



The  
British  
Psychological  
Society

# **Making Open Data Real: A public consultation**

British Psychological Society response to  
the Cabinet Office

October 2011

## About the British Psychological Society

The British Psychological Society, incorporated by Royal Charter, is the learned and professional body for psychologists in the United Kingdom. We are a registered charity with a total membership of almost 50,000.

Under its Royal Charter, the objective of the British Psychological Society is "to promote the advancement and diffusion of the knowledge of psychology pure and applied and especially to promote the efficiency and usefulness of members by setting up a high standard of professional education and knowledge".

We are committed to providing and disseminating evidence-based expertise and advice, engaging with policy and decision makers, and promoting the highest standards in learning and teaching, professional practice and research.

The British Psychological Society is an examining body granting certificates and diplomas in specialist areas of professional applied psychology.

## Publication and Queries

We are content for our response, as well as our name and address, to be made public. We are also content for the Cabinet Office to contact us in the future in relation to this consultation response. Please direct all queries to:-

Consultation Response Team, The British Psychological Society,  
48 Princess Road East, Leicester, LE1 7DR.

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

## About this Response

This response was prepared for the British Psychological Society by Alan Jones CPsychol, Chair-Elect and on behalf of the Scottish Division of Educational Psychology, and member of the Special Group in Coaching Psychology.

We hope you find our comments useful.



**Prof P Kinderman, CPsychol, AFBPsS**  
*Deputy Chair, Professional Practice Board*

The British Psychological Society (BPS) thanks the Cabinet Office for the opportunity to respond to this consultation.

The BPS's response addresses one of the key consultation questions:

***How we might ensure collection and publication of the most useful data***

1. In response to the Open Data strategy, anyone who keeps data on clients, parents, children, and families may need to consider *what* data they keep, *how* it is kept and whether psychology is actively applied to the content and impact of the data kept.

A number of applied psychology professions who work with the public keep both data on clients and also some form of self-evaluation data on systems and service delivery. A key question for psychology professionals, and also for wider public services, is to what extent is the psychological impact of *what* and *how* what is written about clients in files or clinical notes considered?

When certain psychological theories of understanding are applied to the way people think and respond to information about themselves, it becomes clear that both the language used to record these notes, together with the beliefs held by professionals, have an effect on how such data interpreted by future retrievers of the information, the action taken in response to the data, and the clients experience. This raises an ethical question about the potential power of the professional discourse to influence client experiences and outcomes.

One example of how a psychological model can inform '*what*' data is sought and '*how*', is through a social constructivist or contextual world view. These psychological perspectives explain the way in which meaning, both personal and societal, is socially constructed. It follows, that written documentation, (for example, of a dialogue with a client) has the potential to influence and change the beliefs and meaning for the client.

2. Psychology can offer insight and support to agencies or services who wish to collect quality data with the purpose of offering public choice and access to improved public services by applying evidence based psychological research methodology and theoretical psychology.

Evidence-based psychological research methodologies; especially in the areas of interpretative, thematic and phenomenological research frameworks, can support the impetus towards the right, high quality data being collected and disseminated to allow public choice and a move toward improved public services.

The target of data collection, the way the data is collected, and how it is analysed and then presented, all influence the meaning and psychological impact of the data. This is particularly relevant to the discussion on how data can inform public choice in services such as mental health, education and health. Data is not neutral, and the application of psychological theory and models of research can address this issue directly. Psychology cannot eliminate bias or misinterpretation, but the application of thorough, theoretically and empirically based research methodologies can help to improve the elusive quality of data.

*End*