

National Retraining Scheme Product Pipeline Procurement

Question and Answer pack

NRS Roadmap/Products/Service Requirement

No	Question	Response
1	Can you give some information about your current technical architecture and your plans around the products DFE want to build within this NRS programme?	Our architecture is in line with Government's Technology Code of Practice. Our approach is that we develop and begin with lean systems that meet user needs. All our digital products are cloud native and we use containerised deployment on Azure with Infrastructure as Code. We prefer Ruby on Rails web applications although there is some flexibility in this area as long as there are existing communities of users for a particular language or framework within the department.
2	When will we know of the exact locations to deliver the various NRS Product pipeline projects?	This information will be made clear at the point of issuing the individual statement of work requirements after contracts have been signed. Each statement of work will include the location details. Locations are likely to be DFE premises.
3	Could we locate at our own premises to deliver requirements?	We have a very strong preference for co-located teams, and we would expect suppliers to locate with us as a rule. We will consider flexible working around this, but would want suppliers to demonstrate how they will make this work with an embedded team.
4	What is the biggest technical risk?	The work poses a number of challenges and opportunities. Products are not yet very clearly defined. We have a theory of change we are developing, which involves a lot of assumption testing throughout the lifecycle to get the outcome we want. In terms of other risks, this is a new programme with no legacy systems in the core

		NRS, but which may involve integrations with other data and services across government, preferably via API.
5	Is design particularly important and a strong component in your evaluation?	We expect all our services to follow GDS standards, in terms of accessibility, design patterns. The Department has an Equality and Diversity Policy, which includes 'user accessibility' requirements and User Acceptance Testing. Service design based on a strong understanding of user needs is very important to us, and we expect that there will be considerable design work involved in upcoming products.
6	Stylistically do you have a similar portal in mind?	Our assumption is that we would use the Gov.uk design patterns unless we can identify and evidence very strong user needs that would require a different design
7	Is there any requirement for outreach, any comms in terms of social media etc.?	We do not anticipate a requirement for promotional activities for the scheme as a whole. However, there is likely to be an important requirement in terms of user recruitment for research and testing. We would expect supplier proposals to set out clearly how they would deliver user recruitment to meet the needs of product development.
8	Is DfE developing our own tool or are we essentially prototyping a digital product at the moment?	The product (currently in Private Beta stage) is being developed in-house, according to the Government Service Standard and GDS design patterns. This is following detailed Discovery and Alpha work. We would anticipate that most, if not all, products on our roadmap, will be developed in house. However, we remain open to other routes to delivery if they can be demonstrated to meet user need and value for money considerations.
9	Are DfE delivering directly Discovery (disco), Alpha and Beta themselves?	The National Retraining Scheme are not directly delivering Alpha or Beta phases, we are working with external suppliers for the delivery of these phases on a small number of products. GHtR is in Private Beta, Online training is in Alpha. The NRS team are, however conducting one policy-focused Discovery in house: The Flexible Adult Offer. Note that all product phases so far have had a DfE product owner from the team.

10	Would a new incoming supplier be expected to pick up where a previous outgoing supplier left off?	In essence, yes. All relevant Discovery and Alpha materials will be made available to incoming suppliers. Our intention is that all suppliers will have visibility of our roadmap. It is our expectation that appointed suppliers will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement/non-disclosure agreement which will be formed as part of the call off contract.
11	In terms of the delivery, are you expecting the technical input only or a company who can do the actual training, resourcing getting those apprentices and so on?	We are primarily looking for the digital delivery of the services. There is a question around what training might look like and what role do we have in delivering it but at this stage, we do not envisage the provision of training to be a service we expect suppliers on this framework to provide directly. Note that we are looking for suppliers that will provide capability beyond just the technical e.g. we would expect teams to provide capability in user research, business analysis, technical architecture and other skills essential to digital service delivery.
12	In terms of technical/digital delivery, would we be looking at graduate consultant working with you to create the platform?	We would expect suppliers to be able to provide the full range of capability to deliver an agile digital product of sufficient quality to meet government service assessments. They could do this either singly or as part of a consortium. In terms of the qualification levels of the staff provided, that will be up to the supplier to decide, given these will be outcomes-based contracts. However, we would expect full transparency of levels of capability of staff to be reflected in the rate card, and for suppliers to be clear about who is deployed onto a project.
13	What has been done to date subject to scoping the technical platform or the training delivery?	We have delivered two discoveries and an Alpha for the entire programme. We have now gone into Private Beta with Get Help to Retrain and Alpha for our Online Training product. Three further policy (rather than digital) products are in flight; Awareness Raising, Flexible Adult Offer and Do Training (work we do with learning providers). Everything else is at pre-discovery phase.

14	Are you looking at rainbow team approach?	We may like to get there eventually but in terms of where we are now, in terms of departmental digital maturity, we are more reliant on suppliers than we would like at this point and expect that this will change over time. For this package, realistically, we would expect successful suppliers to provide most of the resourcing, with an outcome-based approach. We will continue to provide some key roles in product teams in-house, like Product Owners.
15	We have experienced that other organisations tend to focus on bringing in innovative and best practice. In the presentation, DfE talked about SoW RFP that sounds very descriptive i.e. we specifically ask for what needs to be done, duration and people needed, what is the balance between accommodating innovation in the RFP vs ticking the boxes to say yes we can do this and we can do that.	Our service delivery is rooted in taking an agile, user centred approach. The RFP needs to be driven by user needs as discovered within that phase of the development. The department will design the SoW template to include Scope, deliverables, evaluation criteria and evaluation methodology.
16	Are you we going to consider domain knowledge (in training and employment) as part of the competition?	What we are looking for primarily is the ability to design and deliver high quality services according to the government service standard. We certainly welcome domain knowledge where it can add value to research, design or delivery of key products.
17	Are you thinking about sticking to a single tech stack, rather than letting suppliers define their own.	We provide the following ten point guidance to product teams in making decisions about the technology stack: 1. We must define user needs and choose technologies that meet those needs 2. We must make sure all our technology is accessible and inclusive for all users 3. We should only build what is necessary 4. We must ensure systems and data are secure and users' privacy rights are

		maintained 5. We must store all source code on Github and it should be licensed under the MIT license 6. We should prefer truly open source products where they meet user needs 7. We must use open standards to manage interfaces between parts of our system 8. We should use standard government technology components and reuse other departments' software where available 9. We must have full control of any data we store We should be conservative in our choice of technology preferring tools with established communities of users within DfE Digital.
18	What other projects would come from this, if any?	At present the scope of this procurement would be drawn from the product roadmap as set out in our presentation and the slides.
19	Have you thought about look, feel and consistency of language, how would you manage this in line with a variety of suppliers working with you on this requirement?	We have thought of this and we will manage internally with a set of principles. For the single user, it should be one simple journey.
20	Will the suppliers be shaping the outcomes or would DfE be giving plans to suppliers?	Policy outcomes will be defined by our product owners.

Ways of working

N	Question	Response
21	Collaborative Working: We would like to understand how you see the eco system for collaboration working. Once shortlisted, to what extent are you open to us working with you to adapt the product pipeline, so that we are using user research to uncover needs and adapt the pipeline, not just reiterating a product?	The department is open to what the solutions look like. It is our expectation that appointed supplier for each contract wil contribute to collaborative working practices within the NRS programme. Further details will be highlighted within the tender and contractual documentation. We envisage that our thinking may mature and change over time, and we therefore welcome input from user research and product design to shape that during the live running of each Contract.
22	What if our Organisation cannot deliver a particular phase of Agile Delivery, but we are market leaders for another element of the requirement, How can we overcome this?	Our preference would be that you explore the possibility of entering into a consortia arrangement with one or more supplier(s) to ensure that the organisation (or entity) bidding for the work has the right skills/capabilities and expertise for delivery of all key elements of the requirement. As an example, you could bid as a lead organisation with subcontractors/consortia arrangements or vice versa work with a lead organisation.
23	As a 'Lead Organisation', are we responsible for ensuring that we have undertaken due diligence and vetting for suppliers that will work with us to deliver this requirement?	The lead supplier will be ultimately responsible. Therefore, we would expect you to undertake necessary checks to appoint your sub-contractors/consortia members. A lead bidder will be required to enter the DOS call off contract as the prime contractor who will be accountable and responsible for all subcontractors, and third party activities for the delivery of the full service requirement for each contract.
24	Should we form a consortium with a big firm to deliver everything?	That's up to you as a business decision

25	How would suppliers/partners engage with project Governance?	We would anticipate regular meetings with NRS leadership, including the Programme Service Owner, and Lead Product Owner and similar roles. These meetings would be about sharing latest information and thinking on product development and the forward pipeline, and updating on progress. We would encourage suppliers to attend working level ceremonies such as show and tells.
26	Can we bid as an incumbent supplier?	Yes, this is a new opportunity and yes you can bid for this work.

Award of Contract

No	Question	Response
27	Can you assure that Government actually uses a third of it's spend on SME?	The government is committed to 33% of central government procurement spend going to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), directly or via the supply chain, by 2022. More information can be found https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sme-panel

Terms and Conditions

No	Question	Response
28	IP clauses – DfE mentioned that it intends to use the DOS (Digital Outcomes and Specialists) terms and conditions of contract as the baseline with some amendments to the clauses around Intellectual Property Rights (IPR). Can you provide further detail?	The terms and conditions of the DOS Framework and call off agreement will apply to each contract. In addition, any IP clauses specific to DfE will be highlighted as part of the tender documents. Your own IP and background IP will not be affected. New IP generated through the work you do with us will be owned by Government, and we would expect any new code to be open source and available under the MIT licence. It is important to stress that the project outputs (e.g. service blueprint and prototype) must not be wholly or significantly dependent on any specific IP or product of the supplier or third party organisations.
29	Consortium is a good idea for the SMEs, good way to compete. The only constraint would be that consortia is about the barrier of IPR and how they would negotiate that in a fair way on the journey.	We are currently working with our legal representatives to look at the provision of IPR and the terms.

Shortlisting and evaluation

No	Question	Response
30	ISO 27001 standards are aimed at large companies and SME's may struggle with this accreditation. Large companies can also struggle and take a year to obtain as well as spend thousands, is this a mandatory requirement?	The terms and conditions of the DOS Framework and call off agreement will apply to each contract. In addition, DfE security policy will apply, this information will be made available within tender documentation and call off agreement.
31	Would you like one rate card from Lead or multiple?	We would anticipate one single rate-card from the Lead Organisation. This guidance will be made available in the tender documents and financial evaluation criteria.
32	How would we present capacity and capability as a lead with combined skills from sub-contractor?	The lead supplier should present whole team capability and capacity to reflect the requirements specified.
33	What do you mean by "variant bids"?	A ' variant bid ' is a response to a tender in which suppliers propose innovative or alternative approaches to meeting our needs, departing from the methodology or requirements laid out in the specification.
34	When do we register on Jaggaer?	Stage 1 of the competition will be via the Digital Marketplace. Stage 2 documents are currently being developed to provide suppliers with clear instructions in reference to the departments e-sourcing tendering portal and will be issued to the shortlisted suppliers for each opportunities
35	RFP stage - pricing a scenario. In our experience, where this is to be scored as part of the evaluation criteria, customers can end up with very large spectrum of answers based on different supplier's assumptions, particularly where the price submitted is not 'for acceptance' and therefore part of the contract. How will DfE minimise the chance of this happening?	We are currently reviewing the evaluation criteria to ensure that we are following MEAT (Most Economically Advantageous Tender) Criteria and being open, fair and transparent with our approach. There are a number of options available to us and this information will be made available at stage 2.

36	Request for Price RFP stage - rate card. As suppliers we have seen scenarios where rate cards are to be submitted based on a SFIA model (i.e. 42 rates in total), however the programme of work may only require a small number of these rates in practice. If all rates are to be scored as part of the evaluation, this creates the risk that some suppliers may manage the rate card submission to include lower rates (and thereby increase tender score) for rates where there is little or no chance of needing to provide resources at those rates. How will DfE minimise the chance of this happening?	We are currently developing our Pricing strategy as part of the Tender Documents. We will consider all elements of this question when shaping in order to ensure there is realistic pricing mechanisms as part of the evaluation.
37	RFP stage - rate card for outsourced services. Some suppliers may be able to offer competitive rates for a given SFIA level which are delivered onshore, offshore or landed offshore. These may be very different rates and therefore could have a significant impact on scoring of the rate card submission.	We recognise the challenge posed by the question and intend that rate card submissions should explain all relevant assumptions so as to enable a like for like comparison of the rates provided. Our current assumption is that this will form part of the financial evaluation which will follow the MEAT (Most Economically Advantageous Tender) criteria.
38	How will DfE seek to request rate card submissions in such a way that suppliers can be very clear on how rates for onshore, offshore and landed offshore should be submitted to give DfE the best resourcing options whilst ensuring clarity as to how rate cards will be evaluated?	Our current thinking is that we would not in-principle wish to work with off-shored or even near-shored resources instead preferring to have suppliers working in close proximity with the permanent Programme Team. Should suppliers feel they are able to make the case that they meet are requirements with a proposal that includes off-shoring or near-shoring then we would not wish to preclude them from doing so.
39	Is there a reliance for the department to have UK government track record in any evaluation criteria, would this rule an organisation out if they have some experience but not huge amount.	It wouldn't rule you out but it is possible that another supplier with a stronger track record might have more relevant evidence to draw on.

Departmental due diligence

40	We are struggling to register on the Supplier Registration System, can you please help.	Please find the Supplier Registration System guidance https://supplierregistration.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/faq/en_GB/how_do_i_register_my_organisation You must register on the 'Supplier Registration Service' prior to the evaluation of proposals. Please complete necessary sections as best and as complete as you can, The Departments Finance Business Partners will be required to undertake the Financial Due Diligence In order to complete these checks suppliers will need to be registered on the Supplier Registration Service: https://supplierregistration.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/
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