Public Sector News

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Public Sector Information

The big news for the public sector at the moment has to be the launch of the brand new government department to be known as the Office of Public Sector Information (OPSI). Formed in May, the department was launched formerly at a reception in early July. It incorporates HMSO and will continue to be responsible for the publication of legislation. The department has however chiefly been established to address the issues raised by the new legislation on the re-use of public sector information. The EU Directive on this topic *(Directive 2003/98/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council 17 November on the re-use of public sector information)* became UK law through the Statutory Instrument 2005 no. 1515 *The Re-use of Public Sector Information Regulations 2005* on 1st July 2005. OPSI has a 'broad remit to advise on and regulate the operation of the re-use of public sector information.'

To find out more visit their web site at http://www.opsi.gov.uk.

E-Government

E-government work continues apace in the public sector as we head towards the end of 2005 and the targets set for then. To assist in this process and to provide benchmarks, National eService Delivery Standards are now being developed. They will be set at three levels of minimum, progressing and excellent, and claim to be 'raising standards to improve delivery.' It could be argued that they are a bit late in the day but then e-government will continue beyond the target dates so they will presumably be designed to get us beyond the stage of 'ticking the box.' More information may be found on the web site http://www.nesds.gov.uk.

In June, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister announced that it is planning to withdraw from policy setting for e-government and will hand over to the e-Government Regional Partnership Group in March 2006. Little more is known at present but no doubt more information will be made available in time.

If you are interested in comparing the UK with other parts of Europe for the delivery of e-government then take a look at web site of the eGovernment Observatory which monitors e-government in each of the 25 member states of the EU.
http://europa.eu.int/idabc/en/chapter/140.

Freedom of Information

The Office of the Information Commissioner has published two reports recently which give some indication of how the Freedom of Information legislation is bedding down. The first list of decision notices has appeared on their web site giving details of the complaints received and the decisions made by the Information Commissioner. They make interesting reading and may be found at http://www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk/eventual.aspx?id=8617.

The Information Commissioner has also published a report into the way central government coped with the implementation of the Act during the first three months. (Freedom of Information Act 200 Statistics on implementation in central government Q1: January to March 2005) Departments received 7,733 information requests in that period out of more than 13,000 across all the public bodies monitored. 69% of requests of the 13,000 were responded to within 20

days and another 14% were within any permitted extended deadlines. This information may viewed on the http://www.foi.gov.uk.

The Guardian published an interesting profile of the Information Commissioner, Richard Thomas *(Guardian 1st July 2005 The Guardian profile: Richard Thomas, David Hencke).* The article came at the end of a week in which Richard Thomas had attacked plans to introduce identity cards.

MLA
The Museums and Libraries Authority (MLA) has launched a new web site where you can find, among other things, information to help teachers in an area called Literature Matters. Try http://www.mla.gov.uk.

Public Library Services
Statistics published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) show an increase of about 13m visits to public libraries for 2003-04 since the previous figures which covered 2002-03. Book borrowing however has declined and for the same period has dropped from 360.7m to 340.9m. These figures show that libraries are offering the services that people want but that may not necessarily be book borrowing. The statistics can be looked at in detail at http://www.cipfastats.net.

House of Commons Library
The House of Commons library has a new librarian, John Pullinger, who has moved there from the Office for National Statistics. The library not only provides a service to MPs but is also responsible for much of the information about the House and its work which is made available to the public either through their web site or the Information Office.

If you struggle to understand the finer points of Parliamentary procedure you may well find the House of Commons fact sheets a help. They may be found at http://www.parliament.uk/parliamentary_publications_and_archives/factsheets.cfm.

They will tell you all you need to know about early day motions, the Chiltern Hundreds, standing committees, the vote bundle and much more. There are four series of fact sheets covering procedure, legislation, members/elections and a general series which covers major historical events such as the Gunpowder Plot and gives information about the buildings and the traditions of Parliament.

Archive of public sector websites
You may be aware of the work being undertaken by the UK Web Archiving Consortium (UKWAC) to capture the content of web sites which are socially, culturally and historically significant within the UK. They launched their web site in May and have already collected vast amounts of material. The members of the consortium have been given subject areas to work in, and the British Library has responsibility for material relating to the national culture and for events which are considered to be historically significant. In April and May they focused on material relating to the general election. What has already been collected may be viewed at http://www.webarchive.org.