



Leading on Open Government

A UK Open Government Network briefing - May 2015

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Summary

Congratulations on becoming Minister for the Cabinet Office. This briefing paper, prepared by the UK Open Government Civil Society Network, sets out how we believe your government can lead the open government agenda.

As the UK looks to the development of its third Open Government Partnership National Action Plan over the next six months, your leadership will be vital to ensure the UK continues to be amongst the frontrunners of open government.

We call on you to work with civil society and other stakeholders to:

- Continue to champion the reforms the UK has led on to date, including:
 - Company beneficial ownership transparency,
 - Extractive industry payment and revenue transparency,
 - Open data standards (e.g. Open Contracting Data Standard, International Aid Transparency Initiative, and the Open Data Charter),
 - The UK Anti-Corruption Action Plan.
- Identify, develop, agree, implement and review new open government reforms, as part of the next Action Plan, that promote good governance, and support the effective, equitable and sustainable use of resources, delivery of public services and exercise of authority.
- Model open and collaborative approaches to policy making, through the process of developing the UK's new Open Government Partnership National Action Plan.
- Challenge any policy or practice, where it arises, that threatens to undermine open government - particularly any plans to weaken the Freedom of Information Act.
- Raise the practice of open government across the UK through collaboration and competition across the nations.
- Support the open government movement internationally, encouraging new countries to join the OGP and challenging existing members where they backslide or stagnate.

We commit to working with you, your ministerial colleagues and civil servants to make progress across the breadth of open government, and continuing to broaden the movement of individuals and organisations striving for open government.

1. Introduction

Congratulations on becoming Minister for the Cabinet Office. As you will know, within your remit are a number of important government transformation initiatives, the most significant of which being open government.

Around the world, there is a growing movement of reformers inside and outside governments striving to make their governments and institutions work better for citizens through enhanced transparency, participation and accountability.

You take on this agenda at an exciting and important time in the run up to the development of the UK's new Open Government Partnership National Action Plan. This presents an opportunity to demonstrate your government's leadership on critical issues, from reforming public services to tackling corruption, and enhancing democracy to supporting innovation.

Your predecessor made important progress on a number of open government initiatives - notably open data and open policy making. Under your direction, this work can be built upon and extended further into new areas of open government. We look forward to working with you, your ministerial colleagues and civil servants to make progress across the breadth of open government. Your leadership across this agenda will be important to its success in the UK and beyond.

This briefing paper has been prepared by the UK Open Government Civil Society Network - a group of organisations and individuals that collaborates with and challenges governments in the UK to develop and implement ambitious open government reforms through the UK's membership of the Open Government Partnership.¹ In this briefing we set out how we believe your government can lead the open government agenda.

2. Better government

Open government is the simple but powerful idea that governments and institutions work better for citizens when they are transparent, engaging and accountable. Open government has three parts:

1. **Transparency** – opening up of government data and information on areas such as public spending, government contracts, lobbying activity, the development and impact of policy, and public service performance.
2. **Participation** – support for a strong and independent civil society, the involvement of citizens and other stakeholders in decision making processes, and

¹ For more information, see the annex or www.opengovernment.org.uk/

protection for whistleblowers and others who highlight waste, negligence or corruption in government.

3. **Accountability** – rules, laws and mechanisms that ensure government listens, learns, responds and changes when it needs to.

Good open government reforms can transform the way government and public services work, ensuring that they are properly responsive to citizens, while improving their efficiency and effectiveness, and preventing abuses of state power. For example:

- Freedom of Information requests have uncovered millions of pounds of waste, poor performance and malpractice in public services, corruption by public officials and the misuse of powers by public bodies.²
- Among other things, open data has been used to analyse prescription patterns by doctors in the UK, revealing a potential saving of £200m on statins alone.³
- The data sharing open policy making process, conducted by the Cabinet Office during 2014/15, arrived at a set of policy recommendations with broad support from a range of stakeholders, including government departments, privacy campaigners, civil society organisations, and data experts.⁴
- Nesta have calculated that £4.4bn a year could be saved through involving patients, their families and communities in the management of long term health conditions.⁵
- Public engagement on science and technology innovations has helped ensure they develop in a publicly acceptable way, including on medical techniques such as Mitochondria replacement.⁶

3. New frontiers for open government

3.1 Open government reforms

The UK has demonstrated important leadership to date on a number of open government reforms, including:

- Transparency of company beneficial ownership,
- Extractive industry payment and revenue transparency,
- Open data standards (e.g. Open Contracting Data Standard, International Aid Transparency Initiative, and the Open Data Charter),
- The UK Anti-corruption Action Plan.

² <http://www.foi.directory/category/updates/national/>

³ <http://theodi.org/news/prescription-savings-worth-millions-identified-odi-incubated-company/>

⁴ www.datasharing.org.uk/

⁵ <http://www.nesta.org.uk/project/people-powered-health>

⁶ <http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/assets/Uploads/SciWiseMitochondria-CS05-04-14.pdf>

It is important that the UK continues to forge ahead on these issues, at the same time as identifying reforms in new strands of open government.

The development of the UK's third Open Government Partnership National Action Plan presents the opportunity for you to demonstrate your Government's aspirations for making government and other powerful institutions work better for people. The UK Open Government Civil Society Network is committed to working with you to identify and develop robust and ambitious reforms, that will make a positive difference to the lives of people in the UK and abroad.

Over the past six months, we have been crowdsourcing ideas for making government in the UK more transparent, engaging and accountable to form an Open Government Manifesto. Via an online platform⁷ and a series of workshops around the country, over fifty ideas for reforms have been identified.



At the time of writing, the highest rated ideas relate to extending the Freedom of Information Act to contractors, co-producing public services with citizens, and supporting and developing the UK's Anti Corruption Action Plan. We hope to work with your Government in the coming months to prioritise and develop these and other reforms.

As well as promoting open government reforms across government, we call on you to challenge any policy or practice, where it arises, that threatens to undermine open government - particularly any plans to weaken the Freedom of Information Act

3.2 UK Open Government Partnership

The Open Government Partnership emphasises collaboration between government and civil society in developing and implementing a National Action Plan. The process to develop the UK's second National Action Plan is widely considered as one of the best examples to date of this being put into practice. However, the bar is constantly being raised by other members of the OGP, and the UK must develop its approach further to maintain its leading position.

Here we outline three areas in which the UK can further improve:

Open and collaborative policy making

The development of an National Action Plan is not only important for the reforms it contains; there is no better place to test and demonstrate new models of working within

⁷ www.opengovmanifesto.org.uk

government and with civil society, and stretch the practice of open and collaborative policy making.

The second National Action Plan made significant strides in modelling an open way of developing commitments, but the third National Action Plan can go even further in putting the principles of open government into practice. Its development should provide innovative ways for government and civil society to partner on reforms, while ensuring that this is done in a genuinely transparent way. As with the second National Action Plan, this practice should extend to all elements of the policy process, including the scoping out, development, sign-off, implementation and oversight of commitments.

In this way, the OGP process can itself demonstrate leadership on open government, providing a model for other policy processes and countries to adapt and adopt.

Broader engagement

If the open government reform movement is to be succeed, it must extend beyond its champions in government and civil society to become an integral element of progress on issues across society.

The second National Action Plan process involved a relatively small group of civil society in identifying and developing reforms. Though that process was successful in a number of ways, it can be significantly improved upon for the third National Action Plan by broadening engagement.

For the development of the third National Action Plan, the network and government should work together to involve a wide range of people in identifying and developing reforms. This should include typically underrepresented groups. To be effective, it is important that a modest budget is allocated to support this activity.

Devolved action plans

A significant focus for broadening engagement should be collaboration with governments and civil society in the devolved nations. As nations of the UK, the devolved governments of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales fall under the UK's membership of the Open Government Partnership. Depending upon devolution arrangements, reforms included in an UK OGP National Action Plan may or may not apply to each government.

In either case, their engagement in the process of developing the action plan is essential to ensure that it is truly a National Action Plan. The involvement of the devolved administrations is not only vital in principle, but also in practice. Globally, the OGP seeks to create networks of reformers between countries and encourage a "race-to-the-top", whereby countries compete against each other to be more open. Likewise, collaboration

and healthy competition across the UK nations can serve to raise the bar on open government across the country.

The UK Government should work with its devolved counterparts and civil society across the UK to develop a nationwide OGP National Action Plan process. One model could be that of a peer-to-peer action plan, whereby each devolved government partners with local civil society to develop its own commitments, which are shared across the nations for others to also adopt.

The involvement of local and regional level governments in the Open Government Partnership is a growing area of interest. The UK has the opportunity to lead by example through the development of its third National Action Plan.

3.3 Global Open Government Partnership

Not all global trends point towards ever increasing openness. Around the world there are issues with human rights violations, civic space being closed down, whistleblowers being persecuted and privacy being invaded. The Open Government Partnership is the multinational forum through which to challenge these retrograde steps, as well as championing and celebrating the many positive reforms taking place. As a steering committee member, it is critical that the UK, under your direction, demonstrates leadership on these issues. As civil society from around the world use the OGP's response mechanism to raise concerns about the actions of their governments, the UK Government must lead on supporting a robust response.

The Open Government Partnership 2015 Global Summit, to be held in Mexico in October, presents a clear opportunity for the UK to demonstrate leadership. The UK should look to launch a set of ambitious commitments, including joint commitments with other member countries.

Through its diplomatic relationships, the UK should continue to encourage new countries to join and play an active roles in the Open Government Partnership. In addition, it should help to secure long term financial support for the OGP.

Annex: Background information

The Open Government Partnership (OGP)

<http://www.opengovpartnership.org/>



The **Open Government Partnership** is a platform for reformers inside and outside governments around the world to develop reforms that “promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption and harness new technologies to strengthen governance”. Since its foundation in September 2011, over 2,000 commitments have been made by 65 participating countries, covering a third of the world’s population.

Countries must meet a set of basic eligibility criteria and agree to an Open Government Declaration to join. Once a member, governments must develop a National Action Plan with civil society in their country on a biennial basis. The government must regularly report on its progress and work with civil society to achieve the agreed reforms. Progress is evaluated at regular intervals by an independent researcher appointed by the OGP’s Independent Reporting Mechanism. The OGP emphasises partnership between government and civil society at all levels. As such, its steering committee is formed of equal government (11) and civil society representatives (11), with co-chairs drawn from each.

The UK was a founding member of the OGP in 2011. Since, it has produced two National Action Plans (2011-13 & 2013-15), and is due to agree and publish its third (2015-17) by the end of 2015. As well as its domestic role, the UK Government has been an OGP steering committee member since its foundation, and co-chaired the initiative in 2012/13.

The UK Open Government Network

<http://www.opengovernment.org.uk/>



The UK Open Government Civil Society Network is a group of organisations and individuals committed to making government work better for people through increased transparency, participation and accountability. The network collaborates with and challenges governments in the UK to develop and

implement ambitious open government reforms through the UK's membership of the Open Government Partnership.

The UK Open Government Network was formed in the early days of the OGP to engage with the UK government on its membership. One of the first activities the network undertook was to write to the Government to call for an “expanded UK Action Plan based on broad and participative engagement with civil society”.

During the development of the UK's second OGP National Action Plan, the network worked with officials to identify and develop a significant number of the commitments contained in the final action plan.

The membership of the network currently stands at over 450 members. The network is coordinated independently of government by Involve (funded by the Omidyar Network) and has a seven member steering group:

- Andy Williamson, Democratiser
- Anthony Zacharzewski, The Democratic Society
- Claire Schouten, International Budget Partnership
- Martin Tisne, The Omidyar Network
- Rachel Davies, Transparency International UK
- Simon Burall, Involve
- Tim Davies, Practical Participation

Independent but linked networks are being setup in the devolved nations, with the Northern Irish Open Government Network currently the most established.