

Family Strategy and Engagement Division Response

Making Open Data Real: A Public Consultation

18th October 2011

Responses to consultation questions (page 6)

2. Where a decision is being taken about whether to make a dataset open, what tests should be applied?

It is important to highlight that schools are particularly small organisations in public sector terms and therefore will have less capacity and capability to put in place some of the measures that will be easier for other organisations. Parents, though strongly supportive of better information, will have very deep reservations about issues of personal data - including where the small numbers of children in schools can lead to personal information being inferred even if not explicitly stated. Parents will also have reservations about the use of data about children to target services and products that do not support children's, or parents', positive development. This point is also relevant as a response to question 4 below.

4. How do we get the right balance in relation to the range of organisations (providers of public services) our policy proposals apply to? What threshold would be appropriate to determine the range of public services in scope and what key criteria should inform this?

The consultation appears to focus on public institutions such as government departments, schools, local authorities and hospitals. Public sector work is also delivered through the voluntary and community sector (VCS). VCS organisations are mainly funded independently. However, some of their services, products and/or projects are purchased with public money. This could create a potential situation where the VCS organisation incurs more costs trying to meet Open Data standards and that cost will, inevitably be passed onto the commissioner (ie public sector, local authorities or other bodies). This may well affect their competitiveness as well as driving up costs. The costs of potentially running two internal systems - one that's compliant with Open Data standards as well as their own system for their Trustees could be expensive. The needs of the VCS must be considered by any new Open Data requirements?

5. What would be appropriate mechanisms to encourage or ensure publication of data by public service providers?

Stimulating a public demand-led approach could ensure regular publication of timely data. Here, people would need to know what data they are entitled to view, where to obtain it and the benefits from obtaining the data. The publication of large data inventories may confuse people. It may be more meaningful if these details were categorized taking into the priorities of local communities.

Mechanisms to encourage the publication of data could include promoting the efficiencies and benefits to suppliers (e.g. schools) from improved use of electronic systems in order to open up information to users (e.g. parents). For example, improved communications between parents and schools result

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in greater accountability, improved attainment, behaviour and attendance. Also, the range of people who have access to the data should be considered. Should parents as well as teachers see how close students were to grade boundaries so they can help their children decide whether to resit an examination?

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