

Policy position paper on Open Data For UKITA

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Context

UKITA is the Trade Association for small and medium-sized suppliers of IT, digital media and internet-related products and services throughout the UK.

Open Data

Open Data is machine-readable data published in a way that removes barriers to its use by anyone. Published under a licence that allows free re-use of the data and in file formats that are easily consumed.

The UK Government has begun to release much of its own data as open data (see Public Data below). Other bodies produce open data and projects such as Wikipedia and OpenStreetMap are founded on open data.

Linked Data

Linked Data is a method of publishing data that is compatible with the Web, using identifiers that are web addressable (you should be able to link to them).

Linked Open Data is Open Data that is published as Linked Data. Not all Linked Data is Open, not all Open Data is Linked.

(These definitions are taken from this report: [The Foundation of Accountability](#))

Public Data

Public Data is a policy agenda initiated under the previous Labour government. It has been made a central part of the policy agenda of the current, coalition administration.

The Government has created a [Public Sector Transparency Board](#) to guide its work in this area. This Board has developed a working definition of Public Data

"Public Data" is the objective, factual, non-personal data on which public services run and are assessed, and on which policy decisions are based, or which is collected or generated in the course of public service delivery.

Why does UKITA need a position on this subject?

The [Cabinet Office believes that the Public Data agenda will bring the following benefits:](#)

- enable the public to hold politicians and public bodies to account
- deliver better value for money in public spending
- realise significant economic benefits by enabling businesses and non-profit organisations to build innovative applications and websites using public data

These benefits will only be realised if organisations such as those represented by UKITA build tools, apps and websites to make these datasets more useful.

The Government is [consulting on its proposed approach for Transparency and Open Data Strategy](#). If it is to respond effectively to these and other consultations on behalf of the sector, UKITA must be clear about its position on the policy in general.

What are the issues UKITA should consider?

There are issues around the entire principle of public and other forms of open data. Data is not like another good, it can be used many times without wearing out and it can be distributed simply and rapidly on the internet. There is a strong argument that data collected by the taxpayer should be made available to all taxpayers equally, this argument seems to be dominant in the government. There is also an argument that where companies will derive economic benefit from the data, they should share that benefit with the taxpayer.

There is [some research to suggest that opening data, especially public data, can deliver economic benefits](#).

If viable businesses can be stimulated by this agenda, then these businesses should contribute to the state via increased tax contributions. Of course if foreign businesses are more successful in the market, the profits may be taxed elsewhere.

UKITA represents a highly skilled sector. Individuals and businesses in this sector have to constantly work to keep their skills current and relevant. Skill development is based on a complex range of factors but is, essentially, tied to the needs of the market.

It is not yet clear if there are sufficient, relevant technical skills in the market.

The open data agenda will require companies to deploy technical skills in data handling and design as well as an understanding of public policy, storytelling and other skill bases traditionally far

removed from technical knowledge.

It is not yet clear what are the business models that will link these wide skillsets and build economic models on public or other open data. Many companies in the sector that UKITA represents are service providers. They have business models based on building applications and systems specified by customer facing companies and not-for-profit organisations.

For this agenda to succeed, some IT companies will need to develop businesses on a new model proactively developing services based on public or other open data for their existing and new customers. And the existing clients of IT companies will need to identify markets based on open data and then specify contracts to deliver this.

We are at an early stage in this marketplace and there are few, if any, attractive examples of business models based around public data.

If we lack business models, we necessarily lack investment models.

We may have to consider targeted business support to IT and non IT companies to help them understand and access the opportunities in this market.

This is a potentially disruptive innovation. Entirely new companies may be developed to exploit this new market.

What is the recommended position for UKITA?

UKITA welcomes moves towards public and other forms of open data and recognises that there are significant economic and social benefit to be derived from this policy agenda.

UKITA calls for more research into the skillbase within the sector.

UKITA believes that more needs to be done to raise awareness of these new markets, to support experimental business models and to ensure that there are sufficient, relevant skills in the SME sector of the economy.

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