

From the office of the Director General
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Friday 1 December 2006

intellect

Mr Roy Marshall, CIO, DCLG
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Dear Roy

I'm writing to you to discuss a number of concerns which exist in the industry around the procurement and development of the next stage of Government Connect, and specifically the GC Register stage. As you are aware, Intellect is the trade association for the UK technology industry, representing over 800 companies across the IT, electronics and telecommunications sectors.

Intellect has supported the goals of the Government Connect programme throughout its evolution, and the GC Register product selection and evaluation process have been of keen interest to our members. However, our members have raised a number of concerns with us about recent developments which I would like to bring to your attention.

Commercial

Firstly, and most pressingly, Intellect is concerned by the project's intent to designate one product as the recommended solution for the entire local government market, rather than mandate the standards and outcome orientated approach which would allow for a functioning multi-vendor market. The present course restricts customer choice by essentially mandating a single product, and inhibits access to the innovation provided by industry – potentially restricting programme growth.

The recent evaluation of the designated solution – CGI's Excelsior product – has also raised some significant questions. Information about the evaluation, where it has been provided, has been broadly unsatisfactory, and the final report's assessment criteria and conclusions have been questioned by both customers and suppliers.

As you may be aware, the close relationship between CGI and some key project team staff is unfortunately perceived by some in industry and in the customer community to be exerting an inappropriate influence on the project's development. Such an impression is clearly damaging to the project and the wider programme as a whole, and the manner in which the GC project team has gone about this latest phase of activity has not helped to dispel concerns.

In particular, the basis on which Excelsior was originally selected for evaluation remains unclear. Whilst the early stage adoption in Cumbria appears to have been satisfactory, this product will uniquely require further expenditure to develop the scale and full functionality which GC Register specifications originally required, and which has already been implemented by a number of other vendors.

There is also the concern that such a monopoly on the GC Register market may bestow an unfair commercial advantage to CGI in other interrelated product markets – for example portals, CRM, and edge servers. We believe that customers who already have solutions in place in other areas should not be effectively forced to replace their existing technologies when adopting GC Register. The perception again exists, regrettably, that this is an intentional and less than benign attempt to manipulate the market in favour of one supplier.

Communication & Transparency

Industry has been unsighted on recent developments within the project and, as stated above, such information as has been provided has often been unsatisfactory. For example, the departure of key staff, shifting provision of technical support staff and change of project ownership and governance occurred with little or no reference to industry. As discussed above, industry has not been fully informed regarding the project team's intentions around other related project areas and this has led to suppliers operating on supposition and hearsay.

Even where they have been communicated, the project's shifts in procurement strategy, requirements and specification appear to have been undertaken without consultation around their likely impact on the current and future market. Government Connect might like to consider that the industry has invested significant resource into this space, and bear in mind that opaque communication, abrupt changes in direction and unclear motives do not encourage suppliers to commit time and effort to future endeavours.

Intellect is also concerned that full information is not available to customers about alternative products and solutions – including those already providing GC Register functionality in local authorities – because they have not been subject to the same evaluation as Excelsior.

Engagement

Government Connect's engagement strategy opted to set up advisory forums with selected suppliers. Despite the emphasis placed on partnership and joint working with industry established in OGC/Intellect best practice (detailed in the Supplier Code of Best Practice and Concept Viability process), these bodies have not been used to best effect.

The monthly GC Vendor Advisory Group (VAG), ostensibly designed to allow feedback and contributions from industry, has recently been treated as a vehicle for the project team to talk **at** the industry rather than engage in substantive dialogue. More radically, the GC technical advisory body (TDA) – which was set up to encourage the adoption of common standards – was abandoned. Despite the valiant efforts of certain individuals in the wider GC programme industry has therefore often been left in the dark on critical technical and commercial developments, including, for example, the factors behind the decision to evaluate one product as a de facto solution for the entire local government market.

In summary, Intellect strongly believes that in this instance there has been inadequate consideration and evaluation of the different solutions for GC Register, and considers therefore that any immediate decision would be both premature and commercially unsound.

We are aware that the upcoming 6th December meeting of the sponsorship board is supposed to discuss a possible recommendation of the Excelsior product, but Intellect would strongly urge postponement of this discussion until a full and substantial consultation with industry can take place.

In light of this pressing deadline, and because we are aware that industry's concerns are also shared by others in the customer community and even the programme team, this letter is also being circulated to the Office of Government Commerce, the GC sponsorship board and the Society of IT Managers (SOCITM).

I look forward to hearing from you.

*Kind regards
John*

cc Kate Mountain, SOCITM
Stephen Squires, OGC
Miranda Carruthers-Watt, Government Connect sponsorship board