



SPECIAL REPORT

Now is the time:

A report card on government's access to information timeliness

April 1, 2017 - March 31, 2020

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	2
COMMISSIONER’S MESSAGE	3
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
1.0 BACKGROUND.....	7
1.1 Introduction	7
1.2 Application of FIPPA.....	7
1.3 Methodology.....	8
1.4 Government’s current access request process	9
2.0 TIMELINESS OF RESPONSES	10
2.1 The volume of requests	10
2.2 Responses within 30 and 60 business days	11
2.3 Government’s overall point score	12
2.4 Timeliness scores by ministry	13
2.5 Lowest and highest average processing times	14
2.6 “On hold” time and time extensions	16
2.7 Applicant type	19
2.8 No responsive records	20
3.0 COMPLIANCE WITH FIPPA.....	22
4.0 SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS.....	25
5.0 CONCLUSION.....	26
6.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	26
7.0 APPENDICES	27

COMMISSIONER’S MESSAGE

Government’s information is the public’s information. More than a glib phrase, this principle was unanimously enshrined by BC’s legislature in the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FIPPA) more than 25 years ago. FIPPA gives each of us the right of access to a public body’s information within a prescribed time frame, subject to carefully prescribed exceptions.

To be meaningful, any access to information system must work in a timely way — access delayed is, in many cases, access denied. And any time an access response is outside the legislated timeline, government fails to respect the law.

For these reasons, my office has, for many years, conducted periodic assessments of the provincial government’s timeliness in responding to access requests. This report examines timeliness since the previous assessment released in September, 2017. This report uses the same point scoring system as past timeliness assessments to ensure valid comparisons. This report also applies other metrics, which offer further insights into government’s performance.

The positive news is that response times, as measured by government’s point scores of the last three years, are their highest since 2012/13. This is welcome. But it must not obscure what continues to be a blight on the access to information system and a threat to the public’s confidence in it: between April 1, 2017 and March 31, 2020, government took it upon themselves, in over 4,000 cases, to extend the response time for an access request without any legal right to do so.

Timeliness of access is a vitally important principle. Surely it should go without saying that respect for the law is even more important.

This untenable situation has spanned multiple governments over many years. My worry is that, over time, a culture of acceptance has grown around this issue, affecting government’s attitude toward the problem, and also, to be frank, the approach my office has taken. This must end.

To be clear, I acknowledge the rising volume of access requests, especially in the past two fiscal years, as illustrated in this report. The all-time highs for requests undoubtedly present challenges and I credit the dedicated public servants, particularly those in the Information Access Operations office, who work very hard to keep pace. The fact is, however, that the public service must have the resources necessary to keep pace with demand and to comply with the law.

Other tools exist that can improve the situation, so this report makes recommendations that could assist the work of the government’s access experts. Ministries must also prioritize proactive disclosure to ensure commonly sought records are more readily available. In addition, as noted in my s. 71 report published earlier this year, government must establish additional categories of records to make information more easily accessible. I also encourage access

applicants to, wherever possible, try to ensure the scope of their requests accurately targets only the information they truly need.

In summary, while I am encouraged by the improvement in government’s response scores, I am deeply troubled by the large number of cases left unanswered within the time limits set out in FIPPA. This state of affairs cannot continue without bringing British Columbia’s access to information law into disrepute.

September 2, 2020

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY

Michael McEvoy
Information and Privacy Commissioner
for British Columbia

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This office has previously published five reports on government’s compliance with the statutory timelines in the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FIPPA) when responding to requests for access to records. These reports measured government’s response times and made recommendations to improve compliance with statutory timelines. This report assesses both government’s timeliness and its compliance with the law and serves as a wake-up call, particularly in the area of compliance.

Response times have improved since our September 2017 report, even in the face of a significantly higher number of access requests in the last two years. As this report makes clear, however, this is far from an unqualified success. During the three years covered in this report, government responded to about two-thirds¹ of requests within 30 business days, the basic standard for timeliness set out in FIPPA. The legislation also allows public bodies to extend the 30-day time limit for responding to requests by another 30 days in defined circumstances (and additional time beyond that with the permission of this office).

Our work reveals that government is relying more heavily on time extensions. They are relying in particular on the authority under FIPPA to extend with the consent of applicants, or where a large number of records is requested or must be searched and meeting the time limit would unreasonably interfere with operations. Page counts provided by government, as well as a review of complaints to our office, suggest that these extensions are justified.

As with previous reports, we examine here the issue of no responsive records to requests. The figures cited in this report show that the percentage of requests that return no records has substantially increased. According to information received from government, this rise is largely the result of monthly requests made to all government ministries by one applicant type that return no records.

The report’s final chapter underscores government’s failure to comply with the law. It is of critical concern that, between April 1, 2017 and March 31, 2020, government failed to comply with FIPPA’s legislated timelines in thousands of cases. It is concerning that these cases appear to be increasing in number. This state of affairs threatens to bring FIPPA into disrepute and must be rectified.

This report, therefore, includes recommendations aimed to assist government in ensuring all access requests are processed in compliance with the law. These include proactively disclosing records, expanding presumptive sign-off policies and exploring automation for the processing of records.

¹ See Table 1.

The bottom line is that while government has faced an increasing number of access requests, it must dedicate resources to ensure all access requests are responded to within the time limits prescribed in the law.

1.0 BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

For more than 25 years, British Columbia’s *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FIPPA)² has provided citizens with the right to request access to any record held by public bodies. This right contributes to a healthy, functioning democracy. The Supreme Court of Canada has recognized that access to information laws facilitate democracy in two related ways:

It helps to ensure first, that citizens have the information required to participate meaningfully in the democratic process, and secondly, that politicians and bureaucrats remain accountable to the citizenry.³

The legislation also gives individuals the right to access records containing personal information about themselves. Approximately 40% of the requests closed during the period we examined in this report were personal requests, in which an individual requested access to records containing their own personal information.⁴

FIPPA requires that public bodies respond to requests within certain timelines. When responses to requests are late, the information provided often loses its currency. This diminishes access rights and the accountability and transparency they provide.

We started reporting on government’s compliance with FIPPA timelines in 2009. Our previous report examined the period from April 1, 2015 to March 31, 2017. This report considers the subsequent three fiscal years, April 1, 2017 to March 31, 2020.

1.2 Application of FIPPA

We assessed government’s compliance with legislated response timelines pursuant to s. 42(1)(f) as part of the Commissioner’s mandate to monitor the administration of FIPPA to ensure that its purpose is achieved.

The report focuses on timeliness and on compliance with ss. 7 and 10 of FIPPA. These sections set out the time limit for responding to requests and the circumstances in which that limit may be extended.

Section 7 states that public bodies must respond to requests under FIPPA within 30 business days. However, the section also says that the time limit may be extended under s. 10.

² RSBC 1996, c. 165.

³ *Dagg v. Canada (Minister of Finance)*, [1997] 2 S.C.R. 403.

⁴ 41% or 14,028 requests.

Section 10 lists the circumstances in which a public body may take an extension. They are:

- if the applicant does not provide sufficient detail to identify the record requested;
- when a large number of records are requested or must be searched and meeting the time limit would unreasonably interfere with the operations of the public body;
- when more time is required to consult with a third party or another public body before a decision on whether to grant access to the record can be made; or
- if the applicant has consented to an extension.

Additional extensions may be authorized by our office for one of the above reasons, or if it would be fair and reasonable in the circumstances.

1.3 Methodology

We gathered information from Information Access Operations (IAO), which operates within the Ministry of Citizens’ Services and is responsible for processing the requests received by all government ministries and agencies including the Office of the Premier, which itself closed more than 2,000 requests in the reporting period.

We requested a number of datasets from IAO. We also engaged with them in several rounds of questioning regarding that data, their processes and plans, and their implementation of our prior recommendations.

As was the case in previous examinations, we gathered information on three key indicators:

1. Percentage of requests responded to in compliance with FIPPA;⁵
2. Average number of business days spent processing access requests; and
3. Average number of business days a response is delayed beyond the rules set by FIPPA.

We present the data collected in relation to these indicators below, along with a timeliness score to give a snapshot of ministries’ overall performance in providing records.

This scoring metric has been used in four of our five previous reports and is maintained here as a point of comparison. It is calculated by using the percentage of requests that are on time as a base score and then making deductions for any processing time over 30 business days (regardless of whether the additional time was authorized by FIPPA) and average number of business days overdue. (See [Appendix 1](#) for more information about the score.)

⁵ FIPPA allows public bodies up to 30 business days to respond to a request and can take up to an additional 30 business days on their own for specified reasons set out in the Act. Anything beyond 60 business days requires approval by the OIPC. If a public body goes beyond the 60 days without the required permission it is non-compliant with the Act.

Much of the statistical information used in this report is publicly available on the Data BC website.⁶ It is also available in the government’s report on the administration of FIPPA.⁷ However, we gathered and analyzed additional information, such as data about time extensions and the number of pages of records associated with individual requests. We present it in a manner that assesses the data in terms of both FIPPA compliance and the timeliness of ministries’ responses. We also set the data alongside historical data as a point of comparison.

In 2018, government commissioned a review by consulting firm Deloitte. The review assessed government’s access to information processes, including the costs associated with responding to requests.⁸ It also made several recommendations regarding potential efficiencies. We refer to the Deloitte review and its recommendations in this examination as well.

1.4 Government’s current access request process

IAO was formed in 2009 to process requests for government records through a central entity and to assist ministries in fulfilling their statutory duties under FIPPA. Over the past decade, IAO has been responsible for managing the overall request process, including taking or requesting time extensions under s. 10 of FIPPA. Ministries, meanwhile, have also developed varied procedures for managing their part in the process.

The data presented below shows that this reorganized system over the past decade has coincided with an improvement in response times.

Here is how it works.

First, the intake group at IAO receives and reviews requests made to ministries. Then the requests are assigned to the team or teams at IAO that provide services to the selected ministries. Analysts on the teams work with applicants to clarify or narrow the requests as needed. The teams send out a “call for records” based on the wording in the request and staff in the ministries will search for records responsive to the request. Ministry staff gather the responsive records, if any, and send them, along with a harms assessment, to the IAO analyst assigned to the file.

The analyst will review the records and the harms assessment and make severing recommendations. The analyst sends the recommendations, along with a version of the records that shows the proposed severing, back to the ministry. Ministry staff review the

⁶ These datasets date back to 2010 and are available in CSV and XLS formats. The information can be filtered for further analysis. See “Freedom of Information (FOI) Statistics” on the BC Data catalogue at <https://catalogue.data.gov.bc.ca/dataset/freedom-of-information-foi-statistics>.

⁷ <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/british-columbians-our-governments/initiatives-plans-strategies/open-government/open-information/citz-report-on-the-administration-of-foippa-2017-20118-2018-2019.pdf>

⁸ Available at: https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/british-columbians-our-governments/initiatives-plans-strategies/open-government/open-information/foi_review_report_2019.pdf

recommendations and, if appropriate, the head of the public body, or their delegate, signs off on the recommendations and approves the final response, which in most cases includes the release of records to the applicant.

Several other factors can add complexity and other steps to this process. For example, IAO forms cross-government teams to coordinate the process of interpreting and responding to a request made to four or more ministries. One ministry may transfer a request to another in certain specific circumstances. Large or complex requests for records may attract fees, in which case the file is placed “on hold” until the fee process is concluded. Finally, IAO may, and at times is required to, notify a third party when the responsive records include information about that party. A final step, while not counted in the legislated timeline or the measures used in this report, is the publication of general records released in access requests on the government’s Open Information website.

As mentioned at the outset, FIPPA provides both a general right of access to records as well as a right for individuals to access records containing personal information about themselves. Requests to government are distinguished in the same manner and are designated as either “general” or “personal” requests. Both types of requests are subject to the same timelines in FIPPA and are processed in more or less the same manner. The tables below generally include data for each type of request as well as overall statistics.

2.0 TIMELINESS OF RESPONSES

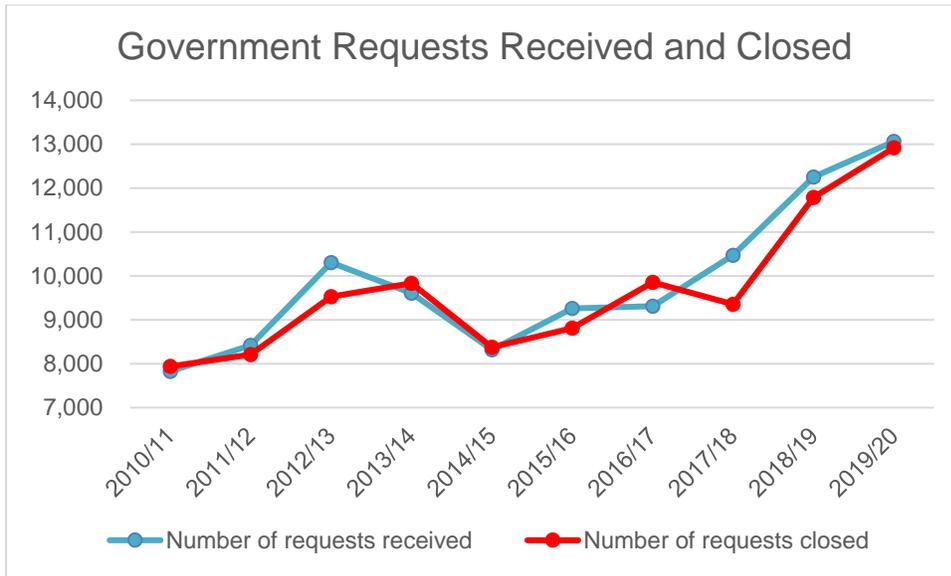
As noted above, this report assesses both government’s timeliness and its compliance with the law. We first considered the timeliness of government’s responses to access requests.

2.1 The volume of requests

It is useful to assess the context in which access requests are processed by government. In particular, it is important to consider the volume of requests they receive each year. The number of requests that ministries receive has fluctuated over time; however, there is a general trend upwards, including a pronounced increase in the last two fiscal years.

Figure 1 charts the volume of requests over the last decade. In addition to the rise in requests, it also shows that ministries are working hard to keep up with that increase.

Figure 1



2.2 Responses within 30 and 60 business days

This report, like those in the past, uses a 100-point scale to rate government’s timeliness record. That scale considers various factors including processing times exceeding 30 business days. However, before those numbers are reviewed in detail, it is useful to ask and answer a more basic question: What percentage of access requests are responded to by public bodies within 30 business days? This is, after all, the baseline set in FIPPA to respond to access requests and the one which public bodies should strive to meet. This is government’s overall record on that front:

Table 1 April 1, 2012 to March 31, 2020	
Year	Completed within 30 days
2019/20	55%
2018/19	64%
2017/18	69%
2016/17	60%
2015/16	61%
2014/15	64%
2013/14	63%
2012/13	73%

The number has fluctuated modestly over the past eight years but it is concerning that the most recent reporting year revealed the lowest number of requests met within the 30 business days.

Extending the time for response another 30 business days requires a justification set out in FIPPA. For example, a ministry may need to consult another public body affected by the request. This is not an uncommon circumstance and for this reason it is useful to consider how many access requests are met within a total of 60 business days.

Table 2 April 1, 2012 to March 31, 2020	
Year	Completed within 60 days
2019/20	77%
2018/19	78%
2017/18	83%
2016/17	87%
2015/16	83%
2014/15	86%
2013/14	83%
2012/13	90%

Again, we observe that like the trend in 30-day responses, response times within 60 business days have declined to their lowest level in the past eight years. What this also reveals is the increasing percentage of cases that are taking longer than 60 business days to complete.

Government must work to improve the number of requests met within 30 business days and reduce the trend of files taking longer than 60 business days to answer.

2.3 Government’s overall point score

Table 3 shows government’s overall timeliness performance using a scale from 0 to 100.⁹ Consistent with past reports, the score is based on three key indicators: the percent of on time responses, the average processing time, and the average number of business days overdue.

It is important to note here that the “percent of on time responses” does not necessarily mean responses were provided within 30 business days. Rather, the term includes all responses provided within the timelines expressly authorized by FIPPA. FIPPA time extensions can, in some cases, go well beyond 60 business days. As noted, so long as there is proper authority for these extensions, the responses, when they occur, are considered “on time”.

⁹ The precise method of calculation is found in appendix 1 of this report.

Government’s “on time” (or compliance) record in 2019/20 was 83 percent. This means that in the remaining 17 percent of the cases, government *delayed responding without legal authority*. This is not a new issue, but it nonetheless remains a deeply troubling one. It will be specifically addressed in section 3.0 of this report.

On the positive side, the overall scores for the three years tracked in this report represent improvement over the previous two reports. This is due to better on time performance, reduced average processing time in 2017/18 and 2018/19 and a reduction in business days overdue in 2018/19 and 2019/20.

Less positive is that average processing times for access requests reached a decade high of 49 days in 2019/20.

In total, the figures below reveal that government has not met the general expectation to provide 30-day responses, or curbed the increase in average processing times.

Year	Number of requests closed	% On time	Average processing time (business days)	Average number of business days overdue	Score
2019/20	12918	83%	49	43	73
2018/19	11792	89%	40	40	82
2017/18	9353	90%	39	63	81
2016/17	9857	80%	46	62	68
2015/16	8809	74%	46	57	63
2014/15	8377	79%	43	55	69
2013/14	9832	74%	44	47	64
2012/13	9525	87%	30	22	85
2011/12	8212	90%	26	16	88
2010/11	7939	93%	22	17	91

2.4 Timeliness scores by ministry

Table 4 lists the scores for each ministry in 2017/18, 2018/19 and 2019/20.

We have traditionally said that ministries with a score below 85 should prioritize improving response times. Approximately half of them are below this threshold in 2017/18 and in 2018/19. In this most recent year, with two exceptions, every single ministry scored below 85.

Table 4 – Scores by ministry for 2017/18 to 2019/20

Ministry	2017/18 score	2018/19 score	2019/20 score
Advanced Education, Skills & Training	83	96	70
Agriculture	76	72	75
Attorney General	85	71	69
Children & Family Development	64	66	61
Citizens’ Services	84	96	74
Education	88	96	72
Energy, Mines & Petroleum Resources	83	81	56
Environment & Climate Change Strategy	68	80	74
Finance	76	81	84
Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations & Rural Development	87	79	57
Health	74	76	55
Indigenous Relations & Reconciliation	71	85	63
Jobs, Economic Development & Competitiveness	70	67	74
Labour	98	85	69
Mental Health & Addictions	80	90	61
Municipal Affairs & Housing	94	79	72
Office of the Premier	79	88	81
Public Safety & Solicitor General	93	91	87
Social Development & Poverty Reduction	96	92	83
Tourism, Arts & Culture	98	77	64
Transportation & Infrastructure	92	93	85

2.5 Lowest and highest average processing times

The most meaningful access metric from an applicant’s viewpoint is how long it takes to get the record(s) they requested. For this reason, we decided to take a closer look at average processing times in this report.¹⁰ It may be counter intuitive, but ministries can achieve a high “on time” score while still taking a long time to process requests. This is because files can legitimately be put “on hold” or extended in certain circumstances.

Table 5 lists the five ministries with the lowest and highest average processing times.

¹⁰ In previous reports, we focused more on compliance rates (the percentage of requests responded to on time).

In 2017/18 the Ministries of Attorney General; Labour, Public Safety & Solicitor General; Social Development & Poverty Reduction; Tourism, Arts & Culture; and Transportation & Infrastructure achieved average processing days of 30 or less. In 2018/19, the Ministries of Mental Health & Addictions, Public Safety & Solicitor General, Social Development & Poverty Reduction, and Transportation & Infrastructure did so. In 2019/20, only the Ministry of Social Development & Poverty Reduction achieved average processing days of 30 or less.

In addition, in 2019/20, the highest average process time increased considerably from the two prior years.

Table 5 – Lowest and highest average processing time

The five ministries with the <i>lowest</i> average processing time (business days) for 2019/20:	
Social Development & Poverty Reduction	30
Public Safety & Solicitor General	32
Jobs, Economic Development & Competitiveness	37
Transportation & Infrastructure	38
Finance + Advanced Education, Skills & Training	40

The five ministries with the <i>highest</i> average processing time (business days) for 2019/20:	
Energy, Mines & Petroleum Resources	74
Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations & Rural Development	68
Indigenous Relations & Reconciliation	65
Office of the Premier	64
Health	61

The five ministries with the <i>lowest</i> average processing time (business days) for 2018/19:	
Public Safety & Solicitor General	25
Social Development & Poverty Reduction	27
Mental Health & Addictions	30
Transportation & Infrastructure	30
Advanced Education	31

The five ministries with the <i>highest</i> average processing time (business days) for 2018/19:	
Children & Family Development	57
Agriculture	53
Office of the Premier	52
Jobs, Economic Development & Competitiveness	44
Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations & Rural Development	43

The five ministries with the <i>lowest</i> average processing time (business days) for 2017/18:	
Public Safety & Solicitor General	21
Tourism, Arts & Culture	22
Social Development & Social Innovation	23
Transportation & Infrastructure	26
Labour	27

The five ministries with the <i>highest</i> average processing time (business days) for 2017/18:	
Children & Family Development	59
Finance	51
Jobs, Economic Development & Competitiveness	47
Environment	47
Health	46

2.6 “On hold” time and time extensions

FIPPA allows access requests to be put “on hold” or for the time to respond to an access request to be extended. Because this has the effect of delaying the final response to an applicant, FIPPA limits the circumstances under which these delays can occur.

Table 6 shows that the number of requests for which time extensions were taken approached and then surpassed a third of all requests¹¹ considered in this report.

Table 6 also shows that the percentage of requests with “on hold” time increased significantly in 2018/19 and 2019/20 after having remained steady in the previous eight years. In these cases, the timeline for processing a request has been suspended. For example, if a public body determines that an applicant is to pay fees for services related to a request, the timeline for responding is suspended until the public body excuses the fee, the applicant agrees to pay it, and/or any issues regarding payment or a fee waiver are resolved.

IAO explained that the jump in on-hold time in 2018/19 and 2019/20 resulted from an increase in the number of requests that attracted fees combined with two cases (one in 2018/19 and one in 2019/20) in which government requested permission from our office to disregard a large number of requests. Under s. 43 of FIPPA, the Commissioner may authorize a public body to disregard requests that would unreasonably interfere with the operations of the public body because of the repetitious or systematic nature of the requests, or because they are frivolous or vexatious. As with the fee example, the timeline for responding to requests is suspended in these cases from the time that the s. 43 application is made until a decision is reached.¹²

¹¹ 38% in 2019/20.

¹² The application in 2019/20 resulted in [Order F19-34](#).

Table 6 – Percentage of requests with on-hold time and with time extensions taken			
	Total # of closed requests	% of requests with “on hold” time	% of requests with time extensions taken
General requests			
2019/20	8330	22%	41%
2018/19	7222	22%	34%
2017/18	4483	10%	31%
2016/17	5380	11%	37%
2015/16	4415	11%	28%
2014/15	4262	11%	21%
2013/14	5235	10%	21%
2012/13	4565	9%	22%
2011/12	3181	12%	24%
2010/11	2774	18%	26%
Personal requests			
2019/20	4588	2%	33%
2018/19	4570	1%	32%
2017/18	4870	1%	27%
2016/17	4477	1%	30%
2015/16	4394	2%	26%
2014/15	4115	0.4%	30%
2013/14	4597	0.2%	26%
2012/13	4966	0.1%	20%
2011/12	5038	0.1%	15%
2010/11	5165	0.3%	13%
Total requests			
2019/20	12918	15%	38%
2018/19	11792	14%	33%
2017/18	9353	6%	29%
2016/17	9857	6%	34%
2015/16	8809	6%	27%
2014/15	8377	6%	25%
2013/14	9832	5%	23%
2012/13	9531	4%	21%
2011/12	8219	5%	19%
2010/11	7939	7%	17%

We wanted to better understand government’s reasons for taking these extensions. As noted earlier, extensions are authorized by FIPPA, but the fact that they were taken in an increasing number of cases warranted a closer look.

Table 6.1 shows the reason cited for the first time extension taken by IAO.

Table 6.1 – Time extensions by reason cited for first extension			
	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Applicant has consented	408	972	2142
Consultation required	456	788	588
Large volume of records	1554	1810	1756
Both large volume & consultation required	108	189	230
Further detail from applicant required	58	53	79
Fair & reasonable to do so	21	8	28
Total files, time extension taken	2605	3820	4823

Over the three years reviewed, the most often cited time extension was under s. 10(1)(b) of FIPPA, where a large number of records have been requested or must be searched and meeting the time limit would unreasonably interfere with the operations of the public body.

On average, IAO processed 1.86 million pages of records in each of the past three years. Given these volumes, it is not surprising that time extensions related to a large volume of records accounted for 60, 47 and 36 percent of all extensions taken in 2017/18, 2018/19 and 2019/20, respectively.

During 2019/20, this office received eight complaints pertaining to government’s application of s. 10(1)(b) of FIPPA. The OIPC did not substantiate any of these complaints.

The large increase in time extensions taken with the consent of the applicant, particularly in 2019/20, is also noteworthy. This provision – s. 10(1)(d) – which came into effect in 2011, has likely aided government in improving its on time response percentage.

We understand that political party applicants, who account for a large number of requests, often consent to time extensions. However, government may find itself further offside FIPPA’s timelines if applicants stop consenting to time extensions.

RECOMMENDATION 1
Monitor reliance on time extensions taken with applicants’ consent and have a plan in place in the event of a downward trend in applicants providing this consent.

2.7 Applicant type

Previous reports from this office have set out and commented on response times for various applicant types, with the aim of ensuring that each receives timely responses to requests.

Over the three years covered by this report, the number of requests closed for most applicant types has remained relatively consistent. The two notable exceptions are for “researchers”, where the number of closed requests declined from 1,026 requests in 2017/18 to 221 requests in 2018/19 and to 90 requests in 2019/20, and conversely with “political party applicants”, where closed requests jumped dramatically from 724 in 2017/18 to 4,517 in 2018/19 and to 5,960 in 2019/20.

Requests from political party applicants have always been high, but the number of requests over the past two years represent 63 and 72 percent, respectively, of all general requests closed in those years and far exceeds the figures we have seen in the past. One of the key purposes of FIPPA is to make public bodies more accountable. It is therefore no surprise that political party applicants make use of the access to information system, as is their right.

However, it is also to be expected that the large increase in requests in recent years has added pressure to the access system, which is reflected in government’s point score with respect to political party applicants, dropping from 83 to 72 and then 71 over the three-year period studied in this report.

Applicant type	2017/18 score	2018/19 score	2019/20 score
Business	84	77	73
Individual	78	78	73
Interest group	79	78	68
Law firm	84	81	86
Media	73	75	72
Other governments	100	89	87
Other public body	34	75	87
Political party	83	72	71
Researcher	90	62	36

The point decline is largely attributable to an increase in the number of days it took to process these requests in 2018/19 and 2019/20 and to a lower on time percentage in 2019/20. The increase in processing time was, in many instances, aided by time extensions consented to by applicants. As noted in Recommendation 1, government must be careful not to rely unduly on extensions by consent.

Finally, it is worth noting government’s score in responding to access requests from media, which continues to be among the lowest among all applicant types. The media play a fundamental role in our society in holding governments at all levels to account for their actions. Many important stories have resulted from access to information requests.

Significant efforts must be made by government to improve responsiveness to access requests from all applicant types, and particularly those who have fallen furthest behind.

2.8 No responsive records

In several previous reports, we have examined and commented on the number of requests that result in no responsive records (NRR). Our most substantive report on this matter was issued in 2013,¹³ when the percentage of requests returning no records reached 25 percent.

In addition to the high NRR response rates, we have also expressed concern, in that report and elsewhere, about cases where what would seem to be important government files appeared to lack reliable documentation.¹⁴

The 2013 report made several recommendations to both address and mitigate the issue of NRR responses. The most prominent recommendation was for government to legislate a duty to document. This finally occurred in 2017 with the passage of the *Information Management (Documenting Government Decisions) Amendment Act*, but those changes were not brought into force until March 2019.¹⁵

In the four years since our 2013 report, the NRR response rate dropped below 20 percent and fell as low as 12 percent in 2016/17. However, in the fiscal years covered by this report, we again see a rise in NRR response rates. The following table shows that the percentage for 2019/20 has surpassed the figures that first caused this office to investigate this issue.¹⁶

¹³ F13-01: *Increase in No Responsive Records to General Access to Information Requests: Government of British Columbia*.

¹⁴ See [F13-01: Increase in No Responsive Records to General Access to Information Requests: Government of British Columbia](#); [F13-03 Access Denied: Record Retention and Disposal Practices of the Government of British Columbia](#); and [Speech to the Special Committee to Review the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act \(November 18, 2015\)](#).

¹⁵ The Bill received Royal Assent in March 16, 2017, but was not brought into force until March 31, 2019 (B.C. Reg. 65/2019).

¹⁶ See Appendix 5.

Fiscal year	General requests closed	% of NRR responses
2019/20	8330	34%
2018/19	7222	22%
2017/18	4483	21%
2016/17	5380	12%
2015/16	4415	17%
2014/15	4262	17%
2013/14	5235	19%
2012/13	4566	26%
2011/12	3182	25%
2010/11	2778	21%

IAO explained that the substantial increase in requests from political party applicants was the main driver in the increase in NRR responses. According to their statistics, NRR responses sent to political party applicants represent 70 and 82 percent of all such responses to general requests in 2018/19 and 2019/20 respectively.

When reviewing all requests by applicant type over the fiscal years measured in this report, political party applicants received the highest percentage of NRR responses. By comparison, over the previous two years, political party applicants had the lowest percentage of NRR responses.

Table 9 shows that in 2017/18, 43 percent of requests from political party applicants resulted in no responsive records. This figure dropped to 25 percent in 2018/19 but crept back up to 39 percent in 2019/20. These figures exceed the NRR response rate for all other applicant types. IAO attributed the high rate of NRR responses to political party applicants in part to regular monthly requests made to all government ministries for which no responsive records are located.

If we remove cross government requests (i.e., requests made to four or more ministries) made by political party applicants, the overall NRR response rate is reduced to seven and six percent in 2018/19 and 2019/20 respectively.

Applicant type	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Business	27%	18%	22%	19%	21%
Individual	17%	9%	12%	19%	21%
Interest group	18%	18%	8%	15%	17%
Law firm	20%	11%	16%	14%	12%
Media	26%	15%	14%	21%	27%
Political party	13%	8%	43%	25%	39%
Researcher	35%	28%	27%	13%	14%

Government indicated that for the three fiscal years included in this report, 42 percent of all NRR responses to general requests were for cross-government requests. It is likely that some of the remaining requests were made to two or three ministries, however this data is unavailable.

Government’s centralized system of receiving requests, in which the use of online check boxes allows applicants to select any number of ministries in which to direct requests, partly enables this. While we support this functionality, we recognize that it may increase the number of requests along with the number of requests that return no responsive records.

3.0 COMPLIANCE WITH FIPPA

It should go without saying that government, like everyone else, is obligated to follow the law and to be held to account when it does not. With respect to FIPPA, government must follow the rules related to timelines for responding to access applicants. As noted earlier, government has up to 30 business days to respond to a request after which it is entitled to take an additional 30 business days where certain criteria are met. Beyond this, the law dictates that a public body must get permission from this office for more time to respond to an access request.

In thousands of cases over the past three years—and this phenomenon that has gone on for many years—government failed to seek such permission. In these cases, it simply gave itself more time to answer a request without any lawful authority. This state of affairs is surely obvious to government. It is reasonable to conclude that this long-standing problem is caused by, at best, a knowing disregard for what the law requires.

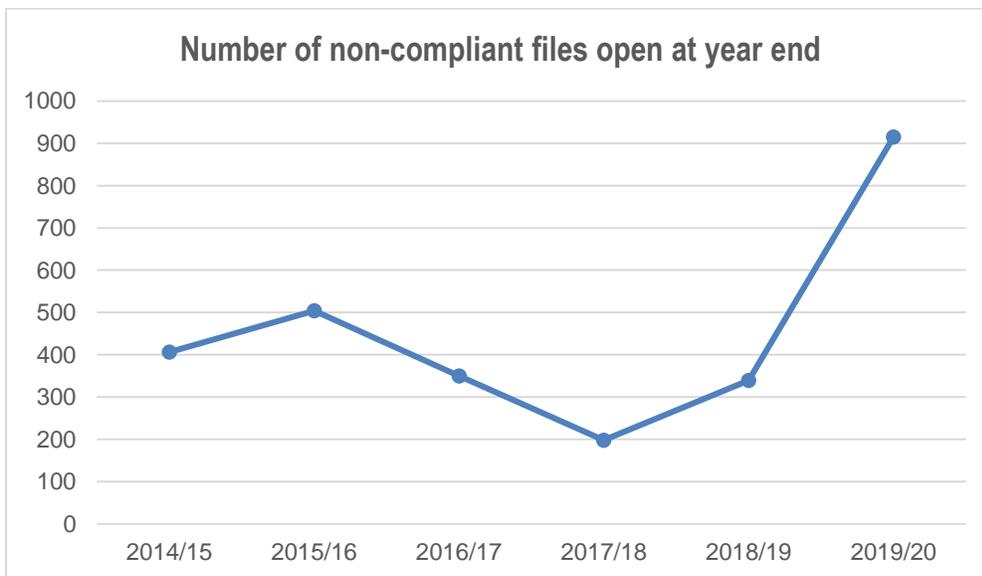
The magnitude of this issue is demonstrated in Table 10:

Table 10 – Non-compliance rate April 1, 2011 to March 31, 2020			
Year	Number of requests closed	Number of non-compliant requests	% Non-compliant
2019/20	12918	2196	17%
2018/19	11792	1297	11%
2017/18	9353	935	10%
2016/17	9857	1971	20%
2015/16	8809	2290	26%
2014/15	8377	1759	21%
2013/14	9832	2556	26%
2012/13	9525	1238	13%
2011/12	8212	821	10%

As is evident from this table, this conduct has extended over multiple governments and has gone on so long that it has come to be accepted. The failure of successive governments to comply with FIPPA threatens to bring access to information in British Columbia into disrepute.

As of the end of the most recent fiscal year, over 900 files remained unanswered with no legal authority to delay responding. As Figure 2 below reveals, this number represents a significant increase after a two-year decline.

Figure 2



What the public would expect, and what the law requires, is that *all* requests for information are handled according to the provisions of the statute. Several actions could help remedy this situation.

There are two recommendations made in previous reports that have been implemented by government but can be further refined and expanded.

The first is the need to proactively disclose records, especially those that are regularly requested. We acknowledge government’s efforts to date to improve proactive disclosure. As indicated in my s. 71 report, government must establish additional categories of records to make information more easily accessible. We encourage government to expand its efforts to proactively disclose records.

RECOMMENDATION 2
Expand efforts to proactively disclose records.

Second, we previously recommended that government expand its policy of presumptive sign-off where possible. Delays at the sign-off stage of the request process were identified as an issue in earlier reports. The presumptive sign-off policy addresses this issue by deeming a response to have been signed off once it has waited five days for approval. However, this only applies to requests for records in ministers’ offices.

In response to our queries regarding the implementation of this recommendation, IAO indicated that it has provided training on how and when presumptive sign-off should occur and issued guidance on appropriate delegation. In our view, these steps only address part of the overall recommendation (which included ensuring that the authority to sign-off on releasing records was appropriately delegated). We therefore again recommend expanding the presumptive sign-off policy to apply to a broader range of requests.

RECOMMENDATION 3
Expand the presumptive sign-off policy beyond requests made to ministers’ offices.

A third step is operationalizing recommendations made in the government-commissioned Deloitte review referenced earlier in this report. A number of these recommendations reflect previous recommendations made by this office, such as improvements to records management and better tracking of requests as they move through the FOI process.

Recommendations made by Deloitte focusing on new technologies that automate systems to sort and analyze records through artificial intelligence, as well as those on improving network speeds and implementing secure file transfer, have promise. The only caution is that any system of this kind must respect and maintain individuals’ ability to understand and appeal decisions and actions taken by a ministry.

RECOMMENDATION 4
<p>Evaluate the automation recommendations from the Deloitte report and ensure that any implementation is not made at the expense of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• protecting personal information;• applicants’ ability to retrieve a broad and full set of records; and• applicants’ right to understand and appeal decisions made by ministries.

4.0 SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Monitor reliance on time extensions taken with applicants’ consent and have a plan in place in the event of a downward trend in applicants providing this consent.

Recommendation 2: Expand efforts to proactively disclose records and information.

Recommendation 3: Expand the presumptive sign-off policy beyond requests made to ministers’ offices.

Recommendation 4: Evaluate the automation recommendations from the Deloitte report and ensure that any implementation is not made at the expense of:

- protecting personal information;
- applicants’ ability to retrieve a broad and full set of records; and
- applicants’ right to understand and appeal decisions made by ministries.

5.0 CONCLUSION

This report sets out government's mixed record when it comes to responding to access requests. The point score metric used in this and past reports demonstrates a general improvement since 2013/14. However, a deeper look at the numbers reveals that it is taking longer for public bodies to respond to requests.

The issue of timeliness examined in this report is related to, but not the same as, government's obligation to comply with FIPPA. It should go without saying that government must respect its legal obligations. This will require the leadership in all ministries to commit the resources and time necessary to ensure this is done.

The fact that access to information legislation is so well used in BC is a testament to its value. Broad segments of the public, including individuals, media and a multitude of organizations, exercise access rights provided by the legislation.

The foundation of the access to information system has proven remarkably durable over the past 25 years. But there is, as always, room for improvement, and that is the spirit in which this report is delivered.

6.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my deep appreciation to the frontline staff in government who deal with access to information requests. None of the matters expressed in this report should be taken as admonishing their efforts, and in particular those at the IAO, who are responsible for processing an increasing number of requests. Indeed, they were responsible for closing a record number of files in 2019/20. Theirs is an immensely important task which contributes to a significant pillar of our democratic system, namely accountability. The staff at IAO were helpful at every turn in this investigation, providing records and data whenever asked.

I also want to thank members of my own team led by Deputy Commissioner Jeannette Van Den Bulk; the Director of Audit & Systemic Review Tanya Allen, Director of Investigations Tina Doehnel and others whose work in helping compile this report was invaluable.

7.0 APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Score calculation explanation

Each public body received a score based on the following calculation:

Base Score (Percentage of requests responded to on time), minus

Processing Time (average number of days over 30 days, divided by 3), minus

Days Overdue (Average days past rules laid out by FIPPA, divided by 10)

= Score

The **base score** is the percentage of responses to information requests that occur in compliance with FIPPA, that is, within 30 business days of an access request and within any legitimate time extensions. From this base score, two deductions are made. The first deduction is for **processing time**: the average number of business days beyond 30 days is divided by 3. This number is deducted from the base score. The second deduction is for **days overdue**: the average number of business days beyond the timeline laid out in FIPPA (which is an initial 30 days and any legitimate time extensions) is divided by 10. This number is deducted from the base score, resulting in the timeliness score.

This calculation from the key three indicators does not take into account any time during which a request was legitimately “on hold.”

Utilizing this score allows comparison with results for each ministry, over time. A comparison is not possible for all ministries due to a change in ministries in 2017. For example, the Ministry of Labour, the highest performing Ministry in 2017/18, became a stand-alone ministry and comparison with previous years is not possible.

Appendix 2A All ministries April 1, 2017 – March 31, 2018					
Public body	Number of requests closed	% On time	Average processing time (business days)	Average # business days overdue	Score
Advanced Education	108	88%	32	45	83
Agriculture	79	78%	33	7	76
Attorney General	377	88%	29	35	85
Children & Family Development	2066	85%	59	111	64
Citizens' Services	242	97%	34	133	84
Education	139	91%	33	21	88
Energy & Mines	186	94%	44	61	83
Environment	330	79%	47	51	68
Finance	1000	87%	51	44	76
Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations & Rural Development	410	91%	36	19	87
Health	279	86%	46	68	74
Indigenous Relations & Reconciliation	108	76%	38	19	71
Jobs, Economic Development & Competitiveness	185	94%	47	179	70
Labour	67	99%	27	17	98
Mental Health & Addictions	49	82%	32	13	80
Municipal Affairs & Housing	159	96%	33	7	94
Office of the Premier	411	89%	43	63	79
Public Safety & Solicitor General	1750	95%	21	16	93
Social Development & Social Innovation	945	97%	23	14	96
Tourism, Arts & Culture	90	98%	22	1	100
Transportation & Infrastructure	373	94%	26	16	94
All ministries total	9353	90%	39	63	81

Appendix 2B All ministries April 1, 2018 – March 31, 2019					
Public body	Number of requests closed	% On time	Average processing time (business days)	Average # business days overdue	Score
Advanced Education	226	97%	31	10	96
Agriculture	259	81%	53	17	72
Attorney General	596	80%	42	46	71
Children & Family Development	2238	82%	57	71	66
Citizens' Services	436	98%	34	6	96
Education	239	97%	31	5	96
Energy, Mines & Petroleum Resources	254	89%	43	32	81
Environment & Climate Change Strategy	499	87%	41	34	80
Finance	1198	87%	42	17	81
Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations & Rural Development	589	86%	43	24	79
Health	339	83%	40	41	76
Indigenous Relations & Reconciliation	177	91%	38	31	85
Jobs, Economic Development & Competitiveness	224	75%	44	37	67
Labour	192	88%	33	19	85
Mental Health & Addictions	154	92%	30	23	90
Municipal Affairs & Housing	222	84%	36	26	79
Office of the Premier	748	98%	52	25	88
Public Safety & Solicitor General	1503	94%	25	26	91
Social Development & Poverty Reduction	1081	92%	27	13	92
Tourism, Arts & Culture	195	83%	38	37	77
Transportation & Infrastructure	423	96%	30	28	93
All ministries total	11792	89%	40	40	82

Appendix 2C All ministries April 1, 2019 – March 31, 2020					
Public body	Number of requests closed	% On time	Average processing time (business days)	Average # business days overdue	Score
Advanced Education	225	76%	40	26	70
Agriculture	347	86%	53	30	75
Attorney General	582	79%	47	44	69
Children & Family Development	2388	77%	59	64	61
Citizens' Services	269	81%	46	16	74
Education	205	79%	42	29	72
Energy, Mines & Petroleum Resources	304	76%	74	56	56
Environment & Climate Change Strategy	467	84%	47	45	74
Finance	1700	89%	40	19	84
Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations & Rural Development	643	73%	68	34	57
Health	422	71%	61	53	55
Indigenous Relations & Reconciliation	219	78%	65	37	63
Jobs, Economic Development & Competitiveness	172	79%	37	26	74
Labour	156	79%	53	26	69
Mental Health & Addictions	237	72%	50	50	61
Municipal Affairs & Housing	341	82%	48	39	72
Office of the Premier	1024	95%	64	25	81
Public Safety & Solicitor General	1499	92%	32	40	87
Social Development & Poverty Reduction	1071	85%	30	22	83
Tourism, Arts & Culture	223	74%	49	36	64
Transportation & Infrastructure	424	90%	38	19	85
All ministries total	12918	83%	49	42	73

Appendix 3 All ministry comparison 2017/18 to 2019/20												
Public body	Number of requests closed			% On time			Average processing time (business days)			Average # business days overdue		
	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20
Advanced Education	108	226	225	88%	97%	76%	32	31	40	45	10	26
Agriculture	79	259	347	78%	81%	86%	33	53	53	7	46	30
Attorney General	377	596	582	88%	80%	79%	29	42	47	35	46	44
Children & Family Development	2066	2238	2388	85%	82%	77%	59	57	59	111	71	64
Citizens' Services	242	436	269	97%	98%	81%	34	34	46	133	6	16
Education	139	239	205	91%	97%	79%	33	31	42	21	5	29
Energy & Mines	186	254	304	94%	89%	76%	44	43	74	61	32	56
Environment	330	499	467	79%	87%	84%	47	41	47	51	34	45
Finance	1000	1198	1700	87%	87%	89%	51	42	40	44	17	19
Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations & Rural Development	410	589	643	91%	86%	73%	36	43	68	19	24	34
Health	279	339	422	86%	83%	71%	46	40	61	68	41	53
Indigenous Relations & Reconciliation	108	177	219	76%	91%	78%	38	38	65	19	31	37
Jobs, Economic Development & Competitiveness	185	224	172	94%	75%	79%	47	44	37	179	37	26
Labour	67	192	156	99%	88%	79%	27	33	53	17	19	26
Mental Health & Addictions	49	154	237	82%	92%	72%	32	30	50	13	23	50
Municipal Affairs & Housing	159	222	341	96%	84%	82%	33	36	48	7	26	39
Office of the Premier	411	748	1024	89%	98%	95%	43	52	64	63	25	25
Public Safety & Solicitor General	1750	1503	1499	95%	94%	92%	21	25	32	16	26	40
Social Development & Poverty Reduction	945	1081	1071	97%	92%	85%	23	27	30	14	13	22
Tourism, Arts & Culture	90	195	223	98%	83%	74%	22	38	49	1	37	36
Transportation & Infrastructure	373	423	424	94%	96%	90%	26	30	38	16	28	19
All ministries total	9353	11792	12918	90%	89%	83%	39	40	49	63	40	42

Appendix 4A Score breakdown by applicant type April 1, 2017 – March 31, 2018					
Applicant type	Number of requests closed	% On time	Average processing time (business days)	Average # business days overdue	Score
Business	332	91%	36	49	84
Individual	4457	90%	42	83	78
Interest group	307	87%	41	47	79
Law firm	1424	93%	35	71	84
Media	1029	80%	42	27	73
Other governments	18	100%	16	0	100
Other public body	36	89%	94	336	34
Political party	724	95%	27	121	83
Researcher	1026	92%	32	10	90
Total	9353	90%	39	62	81

Appendix 4B Score breakdown by applicant type April 1, 2018 – March 31, 2019					
Applicant type	Number of requests closed	% On time	Average processing time (business days)	Average # business days overdue	Score
Business	296	82%	38	27	77
Individual	4250	87%	42	51	78
Interest group	368	85%	42	34	78
Law firm	1281	89%	40	43	81
Media	770	81%	40	27	75
Other governments	62	92%	32	16	89
Other public body	27	81%	38	32	75
Political party	4517	93%	81	35	72
Researcher	221	70%	48	23	62
Total	11792	89%	40	40	82

Appendix 4C Score breakdown by applicant type April 1, 2019 – March 31, 2020					
Applicant type	Number of requests closed	% On time	Average processing time (business days)	Average # business days overdue	Score
Business	314	82%	44	43	73
Individual	4472	83%	45	53	73
Interest group	248	80%	52	50	68
Law firm	1101	91%	34	32	86
Media	620	80%	44	33	72
Other governments	77	91%	39	8	87
Other public body	36	89%	32	9	87
Political party	5960	82%	54	33	71
Researcher	90	77%	93	203	36
Total	12918	83%	49	42	72

Appendix 5 Outcome of access requests: Fiscal years 2015/16 to 2019/20 comparison										
Outcome	2015/16		2016/17		2017/18		2018/19		2019/20	
	# of requests closed	Percent	# of requests closed	Percent	# of requests closed	Percent	# of requests closed	Percent	# of requests closed	Percent
Abandoned	843	9.6%	660	6.7%	637	7%	898	8%	1199	9%
Access denied	224	2.5%	209	2.1%	255	3%	326	3%	268	2%
Access denied – Section 20	3	0.03%	14	0.14%	10	0.1%	7	0.09%	10	0.08%
Access denied – Section 43	Not tracked until 2019/20								6	0.05%
Cancelled	44	0.5%	54	0.55%	38	0.4%	35	0.29%	64	0.5%
Correction	n/a	n/a	1	0.01%	1	0.01%	0	0%	3	0.02%
Full disclosure	1014	11.5%	1685	17%	1273	14%	1291	11%	1315	10%
No Resp. records exist/located	1045	11.9%	856	8.7%	1224	13%	1799	15%	3117	24%
Outside Scope of Act	35	0.4%	16	0.16%	9	0.09%	8	0.06%	25	0.2%
Partial disclosure	4958	56%	5307	54%	5001	53%	5570	47%	6107	47%
Records in another min/org	93	1.1%	132	1.3%	104	1%	216	2%	48	0.37%
Refuse to confirm or deny	3	0.03%	8	0.08%	20	0.2%	79	1%	59	0.46%
Routinely releasable	69	.78%	67	0.68%	51	1%	46	0.3%	70	0.54%
Transferred	143	1.6%	208	2%	213	2%	141	1%	148	1%
Withdrawn	335	3.8%	640	6.5%	515	6%	1375	12%	479	4%

Appendix 6
Individual ministry compliance reports
2017/18 to 2019/20

										2017/18 Score: 83		
										2018/19 Score: 96		
										2019/20 Score: 70		
Advanced Education, Skills & Training												
	Number of closed requests			% On time			Average processing time (business days)			Average number of business days overdue		
	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20
All requests	108	226	225	88%	97%	76%	32	31	40	45	10	26
Personal	8	9	16	100%	89%	63%	13	36	32	0	14	9
General	100	217	209	87%	98%	77%	33	31	41	45	9	28
By applicant type												
	Number of closed requests			% On time			Average number of business days overdue					
	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20			
Business	3	7	2	67%	100%	50%	7	0	9			
Individual	26	21	31	92%	95%	42%	22	14	15			
Interest group	8	3	3	63%	100%	67%	29	0	9			
Law firm	1	5	1	100%	100%	100%	0	0	0			
Media	9	14	11	56%	100%	73%	19	0	59			
Other governments	0	1	1	n/a	100%	100%	n/a	0	0			
Other public body	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a			
Political party	35	167	173	94%	98%	82%	179	4	31			
Researcher	26	8	3	96%	75%	100%	18	17	0			

Agriculture										2017/18 Score: 76		
										2018/19 Score: 72		
										2019/20 Score: 75		
	Number of closed requests			% On time			Average processing time (business days)			Average number of business days overdue		
	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20
All requests	79	259	647	78%	81%	86%	33	53	53	7	17	30
Personal	0	1	1	n/a	100%	100%	n/a	70	30	n/a	0	0
General	79	258	346	78%	81%	86%	33	53	53	7	17	30
By applicant type												
	Number of closed requests			% On time			Average number of business days overdue					
	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20
Business	4	6	8	50%	67%	50%	6	27	126			
Individual	4	11	11	75%	36%	82%	12	5	22			
Interest group	3	14	8	67%	64%	63%	1	34	32			
Law firm	6	8	4	100%	63%	100%	0	19	0			
Media	18	8	9	78%	25%	89%	9	9	127			
Other governments	0	0	1	n/a	n/a	100%	n/a	n/a	0			
Other public body	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a			
Political party	21	199	306	90%	90%	88%	1	14	17			
Researcher	23	13	0	46%	46%	50%	8	27	126			

Attorney General										2017/18 Score: 85		
										2018/19 Score: 71		
										2019/20 Score: 69		
	Number of closed requests			% On time			Average processing time (business days)			Average number of business days overdue		
	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20
All requests	378	596	582	88%	80%	79%	29	42	47	35	46	44
Personal	125	139	146	98%	93%	87%	16	21	23	5	15	21
General	253	457	436	83%	77%	77%	36	49	55	37	49	48
By applicant type												
	Number of closed requests			% On time			Average number of business days overdue					
	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20
Business	15	18	19	93%	78%	89%	88	16	9			
Individual	160	195	203	96%	87%	84%	26	39	25			
Interest group	9	13	17	100%	85%	88%	0	6	23			
Law firm	26	42	28	96%	69%	89%	511	26	186			
Media	82	111	94	68%	72%	73%	12	26	33			
Other governments	0	0	1	n/a	n/a	100%	n/a	n/a	0			
Other public body	3	0	2	100%	n/a	50%	0	n/a	1			
Political party	33	207	210	94%	81%	74%	190	76	47			
Researcher	50	10	8	82%	80%	88%	13	82	472			

Children & Family Development										2017/18 Score: 64		
										2018/19 Score: 66		
										2019/20 Score: 61		
	Number of closed requests			% On time			Average processing time (business days)			Average number of business days overdue		
	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20
All requests	2067	2235	2388	85%	82%	77%	59	57	59	111	71	64
Personal	1964	1983	2020	85%	83%	79%	60	60	62	114	82	77
General	103	252	368	93%	77%	65%	27	35	45	2	9	21
By applicant type												
	Number of closed requests			% On time			Average number of business days overdue					
	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20
Business	6	4	5	50%	75%	60%	226	2	149			
Individual	1639	1818	1946	84%	82%	78%	118	75	75			
Interest group	36	53	30	86%	87%	77%	23	66	55			
Law firm	291	166	96	89%	81%	83%	74	108	48			
Media	13	15	12	100%	73%	67%	0	12	34			
Other governments	4	4	21	100%	100%	100%	0	0	0			
Other public body	11	3	12	82%	82%	92%	169	9	1			
Political party	28	159	264	100%	62%	62%	0	2	21			
Researcher	39	13	2	90%	33%	100%	1	36	0			

Citizens' Services										2017/18 Score: 84		
										2018/19 Score: 96		
										2019/20 Score: 74		
	Number of closed requests			% On time			Average processing time (business days)			Average number of business days overdue		
	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20
All requests	245	436	269	96%	98%	81%	34	34	46	133	6	16
Personal	4	11	13	100%	100%	100%	26	45	45	0	0	0
General	241	425	256	96%	98%	80%	34	33	46	133	6	16
By applicant type												
	Number of closed requests			% On time			Average number of business days overdue					
	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20
Business	4	6	16	100%	67%	88%	0	8	12			
Individual	23	27	47	96%	100%	91%	3	0	3			
Interest group	1	3	5	100%	100%	100%	0	0	0			
Law firm	12	9	1	92%	100%	100%	4	0	0			
Media	33	32	17	91%	88%	94%	19	7	2			
Other governments	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a			
Other public body	2	1	0	0%	99%	n/a	435	3	n/a			
Political party	67	348	183	97%	100%	76%	131	0	18			
Researcher	103	10	0	100%	100%	n/a	0	0	n/a			

Education										2017/18 Score: 88		
										2018/19 Score: 96		
										2019/20 Score: 72		
	Number of closed requests			% On time			Average processing time (business days)			Average number of business days overdue		
	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20
All requests	139	239	205	91%	97%	79%	33	31	42	21	5	29
Personal	13	10	9	92%	100%	89%	28	40	34	2	0	2
General	126	229	196	90%	97%	79%	92	31	42	23	5	30
By applicant type												
	Number of closed requests			% On time			Average number of business days overdue					
	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20			
Business	9	8	5	89%	100%	80%	17	0	2			
Individual	27	22	22	93%	86%	77%	3	5	18			
Interest group	18	17	13	83%	94%	92%	15	4	11			
Law firm	4	5	4	100%	100%	75%	0	0	3			
Media	22	10	13	82%	100%	85%	11	0	4			
Other governments	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a			
Other public body	1	0	0	0%	n/a	n/a	131	n/a	n/a			
Political party	30	172	143	100%	99%	77%	0	6	35			
Researcher	28	5	5	93%	100%	100%	18	0	0			

Energy & Mines & Petroleum Resources										2017/18 Score: 83		
										2018/19 Score: 81		
										2019/20 Score: 56		
	Number of closed requests			% On time			Average processing time (business days)			Average number of business days overdue		
	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20
All requests	186	254	304	94%	89%	76%	44	43	74	61	32	56
Personal	0	1	0	n/a	100%	n/a	n/a	22	n/a	n/a	0	n/a
General	186	253	304	94%	89%	76%	44	43	74	61	32	56
By applicant type												
	Number of closed requests			% On time			Average number of business days overdue					
	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20
Business	9	17	10	89%	88%	90%	2	144	40			
Individual	19	21	25	100%	81%	80%	0	14	105			
Interest group	14	13	8	79%	85%	75%	4	6	76			
Law firm	19	7	11	89%	86%	91%	317	2	27			
Media	58	20	16	98%	80%	63%	3	28	47			
Other governments	1	3	4	100%	100%	100%	0	0	0			
Other public body	0	1	3	n/a	95%	100%	n/a	24	0			
Political party	29	165	218	93%	14%	75%	7	35	25			
Researcher	37	7	9	92%	100%	44%	21	0	347			

Environment & Climate Change Strategy										2017/18 Score: 68		
										2018/19 Score: 80		
										2019/20 Score: 74		
	Number of closed requests			% On time			Average processing time (business days)			Average number of business days overdue		
	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20
All requests	333	499	467	78%	87%	84%	47	41	47	51	34	45
Personal	8	5	3	100%	40%	67%	23	81	27	0	79	8
General	325	494	464	78%	88%	84%	47	40	47	51	32	45
By applicant type												
	Number of closed requests			% On time			Average number of business days overdue					
	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20
Business	45	56	58	93%	89%	93%	13	16	44			
Individual	83	64	71	77%	80%	82%	61	31	71			
Interest group	43	40	31	84%	80%	84%	7	16	82			
Law firm	32	30	24	63%	70%	79%	75	30	32			
Media	56	39	35	71%	85%	89%	30	69	12			
Other governments	0	1	2	n/a	100%	50%	n/a	0	13			
Other public body	1	1	4	100%	94%	75%	0	22	6			
Political party	32	254	231	88%	50%	83%	234	78	31			
Researcher	41	14	11	73%	100%	73%	11	0	140			

Finance										2017/18 Score: 76		
										2018/19 Score: 81		
										2019/20 Score: 84		
	Number of closed requests			% On time			Average processing time (business days)			Average number of business days overdue		
	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20
All requests	999	1198	1700	87%	87%	89%	51	42	40	44	17	19
Personal	233	289	324	83%	72%	80%	40	47	41	18	15	14
General	766	909	1376	88%	92%	91%	54	40	40	54	19	22
By applicant type												
	Number of closed requests			% On time			Average number of business days overdue					
	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20			
Business	20	20	9	80%	75%	89%	109	37	155			
Individual	307	198	239	91%	65%	75%	19	18	14			
Interest group	18	28	17	78%	82%	76%	61	32	8			
Law firm	151	179	172	83%	80%	87%	38	9	10			
Media	239	125	97	76%	81%	79%	40	21	8			
Other governments	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a			
Other public body	3	3	2	100%	98%	50%	0	16	29			
Political party	86	625	1153	94%	90%	93%	245	11	27			
Researcher	175	20	11	94%	67%	91%	15	17	1			

Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations & Rural Development										2017/18 Score: 87		
										2018/19 Score: 79		
										2019/20 Score: 57		
	Number of closed requests			% On time			Average processing time (business days)			Average number of business days overdue		
	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20
All requests	409	588	643	91%	86%	73%	36	43	68	19	24	34
Personal	8	13	9	88%	62%	78%	40	51	48	2	13	16
General	401	575	634	91%	86%	73%	36	43	69	20	25	35
By applicant type												
	Number of closed requests			% On time			Average number of business days overdue					
	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20
Business	90	61	65	92%	79%	62%	30	35	30			
Individual	122	157	153	89%	81%	74%	4	13	34			
Interest group	34	50	45	88%	82%	67%	22	39	59			
Law firm	40	59	37	88%	75%	73%	42	38	66			
Media	55	35	31	91%	86%	65%	32	19	21			
Other governments	2	40	41	100%	93%	88%	0	7	6			
Other public body	2	6	0	100%	96%	n/a	0	6	n/a			
Political party	21	169	262	100%	82%	76%	0	31	28			
Researcher	43	11	9	93%	83%	67%	5	7	82			

Health										2017/18 Score: 74		
										2018/19 Score: 76		
										2019/20 Score: 55		
	Number of closed requests			% On time			Average processing time (business days)			Average number of business days overdue		
	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20
All requests	279	340	422	85%	83%	71%	46	40	61	68	41	53
Personal	68	42	43	99%	95%	79%	33	29	31	15	52	13
General	211	298	379	81%	81%	70%	51	41	65	69	41	56
By applicant type												
	Number of closed requests			% On time			Average number of business days overdue					
	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20			
Business	21	14	14	95%	71%	79%	2	16	17			
Individual	114	90	141	89%	91%	72%	138	23	18			
Interest group	16	25	22	88%	96%	77%	4	2	13			
Law firm	26	20	8	77%	95%	88%	87	22	1			
Media	50	40	39	68%	88%	69%	28	26	25			
Other governments	0	3	0	n/a	67%	n/a	n/a	1	n/a			
Other public body	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a			
Political party	17	121	188	88%	74%	68%	2	53	88			
Researcher	35	27	10	97%	74%	80%	2	49	16			

Indigenous Relations & Reconciliation										2017/18 Score: 71		
										2018/19 Score: 85		
										2019/20 Score: 63		
	Number of closed requests			% On time			Average processing time (business days)			Average number of business days overdue		
	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20
All requests	108	177	219	76%	91%	78%	38	38	65	19	31	37
Personal	1	0	1	100%	n/a	100%	28	n/a	13	0	n/a	0
General	107	177	218	76%	91%	78%	38	38	65	19	31	37
By applicant type												
	Number of closed requests			% On time			Average number of business days overdue					
	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20
Business	8	4	6	75%	75%	83%	4	2	57			
Individual	7	9	11	57%	56%	73%	25	35	27			
Interest group	12	3	0	83%	100%		8	0				
Law firm	7	11	3	43%	64%	67%	71	71	134			
Media	22	6	5	55%	83%	80%	10	14	61			
Other governments	0	1	1	n/a	100%	0%	n/a	0	17			
Other public body	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a			
Political party	25	136	189	100%	98%	78%	0	2	34			
Researcher	27	7	4	81%	57%	100%	6	14	0			

Jobs, Economic Development & Competitiveness										2017/18 Score: 70		
										2018/19 Score: 67		
										2019/20 Score: 74		
	Number of closed requests			% On time			Average processing time (business days)			Average number of business days overdue		
	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20
All requests	187	224	237	93%	75%	69%	47	44	50	179	37	39
Personal	38	24	20	100%	96%	85%	29	34	45	0	62	34
General	149	200	217	91%	73%	67%	51	45	50	179	37	39
By applicant type												
	Number of closed requests			% On time			Average number of business days overdue					
	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20
Business	11	4	12	100%	100%	92%	0	0	21			
Individual	23	11	14	100%	82%	100%	0	12	0			
Interest group	16	15	2	88%	80%	50%	596	79	79			
Law firm	25	11	11	92%	100%	91%	371	0	2			
Media	39	22	18	87%	50%	61%	23	23	16			
Other governments	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a			
Other public body	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a			
Political party	32	155	178	97%	77%	64%	276	41	41			
Researcher	41	6	2	93%	33%	100%	3	23	0			

Labour										2017/18 Score: 98		
										2018/19 Score: 85		
										2019/20 Score: 69		
	Number of closed requests			% On time			Average processing time (business days)			Average number of business days overdue		
	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20
All requests	67	192	172	99%	88%	79%	27	33	37	17	19	26
Personal	7	8	6	86%	100%	100%	45	39	35	17	0	0
General	60	184	166	100%	87%	79%	25	32	37	0	19	26
By applicant type												
	Number of closed requests			% On time			Average number of business days overdue					
	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20			
Business	3	5	5	100%	60%	100%	0	10	0			
Individual	8	12	11	88%	75%	91%	17	15	19			
Interest group	2	5	1	100%	100%	100%	0	0	0			
Law firm	1	2	0	100%	100%	n/a	0	0	n/a			
Media	4	6	7	100%	100%	100%	0	0	0			
Other governments	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a			
Other public body	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a			
Political party	18	159	148	100%	89%	76%	0	19	26			
Researcher	31	3	0	100%	33%	n/a	0	34	n/a			

Mental Health & Addictions										2017/18 Score: 80		
										2018/19 Score: 90		
										2019/20 Score: 61		
	Number of closed requests			% On time			Average processing time (business days)			Average number of business days overdue		
	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20
All requests	49	154	156	82%	92%	72%	32	30	53	13	23	50
Personal	0	0	2	n/a	n/a	50%	n/a	n/a	32	n/a	n/a	3
General	49	154	154	82%	92%	73%	32	30	53	13	23	51
By applicant type												
	Number of closed requests			% On time			Average number of business days overdue					
	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20
Business	1	1	1	100%	100%	100%	0	0	0			
Individual	1	4	6	0%	75%	50%	4	12	44			
Interest group	2	2	1	100%	50%	100%	0	3	0			
Law firm	0	1	0	n/a	100%	n/a	n/a	0	n/a			
Media	6	13	9	17%	69%	67%	15	22	160			
Other governments	0	n/a	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a			
Other public body	0	n/a	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a			
Political party	16	125	138	94%	98%	74%	4	6	42			
Researcher	23	8	1	91%	50%	0%	16	44	10			

Municipal Affairs & Housing										2017/18 Score: 94		
										2018/19 Score: 79		
										2019/20 Score: 72		
	Number of closed requests			% On time			Average processing time (business days)			Average number of business days overdue		
	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20
All requests	159	222	341	96%	84%	82%	33	36	48	7	26	39
Personal	8	4	4	88%	100%	100%	33	26	21	1	0	0
General	151	218	337	97%	83%	81%	33	36	48	8	26	39
By applicant type												
	Number of closed requests			% On time			Average number of business days overdue					
	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20			
Business	6	5	2	83%	60%	100%	2	8	0			
Individual	48	26	30	98%	69%	87%	1	30	65			
Interest group	5	6	2	80%	67%	50%	29	6	55			
Law firm	7	7	3	100%	71%	67%	0	24	1			
Media	41	14	20	95%	79%	95%	5	75	2			
Other governments	1	0	1	100%	n/a	100%	0	n/a	0			
Other public body	1	0	1	100%	n/a	100%	0	n/a	0			
Political party	22	159	280	100%	89%	81%	0	22	34			
Researcher	28	5	2	96%	80%	0%	1	6	134			

Office of the Premier										2017/18 Score: 79		
										2018/19 Score: 88		
										2019/20 Score: 81		
	Number of closed requests			% On time			Average processing time (business days)			Average number of business days overdue		
	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20
All requests	412	748	1024	89%	98%	95%	43	52	64	63	25	25
Personal	12	7	4	92%	100%	100%	63	35	28	12	0	0
General	400	741	1020	89%	98%	95%	42	52	64	64	25	25
By applicant type												
	Number of closed requests			% On time			Average number of business days overdue					
	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20			
Business	4	4	5	75%	50%	100%	10	35	0			
Individual	32	27	20	91%	100%	100%	58	0	0			
Interest group	9	21	10	89%	95%	90%	35	55	17			
Law firm	6	3	2	83%	100%	100%	5	0	0			
Media	129	75	70	79%	92%	91%	40	21	13			
Other governments	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a			
Other public body	1	1	0	0%	100%	n/a	680	4	n/a			
Political party	99	596	915	91%	95%	95%	99	30	26			
Researcher	132	21	2	98%	0%	100%	10	19	0			

Public Safety & Solicitor General										2017/18 Score: 93		
										2018/19 Score: 91		
										2019/20 Score: 87		
	Number of closed requests			% On time			Average processing time (business days)			Average number of business days overdue		
	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20
All requests	1750	1503	1499	95%	94%	92%	21	25	32	16	26	40
Personal	1506	1135	1115	96%	97%	97%	19	21	26	17	17	14
General	244	368	384	91%	86%	78%	29	37	51	12	31	52
By applicant type												
	Number of closed requests			% On time			Average number of business days overdue					
	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20			
Business	21	17	21	95%	71%	95%	1	12	2			
Individual	1378	1076	1061	96%	97%	96%	15	12	19			
Interest group	7	11	12	100%	82%	92%	0	88	198			
Law firm	212	137	141	97%	93%	91%	31	32	15			
Media	70	109	63	89%	78%	81%	13	41	83			
Other governments	4	4	0	100%	75%	n/a	0	57	n/a			
Other public body	2	3	4	100%	98%	100%	0	14	0			
Political party	22	135	191	100%	73%	75%	0	22	33			
Researcher	34	11	6	94%	100%	50%	2	0	358			

Social Development & Poverty Reduction										2017/18 Score: 96		
										2018/19 Score: 92		
										2019/20 Score: 83		
	Number of closed requests			% On time			Average processing time (business days)			Average number of business days overdue		
	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20
All requests	945	1081	1071	97%	92%	85%	23	27	30	14	13	22
Personal	866	883	847	98%	96%	94%	23	26	25	13	10	15
General	79	198	224	78%	77%	49%	29	31	48	15	16	24
By applicant type												
	Number of closed requests			% On time			Average number of business days overdue					
	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20
Business	3	9	10	100%	89%	60%	0	2	62			
Individual	344	353	338	96%	92%	88%	14	8	15			
Interest group	31	28	13	94%	86%	100%	12	7	0			
Law firm	500	519	511	99%	97%	96%	13	16	18			
Media	8	11	2	63%	73%	100%	18	21	0			
Other governments	5	3	2	100%	100%	100%	0	0	0			
Other public body	3	5	7	100%	80%	100%	0	14	0			
Political party	26	144	186	100%	56%	48%	0	41	23			
Researcher	25	9	2	68%	100%	100%	14	0	0			

Tourism, Arts & Culture										2017/18 Score: 98		
										2018/19 Score: 77		
										2019/20 Score: 64		
	Number of closed requests			% On time			Average processing time (business days)			Average number of business days overdue		
	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20
All requests	91	194	223	98%	83%	74%	22	38	49	1	37	36
Personal	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
General	91	194	223	98%	83%	74%	22	38	49	1	37	36
By applicant type												
	Number of closed requests			% On time			Average number of business days overdue					
	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20
Business	1	4	2	100%	100%	50%	0	0	10			
Individual	1	4	7	100%	75%	43%	0	17	24			
Interest group	1	3	0	100%	100%	n/a	0	0	n/a			
Law firm	1	0	0	100%	n/a	n/a	0	n/a	n/a			
Media	6	13	14	100%	69%	100%	0	19	0			
Other governments	0	1	0	n/a	100%	n/a	n/a	0	n/a			
Other public body	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a			
Political party	41	164	199	95%	84%	73%	1	41	37			
Researcher	40	5	1	100%	60%	100%	0	37	0			

Transportation & Infrastructure										2017/18 Score: 92		
										2018/19 Score: 93		
										2019/20 Score: 85		
	Number of closed requests			% On time			Average processing time (business days)			Average number of business days overdue		
	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20
All requests	375	424	424	94%	96%	90%	26	30	38	16	28	19
Personal	1	3	5	100%	100%	100%	30	30	38	0	0	0
General	374	421	419	94%	96%	90%	26	30	38	16	28	19
By applicant type												
	Number of closed requests			% On time			Average number of business days overdue					
	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20	17/18	18/19	19/20			
Business	45	26	39	93%	100%	97%	21	0	1			
Individual	98	102	85	99%	99%	95%	3	14	18			
Interest group	21	14	8	90%	93%	100%	25	8	0			
Law firm	58	61	44	100%	95%	100%	0	100	0			
Media	72	52	38	86%	90%	87%	18	5	16			
Other governments	1	1	2	100%	100%	100%	0	0	0			
Other public body	8	157	1	100%	97%	100%	0	12	0			
Political party	25	8	205	96%	75%	84%	11	25	21			
Researcher	47	3	2	87%	100%	100%	9	0	0			