

[data.gov.uk](#) [1]

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Following in the tracks of the USA, Australia and New Zealand, the government's new website [data.gov.uk](#) [3] has been launched today. Created with the help of internet mastermind Tim Berners-Lee, it is designed to make government information and statistics available and accessible to the public. Generating figures and statistics uses up time, resources and money. However, by making them available to the public, much more can be achieved than if they simply lay dormant in a department's filing cabinet.

At the moment the website is still very much a work in progress; the data sets are rather limited, the website a little muddled and specific information hard to isolate. However, it is a step towards transparency, efficiency and the opening up of knowledge to businesses and individuals. The website invites you to make suggestions for 'apps' that utilize the information available - and allows you to upload your own creations. So far tools that allow you to check out your neighbour's council tax band may not be revolutionary, but they could lead in a real change in the way people interact with public services and spending. As the minister for digital Britain Simon Timms notes, "by allowing industry to use data creatively they can develop new services and generate economic value from it."

The more public information made available through this website the better. George Osborne has pledged that a Tory government would put any government expenditure over £25,000 online. Posting such information along with data from local government could enable providers of services to compete with one another on price, delivering better value for taxpayers. The development of data.gov.uk would make scrutinizing the 'success' of policies in areas such as crime, health and education much easier, as well allowing the public to see just where their taxes go. If the concept of transparency and accountability really takes off in Westminster, perhaps the public will gain some political power, and the government will act like less of a ruler and more like the public servant it should be.

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