



Department
for Business
Innovation & Skills

BIS and Open Document Formats

Implementing open standards
for document formats

JULY 2015

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Introduction

On 22 July 2014 the Cabinet Office announced the open document formats selected for sharing and viewing government documents. The open standards are intended to ensure that the public no longer require specialist proprietary software to open or work with government documents. The open standards policy establishes PDF/A and HTML5 as the default for publishing documents for viewing. Documents being shared as editable documents should be published in Open Document Format (ODF 1.2), for example .odt (OpenDocument Text), .ods (OpenDocument spreadsheet), .odp (OpenDocument presentation).

The government departments' Technology Leaders Network meeting, on 26 September 2014, called for publication of implementation plans. The purpose of this plan is to document the steps necessary for implementing Open Standards for document formats in BIS, and to establish milestones to show whether we are on track to meet our goals.

Scope

This plan is the first iteration of a living document. We will update the document to show how we are meeting targets and with explanations if we move our targets. This plan covers 3 major phases - firstly the publication of documents to GOV.UK, secondly the creation and saving of new documents internally and finally the modification of all workflow or other business applications that consume or produce documents for viewing or editing.

We will adopt the new open standards as part of a broader aim of encouraging our staff to choose the right digital format. The open standards will apply to all new documents.

Out of scope are:

Previously published documents - these will not be retrospectively amended unless they are altered and re-published with new material.

Datasets - these are designed to be machine readable by external software, and will continue to be published in csv format under the Open Data agenda on Data.gov.uk. The GDS Service Design Manual has informal guidance on the [publication of these datasets](#) and [open data principles](#).

Position summary

BIS currently published documents intended for viewing on GOV.UK in HTML and PDF format. The majority of BIS documents to be viewed are currently published as PDF with some HTML. We will promote the use of HTML as an option for simpler documents where the user will prefer to view them on a mobile device over printed.

BIS currently publishes documents for editing in a variety of formats, but does not publish in ODF 1.2 at present on GOV.UK. Therefore the main focus of our implementation will be adopting OpenDocument formats where appropriate.

BIS will also engage with its partner organisations on the implementation of the open document standards. BIS does not directly provision or purchase of software for the majority of our arm length bodies and this may constrain adoption of ODF standards.

Approach

Phase One

Publication of new documents to GOV.UK in the new formats will require the least investigation and planning and should be implemented swiftly.

Potential routes to compliance are:

1. A small group within BIS such as the Digital Publishing team is responsible for uploading document attachments. These can be trained quickly and ensure that all documents that are uploaded as attachments rather than HTML5 or PDF/A are correctly converted to ODF 1.2
2. We identify all of the individuals within BIS who have the right to upload document attachments to GOV.UK and train them and provide them with the tools to ensure that all publications are compliant
3. We set the default settings across the business to only create compliant document formats.

In reality, for phase one the sensible approach will be a mixture of options 1) and 3). At a sysadmin level we will modify the settings for our office productivity tools so that any member of staff creating a PDF will automatically create a PDF/A

We will ensure that the team responsible for publishing to GOV.UK knows that if documents are for viewing, it is best to use HTML5, and that PDF/A should be used only if a document must have a certain layout when printed.

For documents that must be editable, and that are not data sets (which will remain in .csv format), the document will be converted to ODF 1.2 at the point of publication if it is not already in that format. We will make other formats available on request but will not publish both formats to the website.

Phase Two

BIS currently uses Microsoft Office 2010 as its office productivity suite, which can enable us to create, save and edit all new documents and versions of documents in ODF. When we come to seek proposals for our next office productivity tools, we will ensure that the solution we choose is able to meet both our users' needs and the Open Formats standards. We do not intend to replace or upgrade our technology ahead of that time unless there is a significant financial and business benefit in doing so.

Business Change: We will assess the impact that adopting ODF will have on department and our partners and external stakeholders. Stakeholders will need to be engaged as soon as possible and a change impact assessment will be conducted. We will publish new staff guidance explaining what will be happening and what may feel different.

Technical change: We will assess the impact that adopting ODF 1.2 will have on our current IT environment. If we need to change productivity suites then we will consider as many options as we can that fit our requirements, and will do limited user testing with our shortlist before selecting. We will get the best value and the best user experience whilst meeting the standards.

Phase Three

Any bespoke software in BIS that consumes documents should be identified at this stage, as well as documents which have macros written in Visual Basic. Workflow applications will need to be altered to accept ODF 1.2 input or to change the output format, but this should be part of the rolling removal of legacy software. It may be that in many cases an application is no longer required to produce editable outputs, in which case it may be better to create PDF/A or HTML5 documents, or online forms instead.

We do not currently know the extent of this landscape, which means that we are less able to set targets for completion with certainty. However, we will begin the assessment as soon as possible and make estimates when we understand the size of the task.



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BIS/15/472