

## Public Sector News

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### OPSI and National Archives to merge

Probably the major news in the public sector, for official publishing at least, was the announcement in June that the Office of Public Sector Information (OPSI) is to merge with the National Archives. It will all be known as the National Archives, and the change takes place in October 2006. OPSI was launched in July 2005 and incorporated HMSO, which has responsibility for crown copyright, legislation and official publishing. It is attached to the Cabinet Office, but the merger will mean it will in future sit within the Department for Constitutional Affairs (DCA).

### Legislation

For those of you who need to access legislation the OPSI website at [www.opsi.gov.uk](http://www.opsi.gov.uk) has all Acts of Parliament since 1988 and Statutory Instruments from 1987. This site is well established and the URLs for individual documents are permanent so you can link to them with confidence. OPSI has recently introduced an RSS feed for new Acts and Statutory Instruments.

Of course the legislation on the site is not consolidated and we still await a freely available official statute law database. This database has been in development since the early 1990s but the latest date for public access is now September. The press has carried articles criticising the slowness the Department of Constitutional Affairs to deliver this service and the Department's refusal to release the raw data in response to a Freedom of Information

According to the DCA website an "on-line enquiry service for the statute law database was launched for government staff on 31 May 2006". The site also promises that they will "start developing a similar enquiry service for the general public later in 2006". This would be a real help for those of us who use legislation infrequently and may not have access to subscription services such as Lexis Nexis.

### Information Asset Register

As well as information on the reuse of public sector information and Crown Copyright, the OPSI site is the home of the Government's information Asset Register known as Inforoute. It lists information resources held by the UK Government, but the focus is on

unpublished resources, so it complements any lists of departmental publications held on websites or issued as paper catalogues. <http://www.opsi.gov.uk/iar/index.htm>

### Podcasts

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) has not only provided webcasts of their Board meetings on their websites, but is also making available podcasts, which may be downloaded and listened to at your convenience. The reason they have taken this route is to ensure that the decisions made by the FSA are as open as possible and in this way they hope to reach a wide audience. <http://www.food.gov.uk>

It will be interesting to see if other public bodies follow suit.

On the FSA site <http://www.eatwell.gov.uk> you can savour the delights of Virtual Sam and her tips on healthy eating!

### Statistics

Official statistics are under the microscope with the consultation on the independence of the Government's statistical service announced by the Chancellor in the Budget speech in March. The Treasury Select Committee responding to the consultation points out that a system where some statistics are produced by the Official of National Statistics and others by Government departments is confusing for all users.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmselect/cmtreasy/1111/111102.htm>

More specifically, crime statistics have come in for criticism recently, with the Statistics Commission saying the production of crime statistics must be separated from the policy work of the Home Office. Official statistics are available at <http://www.statistics.gov.uk>, and although the site comes in for a great deal of criticism, it does hold a wealth of information.

### E-government transformed

Last November the Cabinet Office published *Transformational Government. Enabled by technology* (Cm 6883 November 2005) which you will find on the website of the Central Office of Information [www.coi.gov.uk](http://www.coi.gov.uk). The aim of the document was to see how technology can be used for:

- the transformation of public services for the benefit of citizens, businesses, taxpayers and front-line staff

- The efficiency of the corporate services and infrastructure of government organisations, thus freeing resources for the front-line.

There focus of e-government was the delivery of information and transactions mainly, but not exclusively, via the Web. t-government or t-gov as you will now see it called is, as far as I can see, about using technology to re-engineer the processes and create a more efficient and effective service

One aspect of this for local authorities is the simplified-sign on work being done under the Government Connect banner. To read more about Government Connect go to <http://www.govconnect.gov.uk> where you can see that it is aiming to provide “secure and effective online services”, and the aim is for “all Local Authorities to actively benefit from GC Solutions by the end of 2007.”

Alongside t-gov are some National e-Service Delivery Standards which I mentioned in the last issue of eLucidate. Currently the status of these standards is still unclear, but what is clear is that, unlike the case with e-government, there is no funding to support their delivery by local authorities. It will be very difficult to achieve these as they do not seem to have status, funding or targets attached to them <http://www.nesds.gov.uk>.

*Public Sector News is supplied by ALGIS (The Affiliation of Local Government Information Specialists) which represents information professionals providing information services to local authority staff and elected members. Jane Inman is currently Chair of ALGIS. ALGIS welcomes anyone with an interest in public sector information who feels they would benefit from being part of a community working in the same area. For more information go to <http://www.algis.org.uk>.*