

## **Open letter from ODUG to the new Government June 2015**

The Open Data User Group (ODUG), a Cabinet Office sponsored group, has worked for the last three years with a remit to represent and promote the interests of open data consumers at the heart of Government. We have a proven record of success in bringing evidence-based debate to the table, by talking to data consumers, representing their views and helping deliver open data sets.

We would like to see a further strengthening of the process for requesting open data sets from Government (Data Request Mechanism) and continued support for small projects which can release new open data sets (Release of Data Fund).

Following the recent appointment of a Government Chief Data Officer, and the formation of a new Government, we would like to highlight the key issues facing users and producers of Open Data during the new Parliament:

### **Data as a public asset**

Delivering the concept of 'Public Data as an Asset' requires continuous, open, free at the point of use access to key datasets to deliver transparency, the more efficient design and delivery of public services, citizen engagement and opportunities for innovation and business growth.

We believe that as much public data as possible should be made open, for use and re-use, free at the point of access, and that delivering a National Information Infrastructure (NII) (<http://odug.org.uk/national-information-infrastructure-nii/>) should be a key priority to deliver the potential of open data for transparency, social and economic benefit. The United Kingdom leads international effort through the Open Government Partnership, yet on closer inspection some of the claimed successes in the UK deliver less than they appear to.

### **Establish clear data standards and principles for sharing**

We need to develop canonical, standardised data sources that can easily be shared. Public sector bodies often adopt a 'data ownership' mindset that prevents data sharing, duplicates effort, drives up costs, hinders service delivery and stifles innovation.

### **Data privacy should not be a barrier to opening up more data**

Clarifications on data privacy and protection of the individual are required to encourage public confidence in the use and management of personal data. For example individuals can be at risk of identification through the publication of registers and the linking of datasets. However there are solutions to these challenges and privacy is not a reason to prevent the opening up of data. Data privacy issues need to be properly addressed at a policy level, but privacy itself is not a reason to prevent the government from making further progress with the open data agenda.

The Government should focus on the following activities in order to maintain the UK's status as a world leader in Open Data and to realise the potential of open data for the United Kingdom:

### **We need a skills development programme**

The Government should support a comprehensive education programme across the public sector to improve understanding of data issues. The range of skills covered should include: privacy, publishing, data quality, data sourcing, reuse, APIs, data licensing, data analytics and interpretation.

### **Data reuse should be the norm not the exception**

The public sector should work towards publishing open data in real time, rather than after long publication delays, and consume this data itself. This will improve timeliness and accuracy of the data whilst also building transparency and public confidence.

### **More work is needed to understand the needs of data consumers and curators**

Data consumers should be at the heart of the open data policy. Becoming more responsive to all user needs will allow Government to create better services, improve the efficiency of the existing ones, allow new businesses to flourish and will extract greater value from the data through greater use.

### **A clear plan and structure within government for delivering genuine progress**

It needs to be clear where responsibilities for Open Data and data more widely lie across Government and the wider public sector. User engagement is essential. ODUG or a similar government sponsored forum should continue.

### These would be our priorities for the next three years:

- The government should put plans in place to deliver the National Information Infrastructure (NII), with a clear roadmap and responsibilities, a strong focus on Open Core Reference Data and with as many datasets as possible is available under the Open Government License (OGL). In particular the Government should deliver:
  - An open Address Register for the United Kingdom
  - An open register of public bodies
  - Further releases of Office for National Statistics (ONS) and other essential public data
- There should be an end to the sale of public data assets to third parties for private profit.
- We would like to see a further strengthening of the process for requesting open data sets from Government (Data Request Mechanism) and continued support for small projects which can release new open data sets (Release of Data Fund).

The Open Data User Group (2012-2015)

View our three-year archive at <http://odug.org.uk>