

The giant gavel of justice at the Ohio Judicial Center in downtown Columbus, Ohio

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2013 Nominet Trust 100 Winner

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"I wish that the superfluous and tedious statutes were brought into one sum together, and made more plain and short."

Edward VI (1537–1553)

Edward's wish may finally have been granted, thanks to the internet and some outstanding government intrapreneurship.

Legislation.gov.uk is a kind of Magna Carta for the digital age, a compendium of all legislation published by the UK, Scottish and Welsh governments, over the past 1,000 years, updated daily, so citizens can see in one place all the laws they live under.

The site was created by staff at the National Archives, part of the Ministry of Justice. It may sound dull but it's incredibly popular, attracting more than 2 million unique visitors a month. As well as providing a complete history of legislation, the site also provides a daily update of how government rules, often through statutory orders and instruments issued by civil servants.

On 15 August 2013, for example, in the middle of 10 statutory orders relating to road works on major roads and motorways, there was an order restricting exports to Syria. On 9 August, alongside important amendments to the National Minimum Wage, there was an order which seemed to have come straight from the Middle Ages, conferring on the Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority rights to run several oyster fisheries for a period of 10

years. The UK's lack of a written constitution makes it a somewhat conspicuous absence from Constitute, another of our NT100. Legislation.gov.uk hence assumes an added significance for Britain's civic digital profile. It is a prime example of how government can lead the way in making itself more transparent, open and accountable, helping citizens to understand how they are governed and what their rights are.

Image 'Giant Gavel' courtesy of Sam Howzit

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