

First benchmark survey of Open Data understanding across UK public sector

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UK Government's ambitions to create new jobs, reduce expenditure and improve public services are being held back by low levels of understanding amongst public servants of the value of open data, according to the first benchmark of open data understanding across the public sector.

Public servants say they do not know about the benefits that stem from the Government's Open Data initiatives, that it is difficult for them to access and reuse the right data and, critically, there is a deficit of technical knowledge and expertise to exploit the data available.

"On the face of it, the findings are concerning and present some challenges for the data community within government but that is within the context of the significant open data policy progress achieved in the UK," said David Mitton, director at Listpoint. Listpoint commissioned the survey, conducted by the specialist public sector research company Dods.

"Better skills, training and communication across government will undoubtedly make a big difference to creating new digital economy jobs, and innovative products and services, all rooted in open data. Open Data, and Big Data, has the capacity to generate a very significant number of new jobs as well as allow government to transform the delivery and cost of public services.

"In this research, local and central government civil servants are saying they have not enough basic understanding. They cannot easily access data and they do not recognise what open data and data standards have to offer. The great potential of open data – new jobs, better services and lower cost IT implementation – will remain locked away unless those running public life can properly access and understand open data and standards," he added.

Key highlights include:

- 78% do not know about government plans for open data and the benefits that follow
- Only 52% recognised that ready access to data and data standards will generate new enterprises, jobs and services in the public and private sectors
- 57% do not know how to access data sets, how to interpret them or how to best apply data standards
- Over 75% do not know what data is available outside their department to help develop new solutions for service delivery
- 66% said they did not understand their role in delivering the open data agenda
- An overwhelming 72% recognised that knowing how to access, share and use data will be increasingly important over the next three years.

"We can turn this round if the data community - from both the private and public sectors – work collaboratively on these issues," added Dermot Joyce, Listpoint's Chief Executive.

“Government can enable knowledge from open data by improving the cost of access, and encouraging the reuse of open data through tools that aggregate Government open data in such a way that that skilled data experts can develop exactly the types of new products and services that the open data policies are designed to achieve.

“The benchmark conclusions indicate that more consideration is needed on how to make the right data more identifiable, available, interoperable and reusable to those with the business ideas and investment.

“Enhancing the necessary skillsets within Government is key to achieving this. Given that the Government is by far the biggest owner and producer of data in the country, it is also the most significant curator and creator of data standards needed by facilitate innovation. Until this benchmark survey, data standards had not being identified as a constraint but the data standards used to encode the open data is just as important as the data itself,” added Dermot Joyce.

The research was conducted in late December 2012 and more data is available on Listpoint’s website: www.listpoint.co.uk/media. More than 1000 responses were received across central and local government, non-departmental bodies, the NHS and police forces.

About Listpoint:

Listpoint is the free-to-use, biggest, open platform of UK government and private sector code lists, complete with tools to help you find, map and manage data standards and make datasets interoperable. As a web-based service, Listpoint helps you maintain data standards, build interoperability, interpret your data better and create apps. www.listpoint.co.uk

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