



PUBLIC ACCESS SCHEMES
JUNE 2006

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Following public consultation in 2004 Public Library Subsidy on printed legislation was removed from October 2005 and the funding reallocated to develop online legislation services.
- 1.2 This change was a direct response to the demands of libraries and online users to upgrade and improve OPSI's existing online legislative services and searching facilities, improving public access to legislative material.
- 1.3 This status report reviews the first year of operation and provides an update to all those involved in the consultation.

2 Transforming Access to legislation online

- 2.1 The online legislation service is one of the most used online services from government and has tremendous reach (over 10 million pages viewed and in excess of 800,000 unique visitors per month). The additional funding allowed OPSI to build on the strengths of the online legislation service, in terms of the accuracy of the content, immediacy of publishing and reach.
- 2.2 The funding has been used to achieve both short term improvements such as adding new content and features, and address the longer term issue of improving the accessibility standard.
- 2.3 All the improvements made have been in direct response to user demand or detailed user research. Many public users who previously accessed legislation in hard copy at Public Libraries, now access legislation on-line via OPSI's website, and therefore the users of the website have been at the heart of this process.

3 New Content Added to the Legislation Online

3.1 Legislation available in User Friendly Format

- 3.1.1 All legislation since 2002 has been published on our website in Portable Document Format (PDF). This enables users to download and printout their own 'official' version of a piece of legislation. From October 2005 all new legislation will be published in both HTML and PDF formats.
- 3.1.2 Due to the success of this service selected primary legislation to 1999 was also added. In total nearly 12,000 PDFs files have been added to our website.

3.2 Links from Legislation to other relevant legislative material

3.2.1 To supplement the existing legislation user friendly links to other related legal information has been added. These include links to:

- commencement orders for primary legislation
- enabling powers for secondary legislation
- EU Directives where UK legislation relates to European law.

4 New Services for users of the Legislation Website

4.1 Notification Service when Legislation is published

4.1.1 One of the great strengths of the online legislation service is its immediacy, with simultaneous publication in print and online. To help users stay up to date, and avoid the need to keep checking the website for newly published legislation, a new service to alert users when content has been added has been implemented.

4.1.2 Users can choose to receive email notifications when any of the following are published:

- UK Acts of Parliament
- Statutory Instruments
- Acts of the Scottish Parliament
- Scottish Statutory Instruments
- Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly
- Northern Ireland Orders in Council
- Statutory Rules of Northern Ireland

4.2 Improved Searching Facilities

4.2.1 The search engine has been upgraded in direct response to user feedback. This is being constantly tailored to better help users find the content they are looking for. The new search engine makes items of legislation easier to find both within the site and from external search engines.

4.3 Speech enabled with Browsealoud

4.3.1 A new service to assist users with disabilities to access our site has been provided. The service uses award winning technology called Browsealoud designed to assist the following four user groups gain better access to websites:

- Users with low literacy and reading skills
- User where English is not the first language
- Users who are dyslexic
- Users with a mild visual impairment

The Browsealoud plug-in is free for users to download and use. All legislation in both HTML and PDF formats can be read to users with Browsealoud. See www.opsi.gov.uk/about/accessibility.htm for further information.

5 Enhanced Usability and Accessibility for Users

5.1 Usability study

5.1.1 In order to better understand how users work with our site and to test some of the planned changes, qualitative usability testing using a pioneering eye-tracking system was undertaken. The tests were conducted on users of the web, including some existing users of our site, performing real tasks and observing what they actually did. The evidence from this study has guided many of the planned improvements and will continue to be influential as the online service progresses over the next year.

5.2 Usability enhancements

5.2.1 Building on the evidence of the usability study a series of usability enhancements have been made to the online service, providing for far greater consistency of appearance and navigation.

5.3 Making legislation accessible for all

5.3.1 In order to make legislation accessible to all at the highest standard OPSI aspires to achieve the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) Guidelines Triple A standard of accessibility for legislation online. Reaching that goal for the legacy content of over 100,000 pages of HTML is a difficult and complex task. A pilot project to better understand the problems with attaining the WAI Triple A standard and develop strategies for attaining that level of accessibility has been undertaken. This involves the development of specialist software, for example to add attributes to images and appropriate additional information to tables. The standard of HTML encoding required to achieve this will move up to XHTML. This work will not only help make legislative content more accessible for users relying on assistive technologies, such as screen readers. It underpins the future proofing of the online legislation service in an ever more connected world, where wireless devices are in abundance.

5.4 Accessibility and Usability Auditing

5.4.1 An independent rigorous automated audit of our website will be conducted, which will have efficiency gains avoiding the need to manually check our website to ensure links are operating effectively. The auditing testing will continue throughout the process of re-publishing of our website ensuring standards are maintained.

5.5 Measuring User access and Usability

5.5.1 An advanced monitoring system has been implemented to monitor how users access and use the website. This provides a series of metrics that enables a deeper understanding of how the new content, features and services are changing the way people work with the service. This evidence will be fed back into the process of continually refining, improving and enhancing the Government's online legislation service - providing access to legislation for all.

6 Conclusion

- 6.1 We will be monitoring user satisfaction and comments on the enhanced services and publishing regular reports. We welcome any comments or feedback, please contact sarah.cossey@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk.