

## Information Commissioner Seeks Guidance on Future Role



*The Information Commissioner is the UK's Public Authority for Privacy and Freedom of Information. In recent years this office has been at the centre of a series of controversies – from phone hacking to the Snowden revelations – which have led to growth, and new challenges to the role and function of the organisation. Here **Christopher Graham**, the Information Commissioner, explains why – and how – he seeks to consult the public on the new challenges for Information Rights, and the future of his organisation.*

Earlier this year, in [my opening address at the ICO's data protection conference](#), I commented that we appeared to be condemned to live in interesting times. Data protection is firmly established at the centre of so much of what we do, while tightening budgets brings increased demand for transparent government, both locally and nationally.

Over the past nine months, times have got even more interesting. With the issues around data and the right of access to official information becoming ever more significant, the ICO has been reviewing its own role and impact – to make sure that we can remain the authoritative arbiter of information rights we need to be.

More specifically, we've been focusing on proactively shaping how our organisation might look in 2020. It is true that the regulatory landscape with which we deal is undergoing change, and that the nature of that change is not yet clear, either in detail or timescale. But as a responsible regulator, the ICO cannot simply mark time and wait for every uncertainty to fall away, nor should we behave reactively to each new development.

We need to be prepared for a future that will be different and ever changing, and, for that reason, we need to become more agile. We need to maintain a strategic approach and be able to adapt within that strategy – not improvise around a series of tactical responses.

That is what frames the vision we set out today. It's a vision that addresses the growing importance of information rights in the public mind, and the impact that has on our workload, but against the backdrop of a funding crunch that stretches our resources to the maximum.

Much of what you'll read reaffirms how we already do things, but there are some significant changes in direction. There's a notable shift in focus towards getting results for the many by acting on the concerns of individuals, as well as a significant commitment towards exploring the development of trust marks and privacy seals so that the ICO is not the first and last line of defence for citizens and consumers' rights.

But now [we'd like to hear your views](#) about what we are proposing. Our work so far has included customer satisfaction surveys and stakeholder research, but now we want to hear directly from the people who these changes would affect. Are we on the right lines? What should we do more of? What should we do less of?

You can [read exactly what our view is here](#), and you can then find a questionnaire with which to [feed back your views here](#). The consultation closes on 7 February 2014 and we anticipate publishing our final thoughts in March, alongside our corporate plan for the three years 2014/15 – 2016/17. The next few years promise to be hugely important for the ICO, and we appreciate your help in shaping them.

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