

OGP UK 2011 National Action Plan – Self Assessment Report

- **Introduction/background**

- **The UK Government's Commitment to Transparency**

The UK was one of the eight founding members of the Open Government Partnership (OGP) and in September 2011 at the OGP Official Launch endorsed an Open Government Declaration and a National Action Plan (*Annex A*). We remain strongly committed to these principles in our international engagement, and we continue to work to foster a global culture of Open Government that empowers and delivers for Citizens.

Since that launch an additional 50 countries have committed to the principles of the OGP, working alongside Civil Society Organisations all over the world.

In September 2012, the UK took over from Brazil as the lead co-chair of the OGP and published a strategy that highlighted our priority areas for the year ahead (*Annex B*).

After almost two years' involvement in the Open Government Partnership, and some three years since the last General Election at which the UK Government embarked on active policy of transparency, it is now time to reflect on our progress. We know that we have much to be proud of and believe the UK today is a more open place than it was three years ago. Yet we will not shirk from critically assessing our progress – to do so would run against the very spirit of transparency we are seeking to promote. Progress to date has been strong but we would fool ourselves if we thought that this journey was anywhere near completion. We look forward to welcoming the Independent Reporting Mechanism's report this autumn.

- **Summary of Achievements**

Since the publication of its National Action Plan, the UK has forged ahead with both its domestic and international transparency agenda. In a relatively short space of time the UK has positioned itself as one of the world leaders in open data and transparency. Our objectives are:

- ***Making government more accountable*** - publishing vast amounts of public sector spend data, such as contracts information and staff salaries, so the public can hold us to account for our performance;

- **Better delivery of public services** - using data to identify best practice, encourage providers to improve productivity and quality, root out waste and malpractice, and help citizens make more informed choices; and
- **Social and economic growth** - using data as a raw material to spur economic growth by giving businesses data to develop innovative products and services, opening up new information marketplaces.

Our transparency achievements include:

- Developing and updating a single source, data.gov.uk from which all public data can be accessed and which now holds over 40,000 files; developing tools so data is available in a variety of open formats.
- Regularly publishing data that allows citizens to hold government to account over spend, resource and progress - for example:
 - All new central government contracts and tenders worth over £10,000 placed on a single website
 - Placing DFID international development projects over £500 online
 - Publishing all items of government spend over £25,000
 - Publishing street-level crime data to allowing the public to see what crime has been reported on their streets. With over 47m hits since inception the site has been developed to show the outcome for each reported crime, including movement through the justice system;
 - Publishing an Open Data White Paper that details a strategy for UK government to ensure all aspects of the public sector are open to scrutiny and can be accessed by citizens, businesses and civil society alike;
 - Developing and using Public Data Principles so data is not only timely and high quality, but is also in the most accessible and open formats;
 - Developing and publishing an ICT strategy that supports the Public Data Principles and that establishes core requirements for future government ICT;
 - Working directly with developers and users of data to enable the release of the most valuable data;
- Focusing on embedding a digital-by-default approach within UK government and public services through the work of the Government Digital Service;
- Launching gov.uk, a single domain for government information and services;

- **Scope of the self-assessment report**

This document aims to update on progress. It will also demonstrate how our transparency agenda has been evolving in the past two years, taking into account new approaches without deviating from our beliefs and principles.

Annex C gives a detailed account of the level at which each commitment has been fulfilled and how. There will be a description of lessons learned and plans for the future. In addition, we have highlighted where commitments to openness and transparency were either not captured in the plan or were subsequently committed to.

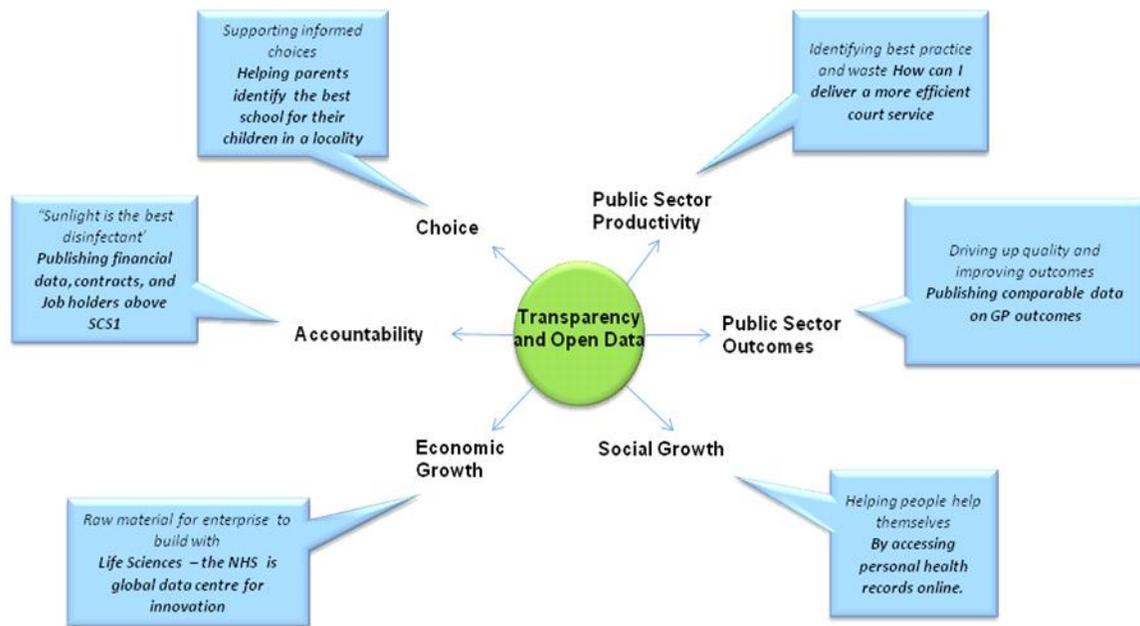
One reflection from this assessment process is that the initial national action plan was just one dimension of the transparency work across the UK government. Further commitments to transparency have been made to ensure the agenda moves forward and that all aspects of transparency and open data work are taken into account.

- **The UK involvement in OGP**

A commitment to transparency is central to the UK Government's policy agenda. As Prime Minister, David Cameron, wrote in a letter to Cabinet in July 2011:

"...transparency is at the heart of our agenda for Government. We recognise that transparency and open data can be a powerful tool to help reform public services, foster innovation and empower citizens. We also understand that transparency can be a significant driver of economic activity..."

Every department and all Arm's Length Bodies, share responsibility for the Government's drive to make public sector organisations more accountable to citizens. Much has been achieved since we began opening up central Government and the wider public sector, changing the relationship between the citizen and state by giving people access to data that matters to them. Greater transparency enables accountability, improves choice, increases public service productivity and quality, and encourages social and economic growth.



Another benefit has been to make the processes for driving progress transparent. We publish the minutes of the Public Sector Transparency Board and other sector specific boards, (both in traditional form and using interactive new media such as blogs and tweets); secondly, releasing guides and coding to assist other countries developing open data agendas. Open source coding sits at the heart of the UK agenda, with all coding for its open data portal and corresponding tools available for others to use or develop further.

It has been remarkable to see how much the OGP has grown and developed in just over 18 months, but we have even greater expectations and the organisation, which has widened significantly in a short time, now needs to deepen. By the end of our co-chairmanship we expect to have:

- Further raised the profile and prestige of the OGP;
 - Guided the establishment of the Partnership as a sustainable association with clear objectives, and effective supporting mechanisms; and
 - Enhanced engagement with governments, multilateral institutions, civil society organisations and the private sector.
- **Re-affirmation of belief in the values and principles of the partnership**

Two years on from the OGP's establishment, we want to take the opportunity to re-affirm the Government's strong belief in its principles and values, enshrined in the

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Convention Against Corruption, and other applicable international instruments related to human rights and good governance.

We confirm our commitments to work with others to:

- Increase the availability of information about governmental activities;
- Support civic participation;
- Implement the highest standards of professional integrity throughout our administrations;
- Increase access to new technologies for openness and accountability.

- **The Process**

- **How the plan was developed and choice of the OGP “Grand Challenges”**

The UK’s National Action Plan, published in September 2011, was the product of a wider Transparency Strategy for government, which was intended to be particularly challenging and stretching, to reflect our OGP commitments.

The Cabinet Office published its Open Data Consultation on 4th August 2011 setting out proposals for the government’s Transparency and Open Data Strategy. The consultation made a series of proposals aimed at establishing a culture of openness and transparency in public services. As a result, the focus of UK action fell on the OGP “Grand Challenges” of “Improving Public Services” and “More Effectively Managing Public Resources”.

- **The Commitments**

The commitments were formed in three areas

- Open Data (Consultation)
- Overseas development aid
- ICT Strategy

The UK National Action Plan Open Data commitments aimed to build on this government's established approach to deliver the following high level outcomes:

- accountability
- informed choices
- improved outcomes and quality
- productivity in key services through informed comparison
- transformation of social relationships – empowering individuals and communities
- dynamic economic growth

- **Level of public consultation/Civil Society Engagement**

The proposed approach was about creating a 'pull' (a right to data) and a 'push' (a presumption of publication). The public consultation lasted three months and asked for the public's views on:

- How we might enhance a 'right to data', establishing stronger rights for individuals, businesses and others to obtain data from public service providers;
- How to set transparency standards that enforce this right to data;
- How public service providers might be held to account for delivering open data;
- How we might ensure collection and publication of the most useful data;
- How we might make the internal workings of government and the public sector more open; and
- How far there is a role for government to stimulate enterprise and market making in the use of open data.

There were 247 written responses to the consultation and a further 217 online comments via data.gov.uk. Across the responses, there was widespread support for transparency and open data, though there were divergent views on how 'Open Government' might be realised.

The Cabinet Office Transparency Team published a government response to the consultation in January 2012. A formal response was provided in the form of an Annex in the Open Data White Paper, [Making Open Data Real Consultation \(August 2011\)](#)

Amongst the success stories:

Commitments to High Value Open Datasets to support Growth

In Autumn 2011, as part of the Chancellor's Autumn Statement, the UK Government made a series of world-leading commitments to open up public sector data to make travel easier, healthcare better and create significant growth for industry and jobs in the UK. The aim was to boost investment in medical research and in digital technology in the UK, including in many small and medium sized enterprises. These measures were specifically focused on:

- Improving medical knowledge and practice with a world-first linked-data service to allow healthcare impacts to be tracked, improve medical practice and put the UK in a prime position for research investment;
- Making business logistics and commuting more efficient through new releases of data planned on the real-time running of trains and buses across Britain and data on almost every road in Britain for the first time, including road works;
- Allowing entrepreneurs to develop applications for business and consumers using the largest volume of open, free high quality weather data in the world along with house prices at address level.

Opening up Core Reference Data

In March 2012, the UK Government published the terms of reference for new organisations that ensure the release of open data from some of the most well respected data producing organisations: the Met Office, Ordnance Survey, Companies House and Land Registry. The roles were split between the Public Data Group (PDG) as provider of high value data to Government, and the Data Strategy Board (DSB) as commissioner. The DSB also receives advice on data that should be released with expert advice provided by the Open Data User Group (ODUG). The ODUG has already argued for the release of certain core reference datasets, and has shown the benefits of releasing these as Open Data.

A world-leading Open Data White Paper

The UK Government published an Open Data White Paper in July 2012. The White Paper set out how government could achieve a transparent society through enhanced access (to data), building trust (amongst citizens) as well as improving access to meaningful and re-usable data. The paper outlined plans to ensure that the protection of people's privacy would remain paramount as government published more data. A privacy expert, Dame Fiona Caldicott, has been appointed to the Public Sector Transparency Board. The paper also detailed how government could make better use of the data we hold. It outlined how we can make progress in both breaking down unnecessary barriers and creating new ways of working in order to deliver more efficient and effective public services.

Comprehensive Open Data Strategies across central government

Published in June 2012, The Open Data Strategies for each main government department, set out, for the first time, how Departments will embed transparency and place a presumption to publish at the heart of their business activity.

Each strategy covered five main areas of focus, including the release of anonymised public datasets; where relevant, individual access to secure personal records (e.g. GP records); and, greater use and publication of customer insight data. Together with steps to improve data quality – vital for ensuring the success of Open Data – and increased engagement with data users/reusers, the Open Data Strategies are a significant first step towards truly open government.

The world's first Open Data Institute

In October 2011 the Government committed to provide £2m of funding annually over the next five years to an Open Data Institute (ODI), to be matched by an equivalent amount of funding from outside government.

The ODI is a global first. It works with data owners and data users/consumers to stimulate the publication and use of open data as well as to deliver training across all sectors to increase capability. It is independent and not-for-profit.

DfID: Transparency in International Development

The UK Department for International Development came first out of 72 organisations in Publish What You Fund's 2012 Aid Transparency Index. In addition, DFID have introduced the Aid Transparency Guarantee: ensuring that money spent in development aid is published in significantly more details so it is fully transparent to citizens both in the UK and in developing countries.

- **Challenges**

One of the main criticisms of the UK government agenda from civil society groups has been the tendency for the transparency agenda to focus on “Open Data”, rather than a broader definition of Open Government. For this reason, our new National Action Plan takes a wider view of transparency and its role in driving social and economic growth.

Until recently the transparency agenda has been centrally driven. This has produced high profile results but with some weaknesses – for example the inability to accurately assess which releases would have the greatest impact on growth.

The Public Accounts Committee recently undertook an investigation of the transparency policy. A number of the committee’s recommendations have already been taken up by Cabinet Office and are being built into future policy development plans, for example:

- **Improving data quality:** the re-launch of Data.Gov.uk saw a vastly improved user interface alongside better presentation of data. All departments agreed to a minimum format standard as part of the Open Data White paper; most are now adhering to it. The Public Data Principles also provide the foundations for improving data quality;
- **Understanding the cost and benefits:** Part of the Open Data Institute’s remit is to also look at this issue;
- **Understanding the impact on economic growth:** The Data Strategy Board has undertaken a review led by its Chair, Stephan Shakespeare, and will shortly be publishing its findings, including an independently commissioned report on understanding the impact of open data and transparency on the economy;
- **Concerns that ‘commercial confidentiality’ will be used as reason for non-publication:** Changes to the procurement processes are being driven centrally and a transparency clause is now included in contractual terms as standard. Further work is being done to open up transparency around grants, in particular to civil society organisations so taxpayers can ‘follow their pounds’;
- **Creating a level playing field in terms of transparency:** A number of the original PM commitments were only applied by core government departments. This was done to get the process right before we widened the scope to other government organisations. Some organisations are still exempt from publication, in particular trading funds which compete

with private sector organisations. Publishing requirements are likely to expand further.

Despite some specific criticisms, the PAC's report supported the government's overall agenda. The issues raised had already been recognised by the Government and the report has helped shape the agenda, giving sharper focus to areas that require greater attention.

One of the key challenges is to ensure progress with the same pace we have achieved since 2010. The success of an agenda based on growth depends both on access to open data and for the data to be used (and citizens to benefit from it).

Government needs to better understand the needs of users, rather than just focusing on the release of data. This requires a shift from the current practise of 'pushing' from the centre. First steps in this direction have been made through the Open Data Institute and the Open Data User Group. In addition to data releases, we must recognise that there are core skills required to create innovative ways of using the data. ODI's remit includes incubation of these skills for established and start up companies/individuals to create new value to the data being released.

- **Conclusions**

We are proud of how far the UK government has come in a relatively short space of time. A key ingredient of our success has been strong political leadership from the start and recognition that open data is a valuable untapped resource.

Over the past two years the Government has worked hard to secure our global position as a leader in the open government agenda. Yet being at the forefront of such a challenging agenda carries risks: the most challenging aspect has been maintaining the balance between progress and an awareness of the potential pressures transparency can put on government organisations. Key to mitigating these pressures are strong central guidance and support for organisations to reduce the manual intervention required in each release. The creation of the transparency governance structure has also been instrumental in keeping the agenda moving by factoring in the resources and limitations of each department, to ensure that data publication is achievable by all.

Further pressures are added when looking at the free release of data that has previously been charged for. This is commonly core data that provides underlying support to a far

wider range of other datasets, for example, ordnance survey information and street address information. The Data Strategy Board and Public Data Group were formed to look at this particular issue. Through evidence gathering exercises it will be determined how and under what terms this high value data is released. The ODI will also feed into this process to ensure that the data can be released under the best possible terms for the user.

Following the publication of the action plan, a coalition of civil society organisations drafted a paper setting out their views on the plan (*available at:* <http://www.opengovernment.org.uk/civil-society-perspectives-on-uk-national-action-plan/>)

Their two main criticisms were:

- The plan was too much/only focused on Open Data
- The UK Government did not engage with CSOs as effectively as they wished

As well as these points we have received much positive feedback. At home for example, the users' community in particular has appreciated the opportunities provided by our strategy of Open Data release. Internationally, many governments, both OGP participants and non-participants, have sent delegations to London to learn from our experience.

The Cabinet Office Transparency Team has introduced a new approach for the development of the next action plan by taking engagement and consultation to a higher level. Officials from the Cabinet Office and other government departments meet weekly with civil society at the Open Data Institute, working side by side to co-create our next National Action Plan with developers, users, businesses and civil society organisations.

National Action Plans are live and developing documents that demonstrate how the process of opening up government is a journey. So, while we formally close the 2011 NAP and transition into the new NAP, we also look forward to receiving our first Independent Reporting Mechanism report and commit to working alongside our domestic and international partners to implement its recommendations; making changes to the new NAP as necessary to ensure that we are always moving forward with our agenda.

- **Next steps**

This self-assessment report has been open for public consultation for two weeks and is now published on www.data.gov.uk, on the [Cabinet Office website](#) and on www.opengovernment.org.uk and on www.opengovpartnership.org.

This report was met favorably as we only received very few comments during the consultation period. A number of these have been incorporated in this final report; others will be addressed separately, through the civil society portal where they were made (www.opengovernment.org.uk) and will be made available to the IRM.

As previously indicated, the UK Government started working a few months ago to develop the new National Action Plan with a number of civil society organisations. The new plan will be published in draft in the next few days, to ensure a seamless transition between the past, the present and the future.

The publication of a draft of the new plan will be followed by a much wider engagement process to ensure that the final document, which will be ready by the end of October 2013, will be the result of a more participative and effective consultation.