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**A COMPREHENSIVE BUSINESS DIRECTORY FOR THE UK: IMPROVING DATA  
ACCESS ACROSS GOVERNMENT**

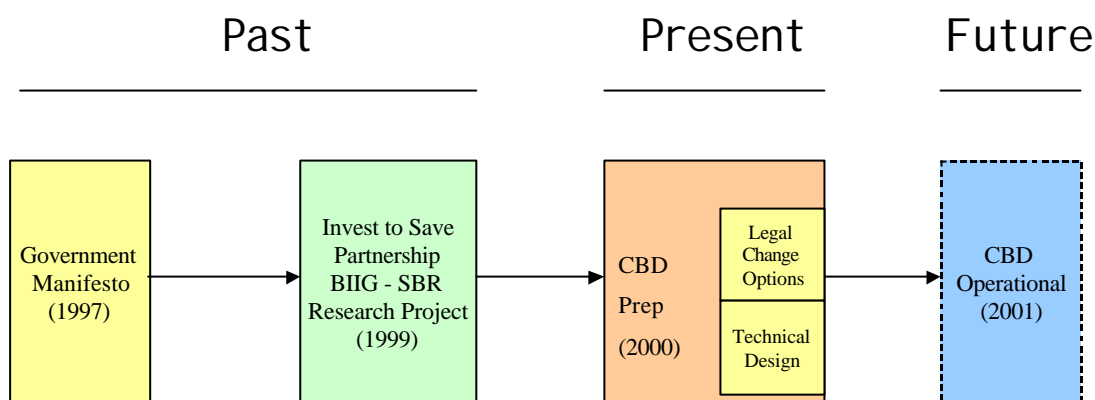
**Note by Office for National Statistics of United-Kingdom\***

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## Introduction

1. This paper outlines the work that has been undertaken to research the prospect of a single business register for general government use and the current work on the proposed option for a Comprehensive Business Directory (CBD).
2. The project is closely aligning itself to other cross-government initiatives and therefore it is becoming a focus of interest.
3. The diagram below shows the path the project has taken overall.



## The Government's Manifesto

4. The Government's General Election Business Manifesto 'Equipping Britain for the Future' stated the need to 'reduce the demands for information that central Government makes on business by developing a common database available to all Government departments'. A whole range of government information and communication technologies makes it ever easier to gather, process and disseminate information and these need to be harnessed to deliver the manifesto objective.

## Background: The Business Information in Government (BIIG) Study

5. The 1999 Business Information in Government (BIIG) study - referred to in the Modernising Government White Paper - investigated the prospect of a common database. The research investigated the potential for a single business register to facilitate the delivery of services to the UK business community and the need for a single business identifier. Recommendations would be made proposing the most appropriate model of such a central facility. The research was funded under the Invest to Save budget, project managed by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in partnership with Inland Revenue (IR), HM Customs & Excise (HMCE), Companies House and Department of Trade and Industry (DTI).
6. The research identified a number of significant conclusions and these were notified to the UK government's senior departmental representative group called the Information Age Government

Champions. This led to a secondary study project regarding the implications for future policy for electronic service delivery. The key findings of BIIG were:

- Government should consider the full range of issues relating to the management of business information in Government in light of the broader agenda of 'Modernising Government'.
- A single business register system would not be capable of supporting all government purposes in every business operation.
- Business identification could not be dependent upon a single identifier.
- New views could be formed of the business community through controlled data matching and sharing.
- There exists a need for an 'intelligent gateway' to distribute commonly used data received from businesses to relevant government departments.

7. The study concluded that a single database and numbering system meeting all government services is not feasible but a central facility bringing together disparate data for a number of determined purposes through an intelligent and secure process is achievable.

### **The Solution: The Comprehensive Business Directory (CBD)**

#### **What is the CBD?**

8. The conclusions from the BIIG study have been taken forward as a central facility, termed the Comprehensive Business Directory (CBD). It will provide a range of services by acting as a business data locator containing information on what and where data, relating to the business community, is used and held in administrative data sources.

9. The facility would operate in a controlled environment to protect the use and release of information managed by prospective central and local government organisations. This recognises that each participator is strictly governed by legal and policy controls. However, within these safeguards, the CBD facility will need to have the flexibility and capacity to allow each user to interpret available data for their particular purposes. For example, one such view may meet the needs of the Treasury Banking Review team. An extract from their official response makes mention:

*"The Cruickshank Banking Review (Recommendation 39) highlighted the essentiality for a Comprehensive Business Register. It stated that the register should include information on the location of business, sector, date of business trading, turnover and VAT record. HM Treasury have accepted the concept of a register that draws on sources of information from various government departments. It has asked the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to co-ordinate an inter-departmental project to make this facility available across Government."*

#### **CBD Partners**

10. The necessary research into the feasibility requires a good understanding of the various types of data held in government offices. The feasibility has therefore been conducted using the data management models of: the Office for National Statistics (ONS), Inland Revenue (IR), HM Customs & Excise (HMCE) and Companies House. This does not commit anyone of the four departments to actual involvement or participation beyond the feasibility phase. Where there is appropriate legal opportunity a service would be considered that could extend to other central and local government offices.

### **The Benefits of the CBD**

11. It is not possible in this paper to state the benefits of a central facility for each government department. However, a number of key benefits have been identified and include:

- Reduction of burden placed on business-government interaction.
- A single point of access to publicly available business data sets (e.g. telephone directory information).
- Enabling on-line services to businesses.
- Greater availability of information within government.
- Improved information quality derived from more data sources.
- Provide added value to existing data sets.
- Centrally managed security safeguards for data sharing across the GSI.
- Improved government response and effectiveness in business-with-government service by supporting new process working.

12. The above benefits highlight benefits across the broad range of public service activities.

### **CBD Project Coverage (FY2000/01)**

13. The project may be seen as an IT development initially but the issues it raises require closer examination of government processes, legal and policy structures and the standards that are being set by the Office of the e-Envoy for better government inter-operability. The project will embrace the majority of these issues and will therefore participate in forums and with project teams working on other government change processes.

### **Technical Development Stage**

14. There is no equivalent facility available in central Government, and therefore the CBD project in 2000/01 is a beacon project that will test the feasibility of building a virtual data warehouse service,

providing controlled access to administrative business data. The proposition is to establish a set of intelligent matching and data managing tools on the Government Secure Intranet (GSI) - a Virtual Private Network (VPN). With this strategic facility being hosted on the GSI, it will maximise use by all GSI members thus, enforcing the coherence of public sector work. Specific issues to be explored are:

*Metadata:* Acting as a data locator the CBD will require context information about the data that it finds. It will store:

- Information about each data item, including format, allowable values and derivation.
- Technical information about where the data item can be found and how the hub is to access it.
- Privacy information that informs the hub who is allowed to have access to the data item, and for what purposes.

15. Work is progressing on this component with close liaison with departmental and other inter-departmental projects with a metadata interest.

*Matching:* Data from different sources might contain identifiers (such as Company Registration Number) that allow records to be clearly matched. However, matching will require sophisticated software tools that can match upon secondary data items contained in their record set. The CBD team will collaborate with the ONS Inter-departmental Business Register (IDBR) team who have an ongoing interest in alternative data matching approaches.

*Data Management:* The hub needs to be built on effective data management tools, able to interface with contributing departments' datasets, and deliver the data seamlessly. The data management tools need to work very closely with the metadata tools, particularly those aspects relating to relevant permissions on the data. The CBD team is conducting an appraisal of appropriate data management tools, looking at what is being used for analogous projects across the public and private sector, and by discussions with potential suppliers.

### **Legal and Policy Stage**

16. The project will research and assess the legal implications of a CBD facility. It will look at privacy and information technology security issues, the Data Protection Act, the Human Rights Act and key legislation and directives in UK and Europe with regard to data access, specifically for business data.

17. Two experts in the fields of E-privacy and departmental legislation have been recruited to the team to facilitate a closer investigation of the issues that a CBD facility raises. The stage will specifically look at the legal powers and legislative structures underpinning each of the partner departments viewed from the proposed operational model for a CBD.

18. The conclusion to the investigation will be the identification of the legislative and policy issues arising from a CBD facility and guidance on the legal direction that could enable a CBD service.

19. Progress is being made on the following areas of the legal/policy work:
- A review of legislation and policy within the partner departments relevant to the operation a CBD.
  - An impact assessment of the wider E-government policy implications of data sharing across government.
  - A report that draws a comparison between privacy and information technology security.
  - A report addressing legislation and regulatory issues and recommendations.

### **Development of the CBD: Key Deliverables**

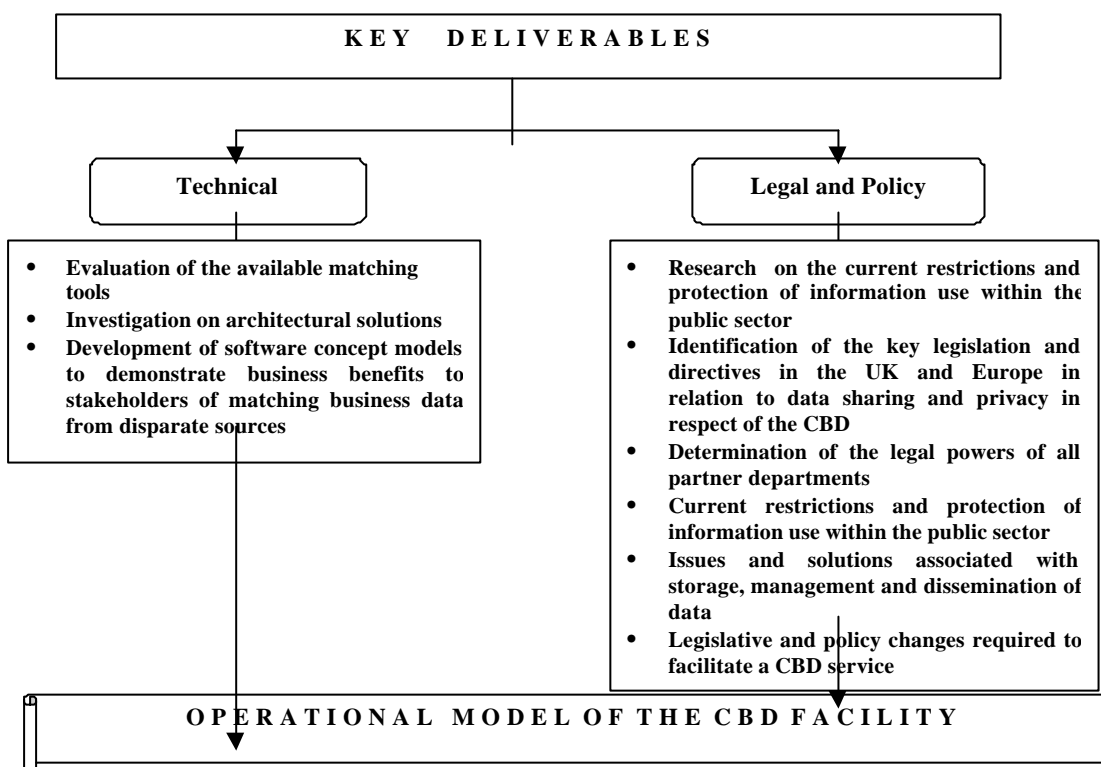
20. The key deliverables for the CBD project have been highlighted in the diagram overleaf. The product checklists for the technical development and legal/policy research are presented in Appendix A and B, respectively.

### **Other Related Government Initiatives**

21. There are a number of related government initiatives aimed at information knowledge and handling. Following from these there will be consequential changes in departmental IT systems and most possibly legislation. For this reason it is imperative that the CBD is recognised as a beacon project and that the CBD team should work closely with the key initiatives.

22. Key projects identified where an alliance would benefit in the development of shared ideas, knowledge and resource use, reduced duplication of effort, and develop the projects in relation to a common programme schedule. Some of the key projects are:

- *Policy Framework on Data Sharing* led by the Performance and Innovation Unit (PIU), Cabinet Office. This project aims to establish a government-wide framework for data sharing (citizen level).



- *Information Asset Register (IAR)* led by HMSO, Cabinet Office. A meta-database will be built to register different government department's information resources (intelligent electronic mapping).
- *Catalogue of Data Sources (CODS) and Intelligence project* reviewing the construction of a meta-database for closer working.
- *Review of Government Processes* led by IR. This will establish a map of all processes across government with aid from the deliverables of the IAR, GUIDE and CBD projects.

## Conclusion

23. The CBD will be a pioneering development in the sharing of data across Government. Although there are key areas to be explored before it can become operational, if established it will improve the quality of and access to data. Great effort is being made to make sure that the most appropriate technological solutions will be in place for its operation underpinned by the necessary legal and policy structures. Every effort is being made to deliver the joined up Government objective.

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