The National Archives

Information Asset Register and Freedom of Information

A co-ordinated response to information access

Contents

This guidance details the role that the Government's Information Asset Register (IAR) plays within Freedom of Information (FOI) Publication Schemes and how the IAR can manage some of the demand that FOI will generate.

Purpose

1   This Guidance Note explains how the IAR, and specifically departmental IARs, should contribute usefully to Freedom of Information Publication Schemes and the broader management of information requests under FOI.

Background

2   The Government's decision to create an Information Asset Register (IAR) was announced in the White Paper The Future Management of Crown Copyright (Cm 4300, 1999) and was subsequently adopted as a recommendation in the UKOnline Action Plan. This initiative responded to widespread frustration by re-users of government information unable to find material. An IAR policy steering group supported by Departmental IAR officers have fleshed out the original proposal to create a working tool that has some 2020 records to date. Details of the current progress of the IAR can be found in the latest IAR Progress Report.

Seminars and Newsletters are produced to keep all those with IAR responsibilities informed about IAR activity and developments.

3   The IAR is a catalogue of unpublished information resources that anyone with web access can search in order to identify

- what information the government holds
- how useful that information is
- a contact point to whom requests for the underlying information may be made; requests would be subject to the Open Government Code and, in future, the FOI Act

Users do not need to know which department may be responsible for a particular subject.

Using the inforoute search engine, they will be able to identify which department holds information on a particular subject, some explanations about that information, the format in which it is held and the contact details within the department.

4   Each government organisation is responsible for creating the records within its own departmental information asset register. All these separate IARs, collectively, form the Government's Information Asset Register.

5   IAR records are created using a template provided by HMSO. This ensures records are in a consistent format regardless of their origin and conforms to the Government Metadata Standard (e-GMS) and Government Category List (GCL), being developed by the Office of the e-Envoy.

Freedom of Information

6   The Freedom of Information Act 2000 was passed on 30 November 2000. It gives a general right of access to recorded information held by public authorities, sets out exemptions from that right and places a number of obligations on government departments amongst other bodies.

7   Subject to the exemptions, any person who makes a request to a department for information must be informed whether the department holds that information and if so, that information must be supplied. In general, a response must be provided within 20 working days.

9   Every department has been required to adopt and maintain a Publication Scheme, by 30 November 2002, setting out how it intends to publish the information it holds, including:

- the classes of information the department publishes
- the manner in which the information is published
- whether it is free of charge or on payment

10   Where information is already accessible because it is covered by a department's Publication Scheme, the department will not then be required to provide the information in response to an individual request. In this way Publication Schemes should reduce the burden on departments in dealing with information requests.

11   Further information on Freedom of Information is available from the [Office of the Information Commissioner](#).

Environmental Regulations 1992

12   The [Environmental Information Regulations 1992](#) (SI 1992 No. 3240) require the release, on request, of a wide range of information, including all information on all aspects of the environment and any activities, measures, plans, policies, programmes or decisions likely to affect the environment.

A co-ordinated approach - FOI and IAR

13   Departments are required to prepare both an IAR and a FOI Publication Scheme. These two initiatives are complementary.

14   While much departmental effort has focused on Publication Schemes and the need to meet this first requirement, it is apparent that FOI and the Environmental Information Regulations will create a demand for information that may not be covered by the departmental Publication Schemes. When used appropriately, the IAR can help to manage the demand for information beyond that which is covered by the Publication Schemes.

15   Publication Schemes aim to reduce the number of individual requests by publishing proactively the information most likely to be requested. However, many information

resources may not be included in Publication Schemes. This may be because the material could not be made widely available without considerable cost, or there is thought to be limited interest in it. However, such information resources should already be included in departmental IARs, which detail information that may be of interest, yet is not published.

16   By highlighting the IAR and inforoute within a departmental Publication Scheme, users will be able to further their enquiry beyond information that is published. By doing so, it should be possible for users to identify the department that holds the information they require. This will eliminate the need for users to make trawling enquiries of a number of departments and reduce the burden on staff.

17   Moreover, detailing unpublished information holdings within an IAR allows and encourages users to make a request for a specific information resource and will spare departmental effort. The department will also be able to identify which other department might hold the information requested and the response to the enquirer can be more helpful and provided much more quickly. In this way, comprehensive IARs may contribute considerably to the management of information requests.

18   Common standards adopted by IAR, such as the e-Envoy's Government Metadata Standard (GMS) ensure information is presented in a consistent and useful way that brings benefits for both information users and providers. Similarly the Government Category List (GCL) provides common terms and categories across government activity for the benefit of users unfamiliar with the machinery of government.

19   When developed appropriately departmental IARs provide a resource beyond the scope of Publication Schemes to identify information users require. In this way IARs can further reduce the burden of implementing FOI within departments.

The role of the United Kingdom Official Publications Bibliography

20   Further guidance on the arrangements for maintaining the complete catalogue of UK official publications, enabling search of and access to all official publications, is set out in [Maintaining the bibliography of UK Official Publications](#).