

ePrescribing System Procurement – How to Avoid Common Pitfalls

Following a recent engagement event with suppliers of ePrescribing solutions it was suggested that it would be beneficial to compile a short list of common pitfalls that NHS organisations should endeavour to avoid when procuring an ePrescribing solution. The list is not exhaustive. It provides answers to a number of key questions that Trusts might consider before going out to tender.

1. Does the system you want really exist?

There are two main types of system – those that are integrated with a full EPR and those that interface with other systems. Be clear what type of system you require.

Also bear in mind that implementation will take sustained commitment over a period of time and you are unlikely to require all of the functionality on day one. Whilst there are a range of functionalities in existing ePrescribing solutions in the UK marketplace there is a variance in development and functionality. Whilst it is critical to have a longer term vision make sure that you understand the current level of capabilities available, their strengths and limitations. If you want capability beyond that which is currently available you cannot make it a mandatory requirement – but you can be clear that it is something that you are looking for in the future and request evidence that capabilities are on the product roadmap.

Recently procurements have had to be abandoned and reshaped because the requirements set out as mandatory were unrealistic and not able to be satisfied by currently available systems.

2. Are your requirements clear and realistic?

Your requirements should be clear and concise. Try and avoid having a number of different features within a single point, particularly if the content is mandatory. Making complex requirements mandatory may mean that systems are excluded.

3. Are your timescales sensible – what else is going on at the same time?

The launch of the technology fund has meant that there are now a significant number of procurements underway simultaneously. The supplier market is aware of this step change in demand and has assured us that they have scaled up their capacity to respond.

It has probably taken you several months to prepare your requirements and tender; give suppliers a reasonable opportunity to respond to your requirements. This means allowing at least 4 weeks, and preferably more time, for suppliers to respond to your tender.

Consider how many other tenders have been released and any you know are due to be released; you may have to be flexible about the timing of the release of your tender or the amount of time suppliers have to respond when capacity is challenged.

4. Are you clear about how you are going to use any information returned by suppliers?

Don't ask for information that is not material to your requirements; you will have to invest time in evaluating the information you receive and suppliers will invest time in responding to your requests. Neither is efficient if the matter is not important to you or it will not have a bearing on the outcome of the competition.

Keep the requests simple and focused whilst allowing for responses that produce the information you require. If you are overly proscriptive it will be a challenge for suppliers to provide the right information.

5. *Sharing information and learning*

There is a toolkit being developed to support both procurement and ePrescribing (www.eprescribingtoolkit.com). These are being put together to provide a source of information that can be shared within the wider NHS. Please do share your learning and documents – requirements, project outlines, benefits frameworks, lessons learnt, case studies and so on with us so that others can benefit from your knowledge – send your information to eprescribingresearch@uhb.nhs.uk or ann.slee@nhs.net