



Book Review by Ibrahim Hasan (Act Now Training www.actnow.org.uk)

Government and Information: The Law Relating to Access, Disclosure and their Regulation (4th Edition)

By Professor Patrick Birkinshaw and Dr Mike Varney

Bloomsbury Professional - Price £85

<http://www.bloomsburyprofessional.com/1346/Bloomsbury-Professional-Government-and-Information--The-Law-Relating-to-Access--Disclosure-and-their-Regulation--4th-edition.html>

Access to information held by public officials is a controversial subject. Ever since the MPs' expenses scandal, the WikiLeaks saga and even the phone hacking scandal there seems to be an increasing demand for a clear explanation of the complex law in this area. Government and Information is a good attempt at doing this. This is now the fourth edition of this book by acknowledged experts from the University of Hull.

The Freedom of Information (FOI) section explains the 2000 Act clearly and concisely. It has been revised to take account of recent developments including important decisions by the Information Commissioner and the First Tier Tribunal (Information Rights) (formerly the Information Tribunal). More could have been written about the FOI exemptions which cause much difficulty and debate amongst the public sector professionals. However there is ample guidance on the Information Commissioner's website (www.ico.gov.uk) for the reader who requires a more in depth analysis. This book also makes useful reference to the Protection of Freedoms Bill (currently going through the House of Lords) which will make changes to the FOI regime particularly in relation to the release and re use of datasets. There is also a chapter on access to personal information and the overlap between the Data Protection 1998 and FOI. This will be particularly useful for FOI officers who often have to deal with requests for personal information and have to consider the tortuous section 40 exemption (personal data).

This book is not just about Freedom of Information though. The authors explain other laws, which regulate access to and disclosure of information within central and local government. The section on central government covers access to information through the system of the code of practice, Parliamentary Questions and other provisions relating to ministers and civil servants' responsibilities and duties. Other topics include information provisions within EU Regulations and the Civil Procedure Rules as well as developments in related areas of case law.

This book also considers the laws and regulations which contain restrictions on the use of information held by public officials. It includes an exhaustive list of statutory provisions concerning prohibitions on the disclosure of information, ranging from the Abortion Act 1967 to the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1949. This will be particularly useful for those considering the FOI exemption under section 44 (prohibitions on disclosure). In the statutory materials section at the back there is a full copy of the Freedom of information Act and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

This book will be most useful for information lawyers and information management professionals e.g. DP and FOI officers who wish to understand the wider laws around access to information. With a price tag of £85 it is good value and a good addition to any legal library.

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