



HM TREASURY

1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ

6 July 2010

Francis Irving

Information Rights Unit

By email:
request-36769-46be6517@whatdotheyknow.com

Tel: 0207 270 4558
Fax: 0207 270 4861

www.hmtreasury.gov.uk
FOI.responses@hmtreasury.gsi.gov.uk

Ref: 10/478

Re: Freedom of Information Act 2000: HMT Public Spending Database Replacement Project

Thank you for your enquiry dated 8 June 2010 requesting information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

2. You asked for information covering –

documentation about the project to replace COINS (known as Project OSCAR); specifically: -

- *an overview document,*
- *the current specification, and*
- *documentation describing why a new system is needed, rather than upgrading COINS.*

3. I confirm that the Treasury holds information falling within each of the parts of your request.

4. An overview of the project, which includes the requirements for a replacement system, is attached.

5. We intend to publish the specification for a new system to coincide with any move to a full procurement exercise. As the overview makes clear, there has not yet been a decision to proceed to that stage with Project OSCAR. Current draft details of the potential specification for a new system are commercially sensitive and engage the exemption at section 43(2) under the Act.

6. In applying this qualified exemption we have balanced the public interest in withholding the information at this time against the public interest in disclosure. We recognise there is a strong public interest in transparency of public spending and procurements to secure accountability and propriety; however, audit arrangements already provide assurance in this area. On the other hand, there is a strong public interest in safeguarding both value for money and the operations of the Treasury. These stand to be compromised by disclosure of commercially sensitive procurement information prematurely.

7. In the light of these considerations, we have concluded that at the present juncture it would be against the public interest overall to disclose the exempt information.



8. If you have any queries about this letter, please contact me. It will be helpful to us if you remember to quote the reference number above in any future communications.



Paul Morran
Information Rights Unit

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Your right to complain under the Freedom of Information Act 2000

If you are not happy with this reply, you may request a review by writing to HM Treasury, Information Rights Unit, 2/S2, 1 Horse Guards Road, London SW1A 2HQ.
Email FOI.responses@hmtreasury.gov.uk

Any review request must be made within 2 months of the date of this letter.
It would assist our review if you set out which aspects of the reply concern you and why you are dissatisfied.

If you are not content with the outcome your complaint, you may apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Generally, the ICO cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted the complaints procedure provided by the Treasury. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: The Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 5AF.



Project OSCAR

Management Information

The Treasury uses public spending data to support four of its key roles:

- **Consolidating** financial data from across the public sector and reporting on it to a variety of audiences, including ministers, Parliament and the public;
- **Controlling** public spending through allocating budgets and monitoring in-year spend to ensure it meets fiscal targets;
- **Challenging and supporting** departmental spending decisions, in a way that adds value and uses information, e.g. through benchmarking; and
- Driving **transparency** in public spending data.

What is COINS?

The Treasury uses the Combined Online Information System (COINS) to collect financial data from across the public sector to support fiscal management, the production of Supply Estimates for Parliamentary scrutiny, the production of public expenditure statistics, the preparation of Whole of Government Accounts (WGA) and to meet data requirements of the Office for National Statistics.

The Treasury published COINS data for the first time on 4 June 2010 at www.data.gov.uk, with a further update on 14 June.

COINS is a consolidation system rather than an accounts application. It therefore contains aggregate spending information rather than details of specific items of spending.

What is OSCAR?

Project OSCAR, the Online System for Central Accounting and Reporting, is considering the replacement of COINS. Subject to approval, the Project will also be responsible for the implementation of any new system.

Why consider replacing COINS?

COINS was introduced in 2005 and is over half way through its expected life. The changing needs of the Treasury are outgrowing the capabilities of the current system. The Treasury envisages the need for a system, which can better support:

- **improved transparency of public sector financial information,**
- **simplified publication of the database data itself,**
- **improved system functionality,**
- **enhanced access to data for system users,**
- **data storage with increased granularity; and**
- **the ability to better analyse and model information at the centre of government.**

