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TSO: UKOP BECOMES DOI ENABLED

* The Stationery Office has announced that Digital Object Identifiers (DOI) have been attached to 490,000 resources in the United Kingdom Official Publications catalogue.

By David Worlock, Chairman

With this announcement, persistent identifiers in general and DOIs in particular, grow to a new stature. DOI has been in danger of becoming landlocked in the STM marketplace: in the government content area it now percolates knowledge domains that move right across the spectrum, from corporate information through legal information and government pronouncements to health, science and education. While the UKOP announcement only covers the tip of the iceberg in terms of government's formal publishing, it does start the trickle-down process going and moves the UK into parallel with thinking in the US, Canada and Australia – and ahead of most of them in practice.

UKOP itself is a central reference point for government publishing. It includes Parliamentary output; primary and secondary legislation; reports and papers from central government, agencies and quasi-governmental bodies; and information from some international bodies (UN, EC, WHO etc). But this is a breakthrough not because of the size of the file - it is quite small in terms of government's overall content or DOI's capabilities - but because of its promise to release, in time, huge advances in cross-referencing, in metadata control and examination, and in citation. If a persistent identifier can effectively link real world identifiers - ISBN, ISSN - to persistently updated web locations and ultimately to URI, then a huge connectivity gain has been achieved in the network. If at the same time the identifier allows all of the descriptive metadata around a document to be attached to the identity tag, then major advances in content discovery will be available. And if the identifier allows linkages to related information - previous versions of the same document, or other content relationships - then further advances in citation and discovery of associated information become possible.

So will it happen? Most probably, DOI in this context will become a benign bacillus, spreading rapidly through the government content network as an essential element in the networked discovery of knowledge, and percolating out of government and through the private sector content marketplace as government-originated content moves through the bloodstream. DOI will grow and develop - see our recent Update on the new DOI Handbook (08/05/03) - but it will stay important for the same underlying reason: in the virtual world, until we move totally into semantic-based searching and discovery in thirty years time, we have to put the links in place or we are walking in the dark. Persistent identifiers will come to be seen as the interim technology that made content networking work.