

News release

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Significant weaknesses in management of ICT programmes

Audit Scotland has found significant weaknesses in the management of three public sector information and communication technology (ICT) programmes costing a combined £133 million so far.

Managing ICT contracts: An audit of three public sector programmes, published today, reports on the management of important ICT programmes that were delayed, cancelled or overran on costs. The programmes were the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (£10 million budget), Disclosure Scotland (£31 million budget), and Registers of Scotland (project originally valued at £66 million but £112 million has been spent so far).

The report says many of the problems stemmed from a lack of specialised information technology skills and experience. But there were also weaknesses in basic project management and control, and the 'Gateway' system that the Scottish Government uses to provide assurance on the management of projects was not always effective.

Audit Scotland says the Scottish Government should consider the benefits that could be achieved by providing a central resource of specialised ICT expertise and advice for public bodies undertaking such programmes. The government also needs to comprehensively review how it can best support and oversee public bodies undertaking significant ICT programmes.

Auditor General for Scotland Caroline Gardner said: "Information and communication technology is an important way of helping public bodies work more efficiently and deliver better and more joined-up services. Scotland's public bodies invest heavily in ICT, spending about £740 million a year, and there are several major programmes underway across the public sector.

"We examined three programmes – which have cost more than £130m in total so far – that were delayed or cancelled in order to learn lessons for other public sector projects. We found significant weaknesses in how they were planned, managed and overseen. Some of this arose from a lack of specialist skills, but there were also flaws in areas of basic project management that apply to capital works of all types. The Scottish Government needs to address these weaknesses and strengthen its strategic oversight of ICT investment to ensure the public sector delivers programmes that improve public services and provide value for money."

For further information contact Simon Ebbett tel 0131 625 1652 sebbett@audit-scotland.gov.uk

Notes to editors

1. In December 2011 the then Auditor General for Scotland prepared separate reports under section 22 of the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act 2000 on the 2010/11 accounts of Registers of Scotland (RoS), Disclosure Scotland (DS), and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS). These reports concerned the ICT projects mentioned above. When publishing the reports, the AGS said he wanted to undertake a more detailed examination of the projects to identify what lessons could be learned. Details of each project follows:
2. Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service: £10 million Phoenix case management system approved in August 2009 and due in June 2011. COPFS terminated programme in November 2010 due to increasing costs and reducing capital budget and wrote off the £2.3 million already spent on development.
3. Disclosure Scotland: new £31 million ICT system for new disclosure arrangements approved in June 2009 and due in May 2011. System went live in February 2011 and has experienced significant problems and is now expected to be functional in autumn 2012. Total spending so far is £19 million.

4. Registers of Scotland: in 2004 RoS started a ten-year agreement an external supplier worth £66 million but expected to rise. Several ICT projects planned under the agreement were late or not delivered at all. Total spending so far is now at £102 million and RoS is terminating the contract 18 months earlier than planned.
5. All Audit Scotland reports published since 2000 can be found on Audit Scotland's website www.audit-scotland.gov.uk
 - Audit Scotland is a statutory body set up in April 2000, under the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act, 2000. Audit Scotland has prepared this report for the Auditor General for Scotland.
 - The Auditor General is responsible for securing the audit of the Scottish Government and most other public bodies in Scotland, except local authorities. She investigates whether spending bodies achieve the best possible value for money and adhere to the highest standards of financial management. The Auditor General is independent and is not subject to the control of the Scottish Government or the Scottish Parliament.