

Working in partnership
with the ICT industry



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Becta

British Educational Communications
and Technology Agency



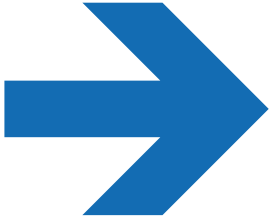


Becta's relationships with the commercial sector are stimulating and productive. However, at times those relationships can also be quite complex, especially when Becta is involved with an individual company on both a consultative and a regulatory basis.

This is one of the reasons why Becta has decided it should define exactly how it works in partnership with the ICT industry, setting out the processes, procedures and criteria involved. This publication is designed to do just that across a range of different scenarios, but it is also a 'work in progress' and I would like to actively solicit your comments on its content and the models of engagement with the ICT industry that Becta has developed.

It is certainly my aim that Becta's relationships with the ICT industry should be professional and honest. The ICT industry is a key strategic partner for Becta and absolutely central to the systemic embedding of ICT in education. We very much value the expertise and experience that you offer in support of our drive to realise the benefits that ICT can bring to teaching, learning and organisational management. Becta believes that the UK educational ICT industry is second to none and I look forward to ongoing positive relationships with you all.

Owen Lynch, Chief Executive, Becta





Becta is the Government's key partner in the strategic development and delivery of its information and communications technology (ICT) and e-learning strategy for the schools and the learning and skills sectors.

Becta is a UK agency and we support all four UK education departments in their strategic ICT developments. Becta's mission is to exploit the power of ICT to support learning. We provide strategic leadership on ICT and learning, helping to develop a world-class education system. Becta guides and co-ordinates the necessary changes in policy and practice and brokers effective partnerships to establish and exploit reliable and sustainable educational technology.

Since its inception, Becta has engaged in dialogue with the ICT industry and greatly values the contribution that large, medium and small enterprises have already made to delivering the Government's vision for ICT in education. Becta's remit defines Becta's role in relation to the commercial sector and makes specific reference to the need for links with the ICT supply industry. As a result, Becta has developed six models of engagement to facilitate its relationships with the ICT industry. These models are set out in this publication.

Becta undertakes to manage its various engagements with the ICT industry in a way that is non-exclusive and ensures no unfair commercial advantage is bestowed on any particular company or group of companies.

However, Becta acknowledges that it may be perceived to have a conflict of interest where, on the one hand it is consulting with industry and on the other, regulating aspects of provision. Becta is committed to being open and transparent and, to mitigate this concern, it will always seek to provide the maximum separation of duties between those staff engaged in formal procurement activities with a company and those involved in other strands of engagement. It will also endeavour to ensure that the timings of activities are managed in such a way as to minimise the potential for conflict. In addition, it will provide the maximum possible disclosure in relation to the models of engagement being developed and the industries participating in them.

Becta also appreciates that it may on occasion come into conflict with individual players in the ICT industry. For example, a supplier might be dissatisfied with the conduct or outcome of a procurement activity. To minimise this possibility, Becta has developed comprehensive requirement documents and associated evaluation models. It also conducts procurements in accordance with EU procedures and takes specialist legal advice, where appropriate.

Clearly Becta is involved in a wide range of different initiatives in conjunction with industry. It is unlikely that all of these can be facilitated and Becta has developed criteria which will allow it to prioritise resources.

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Becta's remit requires that it should:

- set appropriate standards for educational ICT equipment and services, accrediting and monitoring the supply industry and informing customers
- monitor the supply and quality of content, and its take-up and use by the education system
- provide a framework of guidance and advice for content suppliers and purchasers on the quality and pedagogic issues relating to the educational use of content
- continue to develop its high-level strategic relationships with national and international organisations from the private and public sectors
- develop its understanding of technological developments and their associated markets in order to inform its work and government policy, and to help make the UK a centre of excellence in using digital learning in education.

Becta's remit creates a need for a range of models of engagement that can facilitate both supply-related initiatives focusing on standard setting, monitoring and procurement, and policy formulation and advice initiatives focusing on dialogue, market developments and information gathering. This publication sets out six models of engagement that Becta has developed to facilitate its relationships with the ICT industry. The models are:

- **the consultation model** whereby Becta makes strategic consultations with the ICT supply industry
- **the intelligent customer model** whereby Becta acts as intelligent customer on behalf of government and of the schools and learning and skills sectors
- **the formal partnership model** whereby Becta enters formal partnerships with the key players in the global ICT marketplace
- **the not-for-profit activity model** whereby Becta facilitates not-for-profit or philanthropic investments
- **the value-for-money review model** whereby Becta carries out focused, commercial value-for-money reviews
- **the sponsorship model** whereby Becta enters into a range of sponsorship relationships with the commercial sector.

For each of these models of engagement, this publication describes Becta's rationale, the scope of the engagement and the intended outcomes of the activities involved.

Becta believes that a more strategic approach to procurement in ICT in education will yield significant savings for the sectors.



Rationale

Consultations are the primary mechanisms for Becta's engagements with the ICT supply industry. Such consultations are wide ranging in their participation and broad in their areas of dialogue. They seek to develop a shared understanding across the industry that encompasses:

- communicating and developing Becta's 'vision' for ICT in education
- addressing the challenges associated with the need to deliver coherence across the ICT infrastructure
- approaches that ensure continual improvement in the nature, quality and scope of ICT systems and services to the education sector.

Scope of engagement

Becta regularly instigates discussions with the ICT supply industry that inform the development of strategy. These consultations are open to hardware, software and service suppliers, as well as to consultants working in the education sector, and take a number of forms, including:

- industry partner seminars to update, consult and debate on key educational issues and how ICT might effectively and efficiently be deployed to address these requirements
- workshops and working groups to engage the industry in detailed discussion and development about, for example, technical standards
- working with industry partners to develop and promote consistent messages about, for example, adopting consistent good practice for the operational management of ICT.

Outcomes

Becta's ongoing consultations with the ICT supply industry ensure that the industry as a whole is aware of the current educational agenda, of the education sector's developing requirements for ICT and of policy as it develops. This ensures that:

- the ICT supply industry's experience and expertise directly supports the development of future strategy
- the resulting strategy and policy is deliverable now and flexible enough to meet future requirements
- both small and large companies have a channel through which they can engage with strategic developments.

In particular, Becta seeks to work with the ICT industry to ensure that it is ready and able to deliver the necessary services to the education sector.



Intelligent customer model

Rationale

This area of procurement and contract management is a major focus for Becta in terms of its engagement with the ICT industry. In essence, Becta's role here is to act as a purchaser, on behalf of government, within the policy and procurement frameworks established by both the EU and the relevant agencies in the UK, such as the Office of Government Commerce. In this model, Becta acts as a strong intelligent customer, with effective procurement and contract management skills. This role is becoming more complex, owing to a number of factors, including:

- the scale of investment being made by government
- the growth in the range of ICT-related products and services
- the range of suppliers active in the marketplace, from the quasi-public sector and multinational to the SME
- the diverse range of educational users, from primary schools to FE/HE institutions, whose requirements must be met
- the need to balance the requirements of individual institutions with achieving demonstrable value for money in the procurement of goods and services.

Scope of engagement

At any particular time, Becta is involved in a wide range of procurement, commissioning and service monitoring activities. The activities may be UK wide, sector related or geographically defined and undertaken on behalf of central government or devolved administrations. To ensure that they are fair and non-discriminatory, and to ensure that all potential suppliers are subject to a consistent evaluation process, all procurements are carried out in accordance with the requirements of the relevant EU directives. Where appropriate, Becta will seek information and views from suppliers to inform the procurement strategy prior to placing a formal Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) notice. For each of the procurements and accreditations that it undertakes, Becta is supported by an independent advisory board, which is made up of representatives from Becta, government departments, customers and legal advisers. The board reviews each stage of the evaluation process and must satisfy itself that this has been executed in a fair and equitable manner.

Becta also follows the guidance from the Office of Government Commerce on the debriefing of suppliers and, in the interests of understanding why decisions have been taken, encourages contact between the parties. In addition, Becta proactively monitors the performance of suppliers awarded accreditation or a framework contract to ensure that supplier performance is maintained and that the contracts meet the needs of the education sector. If the performance of any supplier falls below that which is expected, Becta works with the supplier to agree an appropriate plan of action to rectify the issues. If suppliers continue to fail to maintain the necessary standards, then termination of the contract or removal of accreditation is considered.



Outcomes

In general terms, the outcomes from this engagement model are improved value for money in the supply of ICT-related goods and services to the education sector, improved standards of provision and a more informed customer base. Data collection during contract management also provides an invaluable source of information on the dynamics of the market and how purchasing trends are changing. In exercising its role of intelligent customer, Becta is aware of the value of competition and choice in the supply chain and the advantages this brings to customers. Becta therefore monitors the Office of Government Commerce and the Small Business Service pilot projects that aim to break down the barriers to entry faced by SMEs when competing for government contracts.

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Formal partnership model

Rationale

The key rationale underpinning the establishment by Becta of its formal partnership programme is:

- the need for Becta to be able to anticipate technological developments in the global ICT marketplace
- an increased need to ensure that government policy in relation to ICT in education is appropriately aligned to such future developments.

Scope of engagement

Formal partnership agreements are focused on specific industry players rather than on cross-industry groupings and are aimed at significant international or national players in the ICT marketplace. Typically, companies that would be candidates for a formal partnership agreement with Becta would meet the following criteria:

- be among those that set the global and national ICT agenda rather than simply respond to it
- have a significant research and development capability
- have a wide portfolio of products of particular relevance to education
- be prepared to provide Becta with a range of insights into the future direction of the ICT marketplace with specific reference to emerging products, services and trends
- have a significant international and national presence.

Having identified suitable formal partnership candidates and the areas of their activity that are of strategic interest and potential benefit to the education sector, Becta seeks to put in place formal arrangements to share confidential information, including non-disclosure agreements if appropriate. It aims for these agreements to be signed by personnel at the highest level, to indicate a firm commitment to the UK education system and to ensure access to international investment and expertise of the highest calibre. Becta will publish the names of companies with which it has signed formal partnership agreements.

Becta recognises that it needs to ensure its advice to government is well informed and that government's investment and strategy are well placed to react to and adopt developments that may be evident in three to five years' time.



Outcomes

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The range of areas in which Becta is currently seeking to develop an enhanced understanding of the global trends in the ICT marketplace via formal partnerships include:

- developments in the home ICT marketplace that could relate to and inform developments in the education sector
- experiences of technology deployment in other sectors that might be transferable to the education environment
- research and development into developing technologies – for example wireless networking, grid computing and data mining – that could relate to and inform developments in the education sector.
- research and development into the applicability of specific technologies to education, for example the viability of open source software as an alternative to proprietary solutions
- early insight into the practical application of technologies to aspects of the education sector, for example the special educational needs agenda.

Becta also continues to facilitate opportunities for senior policy-makers in the ICT in education arena to engage with key decision-makers in the global ICT marketplace.



Not-for-profit activity model

Rationale

Becta is consulted from time to time by a variety of commercial interests that may be developing or considering philanthropic or not-for-profit interventions in the educational ICT marketplace. In some circumstances it is only appropriate for Becta to comment on specific proposals. In other circumstances Becta's role may be to broker a partnership between the potential sponsor and a group or groups likely to benefit most from the proposed intervention. In some cases Becta may recommend that the proposed initiative would not fit well with either the Government's ICT in education policy or Becta's own vision of the role of ICT in education.

Scope of engagement

Becta has a set of generic guidelines, which it uses to determine whether Becta involvement in a particular activity is appropriate. Under these guidelines, Becta must be satisfied that:

- the nature and effect of the engagement is overwhelmingly philanthropic and that there are no sales or marketing targets associated with the intervention
- the nature of the intervention must be such as to generate educational benefits that are appropriate and support Becta's vision in relation to the role of ICT in education
- the intervention must take account of its impact on educational organisations and the commercial marketplace and involve improvement that is sustainable in the long term
- the effect of the intervention should not seek to commercially advantage the sponsor body or disadvantage other commercial players in the ICT in education arena. Becta reserves the right to consult and be advised by relevant regulatory bodies in this area.
- where the intervention involves research activities or potential joint publications, there is a need for absolute independence of process regarding the study and the communication of outcomes. Becta needs to have executive authority in this area.
- Becta's role is the provision of advice at the policy and strategy level, with the burden of resourcing the detailed administration of any scheme resting primarily with the commercial sponsor
- where Becta is asked to share in the management or governance arrangements for any intervention, those arrangements should enable Becta to ensure that its participation will meet the agreed criteria on an ongoing basis.



Outcomes

As a minimum, Becta should have the right to appoint members of any board of trustees or management in at least equal numbers to those appointed by the sponsor. The board of trustees or management would have ongoing responsibility for:

- setting the strategic direction for the intervention
- agreeing the overall management structures for the intervention
- ensuring that there is a system of effective planning, management and control in place in respect of the intervention
- agreeing annual business plans for the intervention, taking account of the overall balance of any proposals received and the extent to which they have taken account of Becta's vision.

The scale of any Becta involvement needs to be proportionate to the commercial commitment by the sponsor body, in recognition of the fact that such engagements can involve Becta in significant activities and that the organisation is necessarily resource-constrained.

Becta will represent the interests of the education community in its engagement with the private sector.



Value-for-money review model

Rationale

In line with its new, more strategic remit, Becta has taken a proactive approach to industry with a view to aggregating the purchase of ICT products and services for the education sector and achieving economies of scale in relation to those purchases.

Scope of engagement

Under the value-for-money review model, Becta works with the ICT supply industry to understand the existing commercial model, identify inefficiencies and discuss opportunities for improved value for money. Discussions are wide ranging and Becta is open to new methods proposed by industry to remove costs from the supply chain. However, these discussions are not purely about reducing the cost of supply and/or purchase. Becta also aims to improve the quality of service, efficiency and effectiveness and to reduce the total cost of ownership of ICT.

Becta seeks to ensure that the benefits of any costs that are taken out of the system flow directly to institutions, releasing cash and time at the frontline for teaching and learning. Becta monitors the process to ensure that this is happening. Becta is often asked by the Secretary of State for Education to undertake investigations, but may also initiate them itself where there is evidence that sub-optimal arrangements are in place. Becta reports to ministers and the DfES on the progress of specific discussions and negotiations.

Outcomes

Becta expects that improvements in the value-for-money proposition represented by the level of spend associated with ICT in education can be delivered via three mechanisms:

- reductions in unit costs as a result of aggregation opportunities
- improvements in provision as a result of a more strategic approach to procurement.
- reductions as a result of supply chain efficiencies

Becta believes that its more strategic approach to procurement in ICT in education will yield significant further savings for the sector. Therefore, it continues to work to identify opportunities for aggregation and supply chain efficiencies and seeks to sign formal agreements and issue joint statements to the press on the successful conclusion of such arrangements.



Rationale

Sponsorship can be defined as the payment of a fee or payment in kind by a company in return for the rights to a public association with an activity, event or item for mutual benefit. As such, Becta enjoys a range of sponsorship relationships with the ICT industry and indeed the commercial sector in general. When entering into a sponsorship agreement Becta is committed to acting with demonstrable impartiality, honesty and integrity, and to regulating its relationships with sponsors as is appropriate for a public sector organisation.

Scope of engagement

In considering potential sponsorship agreements, Becta operates on the following general principles:

- Becta seeks sponsorship of activities, events or items – but not individuals – in an open and even-handed manner, from businesses competing in a particular field
- Becta does not accept sponsorship that places Becta under an obligation to the sponsor beyond the agreement relating to the activity, event or item being sponsored
- Becta does not, and must not appear to, endorse the sponsoring company or its products
- Becta only considers sponsorship support that adds to core funding, is likely to produce significant net benefit for Becta and is not detrimental to the public interest
- Sponsors may not use a Becta activity as a direct sales channel for their products or services and may not expect to influence Becta's communications towards their business area
- Becta examines sponsors for their financial viability, appropriate business practices, policies and customer and media profiles.

Outcomes

In any sponsorship scenario, Becta sets out what benefits a sponsor may reasonably expect. These might include, for example, association with Becta through the use of its logo and promotion as a sponsor through media coverage, advertising, provision of promotional support material, events, electronic media, networking and future promotional links with other involved organisations. In general, however, the procedures that Becta has put in place ensure that sponsors receive returns that are commensurate with their involvement and that any sponsorship agreement is able to withstand public scrutiny.



Further information

For additional information on Becta's partnerships with the ICT industry, see:

<http://www.becta.org.uk/industry/index.cfm>

To add your details to Becta's list of industry contacts, send an email to:

industrypartner@becta.org.uk



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