



OPSI LAUNCHES IFTS ONLINE IN RESPONSE TO NEW PSI REGULATIONS

The 1st of July saw the launch of IFTS Online, an extension to the existing best-practice system run by the Office of Public Sector Information (OPSI). This system provides a quick and easy framework to manage the re-use of the information held by Public Sector Bodies (PSBs). It can be used by all parts of the public sector including local government and the NHS. It has been introduced to help PSBs meet their responsibilities under the new Re-use of Public Sector Information Regulations 2005 (SI 2005/1515).

Freedom of Information legislation allows the public access to public sector information (PSI). However, it does not grant an automatic right to re-use the information, for instance by copying or publishing it. The PSI Regulations focus on how people can re-use information they already have access to.

IFTS was launched in 2003 in the form of a detailed verification scheme aimed at major information traders such as Ordnance Survey and the Met Office. The full IFTS process involves an onsite audit of a PSB's information trading activities. The IFTS Online scheme evolved in recognition that:

- There was a need for a simpler version of full IFTS to reflect the differing levels of information trading
- The new PSI regulations introduced new responsibilities for PSBs

IFTS Online is a simple system that enables PSBs to measure how effectively they meet their responsibilities under the PSI Regulations. The key to IFTS Online is that it is quick to use and low cost.

The principal benefits of IFTS Online are that:

- A simple system that enables PSBs to assess whether they are meeting their responsibilities
- It identifies those areas where improvements are necessary with tailored reports and individual recommendations
- It provides assurance to the PSB and to re-users that a certain standard has been reached.
- It provides a source of advice and up to date information on government re-use policy
- It allows use of the IFTS Online logo
- Customers can be confident they will be treated fairly

There are two entry levels to IFTS Online:

IFTS Online Registered. This involves PSBs answering 6 simple questions with a 'Yes' or 'No' response. Once each of the questions have been answered an automated report is generated which confirms whether the PSB is meeting the minimum requirements. If it is the PSB can use the IFTS Registered logo indicating it is a member. This is a free service, and takes less than an hour to complete.

IFTS Online Assessed. This is an interactive system. It involves a PSB answering eight standard questions and providing a range of evidence, such as links to relevant parts of its web site. After submitting this information, a member of the IFTS Online team will review the information provided and prepare a tailored report that comments on how effectively the PSB is meeting its responsibilities. The report will highlight the areas where the PSB should aim to improve and identify those areas where the PSB has performed well. If the PSB has met the standards of openness, fairness and transparency they will receive a certificate, and the permission to use the IFTS Online Assessed logo on their website and correspondence. IFTS Online Assessed takes less than two hours to complete, and costs £250.

As the public, and more importantly commercial business, become more aware of the PSI Regulations and the potential value of PSI in the wider economy, there will be increasing calls for a scheme to assess PSBs and their compliance with the PSI Regulations, in much the same way that there has been pressure for best practice schemes in a wide variety of private sector activities such as landlords and estate agents. People and companies want and deserve to know that decisions taken by the PSB in allowing re-use and the granting of licences is carried out in a fair and open way. IFTS is the scheme that will give this reassurance.

The online schemes have made it possible for a large scale uptake of the IFTS principles without the cost and manpower needed for full accreditation. However, if any PSB is interested in applying for full accreditation, contact OPSI's Standards Team.

For more information please contact the Standards team on 0207 276 5208 or visit www.opsi.gov.uk/ifts/assessment.