Request for Proposal (RFP) on behalf of Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)

Subject Provision of support services for TRAC (Transparent Approach to Costing) and understanding and advising on academic and financial sustainability to the UK Higher Education sector and sector stakeholders

Sourcing reference number PS16003 HEFCE

UK Shared Business Services Ltd (UK SBS)
www.uksbs.co.uk

Registered in England and Wales as a limited company. Company Number 6330639.
Registered Office North Star House, North Star Avenue, Swindon, Wiltshire SN2 1FF
VAT registration GB618 3673 25

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Section 1 – About UK Shared Business Services

Putting the business into shared services

UK Shared Business Services Ltd (UK SBS) brings a commercial attitude to the public sector; helping our customers improve efficiency, generate savings and modernise.

It is our vision to become the leading provider for our customers of shared business services in the UK public sector, continuously reducing cost and improving quality of business services for Government and the public sector.

Our broad range of expert services is shared by our customers. This allows our customers the freedom to focus resources on core activities; innovating and transforming their own organisations.

Core services include Procurement, Finance, Grants Admissions, Human Resources, Payroll, ISS, and Property Asset Management all underpinned by our Service Delivery and Contact Centre teams.

UK SBS is a people rather than task focused business. It's what makes us different to the traditional transactional shared services centre. What is more, being a not-for-profit organisation owned by its customers, UK SBS' goals are aligned with the public sector and delivering best value for the UK taxpayer.

UK Shared Business Services Ltd changed its name from RCUK Shared Services Centre Ltd in March 2013.

Our Customers

Growing from a foundation of supporting the Research Councils, 2012/13 saw Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) transition their procurement to UK SBS and Crown Commercial Services (CCS – previously Government Procurement Service) agree a Memorandum of Understanding with UK SBS to deliver two major procurement categories (construction and research) across Government.

UK SBS currently manages £700m expenditure for its Customers.

Our Customers who have access to our services and Contracts are detailed here.

Section 2 – About Our Customer

Higher Education Funding Council for England

HEFCE distributes public money to higher education institutions in England and ensures that this money is used to deliver the greatest benefits to students and the wider public.

In 2014-15 HEFCE directly funded 130 universities and higher education colleges and 212 further education colleges. The funding is used to support institutions’ teaching, research, knowledge exchange and related activities. This includes research and activity to ensure that everyone with the potential to benefit from higher education has the chance to do so.

To ensure that this money is being used appropriately, HEFCE:

- monitors the institutions’ financial and managerial health
- ensures that the quality of teaching is assessed
- organises the assessment of research quality with the other UK funding bodies.

Section 3 – Working with UK Shared Business Services Ltd.

Section 3 – Contact details		
3.1	Customer Name and address	Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) Nicholson House, Lime Kiln Close, Stoke Gifford, Bristol BS34 8SR
3.2	Buyer	Kayleigh Rawlings UK Shared Business Services
3.3	Buyer contact details	Kayleigh.rawlings@uksbs.co.uk
3.4	Estimated value of the Opportunity	Value of contract up to £2.3M (ex VAT) over period of up 4 years. For 2 years with the option to extend for a further 2 years, reviewed on an annual basis.
3.5	Process for the submission of clarifications and Bids	**All correspondence shall be submitted within the Emptoris e-sourcing tool. Guidance Notes to support the use of Emptoris is available here.** **Please note submission of a Bid to any email address including the Buyer will result in the Bid not being considered.**

Section 3 - Timescales		
3.6	Date of posting of Contract advert to OJEU.	20th April 2016
3.7	Date RFP available to Bidders	22nd April 2016
3.9	Latest date / time RFP clarifications should be sent be received through Emptoris	11th May 2016 11am
3.10	Latest date / time RFP clarification answers should be sent to all potential Bidders through Emptoris	19th May 2016 2pm
3.11	Closing date and time for Bidder to request RFP documents	27th May 2016 2pm
3.12	Closing date and time for Bidder to submit their response (‘**the deadline’**).	31st May 2016 2pm
3.13	Date/time Bidders should be available if telephone / face to face clarifications are required	If Clarifications are required, these will take place between 9 and 14 June. Bidders should be aware that they may be required to participate in a telephone / face to face clarification session at a time determined by the customer during this period.
3.14	Interviews	Interviews are expected to take place on one of the following dates: Thursday 16th June Monday 20th June Wednesday 29th June Thursday 30th June
3.15	Notification of proposed Contract award to unsuccessful bidders	By no later than 5th July 2016
3.16	Anticipated Contract Award Date	By 5th July 2016
3.17	Commencement of Contract	By 18th July 2016 (or 10 clear days from the actual award date)
3.18	Bid Validity Period	90 days

Section 4 – Specification and about this procurement

Provision of support services for TRAC (Transparent Approach to Costing) and understanding and advising on academic and financial sustainability to the UK Higher Education sector and sector stakeholders

Background to the Council

1. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) was established in June 1992 under the terms of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 as a non-departmental public body operating within a policy and funding context set by the Government. The Council assumed responsibility for funding higher education in England on 1 April 1993. The Council's main function is to administer grant provided by the Secretary of State for Education. The Council funds education, research and the associated activities at universities and other higher education institutions.

2. HEFCE's remit encompasses supporting an ongoing improvement in the quality of the leadership, governance and management of higher education institutions (HEIs) and as part of this programme HEFCE, along with other UK HE funding bodies (Scottish Funding Council, Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, Department for Education and Learning, Northern Ireland) and Research Councils UK (RCUK), is funding the work of the Financial Sustainability Strategy Group and the TRAC Development Group. The group is also supported by HE sector bodies including Universities UK, GuildHE and British Universities Finance Directors Group (BUFDG).

3. The Financial Sustainability Strategy Group (FSSG) and the TRAC Development Group (TDG) are HE-sector-led groups chaired by representatives from the HE sector, with membership drawn from across the UK higher education sector, HE sector bodies (including Universities UK, GuildHE and BUFDG), and from UK HE funding bodies and Research Councils UK.

4. HEFCE is the contracting agent for FSSG and TDG and day-to-day management of the FSSG and TDG programmes and TRAC-related issues is carried out by staff of the HEFCE, on behalf of all UK HE funding bodies and RCUK.

Background to FSSG, TDG and TRAC[1]

Financial Sustainability Strategy Group (FSSG)

5. The FSSG is a high-level policy group, chaired by Professor Mark E. Smith, Vice-Chancellor, Lancaster University. The FSSG focuses primarily on formulating strategic advice and policy aims in supporting the academic and financial sustainability of the UK HE sector. Further information about the FSSG's current terms of reference, aims and objectives can be found on the FSSG web pages: http://www.hefce.ac.uk/funding/finsustain/fssg/

6. Key elements of the FSSG's programme of work for 2013-16 include:

- developing and supporting implementation of an approach for HEIs and their governing bodies to assess the long term sustainability of their institution
- oversight of the TDG's programme to review, streamline and re-launch the TRAC guidance, and its work with the HE sector to enhance the utility of the TRAC system for institutions whilst also maintaining the integrity of TRAC methods and credibility of the system with funders, government, higher education institutions and other key stakeholders
- report on 'The Sustainability of learning and teaching in higher education in England' (March 2015).

7. The FSSG has recently reviewed its current role and remit, and consulted the HE sector and other stakeholders and future plans. This has been used to inform the development of proposals for the future programme for FSSG and TDG for 2016 – 18 which is currently being considered by the FSSG's funders.

8. Further information about the FSSG's current programme and development of its future plans is available from the following sources:

- Recent reports from FSSG: http://www.hefce.ac.uk/funding/finsustain/pubs/
- Letter from the Chair of FSSG – invitation to comment on future role and programme for FSSG (18 June 2015) http://www.hefce.ac.uk/funding/finsustain/fssg/
- FSSG Newsletter – October 2015 http://www.hefce.ac.uk/funding/finsustain/news/
- FSSG Future plans 2016-18: programme proposal to funders (subject to approval by funders) –Appendix A

[1] The Transparent Approach to Costing (TRAC) is an activity-based costing system implemented in all publicly funded UK higher education institutions.

TRAC Development Group (TDG)

9. The TDG's remit is focused on the governance, maintenance of the TRAC system and provision of guidance to meet the needs of all stakeholders/ users and maintaining confidence and credibility in the system. Its current remit includes oversight of the support service for practitioners and users and a programme of work to supporting enhancement of TRAC to improve efficiency and sustainability.

10. Further information about the TDG's current programme is available from the following sources:

- TRAC Development Group: http://www.hefce.ac.uk/funding/finsustain/tdg/
- TDG's current work on Management Information Projects http://www.hefce.ac.uk/funding/finsustain/mips/
- Latest TDG bulletin http://www.hefce.ac.uk/funding/finsustain/news/#TDGBulletins

TRAC

11. TRAC is an activity-based costing system developed for the UK higher education sector, and implemented in all UK publicly funded higher education institutions. The primary aim of introducing TRAC was for all HEIs to have embedded costing and pricing processes integrated with their financial and academic decision-making, which, by forming part of financial strategy and management processes, help to ensure their activities are financially sustainable in the long term whilst also meeting accountability requirements of public funders, specifically UK HE funding bodies and Research Councils. Complementary aims include institutions being able: (a) to determine the full economic cost of all their activities at a level appropriate to their decision-making; and (b) to set prices for their activities using either market-based pricing (taking account of markets, customers, competition and risks) or cost-based pricing, as appropriate.

12. The five main purposes of the Higher Education TRAC methodologies are:

a. To facilitate the use of costing as part of the strategic management of institutions and to inform management decision making.
b. To provide the basis of the statutory annual reports made by HEIs to the Funding Councils, attributing and reporting costs and income across specified activity types (Annual TRAC).
c. To provide the basis for forecasting and accounting for full economic research costs at a project level. (TRAC-fEC).
d. To provide the basis for allocating teaching costs to disciplines, according to HESA academic cost centres (TRAC(T)).
e. To provide the basis for an alternative research project pricing method acceptable to the European Commission (TRAC EC-FP7).

13. The TRAC guidance re-launched in August 2014 following a review to streamline the TRAC requirements and improve the clarity and usability of the guidance. Further information on TRAC, the history and development to TRAC, and the TRAC guidance can be found at the via following links:

- TRAC: A guide for senior managers and members of governing bodies (June 2015) http://www.hefce.ac.uk/funding/finsustain/pubs/
- Policy overview of the financial management information needs of higher education, and the role of TRAC' (July 2009) http://www.hefce.ac.uk/funding/finsustain/pubs/
- TRAC guidance: http://www.hefce.ac.uk/funding/finsustain/trac/
- History of TRAC: http://www.hefce.ac.uk/funding/finsustain/trac/history/

14. This tender documentation should be read in combination with the documents and materials listed in this document.

15. Proposals for the on-going roles and remits of the FSSG and TDG for a period from 1 April 2016 to 31 July 2018 are currently being considered by the UK HE funding bodies and Research Councils UK, and agreement of is expected to be confirmed by spring 2016. See FSSG Programme proposal 2016-18 (Appendix A).

16. The current provider of support services to FSSG, TDG, UK HE funding bodies and RCUK has not participated in discussion of future plans for the FSSG and TDG.

17. It should also be noted that the governance and management arrangements outlined above are expected to develop over time but that it is intended that there will continue to be arrangements in place for sectoral oversight of TRAC and a programme to support understanding of academic and financial sustainability in the HE sector for a period at least to 31 July 2018 under the auspices of HEFCE as the principal contractor.

Services required

18. HEFCE, on behalf of the Financial Sustainability Strategy Group (FSSG) and the TDG, is seeking to identify a Contractor capable of delivering support services to the FSSG, TDG and UK higher education sector stakeholders, including providing a central support function for TRAC.

19. In delivering these services, the Contractor will be expected to support the needs of the various stakeholders: the governance groups (FSSG, TDG); Funding Councils; Research Councils; other public and private bodies funding the HE sector; the Universities and Colleges and their representative organisations. The Contractor will be expected to have an excellent understanding of and be able to respond to the changing funding and regulatory

arrangements in UK higher education and the implications and impact of these on the UK higher education sector. This will require a level of audience segmentation and recognition of new audiences when providing the various communication services.

20. Day-to-day contract management will be with a specified HEFCE manager, noting that this reporting line will include consultation with the other major stakeholders. Based on the agendas shaped by FSSG and TDG, the Contractor will work with the contract manager to develop detailed work-plans, modifying and updating these as priorities evolve. The Contractor will also be required to work closely with members of the FSSG and the TDG from time-to-time on specific tasks arising from the work of these groups

Specification

21. The specific services the Contractor is expected to provide, under the direction of the FSSG and/ or TDG, are as follows:

(1) Support services for TRAC

a. An authoritative centre of knowledge and expertise on higher education costing methodologies, including TRAC, management information systems, and relevant alternative costing models being employed worldwide in HE and other sectors.

b. A good practice dissemination service to enable institutions to learn from each other in implementing developments in practice and integrating TRAC into institutions' strategic management systems and processes.

c. A general support service for all users and stakeholders, recognising their different needs as appropriate, but most particularly, institutional TRAC practitioners.

d. Detailed technical support for practitioners and also institutional support in their compliance with TRAC requirements and development and use of TRAC processes and information and its relationship to HE sector financial reporting and other data reporting and accountability requirements. (See notes 1 and 2)

e. Provision of high level advice on development of the TRAC methodology and systems alongside other HE sector financial and data reporting mechanisms.

f. Provision of website content for TRAC and FSSG and TDG programme elements delivered by the contractor, providing and updating the written content to meet the information and communication needs of key audiences and stakeholders. The TRAC guidance and web pages for the FSSG and TDG programmes are currently hosted within HEFCE's website and maintained by HEFCE. The contractor will be required to work with HEFCE's Communications team and the FSSG/TDG programme team, and provide material for publication on the web consistent with HEFCE standards and protocols (see note 3) for its website and accessibility standards.

g. Facilitating, with the HEFCE Contract Manager and others, the provision or sharing of networking opportunities, including, but not limited to, supporting the TRAC Regional Groups and Chairs of TRAC Regional Groups.

h. Pro-actively maintain a wider awareness of developments in costing both within the UK and internationally, within higher education and other sectors, and use this when providing advice on the development of TRAC.

(2) TRAC Guidance

a. Develop a plan within 4 months to cover planned development of the TRAC guidance to meet stakeholder needs and requirements for the period of the contract.
b. Maintenance and updating of the existing TRAC technical guidance – the TRAC guidance is published and maintained in web format only. (The contractor will be required to work with HEFCE's Communications team, and the FSSG/ TDG programme team, and provide materials for publication on the web that are consistent with HEFCE's standards and protocols for its website and accessibility standards.)
c. Development and preparation of new guidance material, as and when required by TDG, including communication of changes/updates to the sector.

(3) Policy development and support to FSSG and TDG

a. Provision of an advisory function to FSSG, TDG , including gathering relevant information and contributing to policy development in relation to the remits of FSSG and TDG in supporting the relevant HE funding bodies and RCUK/ Research Councils in their understanding academic and financial sustainability and the use of TRAC and cost information in higher education policy, funding and decision-making.
b. Work with FSSG to develop a plan (within 3 months) of appointment to cover support for FSSG's proposals for developing understanding of, and dialogue about sustainability in the emerging higher education environment (as detailed in FSSG proposals document) and advise on how the plan can be delivered. Where the Contractor can demonstrate relevant expertise, capacity and capability to deliver this work, the Contractor may be separately commissioned to deliver some aspects of this programme. (See FSSG future plans proposal for further information about the potential nature of this work. – Appendix A). <u>For the purposes of preparing their tender proposals only</u>, bidders may plan on the basis that the contractor may be invited to contribute scoping, developing and delivering 'think pieces' on one theme in the first year of the contract, and on two themes in the second year of the contract.
c. Provide advice to FSSG on the impact of UK higher education policy and funding; UK research policy and funding, the regulatory arrangements for HE providers in the UK, and the wider economic and risk environment and the impact of these on the financial health and academic and financial sustainability of HE providers and the UK HE sector.
d. Preparation of and contribution to papers and reports to the FSSG, TDG and any sub-groups thereof established to deliver specific projects/ outcomes within the programme. At least one member of the Contractor's team is likely to be required to attend on a regular basis. (See note 4)

(4) Communications

a. Produce an annual communications plan to support the programmes delivered by FSSG and TDG and cover all aspects of activities delivered by the under these support arrangements including: the technical support for TRAC; support for sub-groups and projects undertaken by the FSSG and TDG; and wider communication and dissemination to all stakeholders and audience groups with an interest in the FSSG and TDG programmes. The communications plan should be developed within 4 months and cover delivery of communications via all communications channels including through meetings, events, publications and the website for the FSSG and TDG programmes.
b. Provide support for communication events associated with the FSSG and TDG programmes including support for group members or other speakers contributing to the events.
c. Act as a credible 'ambassador' for the FSSG, TDG and for TRAC; influence a range of policy and institutional stakeholders at key events such as conferences and high level meetings through presentations and networking, and play a role in brokering policy outcomes to achieve FSSG, TDG and stakeholder needs.

(5) Other requirements

a. Creation of a working environment suitable to encourage the interaction of HEI staff with the support unit and facilitate building capability within the HE sector to (a) enhance and advocate understanding of academic and financial sustainability and utility of cost information across the range of strategic and operational managers, academic staff and professional/ specialist groups and (b) technical understanding of TRAC and its methodologies. This could be through the provision of effective support for regional network groups, liaison and interaction with professional and sector groups such as BUFDG, HESPA etc.; facilities enabling HEI staff to be seconded to join the unit for specific enhancement activities or prospective development studies; alternatively tenderers may wish to provide examples of other approaches that would support this aim.

(6) Transition arrangements

a. Work with FSSG, TDG, the HEFCE programme team and the current support service provider to plan and agree arrangements for transfer of full responsibility for the support services under this specification, including responsibility for the TRAC Support Services as described in section 1 above. (See paragraphs 22-23 below and Appendix B for further information about the proposed arrangements for facilitating the handover of the TRAC Support Services.)

22. The contract is envisaged to be for a period to 31 July 2018 with annual reviews and a potential option for an extension of the contract for one or two years. Continuation at each annual review will be contingent on necessity and the availability of further funding as well as satisfactory performance. Performance criteria will be agreed with the contractor at each annual review where the contract is to be delivered for a further 12 month period.

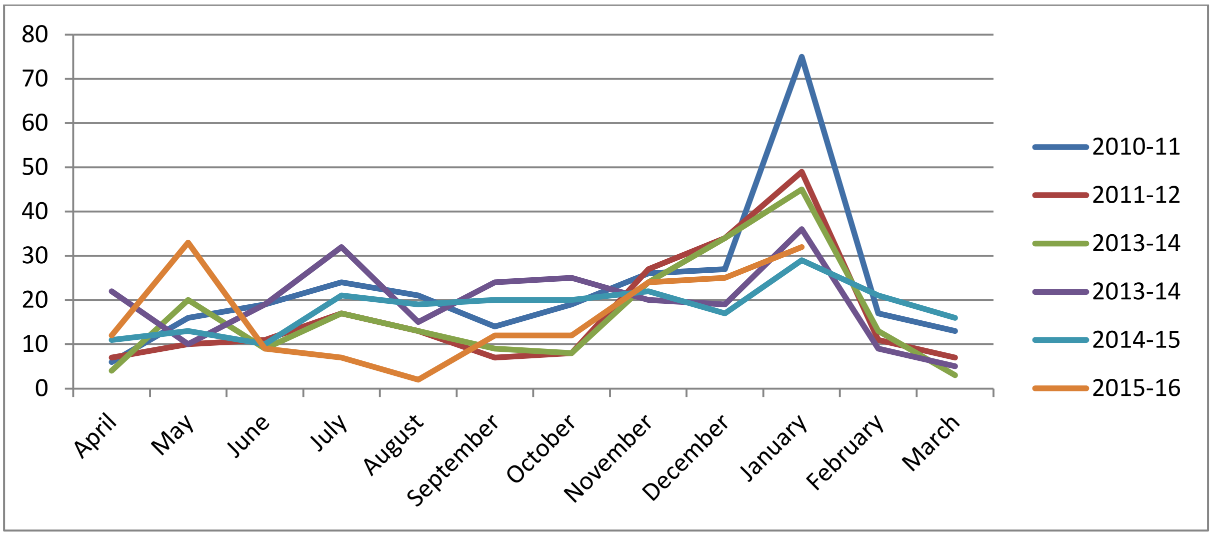
23. The planned starting date for the contract of 18th July 2016 with transitional arrangements for phased handover of responsibility for core support service from the existing provider. The view of the FSSG and TDG is that the majority of the core support services outlined in the specification above, can be transferred by 30 September 2016. However, the FSSG and TDG considers there would be risks associated with seeking to transfer responsibility for technical support services for TRAC during the submission cycle for 2015-16 academic year TRAC returns (i.e. 28 February 2017). In order to manage these risks and to ensure the continuity of technical support for TRAC in this period, it is proposed that handover of responsibility for technical support services for TRAC should take place in March 2017. Further information about arrangements for handover of support arrangements are provided at Appendix B Where bidders consider they could commence delivery of these services from an earlier date, or wish to propose alternative arrangements for transfer of responsibility for support services, these should be described in their proposal under item 6 'Transitional arrangements' and the resourcing of these arrangements should be reflected in the pricing schedule.

24. Subject to paragraphs 22-23 above, the tenderer should be able to provide the services set out in headings 1 to 5 above throughout the duration of the contract.

Note – 1: The specification of support does not include specific provision of consultancy to individual institutions wishing to enhance or change their internal TRAC processes. This would be a matter for those institutions. Bidders with capacity to offer this support, and wishing to offer this service directly to HEIs, should indicate the basis on which they would do this. However, such services are not part of this specification.

Note – 2: Data on the annual profile of enquiries to the TRAC Helpdesk are shown in the chart below:

Volume of queries received by month



The nature of technical enquiries to the TRAC Helpdesk varies but the most frequent enquiries over the last year have included the following topics:

- *Facility costing (specifically facility utilisation records) and laboratory technicians*
- *Time Allocation and Workload Planning mapping*
- *understanding validation queries presented by the TRAC return templates*
- *TRAC Guidance and the TRAC Statement of Requirements*
- *Management Information Projects*
- *Facility costing, in particular data storage costs in response to EPSRC requirements*
- *TRAC Dispensation.*

Note – 3: Guidance on HEFCE's standards and protocols for writing web content is provided at Appendix C.

Note – 4: Reports prepared for the FSSG and TDG may be published on the FSSG or TDG web pages, and reports, papers and other material prepared for the FSSG and TDG may be used by the FSSG, TDG, the UK HE funding bodies, RCUK to inform advice on policy development within these organisations, or advice to government or government departments. Reports prepared for and intended for publication should be prepared and formatted in accordance with HEFCE's guidance for external authors – See Appendix D.

25. Key events in the current programme lifecycle and an indication of anticipated number/ frequency of events where support will/ may be required are outlined in the table below.

Event/ programme element	**Date/ Frequency**	**Indicative contractor input**
FSSG meetings	2 per year (usually February/March and October/November)	At least 1 team member to attend and/or provide papers
Other FSSG programme activity/ projects - scope and specification of activities to be agreed by FSSG with contractor input to be determined depending on capability, capacity, need and availability of funding.	To be defined and agreed	Contractor Team input to be confirmed according scope, specification and need
FSSG sector engagement events – to be developed within the annual communications plan	To be defined and agreed	Contractor Team input to be confirmed according scope, specification and need
TDG meetings	3 per year (usually March, June, October)	At least 1 team member to attend; provision of papers
TDG sub-groups/ project groups – to be determined according to programme developed with the TDG, and capacity/ funding available – potentially 2-6 projects per year depending on priorities, capacity and availability of funding	To be defined and agreed	At least 1 team member likely to be required to attend; provision of papers
Meeting with TRAC Regional Group Chairs	2 per year	At least 1 team member to attend
TRAC Regional Group meetings/ events	2 – 3 per year (8 regional groups)	Attendance at two meetings in each region once per year
BUFDG Regional meetings	3 per year in each of 7 regions	Attendance at one meeting in each region once per year
TDG Annual conference	Autumn each year	Key contributor

TDG sector engagement/ dissemination – to be developed within the annual communications plan	To be defined and agreed	Contractor Team input to be confirmed according scope, specification and need
Submission of Annual TRAC data	January	Technical support to HEI Practitioners; input to design of data collection template
Submission of TRAC(T) data	February	Technical support to HEI Practitioners; input to design of data collection template
Annual verification of TRAC data and calculation of dispensation rates	February	Technical advice to HEIs/ funders

Note-5: Details of the Financial Sustainability Strategy Group and TRAC Development Group programme will evolve over the life of the project. The above table indicates key events and provides an indication of inputs required but service providers will need to have capacity and flexibility to respond to the programme and priorities agreed with the FSSG and TDG.

26. The team undertaking this programme of work will be expected to be able to provide evidence of and demonstrate the following competencies and capabilities:

a. Individual staff membership of relevant professional bodies or trade associations.
b. Understanding of the UK higher education sector - core team members should be able to demonstrate an understanding of the following: UK higher education policy and funding; UK research policy and funding; the regulatory arrangements for HE providers in the UK; the wider economic and risk environment, the complexity of the changing HE landscape and the impact of these on the financial health and, academic and financial sustainability of HE providers and the UK HE sector.
c. Ability to support and deliver advice on complex public policy and public administration service environments including experience of brokering policy outcomes: examples of successful stakeholder liaison and brokering of outcomes should be provided.
d. Capability and understanding in relation to TRAC and its use within the UK higher education sector. At least one team member able to provide support and advice on **technical** TRAC issues at the start of the contract.

e. Capability in all costing methodologies: at least two of the proposed team who will be active in this work has costing experience and relevant accountancy qualifications.

f. Understanding of HE sector financial reporting (including statutory and regulatory reporting requirements) and current/ emerging issues and developments to inform provision of advice to stakeholders, users and practitioners.

g. Capability in provision of support functions including:

- previous work with projects of a similar nature and scale in terms of technical complexity and geographical spread of users - ideally within the public sector (experience of support function provision in other sectors will be considered if suppliers can demonstrate its relevance to the requirements of this work)
- communication with user groups and design and preparing material for publication on the web. (Bidders are not required to provide web hosting and web editing services as part of this service specification, but will need an understanding of effective web-based communications. Bidders will be required to work with web editors selected by the Council.)
- operational management in the provision of high quality, scalable support and guidance.

h. Demonstrated evidence of developing and implementing communication strategies and processes that meet the needs of different user communities.

i. Demonstrated proficiency in high level communications and advocacy for example:

- brokering dialogue with senior level policy stakeholders (e.g. Vice Chancellors and Senior Officers in funding bodies or government departments) when necessary to secure positive outcomes
- undertaking work to convey a new and lasting message or to create a change in practice.

j. Reporting and publications written by members of the team demonstrating proficiency in writing (i) on strategy and policy issues for multiple audiences/ stakeholders and (ii) technical material for specialist audiences.

k. Demonstrated evidence of programme and project planning and management comparable in terms of scale and complexity, as well as the regulatory framework within which such programmes/ projects operate, and delivery on time and within budget.

27. It is estimated that the Contractor will need to dedicate approximately 175 – 220 person days per year for the provision of the support services required. An additional contingency of 30 -50 days could also be called upon. Bidders are expected to carry out their own independent assessment of the resources required to deliver the requirements for this contract. We do not anticipate that the full range of services specified or skills required can be met by a single person. The cycle of activities and the skill sets required suggest to us that our requirements would be best serviced by a small number of suitably qualified individuals.

28. The Council will also wish tenderers to indicate their capacity to undertake additional consultancy or technical work of a similar nature to that outlined above, on a call-off basis.

29. Bidders may wish to identify alternative approaches to delivering the requirements described in the Specification above, or to offer additional services outside this specification they consider relevant to enhance the service and support to be provided.

Duration of Contract

30. The contract is envisaged to be for a period to 31 July 2018 with annual reviews and a potential option for an extension of the contract for one or two years. Continuation at each annual review will be contingent on necessity and the availability of further funding as well as satisfactory performance. Performance criteria will be agreed with the contractor at each annual review where the contract is to be delivered for a further 12 month period. The planned starting date for the contract of 18^{th} July 2016 with transitional arrangements for handover of responsibility for core support service from the existing provider by 30 September 2016 and transfer of responsibility for Helpdesk and technical support services after TRAC reporting for academic year 2015-16, i.e. in March 2017.

Section 5 – Evaluation model

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 The evaluation process will be conducted to ensure that Bids are evaluated fairly to ascertain the bidders who can demonstrate the required skills qualities, technical ability and capacity, commercial stability and experience to ensure successful performance of the Contract.

5.1.2 The evaluation team may comprise staff from UK SBS, the Customer and any specific external stakeholders UK SBS deem required

5.2 Evaluation of Bids

5.2.1 Evaluation of Bids shall be based on a Selection questionnaire defined in the e-sourcing tool.

5.3. SELECTION questionnaire

5.3.1 The Selection questionnaire shall be marked against the following Selection pass / fail and scoring criteria.

5.3.2 The selection questionnaire shall be marked against the following Mandatory or discretionary pass / fail criteria.

Selection Pass/fail criteria		
Questionnaire	**Q No.**	**Question subject**
Selection Part B	SEL2.2	Conviction for conspiracy
Selection Part B	SEL2.3	Conviction for corruption
Selection Part B	SEL2.4	Conviction for bribery
Selection Part B	SEL2.5	Conviction for fraud
Selection Part B	SEL2.6	Conviction for Terrorism/ Serious Crime
Selection Part B	SEL2.7	Conviction for Money Laundering
Selection Part B	SEL 2.8	Conviction for proceeds of crime
Selection Part B	SEL 2.9	Conviction for other offences
Selection Part B	SEL 2.10	Tax and social security breaches
Selection Part C	SEL3.2	Compliance with applicable obligations in the fields of environmental, social and labour law.
Selection Part C	SEL3.3	Bankruptcy, Insolvency or Winding up
Selection Part C	SEL3.4	Grave Professional misconduct
Selection Part C	SEL3.5	Agreements with other economic operators that create a Distortion of Competition
Selection Part C	SEL3.6	Conflict of interest within meaning of regulation 24
Selection Part C	SEL3.7	Distortion of competition within the meaning of regulation 41
Selection Part C	SEL3.8	Deficiencies in performance of prior public contract
Selection Part C	SEL3.9	Serious Misrepresentation
Selection Part C	SEL3.10	Tax Returns
Selection Part C	SEL3.11	Compliance to Modern Slavery Act 2015
Selection Part D	SEL4.1	Economic and Financial standing assessment
Selection Part D	SEL4.2	Minimum financial threshold
Selection Part D	SEL4.3	Guarantee
Selection Part D	SEL4.4	Insurance
Selection Part E	SEL5.2	Health and Safety Policy
Selection Part E	SEL5.3	Remedial Orders relating to Health and Safety Executive (or equivalent)
Selection Part E	SEL5.4	Conviction of breaching environmental Legislation
Selection Part E	SEL5.5	Sub-contractors infringement of environmental Legislation
Selection Part E	SEL5.6a	Unlawful Discrimination
Selection Part E	SEL5.6b	Complaint following investigation of unlawful discrimination
Selection Part E	SEL5.7	Sub-contractor checks for unlawful discrimination
Selection Part E	SEL5.9	Experience
Selection Part E	FOI1.1	Freedom of information
	In the event of a Bidder failing to meet the requirements of a Mandatory pass / fail criteria, UK SBS reserves the right to disqualify the Bidder and not consider evaluation of the any of the selection stage scoring methodology, nor the Award stage scoring methodology or Mandatory pass / fail criteria.	

5.3.3 Each Mandatory pass / fail question includes a clear definition of the requirements of a successful response to the question.

5.3.4 The evaluation model below shall be used for this RFP which will be determined to two decimal places.

5.3.5 Questions marked ‘for information only’ do not contribute to the scoring model.

Selection Evaluation of criteria

Each question will be judged on a score from 0 to 100, which shall be subjected to a multiplier to reflect the percentage of the evaluation criteria allocated to that question.

Where an evaluation criterion is worth 20% then the 0-100 score achieved will be multiplied by 20.
Example if a Bidder scores 60 from the available 100 points this will equate to 12% by using the following calculation: Score/Total Points available multiplied by 20 (60/100 x 20 = 12)

Where an evaluation criterion is worth 10% then the 0-100 score achieved will be multiplied by 10.
Example if a Bidder scores 60 from the available 100 points this will equate to 6% by using the following calculation: Score/Total Points available multiplied by 10 (60/100 x 10 = 6)

The same logic will be applied to groups of questions which equate to a single evaluation criterion.

The 0-100 score shall be based on (unless otherwise stated within the question):

0	The Question is not answered or the response is completely unacceptable.
10	Extremely poor response – they have completely missed the point of the question.
20	Very poor response and not wholly acceptable. Requires major revision to the response to make it acceptable. Only partially answers the requirement, with major deficiencies and little relevant detail proposed.
40	Poor response only partially satisfying the selection question requirements with deficiencies apparent. Some useful evidence provided but response falls well short of expectations. Low probability of being a capable supplier.
60	Response is acceptable but remains basic and could have been expanded upon. Response is sufficient but does not inspire.
80	Good response which describes their capabilities in detail which provides high levels of assurance consistent with a quality provider. The response includes a full description of techniques and measurements currently employed.
100	Response is exceptional and clearly demonstrates they are capable of meeting the requirement. No significant weaknesses noted. The response is compelling in its description of techniques and measurements currently employed, providing full assurance consistent with a quality provider.

All questions will be scored based on the above mechanism. Please be aware that there may be multiple evaluators. If so, their individual scores will be averaged (mean) to determine your final score as follows:

Example
Evaluator 1 scored your bid as 60
Evaluator 2 scored your bid as 40
Evaluator 3 scored your bid as 80
Evaluator 4 scored your bid as 60
Your final score will (60+40+80+60) ÷ 4 = 60

5.3.5 During the evaluation stage, the intention is that only Bidders who pass all the Mandatory and Discretionary requirements of the RFP will be considered for award stage evaluation.

5.4. AWARD questionnaire

5.4.1 The award questionnaire shall be marked against the following Mandatory or discretionary pass / fail criteria. Each Mandatory pass / fail question includes a clear definition of the requirements of a successful response to the question.

Award Pass/fail criteria		
Questionnaire	**Q No.**	**Question subject**
Commercial	AW1.1	Form of Bid
Commercial	AW1.2	Bid validity period
Commercial	AW1.3	Certificate of bona fide Bid
Commercial	AW4.1	Compliance to the Contract Terms
Commercial	AW4.2	Changes to the Contract Terms
Quality	AW6.3	Transparent Approach to Costing Knowledge
-	-	Request for Quotation response – received on time within the e-sourcing tool
	In the event of a Bidder failing to meet the requirements of a Mandatory pass / fail criteria, UK SBS reserves the right to disqualify the Bidder and not consider evaluation of the any of the selection stage scoring methodology, nor the Award stage scoring methodology or Mandatory pass / fail criteria.	

5.4.2 The Award questionnaire shall be marked against the following Award scoring criteria.

5.4.3 The evaluation model below shall be used for this RFP which will be determined to two decimal places.

5.4.4 Questions marked ‘for information only’ do not contribute to the scoring model.

Award Scoring criteria			
Evaluation Justification Statement In consideration of this particular requirement UK SBS has decided to evaluate Potential Providers by adopting the weightings/scoring mechanism detailed within this RFP. UK SBS considers these weightings to be in line with existing best practice for a requirement of this type.			
Questionnaire	**Q No.**	**Question subject**	**Maximum Marks**
Price	AW5.2	Price	15.00%
Quality	AW6.2	Understanding the Requirements	20.00%
Quality	AW6.4	Project Team	25.00%
Quality	AW6.5	Work Plan and Communications Plan	20.00%
Interview	AW7.1	Interview	20.00%

Award Evaluation of criteria

Non-Price elements

Each question will be judged on a score from 0 to 100, which shall be subjected to a multiplier to reflect the percentage of the evaluation criteria allocated to that question.

Where an evaluation criterion is worth 20% then the 0-100 score achieved will be multiplied by 20.
Example if a Bidder scores 60 from the available 100 points this will equate to 12% by using the following calculation: Score/Total Points available multiplied by 20 (60/100 x 20 = 12)

Where an evaluation criterion is worth 10% then the 0-100 score achieved will be multiplied by 10.
Example if a Bidder scores 60 from the available 100 points this will equate to 6% by using the following calculation: Score/Total Points available multiplied by 10 (60/100 x 10 = 6)

The same logic will be applied to groups of questions which equate to a single evaluation criterion.

The 0-100 score shall be based on (unless otherwise stated within the question):

0	The Question is not answered or the response is completely unacceptable.
20	Extremely poor response – they have completely missed the point of the question.

40	Very poor response and not acceptable. Requires major revision to the proposal to make it acceptable. Only partially answers the requirement, with major deficiencies and little relevant detail proposed.
60	Poor response with deficiencies apparent. Some useful evidence provided but response falls well short of expectations. Low probability of success, sufficient obstacles but correctable
80	Response is acceptable but remains basic and could have been expanded upon. Response is sufficient but does not inspire. Good probability of success, weaknesses can be readily corrected.
100	Response demonstrates they can meet a high performance level. High probability of success, no significant weaknesses noted. The response is compelling in its description of techniques and measurements to be employed.

All questions will be scored based on the above mechanism. Please be aware that there may be multiple evaluators. If so, their individual scores will be averaged (mean) to determine your final score as follows:

Example
Evaluator 1 scored your bid as 60
Evaluator 2 scored your bid as 40
Evaluator 3 scored your bid as 80
Evaluator 4 scored your bid as 60
Your final score will (60+40+80+60) ÷ 4 = 60

Price elements will be judged on the following criteria.

The lowest price for a response which meets the pass criteria shall score 100.

All other bids shall be scored on a pro rata basis in relation to the lowest price. The score is then subject to a multiplier to reflect the percentage value of the price criterion.

For example - Bid 1 £100,000 scores 100.
Bid 2 £120,000 differential of £20,000 or 20% remove 20% from price scores 80
Bid 3 £150,000 differential £50,000 remove 50% from price scores 50.
Bid 4 £175,000 differential £75,000 remove 75% from price scores 25.
Bid 5 £200,000 differential £100,000 remove 100% from price scores 0.
Bid 6 £300,000 differential £200,000 remove 100% from price scores 0.

Where the scoring criterion is worth 50% then the 0-100 score achieved will be multiplied by 50

In the example if a supplier scores 80 from the available 100 points this will equate to 40% by using the following calculation: Score/Total Points multiplied by 50 (80/100 x 50 = 40)

The lowest score possible is 0 even if the price submitted is more than 100% greater than the lowest price.

5.5. Evaluation process

5.5.1 The evaluation process will feature some, if not all, the following phases

Stage	Summary of activity
Receipt and Opening	• RFP logged upon opening in alignment with UK SBS's procurement procedures. • Any RFP Bid received after the closing date will be rejected, unless circumstances attributed to UK SBS or the e-sourcing tool beyond the bidder control are responsible for late submission.
Compliance check	• Check all Mandatory requirements are acceptable to UK SBS. • Unacceptable Bids may be subject to clarification by UK SBS or rejection of the Bid.
Scoring of the Bid	• Evaluation team will independently score the Bid and provide a commentary of their scoring justification against the Selection criteria.
Clarifications	• The Evaluation team may require written clarification to Bids
Re - scoring of the Bid and Clarifications	• Following Clarification responses, the Evaluation team reserve the right to independently re-score the Bid and Clarifications and provide a commentary of their re-scoring justification against the Selection criteria.
Validation of unsuccessful Bidders	• To confirm contents of the letters to provide details of scoring and relative feedback on the unsuccessful Bidders Bid in comparison with the successful Bidders Bid.

Section 6 – Selection and award questionnaires

Section 6 – Selection questionnaire

6.1 Introduction

The Selection questionnaires are located in the within the e-sourcing tool.

Guidance on completion of the questions is available at http://www.uksbs.co.uk/services/procure/Pages/supplier.aspx

PLEASE NOTE THE QUESTIONS ARE NOT NUMBERED SEQUENTIALLY

Section 6 – Award questionnaire

6.2 The Award questionnaires are located within the e-sourcing tool.

6.3 Guidance on completion of the questions is available at http://www.uksbs.co.uk/services/procure/Pages/supplier.aspx

PLEASE NOTE THE QUESTIONS ARE NOT NUMBERED SEQUENTIALLY

Section 7 – General information

7.1. Introduction

7.1.1 UK SBS wishes to establish a Contract for the provision of "Provision of support services for TRAC (Transparent Approach to Costing) and understanding academic and financial sustainability to the UK Higher Education sector and sector stakeholders". UK SBS is managing this procurement process in accordance with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (as may be amended from time to time) (the "Regulations"). This is a services Contract being procured under the OJEU Open Procedure

7.1.2 UK SBS is procuring the Contract for add for its exclusive use

7.1.3 UK SBS logo, trademarks and other identifying marks are proprietary and may not be incorporated in the Companies response without UK SBS's written permission.

7.1.4 The Bidder shall indemnify and keep indemnified UK SBS against all actions, claims, demands, proceedings, damages, costs, losses, charges and expenses whatsoever in respect of any breach by the Bidder of this document.

7.1.5 If there is any doubt with regard to the ambiguity of any question or content contained in this questionnaire then PLEASE ASK a clarification question, but please ensure that your question is via the formal clarification process in writing to the UK SBS representative nominated. No approach of any kind in connection with this opportunity should be made to any other person within, or associated with UK SBS. All information secured outside of this named contact shall have no legal standing or worth and should not be relied upon.

7.1.6 It remains the responsibility of the Bidder to keep UK SBS informed of any matter that may affect continued qualification

7.1.7 Prior to commencing formal evaluation, Submitted Responses will be checked to ensure they are fully compliant with the Pass / Fail criteria within the Evaluation model. Non-compliant Submitted Responses may be rejected by UK SBS. Submitted Responses which are deemed by UK SBS to be fully compliant will proceed to evaluation. These will be evaluated using the criteria and scores detailed in the matrix set out in Section 5.

7.1.8 Following evaluation of the submitted Responses and approval of the outcome UK SBS intends to select a short list of Bidders to proceed to Award stage of this Procurement.

7.1.9 Whilst it is UK SBS's and HEFCE's intention to purchase the majority of its services under this Contract Arrangement from the Supplier appointed this does not confer any exclusivity on the appointed Suppliers. UK SBS and any relevant Other Public Bodies reserve the right to purchase any services and services (including those similar to the services covered by this procurement) from any Supplier outside of this Contract.

7.1.10 UK SBS reserves the right not to conclude a Contract as a result of the current procurement process. Bidders should review the contents of Section 7 paragraph 7.8.1 when considering submitting their Response.

7.1.11 The services covered by this procurement exercise have NOT been sub-divided into Lots. A consistent point of contact is required to support the needs of the various stakeholders as an authoritative centre of knowledge and expertise on higher education costing methodologies for the duration of the contract.

7.1.12 UK SBS shall utilise the Crown Commercial Service (CCS – previously Government Procurement Service) Emptoris e-sourcing tool url https://gpsesourcing.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sso/jsp/login.jsp to conduct this procurement. There will be no electronic auction following the conclusion of the evaluation of the Request for Proposal (RFP) responses. Bidders will be specifically advised where attachments are permissible to support a question response within the e-sourcing tool. All enquiries with respect to access to the e-sourcing tool and problems with functionality within the tool may be submitted to Crown Commercial Service, Telephone 0345 010 3503.

7.1.13 Please utilise the messaging system within the e-sourcing tool located at https://gpsesourcing.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sso/jsp/login.jsp within the timescales detailed in Section 3. if you have any doubt as to what is required or will have difficulty in providing the information requested. Bidders should note that any requests for clarifications may not be considered by UK SBS if they are not articulated by the Bidder within the discussion forum within the e-sourcing tool.

7.1.14 Bidders should read this document, RFx attachments, messages and the evaluation questionnaires carefully before completing the Response submission. Failure to comply with any of these instructions for completion and submission of the Submitted Response may result in the rejection of the Response. Bidders are advised therefore to acquaint themselves fully with the extent and nature of the goods/services/goods and services and contractual obligations. These instructions constitute the Conditions of Response. Participation in the RFP process automatically signals that the Bidder accepts these Conditions.

7.1.15 All material issued in connection with this RFP shall remain the property of UK SBS and/or as applicable relevant OPB and shall be used only for the purpose of this procurement. All Due Diligence Information shall be either returned to UK SBS or securely destroyed by the Bidder (at UK SBS's option) at the conclusion of the procurement

7.1.16 The Bidder shall ensure that each and every sub-contractor, consortium member and adviser abides by the terms of these instructions and the Conditions of Response.

7.1.17 The Bidder shall not make contact with any other employee, agent or consultant of UK SBS or any relevant OPB or Customer who are in any way connected with this procurement during the period of this procurement, unless instructed otherwise by UK SBS.

7.1.18 UK SBS shall not be committed to any course of action as a result of:

7.1.18.1 issuing this RFP or any invitation to participate in this procurement;

7.1.18.2 an invitation to submit any Response in respect of this procurement;

7.1.18.3 communicating with a Bidder or a Bidder's representatives or agents in respect of this procurement; or

7.1.18.4 any other communication between UK SBS and/or any relevant OPB (whether directly or by its agents or representatives) and any other party.

7.1.19 Bidders shall accept and acknowledge that by issuing this RFP UK SBS shall not be bound to accept any Response and reserves the right not to conclude a Contract for some or all of the services for which Responses are invited.

7.1.20 UK SBS reserves the right to amend, add to or withdraw all or any part of this RFP at any time during the procurement.

7.1.21 Bidders should not include in the Response any extraneous information which has not been specifically requested in the RFP including, for example, any sales literature, standard terms of trading etc. Any such information not requested but provided by the Bidder shall not be considered by UK SBS.

7.1.22 If the Bidder is a consortium, the following information must be provided: full details of the consortium; and the information sought in this RFP in respect of each of the consortium's constituent members as part of a single composite response. Potential Providers should provide details of the actual or proposed percentage shareholding of the constituent members within the consortium as indicated in the relevant section of the selection questionnaire SEL1.9 specifically refers. If a consortium is not proposing to form a corporate entity, full details of alternative proposed arrangements should be provided as indicated in the relevant section of the RFP. However, please note UK SBS reserves the right to require a successful consortium to form a single legal entity in accordance with regulation 19(6) of the Regulations. UK SBS recognises that arrangements in relation to consortia may (within limits) be subject to future change. Potential Providers should therefore respond in the light of the arrangements as currently envisaged. Potential Providers are reminded that any future proposed change in relation to consortia must be notified to UK SBS so that it can make a further assessment by applying the selection criteria to the new information provided and consider rejection of the Response if UK SBS reasonably consider the change to have a material impact of the delivery of the viability of the Response.

7.2. Bidder conference

7.2.1 A Bidders' Conference will not be held in conjunction with this procurement.

7.3. Confidentiality

7.3.1 Subject to the exceptions referred to in paragraph 7.3.2, the contents of this RFP are being made available by UK SBS on condition that:

7.3.1.1 Bidders shall at all times treat the contents of the RFP and any related documents (together called the 'Information') as confidential, save in so far as they are already in the public domain;

7.3.1.2 Bidders shall not disclose, copy, reproduce, distribute or pass any of the Information to any other person at any time or allow any of these things to happen;

7.3.1.3 Bidders shall not use any of the Information for any purpose other than for the purposes of submitting (or deciding whether to submit) a Response; and

7.3.1.4 Bidders shall not undertake any publicity activity within any section of the media in relation to this procurement

7.3.2 Bidders may disclose, distribute or pass any of the Information to the Bidder's advisers, sub-contractors or to another person provided that either:

7.3.2.1 This is done for the sole purpose of enabling a Response to be submitted and the person receiving the Information undertakes in writing to keep the Information confidential on the same terms as if that person were the Bidder; or

7.3.2.2 The disclosure is made for the sole purpose of obtaining legal advice from external lawyers in relation to the procurement or to any Contract arising from it; or

7.3.2.3 The Bidder is legally required to make such a disclosure

7.3.3 In paragraphs 7.3.1 and 7.3.2 above the term 'person' includes but is not limited to any person, firm, body or association, corporate or incorporate.

7.3.4 UK SBS may disclose detailed information relating to Responses to its employees, agents or advisers and UK SBS may make any of the Contract documents available for private inspection by its officers, employees, agents or advisers. UK SBS also reserves the right to disseminate information that is materially relevant to the procurement to all Bidders, even if the information has only been requested by one Bidder, subject to the duty to protect each Bidder's commercial confidentiality in relation to its Response (unless there is a requirement for disclosure as explained in paragraphs 7.4.1 to 7.4.3 below).

7.3.5 All Central Government Departments and their Executive Agencies and Non Departmental Public Bodies are subject to control and reporting within Government. In particular, they report to the Cabinet Office and HM Treasury for all expenditure. Further, the Cabinet Office has a cross-Government role delivering overall Government policy on public procurement - including ensuring value for money and related aspects of good procurement practice.

For these purposes, UK SBS may disclose within Government any of the Bidders documentation/information (including any that the Bidder considers to be confidential and/or commercially sensitive such as specific bid information) submitted by the Bidder to UK SBS during this Procurement. Subject to section 7.4 below, the information will not be disclosed outside Government. Bidders taking part in this RFP consent to these terms as part of the competition process.

7.3.6 From 2nd April 2014 the Government is introducing its new Government Security Classifications ("GSC") classification scheme to replace the current Government Protective Marking System ("GPMS"). A key aspect of this is the reduction in the number of security classifications used. All Bidders are encouraged to make themselves aware of the changes and identify any potential impacts in their Bid, as the protective marking and applicable protection of any material passed to, or generated by, you during the procurement process or pursuant to any Contract awarded to you as a result of this tender process will be subject to the new GSC from 2nd April 2014. The link below to the Gov.uk website provides information on the new GSC: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-security-classifications

7.3.7 UK SBS reserves the right to amend any security related term or condition of the draft contract accompanying this RFP to reflect any changes introduced by the GSC. In particular where this RFP is accompanied by any instructions on safeguarding classified information (e.g. a Security Aspects Letter) as a result of any changes stemming from the new GSC, whether in respect of the applicable protective marking scheme, specific protective markings given, the aspects to which any protective marking applies or otherwise. This may relate to the instructions on safeguarding classified information (e.g. a Security Aspects Letter) as they apply to the procurement as they apply to the procurement process and/or any contracts awarded to you as a result of the procurement process.

7.4 Freedom of information

7.4.1 In accordance with the obligations and duties placed upon public authorities by the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the 'FoIA') and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (the 'EIR') (each as amended from time to time), UK SBS may be required to disclose information submitted by the Bidder to UK SBS.

7.4.2 In respect of any information submitted by a Bidder that it considers to be commercially sensitive the Bidder should complete the Freedom of Information declaration question defined in the Question FOI1.2.

7.4.3 Where a Bidder identifies information as commercially sensitive, UK SBS will endeavour to maintain confidentiality. Bidders should note, however, that, even where information is identified as commercially sensitive, UK SBS may be required to disclose such information in accordance with the FoIA or the Environmental Information Regulations. In particular, UK SBS is required to form an independent judgment concerning whether the information is exempt from disclosure under the FoIA or the EIR and whether the public interest favours disclosure or not. Accordingly, UK SBS cannot guarantee that any information marked 'confidential' or "commercially sensitive" will not be disclosed.

7.4.4 Where a Bidder receives a request for information under the FoIA or the EIR during the procurement, this should be immediately passed on to UK SBS and the Bidder should not attempt to answer the request without first consulting with UK SBS.

7.4.5 Bidders are reminded that the Government's transparency agenda requires that sourcing documents, including RFP templates such as this, are published on a designated, publicly searchable web site, and, that the same applies to other sourcing documents issued by UK SBS, and any contract entered into by UK SBS with its preferred supplier once the procurement is complete. By submitting a response to this RFP Bidders are agreeing that their participation and contents of their Response may be made public.

7.5. Response Validity

7.5.1 Your Response should remain open for consideration for a period of 90. A Response valid for a shorter period may be rejected.

7.6. Timescales

7.6.1 Section 3 of the RFP sets out the proposed procurement timetable. UK SBS reserves the right to extend the dates and will advise potential Bidders of any change to the dates.

7.7. UK SBS's Contact Details

7.7.1 Unless stated otherwise in these Instructions or in writing from UK SBS, all communications from Bidders (including their sub-contractors, consortium members, consultants and advisers) during the period of this procurement must be directed through the e-sourcing tool to the designated UK SBS contact.

7.7.2 All enquiries with respect to access to the e-sourcing tool may be submitted to Crown Commercial Service, Telephone 0345 010 3503.

7.7.3 Bidders should be mindful that the designated Contact should not under any circumstances be sent a copy of their Response outside of the e-sourcing tool. Failure to follow this requirement will result in disqualification of the Response.

7.8. Preparation of a Response

7.8.1 Bidders must obtain for themselves at their own responsibility and expense all information necessary for the preparation of Responses. Bidders are solely responsible for all costs, expenses and other liabilities arising in connection with the preparation and submission of their Response and all other stages of the selection and evaluation process. Under no circumstances will UK SBS, or any of their advisers, be liable for any such costs, expenses or liabilities borne by Bidders or their sub-contractors, suppliers or advisers in this process.

7.8.2 Bidders are required to complete and provide all information required by UK SBS in accordance with the Conditions of Response and the Request for Proposal. Failure to comply with the Conditions and the Request for Proposal may lead UK SBS to reject a Response.

7.8.3 UK SBS relies on Bidders' own analysis and review of information provided. Consequently, Bidders are solely responsible for obtaining the information which they consider is necessary in order to make decisions regarding the content of their Responses and to undertake any investigations they consider necessary in order to verify any information provided to them during the procurement.

7.8.4 Bidders must form their own opinions, making such investigations and taking such advice (including professional advice) as is appropriate, regarding their Responses, without reliance upon any opinion or other information provided by UK SBS or their advisers and representatives. Bidders should notify UK SBS promptly of any perceived ambiguity, inconsistency or omission in this RFP, any of its associated documents and/or any other information issued to them during the procurement.

7.8.5 Bidders must ensure that each response to a question is within any specified word count. Any responses with words in excess of the word count will only be consider up to the point where they meet the word count, any additional words beyond the volume defined in the word count will not be considered by the evaluation panel.

7.8.6 Bidders must ensure that each response to a question is not cross referenced to a response to another question. In the event of a Bidder adding a cross reference it will not be considered in evaluation.

7.9. Submission of Responses

7.9.1 The Response must be submitted as instructed in this document through the e-sourcing tool. Failure to follow the instruction within each Section of this document, to omit responses to any of the questions or to present your response in alignment with any guidance notes provided may render the Response non-compliant and it may be rejected.

7.9.2 UK SBS may at its own absolute discretion extend the closing date and the time for receipt of Responses specified Section 3.

7.9.3 Any extension to the RFP response period will apply to all Bidders.

7.9.4 Any financial data provided must be submitted in or converted into pounds sterling. Where official documents include financial data in a foreign currency, a sterling equivalent must be provided. Failure to adhere to this requirement will result in the Response not being considered.

7.9.5 UK SBS does not accept responsibility for the premature opening or mishandling of Responses that are not submitted in accordance with the instructions of this document.

7.9.6 The Response and any documents accompanying it must be in the English language

7.9.7 Bidders must submit their response through the e-sourcing tool:

7.9.8 Responses will be submitted any time up to the date indicated in Section 3. Responses received before this deadline will be retained in a secure environment, unopened until this deadline has passed.

7.9.9 Responses received after the date indicated in Section 3 shall not be considered by UK SBS unless the Bidder can justify the reason for the delay.

7.9.9.1 The Bidder must demonstrate irrefutable evidence in writing they have made best endeavours to ensure the Response was received on time and that the issue was beyond their control.

7.9.9.2 Any request for a late Response to be considered must be emailed to bids@uksbs.co.uk in advance of 'the deadline' if a bidder believes their Response will be received late.

7.9.9.3 UK SBS reserves the right to accept or reject any late Response without justification to the affected Bidder and make no guarantee it will consider any request for a late Response to be considered.

7.10. Canvassing

7.10.1 Any Bidder who directly or indirectly canvasses any employee, or agent of UK SBS or its members or any relevant OPB or any of its employees concerning the establishment of the Contract or who directly or indirectly obtains or attempts to obtain information from any such officer, member, employee or agent or concerning any other Bidder, Response or proposed Response will be disqualified.

7.11. Disclaimers

7.11.1 Whilst the information in this RFP, Due Diligence Information and supporting documents has been prepared in good faith, it does not purport to be comprehensive nor has it been independently verified.

7.11.2 Neither UK SBS, nor any relevant OPB's nor their advisors, nor their respective directors, officers, members, partners, employees, other staff or agents:

7.11.2.1 makes any representation or warranty (express or implied) as to the accuracy, reasonableness or completeness of the RFP; or

7.11.2.2 accepts any responsibility for the information contained in the RFP or for their fairness, accuracy or completeness of that information nor shall any of them be liable for any loss or damage (other than in respect of fraudulent misrepresentation) arising as a result of reliance on such information or any subsequent communication.

7.11.3 Any persons considering making a decision to enter into contractual relationships with UK SBS and/or, as applicable, relevant OPB following receipt of the RFP should make their own investigations and their own independent assessment of UK SBS and/or, as applicable, relevant OPB and its requirements for the goods/services/goods and services and should seek their own professional financial and legal advice. For the avoidance of doubt the provision of clarification or further information in relation to the RFP or any other associated documents (including the Schedules) is only authorised to be provided following a query made in accordance with Paragraph 7.15 of this RFP.

7.12. Collusive behaviour

7.12.1 Any Bidder who:

7.12.1.1 fixes or adjusts the amount of its Response by or in accordance with any agreement or arrangement with any other party; or

7.12.1.2 communicates to any party other than UK SBS or, as applicable, relevant OPB the amount or approximate amount of its proposed Response or information which would enable the amount or approximate amount to be calculated (except where such disclosure is made in confidence in order to obtain quotations necessary for the preparation of the Response or insurance or any necessary security); or

7.12.1.3 enters into any agreement or arrangement with any other party that such other party shall refrain from submitting a Response; or

7.12.1.4 enters into any agreement or arrangement with any other party as to the amount of any Response submitted; or

7.12.1.5 offers or agrees to pay or give or does pay or give any sum or sums of money, inducement or valuable consideration directly or indirectly to any party for doing or having done or causing or having caused to be done in relation to any other Response or proposed Response, any act or omission,

shall (without prejudice to any other civil remedies available to UK SBS and without prejudice to any criminal liability which such conduct by a Bidder may attract) be disqualified.

7.13. No inducement or incentive

7.13.1 The RFP is issued on the basis that nothing contained in it shall constitute an inducement or incentive nor shall have in any other way persuaded a Bidder to submit a Response or enter into the Contract or any other contractual agreement.

7.14. Acceptance of the Contract

7.14.1 The Bidder in submitting the Response undertakes that in the event of the Response being accepted by UK SBS and UK SBS confirming in writing such acceptance to the Bidder, the Bidder will within 5 working days of being called upon to do so by UK SBS execute the Contract in the form set out in the Contract Terms or in such amended form as may subsequently be agreed.

7.14.2 UK SBS shall be under no obligation to accept the lowest priced or any Response.

7.15. Queries relating to the Response

7.15.1 All requests for clarification about the requirements or the process of this procurement shall be made in through the e-sourcing tool unless where the e-sourcing tool is unavailable due to Emptoris or Crown Commercial Service system maintenance or failure when a clarification by email to the contact defined in Section 3.

7.15.2 UK SBS will endeavour to answer all questions as quickly as possible, but cannot guarantee a minimum response time.

7.15.3 In the event of a Bidder requiring assistance uploading a clarification to the e-sourcing portal they should use the contact details defined in Section 3.

7.15.4 No further requests for clarifications will be accepted after 5 days prior to the date for submission of Responses.

7.15.5 In order to ensure equality of treatment of Bidders, UK SBS intends to publish the questions and clarifications raised by Bidders together with UK SBS's responses (but not the source of the questions) to all participants on a regular basis.

7.15.6 Bidders should indicate if a query is of a commercially sensitive nature – where disclosure of such query and the answer would or would be likely to prejudice its commercial interests. However, if UK SBS at its sole discretion does not either; consider the query to be of a commercially confidential nature or one which all Bidders would potentially benefit from seeing both the query and UK SBS's response, UK SBS will:

7.15.6.1 invite the Bidder submitting the query to either declassify the query and allow the query along with UK SBS's response to be circulated to all Bidders; or

7.15.6.2 request the Bidder, if it still considers the query to be of a commercially confidential nature, to withdraw the query prior to the end of the closing date and time for Bidder clarifications.

7.15.7 UK SBS reserves the right not to respond to a request for clarification or to circulate such a request where it considers that the answer to that request would or would be likely to prejudice its commercial interests.

7.16. Amendments to Response Documents

7.16.1 At any time prior to the deadline for the receipt of Responses, UK SBS may modify the RFP by amendment. Any such amendment will be numbered and dated and issued by UK SBS to all prospective Bidders. In order to give prospective Bidders reasonable time in which to take the amendment into account in preparing their Responses, UK SBS may, at its discretion, extend the time and/or date for receipt of Responses.

7.17. Modification and withdrawal

7.17.1 Bidders may modify their Response where allowable within the e-sourcing tool. No Response may be modified after the deadline for submission of Responses.

7.17.2 Bidders may withdraw their Response at any time prior the deadline for submission of Responses [or any other time prior to accepting the offer of a Contract]. The notice to withdraw the Response must be in writing and sent to UK SBS by recorded delivery or equivalent service and delivered to UK SBS at UK Shared Business Services Ltd, Procurement Policy Manager, Polaris House, North Star Avenue, Swindon, Wiltshire, SN2 1ET

7.18. Right to disqualify or reject

7.18.1 UK SBS reserves the right to reject or disqualify a Bidder where

7.18.1.1 the Bidder fails to comply fully with the requirements of this Request for Proposal or presents the response in a format contrary to the requirements of this document; and/or

7.18.1.2 the Bidder is guilty of serious misrepresentation in relation to its Response; expression of interest; or the Response process; and/or

7.18.1.3 there is a change in identity, control, financial standing or other factor impacting on the selection and/or evaluation process affecting the Bidder.

7.19. Right to cancel, clarify or vary the process

7.19.1 UK SBS reserves the right to:

7.19.1.1cancel the evaluation process at any stage; and/or

7.19.1.2 require the Bidder to clarify its Response in writing and/or provide additional information. (Failure to respond adequately may result in the Bidder not being selected),

7.20.. Notification of award

7.20.1 UK SBS will notify the successful Bidder of the Contract award in writing and will publish an Award Notice in the Official Journal of the European Union in accordance with the Regulations within 30 days of the award of the contract.

7.20.2 As required by the Regulations all unsuccessful Bidders will be provided with an email advising the outcome of the submission of their RFP response.

Appendix A Financial Sustainability Strategy Group (FSSG): Programme proposal for April 2016 to July 2018

OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE (Commercial)
Confidential draft

To receive access to the Appendix A you must complete the NDA attached to RFx attachments named 'PS16003 Non-Disclosure' and then return a completed, signed PDF version via RFx messages. Once this has been received you will receive a copy of the Annex via RFx messages as a reply.

Appendix B Provision for handover of Support Unit activities

The proposed handover plan, prepared by KPMG as the existing Support Unit provider, and approved by TDG, is made available to prospective bidders as part of the information in the tender specification.

In preparing a plan for potential handover of Support Unit activities, KPMG has assumed that an alternative Support Unit provider would be sufficiently knowledgeable about TRAC, FSSG business, the sector and funders. Therefore training and briefing at this working level of detail is not proposed. The handover activities below therefore concentrate on the deliverables of the Support Unit together with current developments with which a new provider will require familiarisation with.

The themes / topics that would be included in the handover plan are summarised below:

- operation of TDG and FSSG and the expectations of the Support Unit
- background on the development of the new TRAC Guidance
- background to the adoption of FRS 102 into the TRAC Guidance
- background to the development of the ASSUR and MSI
- operation of the helpdesk
- communication strategy
- web site and the role of the Support Unit in maintaining this.

It is suggested that the handover is delivered through a series of structured meetings between KPMG and the new provider. Thereafter a small amount of time would be allowed for questions to be asked of KPMG until 31 March 2017, after which date transitional support would end. The transitional work plan already prepared for the Support Unit also allows for a new provider to shadow KPMG in the autumn meetings of TDG and FSSG.

It would be important that the Lead Partner / Director of a new provider are present in the handover meetings along with other key members of their team.

A brief agenda for the three meetings is summarised in the table below:

Handover meeting 1	Handover meeting 2	Handover meeting 3
• Remit of the Support Unit and expectations • Operation of TDG and FSSG and the role of the Support Unit in these groups • Communication channels and expectations of the Support Unit • Role and engagement with the TRAC Regional Groups • Website and the role of the Support Unit in contributing to this	• Recap and clarifications arising from Meeting 1 • Background on the evolution of development of the TRAC Guidance • Issues and development of the TRAC guidance for FRS 102 • Operation of the helpdesk • Common queries / areas of uncertainty	• Recap and clarifications arising from Meeting 2 • Background to the development of ASSUR, MSI and the project with CUC • Briefing on FSSG related projects

KPMG would allow up to three days per month for six months to 31 March 2017. Following the first three meetings it would be the new provider and/or the TDG/FSSG Contract manager's choice whether to draw on this time.

Appendix C: Web writing guide extracted from HEFCE intranet

What are you trying to communicate?

The first stage in the creation of all web content is to **be as clear as possible about your aims**. It is easy to publish token content without thinking about its purpose, but if the purpose isn't clear in your own mind, it won't be to the user.

As a starting point, one of the things you could do is **list the top 5 things you want users to be able to do** on your page or part of the site. Though it is important to recognise what your users want to do when you are drawing up this list.

The HEFCE site

The main overall purpose of the HEFCE site is to **publish information**. This information takes different forms each with slightly different purposes and aimed at our different audience segments. The table below summarises some of our aims and how our current publication types meet these aims.

The table also shows the small number of cases where we seek to engage with our audiences.

Please note that before you produce content it is always worth discussing your aims and requirements with the relevant contact in Corporate Communications. These contacts are listed next to the types of content.

Type of content	Aim	Audience segment
Publication	• Formal communication with the higher education sector • Provide detailed information about funding and policy decisions/announcements • Publish in a timely fashion	• The strategist • The news seeker • The number cruncher
News item or e-mail alert or promotion on main web pages	• Promote a publication or a key issue immediately and in the short term • Publish in a timely fashion	• The strategist • The news seeker • The number cruncher
'What we do' pages	• Publish overview and latest policy and funding decisions, regulatory and good practice information • Summarise notable reports • Link to other resources • Profile case studies and funded projects • Invite applications for funds	• All segments, but in particular the news seeker and the newbie
Event	• Promote and encourage registration for an event	• The strategist • The news seeker • The number cruncher
Consultation	• Encourage engagement with a consultation	• The strategist

Type of content	Aim	Audience segment
		• The news seeker • The number cruncher
Contact information	• Facilitate contact with the Council	• All segments

More about the types of web content

Publications

The publications section is the most important and popular part of the site. It contains detailed communications about funding and policy decisions and announcements with the sector.

New items/press releases

This is the second most important and popular part of the site. We use news items to maximise the publicity of key information we are publishing. All news items are produced in discussion with the press office.

'What we do' pages

This is the third most important and popular part of the site. These pages are flexible enough to accommodate many different types of information. But as a rule they provide an overview of our key areas of work by theme. The kind of information covers our core activities of policy development, funding, regulation and good practice. The pages can and often do contain technical information relating to the administration of HEFCE funds, but all these pages should be accessible for a non-expert audience.

With the help of an external consultant we have analysed the different segments of our audience according to their behaviour as site users. Based on this analysis, we have put together four 'personas' or fictional characters that represent these audience segments.

These personas are designed to help us when creating content for the site. Once you have established your publishing requirements, you should consider to which of the four personas your requirements relate.

Look at their characteristics and their goals and try to ensure the content you produce can meet their typical needs and behaviour. As with your requirements you may want to do this by listing the **top 5 things users want to do in your section**

Using the personas

For example, if you are writing a web page that relates to 'The Strategist' you might want to clearly signpost detailed strategic documents, provide contact details and ensure the page is flagged up as new content elsewhere on the site.

How do users find information?

Users find web pages in lots of different ways. Here are just a few examples:

- typing a web address into the address bar of a browser
- through browser favourites or bookmarks
- links on other web pages (Including 'jump' links)
- links on other web-sites or in documents

- external search engines
- through e-newsletters or e-mails
- through RSS feeds
- through widgets, apps, SMS
- through social networking/bookmarking sites
- by navigating from page to page on a site using menus, crumb trails etc.
- using a web-site's search box.

Don’t assume knowledge

A key trend in the use of the web shows that as search engines have become more advanced, fewer and fewer people are looking at the homepage of web-sites. In 2009 homepages in general had a 75 per cent bypass rate.

With all the other ways of accessing web content, this means that web pages **must be meaningful independently of other web pages**.

So:

- The title of the page should be clear and meaningful
- Text should not refer to or assume knowledge of information available elsewhere
- The page should provide contextual and/or related links

Since it is also possible to link to any point on a page, the headings and titles of documents on the page should also be meaningful in context.

Headings and titles of documents

For example, a bad title of a document would be:

'Sector impact assessment'

It would be better to call it:

'Sector impact assessment of the Revolving Green Fund'

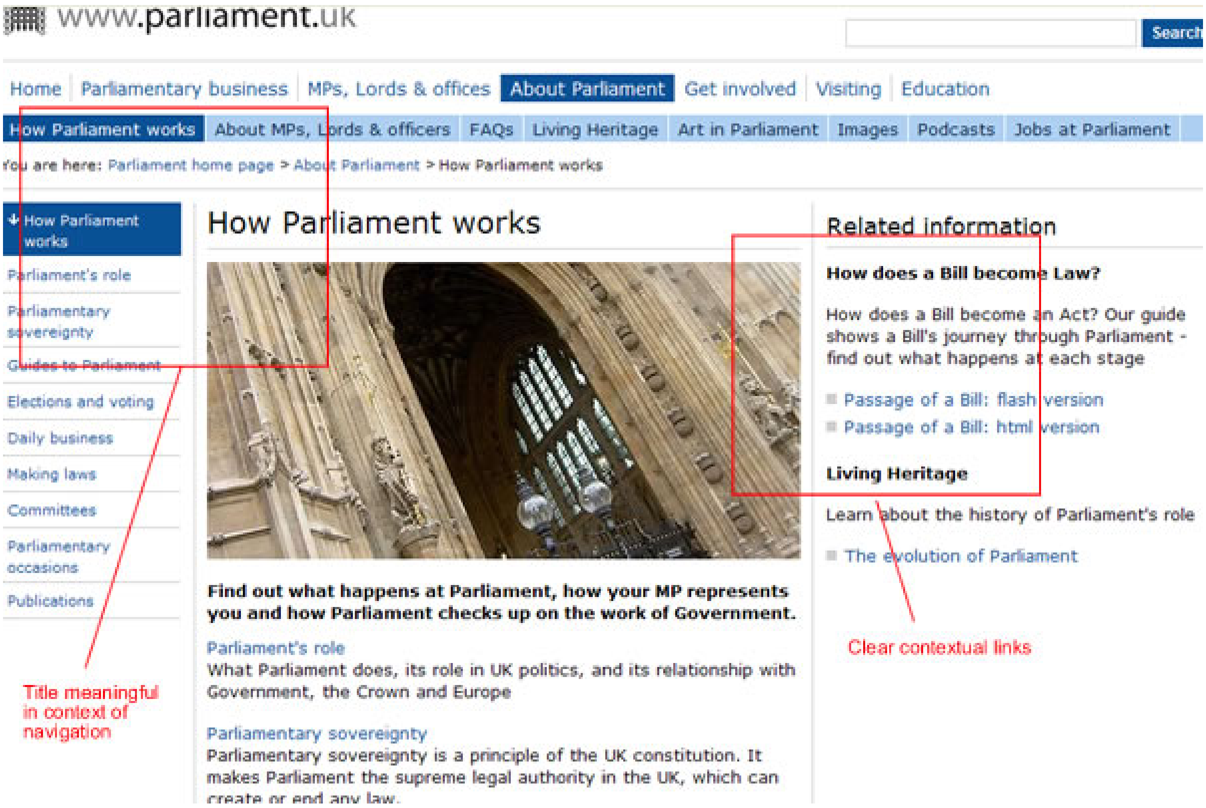
Good orientation and related links

Given that a user can 'land' on any one of a web-site's pages, it is important that they can quickly discover where they are in relation to everything else.

So:

- The navigation (menus and crumb trail) should clearly show this
- The page must obviously belong to the visible hierarchy of pages around it
- The page should provide relevant contextual links to other pages and other sites

Example of good orientation



How do users read web pages?

'With very little patience' is the answer. In general users come to a site with some idea of what they are looking for. This is particularly the case for the HEFCE site where most users are carrying out 'known-item' searches.

This means that users want to find the item they are looking for as quickly as possible and are prepared to cut as many corners as possible to do it.

So **users generally scan**. They do **not** read line by line.

The 'F' pattern

An extensive eye-tracking study carried out by the Nielsen Norman Group (specialists in web usability) showed that:

- Users tend to go to the top left-hand corner of the page content, and begin by reading horizontally.
- They will then jump down the left-hand side of the page a little and, if something catches their attention, they will start reading horizontally again.
- Finally they will resort to scanning down what remains of the left-hand side of the page, with dwindling interest.

The following heat-map (red areas show the most looked-at part of the page) gives an impression of this 'F' pattern.

What does this mean for web content?

This means that content needs to be written specifically for the web (or re-purposed for the web).

Don't steal from publications!

It is not appropriate to copy paragraphs from publications into a web page. Government web-sites, in particular, are often singled out as bad examples of this practice.

Users don't read text closely
So don't rely on them doing so. The following are all bad:

- long paragraphs (particularly copied from publications)
- long sentences
- chunks of text without any visual element, such as headings, sub-headings, bullet points, links.

The F pattern also clearly shows that key messages should be upfront, and not lost in the middle of paragraphs or towards the end of a page.

Visual structure
Conversely give the content a visual structure that maps to the F pattern or which is easy for the eye to latch onto. So:

- Break up the page with meaningful headings
- Make links meaningful for the user, and, if possible, without having to read the full sentence in which they occur
- Break lists down into bullet points
- Keep paragraphs short (2-3 sentences at most).

The rule of twos

Put key words and content in the first two:

- words of a headline, page title, list item, link
- lines of a paragraph or a page
- paragraphs of a page.

Messages and summaries
Users are looking for any content that can help them break down what is available on the page. So it is helpful to provide signposts, either through links to key content or a summary at the top of the page which puts the rest of the content in context.

Readability
Most users of the HEFCE site will be well-educated, high-literacy users who can cope with complex texts. But usability studies show that high-literacy users prefer (because it is easier and quicker) to read web content that has been written deliberately for lower literacy audiences.

Where we are dealing with material that is, by its nature, complex it is not always easy to produce content for lower grades of readability. But a few readability tools can help us move in this direction.

Creating a section

By a section of the site, we mean a set of web pages that forms a **hierarchy of related content**. Typically the section will have a homepage which briefly sets out the focus of the section and provides links through to more detailed sub-pages.

Mapping the section

Before you begin to write content for a section it is important to know the structure of its page hierarchy. A common practice in web design is to do this through a visual aid, either a diagram or map, or even an illustrative wireframe.

This map should identify the section homepage, the pages that fall immediately underneath the homepage, those pages that fall underneath the pages underneath the homepage, and so on.

Example map

The following map was created in Excel. Click the image to see how it translates into web pages.

Revised business and community structure

B&C homepage			
	Higher Education Innovation Fund		
		HEIF 1-3	
	Measuring business and community engagement		
		Higher education-busines and community interaction	
			Survey stakeholders group
		Micro studies	
			Sounding Board
		Pilot public benefits reporting	
		International comparisons	
	Contributing to society		
		Beacons for public engagement	
		Social Entrepreneurship Awards	
	Strategy and development		
		Research into knowledge exchange	

The purpose of these maps is not to identify every single page within the section but simply to show how the content as whole is broadly organised.

'Flow'

The structure of a section should try to **anticipate what a user wants to do**. This means the hierarchy of information should be built around the analysis of your aims and user behaviour.

If a site does this well, users will have an easy experience of the stages that they pass through to access content. Web designers refer to these stages as the 'flow' of information.

This means that you should try to refer back to your aims and audience when you are mapping out the content and **place content in the hierarchy according to the priority of tasks you have identified**.

Note that it is not always the case that fewer clicks improves the flow. **Perceived progress** is the key. Users need to feel like they are finding the information they are looking for.

The way you name pages, headings, links, and the way in which you structure pages all has an impact on the successful flow of information.

Poor flow often occurs in an unnecessarily complex structure, with redundant stages in the hierarchy of information. Use of too much jargon and a structure that reflects the mechanics of an organisation rather than what users want from it, also undermines the flow.

Headings

It is a good idea to break up text that you include on a web page with headings. This makes the page **easier to scan** and take in quickly.

It also **gives more context** to the material you are publishing. Some readers will, for example, scan down the page looking at all the headings to get a sense of what the page is about, and then start hunting for more detailed information.

So the headings should be **meaningful** and **spell out the overall structure of a page**. The page heading and the sub-headings should cover the overall topic of the page and the key areas into which it breaks down.

Example headings

For example, if you were creating a page about our international work, you might like to include information on specific aspects of this work. So the headings might be:

HEFCE's international work [Heading level 1]

[Intro text]

Bologna process [Heading level 2]

[Information about Bologna]

The Europe Unit and the International Unit [Heading level 2]

[Info about the two units]

In excess, headings can work against their purpose by making the page look too visually cluttered, particularly if there are lots of sub-headings and sub- sub-headings. So it is important to strike a balance between visual structure and visual overcrowding.

Paragraphs

Keep them short at around **2-3 sentences**. Long paragraphs create the impression of an impenetrable wall of text.

Use a paragraph to express just **one idea**. Any more than one idea per paragraph will be skipped over by the user.

Ensure that the **key information is in the first sentence** and, if possible, the keywords are in the first sentence towards the beginning. Try to use keywords under which you think the content you are producing may be found.

Example paragraph

The following paragraph occurs half way down a page on the Directgov web-site about the benefits of higher education:

And on average, graduates tend to earn substantially more than people with A levels who did not go to university. Projected over a working lifetime, the difference is something like £100,000 before tax at today's valuation.

The paragraph is two relatively short sentences both about the economic benefits of HE. ' ...graduates ... earn substantially more ...' is the key fact and occurs in the first sentence.

Sentences

Sentences in web text should be:

- short and concise
- in the **active voice**
- constructed around **keywords** preferably at the beginning of the sentence
- easy to understand for a lay audience.

Sentences in web text should avoid:

- the passive voice
- lots of clauses and qualifications
- redundant words and phrases
- jargon and acronyms with no explanation.

Bad sentence	Better sentence(s)	Why?
This 3 year project, led by Harper Adams University College, represents a new and substantial collaboration with the Royal Agricultural College which builds on both institutions' specialist strengths and track records in employer -based CPD and training within the land based professions and industries.	This three-year project aims to support the development of skills in land-based professions. It brings together Harper Adams University College and the Royal Agricultural College to build on their shared strengths in this area.	The bad sentence is too long (it's really a paragraph or even two paragraphs). It also places the initial emphasis on the institutions rather than what the project is about. The ideas need breaking up and re-ordering.
This approach was endorsed by the Bergen summit in 2005, at which ministers also suggested that there should be a register of quality assurance agencies which would provide, in effect, a form of European recognition of quality assurance agencies.	The Bergen summit endorsed this approach in 2005. Ministers at the summit also suggested the need to recognise European quality assurance agencies through a register.	The bad sentence is a) in the passive voice b) too long c) contains redundant/repetitive information d) expresses two ideas through a single sentence.
In this context, higher education covers a broad range of educational and training provision at undergraduate and postgraduate level, including all modes and levels of higher education delivery in HEIs and further education colleges, research activities, industrial linkages, and economic and business development activities.	Here 'higher education' refers to a broad range of postgraduate and undergraduate programmes. This includes: • all programmes at universities and	Too long, contains jargon and redundant language, and a list that can be broken down into a bulleted list.

Bad sentence	Better sentence(s)	Why?
	colleges • research activities • industrial linkages • economic and business-development activities.	
An evaluation of the programme was conducted by Evidence Ltd to enable us to understand the impact of our policy interventions in this area, and inform future policy development and government spending review.	We commissioned an independent evaluation of the programme. This helped us to understand the impact of our work in this area, and will feed into further policy and spending decisions.	The bad sentence is in the passive voice, and uses slightly inward-looking language (policy 'interventions' and how many users will know who Evidence Ltd are?). As above it is also too long.
HEFCE are also under a duty to ensure value for money in the expenditure of public funds delivered through us.	We are also required to ensure the public funds we administer bring value for money.	The first is ponderous and uses the passive voice.

Words

As a general rule it is best to use words that are **simple** and **meaningful**. This generally means that words should be **concrete and familiar** rather than **abstract and technical**.

Bad use of words

HEFCE's approach to **online provision** embraces **OER**.

Good use of words

HEFCE's approach to **online learning** embraces **materials that are freely available to use**.

Keywords

Some users will scan through a page looking for words that carry key information. So when constructing pages, paragraphs and sentences, it is worth thinking about the words you use carefully.

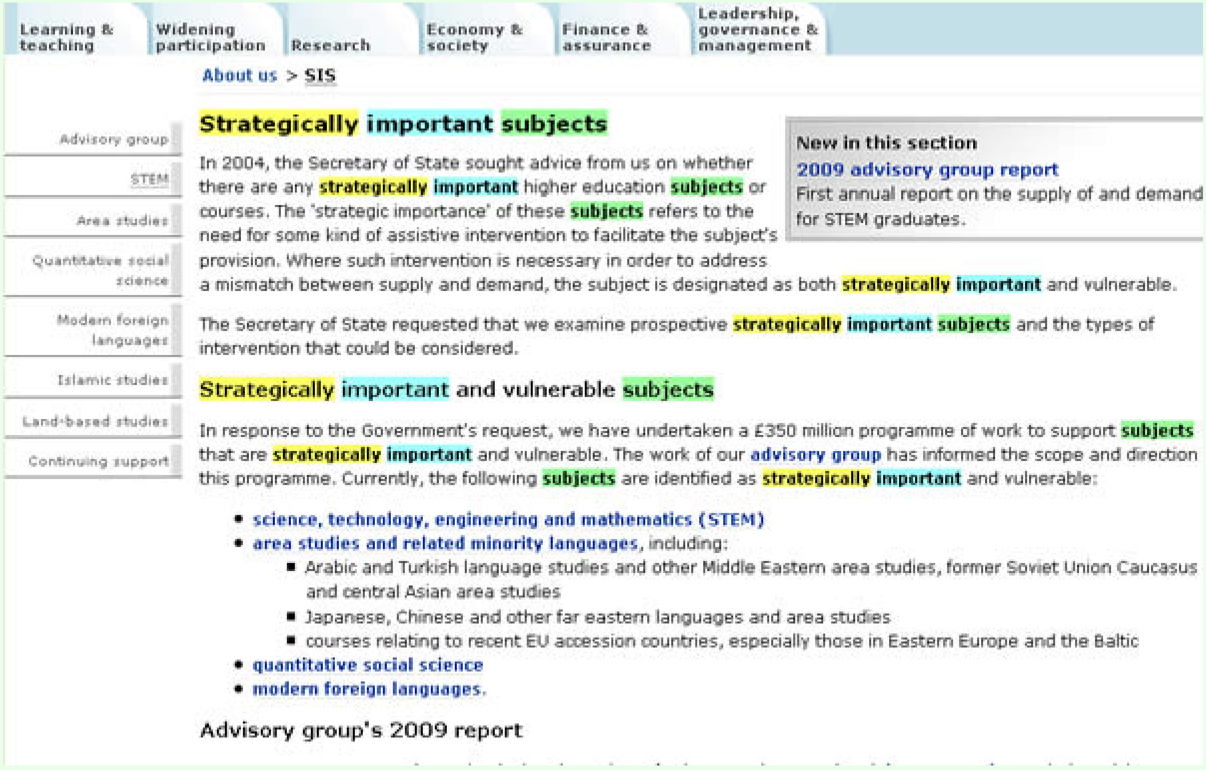
This also helps search engines since they scan through pages looking for relevant terms and trying to get a sense of the page's meaning based on what they find.

Try to choose a handful of words that are meaningful in their own right, give context to the page and are terms which users might search for.

If you can identify two or three keywords:

- use them several times on the page
- place them in headings, links and towards the beginning of sentences.

Example of keywords


Learning & teaching | Widening participation | Research | Economy & society | Finance & assurance | Leadership, governance & management

About us > SIS

Advisory group
STEM
Area studies
Quantitative social science
Modern foreign languages
Islamic studies
Land-based studies
Continuing support

Strategically important subjects

In 2004, the Secretary of State sought advice from us on whether there are any strategically important higher education subjects or courses. The 'strategic importance' of these subjects refers to the need for some kind of assistive intervention to facilitate the subject's provision. Where such intervention is necessary in order to address a mismatch between supply and demand, the subject is designated as both strategically important and vulnerable.

New in this section
2009 advisory group report
First annual report on the supply of and demand for STEM graduates.

The Secretary of State requested that we examine prospective strategically important subjects and the types of intervention that could be considered.

Strategically important and vulnerable subjects

In response to the Government's request, we have undertaken a £350 million programme of work to support subjects that are strategically important and vulnerable. The work of our advisory group has informed the scope and direction this programme. Currently, the following subjects are identified as strategically important and vulnerable:

- science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)
- area studies and related minority languages, including:
  - Arabic and Turkish language studies and other Middle Eastern area studies, former Soviet Union Caucasus and central Asian area studies
  - Japanese, Chinese and other far eastern languages and area studies
  - courses relating to recent EU accession countries, especially those in Eastern Europe and the Baltic
- quantitative social science
- modern foreign languages.

Advisory group's 2009 report

The screen shot above shows the Google cache for our page on strategically important subjects based on the search 'strategically important subjects' (the cache highlights the words of the search term).

In this case a user looking for information about strategically important subjects may scan the page in much the same way as the search engine.

Things to avoid

Wherever possible try to avoid the following:

- jargon
- long words
- redundancy

Style

Style of writing on the web should generally be **spare**, **simple**, **more informal and conversational than printed publications**. It should also follow an **inverted pyramid** structure.

'Stepping back'

Most of our web pages aim to be accessible for laypeople (even though they may contain technical details of funding policy and administration). This means that the style and tone should try to 'step back' a little from the administrative detail.

Since most users are also scanning for information it serves no real purpose to write in a detailed, or overly elaborate way.

Compare styles

Compare

However, where QAA decides that an institution's collaborative provision cannot properly be addressed as part of the standard Institutional audit model, either a separate audit of the institution's management of its collaborative provision will be conducted at a time to be arranged between QAA and the institution, or a hybrid Institutional audit will take place.

with

A large part of the work of the House of Commons and the House of Lords takes place in committees, made up of MPs or Lords. These committees consider policy issues, scrutinise the work and expenditure of the government, and examine proposals for primary and secondary legislation. Select committees operate largely by an investigative process, while legislative committees operate mainly by debate.

Both these paragraphs are explaining the work of organisations but do so in different ways. Beyond the length of sentence, use of jargon, and the passive voice etc., they differ in their apparent aims and assumptions about their readers.

- The first is formal, procedural and almost scientifically indifferent, but the second steps back a little to explain in more friendly and personable terms
- The first seems to assume some sort of prior knowledge, but the second assumes no prior knowledge
- The first is bureaucratic, the second is lay friendly.

The inverted pyramid

The inverted pyramid style is a metaphor used by journalists. It essentially refers to placing the most important attention-grabbing material at the beginning and letting the content taper away in order of importance.

In light of the way users read web pages, it is important to place the most important information where the eye as it scans the page will find it. This is why it is a good idea to place important words in the first two:

- words of a headline, page title, list item, link
- lines of a paragraph or a page
- paragraphs of a page

Storytelling

Conversely **don't tell stories.** However fascinating and/or useful you may think the history behind a policy initiative may be, the chances are that readers won't share your enthusiasm.

If you choose to set out a Council decision by first explaining how it has arrived at the decision, this means the key bit of information (i.e. the decision) will get swallowed up by the story. It is better to either a) avoid telling the story and simply state the decision up front or b) state the decision first and give the context further down the page.

Example of storytelling

Following the letter in December 2004 from the Secretary of State for Education that defined LBS as a strategically important and vulnerable subject, we met with heads of most of the higher education institutions (HEIs) that offered LBS-based courses. The group informally offered advice on the scope of the planned review, including the broad definition of LBS. After that meeting an advisory group was set up, whose membership was representative of interested parties within the higher education (HE) sector and land-based industries. The advisory group met for the first time in October 2005 to agree the terms of reference of the review and finalise the invitation to tender to carry out the review.

It's not totally clear from the text, but the key information here is that an advisory group has been established to oversee the review of land-based studies. This is lost at the end of the paragraph.

Linking

Some users scan through the page looking at just the links (this is also the way in which some accessibility tools break down page content). So links are a powerful way of enhancing the meaning of a page. They are also an opportunity to be as useful as possible to the user.

The text of links

The text of links should:

- Make sense without having to read the whole sentence in which they occur
- Clearly relate to the content they refer to

This means that linking text should avoid phrases like 'Click here' or 'More about this'. We should also try to avoid long links.

Good link

In July, we sent a **letter launching the new framework** to institutions

Bad link

Click here to download the report.

What to link to

If you are linking to another web-site, try to **link to a web page** on the site (rather than a PDF or Word document). If a link goes direct to a download on another site, we are sending users to another site without their knowledge. It is better to make it clear to them that they have left the HEFCE site.

But it is best to find a page on an external site that **relates specifically to the text of your link**. It is not good practice, for example, to create a link to a report on another web-site and link to the other web-site's homepage (rather than the page on which the report can be found).

If you are linking to material on the HEFCE site, it is okay to link directly to downloadable material that 'lives' in other sections of the site, but it is still preferable to link to a web page.

When creating links **try to be helpful** but don't distract from the main purpose of your page. Look to create links that may relate to **why the user has come to the page**.

Helpful links - example

The skills agenda and our work with STEM subjects have some points of overlap. So reciprocal links between the employer engagement section and the STEM pages would probably make sense.

Menus and navigation

Site navigation is one of the ways in which users browse between web pages. But it is also the main way in which users can orient themselves and understand how the pages are organised.

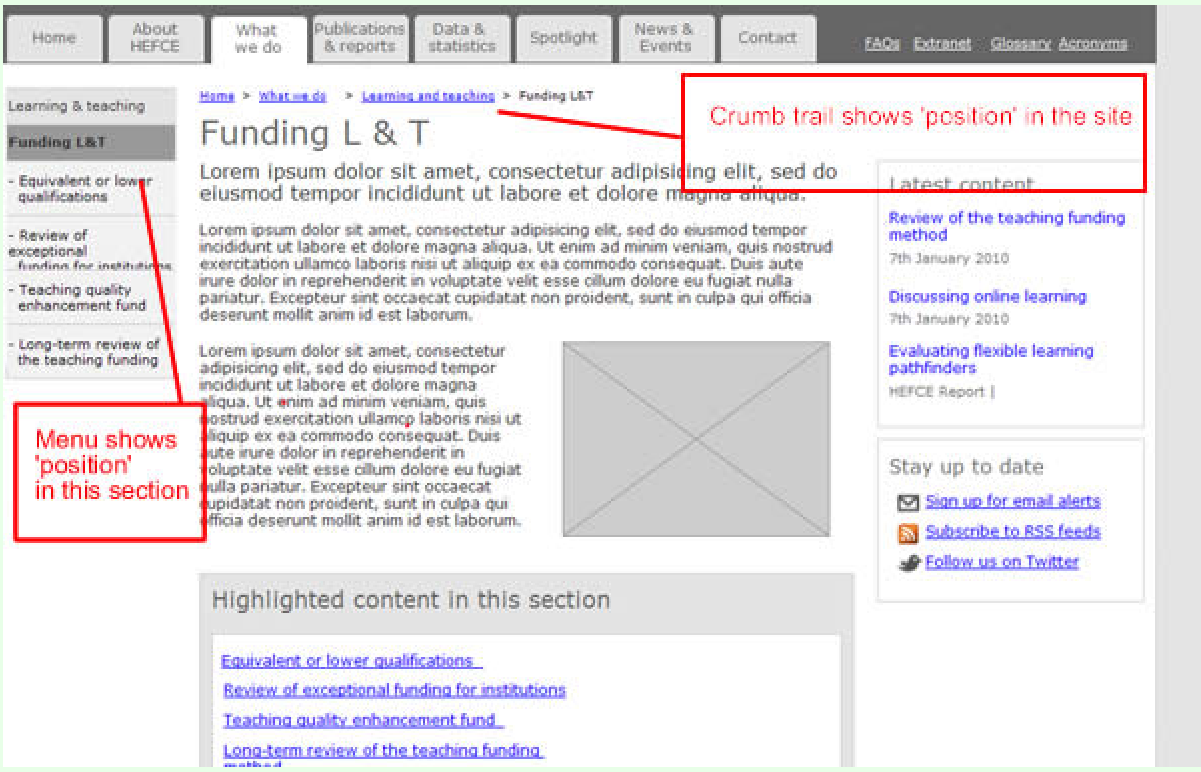
Navigation can be either structured or unstructured. It can involve drilling down through steps in a hierarchy of related pages or leaping about between sections or even across web-sites. Typically users will want to do both, and web-sites should allow them do this.

Structured navigation

Structured navigation follows the hierarchy of information on a site. This means that it is not only a tool for finding information but also a way of **sign-posting the relation of pages to each other**.

On the HEFCE site, the two main forms of structured navigation are **left-hand menus** and **crumb trails**. Both the left-hand menu and the crumb trail show the relative position of the user.

Example of structured navigation



This means that the content of the structured navigation will follow naturally from the structure of your section. This clearly shows that it is important to produce a section hierarchy that is intuitive for the user.

Note that the space available in the crumb trail and the left-hand menu is small. This means that the **title of pages should not be too long**.

The **site map** is another form of structured navigation. Like the crumb trail and the left-hand menu it basically reflects the structure of the content, but for the whole site.

Unstructured navigation

Users will also navigate to pages or between pages without using the structure provided by the hierarchy of information.

This may involve using communications channels over which we don't have as much control. We don't, for example, have control over links that people put in e-mails, or on other web-sites. Search engines also allow users to completely bypass the hierarchy of content on our site.

But we can provide our own unstructured ways of navigating around our site. These will mainly be through:

- links in the text of web pages
- contextual links in the right-hand menu.

Whether these links are to other HEFCE web pages or to another site they should have a **connection with the content of the page** and relate to **why the user has come to that page**.

Search and search engines

Content that is well-written for the web is also well-written for search engines. So, if the HEFCE site follows most of the guidelines set out on these pages, it should be easy to find through the search engines.

This means, in effect, that search engines are another reason to write content specifically for the web.

About search

There are many different search engines available that use slightly different techniques. But most search engines now follow the model pioneered by Google that main search listings should be 'objective'. Google achieves this objectivity by maintaining an index of searches automatically rather than relying on manual classifications.

Google uses a mechanism to trawl through the web called a 'spider'. This spider extracts key bits of information about web-sites and web pages that it can match to search terms entered by searchers. The spider will try to establish the nature and importance of web pages by looking at factors such as:

- Words on the page, in links, the page title, headings, filenames
- The 'quality' 'trustworthiness' and 'importance' of a page

Google's video on how search works explains this in a little more detail.

Writing for the web and 'search engine optimisation'

Google's aim is not to encourage web-sites to write content in a particular way but help users find the best, most relevant and most useful content. It gives more importance to page elements like headings and links, because it expects that they will give important clues about the nature of the content.

So if a page is well-written, well-structured, uses headings and links appropriately Google will work its magic without any effort. **It should not be necessary to write content specifically for search engines**.

Search engine optimisation (sometimes just abbreviated as 'SEO') is a practice for boosting a web-site's rank in the search listings. It quickly became known as a 'dark art' since less reputable practitioners hawked claims (such as guaranteed #1 rankings in Google) they could not deliver or could only deliver through illicit practices.

It is possible to improve the ranking of a web-site or a set of web pages in the search engines, but much of this turns on good writing for the web as such, rather than writing specifically for the search engines.

HEFCE's search box

The HEFCE site has its own search box. This uses Google technology and operates in much the same way. So there is no need to produce content specifically for the HEFCE search box.

But if we find that key search terms are not matching to the relevant pages of the site, we do have the power to add search results to the list of top results that match to specified search terms.

Surfacing content

Quite often on the HEFCE site we want to draw more attention to new content than it would otherwise get if left in its natural place in the information hierarchy.

We can do this in different ways:

News items

If you are looking to maximise publicity for a change or addition to the site, then news items may be a suitable channel of communication. For the most part we use news items to draw attention to important publications, but they can be used to advertise any bit of content on the site. All news items are posted on the web-site's homepage and advertised through admin-HEFCE, the monthly e-newsletter, Twitter and our RSS feed.

Spelling and grammar

The guidance on grammar and the guidance on spelling that we offer for all our publications apply equally to the web.

Correct grammar and spelling are important to ensure clarity of communication and effective presentation.

Poorly constructed sentences full of spelling errors will also do nothing to placate the general impatience with which most users approach web pages.

A few key rules

- Active voice

  The active voice is particularly important. It makes the meaning clearer because the reader can see who or what is the agent of the action. It generally also reduces the length of a sentence. So on both counts it makes reading easier.

- Redundant words

  A **diverse range** of adjectives or adverbs can (as here) lead to tautology but also takes up more space.

- Hidden verbs

  These are verbs that have become nouns. They tend to make the sentence longer and more cumbersome.

Example of hidden verbs

Compare

The Quality Assurance Agency **is carrying out a review** of the institutional audit method.

with

The Quality Assurance Agency **is reviewing** the institutional audit method.

Readability

There are two main reasons to think about the readability of web content:

- Even **high-literacy users prefer to read text written for lower literacy audiences** when reading online.
- **Accessibility guidelines** recommend that web content should use clear language.

Much of the written material that we produce on the site is, by its nature, complex and technical. So it is not always possible to write for lower literacy audiences. But to the extent that we can, we should.

No hard and fast way exists to improve the readability of web content. A few tools use algorithms to assess factors such as the average length of sentences and the percentage of complex worlds.

Some of these tools are more reliable than others, but all should be treated **only as a guide**. Microsoft Word offers a quick, easy and fairly reliable tool.

Checking readability in Word

- Go to the **Microsoft Office Button** and select **Word options**
- Select **Proofing** and ensure '**Show readability statistics**' is checked
- When you then run the spell checker in Word it will also display the percentage of sentences in the passive voice, the Flesch Reading Ease Score, and Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level.

The Flesch Reading Ease Score assesses the readability of the text by giving it a score out of 100. The **higher the score, the more readable the text**.

The Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level indicates what reading grade the text is suitable for, based on the reading ease score.
A **grade level between 8-10 is ideal**, though we may find that much of our text is higher than this.

Appendix D: Guidelines for external authors

Standards for research and evaluation reports published by HEFCE

1. Reports commissioned by HEFCE need to meet minimum standards of clarity, accuracy and accessibility. They are paid for by public money, and we have a duty to ensure that this money is properly used.

2. When these reports are written by external authors, they are expected to meet the following standards.

Clarity

3. The report should be clearly and logically structured, with:

- an A4 format
- an executive summary (see paragraph 5)
- clear sections or chapters
- supporting information in appendices as appropriate
- a logical and consistently applied hierarchy of headings and sub-headings and paragraph numbering. Do not mix different styles of paragraph numbering, or have one number system for headings and another for paragraphs
- pages numbered consecutively throughout.

4. Text should be clear and legible. We recommend a font such as Arial for body text, in at least 11pt. If you choose a typeface such as Times New Roman, the body text will need to be larger to be as legible. Footnotes and labels on graphs can be smaller than the body text, but must be at least 9pt.

5. The executive summary will be the most widely read part of the document. It must be intelligible to the **educated lay person**, and be an accurate summary of the report. Specifically it should:

- be concise
- be free of jargon
- contain the key messages, findings and conclusions.

6. In our own documents, we try to communicate clearly and concisely by avoiding unnecessary jargon, long rambling sentences and verbosity, and by using the active voice. We expect the external reports we commission to take the same approach.

Accessibility

7. HEFCE normally expects to publish a report as both a Word and PDF. It will agree to publishing only a PDF if an accessible version has been supplied – one that confirms to BIS accessibility guidelines, which are outlined in full below:

- document reads logically when reflowed or rendered by text-to-speech software
- language is set to English (in File > Properties > Advanced)
- structural elements of document are properly tagged (headings, titles, lists etc.)
- all images/figures have either alternative text or an appropriate caption
- tables are correctly tagged to represent the table structure
- text is left aligned, not justified
- document avoids excessive use of capitalised, underlined or italicised text
- hyperlinks are spelt out (e.g. in a footnote or endnote).

8. Over-use of abbreviations is a barrier to the reader, so:

- avoid abbreviations and acronyms where possible, for example if they are only used a few times in the report
- if you do use them, always spell out abbreviations on first mention, use them consistently, and list them with the full versions at the end of the document.

9. People who use screen-reading software to view our documents on the web cannot 'see' charts and diagrams. If the title of the chart is in the Word text, then at least they know there is something there. So, to assist such readers, ensure the titles of charts and diagrams are part of the Word text and not embedded in the chart itself.

10. For easy reference, any tables should be numbered consecutively throughout the document (Table 1, Table 2 etc.); charts, figures or diagrams should have a separate numbering system (Figure 1, Figure 2 etc.). Always include the source of data for tables and figures.

11. Many readers will print out documents rather than reading them on screen. So ensure that any charts, figures or diagrams that are produced in colour will also be clear when printed out in black and white. Type used in tables, figures and diagrams must be legible when printed out (see guidelines in paragraph 4).

12. Large file sizes are slow to download, and should be avoided where possible. Logos and overelaborate graphics dramatically increase the file size. Logos on every page are also a distraction for those with screen-reading software. Please use your company logo on the inside cover only, and keep graphics clear and simple.

Accuracy

13. The following are some common problems of accuracy found in consultants’ reports submitted to HEFCE:

- contents list that does not match the contents
- incorrect titles for people, organisation’s and publications
- out-of-date or mistyped URLs
- incorrect cross-referencing within the document.

Quality control and advice

14. When a first draft of an external report is available, HEFCE editors carry out a ‘structure check’ designed to give early warning of any issues which will need fixing. This will include an assessment of what needs to be done to make the executive summary clear and useful to the reader. The HEFCE project manager will feed back any comments or queries so that the authors can respond and make any amendments required. Authors must provide an editable document (usually Word) for this check to enable the editor’s comments to be made on the document.

15. Later, before the final draft of the report goes on the web-site, HEFCE editors will flag up any remaining structural issues and proofread the document.

Appendix E Glossary of Terms

TERM	MEANING
“UK SBS”	means UK Shared Business Services Ltd herein after referred to as UK SBS.
“Bid”, “Response”, “Submitted Bid ”, or “RFP Response”	means the Bidders formal offer in response to this Request for Proposal
“Bidders”	means the organisations being invited to respond to this Request for Proposal
“Central Purchasing Body”	means a duly constituted public sector organisation which procures goods/services for and on behalf of contracting authorities
“Conditions of Bid”	means the terms and conditions set out in this RFP relating to the submission of a Bid
“Contract”	means the agreement to be entered by UK SBS and the Supplier following any award under the procurement
“Contracting Bodies”	means UK SBS and any other contracting authorities described in the OJEU Contract Notice
“Customer”	means the legal entity (or entities) for which any Contract agreed will be made accessable to.
“Due Diligence Information”	means the background and supporting documents and information provided by UK SBS for the purpose of better informing the Bidders responses to this Request for Proposal
"EIR"	mean the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 together with any guidance and/or codes of practice issued by the Information Commissioner or relevant Government department in relation to such regulations
FoIA	means the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and any subordinate legislation made under such Act from time to time together with any guidance and/or codes of practice issued by the Information Commissioner or relevant Government department in relation to such legislation
“Lot”	means a discrete sub-division of the requirements
“Mandatory”	Means a pass / fail criteria which must be met in order for a Bid to be considered, unless otherwise specified.
“OJEU Contract Notice”	means the advertisement issued in the Official Journal of the European Union
“Order”	means an order for served by any Contracting Body on the Supplier
“Other Public Bodies”	means all Contracting Bodies except UK SBS
“Request for Proposal” or “RFP”	means this Request for Proposal documentation and all related documents published by UK SBS and made available to Bidders and includes the Due Diligence Information. **NOTE:** This document is often referred to as an Invitation to Tender within other organisations
“Supplier”	means the organisation awarded the Contract
“Standard Goods	means any goods/services set out at within Section 4 Specification

/Services"	