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For Immediate Release

FreePint Asks: Who's Ready for Freedom of Information?

The Freedom of Information Act comes into force in the UK on January 1st 2005. Everyone will then have the legal right to request access to all types of recorded information held by public bodies. Requests can be in any written form including email or fax, from anywhere in the world, and must be supplied within twenty working days.

A new report published by FreePint, ***An Introduction to Freedom of Information*** by Paul Pedley, explains in plain language the key workings of the act and dispels some myths. It is available to purchase priced £25 online from <<http://www.freepint.com/shop/report/>>.

The report reveals that according to Stationery Office research commissioned in 2003, almost a third of UK Government departments do not know even what the deadline for freedom of information compliance is. This is despite warnings from Richard Thomas, the UK Information commissioner to public bodies last May to get their act together, and prepare now - not panic later.

An Introduction to Freedom of Information covers such areas such as the rights of applicants, fees and charges, records management, complaints procedures and copyright and freedom of information. It also looks at the interface between data protection and freedom of information, and the implications for businesses.

Competitive intelligence

Private sector businesses as well as those in the public sector will need to be prepared, and the report examines implications of the Act on the field of competitive intelligence. This aspect is not often explained, but Pedley examines some contractual risk areas for businesses. Companies for example often have reverse freedom of information requests run to see who has collected information within a Government entity about their company. *"Businesses need to think about the information that their competitors may be able to gain about their business activities from information they have shared with public authorities"* says Pedley.

Records management critical

One of the critical success factors in the introduction of freedom of information includes good record keeping and the importance of electronic management systems. The report highlights an important role for information professionals in records management. Knowing what information is held, and where, and the development of proper retention and archiving policies - a policy for the retention of emails is one example. "Records management can exist without freedom of information but freedom of information cannot exist without records management" according to the National Archives Journal "Records Management News".

An Introduction to Freedom of Information directs people to how freedom of information requests have been handled in other countries. The report also points to a searchable database of previous examples of requests. Understanding the exemptions that are allowed, and what is permissible under the public interest is crucial. Public authorities have to consider whether the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information and this aspect of the law is explained in detail.

The full report is
available online at
[www.freepint.com/
shop/report/](http://www.freepint.com/shop/report/)

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Information for Editors

An Introduction to Freedom of Information. ISBN 1-904769-03-9. Paul Pedley. FreePint 2004. Is available for purchase and immediate delivery online priced £25 from <www.freepint.com/shop/report/>.

If you would like to review *An Introduction to Freedom of Information* please contact Annabel Colley for a press copy.

Paul Pedley

Head of Research at the Economist Intelligence Unit, and editor of KeepingLegal.com, a service covering daily updates on legal issues such as Copyright, data protection, and freedom of information.

Paul is the author of many books, including *Essential Law for Information Professionals*, *The Invisible Web: Searching the Hidden Parts of the Internet* and *Copyright for Library and Information*. He is fellow of CILIP (The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals) He also runs training on copyright, data protection and freedom of information and on business information on the Web. He has worked in Information Management for Law firm Theodore Goddard, and for the DTI and OFTEL.

FreePint

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In the six years since its launch, FreePint's expert consultant authors have helped business users find reputable Web sources on a very diverse range of topics - aviation, charities, military history, marketing, law and finance. FreePint also publishes information-related jobs, book reviews, events and interviews with key industry figures. It commissions and sells original research reports, and hosts interactive exchange seminars on hot topics like search engines, knowledge management and electronic copyright.

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