



# Public awareness research 2022 - summary of results

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## Overview

### *Awareness of FOI rights and FOI law*

- 63% of people said they are "fully aware" or "moderately aware" of their rights to ask for information from public bodies. This is down, substantially, from 71% when the exact same question was asked in 2019, although "fully aware" is unchanged at 21%.
- This decrease was reflected in almost every age group, from 16-34 to 65+; only in the 45-54 group did the proportion saying they are aware remain the same.
- 89% said they've heard of FOISA - a very slight decrease from 91%, although more said they've "definitely" heard of it (up from 59% to 65%).
- The only age group to change by more than 2 % points was 16-34, down from 87% to 83%.

### *How people look for information*

- When seeking info about a public body, 59% said they would look at the authority's website; 56% said they'd use internet search; 45% said they'd send an email or letter.
- Authority website was the most popular answer in each age group except 16-34, of whom 73% said they'd use a search engine (the highest percentage for any option by any group).
- 21% of 16-34s said they'd look for or ask about the information on social media - the 4th most popular option in this group, twice as common as it is for other age groups, and 16-34 is the only group for which this option outscored contacting by phone or in person.

### *Use of FOI rights*

- 58% of people have never asked an authority for information by email or letter; 67% have never asked by other means.
- 46% look for information on authority websites a few times a year or more; 26% look elsewhere online that often.
- Older people are more likely to have asked for information in writing (38-50% compared to 25-27% of younger groups) and by other means; young adults are much less likely than others to look on authority websites regularly, and twice as likely to look elsewhere online.

### *Confidence in using FOI*

- 48% of people are confident of getting a reply if they ask a public body for information - down from 57% when the exact same question was asked in 2019.
- 42% are confident they would get the information they were looking for if they requested it.
- 53% are confident they would know how to go about asking for information - 38% of the youngest group, 56-63% of other age groups.

### *Perceived value of FOI*

- Only 47% agreed that FOI helps people be informed - down from 59% when the exact same question was asked in 2019.
- 50% of people *disagreed* that FOI is a waste of money - down from 62% in 2019 (although most of this is due to a shift to 'neither/nor' and 'don't know' answers; 1 in 10 still agreed).

### *What should be published*

- The proportions of people who feel it's important that certain types of information are published are almost all unchanged from 2019.
- How authorities spend money is seen as important by the largest proportion of people (87%), followed by information about decision-making (80%), service delivery (79%), performance (77%) and lastly contracts (down slightly from 74% to 71%).

### *Who should be subject to FOI*

- 53% of people think it's "extremely important" that publicly funded or contracted health and social care services are covered by FOI.
- Between 76% and 81% said it's either "extremely important" or "very important" that FOI covers each of the types of services or bodies that we asked about.

## Question 1: Understanding of FOI rights

How aware, if at all, are you of your rights to ask for information from public bodies?

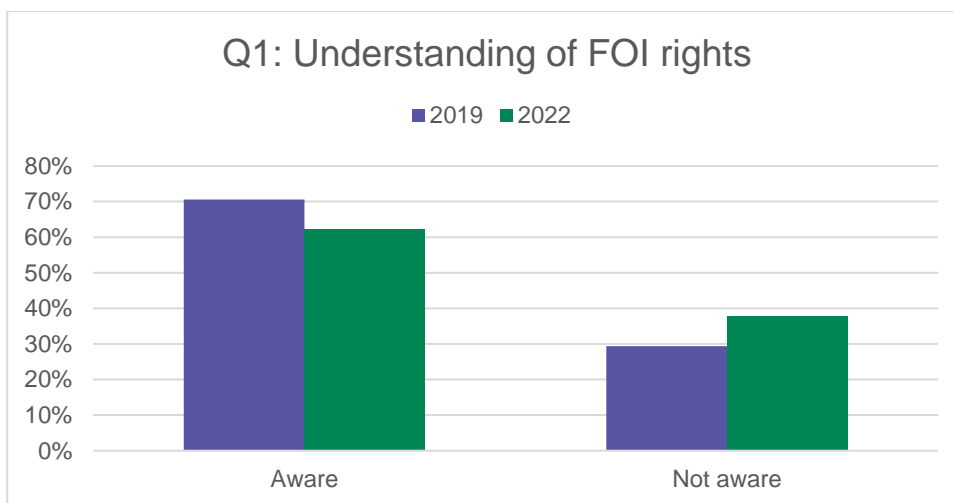
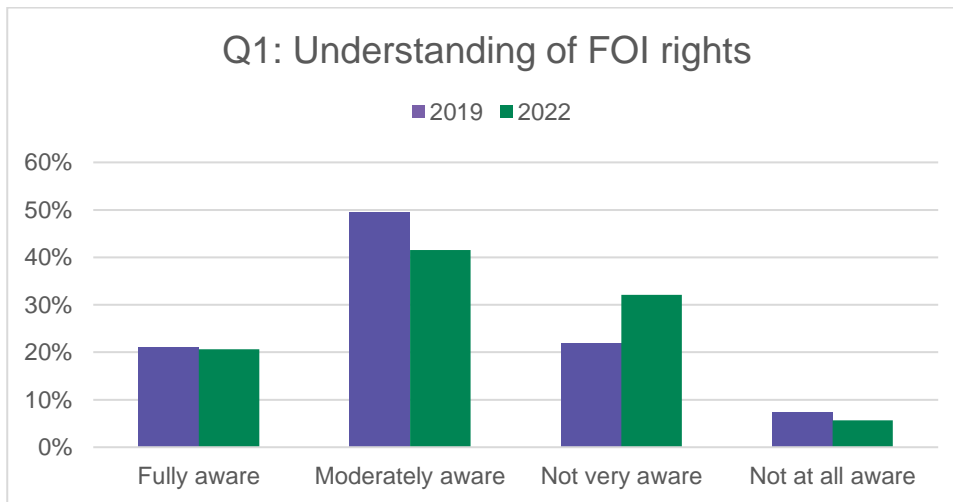
Fully aware: **21%**

Moderately aware: **42%**

Not very aware: **32%**

Not at all aware: **6%**

**Overall, 63% said they were aware. This is down from 71% when the exact same question was asked in 2019, although "fully aware" is unchanged at 21%.**



### Breakdown by age

**16-34: 46%** (down from 53%)

**35-44: 60%** (down from 73%)

**45-54: 73%** (similar to 74%)

**55-64: 70%** (down from 78%)

**65+: 71%** (down from 81%)

## Question 2: Accessing published information

If you wanted to find out about something relating to a Scottish public body - for example about a decision they've taken or a service they provide - how would you go about looking for information?

Sending an email or letter to the public body: **45%**

Contacting the public body by another method (e.g. phone or in person): **18%**

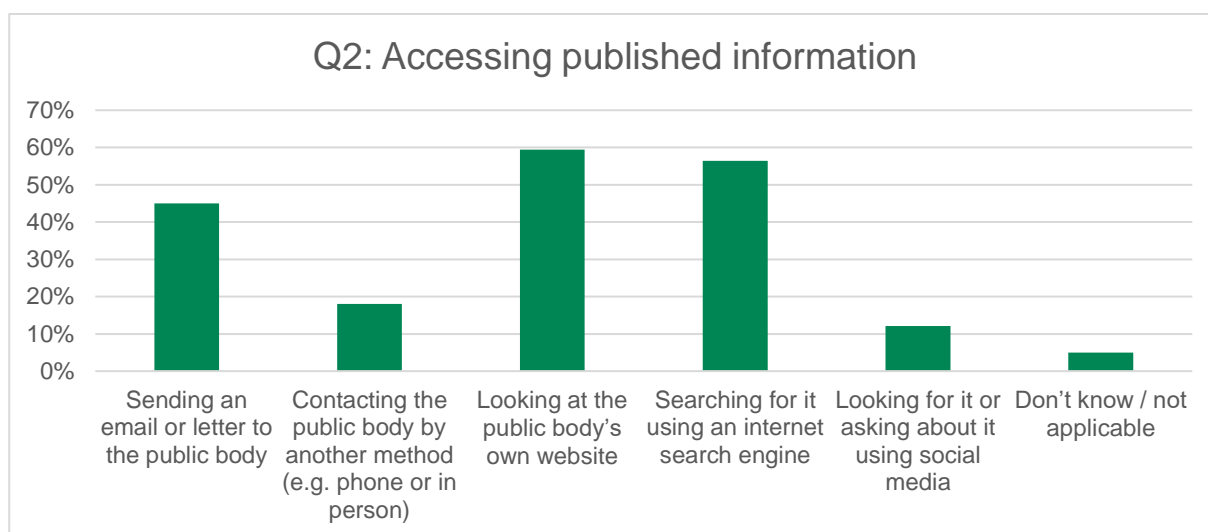
Looking at the public body's own website: **59%**

Searching for it using an internet search engine: **56%**

Looking for it or asking about it using social media: **12%**

Don't know / not applicable: **5%**

***Browsing the authority's website is the most popular action, but is very closely followed by using internet search. Sending an email or letter also scored highly.***



### *Breakdown by age*

**16-34: Search engine 73%**, Authority website 57%, Email or letter 39%, Social media 21%

**35-44: Authority website 56%**, Search engine 54%, Email or letter 49%, Other contact 15%

**45-54: Authority website 62%**, Email or letter 48%, Search engine 47%, Other contact 23%

**55-64: Authority website 60%**, Search engine 48%, Email or letter 46%, Other contact 17%

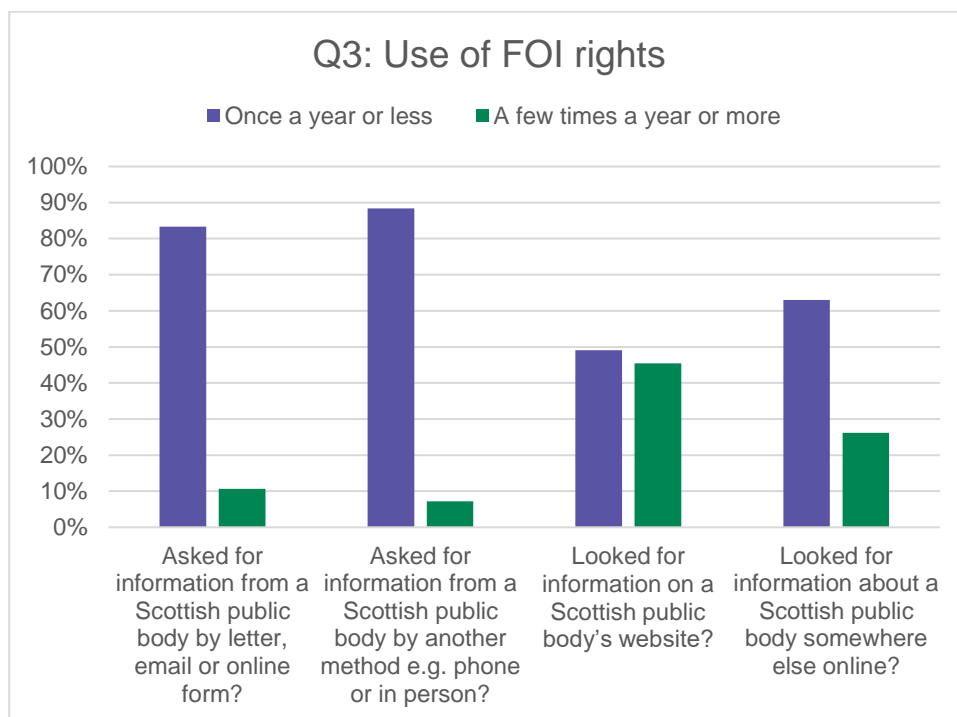
**65+: Authority website 63%**, Search engine 51%, Email or letter 47%, Other contact 20%

The 16-34 age group is unique in favouring search engines as a means of finding information, but three quarters of them chose that option - the largest percentage of all. This age group is also notable for its use of social media to find information; this only scored 7-10% in other age groups.

Meanwhile, those in higher social grades are more likely than others to send an email or letter or look at the authority's website, and less likely to use internet search or social media.

### Question 3: Use of FOI rights

**A clear overall majority of people have never asked an authority for information (58% by email or letter, 67% by other means). Just under half (46%) look for information on authority websites a few times a year or more, but far fewer people (26%) look elsewhere online.**



How often, if at all, have you...

*Asked for information from a Scottish public body by letter, email or online form?*

- Every day: **0%** (0 respondents)
- A few times a week: **0%** (3 respondents)
- A few times a month: **1%**
- A few times a year: **10%**
- About once a year: **7%**
- Less often: **19%**
- Never: **58%**
- Don't know: **6%**

*Asked for information from a Scottish public body by another method e.g. phone or in person?*

- Every day: **0%** (0 respondents)
- A few times a week: **0%** (0 respondents)
- A few times a month: **1%**
- A few times a year: **6%**
- About once a year: **5%**
- Less often: **16%**
- Never: **67%**
- Don't know: **4%**

*Looked for information on a Scottish public body's website?*

- Every day: **1%**
- A few times a week: **4%**

A few times a month: **9%**  
A few times a year: **32%**  
About once a year: **9%**  
Less often: **15%**  
Never: **25%**  
Don't know: **5%**

*Looked for information about a Scottish public body elsewhere online?*

Every day: **0%** (1 respondent)  
A few times a week: **2%**  
A few times a month: **6%**  
A few times a year: **18%**  
About once a year: **7%**  
Less often: **19%**  
Never: **36%**  
Don't know: **11%**

*Breakdown by age*

46% of the oldest group have never asked in writing, compared to 60-66% of most other groups. 25-27% of the youngest two groups have asked in writing, while 38-50% of the other groups have.

71-74% of the youngest two groups have never asked by other means (while 22-23% of them have), whereas 57-67% of the other age groups haven't, and 29-38% of them have.

There is not much variation for authority websites, except "a few times a year", which ranges from 25% of the youngest to 39% of the oldest group, and "once a year", with only 3% of the youngest group. Those in higher social grades are much more likely to have looked on authority websites.

The youngest group are about twice as likely as other groups (13% compared to 5-7%) to look for information elsewhere online fairly regularly; far fewer of this group answered "less often" or "never". Those in higher social grades are slightly more likely to have looked elsewhere online.

## Question 4: Awareness of FOI law

Have you ever heard of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act?

Yes, definitely: **65%**

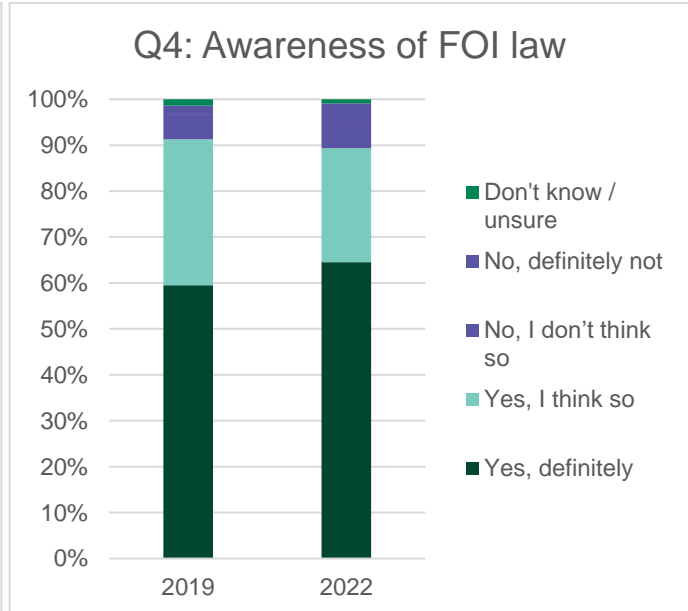
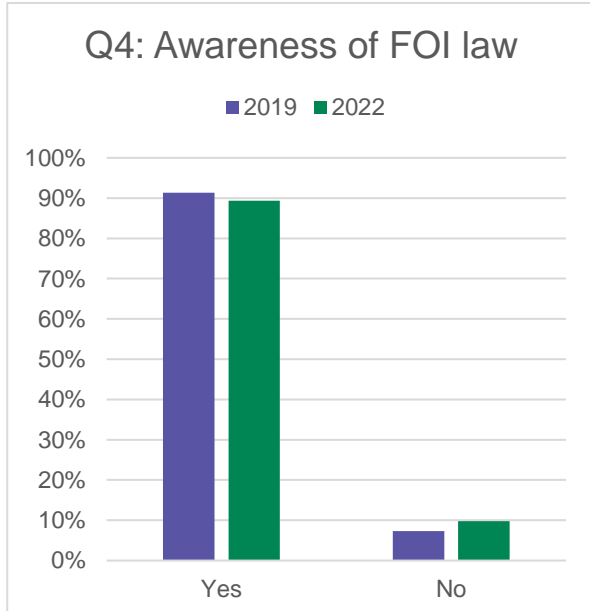
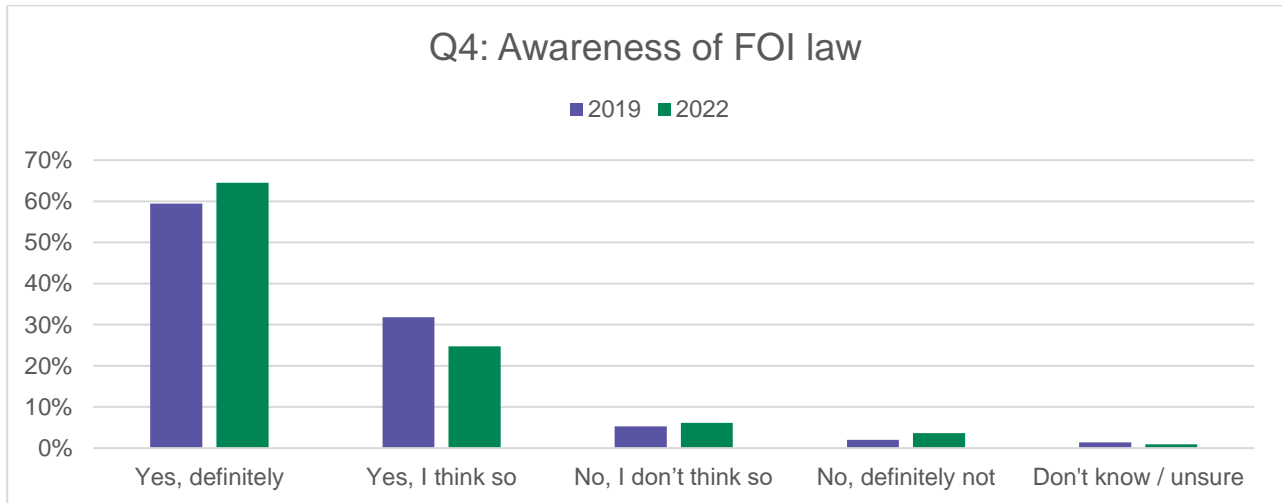
Yes, I think so: **25%**

No, I don't think so: **6%**

No, definitely not: **4%**

Don't know / unsure: **1%**

**Overall, 89% of people have heard of FOISA - similar to 91% when the exact same question was asked in 2019, although more people have "definitely" heard of it - up from 59% to 65%.**



### Breakdown by age

**16-34: 83%** (down from 87%)

**35-44: 93%** (similar to 94%)

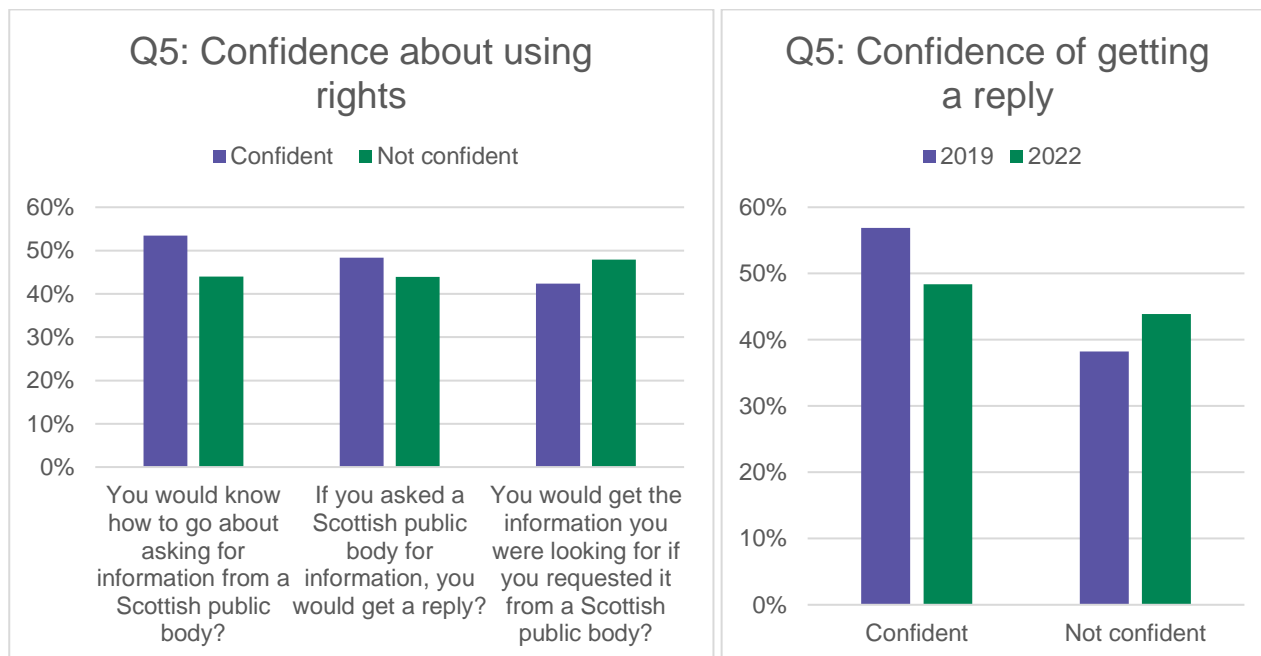
**45-54: 91%** (similar to 92%)

**55-64: 92%** (unchanged from 92%)

**65+: 92%** (similar to 94%)

## Question 5: Confidence about using rights

**A small overall majority feel they would know how to ask, slightly fewer think they'd get a reply ("don't know" answers increase here too), and most are not confident of getting the information they want. Confidence of getting a reply - 48% - is down from 57% when the same question was asked in 2019 (with all of the decrease attributed to "fairly confident").**



Thinking about how you feel about asking for information, how confident, or not, are you that...

*You would know how to go about asking for information from a Scottish public body?*

Very confident: **13%**  
 Fairly confident: **40%**  
 Not very confident: **28%**  
 Not confident at all: **16%**  
 Don't know: **2%**

38% of the youngest age group are confident, compared to 56-63% of other age groups.

*If you asked a Scottish public body for information, you would get a reply?*

Very confident: **13%**  
 Fairly confident: **35%**  
 Not very confident: **31%**  
 Not confident at all: **12%**  
 Don't know: **8%**

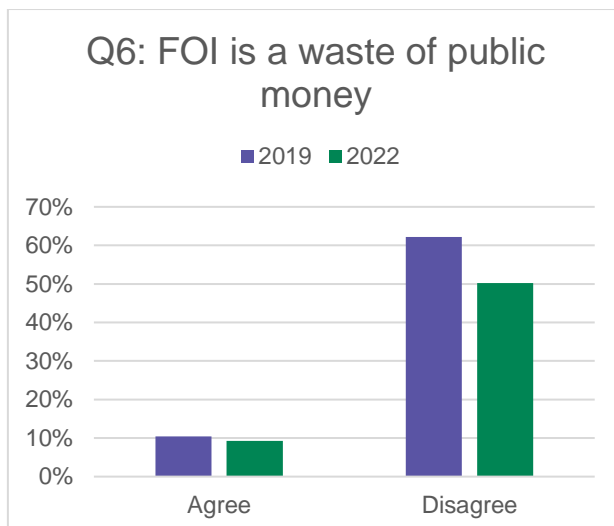
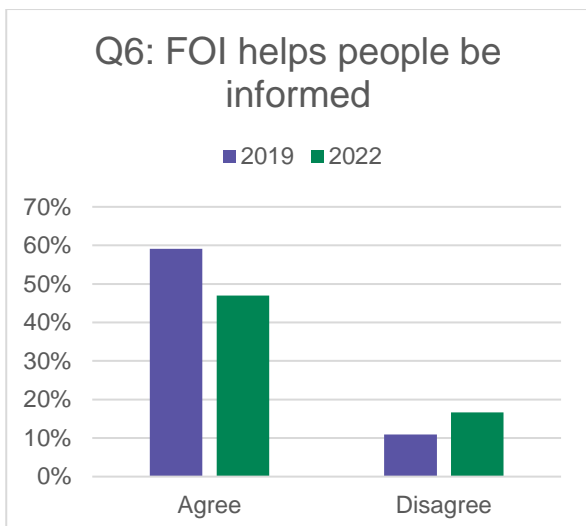
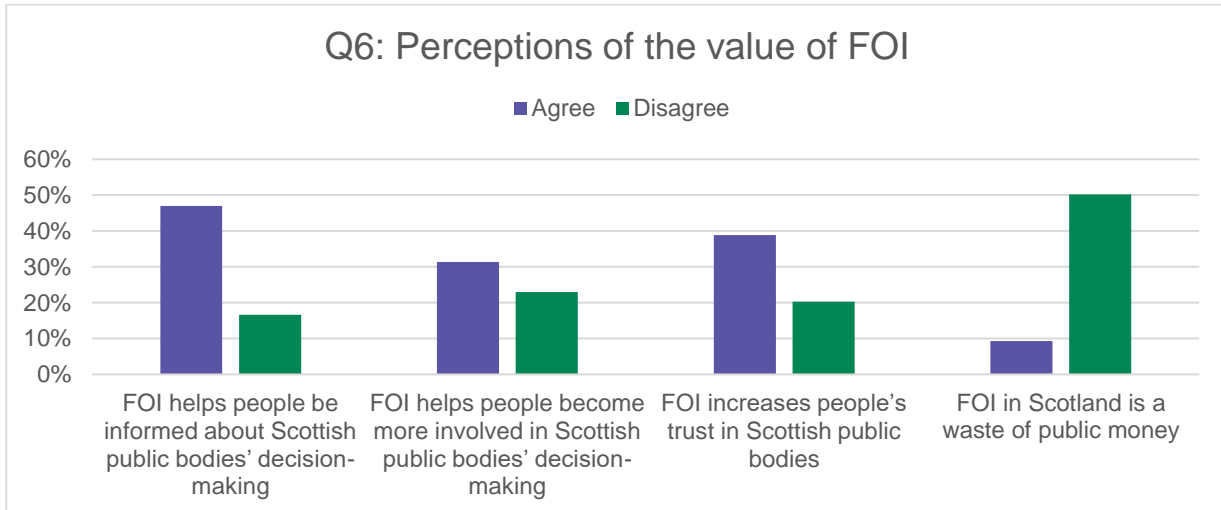
*You would get the information you were looking for if you requested it from a Scottish public body?*

Very confident: **6%**  
 Fairly confident: **36%**  
 Not very confident: **34%**  
 Not confident at all: **14%**  
 Don't know: **9%**



## Question 6: Perceptions of the value of FOI

**Only 47% agreed that FOI helps people be informed - down from 59% when the exact same question was asked in 2019. Meanwhile, 50% disagreed that FOI is a waste of money, which is down from 62% in 2019, although the change is due to more people taking the middle or "don't know" option; the proportion agreeing with the statement was almost unchanged.**



To what extent do you agree with the following statements about FOI?

*FOI helps people be informed about Scottish public bodies' decision-making*

Strongly agree: **11%**

Tend to agree: **36%**

Neither agree nor disagree: **23%**

Tend to disagree: **12%**

Strongly disagree: **5%**

Don't know: **13%**

*FOI helps people become more involved in Scottish public bodies' decision-making*

Strongly agree: **6%**

Tend to agree: **25%**

Neither agree nor disagree: **32%**

Tend to disagree: **17%**

Strongly disagree: **6%**

Don't know: **14%**

*FOI increases people's trust in Scottish public bodies*

Strongly agree: **9%**

Tend to agree: **30%**

Neither agree nor disagree: **29%**

Tend to disagree: **14%**

Strongly disagree: **7%**

Don't know: **12%**

*FOI in Scotland is a waste of public money*

Strongly agree: **2%**

Tend to agree: **7%**

Neither agree nor disagree: **28%**

Tend to disagree: **26%**

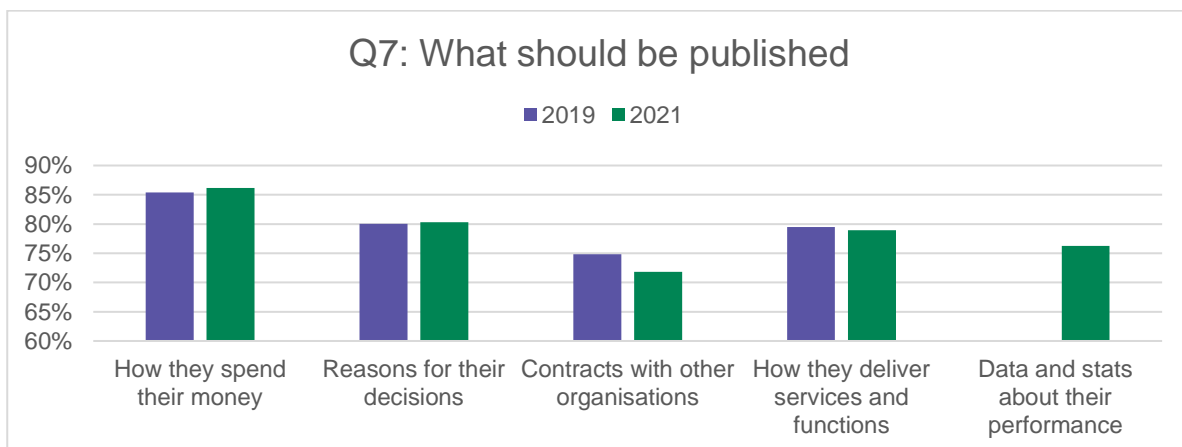
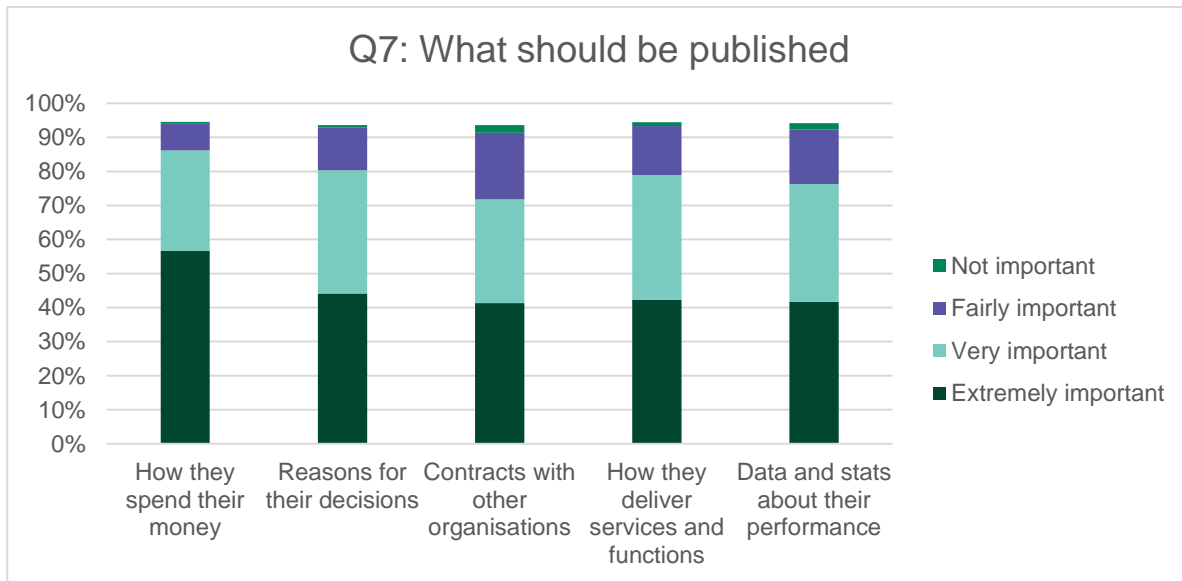
Strongly disagree: **24%**

Don't know: **13%**

## Question 7: What should be published

*How authorities spend money is seen as the most important of these types of information, with a clear overall majority selecting "extremely important" and 87% overall considering it important to publish. That's followed by information about: decision-making (80%), service delivery (79%), performance (77%) and contracts (71%).*

*The results of the questions about spending, decision-making and service delivery are all almost completely unchanged compared to the exact same questions in 2019. Contracts has changed slightly, from 74% to 71% saying it's either "extremely important" or "very important". The question about performance data was not asked in 2019.*



Thinking about information that should be published by Scottish public bodies, how important, if at all, do you think it is for them to make these types of information available for the public to see?

### *Information on how they spend their money*

Extremely important: **57%**

Very important: **30%**

Fairly important: **8%**

Not important: **0%** (6 respondents)

Don't know: **5%**

*The reasons for the decisions they make*

Extremely important: **44%**

Very important: **36%**

Fairly important: **13%**

Not important: **1%**

Don't know: **6%**

*Information on their contracts with other organisations*

Extremely important: **41%**

Very important: **30%**

Fairly important: **19%**

Not important: **2%**

Don't know: **6%**

*Information on how they deliver their services and functions*

Extremely important: **42%**

Very important: **37%**

Fairly important: **14%**

Not important: **1%**

Don't know: **6%**

*Data and statistics about their performance*

Extremely important: **42%**

Very important: **35%**

Fairly important: **16%**

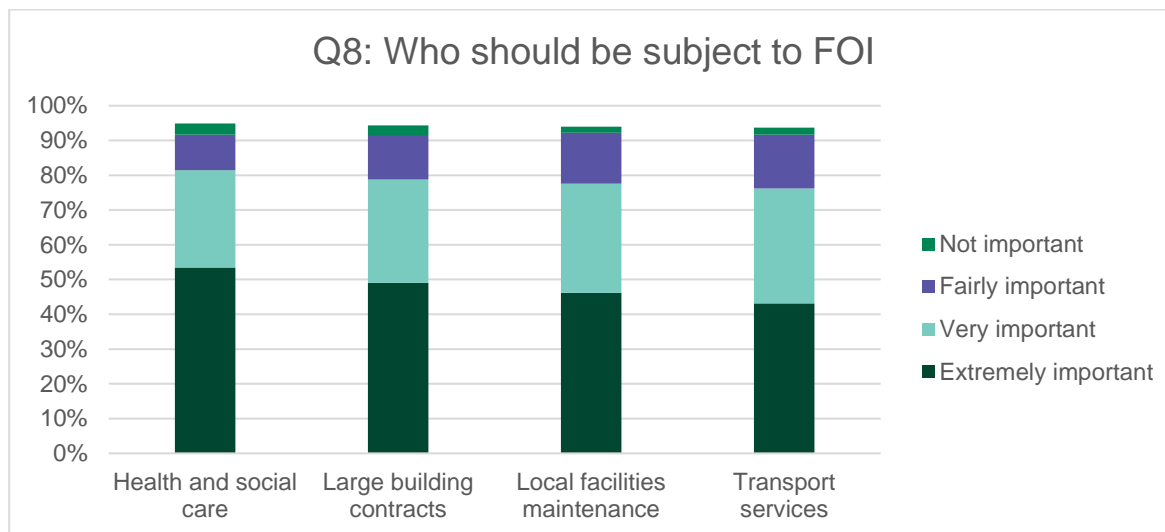
Not important: **2%**

Don't know: **6%**

## Question 8: Who should be subject to FOI

**An overall majority of people consider it "extremely important" that public-funded or public-contracted health and social care services are covered by FOI, with 81% considering it either "extremely important" or "very important". There were similar overall positive responses about each of the other types of bodies (between 76% and 79%).**

**In 2019, we asked a more general question about whether private companies who work on public contracts should be subject to FOI law, to which 80% said yes 8% said no.**



How important, if at all, do you think it is for the following services or types of bodies to be covered by freedom of information?

*Health and social care services - like care homes - provided under a contract with, or funding from, Scottish public bodies*

Extremely important: **53%**

Very important: **28%**

Fairly important: **10%**

Not important: **3%**

Don't know: **5%**

*Bodies carrying out large building and maintenance projects like schools, hospitals and roads, under a contract with a Scottish public body*

Extremely important: **49%**

Very important: **30%**

Fairly important: **13%**

Not important: **3%**

Don't know: **6%**

*Bodies responsible for building and maintaining local facilities like health centres and community centres, under a contract with a Scottish public body*

Extremely important: **46%**

Very important: **31%**

Fairly important: **15%**

Not important: **2%**

Don't know: **6%**

*Bodies delivering transport services on behalf of a Scottish public body*

Extremely important: **43%**

Very important: **33%**

Fairly important: **15%**

Not important: **2%**

Don't know: **6%**