



information  
and privacy  
commission  
new south wales

# ***NSW Community Attitudes to Information Access***

**APRIL 2020**



# RESEARCH DESIGN

## **The Information and Privacy Commission (NSW) IPC commissioned Woolcott Research to investigate the NSW community's awareness of their information access rights under NSW legislation.**

A phone and online survey amongst n=802 NSW residents aged 18+ years was conducted between 20<sup>th</sup> March and 5<sup>th</sup> April 2020.

Quotas were set by methodology (telephone interviewing/online), location (Sydney/Regional NSW), gender and age; data was post-weighted by location, gender and age to reflect the latest ABS population estimates.

Where possible, this report compares results from the 2014 and 2016 omnibus studies, as well as the 2018 mixed mode survey.

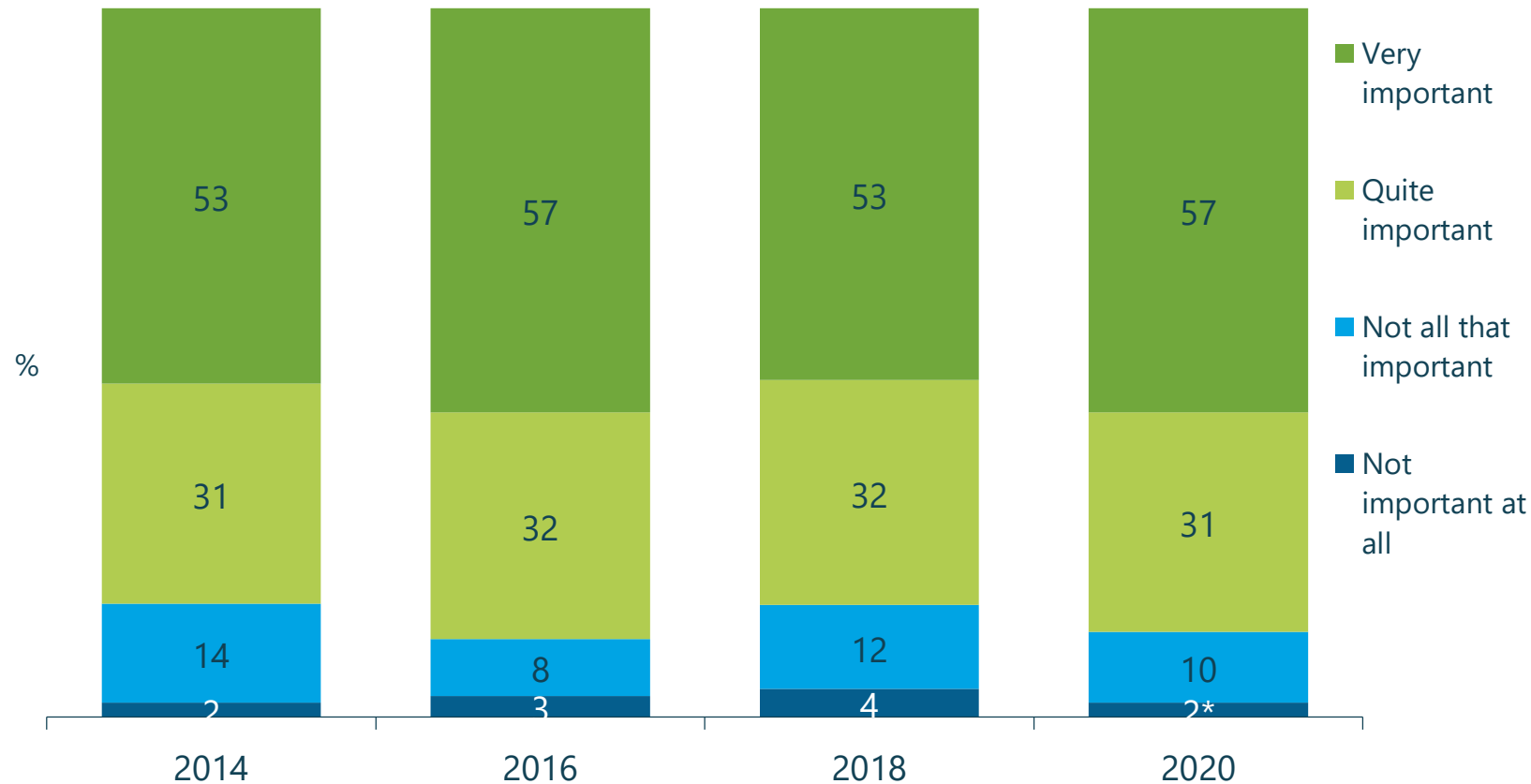
Significant differences in results at the 95% confidence level are shown as follows:

- Results from 2018 that are significantly higher or lower than the total are shown in **GREEN** or **RED** respectively
- Differences between the most recent comparative year and 2018 results are denoted by asterisks (\*)





# IMPORTANCE OF HAVING THE RIGHT TO ACCESS GOVERNMENT INFORMATION

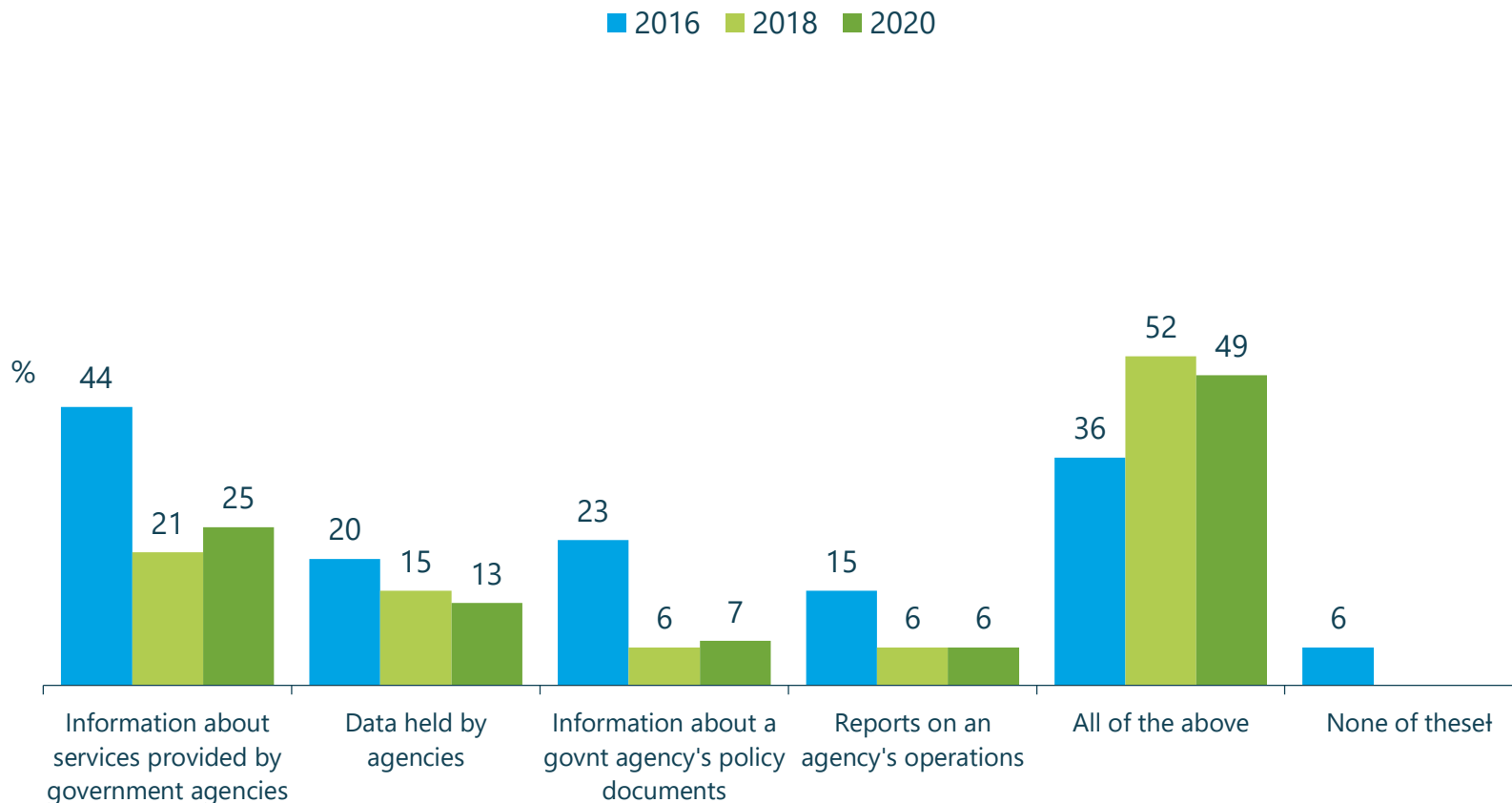


- Similar to previous years, more than half felt that their right to access government information was 'Very important' and three in ten felt it was 'Quite important'
- The proportion of those who felt it was 'Not important at all' decreased in 2020

Q12. How important is it to you that you have a right to access government information?  
Base: All respondents (2014 n=340, 2016 n=340, 2018 n=803, 2020 n=802)



# INTEREST IN TYPES OF GOVERNMENT HELD INFORMATION



- Similar to 2018, almost half were interested in accessing all types of government held information listed
- A quarter were specifically interested in information about government agencies' services

Q13. What type of government held information are you most interested in accessing?

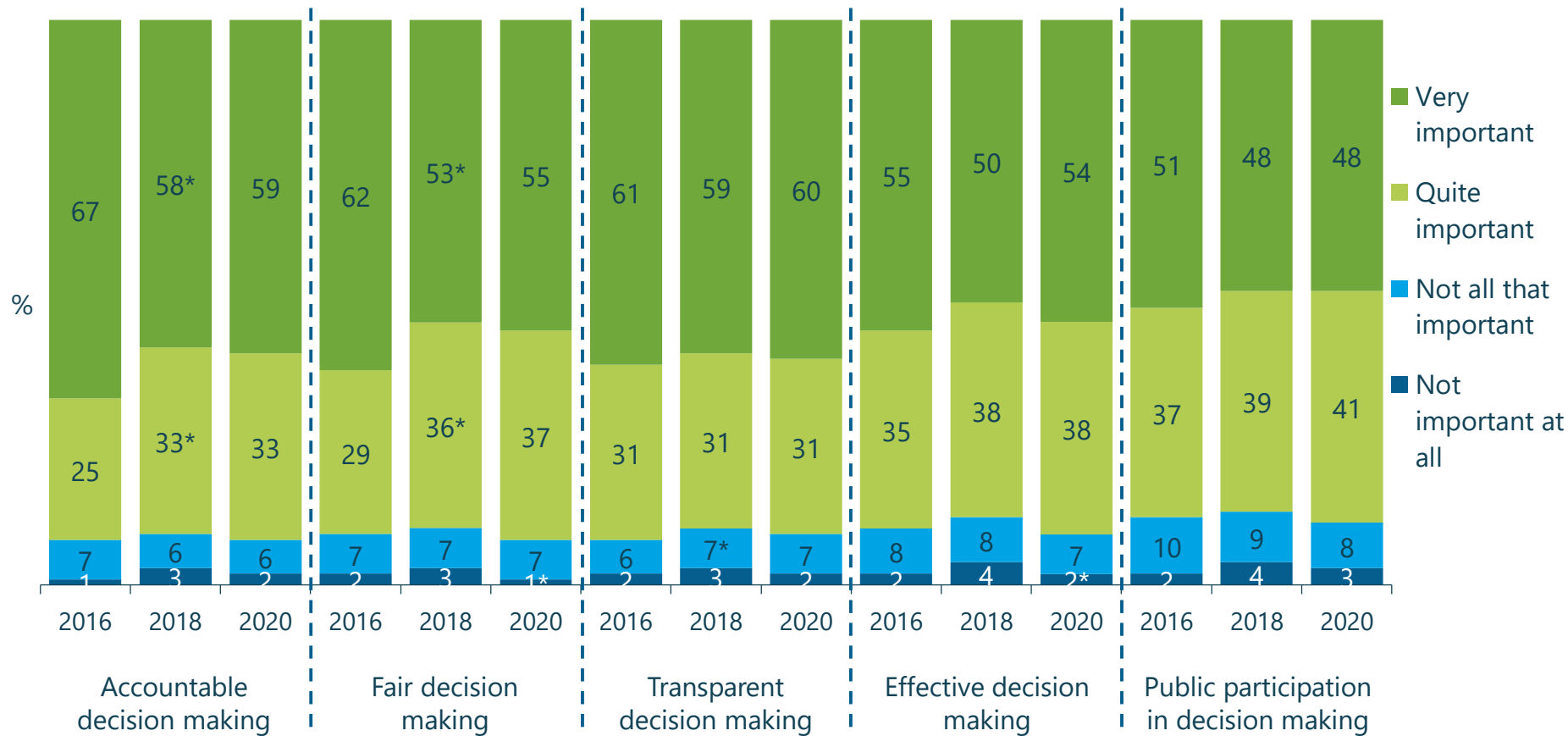
Base: All respondents (2016 n=340, 2018 n=803, 2020 n=802)

†Not an available code in 2018 or 2020

PLEASE NOTE: QUESTION WAS MULTIPLE CHOICE IN 2016



# IMPORTANCE OF ALLOWING PUBLIC ACCESS TO INFORMATION HELD BY GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

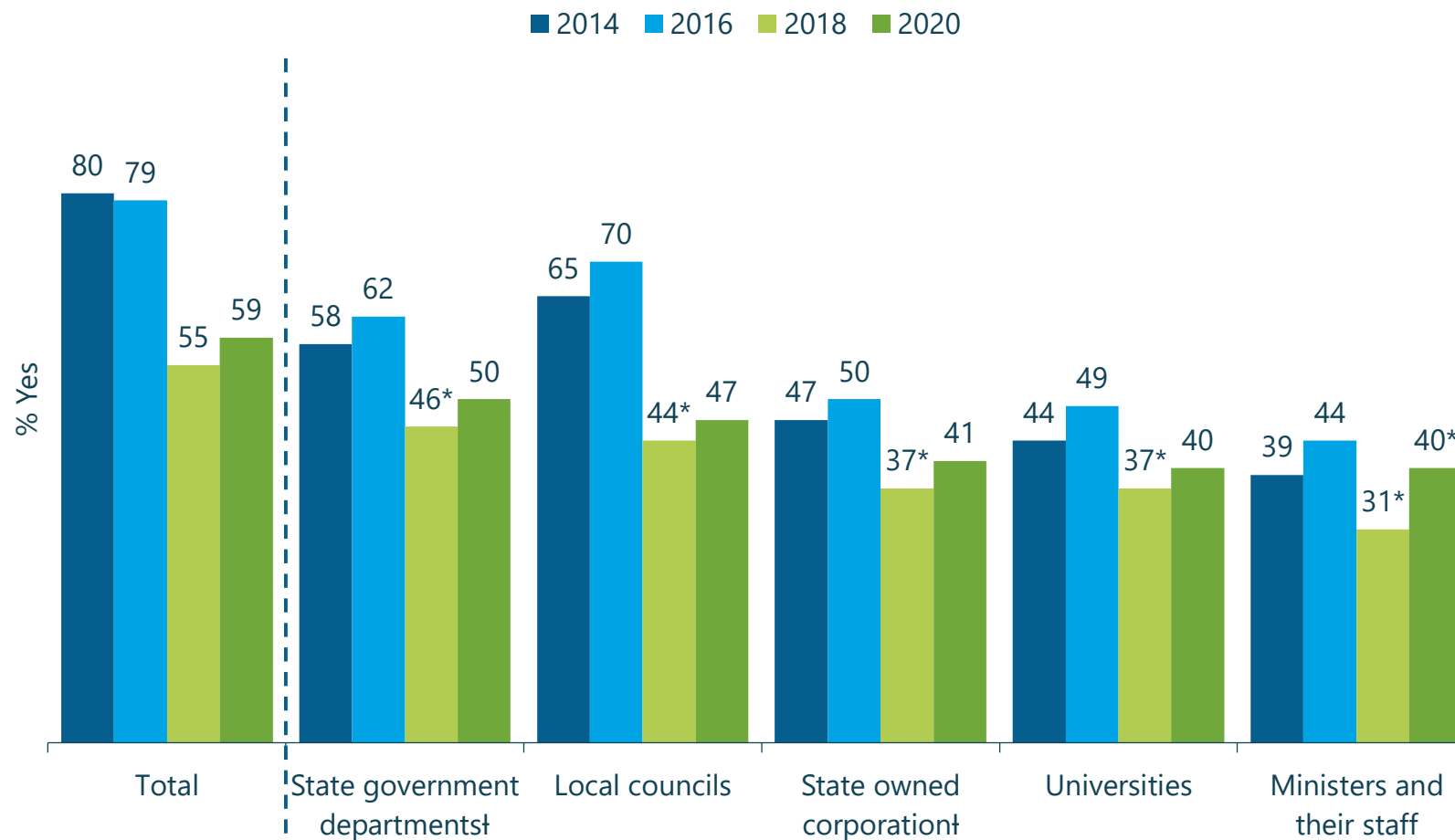


- The majority felt that it was important for the public to have access to data that was held by government for various purposes

Q14. How important is allowing public access to information held by government agencies to help with the following...?†  
 Base: All respondents (2016 n=340, 2018 n=803, 2020 n=802)  
 †Slight wording change in 2020



# AWARENESS OF RIGHT TO ACCESS INFORMATION UNDER NSW ACCESS TO INFORMATION LAW



- Over half (59%) knew of their right to access information from at least one of the agencies listed
- Incidence of knowing about the right to access information across the agencies increased

Q15. Did you know, under NSW access to information law, you have a right to access information held by the following agencies?†

Base: All respondents (2014 n=340, 2016 n=340, 2018 n=803; 2020 n=802)

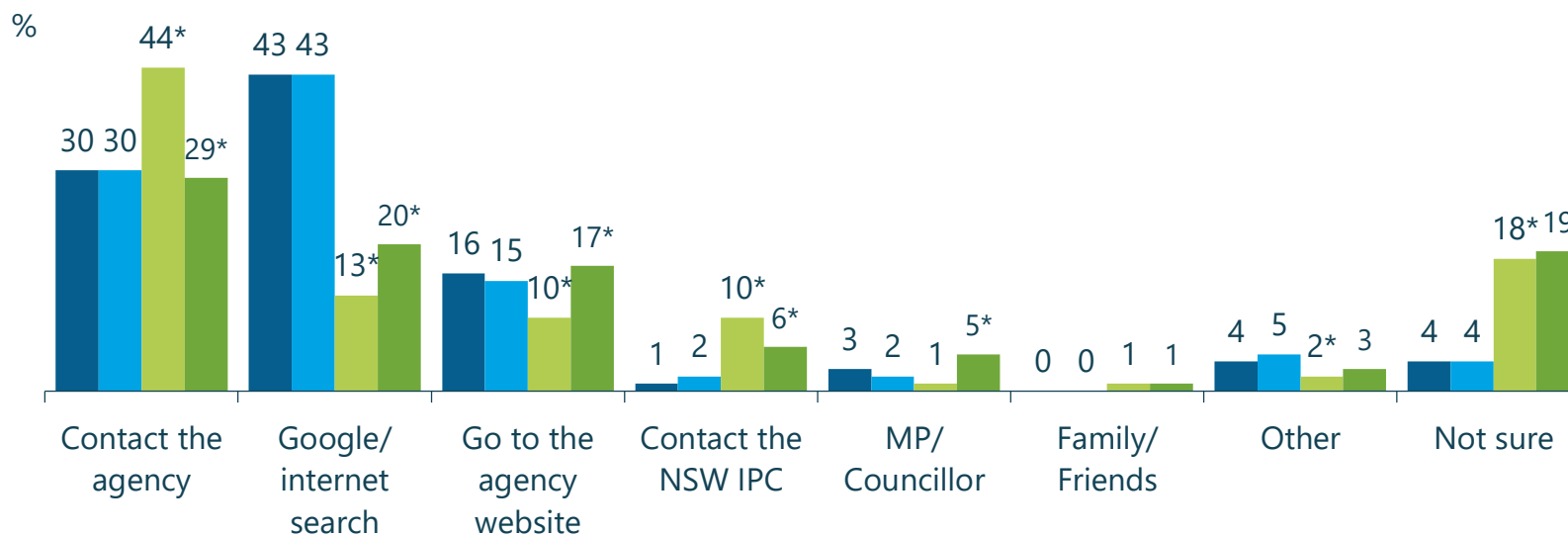
†Slight wording change in 2020

‡Slight wording change in 2020



# FIRST OPTION TO ACCESS INFORMATION HELD BY AGENCIES

■ 2014 ■ 2016 ■ 2018 ■ 2020



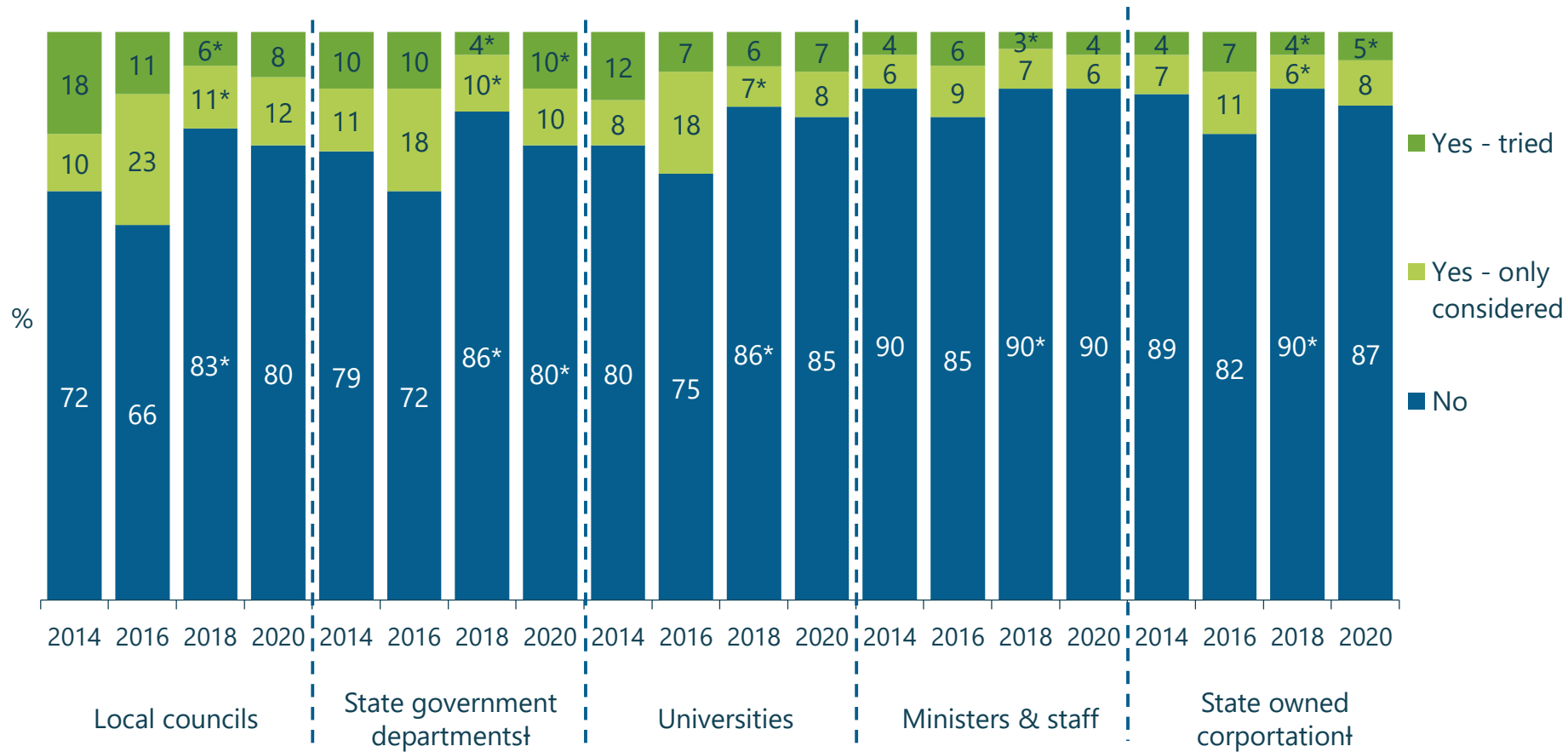
- Intention to contact the agency involved or the IPC decreased in 2020 while preferring to search the internet, go to the agency website and contacting an MP increased
- Similar to 2018, approximately one in five did not know what they would do if they wanted to access information

Q16. If you wanted to access information held by agencies, what would you do to get it? (SR - Unprompted)  
Base: All respondents (2014 n=340, 2016 n=340, 2018 n=803; 2020 n=802)





# CONSIDERATION AND ATTEMPTS TO ACCESS INFORMATION

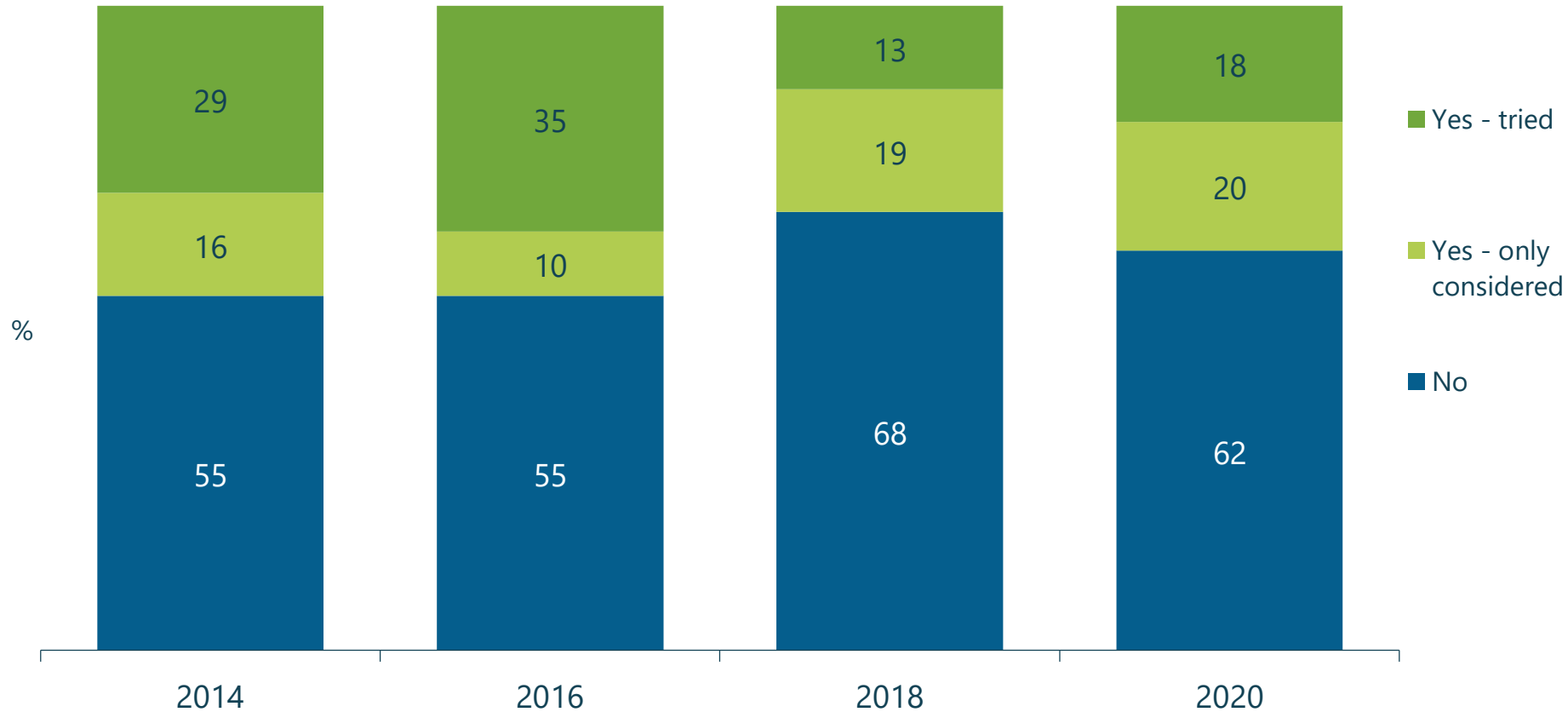


- Incidence of attempting to contact state government departments and state owned corporations was similar to 2018

Q17. Have you ever considered accessing information held by...?  
**IF YES:** And have you tried to access information held by... in the last year?  
 Base: All respondents (2014 n=340, 2016 n=340, 2018 n=803; 2020 n=802)  
 †Slight wording change in 2020



# TOTAL CONSIDERATION AND ATTEMPTS TO ACCESS INFORMATION

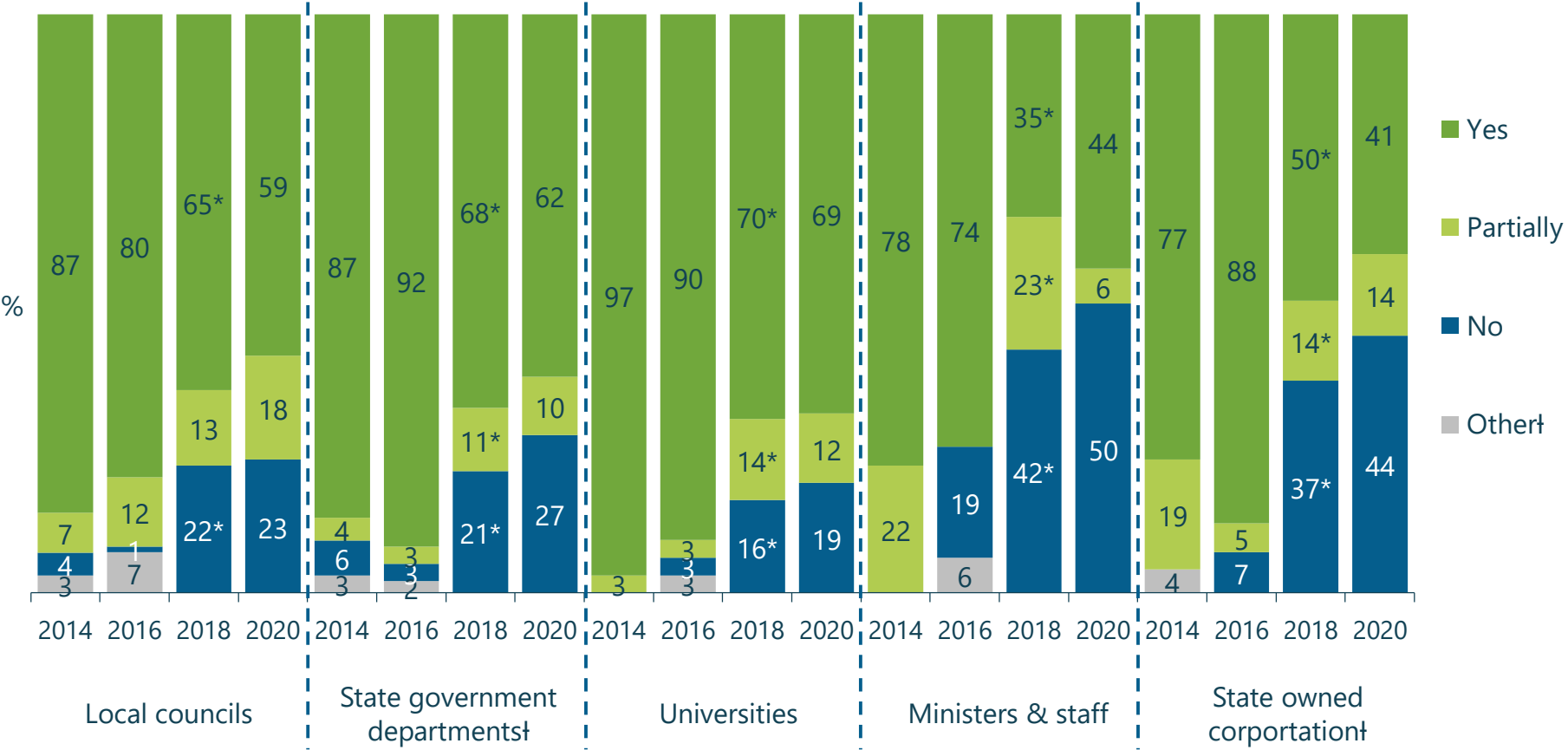


- Around 20% had tried to access information in 2020 however, most had neither considered nor attempted to access information held by any agency

Q17. Have you ever considered accessing information held by...?  
**IF YES:** And have you tried to access information held by... in the last year?  
Base: All respondents (2014 n=340, 2016 n=340, 2018 n=803; 2020 n=802)



# SUCCESS IN ATTEMPTING TO ACCESS INFORMATION

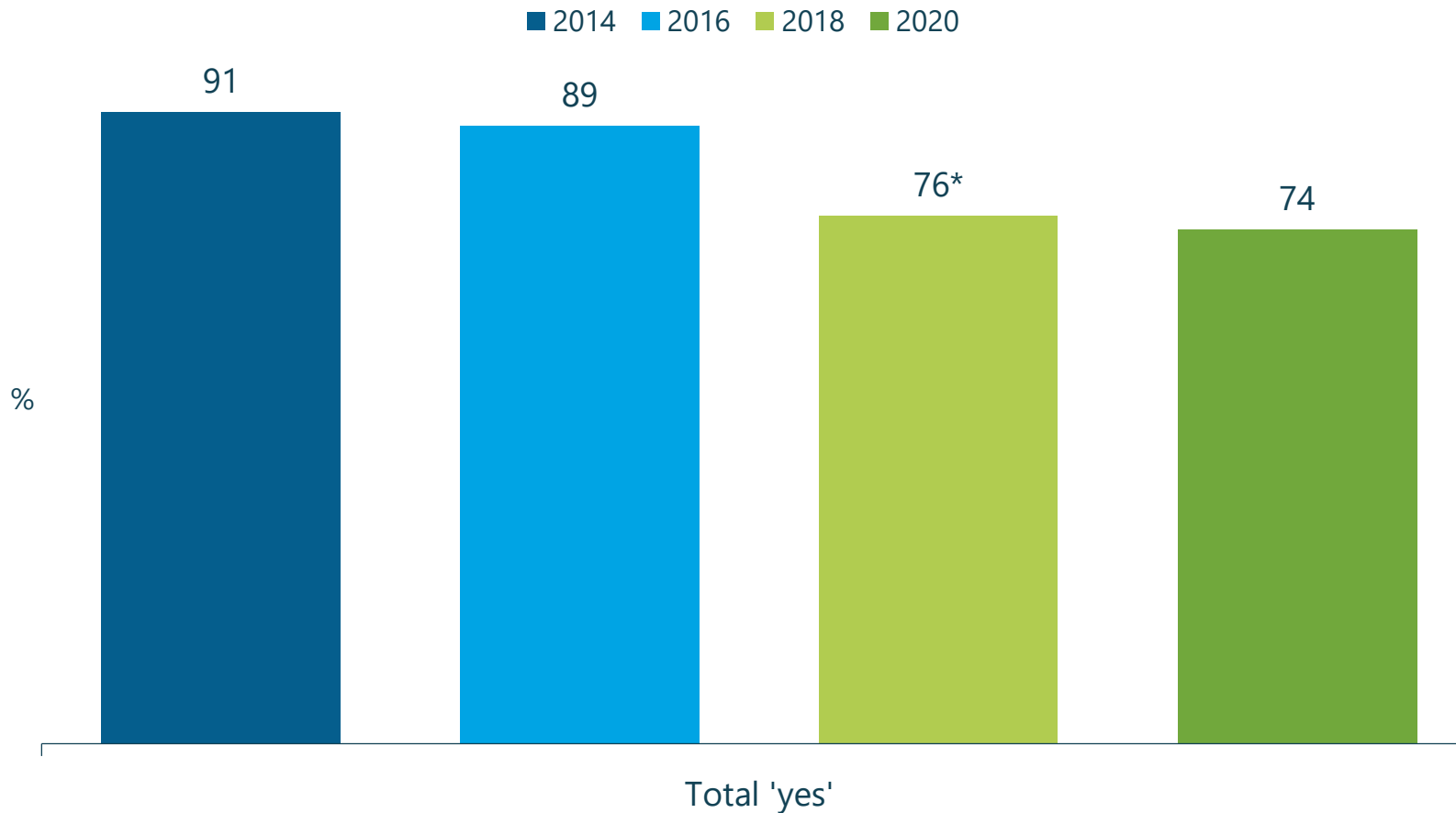


- On par with 2018, most respondents were at least partially successful in attempting to access information from local councils, state government departments and universities

Q18. Were you successful in accessing information from...?  
 Base: Respondents who tried to access information in the last year  
 (2014: Local councils n=63, State government departments n=32, Universities n=29, Ministers and their staff n=15, State owned businesses n=14)  
 (2016: Local councils n=77, State government departments n=62, Universities n=59, Ministers and their staff n=31, State owned businesses n=38)  
 (2018: Local councils n=46, State government departments n=34, Universities n=50, Ministers and their staff n=26, State owned businesses n=28)  
 (2020: Local councils n=62, State government departments n=77, Universities n=59, Ministers and their staff n=32, State owned corporations n=41)  
 †Slight wording change in 2020



# TOTAL SUCCESS IN ATTEMPTING TO ACCESS INFORMATION



- Three quarters of those who had attempted to access information were successful in at least one instance which was similar to last year



# HOW AGENCIES ASSISTED INFORMATION REQUESTS

	2020 % (n=144)
The agency told me the different ways I could access information	36
The agency helped me to clarify the information I was seeking	32
The agency explained the process to obtain information by formal access application	28
The agency followed up in writing	28
If they did not hold the information the agency told me who or what other agency to contact, including how to transfer my application	25
The agency explained what makes the application valid	17
The agency told me about the Information and Privacy Commission and the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal and my rights of review	8
None of the above	19

- There were many ways in which agencies assisted information requests, such as explaining how to access information and clarifying the information respondents were seeking



# HOW AGENCIES DID NOT ASSIST INFORMATION REQUESTS

	2020 % (n=144)
The agency didn't explain the process to obtain information	33
The agency didn't discuss with me the type of information I was seeking	30
The agency failed to answer my questions or did not respond by the required time	24
The agency didn't follow up my outstanding questions	17
None of the above	35

- The most common ways in which agencies did not assist respondents with their information requests were not explaining the process and/or not clarifying the type of information being requested



# HOW AGENCIES COULD HAVE IMPROVED ASSISTANCE

	2020 % (n=144)
Explained the processes available to me to obtain information	41
Provided advice about how to access or seek access to information	40
Referred me to the agency's website to obtain information	29
Told me what agency to go to obtain the information or helped me transfer my application	27
Talked to me about my request to access information	25
Told me how to get information about my information access rights	22
Provided me with an application form to seek access to information	18
None of the above	21

- Many of those who attempted to access information felt that the agencies could have explained the process of obtaining information and provided information about how to access the information



# SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

	2020 % (n=802)
Increase awareness of ability to access information (e.g. on television, media)	14
Provide more/better instructions on how to access information NFI	5
Improve standard of staff involved (e.g. knowledgeable, customer service)	4
Make it easier/faster to access information (e.g. put it on agency website)	4
Be more transparent and/or open/about what happens to my information	4
Provide more/better information NFI	3
Improve websites/information online	3
Create specific platforms to access information (e.g. app, new website, hotline)	2
Connect through internet/social media/texts/emails/letters NFI	2
Provide more/better instructions on who to contact about accessing	2
Other	13
Don't know	6
No improvements needed/All good	7
No response	40

- While many did not offer any suggestions to provide better advice and assistance regarding information requests, more than one in ten felt that NSW agencies should increase public awareness of their right to access information





# DEMOGRAPHICS



# GENDER AND AGE



	2014 % (n=340)	2016 % (n=340)	2018 % (n=803)	2020 % (n=802)
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	44	49	48	50
Female	56	51	52	50
Gender neutral†	Not an option in 2014, 2016 or 2018			-
Prefer not to indicate†	Not an option in 2014, 2016 or 2018			-
<b>Age</b>				
18-24	12	15	15	18
25-34	12	20	21	11
35-44	8	16	17	13
45-54	17	18	16	19
55-64	12	12	12	11
65-74	38	20	10	14
75+			8	14

D1. Which of the following age brackets do you belong to?  
 D2. Do you identify as being...?  
 Base: All respondents (2016 n=340, 2018 n=803; 2020 n=802)  
 †Options added in 2020

# WORK STATUS



	2014 % (n=340)	2016 % (n=340)	2018 % (n=803)	2020 % (n=802)
<b>Working status</b>				
Working full time	Not asked in 2014	89	39	34
Working part time			17	14
Retired		4	23	29
Student		4	9	12
Unemployed		3	5	6
Engaged in home duties		1	7	4
Refused		-	1	1

# MAIN LANGUAGE SPOKEN



	2014 % (n=340)	2016 % (n=340)	2018 % (n=803)	2020 % (n=802)
Main Language Spoken				
English			90	86
Cantonese/Mandarin			1	6
Korean			-	1
Hindi			1	1
Arabic (incl. Lebanese)			1	1
Indonesian			<1	1
Other			6	5
		Not asked in 2014 or 2016		

# SUMMARY



Similar to previous years, the majority felt that it was important to have the right to access government information and half were interested in accessing all types of information listed.

The majority also felt that allowing public access to information used to inform government decisions and processes was important.

Almost three in five were aware of their the right to access information held by at least one of the government agencies listed, which was similar to 2018.

The proportion of respondents who felt they would access information held by agencies by contacting the agency or the IPC decreased in 2020 while incidence of planning to search the internet, go to the agency website and consult an MP increased.

Most had not considered or tried to access information from any of the agencies listed.

The majority of those who attempted to access information were fully or partially successful. However success was lower amongst applications to ministers and staff as well as state owned corporations.

14% of respondents felt that the best thing the government could do to assist with information requests would be to raise awareness of the right to access information.

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NSW Community Attitudes to  
Information Access 2020

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