



Foreign &  
Commonwealth  
Office

## Open Data Strategy Refresh

Author	E. Stewart
Department	Transparency Unit
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## Introduction

In April 2012 FCO published an Open Data Strategy outlining its' approach to Transparency and Open Data and its aspirations regarding future publication and implementation. This document is an update to that approach.

## Vision

FCO sees openness and transparency as an integral part of delivering first class foreign policy for the UK and achieving its core objectives of:

- Safeguarding Britain's national interest by countering terrorism and weapons proliferation and working to reduce conflict;
- Building Britain's prosperity by increasing exports and investments, opening markets, ensuring access to resources and promoting sustainable growth;
- Supporting British nationals around the world through modern and effective consular services

Transparency facilitates improved accountability, drives efficiency in the services we provide as well as supporting the growth agenda.

Open data is the commodity which makes this possible. The FCO adopts the ODI definition of Open data as stated in the ODI Open Definition version 1.1 and summarised as:

***A piece of data or content is open if anyone is free to use, reuse, and redistribute it — subject only, at most, to the requirement to attribute and/or share-alike.***

The FCO holds and generates a variety of data in the course of its work which should be released subject to safeguarding Britain's national interest and is committed to constructively challenging staff to think creatively about publication and public engagement. The data we hold should be viewed as public data and used to drive prosperity and growth wherever possible. To facilitate this we are committed to ensuring that the data we publish is of a 3\* linked data standard or above.

## Digital Diplomacy

We are one of the few diplomatic services around the world to engage seriously and actively with digital and social media. We recognize that the impact of the communications revolution on our traditional 'core' business of diplomacy has been as profound as it has been for journalists, lobbyists and the wider public in the UK and globally. We will continue to build and develop in this area looking use these channels to constructively inform and challenge our policy formulation and facilitate the communities and voices we can consult hold dialogue with.

As the UK is conscious of the power of Transparency and its importance in bringing accountability, benchmarking and stimulating growth, it has made Transparency one of the pillars of the 2013 G8 summit. The FCO is playing a key part in this work which aims to:

- raise global standards so that more information is available - be it on land deals or oil and gas extraction contracts, for example through implementation of the Extractives Industries Transparency Initiative.

- making all government data more open and transparent so people can see how much governments are receiving in revenues, and how much of that money is being re-invested in the economy
- increase transparency in our aid flows, so those people in developing countries can hold their governments to account for spending the aid effectively, while those people who give generously can see the impact their money makes.

As such we recognise that as a department we (and our Arms Length Bodies) must demonstrate our own commitment to transparency and open data through the quality and standard of information we release.

This rationale can also be applied to the UK, which is currently chair of the Open Government Partnership alongside Indonesia since September 2012. Our vision for our chairmanship is to:

- Show that transparency drives prosperity, by demonstrating the value of open governance, inclusive development and citizen empowerment.
- Secure the foundations of the OGP as a globally recognised and respected international initiative
- Do more to communicate the opportunities that open government provides.
- Build on the unique working relationship between participating governments and Civil Society Organisations that is a fundamental facet of the OGP

## **Transparency Unit**

To drive this work we have established a dedicated Transparency Unit which will form one element of the Digital Transformation Unit designed to review and reform our processes and practises to make best use of modern digital channels and technology. This is a cultural change programme which recognises that greater openness is key to making the best use of digital technology.

The transparency unit will be accountable to, and supported by, the Transparency Steering Group chaired by the Transparency Champion and will provide direction and oversight of transparency within the department and the wider FCO family. It will constructively challenge staff to think creatively about publication and public engagement and drive the department to view the data it holds as public data (within the constraints of safeguarding Britain's national interest)

The Transparency unit will:

- Coordinate the release of data from across the FCO;
- Ensure that information is released in a consistent manner and meets a recognisable standard (3\* linked data or above wherever possible);
- Ensure compliance with the 2010, 2011 and subsequent Prime Ministerial Commitments on Transparency;

- Identify and work to release large routine public service data sets such as construction and maintenance of our overseas estate or official development assistance ;
- Develop and implement the FCO approach to My Data
- Ensure the release of satisfaction and experience data to improve user feedback on services (and services delivered);
- Respond to requests for data releases
- Work with FCO FOI and Parliamentary liaison units to ensure information released is in the appropriate format and is as accessible as possible.
- Identify and develop how FCO can contribute to the creation of 'dynamic information markets'
- Embed transparency in new processes and learning/training activities to continuously improve the effectiveness of existing publication processes and the quality of the information provided.
- Ensure that where applicable FCO Arms Length Bodies comply with the PM Commitments on Transparency create and implement their own Open Data strategy in conjunction with FCO.

## Big Data

FCO currently publishes all information required under the PM Transparency Commitments of 2010 & 2011. This includes:

- Energy Consumption
- New Contracts over £10,000
- New Tenders over £10,000
- Spend over £25k
- GPC over £500
- Names, Grades, Job titles and annual pay rates for senior Civil Servants in Pay Band 1
- Meetings with external organisations by Ministers Quarterly
- Overseas travel undertaken by FCO Ministers Quarterly
- Gifts given to Ministers in the FCO over the value of £140 Quarterly
- Exception to cross-Government moratoria on spend in the FCO Quarterly
- Names, Grades, Job titles and annual pay rates for senior Civil Servants with salaries above £150,000
- Organogram and staff pay data for FCO staff in the UK
- Non-consolidated performance related payments

In addition we will publish on an annual basis:

- The quarterly data summary of our Business Plan
- UK Consular assistance enquiries

Other big datasets which we will collate and publish are:

- Official Development Aid
- Performance information for our consular services
- Collated economic reporting & business information
- Historical data, including diplomatic service lists,
- Indexed research reports

- Geographical Information
- Consular service performance data

We will undertake and audit FCO data to produce an inventory of what data is held by FCO that is suitable for release. When complete this will form the basis of the FCO contribution to the National Information Infrastructure.

## **My Data**

FCO service delivery takes place through the Consular Services we provide. In the course of this work we acquire personal data and will investigate if this is a suitable for a mydata model. Details on how this will be achieved will be included in the Consular Digital Strategy which is currently under construction.

## **Creation of Dynamic Information Markets**

The release of open data feeds demand and FCO is committed to increasing the economic impact of existing public sector information and to releasing new public sector information to expand the market for this information. To understand how we can better deliver in this arena FCO will engage directly with data users to determine how we can develop the information we are releasing to meet their needs. We will look to do this through hack days, response to data requests, engagement with the ODI and in partnership with our colleagues across Whitehall.

In addition we will look at what other information we hold or generate and can release (such as collated Economic data or other analytical tools) which may contribute to information markets as well as ensuring our travel alert service (which has already been released as an RSS feed) is available more widely through the .gov.uk platform in different formats.

## **Open Standards & Data Quality**

FCO recognises that in releasing data it must be in a form and of a standard that facilitates reuse. As a result in releasing information it will adhere to the Open Standards Principles as articulated in the Government Open Standards Principles published in 2013:

1. We place the needs of our users at the heart of our standards choices
2. Our selected open standards will enable suppliers to compete on a level playing field
3. Our standards choices support flexibility and change
4. We adopt open standards that support sustainable cost
5. Our decisions on standards selection are well informed
6. We select open standards using fair and transparent processes
7. We are fair and transparent in the specification and implementation of open standards

In doing this we will work to ensure that all data we release will be of 3\* linked data standard or above and that all other information we release will be freely available online. We will not use bespoke platforms or software or charge for our information.

## **Information Principles**

FCO recognises that within the course of its work it collects and manages a range of information much of which can be defined as data. In managing information FCO adheres to the Public Sector Information Principles:

1. Information is a Valued Asset
2. Information is managed
3. Information is fit for purpose
4. Information is standardised and linkable
5. Information is re-use
6. Public information is published
7. Citizens and Businesses can access information about themselves.