



# Annual Track 2014

## Individuals (Topline findings)

# ico.

Information Commissioner's Office

**September 2014**

## CONTENTS

---

|                                    |    |
|------------------------------------|----|
| Overview.....                      | 3  |
| Introduction .....                 | 3  |
| Methodology statement .....        | 3  |
| Note on interpreting results ..... | 3  |
| Dashboard of key indicators .....  | 4  |
| Analysis .....                     | 5  |
| Social issues .....                | 5  |
| Awareness questions .....          | 6  |
| Data protection .....              | 10 |
| Freedom of information .....       | 24 |

## OVERVIEW

---

### Introduction

This report presents the topline findings from the ICO's Annual Track 2014, which measures awareness of the Data Protection Act (DPA) and Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) amongst the general public. This work represents a continuation of tracking research which the ICO have undertaken on this subject since 1997 in relation to the DPA and since 2003 in relation to the FOIA.

### Methodology statement

ComRes interviewed 2,997 UK adults online between 15<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> August 2014. Data were weighted to be representative of all adults in the UK by age, gender, region, and social grade. In order to address the two key topics – data protection and freedom of information – in detail, two different surveys were run side-by-side using separate question sets.

#### Data protection questions

1,575 respondents answered questions relating to the Data Protection Act. Samples were “boosted” in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. This means interviewing a disproportionately large number of people in those countries, to improve the statistical robustness of the findings at the individual country level. Weighting ensures that this has no impact on the representativeness of the overall UK sample.

#### Freedom of information questions

1,422 respondents answered questions relating to the Freedom of Information Act. Samples were “boosted” in Wales and Northern Ireland. No respondents from Scotland were included, as the country operates under a separate Freedom of Information regime. Data were weighted to be representative of all adults in the UK excluding Scotland by age, gender, region, and social grade.

### Note on interpreting results

This year's Annual Track survey marks a transition from the telephone methodology used in previous years to an online methodology. Since the ICO began tracking public awareness of the Data Protection Act in 1997 and of the Freedom of Information Act in 2003, optimal research approaches have changed considerably, in line with **high uptake of internet** across all demographics, and the **decline in landline telephone usage**.

Transitioning to an online approach brings considerable benefits in terms of question design flexibility, speed, and ability to achieve sample quotas. It is important to note, however, that some tracking questions may not be precisely equivalent over the two formats, given the “interviewer effect” in a

telephone survey and the differing limitations of spoken versus visually presented questions. These effects may be significant.

### **Base sizes**

Throughout the report, both the *Actual base* and the *Effective base* are reported beneath each chart or table. The actual base shows the actual number of people who responded to a question. The effective base shows the effective sample size used to calculate margin of error and the statistical significance of findings. This is smaller than the actual base, because Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland were deliberately oversampled and then weighted down to achieve a proportional sample.

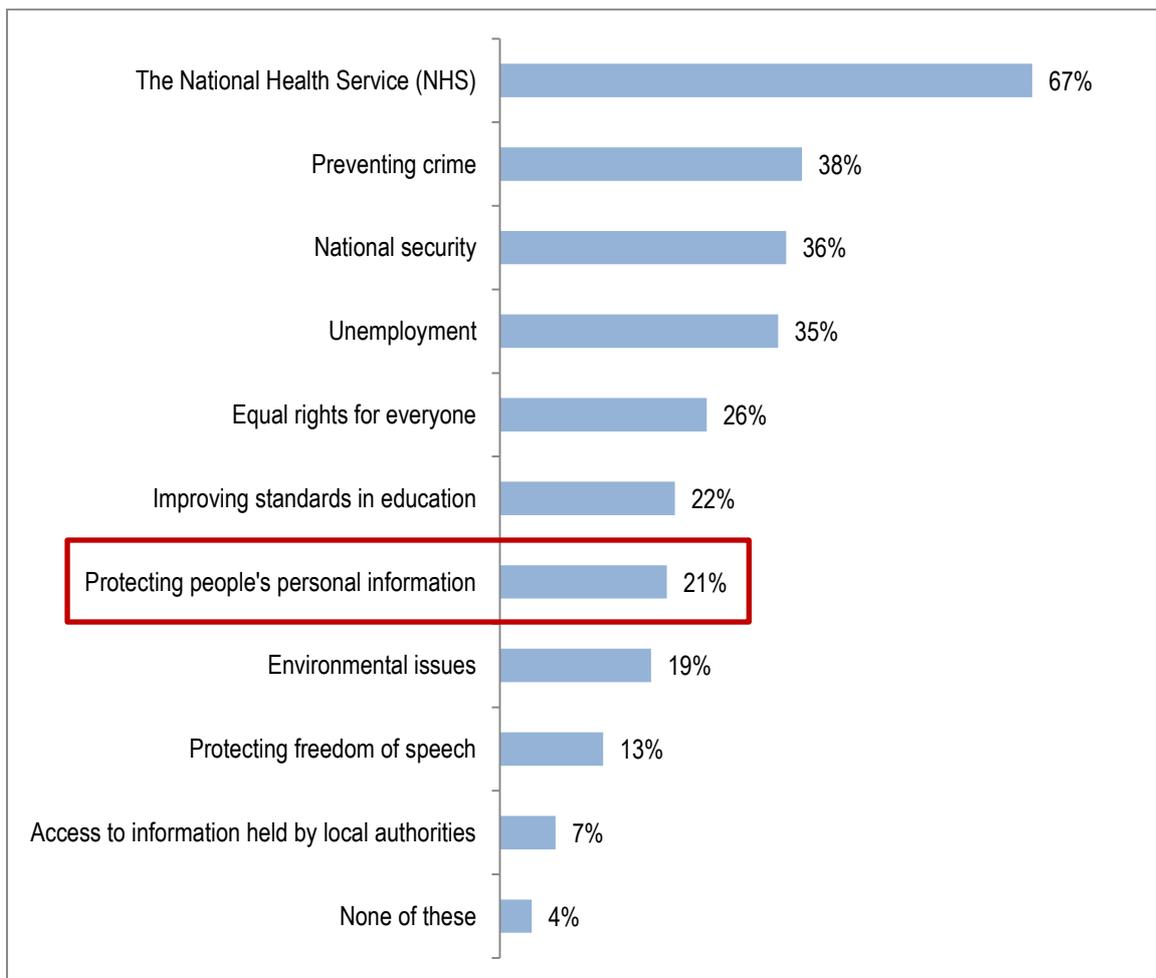
## ANALYSIS

### Social issues

All respondents were asked to rank the top three social issues that they were concerned about. The NHS (67% ranking in the top three) is the clear leader, with preventing crime (38%), national security (36%), and unemployment (35%) all top three concerns for over a third of adults. Around a fifth (21%) of people rank protecting people's personal information as a top three concern.

#### Social issues

**Q. Which, if any, of the following social issues would you say is the most / second most / third most important issue you are concerned about? [% choosing in top 3]**



Effective Base: All respondents (n=2424)

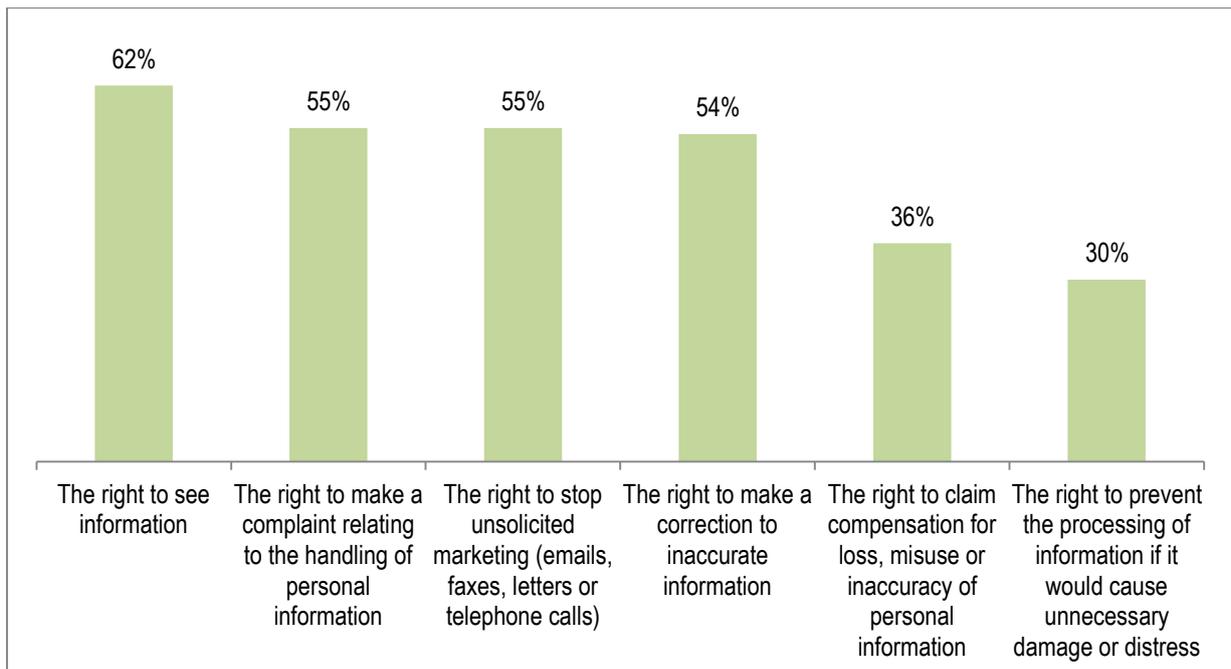
## Awareness questions

As in 2013, the public is most likely to say that they have the right to see information, of the rights tested. However, the results of this question are lower than those of previous years; in 2013, nine in ten (87%) said that they had the right to see information, compared to just three in five (62%) in 2014. This decrease is a more accurate depiction of public awareness than in previous years; not only does a self-completion online survey remove interviewer effect prevalent in telephone surveys, but in reviewing the questionnaire to make it applicable for online, the question wording has been amended.

As part of the change in methodology, ComRes and the ICO worked together to update and refine the questionnaires, and this question is a key question which has changed. In previous years, the question for prompted awareness of rights was phrased as 'which of the following rights do you think you have with regards to your personal details held by organisations?'. It is likely that the addition of 'rights **by law**' and examples of both the organisation that hold personal information, and the types of personal information they hold have had an effect on the proportion of people who truly perceive themselves to have the right to see information.

### Awareness of rights: personal data

**Q. Organisations like doctors, banks and credit card companies hold personal information. This personal information can include your name, your address, your bank account details or your credit rating information. What rights under law do you think you have with regards to personal details held about you by organisations in the UK? Please select any that apply.**



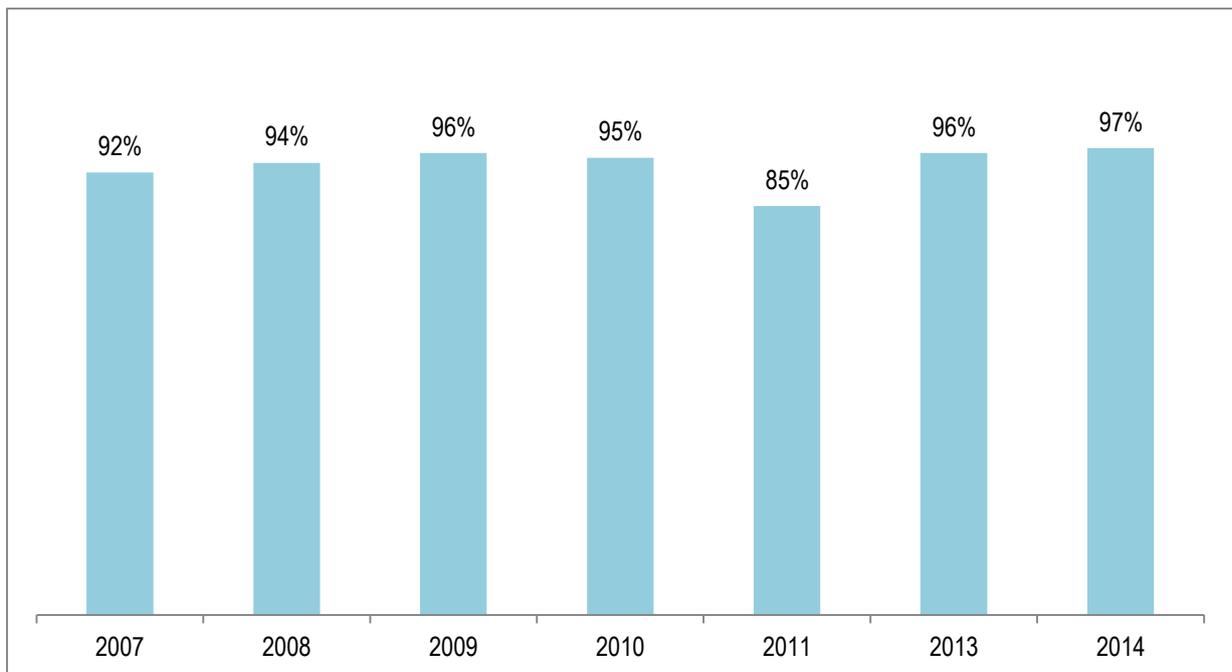
Effective Base: All Data Protection respondents (n=1222)

Interviewer effect is particularly perceptible in prompted questions; people are more likely to respond with a positive answer when they are being asked a question over the telephone. The 2014 data for 'the right to see personal information' is comparable to the 2013 unprompted responses, which indicates more accurate levels of awareness of the public's rights to personal data. Three in five (60%) of the public mention the right to see information as an unprompted response in 2013, compared to a similar proportion (62%) in 2014 who select the option in the online survey.

In line with research conducted in previous years, almost all (97%) of the public say that they are aware of the Data Protection Act when prompted.

### Awareness of rights: Data Protection Act

#### Q. Have you ever heard of the Data Protection Act?

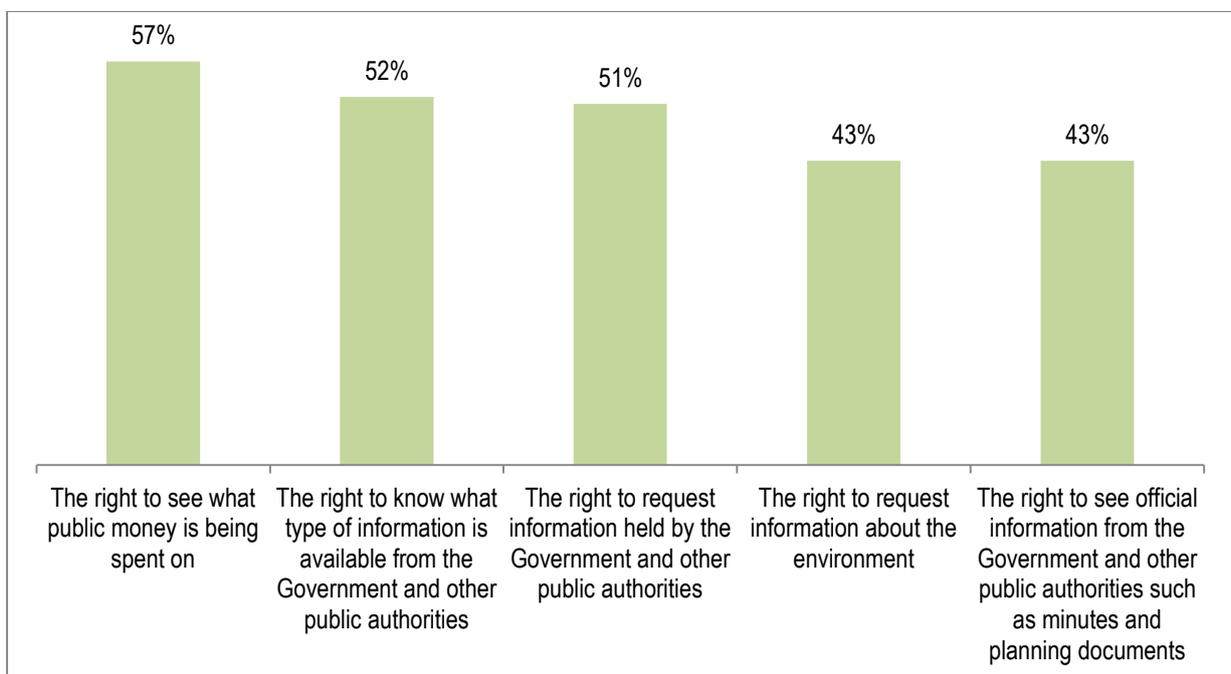


Effective Base: All Data Protection respondents (n=1222)

As in the prompted question regarding personal information, it is likely that interviewer bias has influenced the results of the previous survey. Half (51%) of people say that they have the right to request information held by the Government and other public authorities compared to 86% who said the same in 2013.

### Awareness of rights: accessing information

**Q. What rights under law do you think you have to access information held by the Government and other public authorities in the UK? Please select any that apply.**



Effective Base: All Freedom of Information respondents (n=1207)

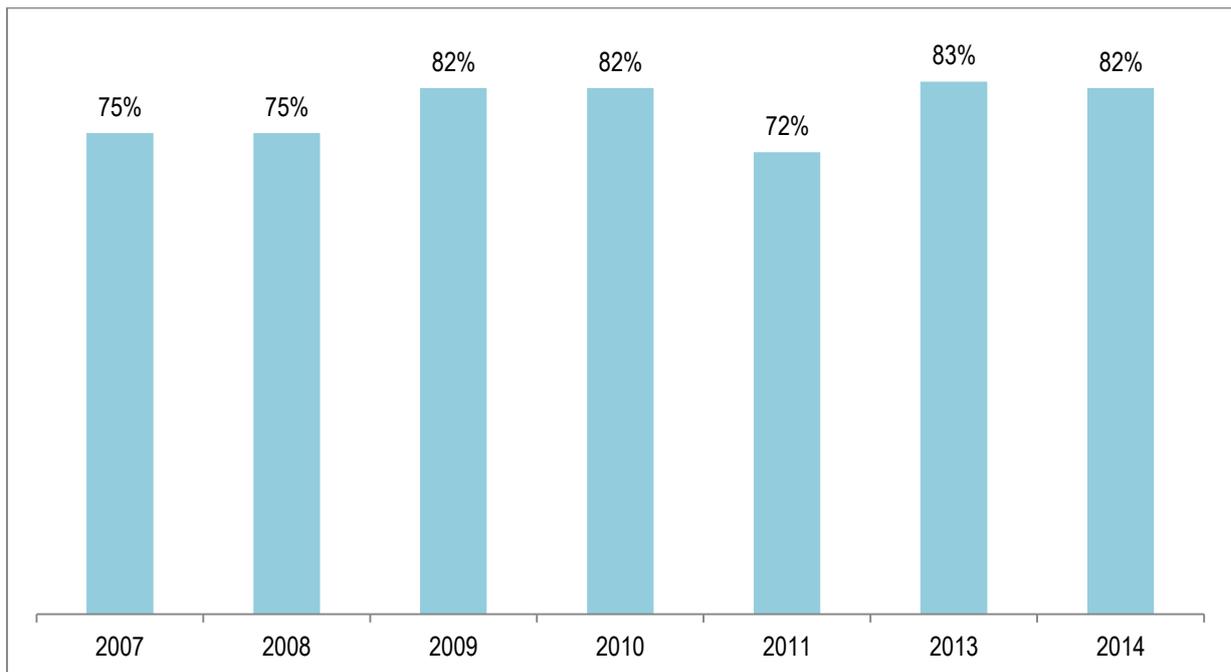
Men are more likely than women to say that they have the right to request information held by the Government and other public authorities; three in five men (58%) say that they have this right, compared to 45% of women.

Similarly, those from higher social grades are more likely to say that they have this right than those from lower social grades; two thirds (66%) of adults from social grades AB say this, decreasing to just half (42%) of those from social grade DE.

In line with research conducted in previous years, four in five (82%) of the public say that they are aware of the Freedom of Information Act when prompted.

### Awareness of rights: Freedom of Information Act

#### Q. Have you ever heard of the Freedom of Information Act?



Effective Base: All Freedom of Information respondents in 2014 (n=1207)

In line with the awareness of rights to request information, men are more likely (88%) than women (75%) to say that they have heard of the Freedom of Information Act. Older people are also more likely to say that they have heard of the Freedom of Information Act; nine in ten (92%) of those aged 65+ say that they have heard of it, decreasing to around half (56%) of those aged 18-24.

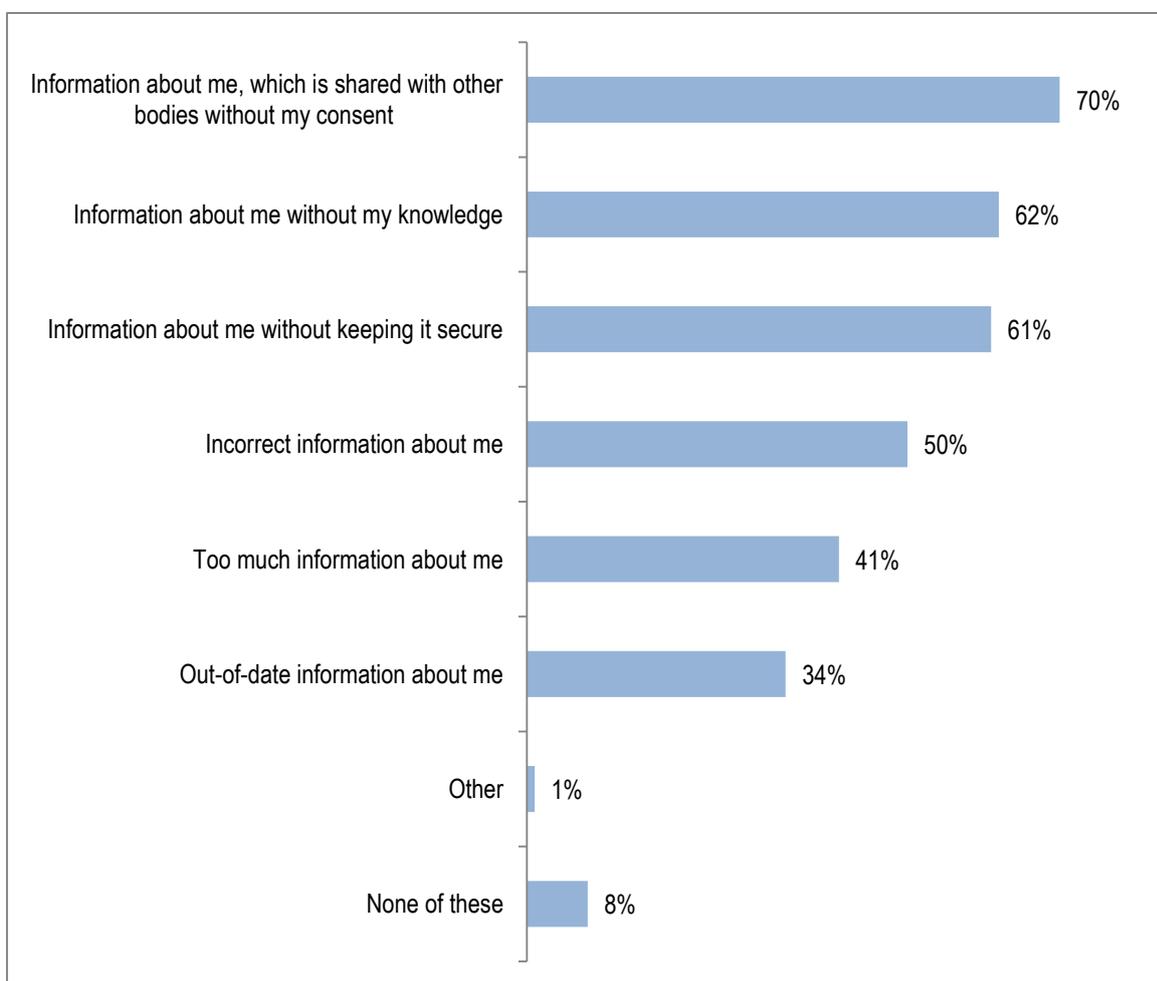
Those from lower social grades are less likely than people from higher social grades to say that they have heard of the Freedom of Information Act. Nine in ten (90%) of people from social grades AB say that they have heard of this, compared to just three quarters (76%) of people from social grades DE.

## Data protection

Personal information shared without consent (70%), personal information held without the individual's knowledge (62%), and insecurely held information (61%) are the public's main concerns in relation to personal information storage.

### Concerns about personal information storage

**Q. Which, if any, of the following are you concerned about? Organisations holding...**



Effective Base: All Data Protection respondents (n=1222)

When presented with a series of attitudinal statements relating to personal information storage and rights, most respondents are concerned about the overall trends. Nearly two thirds (63%) of the public say that “you have lost control over the way your information is collected and processed”, while nearly half (48%) disagree that existing laws and organisational practices provide sufficient protection.

### Statements relating to personal information

**Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

| Statement   | % agree | % disagree | NET   |
|---|---------|------------|-------|
| You have lost control over the way your information is collected and processed                        | 63%     | 13%        | +50pp |
| Online companies collect and keep your personal details in a secure way                               | 22%     | 41%        | -19pp |
| Organisations handle the information they collect about you in a fair and proper way                  | 19%     | 40%        | -21pp |
| Existing laws and organisational practices provide sufficient protection of your personal information | 19%     | 48%        | -29pp |

Effective Base: All Data Protection respondents (n=1222)

Most people are aware of the right to see information (62%), to make a complaint relating to the handling of it (55%), to stop unsolicited marketing (55%), and to correct inaccurate information (54%). Only around a third are aware of the right to claim compensation (36%) and the right to prevent the processing of information (30%).

### Awareness of specific personal information rights

**Q. What rights under law do you think you have with regards to personal details held about you by organisations in the UK?**

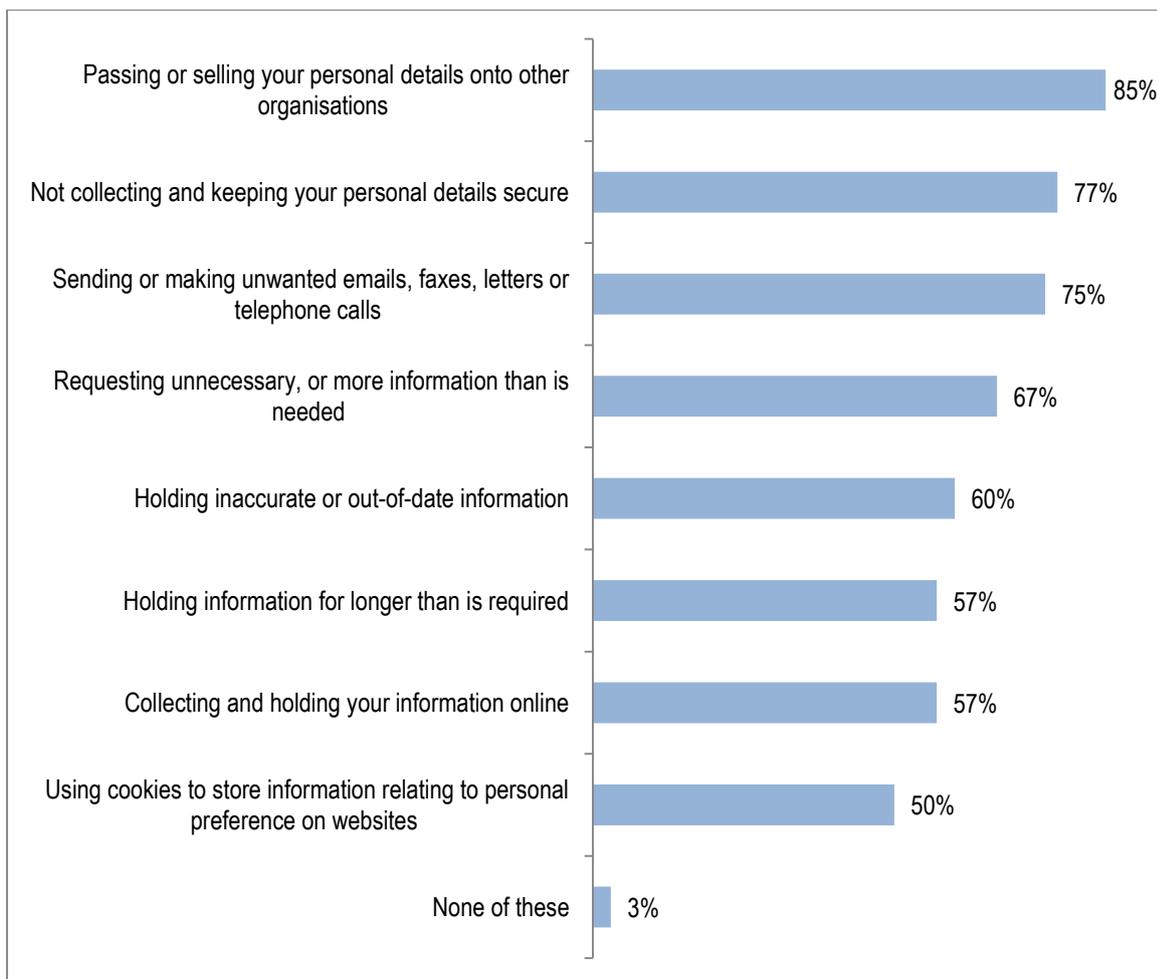


Effective Base: All Data Protection respondents (n=1222)

Most people show high levels of concern about a range of different issues relating to their personal information being stored and shared. Passing or selling personal details onto other organisations (75% very concerned), not collecting and keeping personal details secure (60% very concerned), and sending or making unwanted emails, faxes, letters or telephone calls (59% very concerned) are the principal worries. Less than a third of people (32%) say they are very concerned about cookies, but a further 18% say they are fairly concerned. The figures below show the combined “very” and “fairly” concerned totals.

### Concerns about organisations holding personal information

**Q. Below is a list of concerns people may have about organisations holding their personal details. Which, if any, of the following issues would you say you are VERY / FAIRLY concerned about [% very + % fairly concerned]**



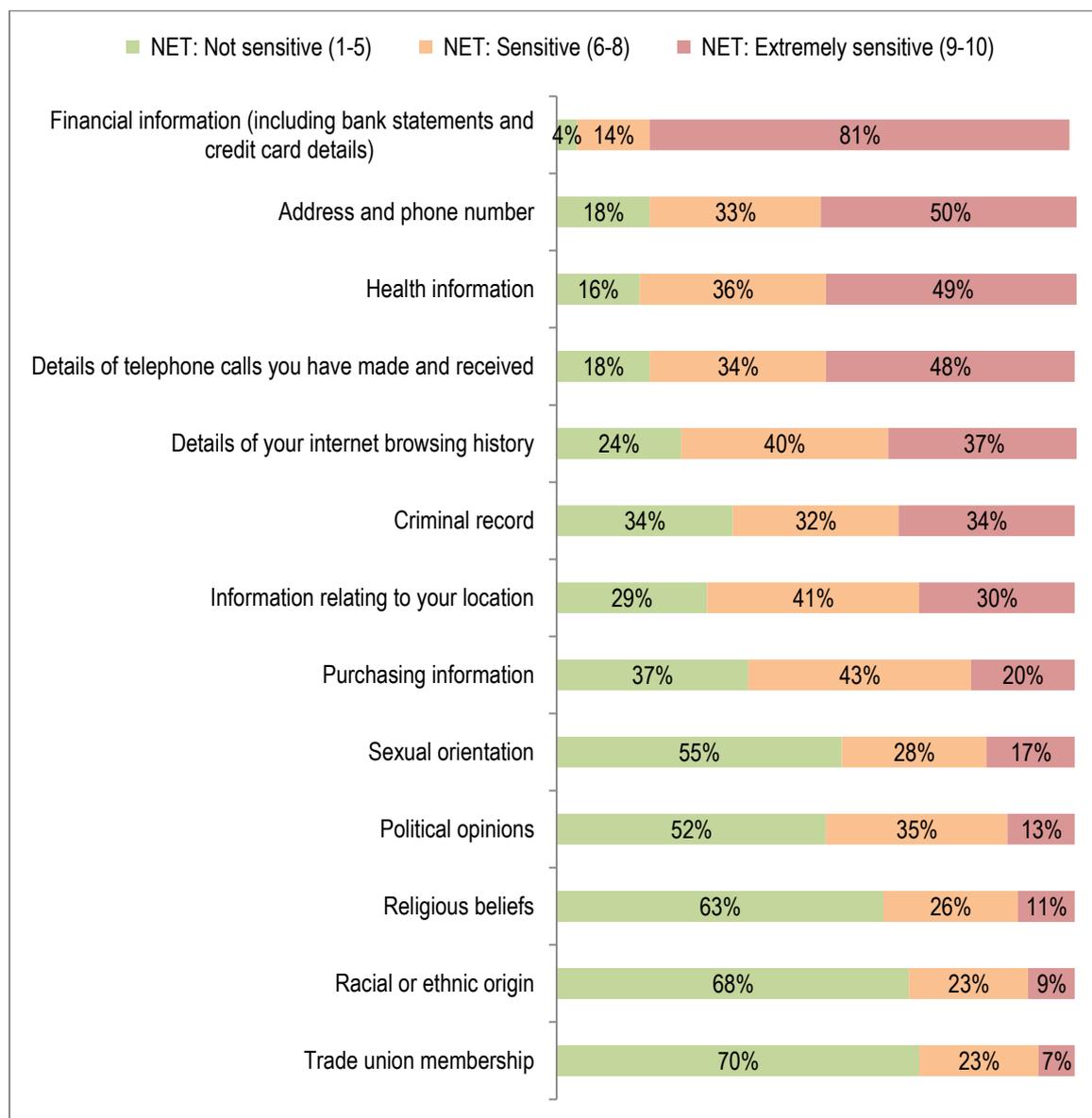
Effective Base: All Data Protection respondents (n=1222)

Financial information is considered extremely sensitive across the population, with an average score of 9.22 on a 1 to 10 scale (where 1 is not at all sensitive, and 10 is extremely sensitive). Address and phone number (average 7.83), health information (7.91), details of telephone calls made and received (7.82), and details of internet browsing history (7.28) are considered to be sensitive.

The least sensitive items are trade union membership (4.26), racial or ethnic origin (4.37), and religious beliefs (4.67).

### Sensitivity of different forms of personal information

**Q. How sensitive, if at all, do you consider the following forms of personal information to be?**

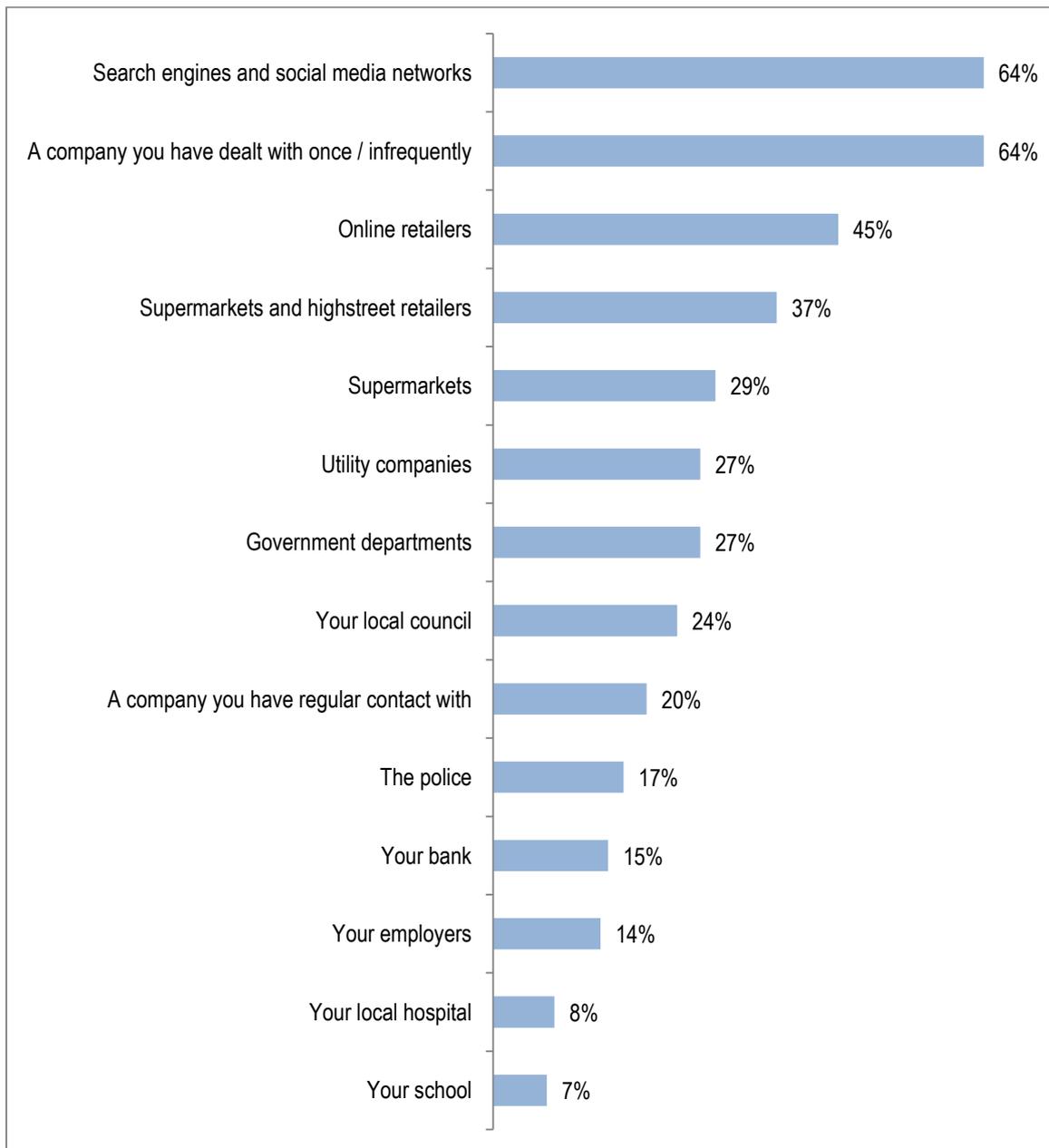


Effective Base: All Data Protection respondents (n=1222)

Search engines and social media networks (64%) and companies dealt with infrequently (64%) stand out as the organisations people are most concerned about holding their personal information.

**Concern about different types of organisation holding personal information**

***Q. Which, if any, of the following organisations would you be most concerned about holding your personal information?***

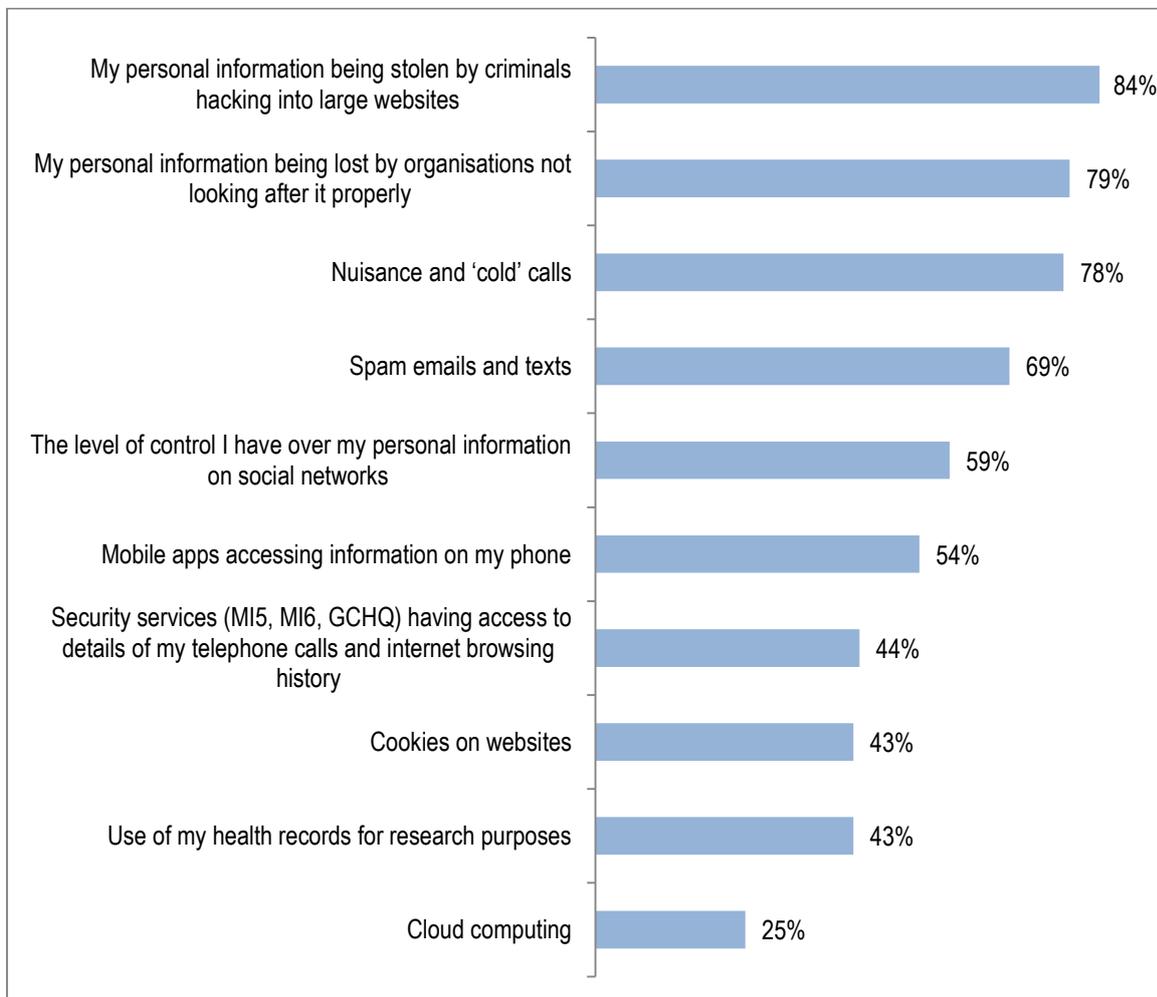


Effective Base: All Data Protection respondents (n=1222)

Three quarters of people (75%) say they are very concerned about their personal information being stolen by criminals hacking into large websites. Two thirds (67%) are very concerned about their personal information being lost by organisations not looking after it properly, and a similar proportion (64%) are very concerned about nuisance and ‘cold’ calls. Over half (53%) say they are very concerned about spam emails and leaks. The chart below shows the combined totals for “very” and “fairly” concerned.

### Fears about personal information

**Q. Which, if any, of the following issues would you say you are very / fairly concerned about? [% very + % fairly]**



Effective Base: All Data Protection respondents (n=1222)

There is relatively low awareness of the recent ruling by the Court of Justice of the European Union regarding search providers being required on privacy grounds to remove links from their results that contain someone's personal information. Only 7% say they have heard a great deal about the ruling, and most say they have heard a little (36%) or nothing at all (38%).

### EU Court of Justice ruling

***Q. The Court of Justice of the European Union recently ruled that search providers (e.g. Google) can be required on privacy grounds to remove links from their results that contain someone's personal information. How much, if anything, would you say you have heard about this judgment?***

|   | %          |
|---|------------|
| <b>NET: A fair amount/ a great deal</b> | <b>26%</b> |
| A great deal                            | 7%         |
| A fair amount                           | 19%        |
| A little                                | 36%        |
| Nothing at all                          | 38%        |
| <b>NET: Nothing at all/ a little</b>    | <b>74%</b> |

Effective Base: All Data Protection respondents (n=1222)

This low awareness translates into only a small percentage of people saying they would be very likely (10%) or fairly likely (15%) to use this right themselves.

***Q. The Court of Justice of the European Union recently ruled that search providers (e.g. Google) can be required on privacy grounds to remove links from their results that contain someone's personal information. How likely or unlikely is it that you would use this right yourself?***

|                             | %          |
|-----------------------------|------------|
| <b>NET: Likely</b>          | <b>25%</b> |
| Very likely                 | 10%        |
| Fairly likely               | 15%        |
| Neither likely nor unlikely | 28%        |
| Fairly unlikely             | 22%        |
| Very unlikely               | 17%        |
| <b>NET: Unlikely</b>        | <b>39%</b> |
| <i>Don't know</i>           | 7%         |

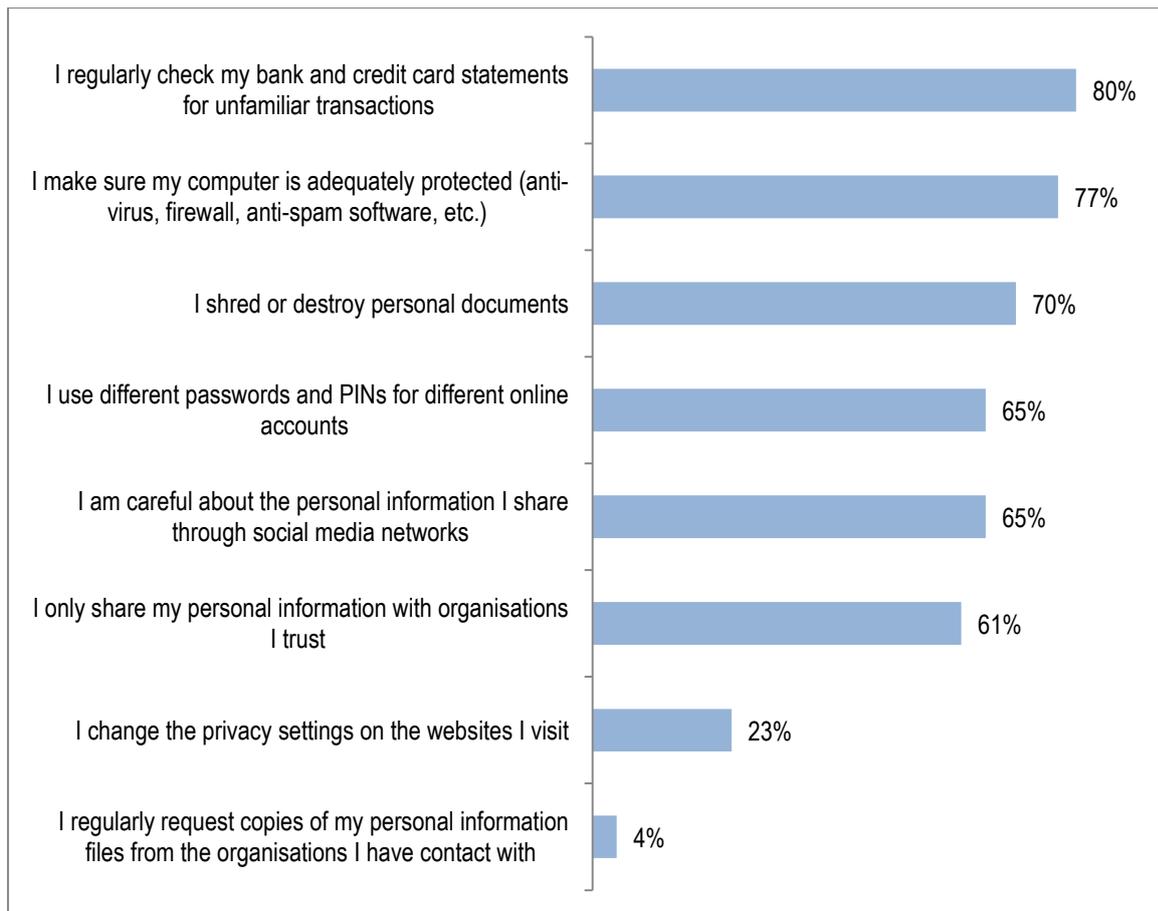
Effective Base: All Data Protection respondents (n=1222)

The vast majority of the public take several steps to protect their personal information. Four in five (80%) say they regularly check bank and credit card statements for unfamiliar transactions, reflecting the perceived sensitivity of financial information. Three quarters (77%) say they make sure their computer is adequately protected, and 70% shred or destroy personal documents.

Two thirds (65%) say they use different passwords and PINs for different online accounts, and the same proportion say they are careful about the personal information they share through social media networks. It is important to note that in areas like this stated behaviour may not always reflect actual behaviour, and is rather an indicator of how people would *like* to behave.

### Steps to protect personal information

**Q. Which, if any, of the following steps do you currently take to protect your personal information?**



Effective Base: All Data Protection respondents (n=1222)

Four in five (79%) cannot name any laws relating to the handling of their personal details unprompted. 18% name the Data Protection Act.

### Unprompted awareness of the Data Protection Act

**Q. Are you aware of any laws relating to the handling of your personal details? If you are, please enter the name in the boxes below.**

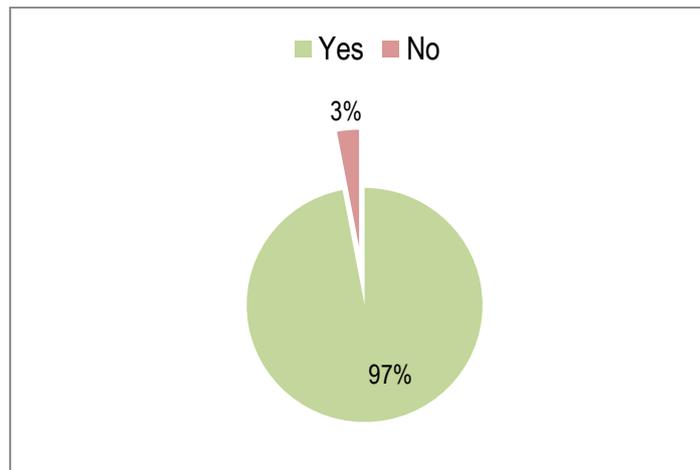
|  | %   |
|--|-----|
| Data Protection Act / DPA  | 18% |
| Freedom of Information Act / FOI / FOIA  | 2%  |
| Other  | 3%  |
| None – I am not aware of any laws relating to the handling of personal details | 79% |
| Don't know   | 1%  |

Effective Base: All Data Protection respondents (n=1222)

Prompted awareness of the Data Protection Act (97%) is much higher, showing that many people are familiar with the name, but do not automatically equate it with a “law relating to the handling of personal details”.

### Prompted awareness of the Data Protection Act

**Q. Have you ever heard of the Data Protection Act?**

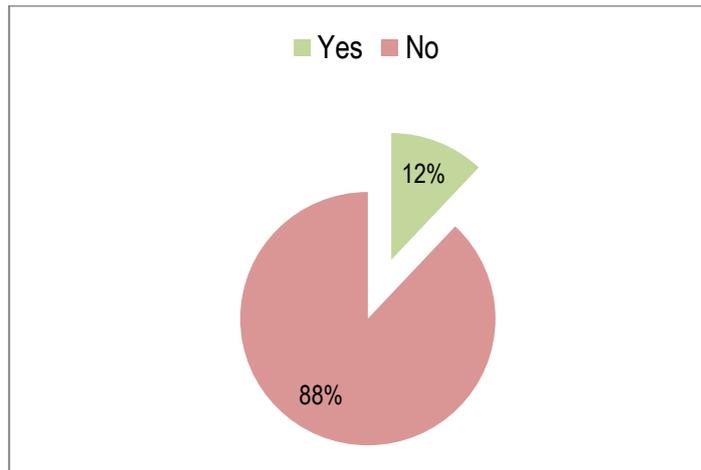


Effective Base: All Data Protection respondents (n=1222)

Only 12% of adults say they have requested to see information that organisations might hold about them.

### Uptake of personal information rights

**Q. Have you ever requested to see information that organisations might hold about you?**

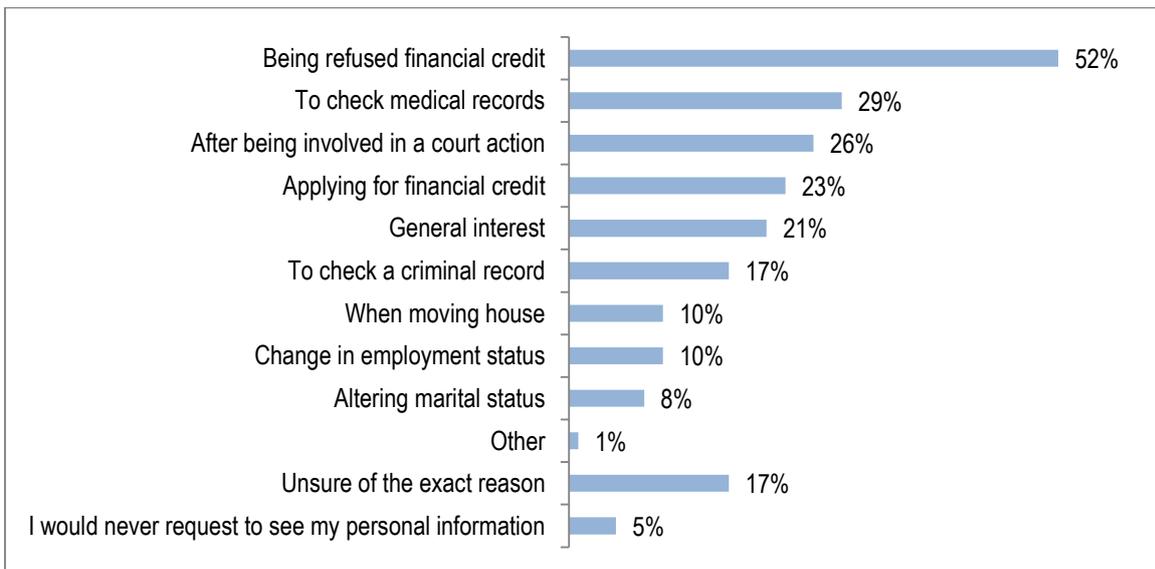


Effective Base: All Data Protection respondents (n=1222)

Being refused financial credit (52%) is the situation perceived most likely to lead to a request.

### Situations leading to personal information request

**Q. Which, if any, of the following situations would lead to you requesting to see personal information held by a company or organisation?**

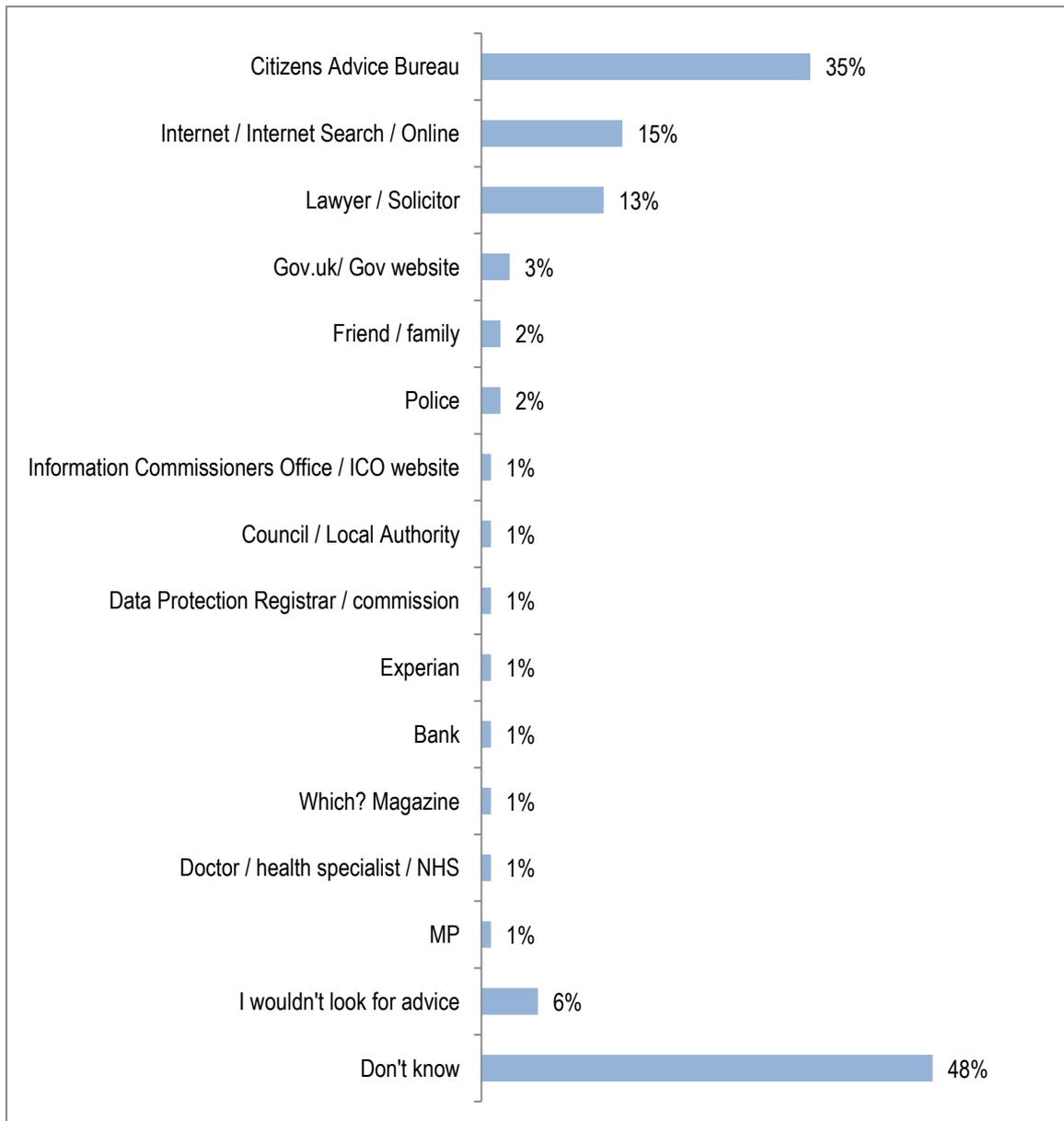


Effective Base: All Data Protection respondents (n=1222)

Nearly half (48%) of people say they “don’t know” where they would go to get advice on their rights on protecting their personal data. A third (35%) name the Citizens Advice Bureau, and 15% say they would search online. Only 1% name the Information Commissioner’s Office.

### Sources of advice

**Q. Where would you go to get advice on your rights on protecting your personal data? You may enter up to three.**

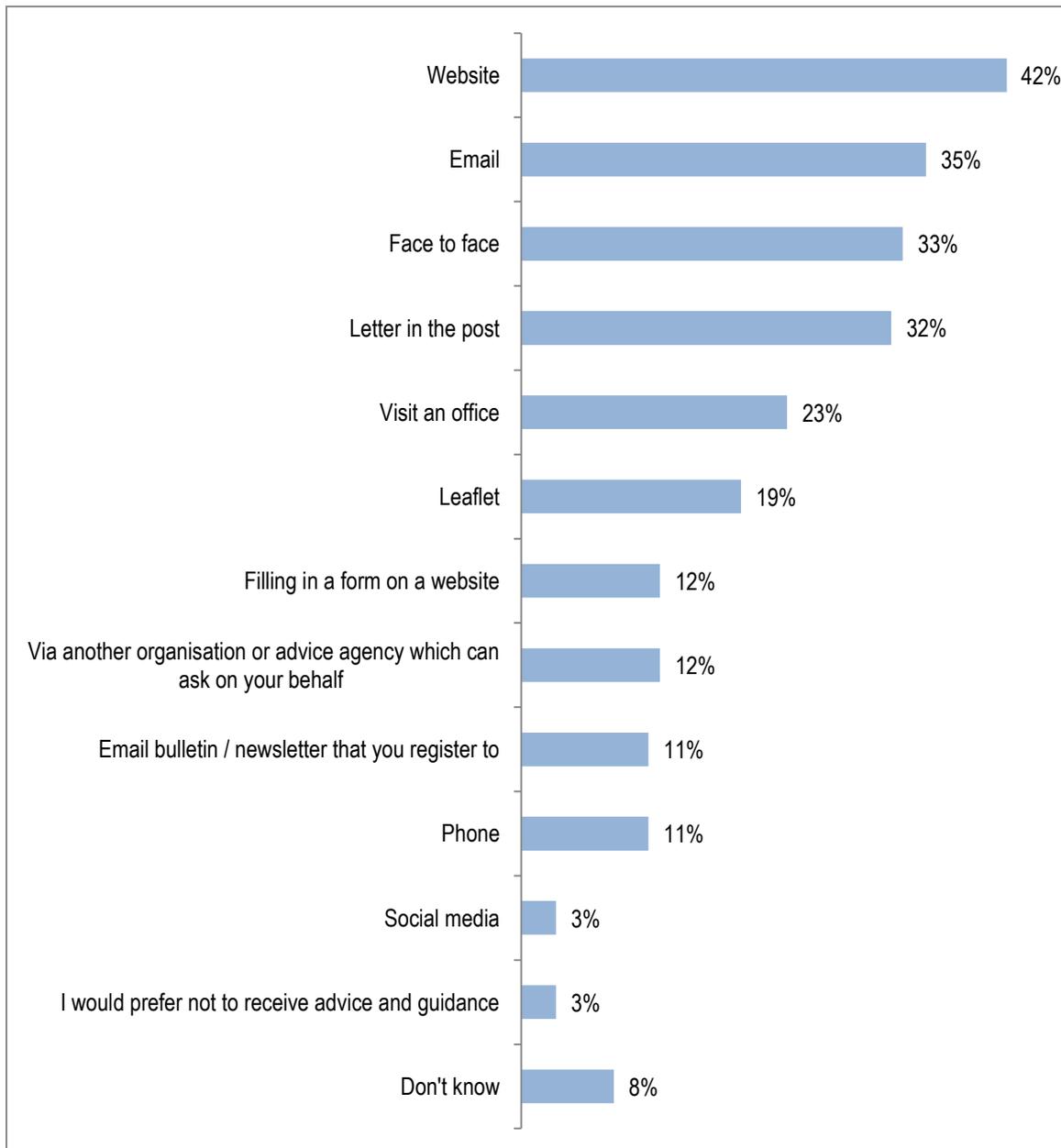


Effective Base: All Data Protection respondents (n=1222)

People are split on preferred communication channels for advice and guidance, with a website (42%) the most popular choice, followed by email (35%), face to face contact (33%) and a letter in the post (32%). Only 3% say they would prefer not to receive advice and guidance.

### Preferred communication channels

**Q. How, if at all, would you prefer to receive advice and guidance on your rights on data protection?**



Effective Base: All Data Protection respondents (n=1222)

There is widespread support for the introduction of a new certification mark to show that an online service provider has been accredited in protecting information rights. Four in five (81%) say they approve, with 44% strongly approving.

### Certification mark

**Q. To the left are some examples of certification marks. To what extent would you approve or disapprove of a similar certification mark being introduced to show that an online service provider has been accredited in protecting information rights?**

|                                | %          |
|--------------------------------|------------|
| <b>NET: Approve</b>            | <b>81%</b> |
| Strongly approve               | 44%        |
| Tend to approve                | 37%        |
| Neither approve nor disapprove | 17%        |
| Tend to disapprove             | 1%         |
| Strongly disapprove            | 1%         |
| <b>NET: Disapprove</b>         | <b>2%</b>  |

Effective Base: All respondents (n=1222)

People are also supportive of educating young people on how to protect their personal information, with 82% saying this is important (of whom 46% describe it as very important).

### Importance of educating young people

**Q. How important or otherwise do you think it is that the following is taught in schools: Learning how to protect your personal information, and pointers on where to go for help, information and advice?**

|                                   | %          |
|-----------------------------------|------------|
| <b>NET: Important</b>             | <b>82%</b> |
| Very important                    | 46%        |
| Fairly important                  | 36%        |
| Neither important nor unimportant | 10%        |
| Fairly unimportant                | 4%         |
| Very unimportant                  | 4%         |
| <b>NET: Unimportant</b>           | <b>8%</b>  |

Effective Base: All Data Protection respondents (n=1222)

Most people (53%) think it is very important that the enforcer of the Data Protection Act is independent of Government and business, with a further quarter (26%) seeing it as fairly important.

### Independence of regulator

**Q. How important or unimportant is it that the enforcer of the Data Protection Act is independent of Government and business?**

|                                   | %          |
|-----------------------------------|------------|
| <b>NET: Important</b>             | <b>79%</b> |
| Very important                    | 53%        |
| Fairly important                  | 26%        |
| Neither important nor unimportant | 11%        |
| Fairly unimportant                | 3%         |
| Very unimportant                  | 2%         |
| <b>NET: Unimportant</b>           | <b>5%</b>  |
| <i>Don't know</i>                 | 5%         |

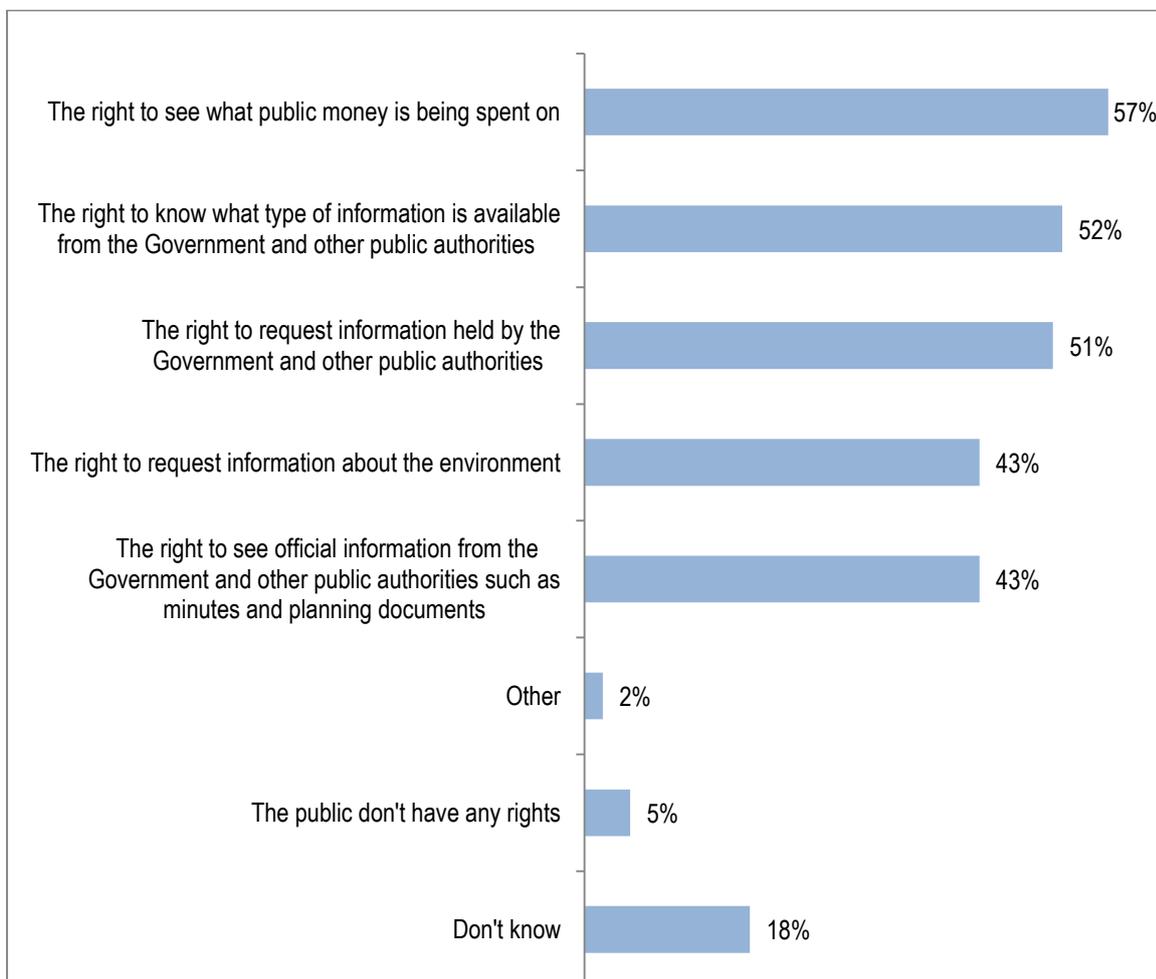
Effective Base: All Data Protection respondents (n=1222)

## Freedom of information

Awareness of FOIA rights is lower than DPA rights. Just over half are aware of the right to see what public money is spent on (57%), the right to know what type of information is available from the Government and other public authorities (52%), or the right to request information held by the Government and other public authorities (51%).

### Awareness of individual rights

**Q. What rights under law do you think you have to access information held by the Government and other public authorities in the UK?**



Effective Base: All Freedom of Information respondents (n=1207)

The public is split on whether information wanted about the Government and other public authorities is available and accessible. 38% think that it is, 30% disagree, and a further third (32%) have no opinion either way.

### Availability and accessibility of information

**Q. Do you agree or disagree that information you want about the Government and other public authorities is available and accessible?**

|                            | %          |
|----------------------------|------------|
| <b>NET: Agree</b>          | <b>38%</b> |
| Strongly agree             | 11%        |
| Tend to agree              | 28%        |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 32%        |
| Tend to disagree           | 21%        |
| Strongly disagree          | 8%         |
| <b>NET: Disagree</b>       | <b>30%</b> |

Effective Base: All Freedom of Information respondents (n=1207)

Unprompted awareness of laws relating to information access is fairly low, although 17% name the Freedom of Information Act.

### Unprompted awareness of the Freedom of Information Act

**Q. Are you aware of any laws relating to access to information held by public authorities about the way they run their organisation?**

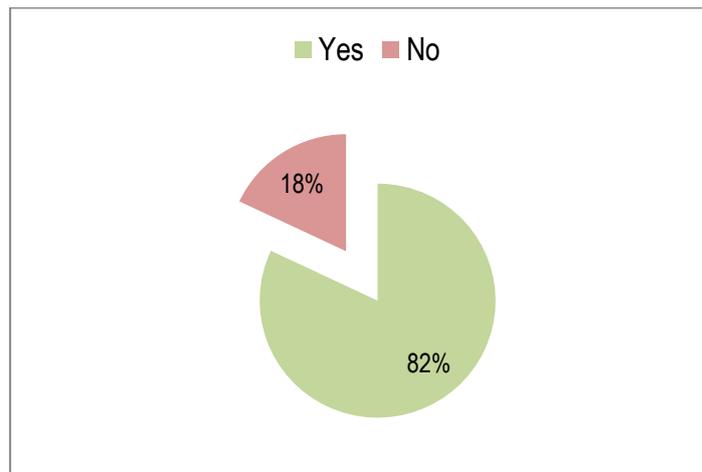
|  | %   |
|--|-----|
| Freedom of Information Act / FOI / FOIA  | 17% |
| Data Protection Act / DPA  | 5%  |
| Official Secrets Act   | 1%  |
| None - I am not aware of any laws relating to the handling of personal details | 77% |

Effective Base: All Freedom of Information respondents (n=1207)

Prompted awareness of the Freedom of Information Act is much higher, with 82% saying they have heard of it – although this is much lower than the 97% who have heard of the Data Protection Act.

### Prompted awareness of the Freedom of Information Act

**Q. Have you ever heard of the Freedom of Information Act?**

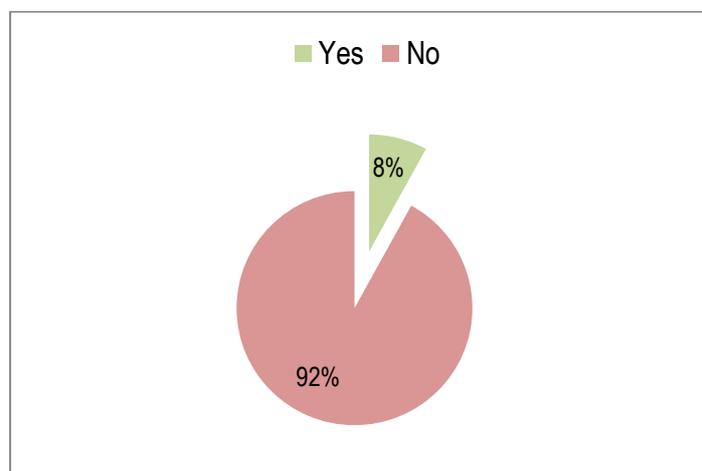


Effective Base: All Freedom of Information respondents (n=1207)

Only 8% of adults say they have requested to see information held by the Government and / or other public authorities.

### Uptake of Freedom of Information rights

**Q. Have you ever requested to see information held by the Government and / or other public authorities?**

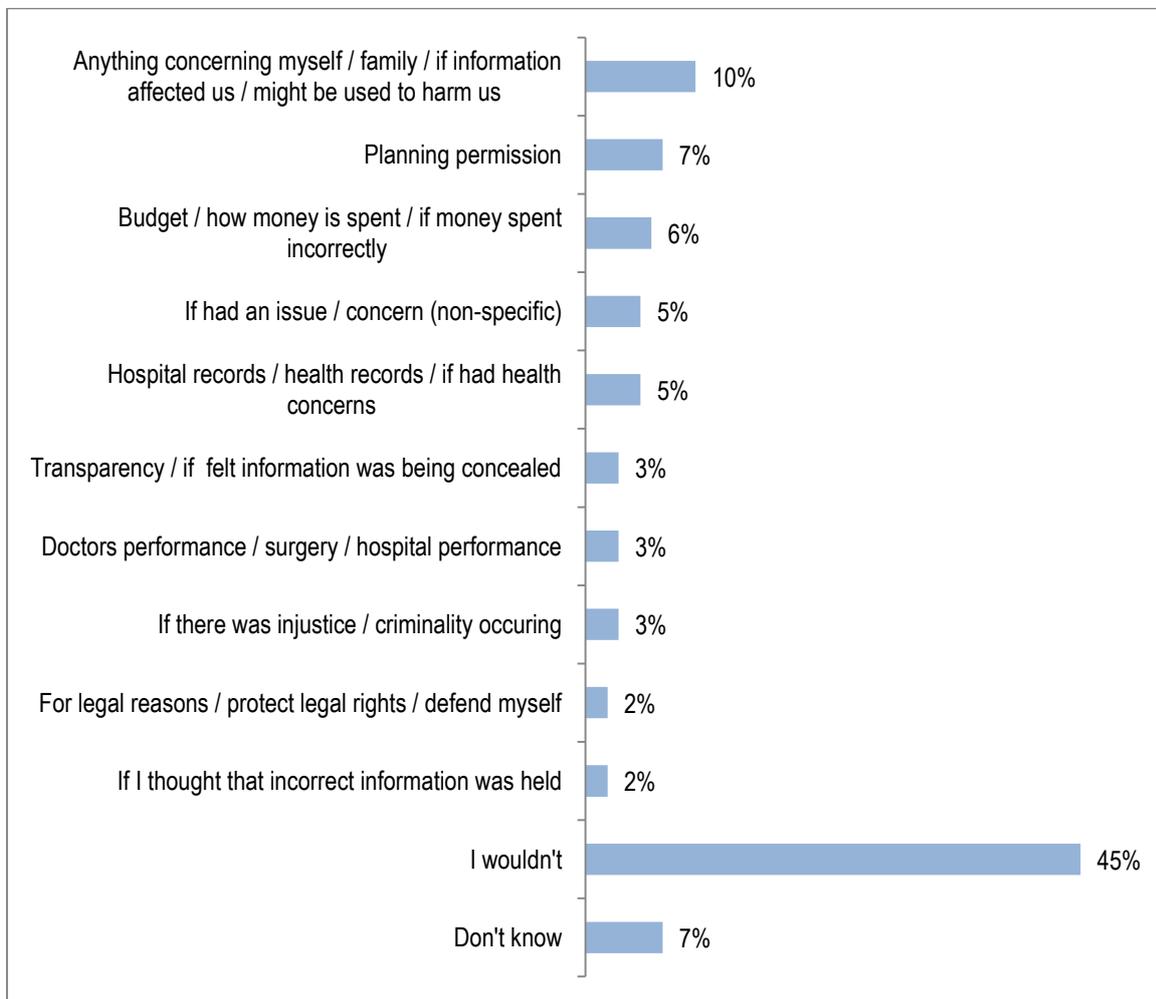


Effective Base: All Freedom of Information respondents (n=1207)

Nearly half (45%) of respondents say they would not request to access information held by the Government or public authorities. The most popular reason is if the information concerned them or their families personally (chosen by 10%), with planning permission (7%) and government spending (6%) following.

### Reasons for requesting to access information

**Q. Under what circumstances, if any, have you or would you request to access information held by the Government and / or other public authorities such as your local council, your local hospital, or a Government department?**



Effective Base: All Freedom of Information respondents (n=1207)

Three quarters of adults (75%) think it is important that private companies acting on behalf of public authorities should be subject to the Freedom of Information Act, with nearly half (48%) saying it is very important.

### Importance of FOIA applying to private contractors

**Q. How important or unimportant do you think it is that private companies acting on behalf of public authorities should be subject to the Freedom of Information Act?**

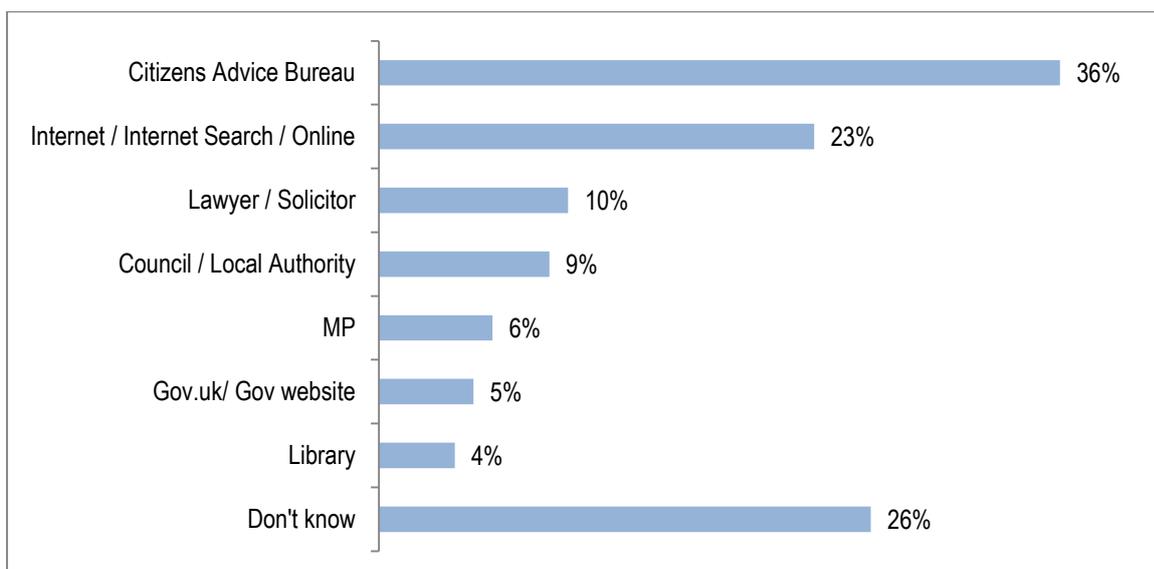
|                                   | %          |
|-----------------------------------|------------|
| <b>NET: Important</b>             | <b>75%</b> |
| Very important                    | 48%        |
| Fairly important                  | 27%        |
| Neither important nor unimportant | 9%         |
| Fairly unimportant                | 4%         |
| Very unimportant                  | 6%         |
| <b>NET: Unimportant</b>           | <b>10%</b> |
| <i>Don't know</i>                 | 6%         |

Effective Base: All Freedom of Information respondents (n=1207)

The Citizens Advice Bureau (36%) and online searching (23%) are again the main sources of advice, although a quarter (26%) say they “don’t know” where they would go for advice.

### Sources of advice on FOIA rights

**Q. Where would you go to get advice on your rights under the Freedom of Information Act? You may enter up to three.**

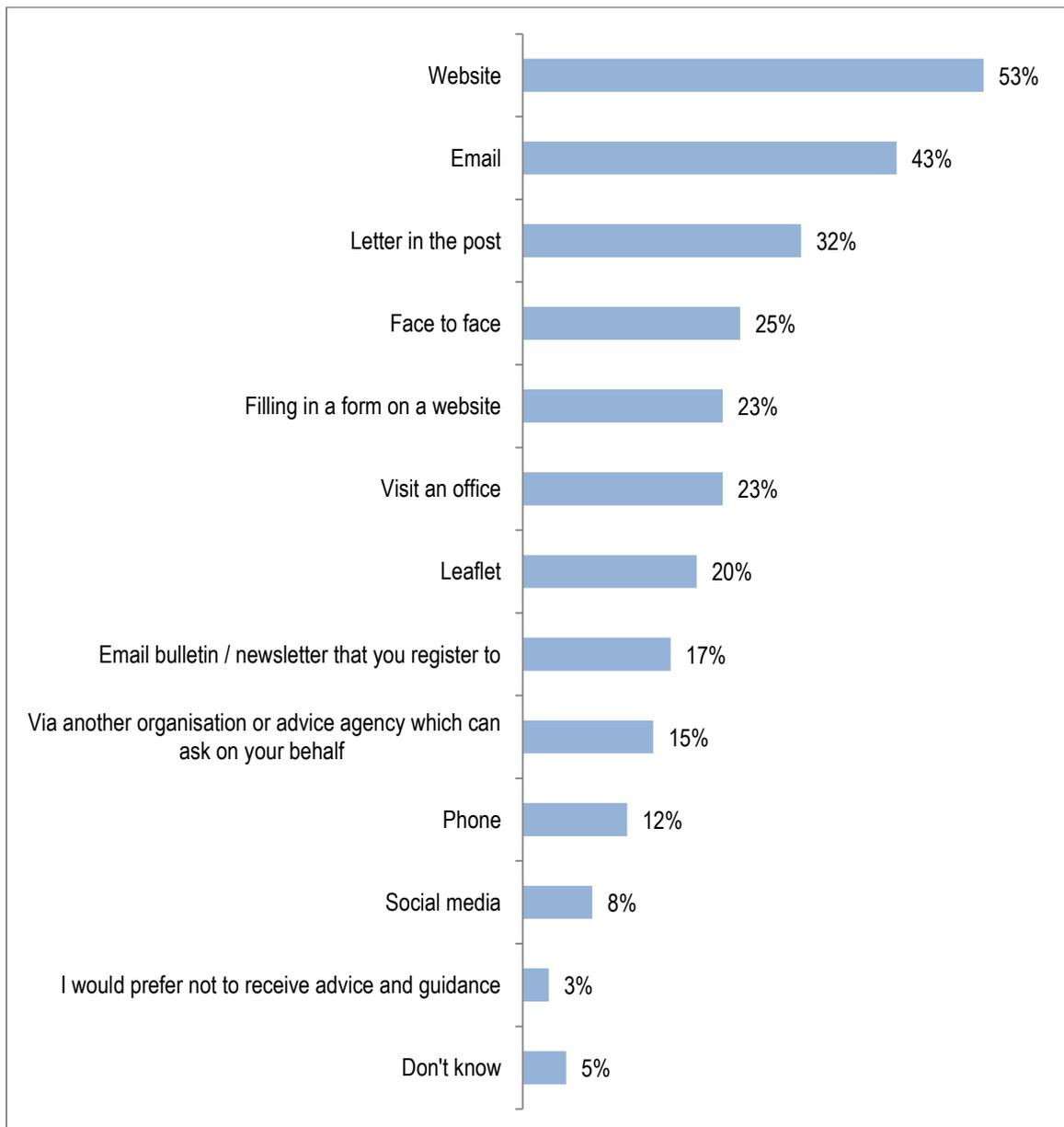


Effective Base: All Freedom of Information respondents (n=1207)

A majority of people say a website (53%) is their preferred channel for receiving advice and guidance on freedom of information, with 43% saying email and a third (32%) saying a letter in the post.

### Preferred channel for receiving advice and guidance

**Q. How, if at all, would you prefer to receive advice and guidance on freedom of information?**



Effective Base: All Freedom of Information respondents (n=1207)

Nearly two thirds (63%) of people say it is important that schools teach rights in relation to requesting recorded information held by a public authority, although less than a quarter (23%) say it is very important. This contrasts with much higher proportions of people saying that it is very important to educate children in their personal information rights.

### Importance of education young people on FOIA rights

**Q. How important or unimportant do you think it is that the following is taught in schools: Learning about your rights in relation to requesting recorded information held by a public authority (e.g. government department, local council or state school) and pointers on where to go to for help, information and advice on making such a request?**

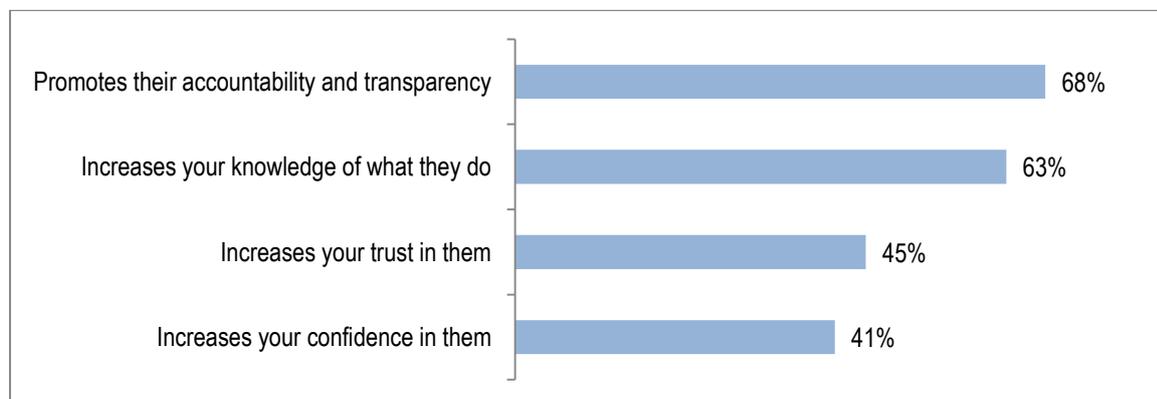
|                                   | %          |
|-----------------------------------|------------|
| <b>NET: Important</b>             | <b>63%</b> |
| Very important                    | 23%        |
| Fairly important                  | 40%        |
| Neither important nor unimportant | 23%        |
| Fairly unimportant                | 9%         |
| Very unimportant                  | 5%         |
| <b>NET: Unimportant</b>           | <b>14%</b> |

Effective Base: All Freedom of Information respondents (n=1207)

Two thirds of people (68%) agree that being able to access information held by public authorities promotes their accountability and transparency, and 63% say it increases knowledge of what authorities do. A minority say it increases trust (45%) or confidence (41%).

### Statements relating to access to information held by public authorities

**Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Being able to access information held by public authorities ... [% agreeing]**



Effective Base: All Freedom of Information respondents (n=1207)

Most people (56%) say it is very important that the regulator of the Freedom of Information Act is independent of Government, with a further quarter (23%) saying it is very important.

### Independence of regulator

**Q. How important or unimportant is it that the regulator of the Freedom of Information Act is independent of Government?**

|                                   | %          |
|-----------------------------------|------------|
| <b>NET: Important</b>             | <b>79%</b> |
| Very important                    | 56%        |
| Fairly important                  | 23%        |
| Neither important nor unimportant | 10%        |
| Fairly unimportant                | 2%         |
| Very unimportant                  | 5%         |
| <b>NET: Unimportant</b>           | <b>8%</b>  |
| <i>Don't know</i>                 | 4%         |

Effective Base: All Freedom of Information respondents (n=1207)

**For more information please contact:**

Andy White  
 Senior Consultant  
 +44 (0)20 7871 8667  
[andy.white@comres.co.uk](mailto:andy.white@comres.co.uk)

Rachel Phillips  
 Research Team Leader  
 +44 (0)20 7871 8657  
[rachel.phillips@comres.co.uk](mailto:rachel.phillips@comres.co.uk)