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Crown copyright - An overview for government departments

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Contents

| | |
|--|---|
| 1. Introduction..... | 3 |
| 2. What is Crown copyright?..... | 3 |
| 3. Copyright ownership..... | 3 |
| 4. Re-use of Crown copyright information | 3 |
| 5. Delegations of Authority | 4 |
| 6. Copyright Infringements..... | 4 |
| 7. Publishing..... | 4 |
| 8. Departmental Logos..... | 5 |
| 9. Copyright and Publishing Notices | 5 |
| 10.Using other people’s copyright..... | 5 |
| 11.Parliamentary copyright..... | 6 |
| 12.Re-use of Crown copyright material originated by other departments..... | 6 |

1. Introduction

1.1 The purpose of this guidance is to provide government departments with a general overview on how Crown copyright is managed. It will cover the following:

- What is Crown copyright?
- Copyright ownership
- Re-use of Crown copyright information
- Copyright and publishing

2. What is Crown copyright?

2.1 Copyright is part of the family of intellectual property rights (IPR) that also includes trademarks, designs and patents. It protects literary, dramatic and artistic works. It also protects the typographical arrangement of published works.

2.2 Works made by officers or servants of the Crown in the course of their duties qualify for Crown copyright protection under section 163 of the [Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988](#).

3. Copyright ownership

3.1 Copyright is usually owned by the person or organisation that created the work. In the case of copyright works produced by civil servants, the copyright is owned by the Crown. Government departments do not own copyright in their own right.

3.2 Copyright can also come into Crown ownership by means of assignment or transfer of the copyright from the legal owner of the copyright to the Crown. This often happens where a government department commissions a person or organisation to produce a report on its behalf and arranges for the copyright to be assigned to the Crown. For further information on this please see guidance note Copyright in Works Commissioned by the Crown.

3.3 The responsibility for the management and licensing of copyright and database rights owned by the Crown rests with The National Archives.

4. Re-use of Crown copyright information

4.1 Anyone wishing to re-use copyright information needs to get permission from the copyright owner. Permission is often given in the form of a copyright licence.

4.2 Most Crown copyright information is available to re-use under the terms of the [Open Government Licence](#).

4.3 The licensing of Crown copyright information is in accordance with the [Re-use of Public Sector Information Regulations 2015](#). For further information see the [Re-using Public Sector Information](#) section of The National Archives website.

5. Delegations of Authority

5.1 Some government departments have delegated authority to license the re-use of the Crown copyright material which they originate. Limited delegations are also granted to parts of government departments which have responsibility for specialised forms of licensing activity. A list of organisations with a delegation of authority is available on our website.

5.2 The licensing activities of all departments must comply with the Re-use of Public Sector Information Regulations 2015.

5.3 A [general delegation](#) has also been issued for Crown copyright information that is not held for a public task purpose under the 2015 Regulations. More information about [public task](#) is available from The National Archives.

6. Copyright Infringements

6.1 If copyright material is re-used without permission of the copyright owner, it constitutes a copyright infringement. Under UK law, copyright infringement is a criminal offence and legal proceedings can be taken.

6.2 With regard to Crown copyright, The National Archives, may need to be a party to any legal proceedings relating to any infringement of Crown copyright, with the department or agency agreeing to meet the cost of the proceedings.

6.3 Any department may take initial steps in investigating an alleged infringement. However, The National Archives should be notified at the earliest opportunity so that the various options can be considered.

7. Publishing

7.1 All departments have a responsibility for communicating policy and information. They can do this in a variety of ways under a blanket delegation of authority:

- by publishing the material themselves
- by contracting others to publish official, departmentally endorsed versions of the material
- by publishing material on official departmental websites

- by publishing items such as Command Papers and departmental House of Commons Papers

7.2 When a department appoints a private sector publisher to publish official material on their behalf, they must not grant exclusive publishing rights (other than in the official edition) to the publisher as this effectively prevents others from re-using the material. This runs counter to government information policy and wider European initiatives, where the emphasis is on encouraging re-use of official information.

7.3 Departments should not grant any publisher the right to license the re-use of Crown copyright information except within the context of end-user licensing of electronic products and services.

7.4 Where Crown servants write articles in an official capacity for publication in academic journals, the Crown copyright in those articles cannot be assigned away to the publishers. The National Archives has published [guidance](#) on the publication of articles written by ministers and civil servants. All such articles should be licensed under the Open Government Licence, and their publication should comply with the [UK Research and Innovation Open Access](#) policy.

8. Departmental Logos

8.1 All departments have the right to authorise the reproduction of their own logos provided that it does not involve the [reproduction of the Royal Arms](#).

8.2 The Lord Chamberlain's Office, which has overall responsibility for the Royal Arms, wants to avoid situations where the Royal Arms are used in an inappropriate way. Consequently, departments seeking to use the Royal Arms for another purpose will require Cabinet Office approval.

8.3 This does not apply to a department's own use of the Royal Arms, including official publishing which is undertaken on the department's behalf.

9. Copyright and Publishing Notices

9.1 Information on [copyright statements and making information available for re-use](#) under the Open Government Licence can be found on our website.

10. Using other people's copyright

10.1 Before you copy or use any material protected by copyright, for example in a publication or on a website, you must obtain permission from the appropriate copyright owner. This applies to published and unpublished material.

11. Parliamentary copyright

11.1 Material produced by the Westminster Parliament is protected by [Parliamentary copyright](#). Most of the information produced by Parliament can be re-used under the [Open Parliament Licence](#).

11.2 Material produced by the Scottish Parliament is the copyright of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body. Further information regarding the use of Scottish Parliamentary material can be found on the [Scottish Parliament's website](#).

12. Re-use of Crown copyright material originated by other departments

12.1 In contractual matters, the Crown is regarded as a single legal entity. This means that a department does not require a formal licence to re-use copyright material originated by another part of government. The policy on such re-use is set out below.

The precise arrangements are dependent on the following factors:

- the material being re-used
- the status of the department that originated the material

12.2 Crown copyright material can be re-used by departments in accordance with the terms of the [Open Government Licence](#).

12.3 The following general principles will apply:

- departments should comply with the standard end-user licence terms issued for electronic products, publications and services
- departments may be required to pay to re-use the material. These charges will be in line with those paid by non-Crown users

12.4 A similar approach will be followed for the re-use of material originated by government trading funds except that users should apply to the trading funds which originated the material.

12.5 Where a department wishes to obtain data from the originating department in a particular format, the originating department is entitled to charge a fee to reflect any costs incurred.