



UK OPEN
GOVERNMENT
CIVIL SOCIETY NETWORK

Kevin Keith
Chair of the UK Open Government Network
Email: KevJKeith@gmail.com
Tel: +44 7400 729 841

Co-Chairs of the Criteria and Standards Committee
Open Government Partnership

By email: jaimemercado@opengovpartnership.org, paul.braithwaite@opengovpartnership.org

October 2022

Dear Lucy McTernan, Civil Society Co-Chair and Government of Germany, Government Co-Chair

On the 2nd of August 2022, the Chief Executive Officer of the Open Government Partnership, Sanjay Pradhan, wrote to the former minister with responsibility for open government, Heather Wheeler MP, informing her that the UK government had failed to meet criteria for the production of a National Action Plan (NAP) for a third successive time. The letter stated:

...the Procedural Review protocols outline that if a country acts contrary to process on numerous occasions and in different ways, the Criteria and Standards Subcommittee (C&S) may, in consultation with the Support Unit, recommend that the country be designated as 'inactive' in OGP. The Criteria and Standards Subcommittee will review and discuss the UK's participation status in OGP when it meets in October 2022...

In advance of the C&S meeting in October, the UK Open Government Network (UK OGN) hosted two events (October 5th and 7th) to enable interested civil society organisations and individuals to input into discussions via this letter.

The events focussed on the NAP process, as any recommendation by the C&S subcommittee would be within these parameters, and not widely held concerns with regards to the UK government's application of open government principles.

Strengths and weaknesses in the original NAP were discussed alongside findings from the Independent Reporting Mechanism, and the three appended commitments: Diversity and Inclusion, Aid Transparency, and Freedom of Information. Positive comments were made about the level of financial support the UK government provides to OGP and efforts to append commitments to the original NAP (although not all were satisfied with the content of those commitments).

The events concluded with an anonymous vote on what the UK's designated status should be, with a majority in both meetings (65% of the total attendees) agreeing the UK should not be declared inactive but should agree to time bound criteria, defined as:

Within six months (before mid-April 2023) the UK government must, as part of the NAP process:

- ***Convene a working group of civil society organisations and government officials to advance work on improving public standards and accountability as per the civil society request for the current NAP.***
- ***Rebuild trust between civil society and government through a significant public statement (or other action) emphasising commitment to the NAP process.***
- ***Publish a 12-month timetable of multi-stakeholder meetings focussing on implementation.***

Failure to meet these criteria should see the UK government asked to leave the OGP Steering Committee in addition to being designated 'inactive.'

Only 12% of attendees at the events felt the UK government should immediately be designated 'inactive.' This was due to the phrase itself being unhelpful as governments with this designation can remain active. Furthermore, some questioned how the UK government would respond to an 'inactive' designation: redouble efforts or retract support and reallocate resources away from open government initiatives? A significant number also felt removal of the UK government from the Global Steering Group would have more impact than being declared 'inactive.'

Yet all felt this had to be a turning point.

The UK government was a founder of the Open Government Partnership (OGP) just over a decade ago. At times it has led the world in areas such as open data, beneficial ownership, and anti-corruption. The UK OGN has contributed towards this leadership too, bringing civil society into the heart of the NAP process for over a decade.

Yet never did the UK OGN imagine the NAP process in the UK would lose credibility to the extent that there are fears about future engagement levels. Never did the UK OGN consider it would be hosting events on whether the UK should be designated inactive. And we hope, through the actions recommended in this letter, that it never will have to again.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "K. Keith." The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Kevin Keith
Chair of the UK Open Government Network,
on behalf of the UK Open Government Network Steering Committee