



30 Jan 2006

Transformational Government: A response to eGU from TiPS

The membership of TiPS (Taxonomies in the Public Sector) applauds the eGU's ambition to "transform the business of government", and particularly its emphasis on the sharing of services.

Our members are information managers with long experience of promoting and delivering shared information services. For the past five years we have been contributing to the development of the eGMS (e-Government Metadata Standard), and our current role includes leadership in implementing the eGMS in our respective organisations. We believe the eGMS and its encoding schemes are vital to underpin the sharing of information within and between our departments, but that this can only be achieved if standards and infrastructure are developed sufficiently to make them workable.

We note with approval that the proposed strategy for "Shared services" acknowledges the need for common technology, data sharing and a consistent approach to standards and architecture. Unstructured information, which is vital to the creation of a knowledge economy, presents a particular challenge and deserves greater emphasis in the strategy. In support of this and indeed all shared information services, it will be essential to continue the unfinished work on the eGMS. This standard and its encoding schemes need continuous maintenance for their lifetimes. Our investment in their development will begin to bear fruit only after several years of dedicated maintenance and promotion. But already some slippage in their updating schedules has led to doubts concerning their sustainability. We would urge the eGU to reinvigorate the standardisation programme by devoting substantially greater emphasis and resource to maintenance of eGMS, IPSV (Integrated Public Sector Vocabulary) and the other eGMS encoding schemes. We additionally urge consideration of how most effectively to develop and apply the standards, including development of the necessary infrastructure for interoperability.

Another vital element of the standards is an approach to interoperability where geographical data are involved. An authority file of geographical names, linked with a capability for "cross-walking" between these and other identifiers (for example latitude/longitude, grid references or postcodes) comprise the essential enabler for interoperability. It is not cheap or easy to build. At the moment, hundreds or perhaps thousands of different authorities throughout the UK feel this need and are wasting resources by trying to build it themselves on an amateurish footing. A centrally provided resource would save money all round, and should be included in your strategy.

It is disappointing to note in the report that 'most major government departments have... recruited experienced IT professionals to fill the CIO posts.' The dominance of the CIO Council by technologists is of great concern as Information Management should be driven by the information needs of the business, and not by the technology that facilitates it." We urge greater involvement of information managers in driving the overall direction of the Programme.

In conclusion, our recommendation is that you redouble your efforts on the standardisation initiatives you have already begun, which are still essential to underpin the sharing/efficiency element of your declared strategy. In return we shall be only too pleased to continue our own efforts to ensure that the standardisation message is heard, the standards themselves are implemented, and (eventually) the efficiency benefits are realised.

Michael Warner (TiPS Chairman)