



House of Commons  
Public Administration Select  
Committee

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# Statistics and Open Data: Government Response to the Committee's Tenth Report of Session 2013-14

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**Fifth Special Report of Session 2014–15**

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## The Public Administration Select Committee (PASC)

The Public Administration Select Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the reports of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and the Health Service Commissioner for England, which are laid before this House, and matters in connection therewith, and to consider matters relating to the quality and standards of administration provided by civil service departments, and other matters relating to the civil service.

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### Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Catherine Tyack and Sian Woodward (Joint Clerks), Adam Fenn (Second Clerk), Sarah Taylor (Committee Specialist), Sarah Hawkswood (Senior Committee Assistant) and Jonathan Olivier-Wright (Web and Publications Assistant).

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# Fifth Special Report

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The Public Administration Select Committee (PASC) reported to the House on *Statistics and Open Data: Harvesting unused knowledge, empowering citizens and improving public services* in its Tenth Report of Session 2013-14, published on 17 March 2014. The Government Response was received on 31 July 2014 and is published as an Appendix below.

## Appendix: Government Response

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### Introduction

The Government welcomes the Public Administration Select Committee (PASC)'s report, *Statistics and Open Data: Harvesting unused knowledge, empowering citizens and improving public services*, published on 17<sup>th</sup> March, 2014. Although the Government has achieved a great deal, in a comparatively short amount of time, it agrees that there is still much to be done to take the agenda forward to achieve a real culture change across the public sector. The Government is also aware that much has changed since the publication of the Open Data White Paper in 2012.

### Background

The transparency and open data agenda has been a priority for this Government. The Prime Minister recognised and communicated the potential of open data to the Cabinet in a letter in May 2010, describing the three key benefits from the publication of Government's data in an open and accessible format. There is broad agreement that open data presents opportunities for improving accountability, through improving the visibility of Government and its structures, highlighting efficiencies in public services, whether through exposing services to feedback or being visible about where resource goes, and to stimulate economic growth through businesses built on open data.

Over the last four years the Government has made significant progress in this programme. The public facing website, [data.gov.uk](http://data.gov.uk), is a world leading data portal where citizens and businesses can access and download over 14,000 open datasets. The Government established the Open Data Institute (ODI), whose remit includes communicating the value of open data and incubating start up companies using open data. The UK is leading the way on the international stage having developed the first iteration of the [National Information Infrastructure](#) (NII), an early attempt to identify the Government's data assets with the greatest potential social and economic impact. The UK was one of the founding members of the Open Government Partnership (OGP) and has since developed, with Civil Society Organisations, two National Action Plans including 21 stretching and ambitious commitments in the [2013 iteration](#) to further open government and transparency in the UK.

The datasets released so far include details of Government spending and structures, school performance, and live transport data. The applications and tools built on these datasets are producing an ever increasing evidence base of these benefits being realised. More and more use cases are coming to light which allow departments to see the innovative and interesting ways their data is or could be used.

As the Committee recognised, progress on the transparency and open data agenda has been significant to date but as the understanding and appreciation of open data has grown so has the momentum on an international scale. Other Governments are learning lessons from the UK and following at a strong pace so it is imperative we build on our achievements to remain at the forefront of this agenda. To this end, the Government will be developing the next iteration of the NII and looking to incorporate service level agreements between open data owners and users. The Government will continue to ensure a continuous flow of open data and push for the release of priority datasets, such as the Prime Minister's ambitious commitment to implement a publicly accessible central registry containing company beneficial ownership data, supported by the expertise offered by the Open Data User Group (ODUG). It will also work with Local Authorities to highlight exemplar activity and facilitate the access to Local Authority data via data.gov.uk.

The Government welcomes both the recognition and the steers that the Committee provided and is keen to take the transparency and open data agenda further with demonstrable progress over the coming years.

The Government has set out detailed responses to each of the Committee's recommendations and key points below.

## Responses to recommendations

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### Barriers to accountability

**1. We recommend that the Government should adopt the twin-track approach to data release advocated by Stephan Shakespeare. Government should 'publish early even if imperfect', as well as being committed to a 'high quality core' (Paragraph 16)**

The Cabinet Office has implemented Stephan Shakespeare's twin track approach, although it should be noted that there are caveats that relate to the early release of data which feed in to Official Statistics so that they do not pre-empt publication. Through its departmental relationship function, it works with departments to secure the ongoing release of open data and has used the early development of the NII to facilitate discussions about the datasets that have been identified as being of the 'greatest importance' and can be considered part of a 'high quality core' for which we can develop a quality assessment framework.

The Cabinet Office recognises that there is more work to be done on the development of the NII to ensure that it is both usable and useful to those inside and outside Government. The NII was designed to be an iterative tool and the Cabinet Office has begun work on an open process to develop the next iteration. We aim to launch this by the end of 2014.

**2. We invite the Government to publish a clear list of open data, indicating when each data series became open in each case. (Paragraph 20)**

The Government has made significant progress in publishing datasets. Data.gov.uk is an open data catalogue of approximately 18,000 datasets, around 14,000 of which are already published. All published dataset entries on data.gov.uk include information about the date they were made openly available via data.gov.uk, theme, temporal coverage and the update frequency. With the exception of 'theme', which was a field added in October 2013, this information has been available on data.gov.uk since it was launched. The commitments set out in the NII narrative seeks to establish, ensure and improve the quality of the metadata about datasets so the provenance is clear.

## Procurement and Open Data

**3. We recommend that companies contracting with the Government to provide contracted or outsourced goods and services should be required to make all data open on the same terms as the sponsoring department. This stipulation should be included in a universal standard contract clause which should be introduced and enforced across Government from the beginning of the financial year 2015 - 16. (Paragraph 29)**

The Government accepts this statement in principle and is committed to transparency of public services that are delivered by external providers, to ensure that accountability is not lost when services are outsourced. We are mindful of the need to avoid over-burdening business, particularly SMEs. We are working with the Confederation of British Industry and other interested organisations to agree principles for greater transparency and provide guidance on their implementation. Building on the commitment in our OGP National Action Plan to enhance the scope, breadth and usability of published contractual data, our work with these interested organisations will aim to advance our ambition and set clear standards and expectations about publication across Government. As part of this work provisions in the Model Services Contract, published in January 2014, will be reviewed to ensure we are taking a more ambitious approach towards transparency and open data in government procurement.

## The right to data?

**4. The Government needs to recognise that the public has the inherent 'right to data', like Freedom of Information. The Government should clarify its policy and bring forward the necessary legislation, without delay. (Paragraph 38)**

The Government took steps to recognise the public's 'right to data' through section 102 of the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012, which was commenced on 1 September 2013 and accompanied by a Code of Practice. Work is now also underway to transpose Directive 2013/37/EU on the re-use of public sector information by July 2015 and widen further the re-usability of public sector information. Consultation and wider public engagement are planned for summer 2014; potential legislation on the implementation of the directive that follows, supported by tools and guidance, will be informed by the outcomes of that consultation.

## Increasing engagement

**5. The Government should adopt a star-rating system for engagement, as recommended by Involve, for measuring, and reporting to Parliament on, Departments' progress on increasing accountability through open data. The Government should expect Departments to set out plans to move towards Five Star Engagement for all their data releases. (Paragraph 56)**

The Government agrees with the Committee about the importance of public engagement with its data. To this end, data.gov.uk already adopts the principles of the five stars of data engagement in the following ways:

a) Be demand driven

We provide a data request process and a 'data value' feedback mechanism to inform publication based on demand.

b) Put data in context

We provide contextual metadata for datasets and the ability for publishers to point to further information across the web to expand or illustrate usage of the data from within the catalogue. We have also started to provide selected visualisations of some key datasets.

c) Support conversation around data

We provide user commenting for each dataset in the catalogue, as well as forums on data and blogs and actively engage, as time and resources permits on over 18,000 datasets, in the conversation.

d) Build capacity, skills and networks

We provide Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) to query the catalogue; forums to discuss data issues; a library of guidance on publication, usage and data management structures; and the data.gov.uk team are active participants and supporters of hacks and data projects across the UK, including helping setup other data portals at regional level.

e) Collaborate on data as a common resource

We provide users with mechanisms to discuss issues with a given dataset (and continue to strengthen functionality in this area) and work with the community at large to facilitate and support the creation of services based on open data, with a marketplace on data.gov.uk of over 300 apps using open data. We work with other organisations to build connectivity between data.gov.uk, its data and other data services.

In addition the Government recommends the use of the ODI's Open Data Certificates. The ODI incorporated the engagement rating into their certification process so there is already a means for measuring engagement with specific datasets. The NII commitments recommend that departments implement the adoption of the ODI Open Data Certificates, prioritising NII datasets in the first instance, but there is a longer term ambition for more comprehensive application of the certificates.

The feedback process, referenced above under the first star was designed to highlight the potential benefits of a dataset against the five criteria described in the NII narrative. However, there has not been a significant amount of feedback to date. The Government can see that there is more work to be done to increase active engagement and participation with its data in order to gain a clearer and better understanding of the opportunities and variety of use cases.

To that end, work is already underway to increase awareness and engagement with open data competitions taking place such as the Open Data Challenge Series and Ordnance Survey's GeoVation programme. There is also a growing effort to communicate the availability of public data to a wider audience with the recent 'Big Data – Open/Free data available for use by businesses', organised by the Big Innovation Centre and the Science and Technology and Facilities Council (STFC).

Engagement with data does not fall solely on the shoulders of the Government. We are keen to use our networks and mobilise existing communities to bring the power of open data to a wider audience. As more use cases come to light these can then be used to articulate the benefits of open data back to Government. Government is another community where open data needs to increase its reach and it will be through highlighting the case studies and opportunities that enables the Cabinet Office to do this.

## General conclusions on accountability

**6. There should be a presumption that restrictions on Government data releases should be abolished. It may be necessary to exempt certain datasets from this presumption, but this should be on a case-by-case basis, to provide for such imperatives as the preservation of national security or the protection of personal privacy. (Paragraph 58)**

The Government accepts this recommendation in principle, with certain caveats. The UK was instrumental in the design of the [G8 Open Data Charter](#)<sup>1</sup> which has 'open data by default' as a first principle. The Charter has been adopted by the G8 countries and the UK Government is encouraging further adoption across OGP countries. However it will take time to fully embed this approach. The policy and principle are in place so it is now a question of inspiring culture and behaviour change and being mindful of situations where open data by default is not straightforward.

As acknowledged in PASC's recommendation, there are important caveats to the principle of open data by default, particularly but not exclusively relating to personal privacy and national security. In many cases anonymisation techniques mean data can still be released while still providing protection to the individual citizens (e.g. crime data is grouped at the level of a few streets to prevent victims, of, for example, domestic violence, being identified). Additionally, the Government will always ensure that open data releases do not breach data protection laws. Similarly for Official Statistics there may be restrictions on the level of data available and access to ensure that there is no disclosure of personal or commercial information.

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1 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/open-data-charter/g8-open-data-charter-and-technical-annex>

In addition, there are costs associated with the release of data as an open resource and these need to be taken into account. These may be direct in terms of the time and resources involved in collection, collation, cleaning and publication, or indirect in the form of lost revenue which would otherwise have come from purchasers or licensors who would have previously paid. Whilst charging for data is in tension with the open data objective, we are still looking for opportunities to go further in terms of accessibility and open release, with a particular emphasis on core reference data. However, it does need to be recognised that where data has traditionally been charged for, and systems and services built upon it, the data owner will need to find an alternative source of revenue if they relinquish that stream, and this can pose challenges. It will always be important for the Government to balance taxpayers' interests whilst supporting potential economic growth.

**7. The Cabinet Office must give a much higher priority to ensuring that the most interesting and relevant data is made open, and that the release mechanisms encourage people to use it and, where appropriate, hold Government and local authorities to account. Beginning in April 2014, targets should be set for the release of totally new Government datasets - not the republishing of existing ones. (Paragraph 59)**

As stated above, the Government has released a significant number of datasets. Over 3,000 new datasets have been published since the publication of the NII and the Cabinet Office will be pressing for the release of more datasets over the next 12 months. We have received positive feedback from open data users about the volume of data we have released but now increasingly the major priority is to improve the quality of the data released, alongside increasing the volume. To address this, the Cabinet Office is already using the commitments in the NII, for instance to ensure the quality and provenance of a dataset and design processes for identifying new datasets, and the second principle of the G8 Open Data Charter, 'Quality and Quantity', as well as convening a practitioners' working group to improve data quality.

In addition, the Release of Data and Breakthrough Funds, which provide an opportunity for public sector bodies to bid for funding to support the release of high value data, will help ensure that there are further levers to ensure that data of value is released.

To ensure that the Government is releasing the data that is wanted and needed, the data.gov.uk team have been working to redesign the way data requests are managed. This will allow the Cabinet Office to prioritise, manage and have complete visibility of each data request's progress so it can ultimately be brought to a conclusion by the ODUG. This will be a more efficient way to refer data requests to departments, and to track communications between the Cabinet Office and departments. Departments will have easy access to the requests they are responsible for, offering quick two-way communication in one system, which will ultimately give rise to improved transparency and accountability. The new system will be launched in the summer 2014.

## Charging for data

**8. A radical new approach is needed to the funding of Government open data. Charging for some data may occasionally be appropriate, but this should become the exception rather than the rule. A modest part of the cost to the public of statutory registrations should be earmarked for ensuring that the resultant data - suitably**

**anonymised if necessary - can become open data. Data held by the Land Registry and car registration data held by DVLA and, indeed, Care.data held by the NHS are among relevant examples. (Paragraph 75)**

Charging for data is already the exception rather than the rule. The Government has adopted the principle of ‘open data by default’, as described in the G8 Open Data Charter, and the vast majority of Government data assets are or will be available openly, and in all cases, the Government is exploring ways to make improve the accessibility of the data.

However, there are exceptions where, as the Committee acknowledges, charging for access is appropriate, but any changes to those charges should be considered and judged on a case by case basis. As discussed above against recommendation 6, there are instances of tension between open data and organisations whose revenue is dependent on its data and there is a need to balance taxpayers’ interests with potential medium term economic growth. Each data holding organisation’s approach needs to be considered in the context of its own circumstance.

There are organisations who charge for the re-use or licensing of their data, but they are able to release a subset or all of the raw data for free. The data that is charged for might have had some value added work done to it or consist of the full dataset. This approach is currently taken by a range of bodies including the Land Registry, Met Office, Ordnance Survey and the Environment Agency.

Some organisations have statutory charges associated with their data. In these cases, it is not possible to increase the fee, or set aside a part of it, to cover the release of the data as it would have taxation implications. Instead, where possible, the Government is taking advantage of the new opportunities presented by technological developments to change the way information is made available, such as making data available as a by-product. For example, Companies House is undertaking a complete overhaul of its web services, to create an open register available to all.

There are also examples where the Government recognises that there is significant economic potential in enabling the release of or better access to the data. In those instances, the Government has deemed it appropriate to compensate an organisation for the cost of releasing that data. To this end the Government contributes £20 million to support the release of Ordnance Survey’s suite of open data products.

## **The value of core reference data**

**9. The sale of PAF with the Royal Mail was a mistake. The Government must never make a similar mistake. Public access to public sector data must never be sold or given away again. (Paragraph 89)**

The Government recognises that the Postcode Address File is an integral part of Royal Mail’s operations and understands the importance of access to the data for innovation. While ensuring that PAF remains in Royal Mail’s ownership, we have secured benefits for data users that will open up new opportunities for growth by increasing the number of free look ups for individuals, improving licensing conditions for micro businesses and charities, and through simplifying the pricing structure.

The Government notes the Committee's advice on the ownership of public data. This will remain a key consideration in future policy decisions about public datasets.

### Ensuring fair access

**10. There is concern about the attitudes of the research councils, and academic researchers in general, to Government data. The Government needs to make the case for giving privileged academic access to the new Government data, when it should be more widely available. It has, after all, been funded by taxpayers. (Paragraph 93)**

The Government's first priority is to open data; where there are sensitivities we recognise them, for instance around personal data, but it is often the case that a sub-set of this kind of data may be released. In the instances where there is greater sensitivity, the data might only be shared amongst trusted third parties, such as the academic and research community. However, this does not fall under the remit of the open data agenda.

The Government notes the committee's concern about the attitudes of the research councils, and academic researchers to Government data. In accordance with the report of the Administrative Data Task Force, the Administrative Data Research Network (ADRN) will help researchers carry out social and economic research of benefit to society. There will be safeguards in place to ensure that only accredited researchers are accessing the data for accredited projects in safe settings. Moreover, the data accessed by researchers will be de-identified, i.e. all personal information is removed.

The longer term potential for the business sector to also benefit from access to such Government held data is recognised. With all of the appropriate safeguards, future access by business to anonymised Government held data to inform commercial decisions and improve the effectiveness of business investments will be considered. However, first priority for Government must be to demonstrate the security, robustness and usefulness of such data and to realise its potential benefits for its own policy making purposes.

### General conclusions on open data and economic growth

**11. Core data needs to be released fast, and above all, free so that businesses can use it along with other data to make progress. To this end the Government should in particular pledge that the data held by GeoPlace LLP, a company owned by Ordnance Survey and the Local Government Association, will remain in the public ownership. (Paragraph 95)**

The Government strongly agrees that data needs to be released fast and, wherever possible, for free so that it can support and generate opportunities for economic and social growth. Departments are all making progress in releasing data with this benefit in mind. In particular, the Department for Transport have gone further than releasing their own data and have worked with private sector providers to publish their data in an open format which has contributed to the rise in transport applications. The Government notes the recommendation on the ownership of GeoPlace LLP. Any possible change of ownership would follow a full consultation.

**12. Departments should be required to list all the surveys conducted and administrative systems in operation to allow the public to see what data might be produced, and should provide to Parliament and the public a prompt and clear account of all revenues from data sale. (Paragraph 96)**

With regards to new datasets created as a result of surveys, both the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and the wider Government Statistical Service (GSS) are committed to transparency in its data collection, and is keen to maximise the use of all data collected and outputs produced. To help achieve these aims a list of all surveys in operation is maintained on the ONS website.

With regards to new administrative datasets, one of the commitments in the NII requires departments to develop processes to identify when new datasets are produced. The ambition is that this activity will be broader than simply reviewing administrative systems as it will look at a range of sources of data collection. Departments are developing processes which meet their specific needs and will allow them to engage with data owners in their Arms Length Bodies.

The Government provided information on the revenue accrued by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and its Trading Funds from the sale of data as part of the Committee's evidence gathering. Data on data sales is not available for the whole of Government as there is not consistent financial reporting of this.

### **Missing opportunities to improve effectiveness**

**13. There is little evidence to suggest that the Government is consistently making the most of the opportunities to improve policy and performance via the use of its own data. Departments need to make full use of the records and information they possess to ensure they are running effectively. Opening up that data to other departments will boost the Government's evidence base and can improve policy making. The benefits of making data open include not just an increase in openness and accountability, but also the opportunity for outside experts to verify, and suggest improvements in the quality and accuracy of, the data itself. (Paragraph 103)**

The Government accepts this recommendation in principle and recognises that there are different tools and techniques to be deployed through a range of different initiatives. 'More digital' is a key theme of the Civil Service Reform Plan and the Civil Service Capabilities plan. Civil servants need to be equipped with the skills to deliver digital solutions and services. As such, departments have been running digital skills briefings and training sessions, targeted to their own services' needs. To complement this, the Government Digital Service (GDS) is working across Government to embed digital into each profession's curriculum. Digital is also being built into leadership development programmes for senior civil servants.

Specifically within the transparency area, departments are realising that open data is a resource that they can use. But there is still work to be done to gain further penetration into different policy areas within Whitehall departments to educate officials on the benefits and opportunities of open data.

The commitments in the NII already challenge departments to establish processes for reviewing the use cases of their data and the Cabinet Office is working with departments to increase understanding within them of how open data can support policy development. Open data training vouchers have also been made available to public servants so they can attend formal training (with either the ODI or the Open Knowledge Foundation).

The Government is undertaking an additional piece of work through to the end of 2014 to look at how it can gain better insights from its data to support policy making and operational decisions. We will be focusing on data science approaches in demonstrator projects, for example the Department for Communities and Local Government's analysis of the London Fire Brigade. In doing so we will make our work as open as possible so that others can see what we are doing, but will approach sharing of data between departments carefully.

Additionally there is a move towards open policy making where organisations such as the Foreign and Commonwealth Office are holding hackathons to facilitate innovative ideas for digital diplomacy or to addresses issues such as ending sexual violence in conflict. #Floodhack was the result of collaboration between Government organisations, including the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Environment Agency and private organisations to explore digital solutions to the flooding crisis. Within the Cabinet Office, a 'Code Club' has been established in conjunction with Rewired State to help civil servants develop their digital skills. These kinds of initiatives demonstrate how the civil service is adopting new techniques to address a broader range of issues and are showcased in Civil Service Quarterly.

**14. The Cabinet Office should be much more active in ensuring Departments maximise the social and economic potential of open data, not least in increasing their own efficiency and effectiveness. To this end it should:**

- a) **require Departments to produce, by the end of 2014, a detailed and timetabled plan for using their data to enhance performance,**
- b) **ensure that the data which is used to underpin policy work in all public announcements is published alongside the policy statements, and**
- c) **bring an end by January 2015 to the outdated and wasteful practice whereby Departments have to pay for access to data that has been produced by Government itself. (Paragraph 104)**

The Government agrees that departments should seek to maximise the social and economic potential of open data. Whilst the Cabinet Office is already working to encourage departments to become consumers of data there is more to be done to further the reach, knowledge and understanding in each department.

- a) The Cabinet Office has been encouraging departments to consider the use cases, internal and external, as part of the NII commitments and through their open data strategies. The Cabinet Office is administering the Release of Data Fund training voucher project to increase the skills, knowledge and understanding of open data amongst civil servants so that they not only release high quality data but become consumers of it too.

Open data is one facet of the information that departments have access to. As a whole, Government owns a significant amount of data (which is not necessarily open) and it needs to use this as well as all the other types of data it holds.

- b) Data that is used to inform and underpin policy work may not be available in open formats. Where it is, the Cabinet Office will actively encourage departments to publish it. The Minister for the Cabinet Office commissioned the policy profession to undertake a piece of work to promote the publication of the data underpinning policy development. The Cabinet Office will consider whether stronger mechanisms are required to enforce this.
- c) It is a principle of Government that different organisations within the public sector are able to charge each other for their goods and services where appropriate. This principle manifests around data on those occasions where the production of the data in question has associated costs that need to be recovered. As Managing Public Money (MPM) sets out: “Charging can thus help prevent waste through badly targeted consumption. It can also make comparisons with private sector services easier, promote competition, develop markets and generally promote financially sound behaviour in the public sector.” The Public Sector Mapping Agreement (PSMA) is one example of the principle in practice and, as MPM suggests, has created an important dynamic for both identifying the geospatial needs of the public sector and supporting the data and associated services continuous improvement.

## The role of statisticians

**15. Many civil and public servants lack the skills to interpret data properly and some civil servants do not seem to share the Government's desire for openness. While bearing fully in mind the needs of national security and personal privacy, civil servants need to be much more aware of the presumption to publish. They should stop being gatekeepers, guarding government data, and become enablers encouraging its wider use; key to this will be the development of a wider understanding of data issues among policy staff. (Paragraph 116)**

The Government agrees with the Committee’s observation that civil servants need to be much more aware of the presumption to publish but would argue that although there is a skills shortage (across all sectors), there has also been some excellent progress made on publication by civil and public servants.

Transparency and open data is still a young policy area and requires a culture shift across the public sector (and will do across the private sector as well). Whilst there is still a need to increase knowledge and understanding of the agenda across the sector, there is also a growing network of reformers and innovators who understand the data and are keen to use it and see it used. As this network grows and as more public sector workers are trained in open data, there will be an increase in those who can be considered ‘enablers’ and we will start to see a culture shift in Government.

Government statisticians developed online learning on transparency and open data which has been well received by all civil servants, not just those in the statistical community. The Government is also looking at capability in the data science programme. Primarily the

focus will be on the skills of analysts, but we will also be working with the range of Government professions including policy makers to raise awareness.

**16. Government statisticians have the skills to do much more with Government data, for example, through producing new series of statistics. But statisticians have chosen to adopt a low profile when they need to be more active in producing new datasets and collaborating with their colleagues in other Civil Service professions to bring more sense and usability to open data initiatives. Government statisticians should become champions of open data. (Paragraph 117)**

The importance of data is becoming increasingly evident and the work done by those who analyse, assess and use data is extremely valuable.

The UK Statistics Authority (UKSA) remains very supportive of initiatives to further open data. The Code of Practice for Official Statistics requires that statistics should be made available in ‘as much detail as is reliable and practicable, subject to legal and confidentiality constraints’, constraints which protect against the disclosure of personal information as proscribed by legislation. Normally the UKSA expects all data underlying official statistics to be published where this is practicable and does not put confidentiality at risk. Judgements about utility and reliability are best left to users, as long as they are fully informed of the strengths and weaknesses of the data.

At this stage, the open data agenda is not about creating new data but publishing what we already have that is not currently accessible. There may be a point in the future where we address the question of what additional data is needed but there are other activities which need to be prioritised first, for instance, ensuring we have a fully comprehensive inventory of data assets.

**17. A second ‘five star’ rating system, developed by Full Fact for assessing the usability of Government statistics, would support the efforts of statisticians to play a more active role in open data. This system should also be adopted by CO in assessing departmental progress on open data. (Paragraph 118)**

The Government recognises that a system to assess data quality in standardised way is desirable and forms part of a wider data management approach, but any method adopted needs to be applicable to the variety of data collected by Government. The Cabinet Office will continue to explore data quality metrics (such as the ODI Open Data Certificates) and work with departments and users to ascertain the best fit method. It may be that a variety of metrics have to be used depending on the type of data (the quality assessment of a geographical dataset or map is, for example, rather different from survey data or financial data).

The statistical community has yet to take a clear view on the value of the 5\* scale. For statisticians disseminating statistics the priority is that they should meet user needs. Since there are often a number of different users for any given set of statistics, it is sometimes not the case that any given presentation will meet the needs of all users and potential users. Having said that, the Full Fact scale covers many of the points that would assess our dissemination of statistics against, and so there is merit in considering that scale as one of the tools for assessing whether or not the presentation of statistics meets user need.

**18. We recommend that the Government should bring forward a practical timetable for training data scientists, with target numbers, to be announced before the end of July 2014. The Government should also include data skills and open data awareness sessions in the training of the policy profession in the Civil Service. (Paragraph 119)**

The Government accepts that there is a need to train more data scientists. As stated above, we are undertaking a piece of work on data science in Government and the skills needed. Early work has started on examining the capability in the analytical community and we will explore this further during the course of the year and will consider the recommendations of the Committee as we draw up our plan.

### **Who is responsible for making the Government's open data plans work?**

**19. To overcome departmental apathy and resistance, open data needs to be treated as a major Government programme in its own right, which will only bring substantial benefits if it is subject to active leadership and management by Ministers and officials. The Minister for the Cabinet Office should be given explicit responsibility for all aspects of open data policy, including the commercial aspects. We believe that Civil Service accountability for progress needs to be much clearer, and that the Cabinet Secretary should be given the overall responsibility for pushing open data through Whitehall and beyond. A single Senior Responsible Owner should be appointed at Deputy Secretary level in the Cabinet Office, to be directly and personally responsible for delivering the benefits in the open data strategy. The Public Sector Transparency Board is too large to be effective in driving progress. A small group from that Board should work as a Programme Implementation Board. (Paragraph 142)**

The pan-Government transparency and open data agenda is led by the Minister for the Cabinet Office and implemented by a central team in the Cabinet Office. The Minister for the Cabinet Office has responsibility for the open data agenda. The Director of Open Data and Government Innovation is the Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) for the programme and has a seat at the Cabinet Office Board, the Public Sector Transparency Board and is the Department's Digital Leader. Centrally, the policy has broad top level support; the Cabinet Secretary is a strong proponent for it and the Prime Minister has highlighted the importance of this agenda on a number of occasions.

Whilst there will always be a need for central leadership of the agenda, its growth will be reliant on the adoption within departments. Each department has a role to play in developing the transparency and open data agenda. There is a strong network of transparency practitioners across Whitehall and the Government is keen to ensure that this is complemented by a SRO in each department. In addition, other cross-Government networks, such as the Digital Leaders, will be used as appropriate. Equally, over the last 12 months, we have seen additional boards being established to provide departmental governance for the agenda, for instance within the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Cabinet Office. The Government is keen that, where appropriate, departments take a strong lead in developing the agenda to ensure the greatest level of buy in.

BIS also plays a key role as it not only holds a very wide range of datasets through the specific roles of its partner organisations – from biomedical research to company data to higher education statistics – but also leads on the digital economy. It has published the Information Economy Strategy and Seizing the Data Opportunity – a strategy for UK data capability. Both documents set out the importance of building UK capability to be able to use data intelligently to provide insight and value. BIS recently published an [update](#)<sup>2</sup> on its engagement with the open data agenda.

The Committee recommend that the transparency and open data agenda be treated as a major programme for Government. The Cabinet Office has made a conscious decision to not adopt the traditional programme governance approach but rather to focus on getting the data into the public's hands without undue bureaucracy and allowing a more agile action driven approach. The Government has seized the opportunities offered by the momentum behind the open data movement to make tangible progress, for instance in establishing the ODI and securing the release of key datasets. At the same time steps have been taken to drive culture change across Whitehall through the various commitments and communicating the value and opportunities of open data. The Government will continue the push to embed an open data culture using the appropriate skills and techniques.

The Government disagrees that that Public Sector Transparency Board is too large to be effective. One of the recommendations from the Shakespeare Review was to simplify the governance arrangements for the transparency and open data agenda. In June 2013 the Data Strategy Board and the Public Sector Transparency Board were merged into a single unified board chaired by the Minister for the Cabinet Office. The Public Sector Transparency Board now provides advice, guidance and challenge to Government. Its membership includes open data activists and experts as well as users. There is further ministerial representation from the Cabinet Office, BIS and the Ministry of Justice.

**20. The Government should, by the end of June 2014, submit to the Committee a detailed report on progress on the actions related to open data. This should include a list of all plans and actions from recent relevant documents, reports and committees on open data, including but not limited to the Open Government Partnership Action Plan and the National Information Infrastructure. The Cabinet Office should report to Parliament at least every six months with a consolidated list of actions. (Paragraph 143)**

The Government does not accept the recommendation to report to Parliament every six months on the basis that there are already reporting mechanisms in place, via the Quarterly Written Ministerial Statement (which will now incorporate progress statements on the NII) and the OGP. However, the Government may explore a means of consolidated reporting. The next Quarterly Written Ministerial Statement is due to be laid in July 2014.

In July 2014, the Government published [progress updates](#)<sup>3</sup> on the National Action Plan, the Open Data Charter, commitments in the Government Response to the Shakespeare Review and the NII.

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2 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bis-open-data-strategy-2014-to-2016>

3 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/transparency-and-open-data-progress-against-commitments>