

NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency

Evaluation report on the pilot of prOJECT software in the Agency

March 2001

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1. Introduction and background

The Agency and previously NHS Supplies have been supporting Business Information Publications (BIP) in the development of their prOJECT software system used for placing contract notices in the European Journal.

The original version of the software was developed for single user environment on a stand-alone PC where the software was loaded onto the PC via CD ROM.

Following representation from ourselves and other public sector users, BIP embarked on the development of an updated, multi-user environment application, to be hosted on BIP servers in Glasgow with Internet access by authorised users using browser technology. Consequently, there was no requirement for users to host the application onto their own systems.

This product was called prOJECT on-line.

2. Overview of prOJECT on-line

PrOJECT on-line is a hosted application resident on BIP servers and accessed by authorised user via user ID and password.

The system has three levels of user hierarchy.

a) System controller

Usually at organisational level the System Controller acts as a main point of contact with BIP and also carries out the administration function on system use - eg managing user profiles, additions/deletions, establishing standard text for use in 'global' fields (eg common text to be used in all advertisements).

This is not a technical post (all technical services are provided by BIP) but a 'responsible officer' post representing the organisation in dealings with BIP. The System Controller has access to and reports on all use of the system within an organisation.

b) Supervisor

A level of management responsibility covering a defined user group of buyers, the Supervisor can see, monitor and report on all system use by buyers who are assigned to him/her.

In addition, the system provides a facility where buyers can create contract notices, which are routed via a Supervisor for authorisation and transmission.

c) User

An individual user who can only see his or her own activity on the system.

System functionality

The system provides for data entry of contract notices (EU or non EU) against a set of pre-established template 'forms'. Within the EU Regulations, the buyer can select the procedure or notice type required, including the ability to place amendments, cancellations or contract awards.

A full history of buyer activity is recorded in the system and buyers can call up a previous notice, copy and edit this into a new notice.

The system also provides for:

- a) search and access to CPV codes
- b) validation of minimum time periods within EU Regulations
- c) access to guidance and information on EU Regulations.

The system can also provide a range of management information and reports, EU statistical returns etc.

Where a buyer generates an EU contract notice, this is transmitted via BIP to OJEC and the buyer receives acknowledgement of this by an e-mailed copy of his/her contract notice.

3. Evaluations

1999 evaluation

In September 1999, we initiated the first evaluation by Reading based buyers of the new prOJECT on-line system. This evaluation ran for six months commencing September 1999. The objective of this exercise was to evaluate the new web enabled version of the software in our own purchasing environment. Similar evaluations were undertaken by other public sector organisations in both civil and local government.

During the course of this evaluation, a number of technical and procedural issues arose and were reported back to BIP and resolved.

March 2000

At the end of the evaluation period, a legal review of the software was undertaken by Pinsent Curtis on behalf of the Agency.

June 2000

Pinsent Curtis reported their findings in June 2000. The Agency reviewed Pinsent's report and added our own commentary. Both sets of observations/recommendations were shared with BIP in July 2000.

BIP responded to these observations/recommendations in August 2000.

September 2000

Representatives of the Agency and BIP met to discuss and agree a way forward, taking account of both the observations/recommendations from Pinsent Curtis and the various functional requirements and features required by the Agency. System enhancements were agreed and a further evaluation of the enhanced software agreed.

November 2000 evaluation

A second evaluation of prOJECT on-line was initiated within the Agency - commencing in November 2000 and to run until the end of February 2001. In addition to existing system users, the logistics buyers in Normanton were included in this trial.

4. Preparation for the second evaluation

A Project Initiation Document was agreed within the Agency and a Project Team was established with the following membership.

Joe Walsh	Project Manager
Rachel Hodson-Gibbons	PASA
Steve Rhodes	PASA
Scott Smith	IT Director, BIP
Gillian Cameron	Client Services Director, BIP

5. Training events - 14 November 2000

BIP provided a one-day training event at our Normanton offices where a series of sessions were provided to introduce buyers to the system and its functionality.

In addition, a 'demo' site was made available to buyers so they could familiarise themselves with the system without operating in a live environment.

6. Implementation

The second evaluation of prOJECT on-line went live on 20 November 2000.

7. Evaluation

The Project Team established an evaluation questionnaire, which was sent to all registered users of the system within the Agency. In addition, for those users who had used the system substantially, a face-to-face interview was conducted.

A copy of the evaluation questionnaire is attached at Appendix A.

8. Summary results

The following pages summarise the results of user questionnaires and face to face interviews with users of the system.

9. Levels of use

The following table shows levels of usage for the live service and demo service.

Pilot usage report (live service)

Name	Accessed system	PINs created	Contract notices created (all Procedure types)	Awards created	Addenda created	Notices submitted	Notices not submitted	Total notices created
Buyer 1	Yes	1	0	0	0	0	1	1
Buyer 2	Yes	0	30	18	1	44	5	49
Buyer 3	Yes	0	11	24	4	37	2	39
Buyer 4	Yes	0	2	2	0	0	4	4
Buyer 5	Yes	1	23	31	2	50	7	57
Buyer 6	Yes	0	0	8	1	9	0	9
Buyer 7	Yes	0	1	0	0	1	0	1
Buyer 8	Yes	0	0	1	0	1	0	1
Buyer 9	Yes	0	0	3	0	3	0	3
Buyer 10	Yes	0	0	1	0	1	0	1
Buyer 11	Yes	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Buyer 12	Yes	0	0	3	0	3	0	3
Total	12	2	67	91	8	149	19	168

Pilot usage report (demo service)								
	Accessed system	PINs created	Contract notices created (all Procedure types)	Awards created	Addenda created	Notices submitted	Notices not submitted	Total notices created
User 1	Yes	0	4	2	2	6	2	8
User 2	Yes	0	1	0	0	0	1	1
User 3	Yes	0	1	0	0	0	1	1
User 4	Yes	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
User 5	Yes	0	1	0	0	0	1	1
User 6	Yes	0	1	0	0	1	0	1
User 7	Yes	0	1	0	0	0	1	1
Total	7	0	9	2	2	7	6	13

10. Software/technical issues arising

There were no technical/software issues arising during the evaluation period. Both the system's functional performance and availability to buyers was 100 per cent.

11. Recommendations

Agency buyers report using the prOJECT on-line facilities has been successful. There is a high level of satisfaction reported in terms of system availability, functionality and features. Buyers report that the system is 'intuitive' – 'easy to use' and there are no significant training issues associated with its introduction.

The level of satisfaction is also re-enforced by a significant level of system use where some 168 contract notices of various types were placed, using prOJECT on-line.

The Project Team recommends that the Agency consider the attached proposal from BIP to introduce the system for use throughout the Agency.

If this proposal is accepted, the Project Team makes the following additional recommendations.

- a) The System Controller role is established within the Agency providing a central support service to all the Agency's purchasing staff.
- b) The Agency adopts a policy that all contract notices be placed using the prOJECT on-line system. This would enable BIP to report 'leakages' - contract notices placed by Agency staff outside the system.
- c) The management and control arrangements for the production, authorisation and transmission of contract notices be harmonised across the various Purchasing sections.

Joe Walsh
Associate Director of e-Commerce
Project Manager
May 2000

Attachments

Appendix A User evaluation questionnaire

User evaluation questionnaire