

The UK Approach to Simple and Streamlined Licensing

The UK Government pioneered online licensing with the launch of the Click-Use Licence in 2001. This licensing model was highly successful, with more than 20,000 licences issued. This initiative had the effect of opening up PSI re-use to a global audience. To support the release of datasets under data.gov.uk and the UK government's transparency agenda it was felt that licensing should be taken to a new level of openness and transparency.

The UK Government Licensing Framework provides a policy and legal overview for licensing of PSI, both in central government and the wider public sector. The framework has been created to meet the needs of:

- the public, including community groups and social organisations
- the information re-user community, both in the public and private sector
- the public data developer community.

The UK was able to draw on the work of public sector colleagues in Australia and New Zealand. Both countries have launched policies designed to open up government and make PSI more readily available for re-use. They did this through the adoption of Creative Commons model licences. The UK, however, decided to develop a new licence – the Open Government Licence. The main reason for this was that none of the existing Creative Commons licences extended to the licensing of works protected by the database right.

The Open Government Licence is at the heart of the UK Government Licensing Framework. The challenge in developing the Open Government Licence was to create a licence that would:

- be interoperable with other internationally recognised models such as Creative Commons and Open Data Commons (opendatacommons.org)
- cover copyright and database right
- be more enabling by avoiding the need for re-users to register and apply for a licence
- be machine readable
- be simple and legally robust
- be sufficiently flexible so that it could be adopted across the public sector, such as by local government and health bodies.

The UK Government Licensing Framework, incorporating the Open Government Licence, was launched on 30 September 2010. It has been welcomed by those within government and in the re-use community as an important innovation. The comments below give a flavour of the positive response that welcomed the delivery of the UK Government Licensing Framework and the Open Government Licence.

'The National Archives isn't simply a repository of our nation's history, its task is to bring information to life, make it accessible and enable its re-use. This innovative licence gives everyone the opportunity to create products and services which benefit society.'

Lord McNally, Minister for The National Archives and Public Sector Information

‘The Open Government Licence [is] one element of the UK's position at the forefront of the worldwide open data revolution. It's great to see a simple and straightforward licence for people to re-use government data in any way they want. It will enable inventive people to build innovative new applications and websites which help people in their everyday lives.’

Sir Tim Berners-Lee, inventor of the world wide web and member of the Transparency Board

‘The UK government went about drafting their new licence in the right way – by consulting many people in the open licensing community and gathering input from experts – the resulting licence is an excellent example of how to go about this process.’

Jordan Hatcher of the Open Knowledge Foundation

The UK Government is now in the process of developing the UK Government Licensing Framework to cover other licensing models.

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