

20 March 2015

Important changes to the Public Library Subsidy scheme

Dear Colleague,

This letter is to inform you of important changes to the scope of the Public Library Subsidy, which is administered by The National Archives.

The Public Library Subsidy (PLS), which was introduced in 1924, was intended to provide a subsidy to public libraries in order to assist them in the purchase of government and other official publications. This was at a time when official information was only available in print.

The PLS is currently claimed by a number of intermediaries which sell copies of qualifying publications to public libraries and then claim the subsidy back from The National Archives.

A high proportion of these publications are accessible free of charge on government and other public sector websites in accordance with the government's digital by default strategy. For many publications, including Command and House of Commons Papers, the only way to access them is online. Online publication has meant that users of government and parliamentary information have had the option of accessing the information at home, work, place of education, in addition to their local library. As well as being free at the point of access, a significant proportion of government and parliamentary information can also be re-used freely under the terms of the Open Government Licence and Open Parliament Licence.

The National Archives has a responsibility to ensure that public money is spent responsibly, including money that is spent on the public library subsidy. In this context we have reviewed the scope of the PLS and concluded that there is no longer a justification for providing a subsidy for documents and publications that are freely available on-line to public libraries and the general public. It is difficult to justify a subsidy for print publishing at a time when the main thrust of government policy is to publish online.



Consequently, the scope of the subsidy will be amended to exclude publications that are available free of charge on official websites.

Therefore, from **20th September 2015** publications which are freely available online will no longer be eligible for the PLS.

An illustrative list of the publications which fall into this category include:

- Government Command and House of Commons Papers
- Parliamentary House of Commons and House of Lords Papers
- House of Commons and House of Lords Bills
- Statistical publications
- Gazettes
- Other organisational publications which are only published online

The changes to the scope of the PLS do not preclude any organisation from continuing to produce and sell printed copies of official information to new or existing customers.

Publications which are not freely available online will still be eligible for the subsidy, this includes; driver education material, citizenship guides, maps and bound volumes of legislation (individual pieces of primary and secondary legislation were removed from the scope of the PLS in 2004). It should be noted that the PLS will remain under review and may be subject to further change in future.

A copy of this letter has been sent to each of the main intermediaries and a copy will be published on The National Archives website.

If you have any queries regarding the change to the scope of the PLS or the publications within it then please contact official.publishing@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely,

Malcolm Todd
Head of Information Policy