



FOI Self-Assessment Toolkit

Introduction to the FOI self-assessment toolkit

Introduction

1. The FOI self-assessment toolkit is a set of resources for authorities to use to self-assess and improve (or maintain) their FOI performance. It contains guidance on how to conduct self-assessments and specific modules which each focus on an area of FOI practice e.g., Responding on Time, Searching for Information.

All of the materials listed below are available on our [Self-assessment toolkit web page](#)

Toolkit contents

2. Guidance which applies to all of the modules
 - (i) **Getting started**
 - (ii) **How to carry out an FOI self-assessment**
3. Modules
 - (i) A **Standards and Assessment Criteria** document specific to the module
 - (ii) Three template workbooks:
 - (a) Assessment Questions and Evidence Grid
 - (b) Summary of Findings
 - (c) Improvement Action Plan
4. An important principle of FOI self-assessment is **proportionality**. It is the outcome of your authority's practice that is important, not how detailed or sophisticated your practice or improvement actions are. For example, it is good practice to monitor and track FOI requests. For some large authorities this is done via a dedicated case management system, while for small authorities a Word table or Excel spreadsheet (or equivalent) serves just as well.

We recommend you read the **Getting started** guidance before starting an assessment.

Approach

5. The approach is very straightforward. The toolkit documents guide you through a process to **capture** current activity and practice, **assess** how well your authority is performing against a set of standards, and **improve** FOI practices, procedures and administrative arrangements.

- (i) To help you **capture** current activity, the module takes you through a series of questions, grouped by good FOI practice “characteristics”. These steer you through what to look for to identify and demonstrate current practice, and there is a question grid in which to record sources of evidence, strengths and areas for improvement.
- (ii) The module standards and assessment criteria set out what good practice looks like and how to evaluate performance by **assessing** each characteristic of your authority’s practice against these good practice criteria. There is a template summary report in which to record your findings.
- (iii) Finally, as an organisation, you decide what actions you want to take to either **maintain** good current practice or **improve** practice. There is a template action plan for you to use.

6. We recommend you read the **Getting started** guidance before you start an assessment.

Why self-assess FOI performance at all?

- 7. Good FOI practice benefits both authorities and the public. For authorities there are financial and reputational benefits to be gained from effective and efficient FOI practice; for the public it saves time and effort if information is easily accessible. For both, the benefits of establishing good relationships and effective communication based on openness and trust is invaluable.
- 8. Experience tells us, here at the Commissioner’s office, that the authorities who achieve the greatest benefits are those who deliver excellent FOI practice. They go beyond simply complying with FOI legislation by seizing the engagement opportunities FOI presents.
- 9. FOI self-assessment works best when it is part of an authority’s wider approach to continuous improvement and where it is the authority that instigates action because it wants to achieve identified outcomes. This might be internally driven, or the result of a suggestion from our office. On, what we hope are very rare occasions, we might direct an authority to carry out a self-assessment (for more information about this, read our [Intervention procedures](#)).
- 10. If you have any questions or comments, please contact us.

Contact us

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