

Foreword

I am pleased to present the twelfth Annual Report on the operation of the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act 2000 within the Northern Ireland Civil Service departments. This management report provides a summary of information requests (including those made under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004), and internal reviews, dealt with between 1 January 2016 and 31 December 2016.

It is presented in two parts to reflect the reduction and reorganisation of government departments, as a result of commitments given in the Stormont House and Fresh Start Agreements.

Accordingly, the first part of this report reflects the performance of 12 departments up to 9 May 2016, and the second part reflects the performance of nine departments from 9 May 2016.

Overall, the number of requests for information has increased by 6% on 2015. The total number of requests received annually across all departments since the Act came into full effect in 2005 continues at around the 3,000 mark.

It is also worthwhile noting that, during 2016, departments released hundreds of historical files with terminal dates 1989 and 1990 to the public through the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland.

I hope you find the information in this report of interest, and evidence of the commitment of the departments in meeting their obligations under the Freedom of Information Act.

David Sterling

Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service

NICS Freedom of Information Act 2000 Annual Report 2016

Overall Key Statistics: for NICS Departments

- A total of 3,164 requests were received across all departments; an increase of 6% on 2015

Key Statistics: for 12 Departments

- A total of 1,083 requests were received
- 84% of all processed requests were responded to within statutory time limits
- In 34 cases the applicant asked for an internal review of our decisions

Key Statistics: for 9 New Departments

- A total of 2,081 requests were received
- 69% of all processed requests were responded to within statutory time limits
- In 95 cases the applicant asked for an internal review of our decisions

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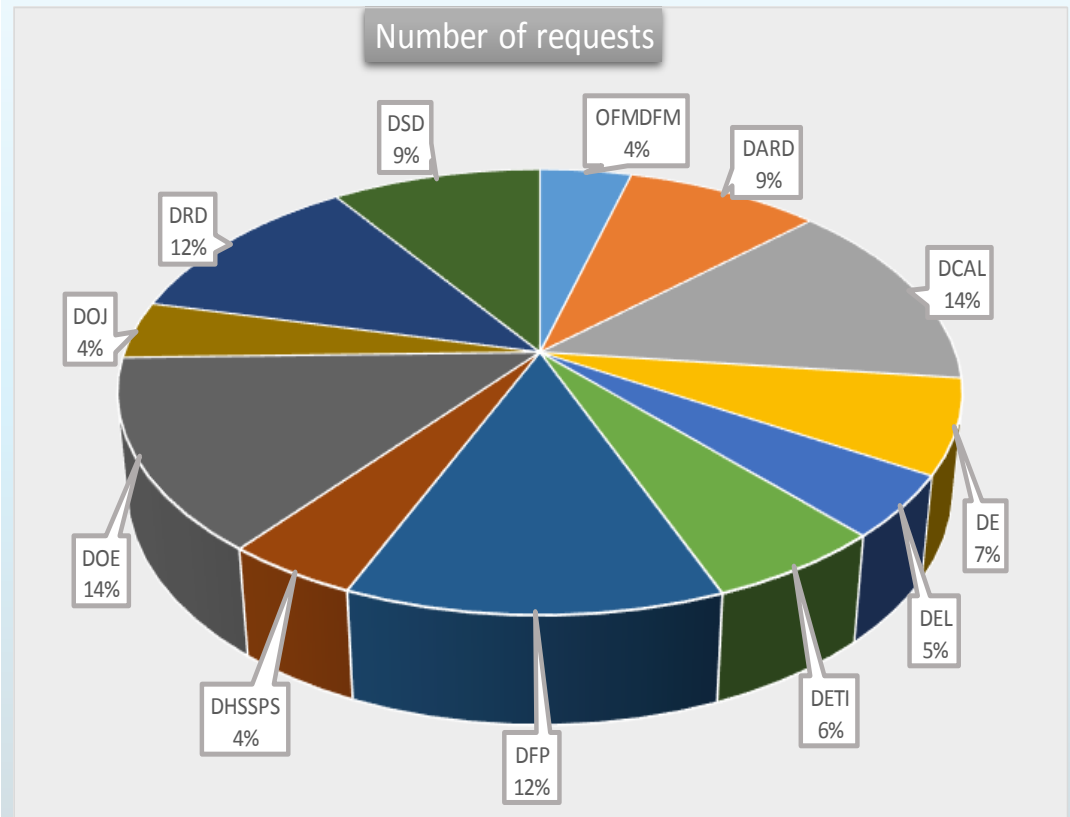
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PART 1: Requests received by 12 departments

This part of the report covers the information requests received by the 12 NICS Departments up to May 2016.

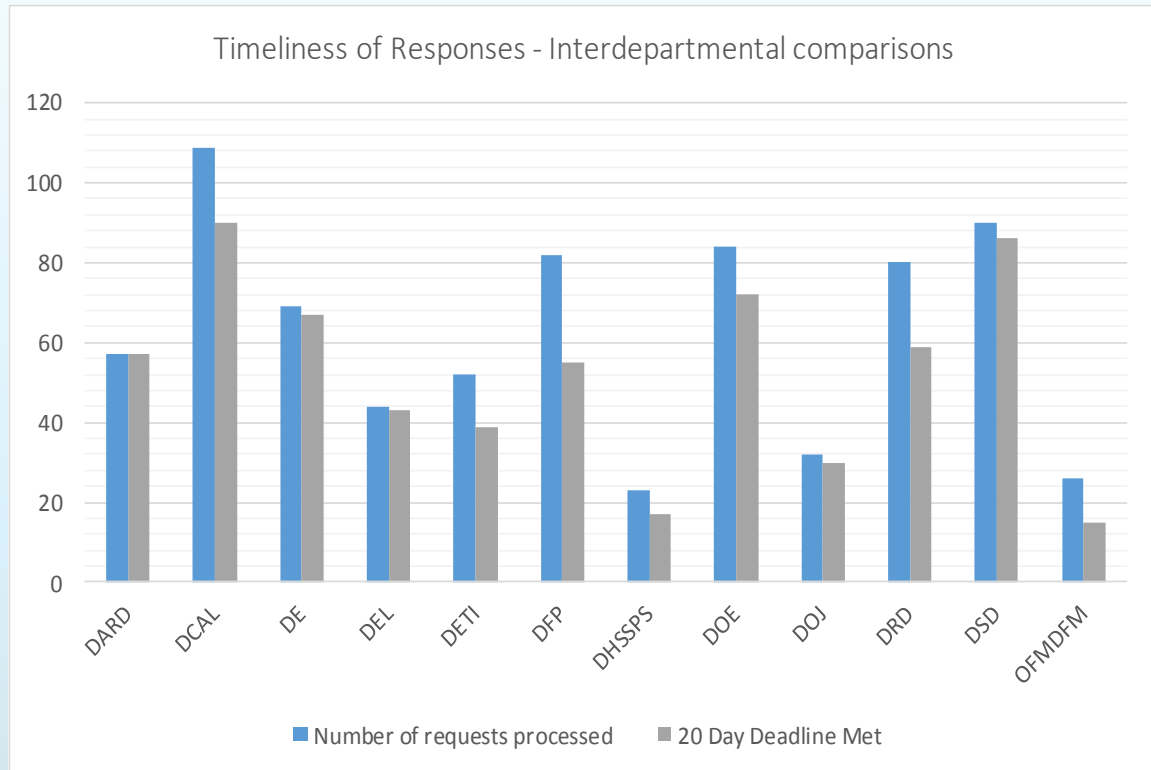
Department	Number of requests
Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD)	96
Department of Culture Arts and Leisure (DCAL)	150
Department of Education (DE)	74
Department of Employment and Learning (DEL)	49
Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment (DETI)	63
Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP)	133
Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS)	47
Department of the Environment (DOE)	151
Department of Justice (DOJ)	45
Department for Regional Development (DRD)	127
Department for Social Development (DSD)	103
Office of the First and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM)	45
TOTAL	1083



1,083 information requests were received by the 12 NICS Departments up to 9 May 2016.

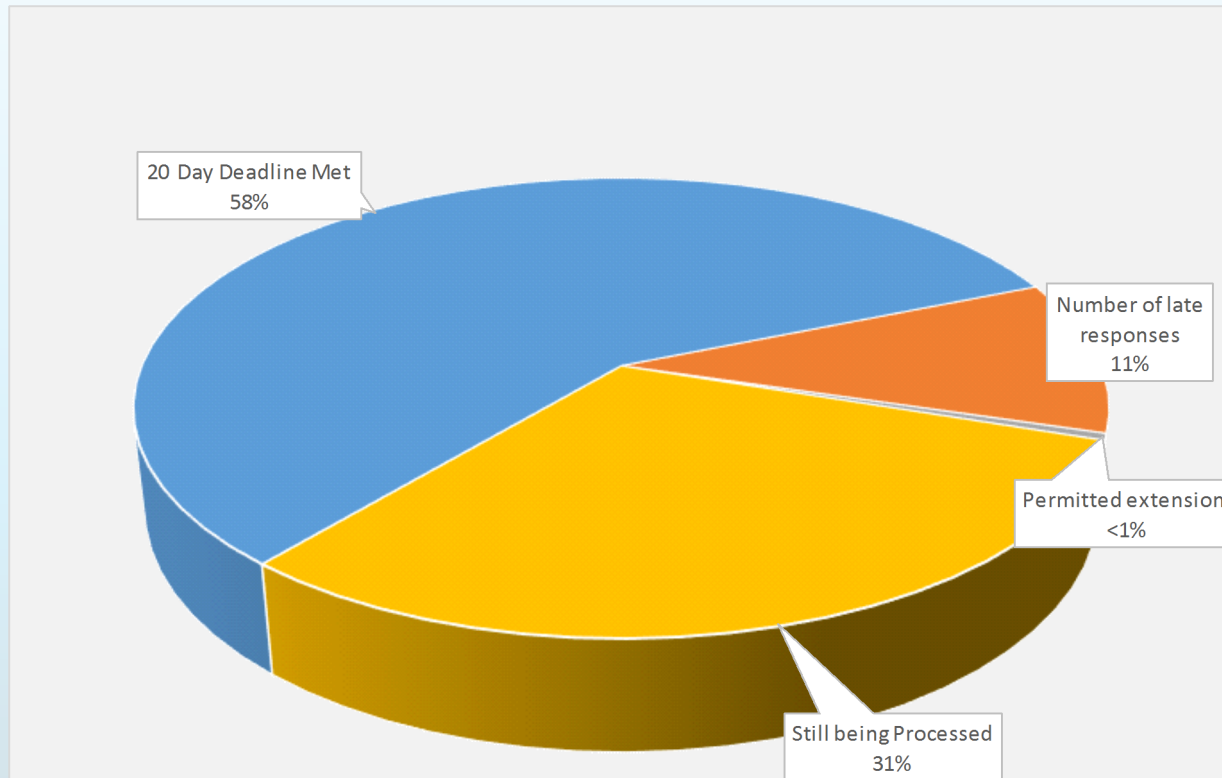
Request handling - Timeliness of responses

Department	Number of requests processed	20 Day or Permitted Extension Deadline Met	Percentage met
DARD	57	57	100
DCAL	109	90	83
DE	69	67	97
DEL	44	43	98
DETI	52	37	71
DFP	82	55	67
DHSSPS	23	17	74
DOE	84	72	86
DOJ	32	30	94
DRD	80	59	74
DSD	90	86	96
OFMDFM	26	15	58
TOTAL	748	628	84



The Freedom of Information Act requires departments to respond to requests for information in a timely manner (within 20 working days, or a maximum of 40 working days with a permitted extension).

Outcome of requests



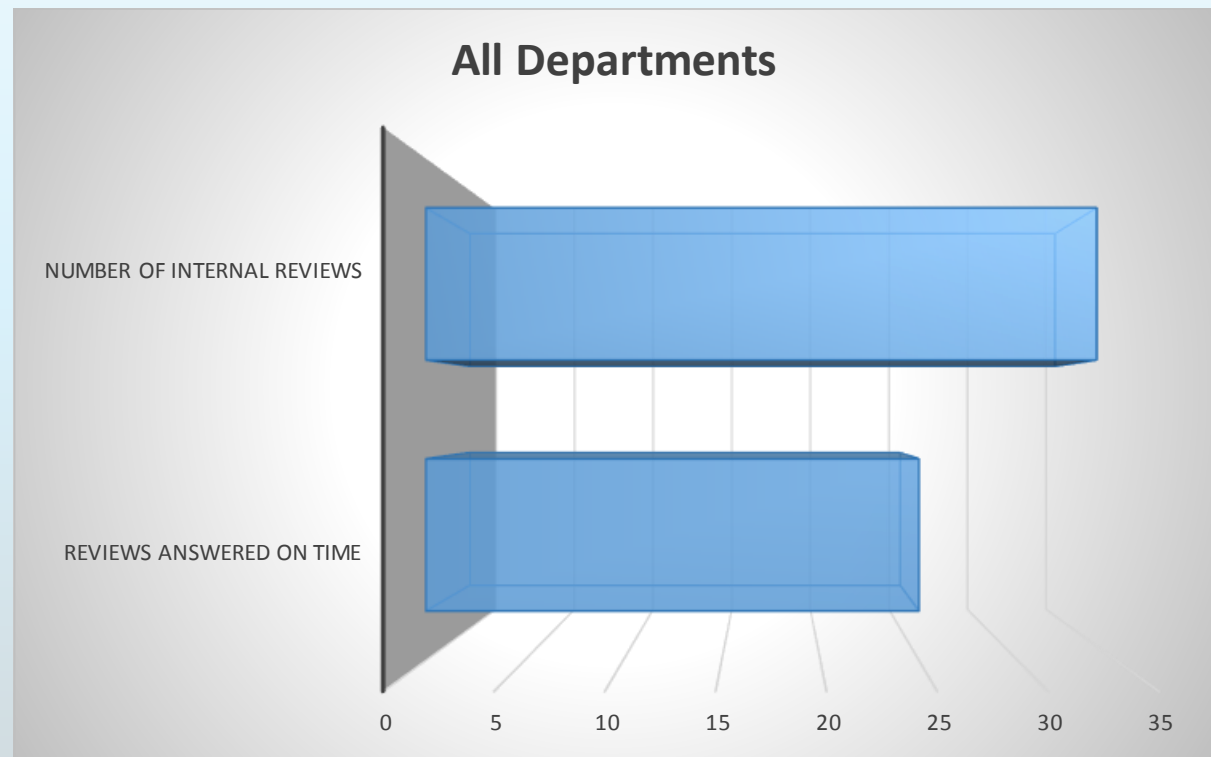
By the time of the restructuring of the departments, 69% of requests for information had been responded to.

The remaining 31% of requests for information still being processed were assigned to the new functionally responsible departments.

Internal reviews

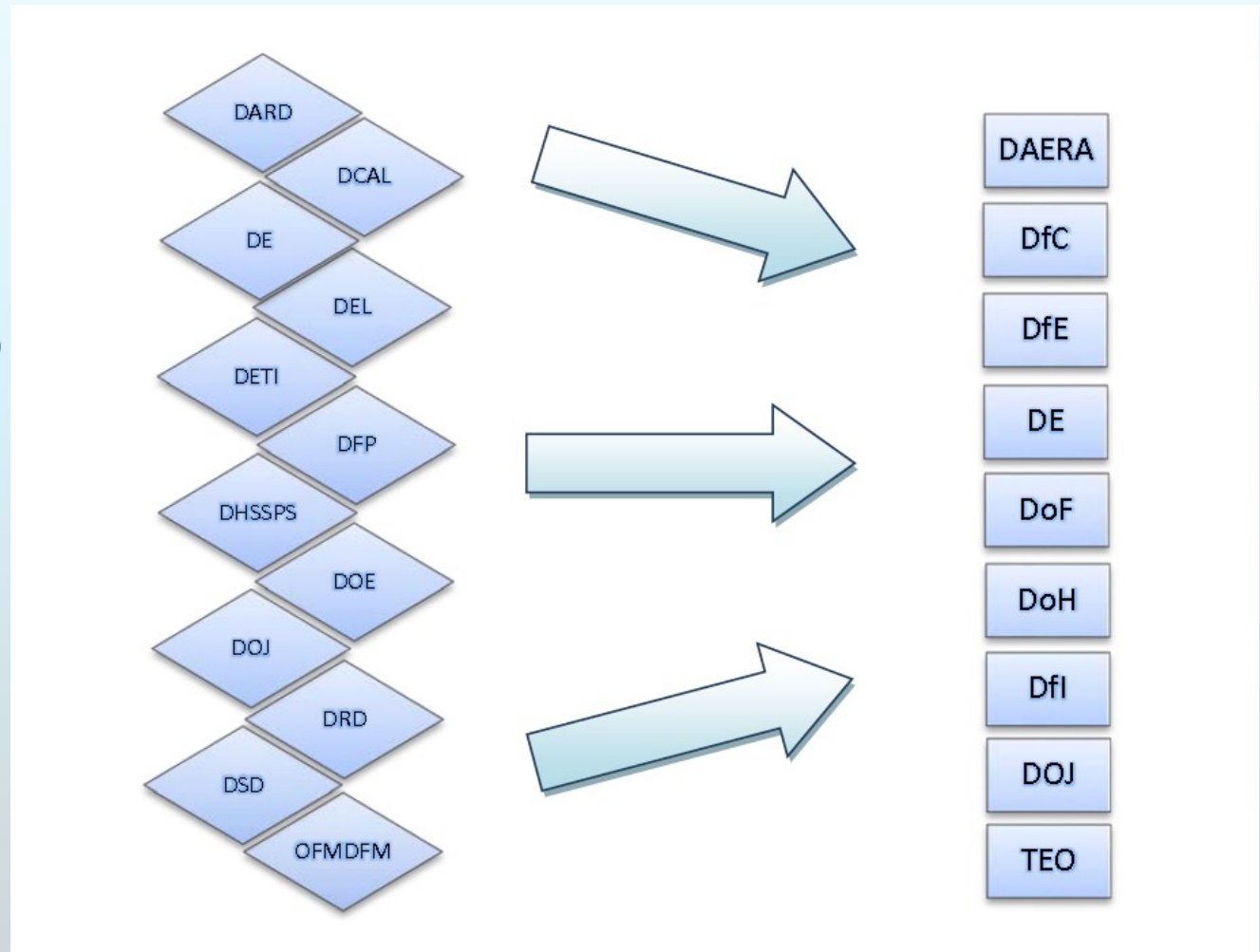
In the event that a requestor is dissatisfied with a department's response to a request for information, they can request that department to carry out an internal review. This internal review involves a fresh and thorough examination of the initial decision, where possible by a person other than the original decision maker. A total of 34 internal reviews were requested, of which 25 were responded to within the 20 working days stipulated by the Information Commissioner.

Department	Number of Internal Reviews	Reviews Answered on time
DARD	4	2
DCAL	1	1
DE	1	1
DEL	3	2
DETI	5	5
DFP	5	4
DHSSPS	1	1
DOE	2	0
DOJ	2	1
DRD	3	1
DSD	3	3
OFMDFM	4	4
TOTAL	34	25



From 12 to 9: The impact of Fresh Start

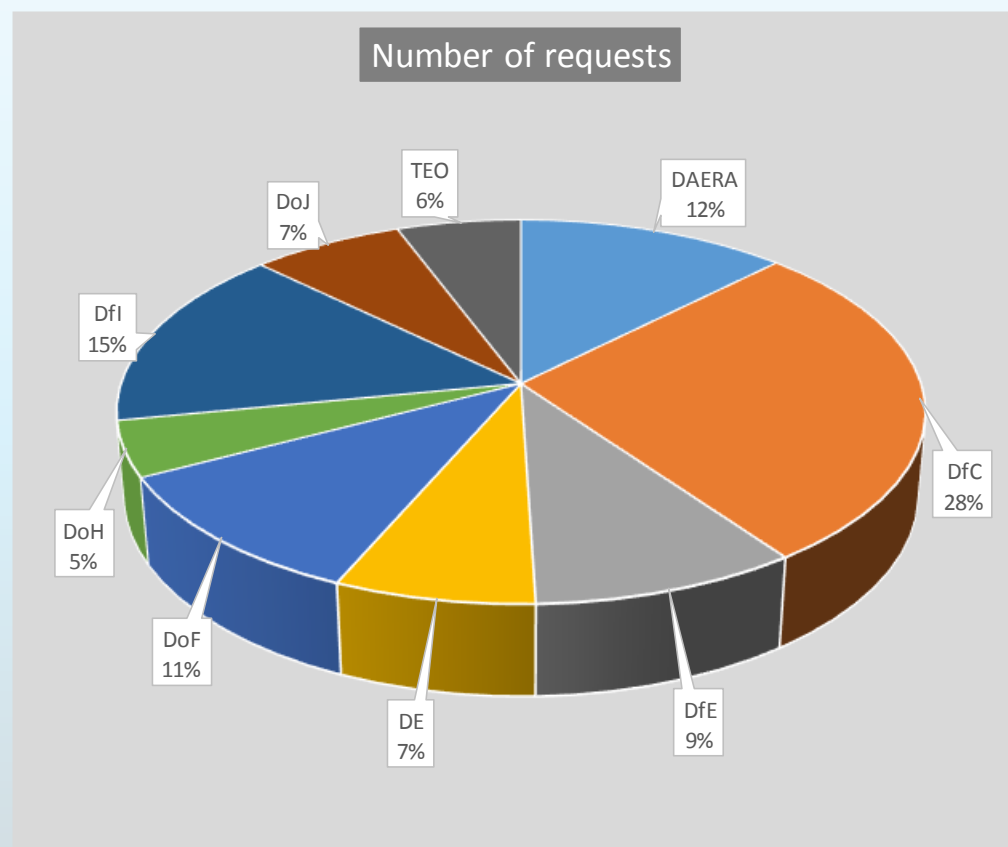
On 9 May 2016 the Northern Ireland Civil Service was restructured in keeping with the provisions of the Stormont House and Fresh Start Agreements. As a result the number of government departments was reduced from 12 to 9. The functions delivered by the 12 departments were distributed across the 9 new departments. For more information on the transfer of functions click [here](#).



PART 2: Requests received by 9 departments

This part of the report covers the information requests received by the 9 NICS departments from May 2016.

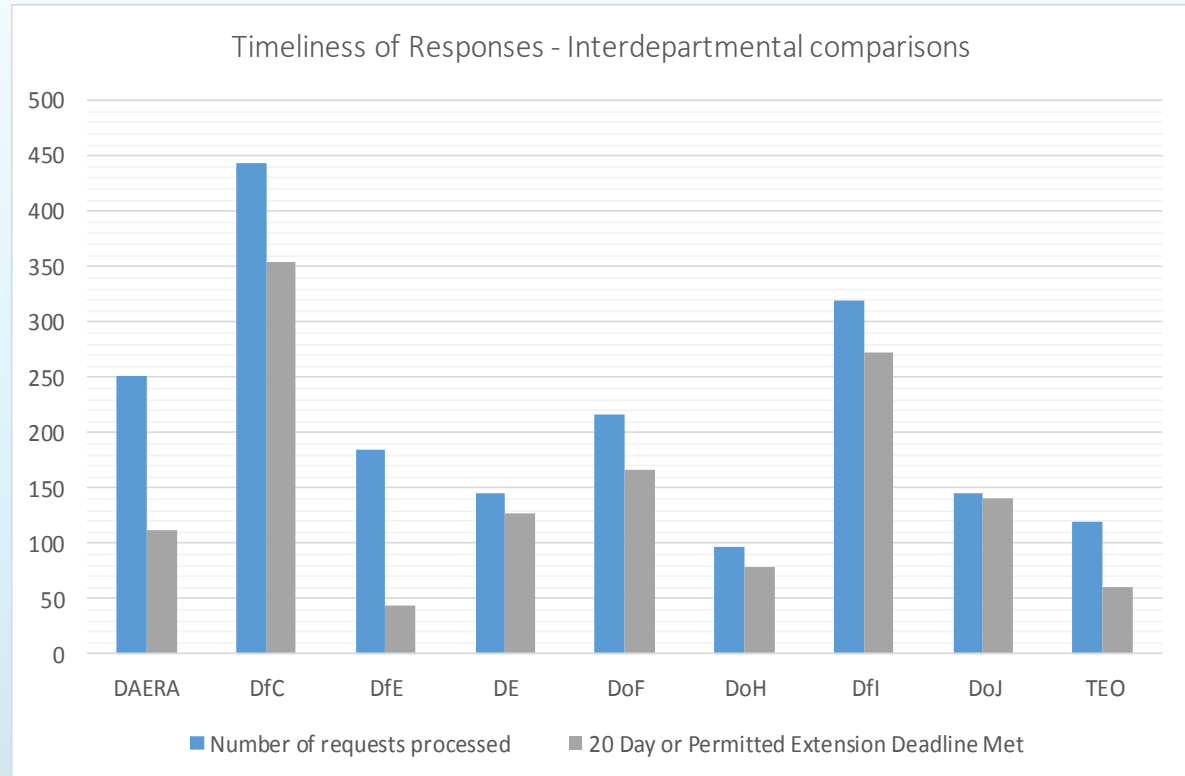
Department	Number of requests
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA)	259
Department for Communities (DfC)	576
Department for the Economy (DfE)	195
Department of Education (DE)	146
Department of Finance (DoF)	224
Department of Health (DoH)	97
Department for Infrastructure (DfI)	319
Department of Justice (DoJ)	146
The Executive Office (TEO)	119
TOTAL	2081



2,081 information requests were received by the 9 NICS departments from 9 May 2016 to 31 December 2016.

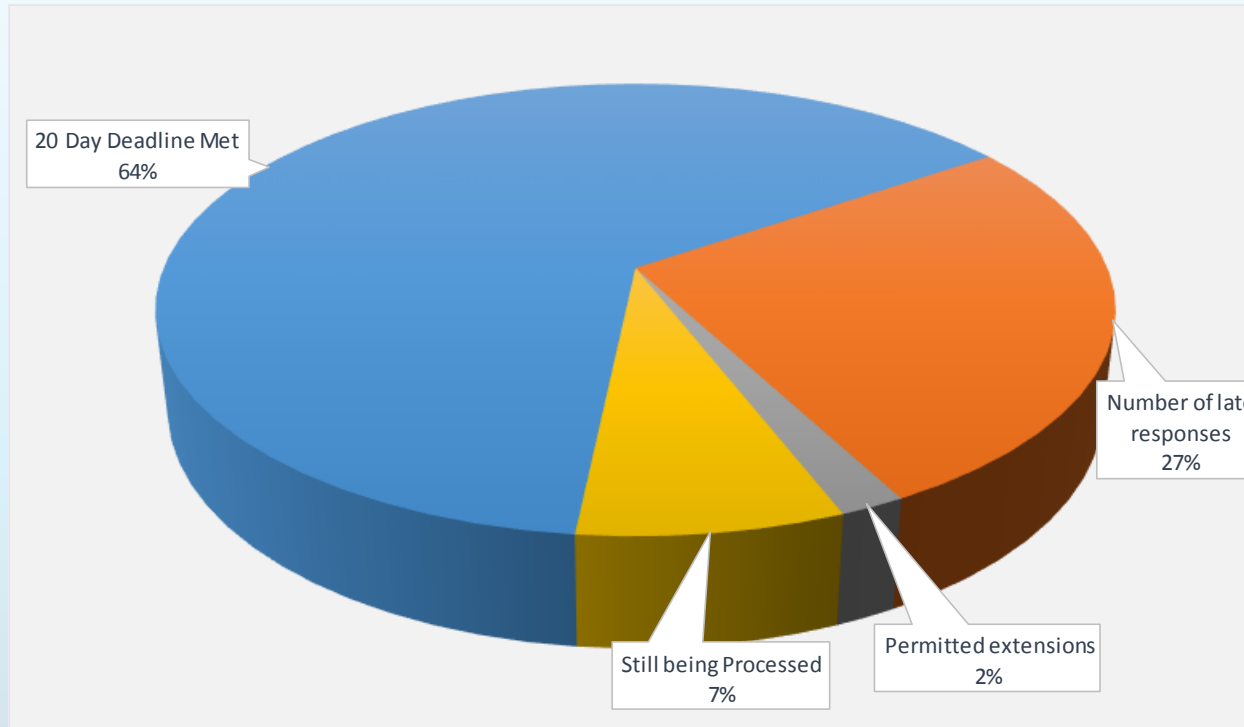
Request handling - Timeliness of responses

Department	Number of requests processed	20 Day or Permitted Extension Deadline Met	Percentage met
DAERA	252	112	44
DfC	444	354	80
DfE	184	39	21
DE	146	127	87
DoF	216	167	77
DoH	97	78	80
DfI	319	272	85
DoJ	146	141	97
TEO	119	60	50
TOTAL	1923	1350	70



The Freedom of Information Act requires departments to respond to requests for information in a timely manner (within 20 working days, or a maximum of 40 working days with a permitted extension).

Outcome of requests



By the end of the reporting period, the nine departments had responded to 93% of requests for information.

Internal reviews

In the event that a requestor is dissatisfied with a Department's response to a request for information they can request that Department to carry out an internal review. This internal review involves a fresh and thorough examination of the initial decision were possible by a person other than the original decision maker. A total of 95 internal reviews were requested, of which 61 were responded to within the 20 working days stipulated by the Information Commissioner.

Department	Number of Internal Reviews	Reviews Answered on time
DAERA	22	1
DfC	18	15
DfE	6	2
DE	8	6
DoF	11	8
DoH	7	6
DfI	8	8
DoJ	6	6
TEO	9	9
TOTAL	95	61

