

International Conference of Information Commissioners – Manchester – 19-21 September.

This major conference of Information Commissioners was split into three days.

A Civic Society Day, (not attended) where NGOs and campaigning groups got together to discuss FoI issues from a users perspective. So far we have no material from this.

An Open Day where regulators and groups came together to raise issues, compare legislation internationally and discuss operations. This will form the major part of this report.

A closed session where ICs discussed amongst themselves some of the issues raised. A summary of this day is available on the conference website - <https://icic2017open.org/>.

The main result was **the motion (also available from that website) passed calling for progress in extending coverage to public services contracted out or delivered by non-public organisations and setting up a working group to monitor progress.**

Issues raised on the Open Day

Alasdair Roberts - Director of the School of Public Policy, University of Massachusetts Amherst, delivered the opening address.

Placing our debate in context he pointed out that we needed to be more vigilant than ever. That FoI laws (or the bulk of them) had been delivered in a (western) society that was affluent, liberal and seemed settled post Cold War. **Now the crash had reduced (public) money available, and that and increasing security threats had changed attitudes and governmental responses to openness.**

He wasn't pessimistic however, pointing out that accountability and transparency were major players in the fight against secretive and authoritarian governments.

Other positive contributions came from **Nervena Razic of Serbia** (second in the global rti rating) and **Oscar Mauricio Guerra Ford of Mexico** (top of the global rti rating). Interesting to note that coverage in these countries extended to non-governmental bodies – even including trade unions!

Both **Toby Mendel (Centre for Law and Democracy)** and **Helen Darbishire (Access Info Europe)** warned about the problems. Namely – whether regulator had enforcement powers, if they were a stand-alone function or part of multi-function body (e.g. Ombudsman), and if they were a Commissioner or a Commission. **In particular the best legislation in the world was no use if the regulator didn't have sufficient resources to carry it out.**

Much talk of transparency and open government was put into perspective by Helen Darbishire, who pointed out the necessity of an enforceable right to request information.

Finally we heard from the journalist community (**Marc Ellison – BBC Scotland and Will Moy – Full Fact**) about the double-edged sword that FoI often was for them. In particular the use of the 20 day window to delay release and the simultaneous publication of data that diluted exclusives.

**Conclusions – A useful international perspective on where we stand.
A resolution for increased coverage that should be used in Scotland.
The need to protect enforcement powers of an independent regulator.**

Chris Bartter