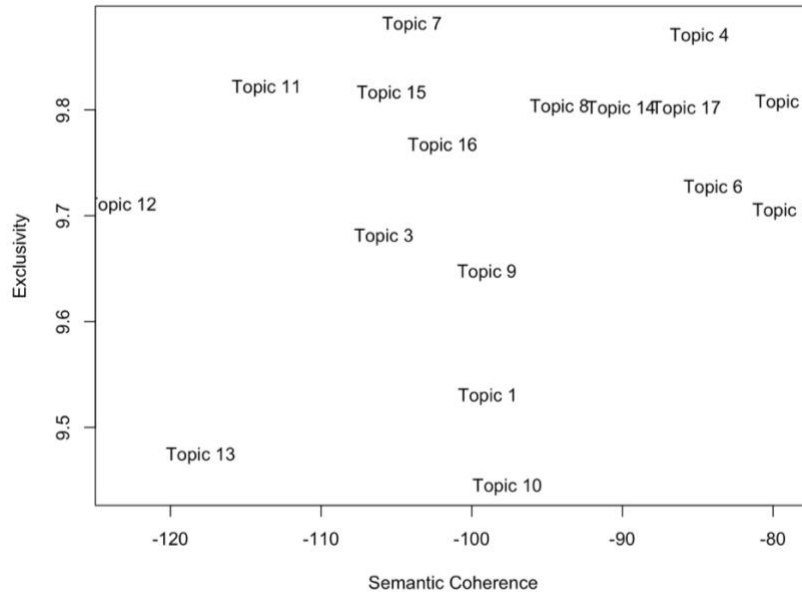


Figure 3. Quality of each topic in a model with k equal to 17 topics.

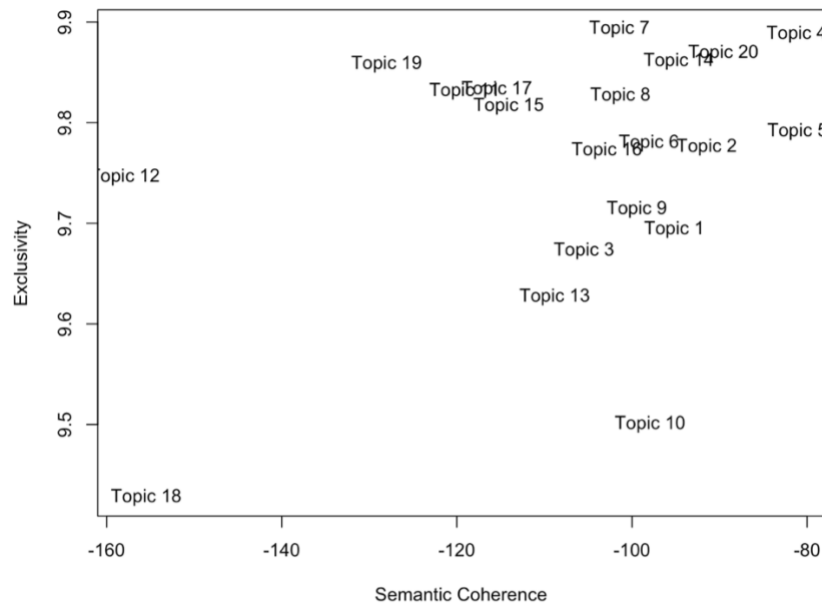


Figure 4. Quality of each topic in a model with k equal to 20 topics.

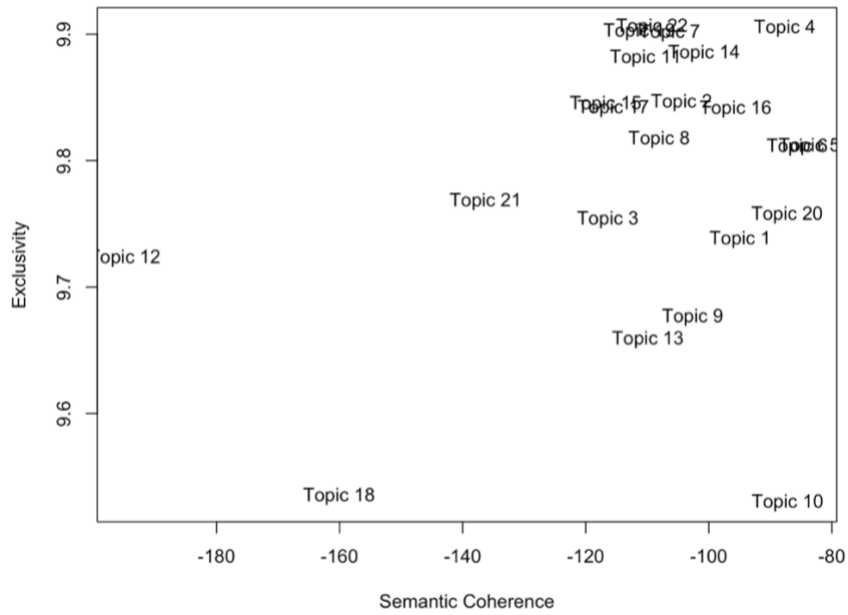


Figure 5. Quality of each topic in a model with k equal to 22 topics.

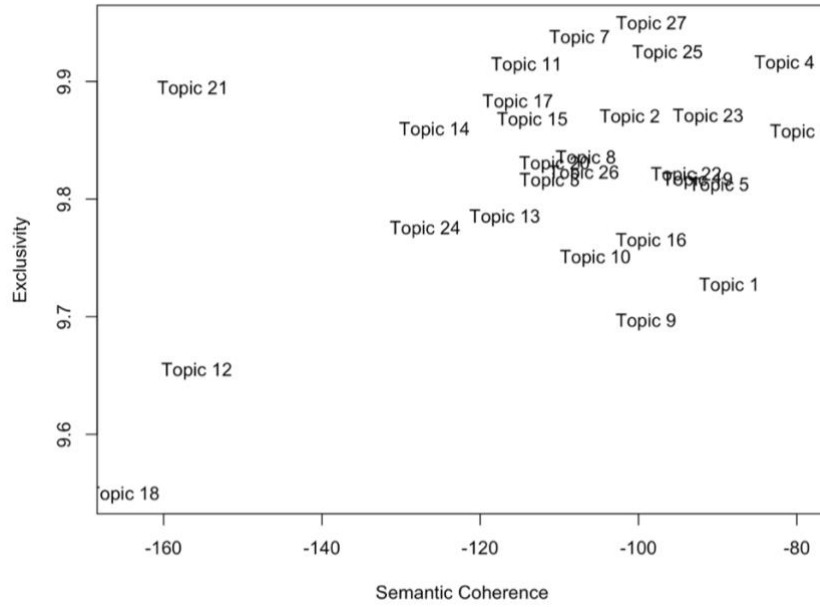


Figure 6. Quality of each topic in a model with k equal to 27 topics.

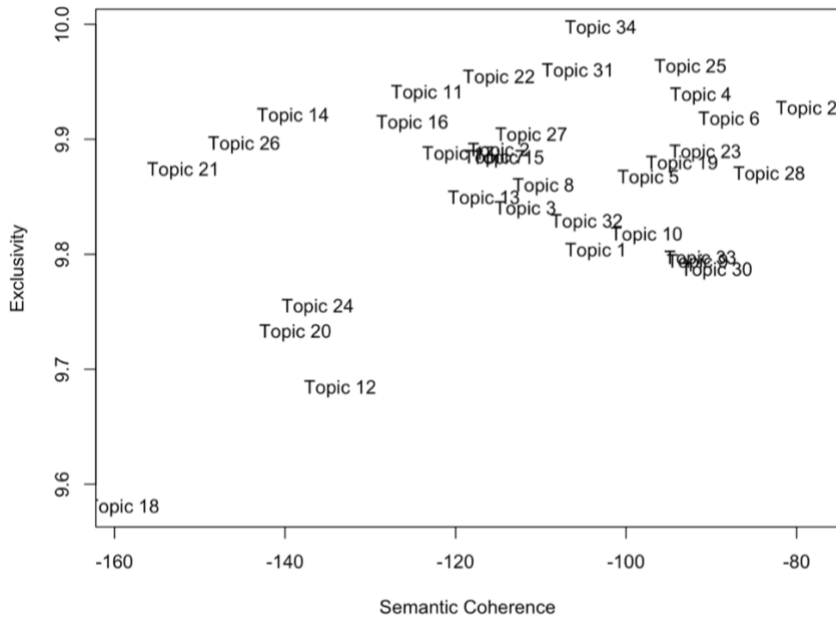


Figure 7. Quality of each topic in a model with k equal to 34 topics.

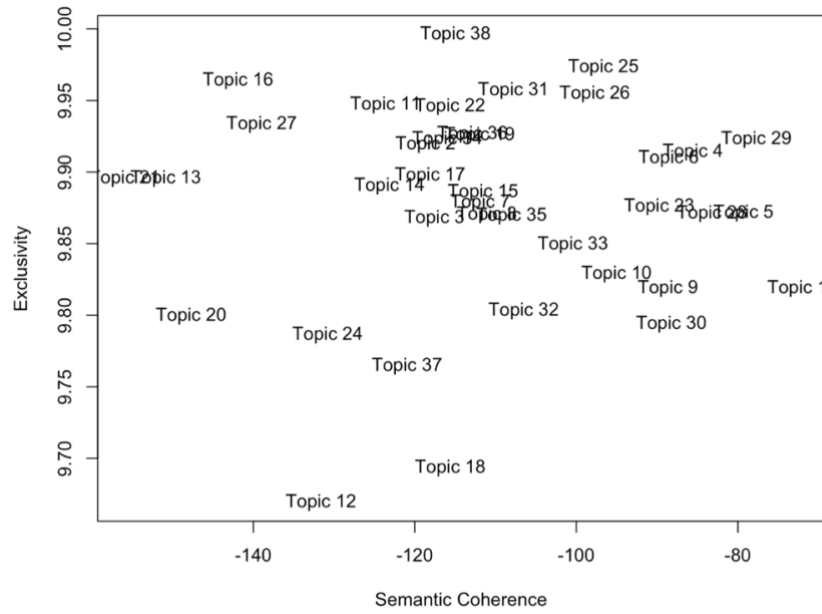


Figure 8. Quality of each topic in a model with k equal to 38 topics.

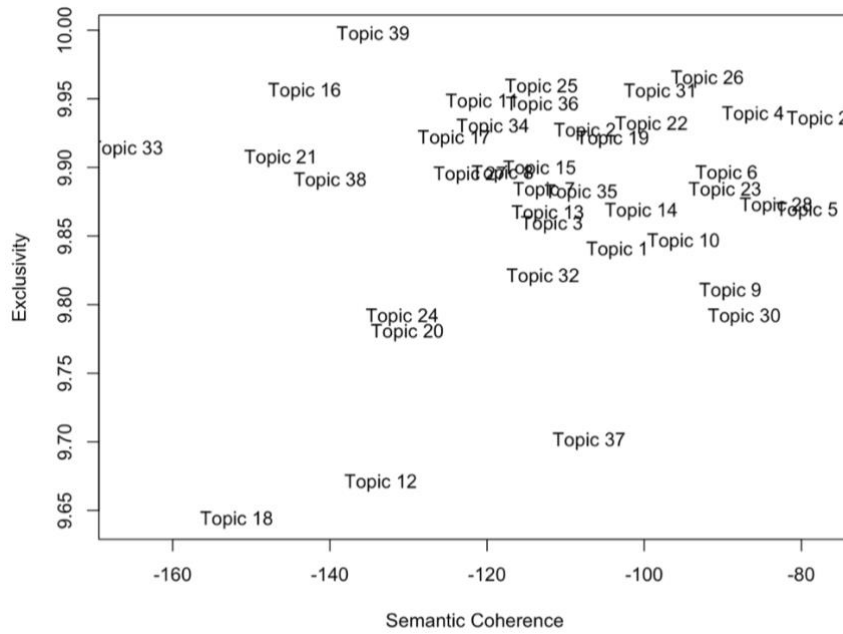


Figure 9. Quality of each topic in a model with k equal to 39 topics.

1.3. Robustness checks

To classify the topics of the full dataset of ATI requests, I trained a supervised machine learning classifier using a manually labeled subset of the data (5% of the full dataset; $n = 1868$). I first preprocessed this labeled subset by constructing a text corpus and applying standard transformations (lowercasing, removing punctuation, numbers, stop words, and extra whitespace). I then generated a document-term matrix (DTM) and removed sparse terms. Using this DTM, I trained a multinomial logistic regression model, which was then applied to predict the labels for the remaining unlabeled ATI requests. To ensure consistent feature representation, I used the same preprocessing steps and applied the vocabulary (dictionary) learned from the labeled DTM when creating the DTM for the unlabeled corpus. The classifier predicted a topic label for each unlabeled document, which I then used to analyze and visualize topic distributions across the full dataset (see the Figure below for topic proportions based on this model).

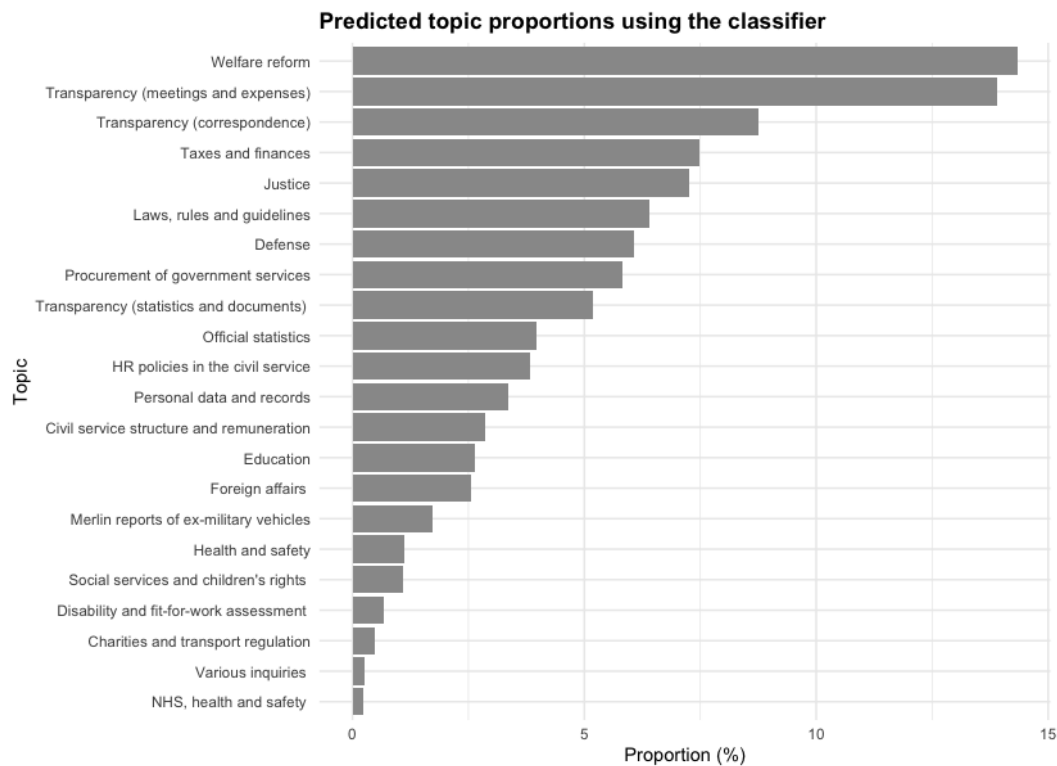


Figure 10. Distribution of predicted topics using the classifier.

1.4. Exploration of topics

This appendix describes the twenty-two topics that were identified by the unsupervised topic modeling approach presented in the study. I discuss how I proceeded with attributing descriptive labels to each topic. First, I closely read around 10% of information requests from each topic. These requests were randomly sampled and amounted to approximately 3,700 information requests altogether. Then, I consulted the lists of each topic's highest probability words (topwords) and words that are both frequent and exclusive, identifying words that distinguish topics (FREX words).

Below, I summarize this analysis. I start with a descriptive label. In addition, I also added the highest probability words, FREX words, the name of the authority to which the request was sent (its abbreviation as introduced in 1.1. Central government bodies included in the analysis), and the date when the request was sent and its outcome. I also provide three representative examples of information requests in each topic. These are unredacted examples as they were submitted by requesters, except for removing information that may compromise the anonymity of requesters. In general, the requests investigated differed in length. While some were just two or three sentences, others were one or more pages long. Due to limited space, I purposefully selected only short information requests as examples where possible.

Combining these multiple sources of information, my substantive knowledge of UK politics and policies and access to information in the UK generated interpretations for all topics (n=22).

Detailed exploration of topics in the model with 22 topics

Topic 1: Merlin reports of ex-military vehicles

Highest Prob: defenc, servic, vehicl, forc, militari, histori, inform

FREX: rover, merlin, cadet, chassi, medal, landrov, vrnregistr

Information requests:

Example 1. MoD, 9 June 2014, successful.

Under the Freedom of Information Act I would like to request any information available for this vehicle. I am the owner of an ex-military Land Rover Series 3 FFR 24v Air Portable. The military registration was 55HG89, would you furnish me with the vehicles military history I intend to take part in military shows, and I would like to return my rover back into the role she served while serving in the armed forces regiment, places served etc.

Example 2. MoD, 20 January 2017, successful.

I am politely requesting under the freedom of information act any history or information you may have on an ex-military Landover 109 with the military registration 46 KC 50.

Example 3. MoD, 4 July 2015, successful.

Please can I request the Merlin Report for my Land Rover 110, Military Reg. 38KL20?

Topic 2: Transparency (statistics & documents)

Highest Prob: report, state, publish, chang, review, new, see
 FREX: impact, publish, survey, announc, gmp, consult, implement

Information requests:

Example 1. Cabinet Office, 22 August 2011, not responded to.

I am very interested in the impact of the Barrier Busting website. See below for link.

Example 2. Office for National Statistics, 8 October 2015, successful.

In the government's response (March 2015) to the Independent Review of the Sharing Economy (November 2014), found at the link below, section 1.7-1.8 says: *“The ONS will assess the feasibility of developing statistics on the sharing economy in the UK, and if possible develop proposals for producing them [...] The ONS will publish this feasibility study, and any proposals for producing statistics on the sharing economy (including timeframes), by summer 2015.”* I cannot find this feasibility study online so please would you be able to provide me with a copy.

Example 3. DCMS, 5 October 2014, not responded to.

With reference to Defra Research Project SE3288 Risk Assessment for Cattle BCG Vaccine: 1) Has the project been completed? 2) Has the Risk Assessment been completed? 3) When will the Risk Assessment be published.

Topic 3: NHS, health and safety

Highest Prob: health, nhs, trust, care, hospit, patient, mental
 FREX: nhs, patient, surgeri, therapi, oxlea, captivitydetent, goddington

Information requests:

Example 1. DHSC, 14 June 2010, not held.

Is there a link between anti-psychotic drugs and pulmonary embolism and is the drug melarill still prescribed in the UK?

Example 2. DHSC, 12 January 2012, not responded to.

Please provide statistics of alcohol related admissions to a and e dept and medical wards in Chesterfield royal hospital Derbyshire?

Example 3. HSE, 9 November 2011, not responded to.

In terms of the Freedom of Information Acts, please can you supply a copy of the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) Report into the tragic and avoidable death of Mr Paul Reekie as described in The Scotsman newspaper website: <https://www.scotsman.com/news/authors-suicide-due-to-slash-in-benefits-1711578?> Thank you.

Topic 4: Transparency (correspondence)

Highest Prob: inform, freedom, follow, request, receive, within, supply

FREX: hesitate, write, inform, esx, clarify, freedom, unmanageable

Information requests:

Example 1. DHSC, 2 February 2011, partially successful.

I am writing to request information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. In order to assist you with this request, I am outlining my query as specifically as possible. I would like a record of all communications between the Department of Health and the think tanks Reform and Doctors for Reform since October 2010. The details should include copies of correspondence, or the information contained therein. I would be interested in any information held by your organisation regarding my request. I understand that I do not have to specify particular files or documents and that it is the departments responsibility to provide the information that I require. If you need further clarification, please contact me by email. If my request is denied in whole or in part, I ask that you justify all deletions by reference to specific exemptions of the act. I will also expect you to release all non-exempt material. I reserve the right to appeal your decision to withhold any information or to charge excessive fees. I would be grateful if you could confirm in writing that you have received this request. I look forward to your response within 20 working days, as outlined by the statute. I would like to receive this information electronically if possible.

Example 2. HM Treasury, 17 September 2013, refused.

Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, I seek the following information: Minutes for all meetings about Bitcoin or where Bitcoin is mentioned (Bitcoin is an online digital crypto currency). If the decision is made to withhold some of this data using exemptions in the Data Protection Act, please inform me of that fact and cite the exemptions used. If you need any clarification then please do not hesitate to contact me. Under Section 16 it is your duty to provide advice and assistance and so I would expect you to contact me if you find this request unmanageable in any way. I would be grateful if you could confirm in writing that you have received this request, and I look forward to hearing from you within the 20-working day statutory time period.

Example 3. Cabinet Office, 26 May 2016, successful.

I am requesting information under Freedom of Information, please forward this request to the appropriate party. I would like to request information related to the Government's Transparency Agenda with some specific questions: How many people currently work on the Transparency Team? 2. How many people are responsible for Open Data and/or Transparency policy within Cabinet Office? 3. Who is currently responsible for implementing Open Data/Transparency policy? Many thanks in advance for your answer.

Topic 5: Welfare reform

Highest Prob: work, pension, claimant, benefit, claim, job, allow

FREX: jobcentr, jsa, jobseek, jobmatch, mwa, jobsearch, wrag

Information requests:

Example 1. DWP, 15 August 2013, successful.

Whilst on JSA,

[1] Can a Jobcentre or Work Programme adviser require, notified through a Jobseeker's Direction or Mandatory Activity Notification, making an application or attending an interview for a Zero Hour job, taking into account: "Jobseeker Allowance claimants are not required to apply for zero hours contract vacancies and they will not face sanctions for turning down the offer of a zero hours contract": <https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/166969/response/407562/attach/2/FoI.30.22.RESPONSE.pdf?>

If they can be required to make the application or attend the interview, can a sanction be applied for:

[2] not making the application? (notified through a Jobseeker's Direction or Mandatory Activity Notification)

[3] not attending the interview? (notified through a Jobseeker's Direction or Mandatory Activity Notification)

[4] if the application or interview is successful for turning down the Zero Hour job/contract?

Example 2. DWP, 11 April 2014, successful.

I have read that if a post work program claimant on JSA stops their claim (and consequently does not make any other claim) one of two things can happen if they make a JSA reclaim:

- Reclaim within 12 weeks they are placed back on the post work program support,
- Reclaim after 12 weeks they are not placed back on the post work program support,

I would like to know: Why is it a 12-week period? Why is it decided that if a JSA reclaim is made after 12 weeks a claimant does not need to go back to the post work

program support? For a claimant who does not go back to post work program support (i.e. reclaimed after 12 weeks) what does the Job Centre now require of them e.g. work activities/work search journal?

Example 3. DWP, 11 January 2014, partially successful.

Could you please provide me the most up to date written information/policy legislation you hold which answer and relate to my following questions?

1. The Jobseeker's Allowance Regulations 2013 came into effect on 29th April 2013. It states a 35 hours per week job search and work availability requirement and the fact that claimants can volunteer for maximum 50% of their work search requirement hours. Which claimants do the above legislation apply to? According to my Jobseeker's Agreement I have to be available for work for 40 hours per week and I do not have a weekly work search requirement time, like the above 35 hrs per week. I see it on internet forums that some JSA claimants have a 35 hours per week work search requirement. The start date of my claim is 31st August 2013. I was also claiming JSA 21st April - 19th August 2013. It is/was income-based JSA. I am finishing the Work Programme on 24th January 2014. When I finish it, will I have to sign a claimant commitment, and will I have a set weekly number of work search requirement hours? Or the "old law" will apply: Jobseeker's Agreement and no set work search requirement hours?
2. Can my Jobcentre advisor ask me or mandate me to give up the voluntary work I do on my own account? I am planning to volunteer with the Citizens Advice Bureau as an Adviser 2 days a week which is under 17 hours per week to gain recent work experience and a reference to help me find a job.
3. I completed 17 hours of voluntary work with Crisis at Christmas 23 – 28th December 2013 and currently not volunteering. I have seen your policy about the fact that JSA claimants who have recently completed some voluntary work or still volunteering are not eligible to be referred to the Mandatory Intervention Regime. Can/would I be referred to MIR if volunteering when assessed?
4. My new Jobcentre adviser keeps refusing to sign and date my job search evidence (ES4JP) I provide when I sign on fortnightly. Does she have to sign it? Does she have to sign it if I ask her to do so?
5. My Jobcentre advisers keep asking me to allow DWP access to my Universal Jobmatch Account. Do I have to? Can they mandate me to do so? Do I have to prove printouts of my Universal Jobmatch Account? Do I have to email my CV to the Jobcentre or provide them a hard copy to keep if asked? Can they mandate me to do so?
6. I live-in a house share with random tenants I do not know very well. Some of my food and some of my post has gone missing. Can I ask the Jobcentre in writing to send me letters recorded signed for to ensure the receipt of my Jobcentre notices/letters? Is the Jobcentre going to post me letters recorded signed for if I make a written request and I offer to pay for the extra costs the Jobcentre or its contractors incur?

7. I have seen it on the internet that from April 2014 there will be a new scheme called Help to Work Scheme under which long-term unemployed JSA claimants may be mandated to do unpaid work for up to 30 hours per week for 26 weeks (community work placements). Can I be mandated to do the above unpaid community work if I do voluntary work of my own choice which the Jobcentre knows about and which I have started already when being assessed whether to be mandated to do the above unpaid community work?
Could you please copy and paste my questions into your reply?

Topic 6: Laws, rules and guidelines

Highest Prob: decis, issu, public, reason, made, regul, respons

FREX: legisl, regul, repli, disclosur, amend, iwm, ico

Information requests:

Example 1. MoJ, 16 December 2014, refused.

My recent FOIA request on the WhatDoTheyKnow web site was ignored by the MOJ, and the ICO issued decision notice FS50560287 on the 19th of November 2014 stating, “*The Commissioner finds that the MOJ breached section 10(1) of the FOIA in this case and has ensured that the details of this case have been recorded for future monitoring purposes*”. I issued a separate issue FOIA request by post on the 2nd of November 2014. The MOJ ignored this FOIA request. I issued an FOIA Internal Review request on the 29th of November 2014 by post regarding the MOJ failure to respond to my FOIA request of the 2nd of November 2014. The MOJ ignored this FOIA Internal Review request. Both postal communications were confirmed by Post Office proof of posting certificates that are available on request. I have today issued a further FOIA assessment request to the ICO regarding the MOJ failure to respond to my FOIA request of the 2nd of November 2014. I note that the WhatDoTheyKnow web site has a number of past FOIA requests against the MOJ concerning FOIA issues. How many times has the MOJ ignored FOIA requests in the past five years? How many times has the ICO issued a decision censuring the MOJ for not complying with the requirements of the FOIA in the past five years? Does the MOJ have a policy of ignoring FOIA requests? Does the MOJ have a policy of delaying FOIA responses that are responded to, to the last day allowed? When the ICO censure the MOJ for breaches of the FOIA what changes have the MOJ made, if any, to their procedures and policies as a result?

Example 2. DHSC, 8 November 2017, successful.

Kindly requesting to provide information regarding the below mentioned:

1. Number of Reimbursed Packages in 2016
2. Total reimbursements in GBP in 2016 of the following drug:
Humira 40mg/0.8ml solution for injection pre-filled syringe (AbbVie Ltd-ATC L04AB04)

Humira 40mg/0.4ml solution for injection pre-filled pen (AbbVie Ltd - ATC L04AB04)

Humira 40mg/0.8ml solution for injection pre-filled pen (AbbVie Ltd- ATC L04AB04)

Humira 40mg/0.4ml solution for injection pre-filled syringes (AbbVie Ltd-ATC L04AB04)

Humira 40mg/0.8ml solution for injection vials (AbbVie Ltd-ATC L04AB04)

Example 3. HMRC, 12 January 2014, refused.

Please provide copies of the verbatim transcripts of HMRC “Staff Phone In’s” redacted, where covered by FOIA legislation, going back as far back as the FIOA compels HMRC (I don’t have the information necessary to determine how far back this period will be so please enact S16 advice/assistance).

Topic 7: Official statistics

Highest Prob: mani, year, tell, month, time, sinc, period

FREX: statist, mani, tell, past, figur, age, period

Information requests:

Example 1. ONS, 2 July 2012, information not held.

I would like to get the statistics for divorces in each of the past three years among couples where both people are of south Asian origin/British Asian.

Example 2. DWP, 21 January 2015, partially successful.

I would like to know the number of dismissals in the last year (if any) (1 January 2014 – 31 December 2014), the reason of those dismissals, the number of appeals against the dismissal, and the outcome of appeal against dismissals (appeal upheld or not upheld).

Example 3. ONS, 3 March 2014, information not held.

Do you have any statistics on the number of pregnant asylum-seeking women who come to the UK? Do you have any statistics on how many asylum seekers are dispersed to the Northeast of England, and if possible, how many of these are women who are pregnant?

Topic 8: Taxes and finances

Highest Prob: tax, custom, money, revenu, payment, pay, paid

FREX: loan, repay, borrow, taxat, tax, levi, bank

Information requests:

Example 1. HMRC, 2 August 2017, successful.

I am a taxpayer. Is the beneficiary of a gift of £3000 in any tax year liable to pay tax on that amount?

Example 2. HM Treasury, 8 April 2009, refused.

Bank Deposits (non-retail) in Kaupthing Singer & Friedlander IOM & UK have been frozen. I would like to have precise details of the basis upon which Dave Whealan was refunded his considerable deposit with KSF UK. If a claim was made for compensation and payment was made through the FSCS, on what basis precis?

Example 3. HMRC, 21 January 2013, refused.

In relation to all transfer pricing investigations, settled throughout 2012, on companies operating in the UK: how much money did HMRC collect and how much money did it ordinarily demand?

Topic 9: Justice

Highest Prob: court, justic, case, prosecut, law, polic, order

FREX: convict, magistr, suprem, judgment, hmp, juvenil, remand

Information requests:

Example 1. MoJ, 9 September 2015, not responded to.

Under what authority do Justices of the Peace hear civil cases in Magistrates courts and from what date have they heard civil cases and who granted them their authority to hear civil cases?

Example 2. MoJ, 21 May 2010, successful.

Do all magistrate judges take an oath and if so, do judges have to provide it to anyone in court who request to see it. Also, if you stand in court when the magistrate enters the court room, do you then give them jurisdiction over you? If a magistrate doesn't get jurisdiction over you, are proceedings allowed to continue?

Example 3. MoJ, 17 June 2015, not responded to.

I wish to obtain a transcript of the criminal trial of REGINA v SHEILA BOWLER, held at Hove Crown Court. Murder conviction 9 July 1993. Also, a transcript of the retrial, ending in acquittal February 1998?

Topic 10: Social services and children's rights

Highest Prob: children, child, famili, right, social, parent, abus

FREX: cafcass, nobl, tortur, child, abus, lie, foster

Information requests:

Example 1. MoJ, 27 September 2016, successful.

I would like to question why children's social workers are allowed to get away with emotionally abusing children then make up that it's the family at fault. I have a very scared and stressed-out teenager who has stopped trusting adults, after social workers started to hound us and harass us. The social workers haven't stopped to think of the impact their actions are having on my daughter, they've subjected her to random doorstep details fishing by complete strangers sent by a team manager for social services, this has left my daughter feeling uncomfortable in her own home. Also, they've told my daughter she was being removed from home when she wasn't causing my daughter to stop sleeping in her own room and comfort eating. They blamed myself and the family for her weight gain, something that we were trying to prevent. The reason we went to the social services was because my daughter was a sugar addict something we were trying to get her off all together. A year on the social workers hadn't helped with her sugar addiction, though my daughter is successfully off sugar through counseling and family's hard work. Scaring children isn't best practice for children services they have irreversible impacts on vulnerable children. My daughter is living proof you don't go to children social services for help as you get excuses, told go waste police time. More alarming is that when a paramedic was asking for assistance, they fobbed him off too. What changes can be made for children social services? What punishments can be put in place when county councils don't deal with these sorts of complaints? What retraining can be given to children social services? Can managers be removed from cases where they are seen to be making families' life so bad that it makes them ill? Can child protection plans be cancelled quicker if shown the social services haven't done anything to help the families when families are seen to be asking for help either by phone or email throughout the time on the plan?

Example 2. MoJ, 26 December 2012, information not held.

I am asking under the FOI how many judges have either been debarred or reprimanded on any of the following within the family courts. Please supply me stats with the offence and action taken.

1. How many judges have been debarred or reprimanded for ignoring evidence from parents that any professional has misled the courts either verbally, under oath or in writing.
2. How many judges have removed children from parents that have reported suspected abuse?
3. How many judges have ignored evidence from the parent that social services have been selective or withheld evidence from the courts (i.e. child makes disclosure to police, social services denied the disclosure existed, parent produces disclosure in court, but judge accepts social worker version because they are "professional"). What is action taken against a judge that ignores this evidence?
4. How many judges have issued an ECO, ICO or similar on the basis that the parent proved the social worker to be misleading the courts?
5. How many judges have issued fines or punishments for any professional that has been caught perverting the course of justice in some way or other, either in writing

or oral within the family courts? The only research we can find is Lord Justice Wall in 2003 criticised a social worker as being a liar to a metropolitan council.

Example 3. MoJ, 16 August 2015, did not fall under FOIA.

Religion of Children being taken by Children's Services - Do you keep a register of the religious faith of families and their children who have been taken from their families by the local authority?

Topic 11: HR policies in the civil service

Highest Prob: cost, staff, total, financi, employ, amount, spent

FREX: spent, cost, salari, fte, scs, expens, staff

Information requests:

Example 1. MoD, 5 January 2010, partially successful.

Could you please provide me with the proportion of vacancies for Civil Servants in your department that are advertised:

1. internally only,
2. across civil service but only to existing civil servants,
3. across limited number of departments,
4. to anyone internal and external?

Example 2. Defra, 25 August 2016, successful.

Were the Departments former Special Advisers, who had been reappointed after the 2015 General Election and left Government in or after July this year, awarded six months' severance pay as part of their severance package? What were the terms of the severance package for Special Advisers appointed after the 2015 General Election? Did these terms for such individuals change? If so, how? What was the proposed total cost of the severance package for Special Advisers before the resignation of Prime Minister David Cameron? What was the proposed total cost of the severance package for Special Advisers after the resignation of Prime Minister David Cameron? Has the department agreed to offer Special Advisers a severance package which has a value over and above their contractual entitlement? If so, what are the respective financial totals?

Example 3. MoD, 1 October 2013, successful.

I would be grateful if you could inform me on the number of E1 grade Civil Servants within the MoD who achieved promotion to C2 grade after successfully completing the online AE (Assessment Exercise). This request should not include those achieving promotion to grade D and then C2 afterwards, only those bypassing the D grade?

Topic 12: Health and safety

Highest Prob: use, secur, test, build, facil, trial, vaccin

FREX: scanner, winter, temperatur, heathrow, hpv, spray, mercuri

Information requests:

Example 1. HSE, 18 February 2014, not held.

Please provide details about the physical and chemical/metal/alloy properties of Mercury amalgam used by the NHS in 1996 as a restorative material in dental surgical procedures. Please include data about NHS use of biocides as sealer's when mercury amalgam was used in 1996:

1. the name of manufacturer(s),
2. the name of each substance in the product including the name of its active substance and the amount of each substance as a percentage of the whole,
3. the classification of the biocidal/heavy metal/alloy product,
4. particulars of any likely direct or indirect adverse side effects,
5. procedures to be followed and measures to be taken in the case of spillage or leakage of the biocidal product and the active substance contained in that biocidal product,
6. safety data sheets for mercury amalgams and biocidal/paraformaldehyde-based sealers. Is mercury amalgam as a restorative material used for pulp cavity fillings used currently?

Example 2. DfT, 12 June 2011, successful.

Question 24 of the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's) on the Department for Transport information on airport body scanners states: The scan shows only the external characteristics of the body. It does not penetrate the skin. Many internet images of airport body scans show the bones of the body, and in a letter (Dec. 2010) to the United States House of Representatives, Steven W. Smith, the inventor of the Rapiscan Secure 1000 x-ray backscatter body scanner, the type currently used in some UK airports, shows graphically that these scanners have an image penetration of up to 2 cm into the body and a dose penetration of over 10 cm into the body.

1. Do UK airport body scanners only ever show the external characteristics of the body?
2. Do UK airport body scanners ever penetrate the skin (image and dose penetration)?
3. If FAQ 24 is factually incorrect, will the DfT correct it? If it will not correct it, why will it not do so?

Example 3. HMRC, 31 May 2014, information not held.

Passing through the GREEN channel on arrival at London Gatwick North Terminal last week, I noticed two arches at the entrance to the channel. These contained flashing

lights and equipment. Please explain what these are, what technology is in use (in particular is it infrared, wireless, X-ray etc, and what the purpose of the equipment is?

Topic 13: Charities and transport regulations

Highest Prob: local, council, author, transport, communiti, commiss, chariti

FREX: chariti, highway, logo, byelaw, pedestrian, arun, southeastern

Information requests:

Example 1. CC, 12 June 2015, successful.

Please provide me with an electronic copy of the Governing Documents for Easton Community Centre, Bristol Registered Charity number: 1151133. Also, if available please provide me an electronic copy of the detailed accounts of Easton Community Centre, Bristol Registered Charity number: 1151133?

Example 2. DCLG, 9 October 2015, successful.

Has DCLG expressed any concerns about the relationship between Tower Hamlets Council and East London Mosque since 2010?

Example 3. DfT, 27 January 2016, successful.

The Department publish approvals made under Sections 64 and 65 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 for signs relating to the temporary suspension of parking places. Some of these approvals specifically revoke previous authorisations some do not. Would the Department please confirm whether each new temporary suspension of parking sign revokes all previous iterations? In other words, whether the latest sign listed on its Traffic Authorisations web page (Details of non-standard traffic signs approved in England since 1 January 2011) is the only legal version to be used by the relevant Local Authority. If this is not the case would the Department list those London Authorities where more than one temporary suspension of parking sign is authorised for use and identify those authorisations which predate 2011 by GT number?

Topic 14: Personal data and records

Highest Prob: record, person, access, process, protect, right, confirm

FREX: consent, access, audio, record, caseman, born-digit, complianc

Information requests:

Example 1. Scotland Office, 27 May 2010, successful.

Do you hold electronic, high-resolution photographs of any of your new (Coalition) ministers? (I would consider a photograph to be of high resolution if either of its

dimensions exceeded 1400 pixels). If ‘yes’, under what circumstances would you consider releasing any or all of the said photos to the public?

Example 2. NA, 28 December 2015, successful.

The Public Records Act 1958 requires central government departments, and certain other public bodies, to identify records of historical value and transfer them for permanent preservation to The National Archives, or to another appointed place of deposit.

1. Were the Office of the Treasury Solicitor and The Charity Commission amongst the government departments/public bodies required to submit records deemed to be of historical value?
2. Would records prior to 1958, i.e. circa 1940 - 1950, be amongst the ones which were later transferred?
3. If not, what has happened to these records?

Example 3. DWP, 11 October 2012, partially successful.

I understand from speaking with Medical Services ATOS, Flowers Hill, Brislington, Bristol that not all Doctors and HCP’s have consented to conduct recorded DLA or ESA medical assessments.

I would like to know some statistics related to this information, specifically:

1. How many doctors are in place at Flowers Hill to conduct DLA assessments?
2. Of those, how many have consented to conduct recorded assessments?

Topic 15: Procurement of government services

Highest Prob: contract, servic, use, support, current, system, agenc

FREX: supplier, contract, printer, vendor, softwar, hardwar, sap

Information requests:

Example 1. DWP, 12 December 2014, successful.

1. Does the organization use Oracle E-Business Suite (EBS) or any Oracle ERP software? How many users are using EBS?
2. Which version of Oracle EBS are you currently using (e.g. 11.5.10, 11i, R12 ...)?
3. When was your last upgrade completed?
4. When are you planning your next upgrade/patching project and to what version will you be upgrading?
5. Do you currently outsource your Oracle EBS upgrade/patching projects/services and to which supplier?
6. What is the value of the contract and when does the contract expire?
7. Who is the person responsible for the Oracle EBS system – please provide full name, title and contact information (if possible)
8. Do you have a current Oracle Support Partner? If so, who is it and when is your contract up for renewal?

9. What are you running on the EBS? (e.g. Finance? HR? Payroll?)
10. If you are not use the Oracle E-Business Suite please could you advise what software you are using? (e.g. SAP, Agresso, JD Edwards, Microsoft...ETC)
11. Which Tender portal does your organization use?

Example 2. DfE, 10 August 2017, successful.

Please could you provide the following information with regards to your current printing expenditure: current contract details, companies awarded, length of contract/s and end dates, number of devices, annual print/copy volume, annual spend for photocopiers/MFDs, printers, print room/reprographics, details on how these were procured. i.e. by framework... Do you have any print management software? If so, which software? Do they supply you with any scanning software (additional to the software native to the device)? What Document Management solution/s do you currently use within your organisation?

Example 3. DWP, 4 May 2009, successful.

Do you hold information which is publicly available on research contracts which have been let to companies, contractors etc...? I need to see the name of companies, value of contracts, title of contracts, the winning proposals, for the last 2 years.

Topic 16: Education

Highest Prob: school, educ, name, academi, primari, england, children

FREX: school, educ, teacher, pupil, headteach, nurseri, gcse

Information requests:

Example 1. DfE, 5 January 2015, successful.

Please could you supply me, in an excel file, an up-to-date database containing contact details of all English schools including independent and special schools. Please could you include: headteacher name, school name, postal address, email address, phase of education?

Example 2. DfE, 23 March 2015, successful.

Please provide me with a list of all Pupil Referral Units in England that can be searched by key stage (or primary/secondary level), local authority and if possible, number of students enrolled.

Example 3. DfE, 30 July 2016, partially successful.

Please can you provide the following up to date information for all Day Nurseries and First schools including all Pupil Referral Units within the UK? I would like a list of all the names of Seniors Contacts/Heads, email address of contact, address, telephone

number, plus the school's URN number. Please, can the information be provided in a spreadsheet?

Topic 17: Civil service structure and remuneration

Highest Prob: name, organis, fund, manag, public, busi, project

FREX: sport, nominet, strategi, sector, structur, cultur, media

Information requests:

Example 1. BEIS, 19 December 2016, partially successful.

Could you please provide the minimum and maximum pay scales for the four main analytical professions broken down by profession, grade, and location, working within your organization: Economists (GES), Social Researchers (GSR), Statisticians (GSS), Operational Researchers (GORS). In addition, could you give the median salary broken down by analytical profession, grade, and location?

Example 2. Ministry of Housing, 13 December 2016, successful.

Please can I have an organization structure of all IT, Procurement, Finance and HR services within your organization, including team name, phone number and team managers name?

Example 3. FCO, 3 July 2013, not responded to.

In an FOI request made on this website Ref: 0401-13 - the Minister for Europe revealed in a letter to Martin Horwood MP (MIN/27083/2012 that the British Government is funding NGOs in Russia.

1. Please could you provide the names of all the NGOs that the British Government has funded?
2. Please could you provide the names of NGOs that the Government is currently funding?
3. Please could you provide the details of how much money has been given to these organizations?

Topic 18: Defense

Highest Prob: defenc, oper, site, incid, safeti, war, aircraft

FREX: weapon, nuclear, bomb, saudi, radioact, hms, mpgs

Information requests:

Example 1. MoD, 17 December 2013, not held.

Having read the radiological Safety Regulations in force at Christmas Island in 1958 it is noted there were three categories for areas: Blue Area, Red Area and Yellow Area.

Could you please supply me with maps of Christmas Island showing which areas were categorized as Blue, Red and Yellow after the detonations of Pennant, Flagpole, Halliard and Burgee. Also, could you please inform me how long these restrictions were in place after each detonation.

Example 2. MoD, 30 September 2013, not responded to.

In July 2012 two Tornado aircraft from RAF Lossiemouth collided over the Moray Firth. The MoD announce that a Board of Inquiry would be set up in order to investigate the cause of the accident. Please can I have a copy of the BOI report?

Example 3. MoD, 17 February 2014, partially successful.

Can you please provide me with the information relating to the MOD's current clean-up plan of radioactive material on Dalgety Bay beach, after unveiling four options? Also, can you please provide me with any publicly available records relating to the MOD's monitoring of the beach from November 2011 up until present day?

Topic 19: Disability and fit-for-work assessments

Highest Prob: assess, train, disabl, medic, ato, esa, condit

FREX: journey, cmep, disabl, hcps, lima, analyst, easement

Information requests:

Example 1. DWP, 29 January 2016, refused.

Please provide me with a copy of the following training guidance for Health Care Professionals.

1. Handout 14 Justification case scenarios WCA academy.
2. Disability analysis for new entrants and introduction to ESA/revised WC.
3. ESA/DLA Learning Path Pack 2
4. MEDLpetM01 lima revised WCA exam technical manual.

Example 2. DWP, 19 July 2016, successful.

Could you provide me with:

1. The number of ESA claimants who are currently waiting for a medical assessment who live in the Portree JC+ area
2. The number of ESA claimants who have been waiting more than 6 months for a medical assessment who live in the Portree JC+ area
3. The number of ESA claimants who have been waiting more than 12 months for a medical assessment who live in the Portree JC+ area
4. The number of medical practitioners, their qualifications and areas of expertise, who are undertaking ESA medical assessments in the Portree JC+ area
5. The number of ESA medical assessment undertaken in the Portree JC+ area since 19th June

6. The number of PIP/DLA/AA claimants who are currently waiting for a medical assessment who live in the Portree JC+ area
7. The number of PIP/DLA/AA claimants who have been waiting more than 6 months for a medical assessment who live in the Portree JC+ area
8. The number of PIP/DLA/AA claimants who have been waiting more than 12 months for a medical assessment who live in the Portree JC+ area
9. The number of medical practitioners, their qualifications and areas of expertise, who are undertaking PIP/DLA/AA medical assessments in the Portree JC+ area
10. The number of PIP/DLA/AA medical assessment undertaken in the Portree JC+ area since 19th June.

Example 3. DWP, 26 September 2016, successful.

I have new disabilities, Dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, cognitive memory loss. Along with physical and other disability. Due to memory and cognitive deficiency, I require extra time to complete new PIP review form. Please can you inform me due to reasonable adjustments under Equality Act 2010 for disabled people, how much extra time do you allow for completed review paperwork?

Topic 20: Transparency (meetings & expenses)

Highest Prob: offic, document, meet, govern, relat, correspond, cabinet

FREX: email, anguilla, correspond, ministeri, meet, e-mail, minut

Information requests:

Example 1. MoJ, 5 June 2009, information not held.

Please supply copies of all correspondence between yourselves and the Prime Minister's Office concerning Phorm/121 Media within the period 1st January 2006 and 5th June 2009?

Example 2. DCMS, 29 July 2012, information not held.

Please provide a list of communications between DCMS (including Ministers, Civil Servants and advisors) and Ofcom between March and May 2005 including an outline of the subject matter.

Example 3. DHSC, 22 April 2016, refused.

I would like to request any consultations documents, agendas, action points, meeting papers, discussion papers, or any other relevant correspondence with Tesco between September 2010 and March 2011?

Topic 21: Foreign affairs

Highest Prob: british, land, food, foreign, countri, offic, commonwealth

FREX: union, cull, embassi, republ, slaughter, ambassador, commonwealth

Information requests:

Example 1. FCO, 17 January 2017, information not held.

Please could you provide me with a list of all non-EU countries with which Britain does NOT currently have trade agreements?

Example 2. FCO, 4 May 2017, successful.

Does the UK or England recognise Palestine as a state? Could you give me a list of the states that the UK and England recognise? Could you tell me when the UK and England last recognised Palestine as a state.

Example 3. Defra, 4 March 2014, information not held.

We know that during the protracted culls 940 badgers were killed in Somerset and 921 were killed in Gloucestershire. Please advise what percentage of badgers were killed in each area on land containing livestock?

Topic 22: Various inquiries

Highest Prob: use, individu, one, call, answer, form, nation

FREX: call, individu, differ, identifi, one, mail, phone

Information requests:

Example 1. DWP, 3 February 2012, successful.

I wish to know information about the performance of call centers as follows:

1. For the most recent period available please detail the average (mean and median) waiting times (i.e. time on hold before speaking to a human operator) for each of the 0845 numbers that handle Job Seeker's Allowance claims and enquiries. Please break down the data by telephone number and give a short description of what specific service is provided on each telephone number.
2. What is the average (mean and median) number of calls to any of the above numbers made in a session (where a session is defined as a sequence of calls from the same phone number made in the same day)?

Example 2. ONS, 23 June 2012, successful.

I would be most grateful if you could furnish me with simple list of the TOP 100 most accessed .COM, .CO.UK internet websites accessed from within the ONS's computer and or systems between 01/01/2011 and today (Including from all internet capable mobile devices if this Information exists). I would like the information furnished in table form with the following headings in the columns; #No; website URL; Number

of Visits Logged; Hours Spent Connected. (The table would thus have 4 columns, and 101 rows including headings) If you cannot provide the Hours connected to the sites, the first three fields would suffice if an average time spent on each site is provided as an alternative.

Example 3. HSE, 8 January 2014, successful.

I have been left hanging on listening to your automated telephone message on your incident reporting line for around one hour between 12.45 and 1.45 pm today - 08/01/2014, phoning from central London. I felt the matter to be urgent and hence was reluctant to use the internet reporting form. I therefore have a very simple question to ask and one which could not possibly take up too many of your resources. How many people actually manned the line in that interregnum? No doubt you have tapes you can check. I strongly suspect that the answer is zero, which would indeed be rather ironic/comical (take your pick).