



TP/CIE

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Dear Colleague

School Management Information Systems (MIS) and Value for Money Follow-Up Market Review

I am writing to bring to your attention an independent review that we will shortly be commissioning into the operation of the marketplace for school Management Information Systems and supplier provided support.

The "School Management Information Systems and Value for Money" report was published by Becta in June 2005. The report identified concerns regarding the effective operation of the schools Management Information Systems marketplace including considerable impediments to the exercise of effective choice by schools, substantial increases in licensing costs of products from the dominant supplier, as well as issues around the timeliness and quality of Management Information software. Highlighting the need for improvement in a number of areas in the procurement and effective use of Management Information Systems, the report made recommendations under the subject areas of Commercial, Interoperability, Delivering Effective Support and Statutory Returns.

Since the publication of the report Becta and the DCSF have been working on the effective implementation of its recommendations and whilst considerable progress has been achieved in some areas, in others cause for concern remains.

The original report recommended that Becta should conduct a national procurement exercise to establish an EU-compliant framework agreement of approved suppliers of systems and services. Feedback from Local Authorities at that time indicated that there was not an appetite for a framework for Management Information Systems, and Becta therefore decided on that basis not to progress this, recognising that responsibility for ensuring that procurements are conducted in accordance with wider EU and competition obligations rests with individual procurement authorities.

However the changing *landscape in regard to Information Management needs of both schools and Local Authorities in more recent years, and the continuing concerns expressed by the supply side makes it appropriate to review the situation again in order for us to establish how best to support Local Authorities meet their procurement responsibilities and the delivery of*

NOT PROTECTIVELY MARKED

- *Children Services – increasing requirement not just for data transfers but for real-time access to data for officers and practitioners within education, social care and health and other external agencies*
- *14-19 – data needs to move with the pupil in real-time and become learner centric rather than institution centric*
- *interoperability between systems – data entered once and used many times*
- *Parental engagement and reporting*
- *Fit for the future Information Management solutions that enable choice of products*
- *Quality and timeliness of solutions*
- *Environmental and financial sustainability – consideration of remote hosted solutions which can both reduce costs and support carbon reduction requirements*

The above does not necessarily mean that new systems will be needed however there are now more suppliers coming into the market with new and innovative solutions to the above issues. Local Authorities are now highlighting to us the need to ensure they are equipped to market test and examine if they have the best solutions in place and procure new solutions if required. Additionally, concerns have been raised by Local Authorities in regard to interoperability and their increasing demand for interoperable solutions particularly in regard to Learning Platforms and School MIS Systems.

Recently a number of suppliers have contacted us expressing significant concerns in regard to how the MIS marketplace is working from a procurement perspective. There appears to be some uncertainty regarding the most appropriate approach to procuring MIS solutions in a manner compliant with EU obligations. It is a complex area.

Becta wants to ensure that any concerns regarding the appropriate application of procurement obligations in this marketplace are properly addressed. We have therefore decided to conduct an independent market review, to obtain a clear understanding of practice on the ground. The outcome of the review will enable us to issue definitive guidance that will support Local Authorities in meeting their legal obligations under EU procurement regulations.

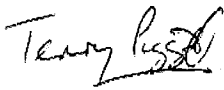
We are due to commission the independent review in the coming weeks to inform our analysis. We hope to be able to report so that Local Authorities receive this advice by the beginning of the new financial year. We are writing to inform you of this activity but will also be informing the relevant members of your teams and your schools through appropriate newsletters.

The effective operation of the MIS marketplace is crucial to guaranteeing ongoing innovation, competition and choice and ensuring that solutions are fit-for-purpose in delivering the Children's Services agenda, raising standards and delivering improvements in value for money.

We appreciate that market-testing your MIS systems will not be your top priority. However, there may be advantages for you in this, both operationally and financially. And there is the legal imperative. This is why Becta is proposing to undertake this study on your behalf.

The full 2005 report is available on our website
<http://publications.becta.org.uk/display.cfm?resID=25917>

Yours faithfully



Terry Piggott
Executive Director
Children's Services & Local Government