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Dear Mr England

Thank you for your email of 10th February to Joe Harley about Open Standards and your email to me of 1st March relating to my letter to Mr Brugman's email of 25th February. I promised to provide a response covering both the issues of Open Standards and transparency in relation to the set of Best Management Practice products now owned by the Cabinet Office and previously developed by the Office of Government Commerce and the CCTA.

The Best Management Practice products

The Cabinet Office owns, and is responsible for maintaining, a series of best practice guidance which it publishes as the "Best Management Practice Portfolio", from which it generates income through two service concession contracts, awarded as the result of an open procurement exercise. The current service concession contracts are due to run to 31st December 2013. The products are produced on a commercial basis and in competition with other products in the market; and are not a cost-free by-product of the work of the day to day work of the Cabinet Office.

Change to the basis of current commercial arrangements prior to December 2013 would carry costs to the taxpayer, in addition to the loss of revenue to the UK government. The contract break point in 2013 will be the opportunity to consider the future support of these products. Any new arrangements will reflect the government policy at that time, not just developments on Transparency and on Open Standards, but also on other areas including, for example, mutualisation.

All Best Management Practice products are made available through our publishing strategy/approach and we enable re-use - though the books do cost money, and we charge for licences where organisations or individuals directly reuse the copyright material and trademarks to support their own commercial activities.

Transparency and Open Data

The Government's ambition is to make the UK the most transparent and accountable government in the world, and to create the environment for state-owned datasets to be exploited for commercial and social gain. Much data has been published in recent months on government spending and performance, and in relation to the names, job titles and hierarchies of civil servants. At present, however, the focus is on 'data', the lowest level of abstraction from which 'information' or 'knowledge' is then derived. The Best Management Practices portfolio would be better characterised according to this schema as 'knowledge'; and our approach to the products reflects that view of their classification.

UNCLASSIFIED

Within the Best Management Practices portfolio, the glossary of terms for each product is already made available and will continue to be made available through a licensing regime based on the Open Government Licence (OGL). There are no current plans to release further Best Management Practice material on similar terms.

All Best Management Practice guidance is, however, already published in a way that makes it openly available to its community in a number of accessible formats, e.g. ITIL content is widely accessed and used by ICT practitioners in many countries. All students, including PhD students, may incorporate our material into their theses without a charge or the need for a licence. Only if the thesis is published and they have incorporated more than 20% of our value added copyright material will the publisher need to obtain a licence.

Open Standards

The UK Government specifies ICT standards that are either related to technical infrastructure or to data. The purpose of these standards is to ensure that ICT components and data can be interconnected, shared and reused to: deliver value from our ICT investments; enable a broad spectrum of suppliers and charitable/voluntary organisations to be involved in Government ICT and service delivery; provide seamless services for citizens; and ensure transparency and accountability. We have a strong preference for the specification and implementation of open standards, where feasible, as they enable these benefits to be realised. Our use of the term open standard is therefore related to technology and data rather than to best practices, which in themselves are not standards.

Our current informal consultation on open standards (www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/content/uk-government-open-standards-survey) includes mention of ISO/IEC 2000, which is an international standard for Service Management that allows organisations to be measured against ITIL practices (or other similar methodologies), and we are seeking views on its inclusion in our list of agreed standards. Whilst ISO standards may not meet our definition of 'open standards', in the absence of a standard that fits with our definition of open, we look more broadly for a suitable standard. Many of the standards that we currently adopt are ISO standards although we do seek to replace them wherever possible with open standards and this is something we encourage.

We will of course continue to welcome views about the development of open standards; and we will consider the way forward in relation to Open Standards and Best Management Practice portfolio products before the 2013 break-point in the current contracts.

Thank you again for your emails.

Yours sincerely,



William Jordan