

Procurement Healthcheck



With health matters much in the public focus, it is timely that we reflect on how health procurement is currently faring. Our interview with Duncan Eaton, the Chief Executive of the NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency, provides a very hopeful prognosis for the future indeed. PASA has been actively pursuing e-auctions of late, and we profile the good use that the Environment Agency has made in this area and has some excellent advice for others starting out along this dynamic path.



This edition also brings you the latest on OGC's progress in embedding best practice, as well as a Skills report – an integral part of the total professional skills package which is expected from all managers. And (despite the autumnal hue of the moment) green is the colour once more, as new environmental targets need to be met by government.



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Source Open Source

Open Source Software (OSS) can offer significant benefits to government. That is the view of OGC in its report on Open Source Software Trials in Government. OSS should be actively considered alongside proprietary alternatives and decisions should be based on a holistic assessment of future needs, taking into account total cost of ownership, with proper consideration of both proprietary and open source solutions.

Conclusions of the report are that:

- OSS is a viable and credible alternative to proprietary software
- The main obstacles are:
 - for desktop applications, the current lack of complex functionality
 - for business applications, the lack of Open Source products to compete with large-scale proprietary enterprise-level products
- Significant savings can be generated in hardware and software and licensing
- Adoption requires investment in planning, training, skills development, and detailed consideration of migration and interoperability.

Recommendations for public sector bodies

- examine carefully the technical and business case for implementation
- review the potential for server consolidation
- consider the potential costs and benefits of migration to an OSS desktop
- identify the role of open standards in future IS/IT strategy and policy
- consider requirements for the development of skills
- review current infrastructure and applications
- consider the benefits of incremental change

For further information visit: http://www.ogc.gov.uk/application.asp?app=latest_news.asp&process=full_record&id=125

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Buy Green

The Government has set itself new, stricter green procurement and building management targets. All central government departments and their executive agencies in England are now obliged to:

- draw up, by 1 December 2005, an environmental purchasing policy and properly integrate that with departmental procurement activities, and set up mechanisms for measuring and reporting on progress.
- work with suppliers to find sustainable solutions to the provision of goods, works and services, helping them to implement environmental supply chain management programmes where appropriate.
- include 'environmental consideration' clauses into all contracts for goods, works and services (including PPPs and PFIs).
- incorporate sustainable development considerations into all new build and major refurbishment construction projects.
- plan to replace or modify ozone-depleting fixed refrigeration, air-conditioning and fire protection equipment as it reaches the end of its life and ensure hydro fluorocarbons (HFCs), and other greenhouse gases, are not used where safe, cost-effective and feasible alternatives are available.

Speaking at a conference for public sector procurement managers organised jointly by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and OGCbuying.solutions, Elliot Morley, Minister for Environment and Agri-Environment, said:

"Despite their efforts, Whitehall departments and other government bodies currently only rate a 'could do better' on sustainable procurement and estate management. A step change in approach was needed - and these new targets are it."

"The new targets will lock in more sustainable purchasing requirements which in turn will send a clear message to manufacturers about the demand for sustainable materials."

The new targets develop and strengthen existing guidance on sustainable procurement and estates management and are the final 'green responsibilities' to be formally quantified in a publication, *Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate*.

OGCbuying.solutions is already advising public sector purchasers on green 'Quick Wins'. A downloadable list of environmentally-friendly products is available from www.ogcbuyingsolutions.gov.uk/environmental/products/environmental_quickwins.asp including:



Elliot Morley



- Energy saving
- Recycled content
- Carbon emissions
- Energy consumption in use
- Volatile organic compounds
- Organic ingredients
- Biodegradability

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Defence Defends Procurement



The Ministry of Defence (MOD) has put up a spirited defence of its procurement following a number of criticisms including a report by MPs. Lord Bach, Minister for Defence Procurement, rejected much of the report saying that it contained unjustified and unsubstantiated criticism of the Defence Procurement Agency - the organisation that buys fighting equipment for the Armed Forces. Lord Bach said the House of Commons Defence Select Committee report on Defence Procurement, published in July, was a flawed document.

"Rejection of major elements of a report written by the Defence Select Committee is unusual for the MOD. I have taken this action because the report made claims that were not or could not be substantiated, was selective in the way it used evidence, and even misquoted me in an answer I gave when I appeared before the Committee."

"The Report was accompanied by a Press Notice that, in my view, made damaging and wholly unjustifiable criticisms of the Defence Procurement Agency and the thousands of Service and civilian personnel who work there. It failed to acknowledge the progress the MOD has made and the action we have taken to improve our performance in the future. We recognise that there are problems going back years, but as I made clear when the report was published, I am absolutely determined we overcome them."

"Overall, this report was misguided, disappointing and flawed. It missed an important opportunity to make a constructive contribution to the department's efforts to deliver the full benefits of Smart Acquisition. I had expected better of a Committee with whom the department normally has a productive relationship."

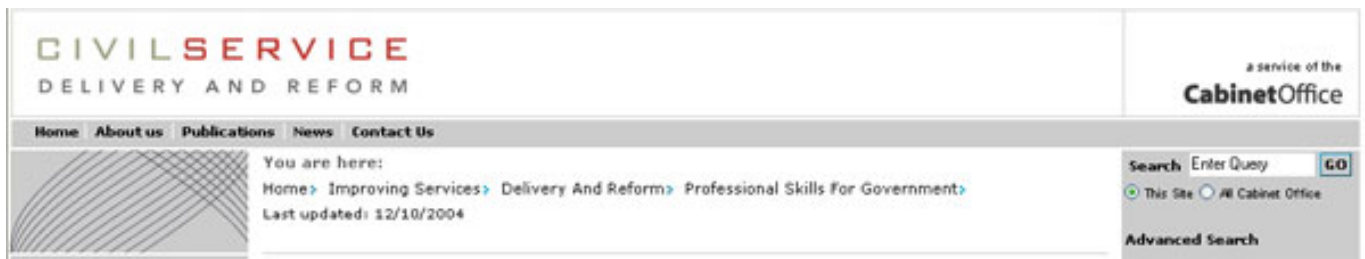
Some of the claims that MOD has rejected include:

- The DPA's performance has been "woeful"
- That *"the Armed Forces have been let down by the organisation tasked with equipping them"*
- That the department has only recently taken action to improve performance on major projects
- That the DPA has only recently sought to identify best practice from elsewhere
- That a *"fear culture"* existed in the DPA
- That the DPA has lacked a proper focus on delivering to the frontline.



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Professional Skills for Government



Procurement is one of the core professions at the heart of a new programme to develop and improve the Civil Service. *Professional Skills for Government* is one of the key priorities for reform of the Civil Service set out by the Prime Minister earlier this year and will encourage staff to develop the right skills and expertise to enable departments and agencies to provide services more effectively.

The programme is about: valuing professionalism, reinforcing the importance of developing skills to meet current and future challenges and providing a clear framework for career development so that those with the potential to reach the Senior Civil Service have a consistent level of skills and experience. The three professional categories essential to Civil Service business are:

- **Policy expert/analyst:** responsible for the effective development of high quality, evidence-based strategies and policies.
- **Operational delivery:** expertise in customer service, design of services, and management of large-scale operations are valued as professional skills.
- **Corporate services:** all successful organisations need professionals in finance, human resources, procurement, ICT, communications – the corporate services that mean the organisation works. In the past, departments have tended to rely on bringing in new talent to stay up-to-date in best practice in delivering these services. Now, a longer-term solution is needed: a Civil Service that invests in recognising and developing expertise in these areas.

Everyone will be expected to have the professional expertise needed to do the job: the old labels of 'generalist' and 'specialist' will no longer be relevant and some 'specialists' will find that their professions do not fit neatly into one of these categories, but cross more than one. All three skills areas are needed to deliver an effective service and career development will be dependent on having experience of working with people from all backgrounds and with different kinds of skills – especially if they are aiming high in their profession. There will be Service-wide standards for promotion so that everyone knows what people should be able to do and what professional qualities they share. To start, standards will be defined for Grade 7, entry to the Senior Civil Service, and Senior Civil Service pay band 3. But departments and agencies will also be required to define their own standards for other levels.

Feedback is being sought from Heads of Professions about the application of these standards to their professions and staff will be consulted in due course.

Further information is available at: <http://www.civil-service.gov.uk/skills>

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Excellence in NHS Purchasing



NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency



The NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency (PASA) is an executive agency of the Department of Health (DH), formed as a result of recommendations contained in the Cabinet Office Review of NHS Procurement (published in 1999) to replace the special health authority, NHS Supplies. PASA aims to modernise and improve the performance of the NHS purchasing and supply system and become the centre of expertise, knowledge and excellence on matters of purchasing and supply for the NHS, for the benefit of patients and the public. Philip Cunliffe talked to PASA's Chief Executive, Duncan Eaton, to find out how this is being achieved.

Philip Cunliffe (PC): What are PASA's main objectives?

Duncan Eaton (DE): We have several objectives. We are implementing a fundamental change in the management of purchasing and supply across the NHS in England. To achieve this, our overarching objective is to ensure that purchasing and supply strategies reflect and contribute towards the achievement of Ministers' policies, strategies and priorities for the NHS. Within this, we are working to establish and implement an overall framework for the management of purchasing and supply in the NHS, and to determine and control the appropriate level at which purchasing and supply decisions are made. In addition, we aim to deliver a comprehensive, cost-effective supply chain, as well as ensuring that improvements in the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the NHS are achieved through purchasing and supply arrangements at the appropriate level, and an integrated supply chain. At the same time, we are working to improve the skills, expertise and professionalism of NHS purchasing and supply staff.



Duncan Eaton

PC: How has the formation of the Department of Health's Commercial Directorate affected the Agency?

DE: The Commercial Directorate was formed in July 2003 with a remit to cover commercial activity throughout the Department and across the NHS. The Commercial Director, Ken Anderson, now acts as Senior Departmental Sponsor for the Agency and the NHS Logistics Authority. During the latter part of 2003 a commercial review of the NHS supply chain was conducted and its findings fed into the wider review of Arms Length Bodies (ALBs) which was running concurrently within the DH. The ALB review has recently reported its initial findings and NHS PASA is recognised as being an essential central service for the NHS. The commercial review had previously recommended further improvements within an overall Supply Chain Excellence Programme (SCEP) to begin early in 2004 and its implementation is now well underway. PASA will be closely involved with this implementation programme and, once fully implemented, it is anticipated that we will be assuming a revised role as the operating arm of the Commercial Directorate; taking on additional work from other ALBs and will be leading subsequent phases of the SCEP.

PC: So what is the next phase of all this work?

DE: Over the course of the last year, the Agency stepped up the programme of introducing a middle tier of procurement in the NHS – supply management confederations – to operate between the national and local level. There have been notable successes across the board and this year, as part of the SCEP, we will see the further development of these organisations and the benefits they can bring within their local health economies. The next stage of development will be the establishment of Collaborative Procurement Hubs (CPH). The success of a CPH in delivering transformational change and significant cost benefits relies on high-level support, strong governance, clinical involvement, comprehensive strategic management of spend and commitment to contracts. All of these were key elements of the selection criteria for the three 'Pathfinders' we have identified. They will report back in early 2005, having developed a robust business cases and an implementation plan. All three have been involved in the design process and are strongly committed to the project.

PC: And has all this meant a change to the structure of the Agency?

DE: Yes. In order to better support this rapidly changing environment I have implemented a programme of organisational re-structuring within the Agency. By introducing a new, flatter management structure we can ensure we can respond effectively to the changing needs of the DH, the confederations and other stakeholders. It will also enable us to deliver our new responsibilities emanating from SCEP. The new management team members will have a regional focus as well as responsibilities for specific national purchasing areas. As the shape of the 'new NHS PASA' emerges from ALB review, a further re-design of the Agency will be undertaken.

PC: What relationship does the Agency have with other public sector organisations - principally the Department of Health and OGC – and can you give examples of collaborative work?

DE: We have, of course, a very close working relationship with the DH, especially on SCEP. We also continue to support the NHS priority areas by managing the related purchasing and supply issues. In addition to this, OGCbuying.solutions and PASA have developed a number of significant joint framework agreements that can be used by the NHS and local authorities. A good example of this work is the joint national framework agreement for photocopiers and multi-functional devices. Although OGCbuying.solutions was the awarding authority, every stage of the process was conducted jointly between the two organisations. The combined value of the two previous independent frameworks was around £40m (about £25m in the NHS and the further £15m from local government) making one of the largest combined agreements outside the IT area. The framework will deliver new cash-releasing savings of approximately 16%, or £4.1m, to the NHS at current volumes. There is also a change in emphasis in the new agreement. Rather than being based on individual products it is focused on the integration of photocopiers into a document and print strategy for customers. The agreement also delivers significantly improved terms and conditions in particular around leasing.

PC: How does the Agency interact with suppliers and how does it manage the supply chain?

DE: OGC has published a report entitled *Making a difference – reducing bureaucracy in central government procurement*. The Agency has a good record in this area through its 'once only' approach and its e-procurement strategy. We continue to pursue this approach which entails reducing replication of effort for both the NHS and suppliers. In terms of the suppliers this is particularly important in view of the drive to remove barriers to competition and the need to help smaller businesses offer their products without unnecessary additional costs. NHS-sid is our major contribution in this area. This is a web-based system so that any potential supplier to the NHS can provide pre-tender qualification information on a 'once only' basis rather than having to do so repeatedly for every tender exercise. At the end of March there were 6000 suppliers registered on the system and 1000 NHS personnel using the information. The Agency is committed to engaging with suppliers and trade associations to ensure all aspects of SCEP are understood and best value for the NHS is achieved from NHS PASA contracts and framework agreements.

The logo for the NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency, featuring the NHS logo at the top, followed by the text "NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency" in a bold, sans-serif font.

The logo for NHS-sid, the NHS Supplier Information Database, featuring the text "NHS-sid" in a large, bold, sans-serif font, with "NHS Supplier Information Database" in a smaller font below it.



PC: Given the Government's high-profile commitment to making public services more efficient, what role is PASA taking in this?

DE: We are very committed to reducing bureaucracy across all our activities. The ALB and Gershon Efficiency Reviews share that objective. NHS PASA has already gone a long way down that road with the implementation of the SCEP and will continue to evaluate how it best meets the needs of the NHS – moving where possible from the centralist role - and developing local and regional levels of purchasing as appropriate. Our commitment to raising levels of purchasing expertise across the NHS will also continue.

PC: What e-commerce work is the Agency involved in?

DE: During 2003/4 the Agency has been involved in a number of successful e-commerce projects. NHS-sid has already been mentioned. On 1 April 2003 we began distributing information on our contracts via a web-enabled online catalogue called NHS-ecat.

<http://www.pasa.doh.gov.uk/ecommerce/ecat/default.asp> .



Then in December 2003 the Agency recommended to the NHS that a new product codification and classification standard (NHS eClass) should be incorporated into purchase records and catalogues for all products and services purchased. We also recommended that the supplier product reference number should be incorporated into all purchase orders and catalogues. Over this last year we have worked with a number of stakeholders on a programme to research the current, and potential, use in the NHS of bar code technology. And we have also developed a web-based database – the NHS Contract Information System (NHS CIS) - that can be used for NHS organisations to hold and share high level information on all trust/confederation contracts.

PC: And have you conducted any eAuctions yet?

DE: We completed our pilot study of eAuctions at the end of March 2004.

During the pilot period, 13 eAuction events were held, delivering an overall saving of 23.5%. More than 100 suppliers were involved producing an average of 130 bids per event, while the average duration per event was one hour and forty minutes. We have also completed a pilot study on eTendering at the end of March this year. During the pilot scheme 25 eTendering exercises were held – 16 of these at a national level, 2 at regional level and 7 at a local level. A total spend of £84.7m was put through the systems we were piloting. We are now planning to undertake all our national tenders through an electronic system.

PC: Does the Agency have a Sustainability strategy?

DE: The Agency's first fully web-based sustainability report *Towards Sustainability – taking a closer look* has now been published. This year's sustainability report builds on the three previous environmental reports, but also addresses some of our social and economic impacts. For the first time this year, the report has also been designed to be accessible by users with disabilities in line with the Web Accessibility Initiative. There is a section providing help specifically for trusts and one for suppliers, and many of the case studies look at our contracts that have sustainability impacts.



http://www.pasa.nhs.uk/sustainabledevelopment/environment/environment_report.stm

PC: How do you communicate with stakeholders – in the public and private sectors?

DE: We communicate in many ways across all our stakeholders. The quarterly magazine PS has a circulation of over 5000 which goes out to suppliers and the NHS alike. This gives more in-depth coverage of current initiatives the Agency is engaged with and has a forward look at contracts due to begin over the coming months. The website is a prime route for communicating – we have a www site, an nhsnet site and, for staff, an intranet. We hold seminars and conferences – on a regional or national level – when needed. We also join forces with NHS Logistics Authority and run a series of twice-yearly seminars across the regions for NHS staff on aspects of contracting that are particularly topical. Furthermore, we hold regular meetings with suppliers within each purchasing function and, at a corporate level, the CEO, directors and representatives from the Commercial Directorate often meet with trade associations.

PC: So, can you finally tell me what the Agency's future commitments, targets and goals are?

DE: There is no doubt we face some real challenges in the future. We have proved that we can adapt to change and that, as a result of both the Commercial and ALB review processes, we have been recognised as a service essential to the NHS. We will continue to rise to those challenges and ensure we get the best value for the NHS through our contracting activity. Our staff have proved their flexibility of approach and demonstrated that they can rise to increasing pressure to 'produce the goods'. We will be re-shaping our organisation very shortly to allow us to adapt to any additional functions that will be coming our way and to implement the Supply Chain Excellence Programme across the NHS.

For more information on the work of NHS PASA, please contact: jackie.lawton@pasa.nhs.uk or phone 0118 980 8631.

All images are courtesy of the PASA website.

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Electronic Reverse Auctions in the Environment Agency

An Electronic Reverse Auction is a procurement tool that allows suppliers to bid against each other, in real time, to supply an identified need, using standard software and the Internet. It is as simple as that. Simple, but not necessarily easy. Simon Butt provides an insight into how the Environment Agency has incorporated the use of auctions as an established procurement tool.



creating a better place

Our first experience of e-auctions was in 2002 when we took part in the Office of Government Commerce's e-procurement trial and, as an extension of this, were asked to carry out a pilot e-auction. The e-procurement system that we were piloting, a joint offering from CAPGemini and Elcom, had an e-auction module, and so, on the principle of trying anything once, we decided to auction our electricity requirements in East Anglia.



To describe this as a learning experience is an understatement but it did bring home very clearly the advantages and problems of auctions. We achieved a substantial saving, in a "tight" market, reducing our annual electricity costs on the contract by more than £300,000, while obtaining 100% "green" electricity. But we also learnt that a great deal of work is required to produce a specification that suppliers can bid against. To do that we had to provide information to bidders that we initially did not have, such as precise historical usage and the exact location of more than 400 sites, obtaining this data required a lot of effort. The software, although robust and well tried, was designed for the North American private sector and was probably not ideal for the use to which we put it. In retrospect, we might have started with something a little less complex, but we did get most of the pain over early.

Building on our earlier experience, we have run six further auctions in the past two years: stationery, paper, computer consumables, life jackets, navigation buoys and trailers. All have been successful, in terms of reducing costs, and adding value to the process. Auctions are now an established procurement tool in the Agency. However, they are only one tool, to be used appropriately, and will never replace more traditional approaches.

Success Factors

Electronic reverse auctions have been used throughout the world for several years and our experience seems to be shared by most other users. So it might be worth looking at the critical factors that go towards a successful auction, as well as some of the corporate and cultural issues that need to be tackled:

- Although a reverse auction establishes a price, the exercise is not about price alone, and all other good procurement practice still has to take place, mostly outside the auction environment. This includes tenderer/bidder selection and qualification (including OJEU, if appropriate), establishing quality and service criteria, and agreeing terms and conditions. An accurate specification is critical at this stage, to ensure that the bidders are bidding for the same thing. Until now, in order to arrive at the "Economically Most Advantageous Offer" we have modified the auction bids with the quality/service scores outside the live auction. The new Consolidated Procurement Directive requires this modification to take place during the actual auction. Most auction software is now able to do this, and we will adopt this practice from now on.

- Choosing the right commodity or service is vital. We recommend starting with something that is relatively low risk to the business and is easy to specify accurately. Bear in mind that there will be additional costs in software licensing and any external support that might be needed, which will have to be offset against savings, so choosing higher value contracts makes sense.

- The market needs to be right. Auctions only work where there is genuine competition, so they are unlikely to be successful where effective monopolies exist, or if there are outside influences, such as raw material shortages.

- Consider the mechanics of running an auction. It is possible to acquire the necessary software, and to run the whole process in-house. But external help is probably going to be needed at least at the start. The key to choosing a partner is to find a firm with access to auction software that is appropriate for the UK public sector and that has experience in the markets in which we operate, as well as an understanding of public procurement. OGCbuying.solutions have set up a series of frameworks with providers that meet these criteria (visit <http://www.ogcbs.gov.uk/RAF/default.asp> for further information). The amount of help needed will depend on the capabilities of the in-house procurement team. Most of the process mirrors traditional good practice procurement and you may find that you need less help than you think, but you will certainly require access to the software, bidder support and training.



Advice on tactical issues such as the starting price, the size and make-up off the lots and the bid decrement (ie, the amount by which a bidder must reduce their price below the last bid) is also valuable.

- Lastly, and most importantly, you must have the commitment of both the bidders and you own internal customers. Surprisingly perhaps, we found that selling the concept within the organisation was harder than convincing our supply base. Suppliers, after some initial scepticism, generally warmed to the idea, when we convinced them that we were not going back to the "lowest price mentality" of twenty years ago. Suppliers generally value the greater transparency that auctions offer: they see them as an open and fair process, which allow for the opportunity to react instantly to competition and to have more than one bite at the cherry. They also see auctions as a means of shortening the negotiation cycle; there will normally be an award decision within a few days of the auction. The credibility of the process is also enhanced by the use of an external service provider, although well designed software ensures a very high level of integrity - the involvement of a neutral party gives additional assurance. Out of the thirty-three companies that we approached to take part in the seven auctions that we have conducted so far, only two refused to participate. That, sadly, was their loss.

Internal sign up has been slightly less easy. We are fortunate in the Environment Agency in having a very professional procurement team. Buyers rightly see negotiation as one of their key skills, and for many it is the part of the job that they enjoy most. They can therefore perceive auctions as a threat to their ability to negotiate. This perception has to be carefully managed. After all, terms other than price are negotiable. There is undoubtedly more upstream work needed, particularly in working with potential bidders and the final user and hard-pressed procurement teams can have difficulty in finding the additional resources needed. But, as the undoubted benefits of using auctions in appropriate circumstances have become clear, enthusiasm for auctions has increased.

The Benefits

Some critics have questioned the savings claimed for auctions. They point out, with some justification, that the fact that more upstream effort, particularly in the drafting of the specification, is required will itself lead to cost savings. There may well be some truth in this, although as it is impossible to conduct an e-auction and a traditional tendering exercise simultaneously, there is no way of establishing exactly what proportion of the savings obtained is attributable solely to the auction. In all but our first auction, we have used a specification, originally drawn up for a traditional tender, slightly "tweaked" for the auction, so are confident that it was the auction that produced the bulk of the savings.

Another often aired view, is that you only get the benefits once. Experience particularly from the US indicates that

this is not the case, and – anyway - once is surely better than not at all. Auctions are a very efficient method of establishing a true market price at a particular time.

We have auctioned contracts with a value of £5.5m in the past two years, and achieved average net savings of 22%. Set against our annual procurement expenditure of £450m this is not a huge figure, but we are convinced that in the right circumstances electronic reverse auctions are a valuable procurement tool. Indeed, they are now part of our procurement strategy.

To those organisations that are undecided about using reverse auctions, our advice would be try it; provided that you follow a few simple rules there is little to lose, and, potentially a lot to gain.

For further information, contact: simon.butt@environment-agency.gov.uk

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Embedding Best Practice

In the first quarter of this year, John Oughton commissioned a review of OGC's approach to Embedding Best Practice. This review, led by Jonathan Tambllyn, looked at the process of developing and promulgating best practice in OGC, and the review team talked to many of OGC's customers about their requirements.

As a result, the OGC Board decided to change the balance away from efforts to produce more and better guidance, towards spending more time working with customers on a face-to-face basis. The aim is to help them to develop their delivery capability and to get their projects, programmes and procurements into better shape and completed more successfully.



Bob Assirati

Customer Engagement Teams

A proposal has also been put to the Supervisory Board to re-organise OGC's engagement with its customers to support this change. Bob Assirati is leading on the establishment of Customer Engagement Teams. The main principles of the model being worked up means that each team will:

- Focus on one customer area (a sector of the public services or a group of central departments)
- Be led by an experienced delivery expert who has knowledge of the customer area and can command respect at top management levels
- Be formed from the direct contacts within OGC with those customers, including for example the existing CRMs, the Gateway Directors, the Efficiency Relationship Managers and the COE Liaison Managers
- Be responsible for sharing knowledge about the customer
- Agree a targeted OGC engagement plan with the customer which addresses their priority needs
- Ensure the plan is delivered without swamping the customer with a host of separate OGC initiatives.

Guidance

Find us your toolkit - The Toolkit team



Meanwhile, a sub-group of the OGC Board has been established to oversee the Best Practice work. A new commissioning scheme is being designed to make sure that new guidance is only produced when absolutely necessary. New requirements will be incorporated into existing guidance wherever possible, and the process will be managed to avoid changing the set of guidance on a continuous basis, which departments find confusing. Nor is OGC planning to create a new version of the Successful Delivery Toolkit during 2004/5. Instead, it is looking at how to make the Toolkit easier to navigate.

The Tamblyn Review highlighted the need for OGC to provide clearer statements on any new guidance saying why it is being released and what "status" it has (ie, mandatory, recommended or just a good idea). The Review also picked up on the need for the centre to be more joined up so that departments weren't confronted with conflicting advice or requirements from the centre.

All these changes are a direct result of feedback from customers in departments. A new Successful Delivery Steering Group, made up of senior departmental delivery leaders, many of them at Board level, is providing advice.

The hope is that this will all contribute to a more effective and streamlined approach to embedding best practice in customer organisations. Success should be measured in changed thinking and behaviour leading to higher success rates, rather than by the quality or quantity of the guidance produced – outcomes rather than outputs. This is essential, especially as OGC has to spread its influence more widely across the public sector.

For further information contact: tony.betts@ogc.gsi.gov.uk

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