



**Improving Market and Social Research Procurement and
Commissioning within the Public Sector**

***The Market Research Society (MRS) Report: Lessons Learnt from the
Creation of the Pan-Government Framework for Market Research
Services***

**A document prepared by the Market Research Society for the
Crown Commercial Service & UK Shared Business Services Ltd**

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Executive Summary

INTRODUCTION

Research is used to support critical policy and operational decisions in all areas of public life. It is particularly important in areas where behavioural management or change are important to policy or operational delivery.

When procuring market research, government is procuring intellectual capital and evidence on which important decisions are based. The procurement practices should be structured to reflect this.

MRS is the world's leading professional research association setting professional and ethical standards for over 60 years. MRS is globally recognised for its expertise in training and qualifications. The UK's research market represents a major asset in the UK, in terms of both the creation of intellectual capital and economic contribution with a conservative GVA of £3bn, it is bigger than many other creative industries and is an export success (with an export value of circa £1bn GVA).

Over the last two years, MRS has successfully assisted government as it has developed its post-COI market research procurement arrangements, focusing on delivering research procurement which is affordable and sustainable. However, the process has not been without its problems, and the aim of this report is to identify those areas which have worked well, those where it failed, and what can be put right now and in the future.

Following extensive consultation with MRS stakeholders, including research suppliers and in-house government research commissioners, MRS has compiled the attached report with detailed recommendations for the way forward. The findings of this report should be a significant consideration in future framework developments, notably the potential creation of new research framework(s) for social and economic research.

The management at UK SBS have been open in encouraging this report and should be congratulated on their willingness to listen to the more critical of the findings that it contains.

KEY FINDINGS

In summary our report details:

Some success with the creation of the pan-government market research framework

- UK SBS adopted many MRS recommendations from MRS' first report, *Improving Market Research Procurement: MRS Recommendations on the Creation of Framework 2 for Research Services*. The recommendations that were adopted – such as a business and policy focused lot structure – have been warmly welcomed by all stakeholders.
- Recognition and appreciation of the professionalism and flexibility of some of the senior project team members within UK SBS, particularly those that managed the project to create the new framework.

- Acknowledgement that a working framework is in place, and market research is being commissioned via the framework.

Significant concern: breaching commercial confidentiality of suppliers

- A serious error by UK SBS, which resulted in highly sensitive commercial pricing information from suppliers being shared with competitors. This serious commercial breach by UK SBS, severely undermined its credibility with research suppliers.

Significant concern: not seeking value

- UK SBS ignored recommendations from MRS, commissioners and suppliers, regarding the best approach to evaluating research, particularly regarding price. By preferring to treat research as a commodity rather than intellectual capital, UK SBS's approach to price evaluation failed first time round and had to be repeated. Even with the duplicated process, the approach favoured by UK SBS was inappropriate for research, and failed to meet the overarching objective which should be about maximising value, not just minimising price.

Significant concern: not supporting SMEs

- UK SBS continue to use its standard terms and conditions, developed originally for the construction sector, despite offers from MRS to assist with creating suitable terms & conditions which would attract SMEs and be consistent with those used widely for research. The result was that the terms and conditions used for the framework were inappropriate for the sector and ultimately too costly for many SMEs. This was best illustrated by the inclusion of consequential losses within the T&Cs. How would such a loss be measured for a research project? Why include such a costly insurance requirement if it can never realistically be applied?

Significant concern: wasteful bureaucracy

- The application process and documentation submission requirements for the framework were excessive, with UK SBS requesting significant amounts of information that were not to be used as part of the evaluation and were "for information only". It is unreasonable to place such an excessive and unnecessary administrative burden on suppliers, particularly in a sector that is dominated by SMEs.
- The primary advantages of a centralised procurement framework approach such as centralised documentation, pre-approved suppliers and their procedures, etc are not being realised with departmental commissioners' incorrectly requesting information gathered by UK SBS as part of the framework process.

Significant concern: insufficient resources and structure supporting the process

- Poor communications, weak administrative procedures and inexperienced junior staff hampered the project throughout the process.

- The feedback from all stakeholders listed a litany of incorrect communications (e.g. informing suppliers they were unsuccessful when in fact they were successful), poor documentation (including documents with errors, tracked changes still showing, cross-references not aligning with text and so on), etc.

Significant concern: lack of expertise supporting the framework

- The poor quality of some of the research briefs and ITTs coming via the framework demonstrates the lack of research commissioning knowledge in some parts of the government. There are insufficient arrangements in place to fill these gaps. For example, there is seemingly no arrangement in place for assisting research procurement for those departments that have no in-house research expertise and are not in direct contract with UK SBS.

Significant concern: poor communication

- There continues to be a lack of clarity and understanding regarding the relationship between UK SBS and Crown Commercial Services (CCS). Stakeholders from all sides are unsure about the relationship between the two organisations, how they work together, where responsibilities lie, and plans for change going forward.
- There is a need for more, and improved, communication with all stakeholders by both organisations. Even relatively simple matters, such as commissioning routes for the framework, are not understood by all commissioners or suppliers.
- Overall there was a lack of clarity of purpose about the way the exercise was approached. This must be rectified for any frameworks created in the future.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Going forward our report contains eight significant recommendations:

Recommendation 1: improve communication with stakeholders

Recommendation 2: make accessible all centrally held documents

Recommendation 3: provide workable standard template building on existing materials

Recommendation 4: enhance research procurement skills and experience

Recommendation 5: streamline the access routes to procurement portals

Recommendation 6: gather performance metrics

Recommendation 7: adopt a continuous improvement approach

Recommendation 8: amend the framework terms and conditions

Section A: Background information

About The Market Research Society (MRS)

With members in over 60 countries, MRS is the world's largest association for market, social and opinion research. For over 65 years MRS has been the world's leading authority on research and business intelligence.

MRS has a diverse membership of individuals at all levels of experience and seniority within agencies, consultancies, support services, client-side organisations, the public sector and the academic community.

MRS also serves MRS Company Partners' agencies, suppliers of support services, buyers and end-users of all types and scale who are committed throughout their organisation to supporting professionalism, research excellence and business effectiveness.

MRS supports best practice by setting and enforcing industry standards. All MRS Members and Company Partners must adhere to the MRS Code of Conduct, its associated regulations and compliance procedures.

More general information can be found on the MRS website www.mrs.org.uk

About the Report Compilation

This second report by MRS was compiled in full consultation with suppliers and commissioners that are using the UK Shared Business Services Ltd (UK SBS) market research procurement framework.

Suppliers consulted were all MRS Company Partners. Suppliers covered the full spectrum of research suppliers: from the very large research groups to the very smallest micro-business, including independent consultants.

Commissioners consulted were from a wide spectrum of government departments: those with large budgets and significant in-house research and procurement teams, to those with smaller budgets and limited departmental expertise.

The report, consultations and discussions with suppliers, commissioners and UK SBS was led by Debrah Harding, the Chief Operating Officer of MRS and co-author of the book, *Quality in Market Research: from Theory to Practice*.

SECTION B: Status Update

Background

In June 2011 it was announced that the COI would be replaced by a small Government Communications Network to 'co-ordinate' communications campaigns across government. At this time it was announced that a centralised procurement function, headed by the Government Procurement Service (GPS), would replace the former COI arrangements for market research. Whilst the new arrangements were being finalised, transitional arrangements had been agreed between government departments and the GPS, with the former COI frameworks continuing to be used for market research procurement, until a new framework was agreed and implemented.

Since June 2012, MRS has been in discussions with the GPS (and its successors) to discuss the procurement arrangements for market research – particularly the creation of 'framework 2' and in October 2012 MRS produced its report, *Improving Market Research Procurement: MRS Recommendations on the Creation of Framework 2 for Research Services* (the Executive Summary and Risk Analysis of which are contained in Appendix A of this report).

In January 2013, MRS made a submission to the Public Administration Select Committee (PASC), based upon MRS' October 2012 report, in response to the PASC consultation on the effectiveness of public procurement. MRS also had input into the National Audit Office's (NAO) February 2013 report to the Public Accounts Committee on improving public procurement.

Significant Changes since the First MRS Report

In December 2012 GPS signed a Memorandum of Understanding, creating a 'strategic alliance'¹, with UK Shared Business Services Ltd (UK SBS) as part of the on-going implementation of the Public Expenditure Committee for Efficiency and Reform recommendations. The aim of this strategic alliance is to expand the scope of collaboration to include the centralised deals available to customers across the public sector. At present this means that the UK SBS is taking the lead in the creation and management of procurement frameworks for the categories of research and construction.

Further to the strategic alliance, the Crown Commercial Service (CCS) has been created which has brought together Government's central commercial capability into a single organisation, amalgamating Government Procurement Service with other commercial teams from the Cabinet Office and central government departments. Among other things, CCS has inherited the strategic alliance with UK SBS.

As a result of the change of responsibility from GPS to the UK SBS, the market research framework is separate from the 'framework 2' post-COI arrangements. The market research pan-government procurement framework was launched in April 2014.

¹ Extract from letter dated 5th April 2012 from Research Councils UK Shared Services Centre sent to stakeholders including MRS.

Separate to the market research project, UK SBS had been asked to investigate the merits of creating a pan-Government framework for social and economic research; plus the possibility of creating two separate frameworks, one for social research and another for economic research has also been suggested. The project is currently being considered by the Heads of Profession of the Government Social Research (GSR) Service and Government Economic Service (GES). Assuming that the project goes ahead, the social and economic research framework/s are planned for launch by the end of December 2015.

A number of departmental research frameworks continue to exist, for example the social and economic research framework at DWP. However the intention is that departments will consider the pan-government research framework/s when their frameworks are due to expire and assess whether the UK SBS framework/s might be suitable for their needs rather than continue to operate departmental arrangements.

Initial Concerns

Prior to the launch of the market research framework in April 2014, MRS had received a significant amount of negative feedback from suppliers about the framework evaluation process by UK SBS. In December 2013, MRS wrote to Johnathan Preece (CEO of UK SBS) and Sally Collier (CEO of CCS) setting out the supplier concerns and inviting feedback and engagement. The concerns were:

1. *Not reducing costs and improving value for money*

- The UK SBS framework includes a 1% "levy charge" for any contract won through the framework. Inevitably suppliers will incorporate the 1% into their fees, and as such government will end up paying more for its research, not less.
- The over-emphasis on price within the evaluation as opposed to quality i.e. "*...the best daily rate will be given the highest score...*". What about the best quality? Research is an intellectual capital and creative service dependent on skills, training and intellectual capacity. It is labour intensive and often requires high levels of customisation and interaction. As such any criteria used to evaluate research services should be based on assessing whether a proposed solution is fit for purpose and good value for money; not on lowest cost. Lowest cost does not equate with value for money.

2. *The disproportionate burden for SMEs of the framework's contractual and administration requirements*

- The terms and conditions for the framework placed a disproportionate burden on SME research suppliers including insurance requirements that cover '*...any direct, indirect or consequential loss, damage, cost or expenses resulting from it or its consequences...*' for UK SBS and its customers. Consequential losses are a standard exclusion from many insurance policies and are unlikely to be covered by any standard policy. Many research SMEs cannot afford to commit to paying disproportionately higher insurance premiums, for specific high-level insurance coverage, on the off chance that they may win some government market research contracts.

- The challenging contractual requirements demanded a level of legal expertise not readily, or cost effectively, available to an SME.
- The request for policy documentation was excessive for any small and micro-supplier, for example, the need for 'complaints procedures' and 'escalation routes'. If a complaint is received by a micro-supplier they will respond to it. There will be no 'escalation route' for an organisation with one self-employed person.
- The tender process assumed suppliers had large staff teams and departments. For example, the tender required suppliers to have project management, account management and local account management as part of their services. Clearly these roles are highly unlikely for any small or micro-supplier research supplier, where the staff base may be one person.

Outside of the top 15 research organisations, all other research suppliers are SMEs. Of these many are small and micro suppliers. SME members of MRS reported that the current approach to the market research procurement framework did not encourage SME participation in procurement, indeed it did the exact opposite.

The approach used for the market research framework had an inherent assumption that SMEs won't apply for the framework – why else would so much of the criteria and contract terms be so inaccessible for SMEs?

3. *Not reducing administration*

- Compared to the previous process for the COI framework, there was an exponential increase in the demands of the process on the suppliers that are appointed to the framework. The stated aim at the beginning of this process was to do the exact opposite and decrease burdens, not increase them.
- The increased administrative burden impacted all suppliers, large and small. For large suppliers applying to multiple lots it has been estimated that they submitted responses of around 10,000 words². Smaller suppliers submitted less but in terms of proportion of their available resource the impact was the same or greater. One micro supplier estimated that the stage 1 and 2 of the process required circa 15 working days to complete. During this time such suppliers were not earning any other fees, and at the end of the process there is still no guarantee at all that work will be forthcoming.
- Some of the questions asked were mandatory to complete but were excluded from the scoring process, i.e. 'for information only'. Why include questions which do not contribute to the outcome? This was a complete waste of time and an added administrative burden, which again is a significant factor that dissuaded so many small and micro suppliers from persevering with the tender.

² Following further consultation with suppliers, MRS has determined that the original estimate of 10,000 was significantly undervalued. For example large suppliers submitted circa 40,000 at the RFQ stage. It is estimated that a third of this total, was in response to "for information only" criteria which were not part of the formal evaluation process.

- Overall the documentation was of a poor quality, with deletions and tracked changes evident in the original paperwork, cross references that were incomplete, contradictory instructions, initially no page references to assist with search-ability, etc. The problem with the paperwork is clear from the volume of clarification questions that were raised during the tender process.

4. The inappropriate and hypothetical nature of the evaluation criteria

- As part of the evaluation criteria, day rates for different staff levels were requested. The advice given was that information must be completed, that 'Not Applicable' was not acceptable, and that if no staff were employed in the various job roles listed that suppliers insert rates that they *might* use in the future if they were to employ such staff.

The evaluation process therefore compared the real rates of likely suppliers with speculative, hypothetical rates provided by suppliers that do not, and likely never will, employ these roles.

It is also interesting to note that UK SBS Ltd are retaining pricing at 40% of the total score despite, we believe, the GPS reducing this to 30% for creative suppliers in the other framework, following representation by the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising among others. Why is the pricing for market research suppliers not being conducted on the same basis as for other intellectual capital and creative content suppliers?

5. Not supporting innovation

- Within the tender documentation there was no recognition of the varied nature of many small and micro-suppliers within market research, particularly those offering specialist or boutique services. This was evident in the adoption of some generic procurement requirements (some of which seemed to have originally been for the construction sector?) that have been poorly adapted or in some case not adapted at all. There is a considerable difference between procuring construction and procuring high level, specialist intellectual capital services such as market research.

In January 2014, UK SBS responded to some of MRS concerns and agreed that once the evaluation process was complete, they would arrange a meeting with MRS.

In May 2014, after the framework had been launched, MRS met with UK SBS and at this meeting the following key points were agreed:

- A rapid in-depth operational meeting would be held between UK SBS and MRS to discuss 'lessons learnt' from the creation of the market research framework.
- UK SBS would re-assess the consequential liability requirement currently standard within its Terms and Conditions.
- UK SBS will factor MRS feedback into the creation of the social and economic research framework/s.

Going Forward

In order to maximise the opportunity to provide feedback for the lessons learnt exercise, MRS held meetings with suppliers and commissioners to learn from their experience during the evaluation process, the contract award and since the framework has become 'live'. The results of this exercise are detailed in the lessons learnt in Section C of this document, together with recommendations for going forward.

MRS continues to participate in the wider discussions regarding the merits of introducing a new pan-government framework (or possible two frameworks) for social research and economic research. MRS has been invited, and has accepted, participation in UK SBS's 'Gateway' process should it be decided that additional framework/s for social and economic research will be created.

Throughout this time MRS has been working with the Social Research Association (SRA) on an overarching cross-research and cross-government project to improve public sector research procurement.

SECTION C: Lessons Learnt

Original Recommendations

Whether it is decided to create a pan-government social and economic research framework, or indeed if it is decided that two additional frameworks – one for social and one for economic – are to be created, MRS’s original recommendations remain central to the creation of any research framework.

Table 1: Summary of MRS’ recommendations from the first MRS report

Reducing Costs and Improving Value for Money

- Streamlining administrative procedures
- Two-stage or restricted procurement process
- Procure research services to address specific business problems within government rather than procuring merely by research methodology
- Use established available recognised resources to save time and improve credibility in the market e.g. use the MRS’s Research Buyers Guide to source regulated suppliers
- Evaluation of research services should be based on assessing whether a proposed solution is fit for purpose and good value for money

Building on What Works and Reducing Administration

- Select the effective elements of the COI framework, and develop and build on these
- Use the excellent network of existing in-house government researchers and suppliers who have expertise built-up in public service evidence generation
- Do not lose access to research expertise when procuring research services

Supporting SMEs

- The framework should be equally accessible to all research suppliers large and small
- The terms and conditions underpinning the framework must be SME friendly

Ensuring Legal, Ethical and Professional Standards

- Any future research framework must continue to recognise the basic ‘hygiene’ factors adopted by COI

- To procure research that is conducted in accordance with the ethical regulatory framework for research, the MRS Code of Conduct and its compliance procedures i.e. procure only from MRS Company Partner organisations or from suppliers with MRS members

Supporting innovation and Ensuring Access to Best Practice

- Have access to the most up to date methods and ideas
- Adopt a feedback loop for the framework to ensure that it constantly evolves and improves in response to any identified weaknesses
- Retain some flexibility in roster development
- Have one lot that remains flexible e.g. an open to new market entrants

Lessons Learnt from the Creation of the Market Research Framework

MRS structured its discussions with suppliers and commissioners on four main questions:

- 1. What worked and is working well?**
- 2. What did not and is not working well?**
- 3. Any recommendations for improvement?**
- 4. Any specific considerations for the creation of a social and economic research framework/s?**

It is recognised that some of the frustrations identified may not be in the control of UK SBS or indeed are due to other parties involved in the procurement process. However, as far as stakeholders are concerned, it is the owner of the market research framework, UK SBS, which is seen to be at fault and needs to amend its processes. Communication about how government procurement works could help remove some of these misperceptions.

1. What worked and is working well?

1.1. Feedback from Suppliers

1.1.1. Staff at UK SBS:

- Recent interaction with representatives at the UK SBS has been generally positive and has definitely improved. UK SBS respond in a timely manner, and have been more candid about their knowledge (or lack in some cases) and have kept in touch with individuals who raised questions.

1.1.2. The framework evaluation process:

- The principle behind the lot approach was right (being based upon policy and business challenges rather than methodologies) and helped suppliers to provide focus within their submissions

1.1.3. Since the launch of the framework:

- The framework is available to be used and the structure of the new framework works. It is much easier to commission research via business issues than methodologies (the approach used by COI).

1.2.Feedback from Commissioners

1.2.1. Staff at UK SBS:

- The staff at UK SBS created structure and timelines for the process when they took over from GPS (as was). There was a clear desire by UK SBS, Clare Godfrey (CG) and Lucy Wicks (LW) in particular, to fully involve commissioners in the process, and they were overall sympathetic and flexible to the commissioners' needs, within the constraints of what they could directly influence.

1.2.2. The framework evaluation process:

- The evaluation process resulted in commissioners gaining access to new suppliers that they had not used previously.

1.2.3. Since the launch of the framework:

- The framework is available and it is being used.

2. What did not and is not working well?

2.1.Feedback from Suppliers

2.1.1. Staff at UK SBS:

- During the RFI and RFQ stages it was impossible to speak directly with anyone at UK SBS, with all communications conducted electronically. This was very frustrating and often the responses were incomprehensible, contradictory to earlier advice, cut and paste from the forms and did not answer the question. The suppliers would have welcomed some open dialogue with UK SBS.
- Since the launch of the framework, UK SBS seem to be taking a less active part. However, there is clearly a need for UK SBS to be assisting some departments. Based upon the use of the framework so far, there is clear evidence of some commissioners not understanding how to use the framework and/or do not know how to commission research.

2.1.2. The framework evaluation process – Pricing:

- The pricing evaluation criteria used by UK SBS, which was based on day rates for five executive grades, was inappropriate for research and did not make any sense. No account was taken of the majority of project costs such as fieldwork.
- Within the evaluation process there was no recognition that market research is procured on a project fee basis, not day rates.
- The hypothetical nature of the pricing evaluation questions was inappropriate, and put a significant number of suppliers at a disadvantage.
- It is clear that the evaluation process did not work appropriately, as UK SBS asked all suppliers to re-submit their prices during the evaluation stage.
- Only one set of prices were requested as part of the evaluation process. Therefore prices for full-service fees were being used to assess research support services such as omnibus services and field & tabulation services. The price level for these services is completely different to full service research services.

2.1.3. The framework evaluation process – RFI and RFQ Stages:

- There were constraints on the evidence that suppliers could submit to demonstrate their capability and expertise in providing responses to individual lots e.g. no historical evidence could be supplied, no references to clients, etc. As a result suppliers gave “text-book” responses, which would not have been helpful to those undertaking the evaluations.
- The instructions at both stages were unclear and contained contradictory instructions. Suppliers wasted far too much time asking questions that would not have been necessary had the documentation been properly prepared and proofed before being issued.
- There were some odd questions both at the RFI and RFQ stages which appeared to be re-purposed from other procurement categories (construction?) which bore no relation to research practices. For example Part E of the RFQ within the section on innovation awarded 60% of points on suppliers’ responses to the question: *“advise how they intend to use technology to reduce the need to travel during any project on this framework, at no extra cost to the consumer”!*
- There was no ‘on boarding’ for suppliers that were new to the government procurement process. This was a particular disadvantage for new SME suppliers.

- Clear instructions on simple things such as format for responses to the RFI and RFQ e.g. hard copy, USB, etc., would have been helpful. All useful instructions were buried away in the forms.
- Timing the RFQ stage for August was insensitive to many SME suppliers, as this is a time when key personnel were away for family holidays and so on.

2.1.4. Awarding of the contract:

- A serious error by UK SBS during the contract awarding stage meant that suppliers received very commercially sensitive and confidential pricing information relating to other suppliers, instead of their own. **This lack of care by UK SBS regarding highly sensitive information undermined confidence in UK SBS by many of the suppliers involved in the process.**
- UK SBS was inflexible about their standard Terms and Conditions. The overriding belief was that all procurement must be completed in the same way. However, there is a significant difference between buying construction (UK SBS's previous experience) and buying professional intellectual capital services such as market research. [This point was also repeatedly mentioned by the stakeholder commissioner group throughout the process.]
- The inclusion of consequential losses within the indemnity insurance terms reflects the lack of understanding about research. How would such a loss be measured for a research project?
- Some suppliers reported that they had been told they had been successful winning the bid; and then subsequently been informed that they had not won the contract. This underlines the poor administrative practices and control by UK SBS.

2.1.5. Since the launch of the framework - Commissioning Routes:

- Clarity is needed on the commissioning routes for the framework. RFQs can arrive directly from government departments or via the CCS procurement system (and within CCS from different routes such as CCS or Spot Buying Mailbox). RFQs via the Spot Buying Mailbox continues to request inappropriate pricing information (see 2.1.7).
- Clarity is needed on the relationship between CCS and UK SBS. It does not appear joined up at all.

2.1.6. Since the launch of the framework – Lots:

- Due to the number of suppliers on some of the lots, suppliers are aware that they are unlikely to get much work due to the competition with other

suppliers. This is limiting responses from some of the suppliers on the framework.

- Much of the documentation that is being issued via the framework is poorly described, which makes it hard to determine whether the work is relevant to supplier's expertise or not.

2.1.7. Since the launch of the framework – Briefs and ITTs:

- The quality of briefs and ITTs is poor, many do not include the name of clients for example. As a result, suppliers are unable to easily assess whether they should respond to briefs, and/or whether the project is suitable for their expertise.
- The framework is not always being correctly used; non-market research briefs for the chemical sector for example have come through the framework.
- The briefs are full of procurement and UK SBS jargon with no reflection of the audience for the briefs: the research suppliers.
- Briefs continue to ask for day pricing information. Even when explained why this is inappropriate, the information is demanded and in some cases demanded within a matter of hours.
- Standard information submitted during the framework stage – standard T&Cs, policies, etc. – are still being requested. One of the main advantages of a centralised framework is the centralising of documentation, so why is this approach not being used? For example circa 70% of a recent MoD PQQ requested information which UK SBS received as part of the Framework agreement. Why are commissioners and departments not accessing this information from UK SBS?

2.1.8. Since the launch of the framework - Mini Competitions:

- Documentation for mini-competitions is not standard and so time is wasted re-stating the same things in slightly different formats, etc. for different clients.
- Some clients are running mini-competitions to select one supplier across qualitative and quantitative methodologies for a period of two years. This approach is not supportive of many SME suppliers which specialise in one or other of the techniques, not both.

2.1.9. Since the launch of the framework – Bidding:

- There is a lack of transparency regarding the number of suppliers bidding for projects which makes it hard for suppliers, particularly SMEs, to make decisions as to whether to commit time and resource to respond to bids.

- There is no process for issuing acknowledgements when suppliers have submitted bids. This is frustrating for suppliers, as they are unable to determine if information has been received.

2.2.Feedback from Commissioners

2.2.1. Staff at UK SBS:

- When senior personnel from UK SBS (CG and LW) were unavailable for key meetings, it was felt that the meetings suffered from a lack of leadership and the junior staff did not have the detailed necessary knowledge and experience for the project. Time was wasted by the inability of the more junior staff to make decisions and to answer the difficult questions.
- Outside of the core of the UK SBS staff involved in the project, commissioners felt that their expertise was not respected. The commissioners stated that their preference would be for the bids to be evaluated using the 70:30 quality vs price model. The commissioners warned UK SBS that their intended 60:40 approach would result in the very best suppliers being excluded. This is exactly what happened – the so called “pricing anomaly” - with the result that the pricing part of the evaluation had to be completely re-run.
- There seemed to be no clear ‘corporate history’ handover notes and/or audit chain for new UK SBS staff to follow.
- There was continual problems with the documents issued to commissioners prior to and post meetings. This comprised of poor version control and administrative errors resulting in incorrect or incomplete documents being distributed. There were often delays in the issuing of meeting notes and documents, and on occasion there were no minutes issued of previous meetings.
- UK SBS appeared to be under-resourced and ill-prepared for the project. This was mainly reflected through the process and administration failures, rather than by the project leaders (CG and LW).

2.2.2. The Stakeholder process:

- There was overall a lack of clarity of purpose for the procurement exercise. As a result the stakeholder group never felt fully informed or prepared.
- The stakeholder group did not represent all of the commissioning departments. This was highlighted by commissioners to GPS and subsequently UK SBS, at the beginning and throughout the process. This problem was not addressed satisfactorily by UK SBS. Significant numbers of Government departments did not respond to emails or attend the meetings. The commissioners were unsure as to what measures were being taken to improve response or address this issue.

- During the stakeholder process there was a perceived lack of appetite by UK SBS to challenge or interpret procurement law in the creation of the research framework. This led to frustration within the stakeholder group.
- Some members of the stakeholder group could have been used more widely. For example MRS could have been used to test and proof draft documents before they were issued more widely to the supplier community.

2.2.3. The framework evaluation process – Pricing:

- The pricing evaluation criteria that UK SBS stipulated had to be used was inappropriate for market research. The 60:40 split put too much emphasis on price, over quality. Overall UK SBS did not understand the pricing of research. The approach adopted by UK SBS meant that research was being treated as a commodity rather than intellectual capital.
- UK SBS' insistence that the pricing evaluation was based on day rates, in conflict with the recommendation of the stakeholder group, underlined the lack of understanding how market research is procured (which is on a project fee not a day rate).
- The exclusive focus on day rates for the pricing evaluation meant commissioners selected suppliers without any reassurance about what suppliers could really *deliver* in terms of price at a project level.
- At the later evaluation stage, key information was missing and in particular details regarding the process used by UK SBS to score suppliers. Commissioners were unsure how this element had been evaluated by UK SBS.

2.2.4. The framework evaluation process – RFI and RFQ Stages

- UK SBS should have been clearer from the beginning about what could and could not be asked from suppliers during the two stages – the RFI and RFQ stages - of the tender.
- Commissioners felt constrained at the latter stages of the evaluation by the fact that during the RFQ only forward looking questions could be asked. If this had been known much more about past experiences of suppliers would have been asked at the RFI stage.
- Although commissioners agreed not to ask for the inclusion of mock bids, if the process had been fully explained, it is possible that the commissioners would have elected to ask for this information. This is an example of why the project, the process and the requirements should have been fully explained from the outset.
- The RFI and RFQ documentation produced by UK SBS was confusing, unclear and had too much jargon. This was evident from the RFI

evaluation stage. Some suppliers ended up failing because they could not spot some crucial mandatory questions at the end of the forms; a number of very good preferred suppliers failed to get onto the framework as they failed at this point.

2.2.5. The framework evaluation process – Evaluation

- UK SBS have been inconsistent in their approach to managing and overseeing the development of the framework. Closely managing the creation of the framework stage, but once evaluation had begun there was no advice or guidance given to commissioners to ensure consistency and standardisation by departments during the evaluation process. As the aim of UK SBS and CCS is to ensure maximum value is extracted and improve overall quality of service delivery, it should provide end-to-end procurement assistance to enable commissioners to do this.
- During the framework evaluation stage, UK SBS's poor attention to detail and weak administrative processes let them down. For example you could clearly identify suppliers from the details when the documentation was said to be "anonymised".

2.2.6. Since the launch of the framework – Lots:

- Although the lot structure was the right approach, the resulting lots are unwieldy, particularly lot 2.
- UK SBS assured commissioners that Supplier Days would be arranged. This has yet to happen and would be very beneficial to suppliers and commissioners.
- There is a disconnect between the specialisms listed and the suppliers that have been selected. Not all those suppliers that are on the lots (particularly lot 2) are specialised in the areas stated. This is partly due to what suppliers specified but also reflects the weaknesses of the evaluation process.
- Poor administration by UK SBS resulted in some suppliers initially being allocated to the wrong lots within their systems.
- Since the launch of the framework UK SBS have stepped too far back from the process, leaving departments to use the framework without sufficiently detailed guidance on how to use the framework, issue Expressions of Interest, etc.
- Digital research is not covered by the framework, even though it was identified by commissioners as a need during the creation of the framework. The Government Digital Service requested that digital research was removed from the market research framework. Within other lots some digital research services may be procured. However, if research

is required into digital services, for example, this has to be purchased off framework.

3. Any recommendations for improvement?

During this exercise it was clear that there is willingness among commissioners and suppliers to make the centralised procurement process for market research more effective. However much still needs to be done to make the process meet the objectives set by the Cabinet Office:

- to ensure maximum value is extracted from every commercial relationship and improve the quality of service delivery.
- to become the “go-to” place for expert commercial and procurement services.
- to ensure that the Government acts as a single customer; freeing up individual organisations to focus their procurement expertise on what is unique to them.

Recommendation 1: Improve communication with stakeholders

In order for CCS and UK SBS to be the “go-to” place for expert commercial and procurement services, its services need to be better understood, and indeed the relationship between UK SBS and CCS clarified. Key to this is improved, clear communications to all stakeholders - commissioners, departmental procurement professionals and suppliers - without using procurement jargon.

Communications should also be used to improve representation and participation across government with the framework; and any future improvements or developments that might be implemented.

There is a clear misunderstanding about when UK SBS and/or CCS are responsible for commissioning, and the relationship between the market research framework and other departmental frameworks.

Initially UK SBS and CCS need to clarify their responsibilities for the other procurement frameworks and relationships throughout government. This communication needs to be relayed to all relevant stakeholders, for example via supplier days for all the suppliers that are on the framework.

Recommendation 2: Make accessible all centrally held documents

One of the key benefits of a pan-government framework approach is that all the necessary checks of suppliers’ policies and procedures, etc. have been undertaken during the framework evaluation process.

However, at present, government departments are repeating these checks through asking unnecessary and wasteful questions whilst undertaking departmental procurement. This is not extracting maximum value; time and resources are being wasted on all sides.

It should be made clear to all users of the market research framework what information has already been gathered and has been evaluated positively, clarifying information does not need to be gathered again from suppliers. The information should be made readily accessible to commissioners, in order to meet their departmental needs.

A centralised approach to retaining and enabling access of information should be relatively straightforward to implement.

Recommendation 3: Provide workable standard templates building on existing materials

There are experienced commissioners and research procurement professionals throughout government.

There are a number of government departments that have a long, successful history of procuring research services. Use this experience, don't ignore it. For example:

- HMRC and OFT were specifically mentioned by suppliers for having some good practice documents which UK SBS and CCS could use. They have excellent guidance for Expressions of Interest and Briefs.
- DWP's existing social and economic research framework could be a useful guidance point when developing the pan-government social and economic research framework/s.
- Although the UK SBS Buyers' Guide is helpful, there are gaps within the documentation. Some of the departments have re-written the UK SBS guidance to fill in the gaps. Gather together the amended Guides and update the UK SBS document so it represents the best advice from across government, not just from within UK SBS.

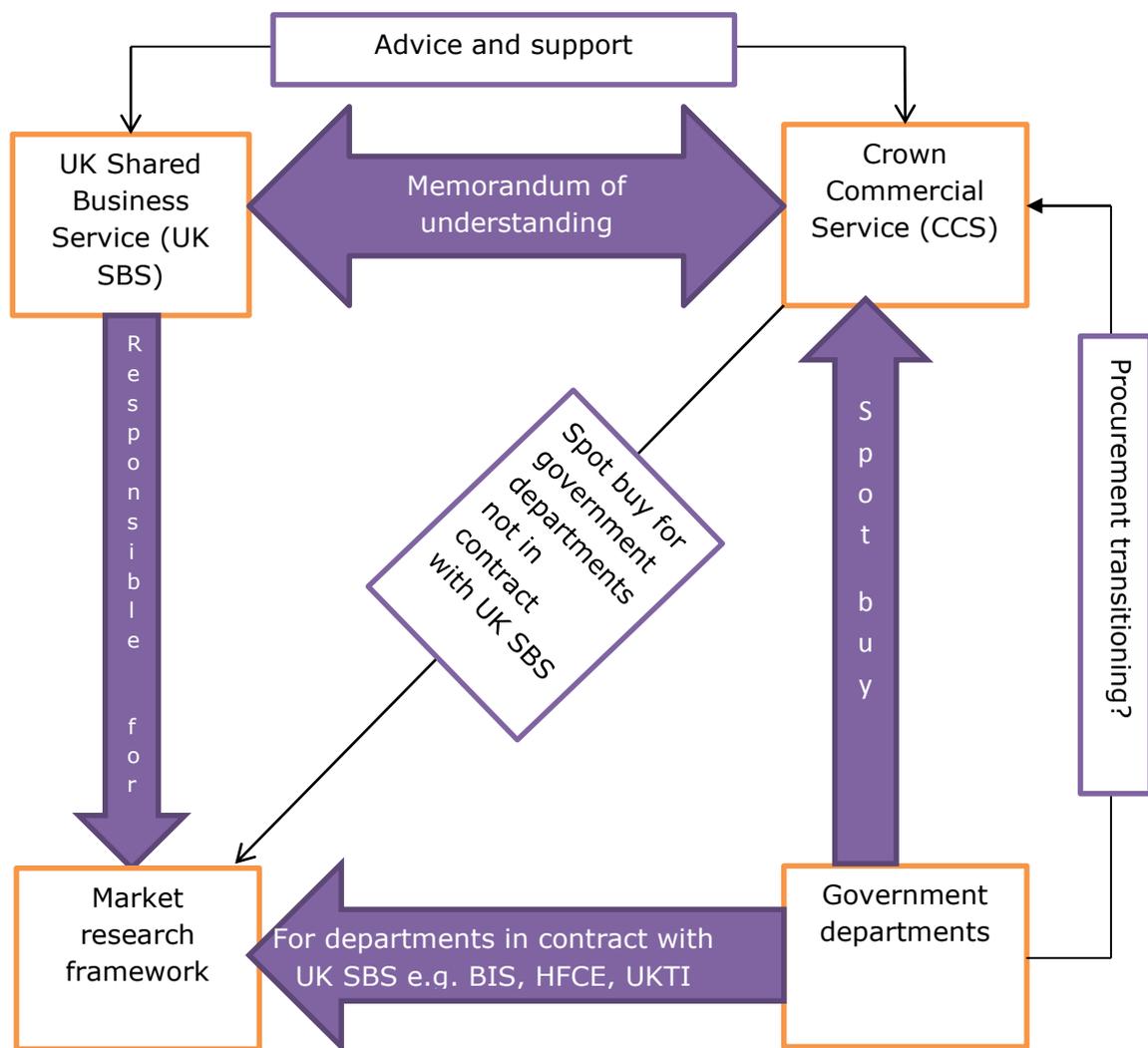
From the experienced government base, some standard templates could easily be derived by adapting materials used successfully by others over a number of years; for example, standard templates for specifications/briefs, Expressions of Interest, evaluations, evaluation weightings etc. MRS is willing to assist in such an exercise if this would be helpful.

Recommendation 4: Enhance research procurement skills and experience

There are gaps in available expertise due to the way in which UK SBS and CCS work together and work with government departments. There is a significant difference between procuring construction and procuring activities that are creative and intellectual capital such as research. Not only is the skillset different, it also requires a cultural shift in perception in the procurement approach; with greater flexibility and use of judgement about what is likely to deliver quality and value for money.

At present, as far as it is currently understood, the current procurement relationship flows is as stated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The current procurement process?



If a government department has no in-house procurement expertise and is not in direct contract with UK SBS they can ask CCS to spot buy their market research services. Similarly, UK SBS will do this for all departments that it is in contract with. However, there is no arrangement for government departments with no or limited research expertise. If a department has no research expertise there is nowhere for them to go to obtain advice.

Clearly when COI existed there was extensive research expertise available. It is appreciated that the level and quality of support and expertise that COI provided within government is no longer available.

It is however, unacceptable to leave a black hole with no advice being given. This gap needs to be addressed urgently if market research procurement is to work effectively and efficiently within government. The types of activities that should be considered include:

- **Appoint or second some experienced people:** There are still significant numbers of former COI staff available within government. Use their experience.
- **Market research training:** MRS is happy to assist with providing training of the appropriate standard to address this need. This training should be available widely within government and across departments; to all those that have some responsibility for research commissioning and procuring.
- **Work experience and orientation:** Suppliers have expressed a willingness to enable UK SBS staff to gain some work experience from within their research companies.
- **Access to experts:** there are excellent researchers within government that understand how to buy research, including the Government Social Research Service. UK SBS should use this readily accessible expertise and work in greater partnership with commissioners throughout government.

Recommendation 5: Streamline the access routes to research procurement

There are too many entry points for procurement within government. Government does not act as a single customer, when RFQs can arrive directly from customers or via the CCS, and when from the CCS either direct from CCS or the Spot Buying Mailbox.

A statement by CCS and/or UK SBS as to how it works, plus plans for how the two organisations intend to work in future, would be helpful for all stakeholders. Such communication would also help stakeholders identify those areas which UK SBS and CCS can address and those which it cannot.

Recommendation 6: Gather performance metrics

Commissioners and suppliers are obligated to submit a significant amount of information to UK SBS and CCS, including monthly management information from suppliers and quarterly commissioning and pipeline reports from commissioners. However, the same level of accountability is not evident for those that are responsible for the procurement i.e. CCS and UK SBS.

Information should be gathered on the performance of UK SBS and CCS and the market research framework (and any subsequent research frameworks that are developed) to assess the effectiveness of their performance. In order to do this Key Performance Indicators should be set which assess all aspects of research procurement (NOT just price) including UK SBS's and CCS's performance, user experience, value for money, quality of research, savings resulting from research recommendations and insights, % of managed spend, etc.

In order to ensure that such measurement is objective it should be conducted by an independent third party, which is separate from all government procurement relationships.

Recommendation 7: Adopt a continuous improvement approach

A continuous improvement approach should be adopted by UK SBS and CCS to ensure that it is focused on increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of the research procurement approach, based upon the needs of all the stakeholders. This would include

suppliers, users and other stakeholders such as MRS. There is a real need to ensure that the voice of the stakeholder is heard and responded to.

Gathering metrics, as detailed in recommendation 6, would be a start of this process by determining current performance, from which areas of improvement and a wider continuous improvement process could be determined and applied.

Recommendation 8: Amend the framework terms and conditions

The current Terms & Conditions used by UK SBS do not work, specifically the inclusion of consequential losses as a contractual requirement. We suggest that as a matter of urgency the contractual terms are amended and this requirement removed.

There is also a need for clarity regarding which organisation will be taking the lead for future research frameworks. Will CCS's Terms and Conditions be used in future? Will these replace those of UK SBS, including for awarded frameworks such as the market research framework? Would it be possible to have a specific set of Terms and Conditions for all the research frameworks which reflect common practice within research procurement (as opposed to construction as is the current case)? Mike Jones, DCPO from UK SBS initially indicated a willingness to explore this, which MRS pursued. Unfortunately after initial willingness was expressed to discuss the concept, no headway was made. This concept should be revisited. There are existing examples of good research Terms and Conditions in use for other existing government research frameworks (such as DWP's), which could be used as a start point for a standard set of Terms and Conditions for all government research frameworks.

4. Any specific considerations for the creation of a social and economic research framework/s?

Consideration 1: Determine what the advantages of a single social and economic research framework are and for whom

A single social and economic research framework is one approach but not necessarily the only approach. Before embarking on the creation of a new social and economic research framework, the advantages and disadvantages of a single framework approach should be fully assessed and, if appropriate, other approaches considered.

Consideration 2: Address all the recommendations made which resulted from the lessons learnt exercise

All of the recommendations from the market research experience will need to be addressed and resolved if the social and economic research framework/s is to be successful.

Consideration 3: Take on board the lessons learnt from the market research framework

There are many relatively modest changes that could be undertaken by UK SBS in the framework creation process that would result in a significantly improved creation and

application experience for all stakeholders, and a much better resulting framework/s for social and economic research:

- UK SBS setting a clear implementation pathway fully informing stakeholders what can and cannot be done within EU procurement requirements, and at what stage key decisions must be made.
- Following a stakeholder led process.
- From the beginning clarifying what can be asked at the RFI stage and RFQ stage in order that the evaluation procedure gathers all the necessary information across the evaluation stages.
- Adopting approaches that reflect the market e.g. research pricing practices within the evaluation rather than procurement preferred approaches.
- Ensuring that quality and value for money is given precedence over price during evaluations.
- Establishing a framework which is focused on the procuring of professional intellectual capital service – research - not taking approaches more commonly associated with purchasing commodities such as construction.
- Keeping it simple! Plain English, non-procurement jargon should be used wherever possible.
- Taking time to ensure the framework is right rather than rush to introduce a poor framework. There is no immediate rush for a social and economic research framework, unlike market research, as a consequence use the time.

Consideration 4: The difference between market research and social & economic research

There are many similarities between market research and social & economic research, with shared disciplines and skills, and there is some cross-over of suppliers which provide services across the research spectrum.

In summary, research is defined as³:

Research is the collection and analysis of data from a sample or census of individuals or organisations relating to their characteristics, behaviour, attitudes, opinions or possessions. It includes all forms of market, opinion and social research such as consumer and industrial surveys, psychological investigations, qualitative Interviews and group discussions, observational, ethnographic and panel studies.

There is no widely accepted definition of how 'social & economic research' differs from 'market research'. Indeed many practitioners that do both would say there is no difference. However the reality is that within government the two activities have tended to be commissioned separately and often by different individuals/research teams.

³ MRS Code of Conduct (April 2010)

The Social Research Association (SRA) has summarised the differences as⁴:

Social research is the term that has been coined for empirical studies of social relations and society more generally. It uses a variety of social science research quantitative and qualitative methods including surveys, statistical analysis, focus groups, interviews, and participant observation. These methods are also used by market researchers and evaluators. The main distinctions between these different kinds of research are their purpose and focus and the body that commissioned it.

As the name suggests, social research is mainly concerned with social and public policy, commissioned by public sector bodies, while market research has a more commercial perspective. This can lead to preferences given to certain kinds of methods. For example, market research tends to use non-probability sampling such as quota samples while social research often uses probability sampling, such as random or stratified samples, to be able to draw conclusions that are representative of the population as a whole.

The distinctions tend to manifest themselves in the following ways:

- Different commissioning teams within government; one for market research, another for social & economic research.
- Market research is not 'centralised' within government and does not have an umbrella body, whereas social research is represented by Heads of Profession for Government Social Research and economic research by the Government Economic Service.
- The language and terminology used by each group can differ.
- The methodologies are generally the same, and are based on the same fundamental principles, although there are preferences for certain approaches within each discipline.
- There can be greater detailed focus on the subject matter of the research for social and economic research, and a great range of topic specialism.
- A fair number of market research suppliers also provide social and/or economic research services. There are however, a significant number of suppliers that will only provide one of the disciplines and many who may concentrate on one or two very specific topic areas. This should be taken into consideration when creating the Lot structure for example.
- There are more academic researchers that supply social and economic research services.
- The outputs from social and economic research are expected to be put in the public domain so that they are accessible to the wider public as well as the research community. This is often not the case with market research.

Should it be decided to pursue the creation of a social and economic research framework/s the differences should be taken on board, as well as the similarities. The framework should be right for the stakeholders. If something has worked within the market research framework it does not necessarily mean it will also work for social and economic research.

⁴ Social Research Association definition supplied by Janet Lewis, Secretary of the SRA/MRS Research Commissioning Group (6 June 2013)



APPENDIX A: MRS's First Report

Improving Market Research Procurement: MRS Recommendations on the Creation of Framework 2 for research services

A document prepared by The Market Research Society for the Government Procurement Service

The Executive Summary & Risk Analysis

Research is used to support critical policy and operational decisions in all areas of public life.

When procuring market research, government is procuring intellectual capital and evidence on which important decisions are based. The procurement practices should be structured to reflect this.

MRS is the world's leading professional research association setting professional and ethical standards for over 60 years. MRS is globally recognised for its expertise in training and the UK's research market represents a major asset in the UK, in terms of both the creation of intellectual capital and export revenues.

MRS believes government should take advantage of the experience and expertise of one of the UK's world leading industries and welcomes this opportunity to help government do so affordably and sustainably.

The opportunity exists for government not only to improve its efficiency but, in doing so, to reinforce the competitiveness of the UK in a major creative and intellectual capital business.

Following extensive consultation with MRS stakeholders, including research suppliers and in-house government research buyers, MRS has compiled the attached report, with detailed recommendations for the procurement approach for developing framework 2 for market research services, to replace the former COI framework.

In summary:

Reducing Costs and Improving Value for Money

- We recommend streamlining administrative procedures by adopting some simple changes e.g. standardising core documentation and information requirements (e.g. Health & Safety policies, data protection and so on) and storing such information centrally.

- We suggest a two-stage or restricted procurement process rather than a completely open one; this will reduce the amount of wasteful and unproductive effort for buyers, procurers and suppliers.
- You should focus on procuring research services to address specific business problems within government as opposed to procuring research solely by research methodology. Research methodologies are tools not research business solutions.
- If you use established available recognised resources you will save time and improve credibility in the market. MRS's Research Buyers Guide, a published and fully searchable online directory, is the only list of MRS accredited research suppliers in the UK. The government would save a lot of money, reduce waste and ensure only research, conducted in accordance with the MRS Code of Conduct and its associated compliance procedures, was procured if the GPS adopt the use of this directory as an 'open' lot on the framework and the resource to access research services for the Agile Route to Market.
- Research is an intellectual capital and creative service depending on skills, training and intellectual capacity. It is highly labour intensive, often requires high levels of customisation and interaction service rather than one based on a 'methodology menu'. As such any marking criteria used to evaluate research services should be based on assessing whether a proposed solution is fit for purpose and good value for money; not on lowest cost. Lowest cost does not equate with value for money.

Building on What Works and Reducing Administration

- The most effective approach to ensure a smooth transition and prevent the loss of capability and knowledge that have been invested in government research data and insight is to select the effective elements of the COI framework and develop and build on these.
- There is an excellent network of existing in-house government researchers and suppliers who have expertise built-up in public service evidence generation. This could be more effectively deployed.
- Do not lose access to research expertise when procuring research services – these are essential for ensuring that the most appropriate research is being procured.

Supporting SMEs

- The research market is dominated by SMEs, niche and specialist suppliers in addition to the small number of very large research groups. The framework and the Agile Route to Market should both be equally accessible to all research suppliers large and small.
- The terms and conditions underpinning the framework (and the Agile Route to Market) must be SME friendly. Disproportionate contractual burdens e.g. unlimited indemnity, obligations to pay 0.5% of charges for services invoiced, numerous warranties, responsibility for changes to contracts, etc. which if adopted (as for

framework 1) will effectively drive many excellent small and micro suppliers not to apply for the framework.

Ensuring Legal, Ethical and Professional Standards

- Research is reliant on the trust of customers who take part in its programmes. It is increasingly dependent on the use of personal data. Policy makers and operational managers must have reliable evidence which is acquired legally and ethically. This is especially true when dealing with children or other vulnerable members of the public.
- In an era of high levels of public and press scrutiny confidence in the quality of evidence used in, for example Equality Impact Assessments must be high.
- Any future research framework and accompanying Agile Route to Market must continue to recognise the basic 'hygiene' factor adopted by COI; only to procure research that was conducted in accordance with the MRS Code of Conduct and its compliance procedures i.e. from MRS Company Partner organisations or from suppliers with MRS members.

Supporting innovation and Ensuring Access to Best Practice

- The UK is the world's second largest research market, after the US, characterised by the innovation and adaptability of its organisations. In order to ensure policy makers and operation managers have access to the most up to date methods and ideas. You should adopt a feedback loop (such as the Cabinet Office's approach of using Mystery Shopping for Contract Finder) for the framework to ensure that framework 2 constantly evolves and improves in response to any identified weaknesses.
- You should also retain some flexibility in roster development; have one lot that remains flexible and open to new entrants to ensure continued access to new suppliers and evolving techniques which might better serve future government research needs.

Key Risks

During our discussions with our stakeholders a number of risks were identified. These **must** be addressed by GPS before any framework is finalised.

Risk Area	Why?	Risk Level	Likely Impact	Mitigation
Reputational damage if poor research is procured	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impact of poor quality research or work undertaken that fails to meet legal, professional and ethical research standards due to lose of COI research expertise Framework fails to recognise the creativity and intellectual capital of research; concentrating too much on research tools i.e. methodologies Framework and ARM includes unregulated researchers Access to insufficient numbers and breadth of research suppliers with the appropriate skills and services needed 	HIGH RISK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government money is wasted on poor research Bad decisions are made by government on poor evidence base due to unsuitable research being procured Ineffective and inefficient decision making processes Complaints about poor research are made, which cannot be pursued as suppliers are not part of the compliance framework Negative public and media perception of government procurement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only use researchers that conduct research in accordance with the MRS Code of Conduct and associated compliance procedures i.e. MRS Company Partners and suppliers with MRS members Structure framework to factor in research expertise – using suppliers and in-house resources more effectively Take a procurement approach that is structured around a high labour intensive, intellectual, customisation and interaction service rather than one based on a 'methodology menu'
Low SME participation in the framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disproportionate contractual terms and conditions required for access to the framework 	HIGH RISK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Failure to meet stated Cabinet Office objectives Narrow range of suppliers on the framework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adopt appropriate and proportionate terms and conditions for framework. Not a blanket 'one size fits all'

<p><i>[See Section F for some research on SMEs views on government procurement]</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Burdensome and complex procurement arrangements 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Buyers unable to access all research services they require Niche and specialists completed excluded 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adopt appropriate and proportionate administrative procedures
<p>Agile Route to Market (ARM) fails to work</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited understanding of how the ARM is meant to work Difficult to apply in practice the threshold measurement Too open; unregulated and inappropriately qualified researchers access ARM 	<p>HIGH RISK</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Waste and inefficiency Potential accusation that the ARM is an 'OJEU avoidance route' Confusion among suppliers and buyers Government money is wasted on poor research Bad decisions are made by government on poor evidence base due to unsuitable research being procured Ineffective and inefficient decision making processes Complaints about poor research are made, which cannot be pursued as suppliers are not part of the compliance framework Negative public and media perception of government procurement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only use researchers that conduct research in accordance with the MRS Code of Conduct and associated compliance procedures i.e. MRS Company Partners and suppliers with MRS members Provide clear guidance on how ARM is to work Use the MRS's existing Research Buyers Guide online directory as the source for any ARM contracts; ensuring only regulated suppliers are used and allowing for new suppliers and techniques to be considered for government projects
<p>Perceived unequal treatment of suppliers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of transparency in procurement process 	<p>HIGH RISK</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disenchantment among suppliers with government procurement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fairness and transparency in the creation of the framework and lots

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some suppliers benefit more than others from the framework approach		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increasing number of suppliers stop bidding for government work• Fewer research suppliers available to provide services to government	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All suppliers large and small have equal access to government research projects via both the research framework and the ARM• Flexibility in the selection of suppliers including access to an 'open' lot which enables access to the full research market of suppliers
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