



National Audit Office

Report

by the Comptroller
and Auditor General

Department of Health

General Practice Extraction Service – Investigation

Summary

1 The vision for the GPES project as a comprehensive source of data on general practice has not been achieved. The project is delayed and many customers have not received data. Mistakes in the original procurement and contract management contributed to losses of public funds, through asset write-offs and settlements with suppliers. The need for the service remains and further public expenditure is needed to improve GPES or replace it.

Procurement and system development

2 The GPES project has been significantly delayed. The original business case said the service would start in 2009-10, but it took until April 2014 for HSCIC to provide the first GPES data extract to a customer. Customers have developed alternative sources of data over this period and have begun to use these in its absence.

3 The NHS Information Centre (NHS IC) changed its procurement strategy and technical design for the GPES extraction systems during the project. This contributed to GPES being unable to provide the planned number and range of data extracts.

4 The NHS Information Centre (NHS IC) contracted with Atos to develop a tool to manage data extraction. In March 2013, the NHS IC accepted delivery of this system from Atos. The system transferred to the HSCIC from 1 April 2013, who found that it had fundamental design flaws and did not work. The system test did not reflect the complexity of a 'real life' data extract and was not comprehensive enough to identify these problems.

Cost of the GPES programme

5 The total expected cost of the GPES programme increased from £14 million to £40 million during planning and procurement. Further cost increases have been smaller, but the project has had at least £5.5 million of write-offs and delay costs. The value of the system to the HSCIC and its projected useful life has significantly reduced because of design and development failures.

Capability of GPES

6 GPES can extract data from all GP practices in England, unlike existing systems. However, only one customer, NHS England has so far received data from GPES. The time needed to design a new type of extract and restrictions in the contracts severely limits HSCIC's ability to provide data to those who request it. It is unlikely that GPES in its current form can provide the NHS-wide service planned.

7 The HSCIC have recognised the failures highlighted and have already put in place a remediation plan which will replace those parts of GPES that do not work to provide a suitable data extraction service in the future.