United Kingdom S&L: MEL Framework

Theory of Change

Crown Commercial Service (CCS) is working together with other government agencies, business and civil society to test and learn how open contracting information can ensure a fair, level playing field for businesses to win government contracts and boost supplier diversity, especially small businesses.

Contracts Finder, the single publishing portal for all public sector procurement opportunities, is the focus of the UK Open Contracting initiative. Contracts Finder makes it easier and more accessible for smaller businesses and voluntary or charitable organisations to do business with the public sector.

Contracts Finder was established to advertise public sector procurements to SMEs and provide greater accountability to the taxpayer by providing transparency of contract opportunities and awards across the public sector. Contracts Finder is owned and funded by CCS. Public sector buyers have to publish information about contracts over certain thresholds (£10,000 in Central Government and £25,000 in the wider public sector) on Contracts Finder. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have their own dedicated public sector procurement websites.

Key Contracts Finder stats from February 2015 to February 2018:
- 112,619 notices
  - 2,270 Early Engagement notices,
  - 1,480 Future Opportunity notices,
  - 52,323 Opportunities,
  - 56,546 Awards,
- 38,344 Registered suppliers from 25,149 organisations 63% of whom are SMEs,

- 3,598 Registered buyer organisations (as of June 2018).
- 82,030 visits in February 2018 resulting in over 1,211,016 page views the vast majority for search.

Contracts Finder is not an e-procurement system itself so this work has a focus on how better quality and more accessible data through a 'user-led' implementation of the Open Contracting Data Standard, accompanied by tools and dashboards making it user-friendly, will provide more accessible and reliable information to smaller businesses and aspirant contractors, as well as linking more effectively to other datasets across government including Competefor for subcontracting opportunities.

This, in turn, should boost business engagement with Contracts Finder and participation in government contracting opportunities. It should also help CCS measure the consistency and quality of the information on Contracts Finder and help it meet its targets for doing more business with small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) Better quality and more accessible information on government contracting should also support wider analysis of public contracting by government, especially as it searches for value for money in its public contracting.

Desired impacts:

1. Improvement in SME participation in public contracts by providing greater visibility of opportunities to supply the public sector, both directly and in the supply chain.
2. Measured improvements in data quality and completeness
3. Increased use of contracting data - particularly by SMEs and data consumers, eg commercial data analysts and Civil Society.

Summary of progress as of November 2017

Baseline data: As of May 2016
Progress data: May 2016 - November 2017, unless otherwise specified

Data availability is a challenge, however, there has been a lot of work towards putting systems and processes in place that will allow for the collection of impact data in the longer term. Below is a short update of progress across the four areas we are watching: data quality, data use and engagement, impact, and internal milestones.

1. **Data collection, publication and quality**

One goal of this project is to improve and sustain the publication of comprehensive user-friendly high quality data on Contracts Finder. When baseline data was collected, there were few, if any, checks in place to ensure data quality. Since May 2016, an initial technical

evaluation has been completed, the findings of which will be used to inform additional enhancements. Further evaluation of the data is currently underway, and will determine if the enhanced Contracts Finder OCDS output is compliant with the standard and identify additional areas for improvement. Additionally, a new compliance strategy was implemented in June 2017 that includes monthly checks by the Crown Commercial Service Transparency in Procurement and quarterly reports on whether the data is being updated regularly in accordance with the regulations. Another key measurement of high-quality data is the conformance and completeness of the data against the 5 stages of the contracting process (planning, tender, award, contract, implementation), and Contracts Finder now publishes notices for three of these five stages.

The UK Open Contracting Steering group, comprised of UK government officials, Civil Society and data users, was established to support delivery of the commitment to implement the Open Contracting Data Standard (OCDS) in the Crown Commercial Service's operations by October 2016 and subsequently to review and provide direction for further developments. It is also a forum to share learning between open contracting projects both within the UK and more widely through connections with the Contracting Five Partnership and the Open Contracting Partnership.

2. Data use and stakeholder engagement

Increased use of Contracts Finder by key parties, particularly SMEs, is key to the success of this initiative. In this first round of data collection, we've seen good progress towards these indicators. From January 2017 through November 2017, total unique visitors increased 5.2%, and what is even more encouraging is returning visitors increased 22.2%. Similarly, both registered suppliers and registered buyers also increased, by 22.3% and 8.3% (from June 2017 to June 2018), respectively. Perhaps most exciting, is the percentage of suppliers that are SMEs increased from 46% to 63%. Over this period, we've also seen channels supporting stakeholder engagement increase, with three new ones created, bringing the total to six- refer to section 2 of the below table for a full list of these groups. For example, there is now an active Open Contracting Steering group with civil society representation, an SME Panel working group that captures supplier perspective, and a cross Whitehall(central government) subcontracting Group which coordinates the onboarding of prime contractors so they publish subcontracting opportunities.

3. Impact

Market Opportunity

The government is committed to 33% of central government procurement spend going to SMEs, directly or via the supply chain, by 2022. The 2015-2016 published data on SME spend for central government tells a mixed story.

While government spent a massive £12.2 bn in 2015-16 with small and medium sized enterprises, more than ever before recorded, the percentage of procurement spend is down from 27.1% in 2014-15 to 24%, which means we've slipped back against our ambition to spend £1 in every £3 by 2022. Measuring SME spend is complex and challenging. Both 'direct' and 'indirect' spend are measured. Direct spending is relatively straightforward, using departmental accounts data to identify what was spent with SMEs by which departments. However, indirect data is more complex: the top 500 suppliers to government are surveyed for their subcontracting spend with SMEs during the year across departments. For both datasets, departments are asked to review and sign off on the figures. The rise in measured spend is mainly due to the inclusion of Network Rail for the first time among the departments and public bodies covered. The fall in % is due to small fluctuations in two of the bigger spending departments (MoJ and MoD) – which have a large effect on overall figures because their high spending.

Contracts Finder was extended in 2016 to the subcontracting market, enabling key suppliers to government to advertise opportunities in their supply chain. Evidence from suppliers, via the SME Panel Contracts Finder Group, indicates that Contracts Finder delivers benefits to them. In March, Servest Group Ltd published a notice on Contracts Finder to generate interest for their Innovation Day – a quarterly event aimed at improving Servest's public sector FM offer with innovative solutions. Contracts Finder generated a huge response. The post received 1,653 views and applications to participate were more than double what they'd seen previously with a wide range of innovations presented to the company. When attendees were asked where they'd heard about Servest's Innovation Day, a third said it had been Contracts Finder.

4. **Internal indicators**

Internally, we are tracking indicators that focus on global innovation, learning, and leadership. An OCDS data use workshop was held in November 2017 and showcased two government case studies and two private case studies. The government case studies demonstrated how OCDS output from Contracts Finder is contributing to increasing compliance with the Transparency in Procurement policy. The second case study showed how OCDS data from Contracts Finder is being used as a key source for the new Contracts and Spend Insight Engine, (CaSIE), an internal tool for government which will provide powerful visualisations of key commercial data and will help better manage supplier relationships. CaSIE will take data from existing government systems Contracts Finder (publicly available information on tender activity and contract awards) and Bravo (internal supplier spend data) to create a complete picture of spend and commitment for Government use.

We are also tracking data use by journalists, as this is a key audience to engage to support open contracting initiatives.

Summary of changes to the MEL framework

During the preparation of this first MEL progress report, we had a few data challenges which made it hard or impossible to calculate some indicators that we had originally planned to capture. We decided to remove these indicators for now, as the data are simply unavailable, and focus on indicators that demonstrate incremental progress. Based on these challenges and discoveries we made the following changes to the MEL methodology:

- We removed the following indicators:
    - Number of Awarded Opportunities that started early / late / on time
    - Number of Opportunities that are completed successfully / cancelled
    - Number of Awarded Opportunities that are completed successfully / cancelled

Indicator / Target *Rationale*	Monitoring Method	Responsible Party	Baseline as of May 30, 2016	Progress as of Nov 2017	Progress as of Nov 2018
1. Data collection, publication and quality					
Improve and sustain the publication of comprehensive user-friendly high quality data on Contracts Finder. *Touchstone: We will know the disclosed data is of high quality and complete when it is technically valid and complete according to agreed targets and identified user needs.*					
Validation *Confirms that published data will be reusable OCDS*	OCDS Validator Tool	CCS, NQC & OCDS Helpdesk	Commitment, but no OCDS output	Initial technical evaluation complete June 2017.	
Evaluation *Checks progress of conformance & completeness against the 5 stages of OCDS & user needs; documents improvements, learnings and progress*	OCDS data evaluation	CCS & OCDS Helpdesk	Preparatory work started	Contracts Finder notices published in 3 of the 5 stages. ● Tender ● Award ● Contract User needs captured	

				in discovery.	
Timeliness *Checks that data is being updated regularly*	Quarterly CCS compliance reports.	CCS & NQC	No checks in place at May 2016	Monthly checks and quarterly reports in place.	
Input *Platforms able to populate CF automatically*			Planned	All Data Feed Providers enabled December 2016.	
e-sourcing providers with automated posting to CF increases *Indicates use*	Quarterly assessment of API usage by Datafeed providers.	CCS/NQC	e-Sourcing providers publishing to Contracts Finder. But no OCDS output available	Two new Data Feed Providers onboarded in 2017. Standardised onboarding process developed. Review with existing Data Feed Providers planned Q4 2017/18. Further MI planned Q3 2017/18.	

2. Data use and stakeholder engagement

Sustained development and use of contracts finders by key users, especially SMEs.
Touchstone: We will know Open Contracting data is useful when we see high levels of access, high levels of user satisfaction and increased number of suppliers and other users using the information.

Count of programs or interventions supporting: Stakeholder engagement, Data		CCS/OCP	3 Groups ● UK Open Government	6 Groups, 3 new ● Steering Group established July	

Use, and Feedback Mechanisms *Channels for capturing user views.*			Programme implementation group ● Mystery shopper program ● SME panel	2016 ● Subcontracting working group established July 2016 ● Dedicated Contracts Finder SME Panel group established February 2017	
Use of system increases - number of visitors to site *Indicates use*	Contracts Finder performance dashboard	CCS/NQC	Total visitors: 75,622 New visitors: 50,982 Return visitors: 24,640 *Data from January 2017*	Total visitors: 79,571 New visitors: 49,458 Return visitors: 30,113	
Registered supplier users increases *Increased take up*		CCS	27,308 registered supplier users 46% are from organisations registered as SME's *Data from January 2017*	33,398 registered supplier users 63% are from organisations registered as SME's	
Registered buyers increases *Indicates use*	CF data	CCS	3,323 Registered Buyer organisations.	3,598 Registered Buyer organisations.	

			Data from June 2017	*Data From June 2018*	
Number of page views increases *Indicates use*		CCS	Baseline Google Analytics from January 2017 New Visitors page views: 361,687 Returning Visitors page views: 498,653 Total page views: 860,340	Google Analytics November 2017 New Visitors page views: 255,055 Returning Visitors page views: 527,675 Total page views: 783,482	
Improved email alert functionality *Indicates user satisfaction*	Search issues identified and addressed. Guidance available. Sign up monitored weekly.	CCS/NQC	No data available on volume of email alerts at May 2016	Approximately 100,000 email alerts issued per week	

3. Market Competitiveness, Value for Money, and Internal Efficiency indicators

The publication and use of data on Contracts Finder is leading to measurable results in terms of market opportunities for SMEs or value for money.
Touchstone: We will know that improved data & engagement are having an impact when new bidders & SMEs are participating in the market & improvements in value for money is achieved.

SME targets are reached	CCS standard SME		2014/2015	2015/2016	

Percent of direct and supply chain spend, based upon spend data flows to SMEs *Market Competitiveness/SMEs*	target monitoring.		Aspiration: 25% Measured: 27.1% Value: £12.1 bn	Aspiration: 33% Measured: 24% Value: £12.2 bn Link to Published Figures	
Mean number of days between opportunity notice and award notice *Internal Efficiency*	CF data (confirmed)		No data	Baseline to be established based on new Contracts Finder MI available in 2018/19.	
Supplier diversity increases (i.e., are opportunities awarded to the same suppliers) *Market Competitiveness/SMEs*	CF data (confirmed)		No data	Supplier identities, eg UK Companies House or Charities number enabled October 2017.	
Does the Awarded Opportunity value vary from the Opportunity value? *Internal Efficiency*	CF data (confirmed)		No data	Enhanced Management Information commissioned in October 2017 for analysis in 2018.	
4. Internal milestones: communication, perception and marketing					
CCS recognised (wins a prize) for being an innovative leader in procurement and open contracting	TBC	CCS	CCS has not won a prize for open contracting	Positive Ministerial statement about Contracts Finder to the UK House of Commons.	

Indicates global leadership					
International case studies developed about OCDS UK case *Indicates innovation, learning and leadership that is worthwhile capturing and sharing*	Publication on gov.uk and on C5 web site	CCS/OCP	No case studies developed	Two public sector and two private sector case studies presented at UK OCDS Data Usage Workshop 15 November 2017.	
Positive media mentions referencing the data or use of the data *Indicates public perception and use by journalists*	TBC	CCS / Cabinet Office Comms / OCP	No media exposure tracked.	Subcontracting on Contracts Finder announced in October 2017 press release.	