

# Report on Public Access Scheme Funding 2006/07

Report by the Office of Public Sector Information

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# Report on Public Access Scheme Funding 2006/07

## Background

Over the last year and a half the Office of Public Sector Information has used funding reallocated from the public library subsidy for printed legislation to improve government's free online legislation services to the citizen. This initiative followed a public consultation in 2004, responding to the demands of libraries and website users to upgrade and improve the online legislation service. This report shows the specific improvements we have made in 2006/07 with this funding.

## Improving access to legislation for all

The approach to publishing legislation online had not been substantially altered in ten years. The style of web publishing and the technical standards adhered to all come from an earlier era – text based, lacking emphasis in key usability features for layout and navigation, missing features to make the content more accessible to those with impairments relying on assistive technologies such as screen readers. The funding made available from the Public Access Schemes has enabled OPSI to embark on wide ranging improvements, to improve access to legislation online.

This work has been done as part of "The Transforming Legislation Publishing Programme". The aim has been to present legislation in the most accessible and useable way, whilst maintaining our traditional strengths of immediacy and accuracy. Legislation is published in print and online simultaneously with the web version having the same legal status as the printed rendition.

The most apparent change made as part of the programme is that legislative content is now presented using the same user interface design as other parts of the OPSI website.

Most of the visitors to the website arrive at a piece of legislation directly, having first conducted a search, typically using the Google search engine.

Figure 1,  
Links to UK  
legislation  
on the  
OPSI  
website  
are  
ranked



The screenshot shows a Google search interface with the search term "freedom of information" entered. The search results are displayed under the "Web" tab, showing "Results 1 - 10 of ab". The top three results are highlighted in yellow:

- Freedom Of Information**  
[www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk) Your rights & responsibilities explained. Official Govt. guide.
- Department for Constitutional Affairs - People's Rights - Freedom ...**  
One-stop-shop for **information** about the **Freedom of Information Act 2000**. ... 9 May 2007:  
Responsibility for **freedom of information** has passed from the ...  
[www.foi.gov.uk/](http://www.foi.gov.uk/) - 10k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)
- Freedom of Information Act 2000**  
UK government legislation defining what **information** public sector organisations are obliged to provide on request.  
[www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2000/20000036.htm](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2000/20000036.htm) - 28k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)

This type of deep linking is very powerful, as it means visitors are offered the content they are looking for immediately, however, up to now they have not been given any context about the material they are looking at – it is almost as if they have come, not at a website at all, but to a disconnected page of legislative content. Providing visitors with a website view of the content, with a consistent site wide layout and clear navigation options, gives first time users a sense of where they have arrived and what other possibilities are provided by the site. Important usability features, such as prominent bread crumb navigation (the “you are here” tracks at the top of each page) provide a context for visitors to explore the site more fully.

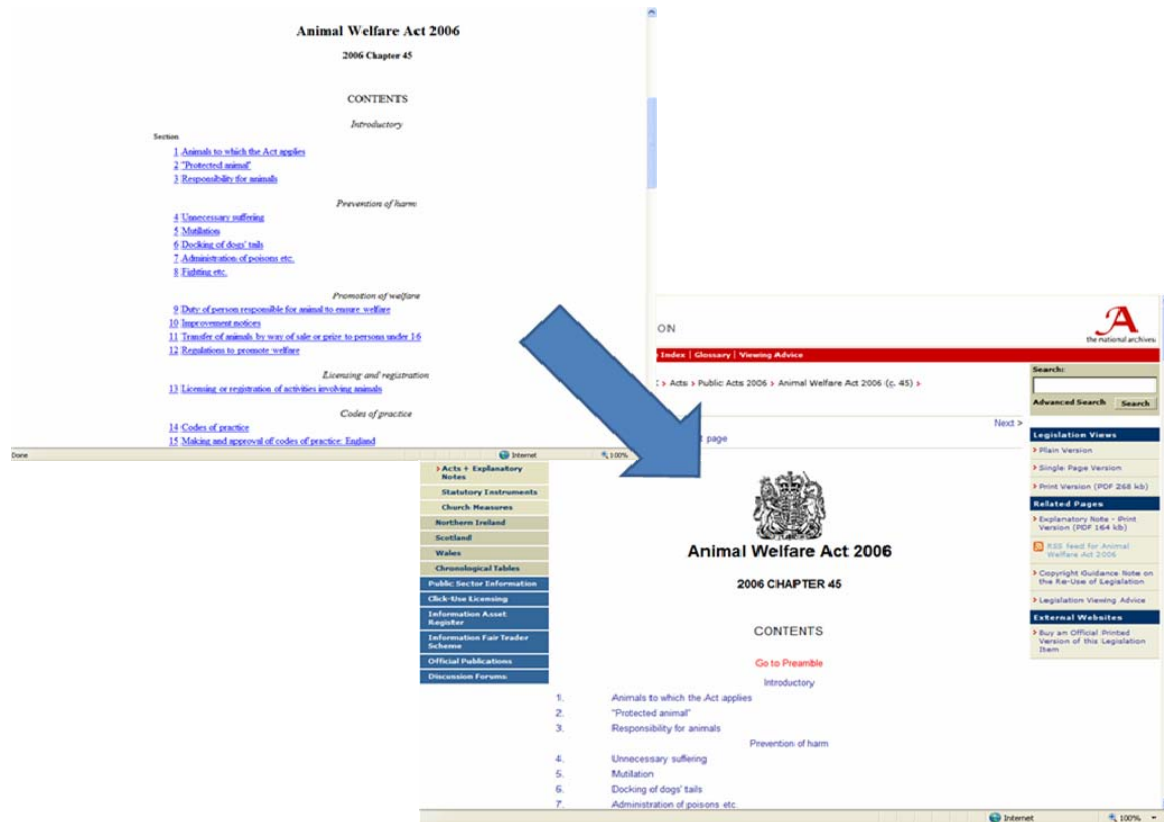


Figure 2, giving users choice over their view of legislation

Legislation Views
➤ Plain Version
➤ Single Page Version
➤ Print Version (PDF 106 kb)

While the usability testing that OPSI carried out in 2006 showed that visitors responded very positively to a “website” style user interface for legislation, it is a change which we recognise is not going to suit everyone. To support all visitor preferences we are providing four different views of legislation.

Figure 3, legislation views

The default view is the website view. This gives users an opportunity to switch to a “Plain Version”, which offers the same content, typically split across several different pages, but without the navigation options of the website view. Another option is the “Single Page

Version”, which follows the style of the unadorned plain version but has all the content on just one page of HTML. This view is ideal for printing the HTML version of legislation, or for quickly navigating through a long Act by scrolling down, rather than moving between pages. The third option is to view a “print version”, which is a PDF of the printed copy.

### Backdating PDF versions of primary legislation to 1800

We know that many visitors to the OPSI website value having a “print version” in PDF, to see an Act or Statutory Instrument as it appears on the print page and to produce their own paper copy. OPSI started publishing PDF versions of legislation in October 2005 and backdated the catalogue of PDFs to 2001, with primary legislation from 1999. This year OPSI has used funding from the Public Access Scheme to backdate the range of PDFs available for Acts of Parliament to 1800, where the Act is wholly or substantially in force – adding several thousand more PDFs of legislation to the website. This content has been scanned and taken through a process called “optical character recognition” so that the resultant PDFs can be indexed and searched.

### Making it easy to find related information

One of the benefits of presenting visitors with a website user interface for legislation is that it affords the opportunity to provide them with links to related information. Initially these links are to the Explanatory Note for Acts or the Explanatory Memorandum for Statutory Instruments, which explain what the legislation seeks to accomplish and why it has been drafted the way it has. Alongside this we are also publishing an RSS feed for the legislation item. This provides visitors with an easy way to keep up to date with subsequent additions to the website, such as when the Explanatory Notes are added for an Act, and also when other related legislation is passed, such as Commencement Orders, or longer term, amending legislation. In future we shall be adding explicit links to Commencement Orders, and where legislation implements an EU Directive, a link also to that Directive.

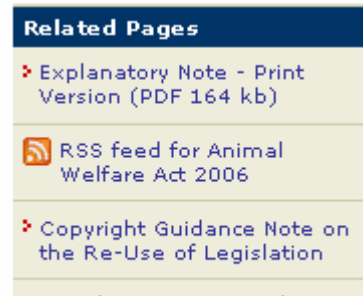


Figure 4, related

Other related pages include links to the copyright guidance for the re-use of legislation and to the viewing advice. Here visitors are able to set a permanent preference about how they wish to view legislation, between the Standard Version website view or the Plain Version.

### Providing appropriate orientation

#### You are here:

Home > Legislation > UK > Acts > Public Acts 2006 > Companies Act 2006 (c. 46) >

Figure 5, “breadcrumb” navigation tail

The OPSI website is one of the largest in terms of numbers of documents maintained by the UK government. Using innovative eye tracking software, one of the key findings of the usability testing of legislation was the importance of providing users with a way of orientating themselves around the site. The prominent “you are here” trail, called a breadcrumb trail, shown at the top of the page was one of the most used and valued usability features, which is being extended to the presentation of all legislation.

## Enhanced in content navigation

PART 5 continued CHAPTER 3 continued

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[First page](#) | [1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) [6](#) [7](#) [8](#) [9](#) [10](#) [11](#) [12](#) [13](#) [14](#) [15](#) [16](#) [17](#) | [Last page](#)

PUBLIC COMPANY BECOMING PRIVATE AND UNLIMITED

Figure 6, mouse-over text displaying the content of a page

Some pieces of legislation are very large documents, spanning tens even hundreds of pages. To help users navigate within a legislative document a clear page based navigation scheme has been introduced, with mouse over texts (or notes which pop-up when the user places their pointer over a part of the page) that give an indication of what content appears on that page.

## Making content fragments directly addressable

.LegClearFix LegP1ContainerFirst  
#pt3-ch2-pb2-l1g21 .LegDS LegP1No .LegDS LegP1GroupTitleFirst  
**21 Amendment of articles**  
#pt3-ch2-pb2-l1g21-l1p1-l2p1 .LegClearFix LegP2Container  
.LegDS LegLHS LegP2No .LegDS LegRHS LegP2Text  
(1) A company may amend its articles by special resolution.  
#pt3-ch2-pb2-l1g21-l1p1-l2p2 .LegClearFix LegP2Container  
.LegDS LegLHS LegP2No .LegDS LegRHS LegP2Text  
(2) In the case of a company that is a charity, this is subject to—  
#pt3-ch2-pb2-l1g21-l1p1-l2p2-l3p1 .LegClearFix LegP3Container  
.LegDS LegLHS LegP3No .LegDS LegRHS LegP3Text  
(a) in England and Wales, section 64 of the Charities Act 1993 (c. 10);

Figure 7, identifiers for content fragments

One of the most important attributes of the legislation published on the OPSI website is that it is the definitive version and since 2002 has carried the same legal status as the official printed version. The republished legislation includes a highly granular unique identifier scheme, which allows specific sections and sub sections within a legislation item to be directly

reference by a URI<sup>1</sup>, which resolves to the right place in the online version. The identifiers, normally hidden, are shown in yellow in Figure 6 using a plug-in for the Firefox browser. The URI scheme is important because if one wished to directly reference, Section 11, Sub Section 2 (a) of the Companies Act 2006, it can now be done using a specific URI: [http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2006/ukpga\\_20060046\\_en\\_4#pt3-ch2-pb2-l1g21-l1p1-l2p2-l3p1](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2006/ukpga_20060046_en_4#pt3-ch2-pb2-l1g21-l1p1-l2p2-l3p1)

This URI scheme can be adopted and used by others and it is hoped will contribute to the development of other more semantic representations of UK legislation as we move towards the Semantic Web (or the web of data).

### Improving accessibility of legislation online

One of the main objectives of the Transforming Legislation Publishing Programme has been to improve the standard of accessibility of legislation published online. Several important accessibility features are supported, including the appropriate resizing of text following visitor’s browser preferences, and the addition of appropriate alternative attributes for images and formula.

*Premiums, leases at undervalue etc*

**34 Treatment of premiums etc. as rent or Schedule D profits**

- (1) Where the payment of any premium is required under a lease, or otherwise under the terms subject to which a lease is granted, and the duration of the lease does not exceed 50 years, the landlord shall be treated for the purposes of the Tax Acts as becoming entitled when the lease is granted to an amount by way of rent (in addition to any actual rent) equal to—

$$P - \frac{(P \times Y)}{50}$$

Formula - P subtract ((P multiply by Y) divide by 50)

*Figure 8, describing the contents of images*

These so called “alt attributes” explain the contents of the image and are important for those using screen readers or other assistive technologies. Another important accessibility point is to relate the columns in a table heading with the columns to which those headings refer and to provide a summary of a table’s content. We have developed new software tools to help us add this additional information to the legislation we publish online. With the thousands of images and tables included in UK legislation, the process of adding this additional information

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<sup>1</sup> Unique Resource Identifier (URI) - is a string of characters used to identify a resource, primarily to enable interaction with representations of that resource over a network such as the World Wide Web.

takes time. To date UK primary legislation up to 1992 has been completed with this extra information.

We have also taken the opportunity to add an expanded meaning for hundreds of the acronyms and abbreviations used in legislation. These can be seen by simply placing the mouse over the abbreviation, in the example below where "c." stands for "Chapter". With such a large body of material, adding this type of extra information is no small task. However these details are important for achieving an appropriate level of accessibility for legislative content, which is our paramount concern.

1988 (c. 1) »

Chapter

Figure 9,  
Showing the  
meaning of  
acronyms

As last year, we have enabled the content on the website to be accessed using the award winning Browsealoud, a plug-in which supports users with a mild visual impairment or other reading difficulty by speaking the contents of a page out to them.

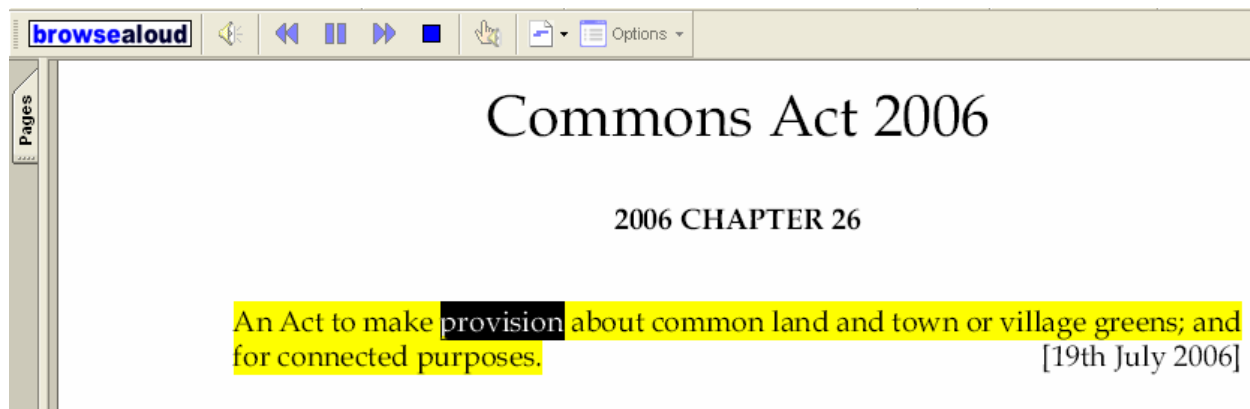


Figure 10, Browsealoud text reading in action

### Improved search


Several enhancements have been made to the way the website search facility works. The search engine, based on the Google Search Appliance, has been integrated with APR's Semaphore product, to provide for a subject based refinement facility. The user performs their search in the usual way, but with their results they are given an opportunity to refine the search by a subject term from the Integrated Public Sector Vocabulary, or to search for related subjects to their original search term.

## Searched for 'pensions'

**Refine your search by subject...**

[Day care centres](#) | [Death in service](#) | [Financial service industries](#) | [Occupational pensions](#) | [Older people](#) | [Pensions](#) | [Personal pensions](#) | [Social and support groups](#) | [State pensions](#)

**Results**

 [RSS feed for 'pensions' \(sorted by date\)](#)

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1 - 10 of 25800 [Next >](#) [Sort by date](#) / [Sort by relevance](#)

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**[PDF] EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM TO THE PENSIONS INCREASE (PENSION SCHEME ...**  
Page 1. EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM TO THE PENSIONS INCREASE (PENSION SCHEME FOR KENNETH MACDONALD) REGULATIONS 2007 2007 No. 802 1. This ...  
[www.opsi.gov.uk/si/em2007/uksiem\\_20070802\\_en.pdf](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/em2007/uksiem_20070802_en.pdf) - 2007-03-19 - [Text Version](#)

**[PDF] EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM TO THE PENSIONS INCREASE (REVIEW) ORDER ...**  
Page 1. EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM TO THE PENSIONS INCREASE (REVIEW) ORDER 2007 2007 No. 801 1. This explanatory memorandum has been ...  
[www.opsi.gov.uk/si/em2007/uksiem\\_20070801\\_en.pdf](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/em2007/uksiem_20070801_en.pdf) - 2007-03-27 - [Text Version](#)

**Related subjects**

- [Age discrimination](#)
- [Benefits](#)
- [Care for older people](#)
- [Employment terms and conditions](#)
- [Insurance](#)
- [Living standards and income levels](#)
- [Personal finance](#)
- [Retirement](#)
- [Social issues](#)
- [Staff benefits](#)

**External Websites**

- [Results IPSV Categorized by !\[\]\(15b3c048ece3c5b28384171962f5ff49\_img.jpg\)](#)

Figure 11, search results with the option to refine search by subject

## User created RSS Feeds

RSS stands for "Really Simple Syndication" and is a web feed format used to publish frequently updated content. RSS makes it possible for people to keep up with their favourite web sites in an automated manner that's easier than checking them manually.

The website search engine also allows visitors to create and then subscribe to their own RSS feeds. To create an RSS Feed, for example to be alerted to any new legislation which is published about "pensions", the user searches for "pensions" in the normal way. At the top of the search results is an option to subscribe to the pensions RSS feed. When a new piece of legislation concerning "pensions" is published, the new items will appear in the feed.

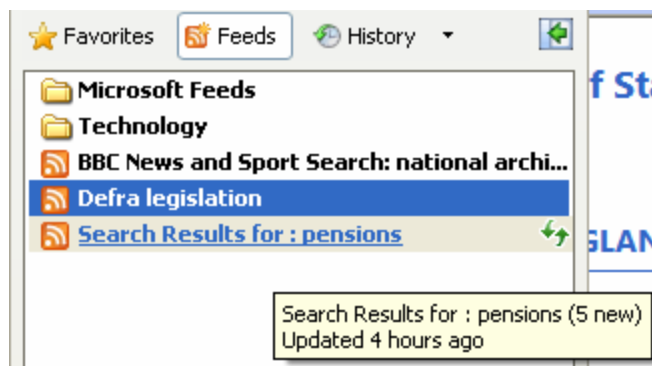


Figure 12, an example of user created RSS feed, in this case for "Defra legislation"

## Revised Statutes from the UK Statute Law Database

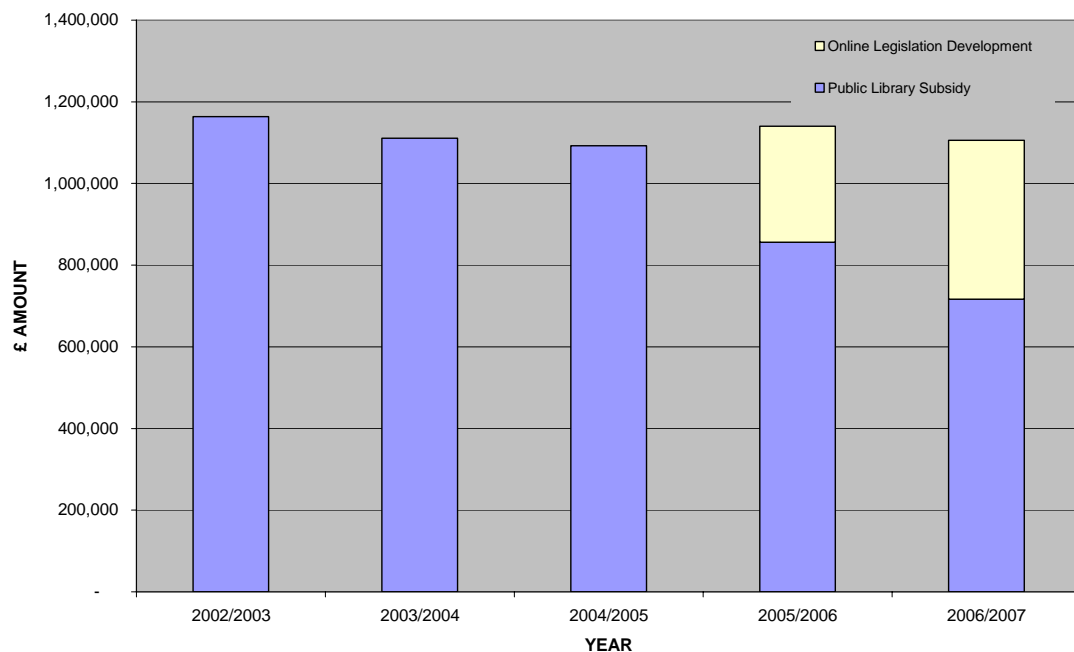
The UK Statute Law Database contains revised statutes (Acts of Parliament) prepared by the Statutory Publications Office (SPO). OPSI is working with SPO to bring our online legislative services together, to create a single place where visitors can access the widest range of legislative content held by the government alongside supporting material. The first step in this process is to publish a most recent version of revised statutes from the Statute Law Database, using the same style and approach as OPSI has taken to publishing legislation as enacted. The first stage of this work, published revised statutes up to 1988, will be completed by the end of the September 2007. This will help improve access to the content in the Statute Law Database, particularly for non-legal experts, less likely to need the more sophisticated features provided by the Statute Law Database website.

## Funding

The graph below shows how funding for the Public Library Subsidy Scheme and online legislative development has been allocated during 2002/03 – 2006/07. The graph shows the amount of funding that has been reallocated to online legislation developments in the past two years after subsidy on hard copy legislation was diverted into access to online legislation services.

A significant proportion of funding continues to be spent on subsidising local authority funded public libraries in the purchase of hard and electronic copies of official publications at half price. The other 50% of the purchase price being funded from this budget. The subsidy is given to facilitate public access to parliamentary, and government materials and legislation that is not available on the official legislation website at [www.opsi.gov.uk](http://www.opsi.gov.uk). For further information on how the Public Library Access scheme works see <http://www.opsi.gov.uk/official-publications/public-library-access-scheme.htm>

## PUBLIC ACCESS SCHEME EXPENDITURE 2002/03-2006/07



### Our plans for 2007/08

Huge advances have been made in the last two years with how legislation is made available online. This year we are building on the progress that has been made and are continuing to deliver yet more improvements and enhancements. Our plans include:

- Detailed usability testing, using eye-tracking software, to evaluate the improvements made to the online legislation service, identify yet more enhancements and to help shape options for bringing together legislation on the OPSI website with content from the Statute Law Database.
- Extending the scope of legislation published from the Statute Law Database from 1988 to date.
- Republishing secondary legislation to the same standard as primary legislation.
- Developing and applying a legislation specific taxonomy, to aid the searching and inter-relating of legislation.
- Publishing non-print Statutory Instruments online.
- Publishing the legislative tables of effect for secondary legislation online.
- Continuing to add alt attributes to images and table summary information to ensure the full contents of legislation is accessible to those using screen readers and other assistive technology.