INFORMATION POLICYMAKING IN THE UNITED KINGDOM: THE ROLE OF THE INFORMATION PROFESSIONAL

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Should a state have a single overarching national information policy? Currently for the United Kingdom, Buckley Owen, Cooke, and Matthews say no, and suggest that their analysis may be relevant elsewhere. Their conclusion is based on primary and secondary research including interviews with policymakers/implementers at the highest level. In their investigation into UK government policy on citizens' access to Public Sector Information, they map responsibility for eighteen different information policy issues across nine government departments, noting the diversity of the issues. Instead of a single rule, they offer a "framework" of elements, often representing cross-cutting issues, and offer suggestions for managing their coordination. They note the influence of experts and lobbyists on this process, and see a potential role for "information professionals" who know both technology and policy, with the relevant professional body playing a leading role. The authors conclude with ten recommendations for operationalizing their approach.

INTRODUCTION

Government information policy, in its broadest sense, is an area of academic research in the United Kingdom that has received little attention from information scientists in recent years, and yet we are seeing a huge growth in the amount and variety of information that we all have to deal with in our daily lives. The development of the World Wide Web has both increased the opportunities for sharing and using information and raised the expectations of what information should be provided. Governments around the world are opening up their data – following the example of administrations in the United Kingdom and United States – and developing electronic services to improve efficiency and drive down costs, as well as making them more responsive to user needs. Information policy is central to this burgeoning eGovernment agenda, as evidenced by the number of eGovernment policy documents that refer to information issues and the rising profile of government data in election manifestos.

Much of the focus in the literature thus far has been on technical issues rather than on information policy issues. This article presents findings from primary and secondary research that sought to

redress the balance, taking an information science perspective. Policy on citizens' access to public sector information (PSI) was used as a case study; however, the focus here is on the wider issues that are relevant for government information policymaking in general, and particularly the role of the information profession.

This research draws on the research philosophy of critical realism,[1] a branch of realism originally propounded by Roy Bhaskar[2] that investigates power relationships and is designed to bring about change:[3] "criticising the social practices that it studies."[4] In doing so, critical realism tries to uncover the values that underpin individual policies, while being sensitive to the perspectives of the individual stakeholders. Robson claims that critical realism "has been seen as particularly appropriate for research in practice- and value-based professions such as social work."[5] This would suggest that it is suitable for use in research by information professionals.

As well as an analysis of policy documents dating back to 1996, and the literature relating to information policymaking, the main research method employed for this article was semi-structured interviews with 25 key stakeholders in the United Kingdom, to understand their personal perspectives on how information policy is developed and promulgated. The interviews were with the most senior persons working in the field in five categories: top civil servants working directly with policies; regulators of and advisers on the relevant policies; external commentators and lobbyists; leading academics; and senior members of the information profession. While one interview was by e-mail and two were by telephone, the rest of the interviews were face-to-face, and of these, the majority were in conducted in London.

Interviewees were chosen because of their mostly unique positions in the policymaking/implementation process and, where possible, those with the highest level of responsibility were selected. They included, for example: the government's then-Chief Information Officer and Head of Digital Policy; the Head of Information Policy and the Head of Research at The National Archives (TNA); the then-president and policy director of the UK's main professional body for library and information professionals; the former chief executive of the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council; the chief executive of the British Library; and a former head of profession for knowledge and information management within the UK government.

This article starts with the theoretical basis of the research, followed by background coverage of the specific issues relating to information policy, particularly coordination of information policy and the concept of a "national information policy" (NIP), based on a review of the literature and policy documents. The next section provides an outline of the main players within the UK government that have a role in information policy. The findings of the research are drawn from the interviews in particular, and address: who makes information policy; the coordination of information policy; and

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[1] Colin Robson, *Real World Research*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 41.
[2] For example, see Roy Bhaskar, *Reclaiming Reality: A Critical Introduction to Contemporary Philosophy* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2010).
[3] Michael Crotty, *The Foundations of Social Research* (London: Sage, 1998), 157.
[4] Robson, 41.
[5] Ibid., 30.

influences on policymaking. Finally, recommendations are made to the information profession as to how it can have more influence on policymaking.

THEORETICAL BASIS OF THE RESEARCH

This research falls firmly in the information policy domain rather than the public administration domain. Nevertheless, various theories of policy development provide a theoretical lens through which to assess the findings. The literature review showed that there is no one information policy but rather a set of (mostly) inter-related policies[6] developed by different UK government departments.[7] By its nature, information policy does not have easily defined boundaries,[8] so the information policy process is not easily defined either. The research found that information policy does not fit neatly into the linear stagist policy model of Hogwood and Gunn[9] but rather reflects Colebatch's[10] description of structured interaction – an altogether more complex mixture of influencers and players than just the small group within government who actually make decisions about what the policy or policies should be. What actually happens on the ground in developing and implementing policy is much more chaotic than the straightforward picture put forward in government policy documents, more akin to Lindblom and Woodhouse's "primeval soup." Writing in 1993, they referred to "deeper forces" structuring and distorting government behavior,[11] which today might include technology, social networking, and trust/transparency. Parsons points out the importance that politicians place on public opinion when developing policy,[12] and issues of trust must surely play into that agenda.

The structured interaction approach recognizes the wide range of players in the development of policy, not just those who actually take the policy decisions. This is also a feature of the Sabatier's Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF).[13] ACF suggests change will happen when a group of people and institutions come together with a common purpose that addresses a policy problem, and that this will include researchers and the media.

This research has other elements in common with ACF in that it attempts to marry a top-down approach, focusing on actual policies through the mapping of UK policy documents – Colebatch's "sacred map"[14] – with a bottom-up approach addressing the "policy problem"– akin to Colebatch's

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[6] Library and Information Commission (Great Britain), *Keystone for the Information Age: A National Information Policy for the UK* (London, Library and Information Commission, 1999).

[7] Michael W. Hill, *National Information Policies* (East Grinstead, UK: Bowker-Saur, 1994), 6.

[8] Robert H. Burger, *Information Policy: A Framework for Evaluation and Policy Research* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1993), 91.

[9] Brian W. Hogwood and Lewis A. Gunn, *Policy Analysis for the Real World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 24.

[10] Hal K. Colebatch, "What Work Makes Policy?" *Policy Sciences* 39, no. 4 (2006): 313.

[11] Charles E. Lindblom and Edward J. Woodhouse, *The Policy-making Process*, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993), 10.

[12] Wayne Parsons, *Public Policy: An Introduction to the Theory and Practice of Policy Analysis* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 1995), 110.

[13] Paul A. Sabatier and Christopher M. Weible, "The Advocacy Coalition Framework: Innovations and Clarifications," in *Theories of the Policy Process*, 2nd ed., ed. Paul A. Sabatier (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2007), 189-220.

[14] Colebatch, 313.

"profane map".[15] Unlike the ACF, this research is not concerned with theory construction but instead was designed to make practical recommendations to stakeholders. However it shares the intention of looking at policy development over a decade or more.

The Multiple Streams Framework of Kingdon stresses the role of the "policy entrepreneur" in manipulating change in policy[16] while the Punctuated Equilibrium theory of Baumgartner and Jones also places considerable emphasis on outside forces; [17] however it is their concept of most policy changing incrementally, with sudden changes of importance, which is of particular interest in light of the development of UK open government data policy from 2009 to 2012. Which elements have come together to raise information policy from a support role to an issue addressed by successive prime ministers and to election pledges?

Underlying policy on developing electronic citizen-centric services has not changed in over a decade, having been a plank of the transformational government – or eGovernment – agenda,[18] which itself was inspired by the New Public Management theory put forward by Osborne and Gaebler[19] and others in the early 1990s. The need for efficiency in government had also been a key feature of the transformational government agenda, but one now addressed with more urgency in the wake of the financial crisis;[20] dealing with citizens on a one-to-one basis is much more expensive than engaging many-to-many through digital channels. The use of the Internet by governments gradually grew but the development of social networking provided a new way for citizens to engage with one another and obtain information, putting pressure on government to match citizens' expectations for digital engagement.[21] Finally public trust in government had been low for many years but the 2009 MPs' expenses scandal[22] – and consequent media coverage – brought this to a crisis point, at a time when a general election was close and citizen engagement in the political process was therefore higher on the political agenda. So while there were elements of policy that had changed little in the last ten years, suddenly there was a series of challenges to be addressed – Kingdon's "policy problems."[23]

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[15] Ibid.

[16] Parsons, 192-194.

[17] James L. True, Bryan D. Jones, and Frank R. Baumgartner, "Punctuated Equilibrium Theory: Explaining Stability and Change in Policymaking," in *Theories of the Policy Process*, ed. Paul A. Sabatier (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2007), 155-187.

[18] Cabinet Office (Great Britain), *Transformational Government Implementation Plan*, Feb. 18, 2008, accessed Mar. 1, 2012, http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20080522080942/http://cio.gov.uk/documents/pdf/transgov/transgovt.pdf.

[19] David Osborne and Ted Gaebler, *Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit is Transforming the Public Sector* (New York; London: Plume, 1993).

[20] HM Government (Great Britain), *Putting the Frontline First: Smarter Government*, Cm 7753 (London: TSO, 2009).

[21] Ed Mayo and Tom Steinberg, "The Power of Information: An Independent Review by Ed Mayo and Tom Steinberg," working paper, June 2007, accessed Mar. 1, 2012, http://www.epractice.eu/files/media/media1300.pdf.

[22] For a summary of the various issues in MPs' expenses scandal, see "MPs' Expenses," BBC News, May 25, 2010, accessed Mar. 1, 2012, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/in_depth/uk_politics/2009/mps'_expenses/default.stm.

[23] Parsons, 204; Paul A. Sabatier, "Top-down and Bottom-up Approaches to Implementation Research," in *The Policy Process: A Reader,* 2nd ed., ed. Michael J. Hill (Hemel Hempstead: Prentice Hall/Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1997), 272-295.

BACKGROUND

Many words have been expended trying to define the concept of information policy. Having studied the field, Burger came to the conclusion that "Information policy can legitimately be used only as an umbrella term for a group of public policies united in one way or another by that ambiguous term 'information'." [24] Braman develops this further: "Information policy is comprised of laws, regulations, and doctrinal positions – and other decision making and practices with society-wide constitutive effects – involving information creation, processing, flows, access, and use."[25] What is important is that information policy is seen as a process rather than a document and this research sought to shed light on that process.

Nilsen[26] and Browne,[27] amongst others, noted that the majority of information policy scholarship had been drawn from the information studies domain and that a more interdisciplinary approach is desirable.[28] Braman, searching more recently in late 2010, found a much wider range of disciplines now addressing information policy issues.[29] Information policy does not fit into neat segments for analysis. The literature on policy analysis suggests that research focuses on policy units such as health, environment, and education; but information policy cuts across these.[30]

A central issue for the research being reported on here is how information policy is coordinated and implemented across the UK government. It is a recurring theme in the literature, especially that of policy analysis. UNESCO's National Information Systems (NATIS) proposed a national coordinating body.[31] In the United States, the Rockefeller report stressed the importance of a central coordinating body,[32] and Trauth found in 1986 that US information policy development had been fragmented because policies had resulted from different technologies and their concomitant problems.[33] She suggests using the "INPUT – PROCESS – OUTPUT" systems model to look at the process rather than the technology, but as Burger notes, this only takes you so far down the evaluation road.[34] Rowlands points out that seamless coordination of information policy across government may not be possible as the players have differing, and possibly unresolvable, visions and

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[24] Burger, 91.
[25] Sandra Braman, "Defining Information Policy," *Journal of Information Policy* 1 (2011): 3.
[26] Kirsti Nilsen, *The Impact of Information Policy: Measuring the Effects of the Commercialization of Canadian Government Statistics* (Stamford, CT: Ablex, 2001).
[27] Mairéad Browne, "The Field of Information Policy: 2. Redefining the Boundaries and Methodologies," *Journal of Information Science* 23, no.5 (1997): 339-351.
[28] Ibid., 349.
[29] Braman, 1-5.
[30] Ian Cornelius, *Information Policies and Strategies* (London: Facet, 2010). For further examples see Parsons, 31; Sabatier and Weible.
[31] United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, National Information Systems (NATIS), *Objectives for National and International Action: Intergovernmental Conference on the Planning of National Documentation, Library and Archives Infrastructures*, report COM-74/NATIS/3, July 1974.
[32] Nelson A. Rockefeller, *National Information Policy: Report to the President of the United States Submitted by the Staff of the Domestic Council Committee on the Right of Privacy* (Washington, DC: National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, 1976).
[33] Eileen M. Trauth, "An Integrative Approach to Information Policy Research," *Telecommunications Policy* 10, no.1 (1986): 41-50.
[34] Burger, 96.

goals.[35] He goes on to highlight the problems of coordination when information policy is so complex, and much is latent rather than explicit.

The consideration of coordination of information policy – or lack of it – leads to the question of which information policies should be coordinated. The concept of a national information policy (NIP) was much discussed at the national and international levels from the 1970s to 1990s. Writing in 1988, Ian Malley defined a NIP as "…government-directed policy for co-ordinated action on all matters relating to information. Most writers on national information policy agree that there is no such policy in the UK at present, and there is also some agreement that there never has been such a policy. However, there is evidence that from time to time the mechanisms for establishing such a policy have existed and the Government itself, although failing to proceed to a national information policy, has set up or supported organisations that might have been capable of assembling and articulating such a policy."[36] This has continued to be true: since he wrote this the Library and Information Commission (LIC) and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) have come and gone.

Malley went on to suggest that a NIP was not developed before 1981 as the focus was too narrow, and after that date the whole information industry rapidly developed and the field became too diverse for one coordinated policy, a problem that is even more prevalent now.[37] Even in 1994 Hill identified a list of government departments with an interest in information policy[38] similar to the list in Table 1 (see page 63 below).

Earlier in 1981 the government had rejected a proposal from the House of Commons Select Committee on Education, Science and the Arts for a minister of Cabinet rank to take responsibility for national policy on library and information services.[39] The post, as envisioned by the Select Committee, would be narrowly focused on a library and information service policy, as opposed to the wider concept of a national information policy. The Select Committee also recommended the setting up of a Standing Commission to coordinate library and information services on a national basis, and this too was rejected by the government. It felt that the establishment of such a body was unnecessary because there were already Library Advisory Councils in existence, which with some extension of their remit, could adequately fulfill the role suggested for the Standing Commission.[40] The Library Advisory Councils were therefore expanded to become Library and Information Service Councils, however they can perhaps be seen as the seed for the Library and Information

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[35] Ian Rowlands, "General Overview," in *Understanding Information Policy: Proceedings of a Workshop Held at Cumberland Lodge, Windsor Great Park, 22-24 July 1996*, ed. Ian Rowlands, (London: Bowker-Saur, 1997), 15.

[36] Ian Malley, *National Information Policy in the UK* (Shepshed, UK: IMPC, 1988), 5.

[37] Ibid., 11.

[38] Michael W. Hill, *National Information Policies and Strategies: An Overview and Bibliographic Survey* (East Grinstead, UK: Bowker-Saur, 1994), 6.

[39] Malley, 15; Department of Education and Science (Great Britain), *Information Storage and Retrieval in the British Library Service, Observations by the Government on the Second and Fourth Reports from the Select Committee on Education, Science and Arts*, Session 1979-80, Cm 8237 (London: HMSO, 1981).

[40] Malley, 4.

Commission (LIC), which was set up by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in 1995, following many years of consultation with the library and information community.

Meanwhile the government was not ignoring the burgeoning information industry. In its 1984 response[41] to the Cabinet Office Information Technology Advisory Panel report "Making a Business of Information,"[42] it gave responsibility for tradable information to the Minister for Information Technology within the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) – a post that lasted only until 1987,[43] although the responsibility for the information industry remains with the DTI successor departments. Writing in 1996 about a UK NIP for the electronic age, Professor Stephen Saxby pointed to "the need for a broader and better resourced information policy".[44] He concluded that "Whereas securing the delivery of the economic fruits of the information society is a legitimate and desirable aspiration for policy, the government should also recognize that it has a higher responsibility. This extends beyond the needs of the market and the dogma of government ideology, towards the maintenance of society's core values applied for the wider good of all."[45]

Shortly after its inception, the LIC recognized the need for concerted action: "if we are to remain competitive in the global information society"[46] and issued a discussion paper titled "Towards a National Information Policy for the UK" in 1997.[47] By now "information" was a buzz word around government; the terms "information society" and the "Information Superhighway" were in common parlance. The LIC considered the elements of a NIP to include:

- information superhighway
- regulatory mechanisms
- universal access
- plurality of technical solutions
- core content for public good
- ensuring delivery of content
- privacy/data protection
- legal deposit
- intellectual property
- free access to core information

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[41] Department of Trade and Industry (Great Britain), *Government Response to the ITAP Report of "Making a Business of Information"* (London: HMSO, 1984).
[42] Cabinet Office (Great Britain), Information Technology Advisory Panel, *Making a Business of Information: A Survey of New Opportunities* (London: HMSO, 1983).
[43] Malley, 20.
[44] Stephen Saxby, "UK National Information Policy for the Electronic Age," *International Review of Law, Computers and Technology* 10, no. 1 (1996): 124.
[45] Ibid., 125.
[46] Library and Information Commission (Great Britain), *Towards a National Information Policy for the UK*, September 1997, accessed Mar. 1, 2012,
http://web.archive.org/web/20000902115228/http://www.lic.gov.uk/publications/policyreports/nip.pdf, 1.
[47] Ibid.

- UK-wide program of information handling skills
- information specialists
- information strategies for organizations[48]

The paper was widely circulated but there was little feedback from government.[49] However the Commission issued an updated paper[50] and organized the *Keystone for the Information Age* conference in March 2000;[51] two weeks later the LIC's functions were subsumed into Resource: The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries (subsequently renamed the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, or MLA). MLA itself has now been closed and its functions redistributed.[52]

The year 2002 was the last time the concept of a NIP for the UK was looked at in any detail: a Policy Advisory Group (PAG) was convened by the Library Association to build on recommendations from the LIC and made recommendations to government and the profession,[53] partly based on research commissioned from Muir et al. into NIPs in various countries around the world.[54]

The Main Players

Two departments within the UK government have the main loci for information policymaking that affects the rest of government: the Cabinet Office and the Ministry of Justice. Figure 1 below shows the main relevant areas of responsibility of those two departments.

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[48] Library and Information Commission (Great Britain), *Keystone for the Information Age: A National Information Policy for the UK.*

[49] Rosalind Johnson, *National Information Policy* (London: Library Information Technology Centre, 2001).

[50] Library and Information Commission (Great Britain), *Keystone for the Information Age: A National Information Policy for the UK.*

[51] Library and Information Commission (Great Britain), *Keystone for the Information Age, British Library*, March 2000, accessed Mar. 1, 2012, http://web.archive.org/web/20001206041700/www.lic.gov.uk/publications/other/keystonereport.html.

[52] Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (Great Britain), "MLA Pledge a Smooth Transition," press release, July 26, 2010, accessed Mar. 1, 2012, http://www.mla.gov.uk/news_and_views/press_releases/2010/mla_gov_announcement.

[53] Library Association (Great Britain), *Report of the Policy Advisory Group on a National Information Policy* (London: Library Association, 2002).

[54] Adrienne Muir, Charles Oppenheim, Naomi Hammond, and Jane Platts, *Report on Developments World-Wide on National Information Policy: Prepared for Resource and the Library Association* (Loughborough, UK: Loughborough University Department of Information Science, 2001).
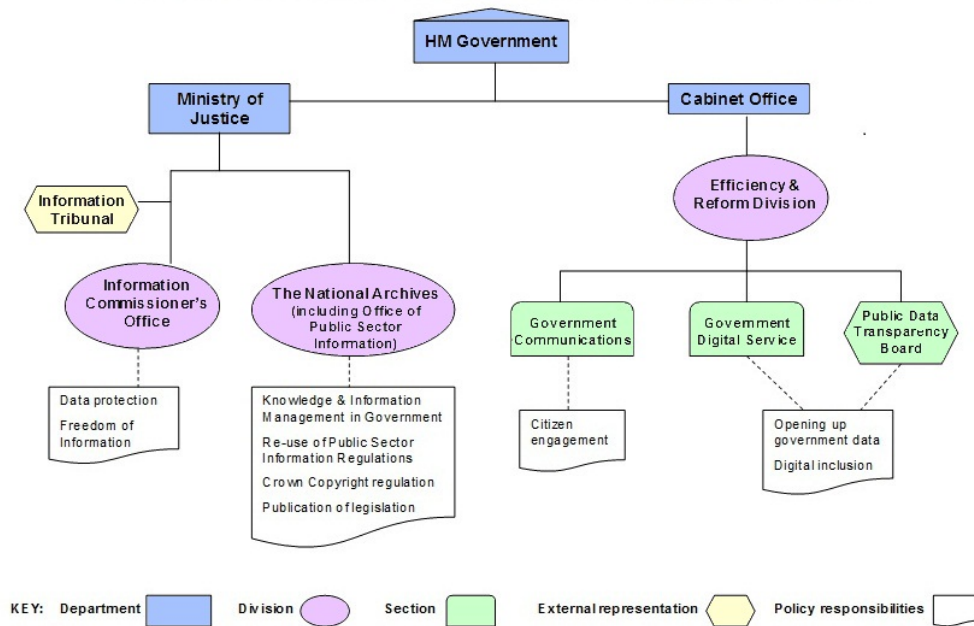
Figure 1: Main UK Government Departments with an Information Policy Brief

The Cabinet Office generally has a central coordinating role within government and has many subordinate units with a government-wide information function. The Efficiency and Reform Group includes the Office of the Chief Information Officer and the Government Communication Group, which is responsible for the Digital Engagement Team. [55] It now also manages the Digital Government Service, bringing together the various strands of the government's digital activity, including the Directgov portal for government websites and the proposed single domain. [56] The Public Sector Transparency Board, [57] which oversees the government's agenda for opening up public data, also sits within the Efficiency and Reform Group. The Cabinet Office is now also working with the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) to set up a Public Data Corporation which will "bring together Government bodies and data into one organisation and provide an unprecedented level of easily accessible public information and drive further efficiency in the delivery of public services. Supporting the Government's growth agenda, it will open up

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[55] Cabinet Office (Great Britain), *Cabinet Office Structure Charts*, 2011, accessed Mar. 1, 2012, http://www.number10.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/Cabinet-Office-Org-Chart.pdf.

[56] Cabinet Office (Great Britain), "Government Digital Service," accessed Mar. 1, 2012, http://digital.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/feed/.

[57] Cabinet Office (Great Britain), "Public Sector Transparency Board," 2011, accessed Mar. 1, 2012, http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/content/public-sector-transparency-board-who's-who.

opportunities for innovative developers, businesses and members of the public to generate social and economic growth through the use of data."[58]

The main government department responsible for the *regulatory* aspects of information policy is the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). The relevant minister (Lord McNally in 2012)[59] has responsibility for data sharing, data protection, freedom of information, democratic engagement, and The National Archives (TNA).[60] Meanwhile the department sponsors the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) and the First-Tier Tribunal (Information Rights), which hears appeals against decisions of the Information Commissioner.[61] The ICO is an independent public body set up to promote access to official information and protect personal information.[62] To do this it enforces and oversees the Data Protection Act, the Freedom of Information Act, the Environmental Information Regulations, and the Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations.

TNA acts as the government archive and also has an overarching role in promoting good practice in records management across both central and local government.[63] In October 2006 the Office of Public Sector Information (OPSI, previously within the Cabinet Office) merged with TNA to enable "the combined organisation to provide strong and coherent leadership for the development of information policy across government and the wider public sector."[64] Responsibilities included:

- Licensing Crown copyright and publishing all legislation (now published separately through the Legislation.gov.uk website);[65]
- Overseeing the Information Asset Register (IAR) that lists information assets held by the UK Government, with a focus on unpublished material;
- Maintaining the Information Fair Trader Scheme which sets standards and assesses public bodies' levels of fairness and transparency in trading PSI;
- Investigating complaints against PSI holders made under the Re-use of Public Sector Information Regulations,[66] which came into effect in July 2005 in response to the EU Directive on public sector information.[67]

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58 Cabinet Office (Great Britain), "Public Data Corporation to Free Up Public Data and Drive Innovation," 2011, accessed Mar. 1, 2012, http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/news/public-data-corporation-free-public-data-and-drive-innovation.

59 Ministry of Justice (Great Britain), "Lord McNally: Ministry of Justice Departmental Board," accessed Mar. 1, 2012, http://www.justice.gov.uk/about/moj/departmental-board/lord-mcally.htm.

60 Information Commissioner's Office (Great Britain), "Relationship with the Ministry of Justice," accessed Mar. 4, 2012, http://www.ico.gov.uk/about_us/how_we_work/relationship_with_moj.aspx.

61 Ministry of Justice (Great Britain), "Information Rights Tribunal Guidance," accessed Mar. 1, 2012, http://www.informationtribunal.gov.uk/.

62 Information Commissioner's Office (Great Britain), "About the ICO," accessed Mar. 1, 2012, http://www.ico.gov.uk/about_us.aspx.

63 The National Archives (Great Britain), "Who We Are," accessed Mar. 1, 2012, http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/about/whowhathow.htm?source=ddmenu_about1.

64 Office of Public Sector Information (Great Britain), "About OPSI," May 20, 2010, accessed Mar. 1, 2012, http://www.opsi.gov.uk/about/.

65 The National Archives (Great Britain), "Legislation.gov.uk," accessed Mar. 1, 2012, http://www.legislation.gov.uk/.

It should be noted that during the research OPSI had a separate identity from TNA and is therefore referred to as "OPSI" here. However this identity has now been subsumed within TNA, except for its regulatory functions.

The work of the Cabinet Office, MoJ, and their related bodies was the focus of this research; however there are other government departments that have a significant input into various aspects of information policy.

Other UK Government Departments with a Responsibility for Information Policy

As the discussion of NIPs above shows, information policy is wide-ranging and is the responsibility of many government departments, not just the Cabinet Office and MoJ. Policy responsibility for public libraries, museums, and broadcasting lies with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and that department also sponsors the British Library. It was the DCMS that set up the LIC in 1995 as "a national source of expertise, advising Government on all issues relating to the library and information sector."[68]

Their work was continued, together with work on digital content, under the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA), a new body formed in 2000 by the merger of the LIC and the Museums and Galleries Commission.[69] The LIC had a definite focus on libraries in a wide sense, and on information services. The remit of MLA was narrower as regards information services and the organization was restructured during 2008-2009 to have "an emphasis on local government engagement."[70] In July 2010 it was announced that MLA would be wound down by April 2012 as a result of public spending cuts,[71] and its statutory and other functions regarding libraries have been reallocated to the Arts Council.

The Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) is the government department that has ongoing responsibility for the local eGovernment policy agenda.[72] As part of its role in support of local government, CLG provides funding and direction, in conjunction with DCMS, for public libraries and encourages local authorities to improve information to citizens on local services.[73]

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[66] The National Archives (Great Britain), "The Re-use of Public Sector Information Regulations 2005," SI 2005/1515, accessed Mar. 1, 2012, http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2005/20051515.htm.

[67] European Parliament and Council of Europe, Directive 2003/98/EC of 17 November 2003 on the Re-use of Public Sector Information, L 345/90-96 (31.12.2003).

[68] Library and Information Commission (Great Britain), home page, accessed Mar. 2, 2012, http://web.archive.org/web/20001205190000/http://www.lic.gov.uk/.

[69] Ruth Levitt, Jane Steele, and Hilary Thompson, *The Library and Information Commission: An Evaluation of its Policy Work and Underpinning Research* (London: Library and Information Commission, 2000).

[70] Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (Great Britain), "Best Practice at Heart of New Dawn for MLA," June 3, 2008, accessed Mar. 2, 2012, http://www.mla.gov.uk/news/press_releases/new_dawn.

[71] Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (Great Britain), "MLA Pledge a Smooth Transition."

[72] Communities and Local Government (Great Britain), "About Us," accessed Mar. 2, 2012, http://www.communities.gov.uk/corporate/about/.

[73] Communities and Local Government (Great Britain), "Community Empowerment Commitments in the Local Government," white paper, 2008.

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)[74] and the Department for Education[75] both have a role in developing the skills of the nation. In England, they have worked in partnership to reform education and training for 14-19 year-olds – to help young people develop the skills they need for work and higher level study, including basic English, mathematics, and information and communication technology (ICT) skills.[76] This is in response to the 2006 *Leitch Review of Skills*.[77] While ICT skills and information literacy skills are not, or should not be, considered the same thing, there is a degree of overlap.

Again, media literacy is related to information literacy but is not the same, and Ofcom (the Office for Communications) has a duty to promote media literacy, arising from Section 11 of the Communications Act 2003.[78] Ofcom is the independent regulator and competition authority for the UK communications industries, with responsibilities across television, radio, telecommunications, and wireless communications services.[79] Ofcom defines media literacy as "the ability to access, understand and create communications in a variety of contexts."[80] The *Digital Britain* report from BIS and DCMS also tasked Ofcom with managing the Consortium for the Encouragement of Digital Participation,[81] which was formally launched on October 15, 2009,[82] and announced the appointment of Martha Lane Fox as the Champion for Digital Engagement.

In order to aid understanding of the complexity of the information policy agenda, Table 1 below provides an overview of which main information policies were the responsibility of the various UK government departments in 2012.

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[74] Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (Great Britain), "Further Education and Skills," accessed Mar. 2, 2012, http://www.bis.gov.uk/policies/further-education-skills.

[75] Department for Children, Schools and Families (Great Britain), "About Us: Departmental Information," accessed July 14, 2008, http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/aboutus/. This website has been decommissioned.

[76] Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (Great Britain), *World Class Skills: Implementing the Leitch Review of Skills in England*, Cm 7181 (London: TSO, 2007).

[77] Sandy Leitch, *Leitch Review of Skills: Prosperity for All in the Global Economy – World Class Skills*, Final Report (Norwich, UK: TSO, 2006).

[78] Ofcom (Great Britain), "Annex B: Supporting Document: Section 11 Communications Act 2003," accessed Mar. 2, 2012, http://postcomm.gov.uk/consult/condocs/strategymedialit/ml_statement/annexb/.

[79] Ofcom (Great Britain), "Statutory Duties and Regulatory Principles," accessed Mar. 2, 2012, http://www.ofcom.org.uk/about/what-is-ofcom/statutory-duties-and-regulatory-principles/.

[80] Ofcom (Great Britain), *Ofcom's Strategy and Priorities for the Promotion of Media Literacy: A Statement*, Nov. 2, 2004, accessed Mar. 2, 2012, http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/consultations/strategymedialit/summary/strat_prior_statement.pdf, 2.

[81] Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Culture, Media and Sport (Great Britain), *Digital Britain: Final Report*, Cm 7650, June 2009, accessed Mar. 2, 2012, http://www.culture.gov.uk/images/publications/digitalbritain-finalreport-jun09.doc.

[82] Ofcom (Great Britain), "Consortium Launch," accessed Mar. 2, 2012, http://consumers.ofcom.org.uk/2009/10/consortium-launch/.

Table 1: Departmental Breakdown of Government Policies with an Information Policy Component 2012

	BIS	CO	DCLG	DCMS	DfE	DEFRA	DH	HMT	MoJ
Digital engagement, incl. Power of Information		✓							
Government websites, incl. quality & standards		✓							
PSI re-use: EU PSI directive									✓
PSI re-use: Trading funds	✓							✓	✓
PSI re-use: Data unlocking		✓							✓
Official statistics policy		✓							
Geographic Information: EU Inspire directive						✓			
Environmental information: EU directive						✓			✓
Health information							✓		
Freedom of Information									✓
Data Protection									✓
Intellectual property	✓	✓							
Knowledge economy	✓								
Digital broadcasting	✓			✓					
Digital inclusion			✓						
Information literacy	✓				✓				
Public libraries and museums			✓	✓					
School libraries				✓	✓				

BIS: Dept. for Business, Innovation and Skills   CO: Cabinet Office
DCLG: Dept. of Communities and Local Govt.   DCMS: Dept. for Culture, Media and Sport
DfE: Dept. for Education   DEFRA: Dept. for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
DH: Dept. of Health   HMT: Her Majesty's Treasury
MoJ: Ministry of Justice

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Who Makes UK Information Policy?

The answer to "Who makes UK information policy?" would seem to be "It depends on who is interested." This supports the finding of the University College London Constitution Unit research that there is no set pattern to the way policy is made in the UK.[83] A minister with a keen interest in a particular area may push policy through but civil servants too can have latitude to develop policy, although they will need a minister to sign it off, and policies that run across departments will be

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[83] Peter Waller, R.M. Morris, and Duncan Simpson, "Understanding the Formulation and Development of Government Policy in the Context of FOI," report prepared for the Information Commissioner's Office, 2009, accessed Mar. 2, 2012, http://www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit/research/consultancy/ICO_-_FOI_and_Policy.pdf.

harder to put in place as many more ministers will have to be brought on board. The Cabinet Office has the most central role within Whitehall but even it cannot enforce policy implementation.[84]

HM Treasury was perceived by interviewees from outside to be a dominant force, but this is at the macro level of operation. Perhaps many information projects are small scale or are a part of other, funded, projects so there does not need to be a submission for funds from Treasury.

Coordination of Information Policy

Britain has never had a NIP as such,[85] but the analysis of policy documents up to and including the 2010 general election manifestos suggests that the UK has moved some way towards a digital information policy as part of an overall digital policy. *Digital Britain* incorporated many elements but was lacking on information content.[86] Following on from that, *Putting The Frontline First: Smarter Government*[87] and *Building Britain's Digital Future*[88] addressed how PSI should be opened up as part of the overall eGovernment strategy, but this is a long way from having a National Information Policy *per se*. Data quality and reliability – cornerstones of the statistician's professionalism[89] – do not figure, nor do the data management skills required by government.

Much has changed since 2002 when the last work was done on NIP in the UK. There has been an explosion in the range of datasets being made available by government for use by business and citizens.[90] The current challenges for government are how to make best use of the capabilities of Web 2.0 in developing new interactive services and expanding channels of access; for example, using mobile technology and digital television.[91] The Central Office of Information has developed guidance for civil servants on the use of social media for public engagement[92] and government department press offices have their own Twitter feeds and Twitter policies.[93] Even Prime Minister David Cameron had nearly two million followers on Twitter in early 2012.[94] The latest government

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[84] Personal interview with senior civil servant, Apr. 16, 2009.

[85] Malley, 5.

[86] Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Culture, Media and Sport (Great Britain), *Digital Britain: Final Report*.

[87] HM Government (Great Britain), *Putting the Frontline First: Smarter Government*.

[88] Gordon Brown, speech on Building Britain's Digital Future, Mar. 22, 2010, accessed Mar. 2, 2012, http://epsiplatform.eu/content/uk-pm-speech-building-britain-s-digital-future.

[89] UK Statistics Authority (Great Britain), *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*, 2009, accessed Mar. 2, 2012, http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/code-of-practice-for-official-statistics.pdf.

[90] For example, see Cabinet Office (Great Britain), *Open Data Measures in the Autumn Statement*, 2011, accessed Mar. 2, 2012, http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Further_detail_on_Open_Data_measures_in_the_Autumn_Statement_2011.pdf; Cabinet Office (Great Britain), "Public Data Corporation to Free Up Public Data and Drive Innovation."

[91] Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Culture, Media and Sport (Great Britain), *Digital Britain: Final Report*.

[92] Central Office of Information (Great Britain), *Engaging Through Social Media: A Guide for Civil Servants*, 2009, accessed Mar. 2, 2012, http://www.coi.gov.uk/documents/Engaging_through_social_media.pdf.

[93] For example, see Department for Work and Pensions (Great Britain), "Press Office Twitter Policy," accessed Mar. 2, 2012, http://www.dwp.gov.uk/newsroom/twitter-policy/; Department for Business Innovation and Skills (Great Britain), "Twitter Policy," accessed Mar. 2, 2012, http://www.bis.gov.uk/site/connect/twitter-policy.

[94] Cameron's Twitter feed can be found at http://twitter.com/#!/Number10gov.

IT strategy highlights the importance of developing mobile applications and providing "digital by default" services to citizens and business.[95] This makes it more essential than ever to ensure that all citizens have the necessary information handling skills[96] and that the country has a vibrant cadre of information specialists.[97] The focus not just of the UK government, but of many governments around the world, is to develop citizen-centric services, not departmental-centric services.[98]

Does Britain actually need a NIP now? Recent literature does not address the subject but findings from the interviews suggested not. A greater degree of coordination between policies was desired, particularly to ensure that they did not conflict, but with the complexity of potential policies and the range of departments involved, one overarching policy was considered unworkable. A framework of policies was a preferred alternative and Table 2 below identifies the elements that could be in such a framework.

Who would be responsible for this framework of policies? Different parts of policymaking are spread throughout various government departments and there is no formal coordination mechanism, no minister for information policy who has a brief to oversee the work of departments, and no enforcer. Information policy is very diverse; it is not usually an end in itself but rather supports other major initiatives. There will be no "Ministry of Information" – the concept conjures up Cold War propaganda activities – but should there be a minister for information? With the trend towards cutting central government the answer is probably "no." Perhaps rather than designating a whole post, a minister without portfolio could have information policy as part of his/her designated brief. There is currently in 2012 a minister without portfolio in the Cabinet Office so there is a precedent for this type of post, and the Institute for Government recommended that ministers should be designated with responsibility for cross-cutting issues,[99] of which information policy would be an example.

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[95] Cabinet Office (Great Britain), "Government ICT Strategy," 2011, accessed Mar. 2, 2012, http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/content/government-ict-strategy.

[96] Mike Gurstein, "Open Data: Empowering the Empowered or Effective Data Use for Everyone?" blog, Sept. 2, 2010, accessed Mar. 2, 2012, http://gurstein.wordpress.com/2010/09/02/open-data-empowering-the-empowered-or-effective-data-use-for-everyone/; International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions and United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, *The Alexandria Proclamation on Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning*, 2005, accessed Mar. 2, 2012, http://tinyurl.com/6wuea7v.

[97] John Feather, *The Information Society: A Study of Continuity and Change*, 5th ed. (London: Facet, 2008), 185; Monika Bargmann, Gerald Pfeifer, and Boris Piwinger, "A Citizen's Perspective on Public Sector Information," in *Public Sector Information in the Digital Age: Between Markets, Public Management and Citizens' Rights*, ed. Georg Aichholzer and Herbert Burkert (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2004), 255-274.

[98] For example, see United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *United Nations E-Government Survey 2010: Leveraging E-Government at a Time of Financial and Economic Crisis*, accessed Mar. 2, 2012, http://www2.unpan.org/egovkb/global_reports/10report.htm.

[99] Simon Parker, Akash Paun, Jonathan McClory, and Kate Blatchford, *Shaping Up: A Whitehall for the Future* (London: Institute for Government, 2010), accessed Mar. 2, 2012, www.civilservant.org.uk/ifgshapingup.pdf, 9.

Table 2: Elements of a 21st Century Framework of Information Policies

Coordination Make it all happen	• Coordinate development of information policies across government: leadership at the highest level, mechanisms to ensure coordination, access to appropriate advice • Coordinate roll-out of government information policies across the public sector • Evaluate implementation of information policy and coordinate action resulting from the evaluation
Skills Boost training for citizens and enhance the information profession	• Improve information literacy of citizens: through education in schools, through UK Online centres and public libraries and the workplace • Develop the cadre of information specialists within government and throughout the country who can gather and organise public information to maximize its usability and use
Content Optimize content and quality of information made available	• Find out and provide what users need: work with user groups, business, social networking groups; focus groups; surveys • Improve the quality of information: standards for quality of statistical data in place; standards for quality of other information; standardised coding (e.g. RDF) to enable re-use and linking of data
Accessibility Minimize barriers to access and maximise use	• Right to data • Core information free at the point of use • Trading funds: Government commissioned review of economics of trading funds: it may be better for the country's economy to make all their information free for re-use rather than charge for key data • Remove barriers for re-use of public sector information • Organize government's preservation of its own documents in both print and electronic form to ensure long-term availability • Maximize channels of access: Directgov and other government websites; use of mobile technology and digital TV; telephone helplines; face-to-face; print; social networks • Enhance social and digital inclusion, including through spread of broadband access • Adhere to interoperability guidelines for digital media to ensure consistency of approach and access, and optimise for search engines • Investigate and test data sharing between government departments, mindful of implications for public trust/privacy
Regulation Target government's legislative impact	• Privacy and data protection: role of Information Commissioner, how government regulates itself with recent lapses in security • Intellectual property: crown copyright and other copyright legislation; open government licence • Legal deposit, especially of electronic documents

Key Relationships and Structures

As found by Perri 6[100] and the Institute for Government,[101] coordination across government is a problem. There are some coordinating mechanisms, but these relate to information management and information systems delivery, for example the Chief Information Officer Council.[102] The Knowledge Council has a formal coordinating structure but its remit at present is limited to internal

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[100] Perri 6, "Joined-up Government in the Western World in Comparative Perspective: A Preliminary Literature Review and Exploration," *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 14, no. 1 (2004): 131.

[101] Parker, Paun, McClory, and Blatchford.

[102] Cabinet Office (Great Britain), "Chief Information Officers Council," accessed March 2, 2012, http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/resource-library/chief-information-officers-council.

information and knowledge management; it does not have a role in policy.[103] Internal reactions from the interviews show that it has been doing a considerable amount of work but it does not have a high profile within the library and information profession and little information about it is available externally. Perhaps as the government is opening up its data, the Knowledge Council should be opening up its advice likewise.

Wildavsky[104] and Mulgan[105] both stress the importance of relationships and the interviews suggested that much is being achieved through informal personal connections, especially between OPSI and various parts of the Cabinet Office. This works well when the personalities get along with each other, but it leads one to ask what the consequences would be if there were a change of personnel.

Supporters and Inhibitors of Coordination

The interviews suggested that inhibitors to cooperation are related to people and financial or technical issues. Cultures varied between departments so it was difficult to get them to all do things in a certain way and there was considerable inertia against change. The Institute for Government still found "siloed thinking" in departments,[106] echoing some of the interviewees. With so many pressures on the time of officials, they will concentrate on the activities that their minister or permanent secretary tells them they have to do. In order to cooperate, it also helps if you have a common understanding of issues, and various interviewees, for example, mentioned a lack of comprehension of the technicalities involved in developing new information services, for example standardization of terminology and formats for ease of searching. Where there is a good understanding, personal relationships can flourish, as with John Sheridan (who has pioneered the use of the semantic web for the UK's legislation database at legislation.gov.uk, published by The National Archives)[107] and David Pullinger, Head of Digital Policy at the Central Office of Information.[108] Good training can overcome shortfalls in technical knowledge and understanding, but developing a shared culture across government, when it is divided into so many departments, is a much more difficult task.

Influences on Policymaking

Advice to government comes from a range of sources, including expert civil servants internally, external experts commissioned to address a particular topic, non-departmental public bodies set up to provide ongoing advice in a subject area, and responses to consultations from the public and interested parties. But driving change across government is not easy. Various interviewees suggested that the only way to get real change was a top-down approach with the most senior leaders committed to change, be they the prime minister or other powerful Cabinet ministers, or top civil

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[103] Personal interview with a senior staff member at The National Archives, May 11, 2009.
[104] Aaron Wildavsky, *The Art and Craft of Policy Analysis* (London: Macmillan, 1980), 17.
[105] Geoff Mulgan, *The Art of Public Strategy: Mobilizing Power and Knowledge for the Common Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
[106] Parker, Paun, McClory, and Blatchford, 7.
[107] Personal interview with senior staff member at The National Archives, Aug. 11, 2009.
[108] Personal interview with senior civil servant, Apr. 16, 2009.

servants, confirmed by the experience of Mulgan.[109] This would seem to be borne out by the change in the UK government regarding the opening up of data, which was achieved after Prime Minister Gordon Brown was persuaded by Sir Tim Berners-Lee to make raw data, and most particularly, some geospatial data, available to third parties.[110] With the Labour Party endorsement of open data,[111] the Conservative Party leadership also produced its own plans to make public data more available, especially information on public spending.[112] At the time of writing these are coming to fruition.[113]

This also demonstrates the impact that external experts can have on government. The original authors of the report *The Power of Information*,[114] commissioned in 2007 to investigate how government should operate in a social networking world, did much to pave the way for the dramatic change from a presumed closed to a presumed open data culture within government, and their ideas were taken forward by the Power of Information Taskforce.[115] Tom Steinberg, a former policy adviser and co-author of the review, had shown what could be done with combining various datasets (data mashing) through his work at MySociety to develop the sites TheyWorkForYou and FixMyStreet, both successful – and free – information services.

After Berners-Lee was taken on as an adviser to the Labour Government in 2009,[116] Steinberg was similarly recruited to advise the Conservative Party,[117] and his early influence could perhaps be seen in the Conservatives' commitment to opening up government spending data.[118] Berners-Lee, Professor Nigel Shadbolt (who worked with Berners-Lee on advising the Labour government), and

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[109] Mulgan.

[110] Tom Chatfield, "Prospect Talks to the Father of the World Wide Web," *Prospect Magazine*, Jan. 27, 2010, accessed Mar. 2, 2012, http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/2010/01/tim-berners-lee/.

[111] HM Government (Great Britain), *Putting the Frontline First: Smarter Government*.

[112] Conservative Party (Great Britain), "The Tech Manifesto Will Open Up Government," Mar. 13, 2010, accessed Mar, 2, 2010, http://blog.conservatives.com/index.php/2010/03/13/our-tech-manifesto-will-open-up-government/.

[113] British Prime Minister's Office, Letter to Government Departments on Opening Up New Data, May 31, 2010, accessed Mar. 2, 2010, http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/statements-and-articles/2010/05/letter-to-government-departments-on-opening-up-data-51204; British Prime Minister's Office, "Government Spending Data Published," Nov. 19, 2010, accessed Mar. 2, 2012, http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/government-spending-data-published-2/; Speech by Francis Maude MP on Nov. 19, 2010 to launch the first publication of data on government spending over £25,000, attended by the researcher.

[114] Mayo and Steinberg.

[115] Power of Information Taskforce (Great Britain), *Power of Information Taskforce Report*, 2009, accessed Mar. 2, 2012, http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100413152047/http://poit.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/poit/wp-content/uploads/2009/03/poit-report-final-pdf.pdf.

[116] Cabinet Office (Great Britain), "Pioneer of the World Wide Web to Advise the Government on Using Data," press release, June 10, 2009, accessed Mar. 2, 2012, http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20090703091641/cabinetoffice.gov.uk/newsroom/news_releases/2009/090610_web.aspx.

[117] Tom Steinberg, "Yes, I'm Going to be Advising the Opposition on IT," *Premise* (blog), Oct. 4, 2009, accessed Mar. 3, 2012, http://steiny.typepad.com/premise/2009/10/yes-im-going-to-be-advising-the-opposition-on-it.html.

[118] Conservative Party (Great Britain), "The Tech Manifesto Will Open Up Government."

Tom Steinberg were all subsequently appointed to the Conservative Liberal Democrat Coalition Public Sector Transparency Board, chaired by Cabinet Office Minister Francis Maude.[119]

Martha Lane Fox, another high-profile external expert, was brought in by the Labour administration to advise on digital exclusion and, like Berners-Lee and Steinberg, has also been given an expanded role ("Digital Champion") by the new Coalition government.[120] It is still too early to tell what difference Lane Fox, Berners-Lee, and others can make to the number of citizens becoming truly digitally and information literate, making full use of eGovernment services. Nevertheless, these external experts have had significant influence on government policy.

There is also influence on government policy from lobby organizations and campaigns. As an example, the *Guardian*'s Free Our Data campaign did much to raise the national consciousness about restrictions on re-use of government data collected at the public's expense: the media also has the power to embarrass.[121] It was suggested by some interviewees that this campaign had more influence on government thinking than any pressure from the information profession.

Influence of the Information Profession

Many interviewees who were not information professionals did not see the profession filling roles in government in developing new information services, and particularly services using Web 2.0 technology. The impetus seemed to be coming from those described by Power of Information Taskforce chairman Richard Allan as being of the Web activists' culture.[122] Several interviewees raised the issue of the need for a new profession between public relations/communications experts and IT professionals, while others saw it more in terms of raising the skills of the information profession. Perhaps it is not so much a new profession that is needed to grasp the opportunities that these Web developments provide, but rather a new mindset amongst current information practitioners: more entrepreneurial and proactive, more fluid in their ways of working, more likely to take risks, more interested in access than control. According to some interviewees, these are traits not traditionally associated with public sector library and information professionals – a point also made by Feather.[123]

There are two functions in this context that library and information professionals could usefully perform. First, with the current economic climate, policy emphasis is on efficiency savings and information staff can show how good use of information can save money. Second, many interviewees felt that government did not have a clear understanding of the value of information; without a clear vision of what could be achieved, it would be difficult to develop and coordinate a

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[119] Cabinet Office (Great Britain), "Cabinet Office Minister Opens Up Corridors of Power," press release, May 31, 2010, accessed Mar. 2, 2010,
http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/newsroom/news_releases/2010/100531-open.aspx.
[120] Race Online 2012, *Manifesto for a Wired Nation*, 2010, accessed Mar. 2, 2012,
http://raceonline2012.org/sites/default/files/resources/manifesto_for_a_networked_nation_-_race_online_2012.pdf.
[121] For ongoing coverage, see Free Our Data, accessed Mar. 2, 2012, http://www.freeourdata.org.uk/index.php.
[122] Personal interview with senior government adviser, May 8, 2009.
[123] Feather.

coherent set of policies. Again, information professionals could articulate to government the value and benefits of information, both for itself and the public.

In April 2009 the Knowledge Council produced the *Government Knowledge and Information Management Skills Framework* which sets out the skills required at various levels within government.[124] The work of the Council and TNA on the Knowledge and Information Management (KIM) function is internally focused and this is clear from a reading of the framework.[125] This internal focus for those working in mainstream KIM departments is to be expected – that is their role, but the interviews also showed that they were not involved in information policymaking.

If the information profession does not appear to have much influence on information policy internally, neither do external information organizations. A key problem is that there are both too many voices within the profession and too many government departments with some kind of information policy agenda (see Table 1 above). It is the nature of information policy that it supports other goals of government such as economic development, lifelong learning or health improvement; rather than being an end in itself, which is why there is no obvious focus within government, or indeed outside it. There is no clear point of contact.

The Library and Information Commission (LIC) had been set up to provide wide-ranging advice to government but was amalgamated within the MLA in 2000, which did not have the same focus.[126] Now the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) too has been dismantled as part of the cuts in public expenditure and its functions dispersed, with library policy going to the Arts Council.[127]

The interviews showed that there was now no one place for government to get advice on information policy, however this does not mean that a replacement organization for the LIC should be set up. With the political and economic climate in 2012, there would clearly be no support for such a new body. Interviewees were not specifically asked if they thought there should be a new policy advice organization, because by the time of the interviews it was clear that the political trend was to reduce the number of non-departmental public bodies, not set up new ones – a trend which has continued. However there was a strong suggestion from various interviewees that another layer of bureaucracy was not desirable anyway; coordination between existing players was preferable.

The Libraries and Archives Copyright Alliance (LACA) provides a good example of interested parties coming together to promote a single issue, however it is not practicable to set up a new body for each policy area; some mechanism is needed to put forward a joint view, drawn from a wide range of organizations with overlapping interests. There may also be some further scope for mergers, as has been the case in the archives world.

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[124] HM Government (Great Britain), *Government Knowledge and Information Professional Skills Framework*, 2009.

[125] Personal interview with senior staff member at The National Archives, May 11, 2009.

[126] Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (Great Britain), *Museums, Libraries and Archives Corporate Plan 2008 to 2011*, April 2008, accessed Mar. 2, 2012, http://www.mla.gov.uk/~/media/Files/pdf/2008/corporate_plan_2008.

[127] Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (Great Britain), "Responsibilities Transfer," Sept. 30, 2011, accessed Mar. 2, 2012, http://www.mla.gov.uk/news_and_views/press_releases/2011/responsibilities_transfer.

In order to get a professional voice heard, relevant bodies need to come together behind a coherent message to the relevant department, possibly through a form of coalition. Who is going to facilitate this? If the information profession wants to have influence on a government information policy it is going to have to make it easy for government by speaking with one voice to whichever department or departments is responsible for a particular initiative. The Chartered Institute for Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) – formed from two earlier bodies: the Library Association and the Institute of Information Scientists – would be the most obvious choice to act as central coordinator, but it would not necessarily be the most appropriate body to lead on all policy areas. However it probably has the largest UK membership spread relevant to this research, if you include library policy.

Government information professionals may be able to help the wider profession with tactics on how to engage government and how to put messages across to policy-makers,[128] but there also need to be people inside and outside the profession who can act as policy champions – who have the ear of those in power and know how to frame persuasive arguments. The research showed that there are few such champions, especially from within the profession.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This research into UK government information policy has been undertaken from an information science perspective. At the outset it was hoped that recommendations to government regarding information policymaking would emerge from the findings, as indeed they did. However what was unexpected was the number and range of findings arising from the interviews which led to recommendations for the information profession, particularly professional organizations and the research community, and these are presented here.

1. The research community should build a framework for government information policies, founded on an international history of national information policies and their relevance today.

The research found that there was no appetite for further bureaucracy to coordinate information policy, therefore it was concluded that a framework of information policies was a more pragmatic approach to take. Table 2 above provides some initial thinking on what the framework of polices in the 21st Century should include; this is only a starting point and there is further work to be done to provide government with a blueprint for a framework.

2. Research should be undertaken to identify what new professional information skills are needed within government, and whether a new profession is needed or whether the information profession might have the appropriate skills to fill the gaps.

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[128] Personal interview with senior member of the information profession, Feb. 11, 2009.

3. University departments of information and relevant professional bodies should investigate what education and training is required to develop the appropriate skills for taking forward the open government agenda, either within the information profession or in a new profession.

4. Information professionals should consider what wider skills they need to be able to take on less traditional roles in government where an information background would be advantageous, for example information policymaking and managing social networking within departments.

Various interviewees referred to the need for a new profession within government, specifically to develop and implement new policy around the provision of public sector information (PSI) and the opening up of government information. The information profession was not seen by some as being able to fill the gap – but it was not fully clear quite what that gap was; opinion was divided. There would appear to be a big opportunity for information professionals to find a new role within government, between communications and information technology. If the profession is to have a wider profile within government, this would suggest that the professionals themselves need to think more widely about what sort of roles they could take on that are outside what might traditionally be thought of as central to their skills.

5. A coordination mechanism should be set up within the library and information profession to campaign and advise government on specific policies as appropriate and CILIP should take the lead on setting up such a mechanism, although it would not necessarily lead on all issues.

The research suggested that the information profession has a very low profile in the development of government information policy and that there is insufficient leadership from within the profession. There are few policy champions and the voices of campaign are too scattered. A coalition is needed to coordinate messages to government to make it easier for government to have a dialogue with the profession, and the profession therefore to have greater influence. Government does not want to speak to lots of organizations; it needs a focus, although that focus might be different for different issues. But the profession must go to government, not wait for government to come to it, particularly when there is no one obvious place for government to go. CILIP is the most likely candidate, but evidence suggests that there will need to be awareness amongst staff and members of what the issues are and with whom to coordinate.

6. Information professional bodies should further encourage leadership within the profession, identifying and working with champions for specific areas of policy.

7. They should also identify and work more with policy champions (whether individuals or organizations) from other disciplines where there is a common purpose.

8. Professional bodies should take a wider approach to policy formulation, looking beyond the boundaries of institutions that provide and manage information.

9. Research should be undertaken into the extent that courses of the schools of information within universities address how information policy is developed within government and also how students are helped to develop skills in influencing government on information policy issues, with a view to building on the courses already available.

Another problem identified in the research was the lack of champions within the profession who can have influence at the highest levels. One cannot wave a magic wand to develop these champions but the professional bodies should encourage and support leadership, and work with champions both inside and outside the profession. The profession should produce, and align itself with, people who will put their heads above the parapet and needs a broader, outward-looking vision if it is to increase its impact. This also means that the information departments within universities need to be recruiting outgoing individuals and educating them to see "the big picture."

10. Finally, the professional bodies and the research community should work together to articulate the value of information to government and develop case studies to show how the profession can be of benefit to information policymaking.

One of the problems identified in the research was government's lack of understanding of the value of information. The information profession could help to improve government's appreciation of information and the role that the profession itself could play.

Information policies in the UK probably now have a higher profile than ever before. They are central to the government's need to improve efficiency in how it operates, showing that it is worthy of trust through the transparency and open data initiatives, getting economic benefit for UKplc[129] out of the data that it collects, and ensuring that businesses and citizens have the skills they need to thrive in a digital world.

This article presents findings from research based in the United Kingdom; however, the UK situation is probably not unique. Certainly many governments face similar challenges in developing and encouraging information services in the digital age. It is hoped, therefore, that these recommendations might also resonate with information professionals in other countries. The information profession ought to be at the heart of the new developments, and be seen to be so at heart, if it is to stay relevant in the 21st century.

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[129] "UKplc" is an informal political term that constructs the United Kingdom as economic entity, with a focus on the need to maximize the economic benefit to the country from the data that it collects.

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