



student action on world poverty and the environment

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION and GO GREEN

You have new rights to access information held by public authorities,
including universities.

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOI), and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR), both of which came into effect on 1 January 2005, mean that:

- You can request to see **any recorded information** held by the authority. This includes minutes of meetings, hand written notes, electronic files... It does not only apply to official documents. You can request information in a preferred format (eg by email).
- The authority is legally obliged **to respond to your request as soon as possible**, and at the very latest within 20 working days (four weeks).
- Authorities have **a legal duty to provide advice and assistance**. This means that they must help you to draft your request where you need such help.
- The authority **must give detailed reasons for any refusal** to release information. They can only refuse if a specific exception applies to the case.
- If your request is refused, **you can appeal against the decision.**

[Information from Friends of the Earth website: www.RightToKnowOnline.org]

How can this help our **Go Green** campaign?

The FOI and EIR could be really valuable tools in the Go Green campaign. How you use them will depend on what stage you're at in the campaign, and how much information your university makes public or is already happy to pass onto you. You don't have to know what information they hold or which documents to ask for, as stated above, they should provide advice and assistance to you in forming your request.

You could ask your university for:

- A copy of their **environmental policy**, if they have one.
- Details of any **review of environmental impacts** that the university has carried out, including what the findings were, whether there was any follow up or recommendations.
- **Information about discussions** regarding environmental management. For example, you could ask if the university has ever considered employing an Environment Manager and what the reasons were for the decision made.
- Who in the university has **responsibilities for environmental management** and the details of what those responsibilities are.
- Any **statements or speeches** the Vice-Chancellor/Principal has made about the environment.

It is probably worth being aware that your university may not know about their obligations under the FOI/EIR. Therefore, when you write to request information, you should probably start by saying that you are requesting information under the FOI/EIR and you therefore hope to hear from them within 20 days. Hopefully this should make them take notice of your request.

If your university does not respond, or refuses to provide information, let us know and we'll help you to respond appropriately.

Where can I get **more information**?

UK Government Freedom of Information Website: <http://www.foi.gov.uk/>

Friends of the Earth Freedom of Information Website: www.RightToKnowOnline.org