

Report to:
Ministry of Economic Development

**EVALUATION OF THE BIZ PROGRAMME:
ANALYSIS OF PROGRAMME REPORTING,
MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the body of this report we provide a summary of the methodology employed and the information obtained during our analysis. The following is a summary of our key findings. The references in each title below are to the relevant section of the report.

Analysis of BIZ Provider Reports (Section 2)

Relevance of reporting information (2.2)

We consider that all of the standard provider reporting requirements for the programme, in terms of both *contract compliance* and *statistical reporting*, are necessary. While conscious of the costs to providers meeting reporting requirements, we do not consider the current requirements to be excessive.

The main weakness associated with the current reporting regime is that the reports provide information only about the quantitative aspects of service delivery – i.e. how many skills training sessions were provided to how many individual people and SMEs. They do not enable judgements to be made about the *quality of services* delivered; the *unit costs* of services; and *client satisfaction levels*. These measures are discussed further in section 3.2.

Performance against targets (2.3)

Over the period from the commencement of contracts to 21 January 2000, there has been a small shortfall of 4.3% between the number of number of clients on courses, seminars and workshops targeted for and actually provided.

In terms of the targets set for particular groups of clients, a number of providers targeting Maori, Pacific Peoples and women fell below their contracted minimum target client numbers.

Maori accounted for 24% of participants at skills training sessions, and Pacific Peoples 9%.

In terms of delivery of BIZ services to women, there have been significantly more women attending courses (61% of the total) than men.

The greatest shortfalls arose in service delivery to Pacific Peoples. The shortfalls may be a reflection of the fact that Pacific People are less likely to be in business than the rest of the population, and therefore that the initial targets were unrealistic.

The providers are a very diverse group of organisations, so significant differences are not surprising. Possible explanations for the differences in performance between providers include: differences in marketing and linkages to target audiences; insufficient scrutiny of the capability of providers during the evaluation phase; differences in experience in providing these types of services; and variations in the quality of key staff.

Administrative costs (2.4)

The BIZ Unit's budget for 2000/01 is \$1.5million, 10.8% of total programme costs.

We estimate that of the 34 providers that had the relevant information contained in their contracts, 13.5% of their total funding is spent on administration. There is considerable variation between providers, ranging from 2.7% to 44.3%, and we are not confident of the reliability of the data.

Differences in administrative costs could arise through: efficiency differences among providers; differences in accounting allocations; and variations in the efforts and costs put into development of course materials.

We note that there is no benchmark as to a reasonable level of administrative costs, and (other than some negotiations at the initial contracting stage) the Ministry to date has not acted upon this information.

We do not consider monitoring provider administration costs to be a priority for action in the future. However, if this is seen as a matter of concern, the Ministry should establish a benchmark range for administration costs, and in future tender rounds indicate to potential providers that it will not fund costs outside this range.

Reporting performance (2.5)

Most providers are providing reports on time and with the required information. However, a small number of providers do not meet reporting deadlines and/or fail to provide all the information requested by the Ministry (generally data related to SMEs, which providers are not contractually obliged to provide).

Moreover, some inaccuracies have been uncovered in the course of the Ministry's compliance reviews. In such cases the Ministry requires that the relevant providers undergo more frequent reviews until it is confident of the integrity of their systems.

In future, the Ministry could include timely, reliable, accurate and complete reporting as a contractual term within required performance measures.

Analysis of management and administration of the programme (Section 3)

Contract Management (3.2)

In general, the systems operated by the BIZ Unit are satisfactory in terms of competence of staff, documentation of systems and procedures, and access to records.

The main areas for improvement include:

- *additional resourcing* for the BIZ Unit – an additional contract manager, with the Unit manager focussing on the review and monitoring of contract managers.
- introduction of *measures of client satisfaction* which are standardized, professionally designed and operated, and with providers left out of the client assessment stage.
- development of systems to *assess the quality of services delivered*.
- review of available data on *unit costs* of services provided, with the objective of deriving meaningful benchmarks of unit costs for comparable services.
- removal of the ambiguity in the *eligibility criteria* for use of BIZ services, possibly including a positive definition (rather than the current definition of who is ineligible), and a standardised application form for all prospective BIZ clients.

Programme implementation (3.4)

The timeline of the tender process in 1998-99 was extremely compact, which we believe detrimentally affected programme. Consequences of this included:

- an inadequate process for assessing need and demand for BIZ services;
- a truncated bidding and contract negotiation process, with high risk of inappropriate decisions;
- insufficient standard contract provisions;
- insufficient planning for the operation of the BIZ Unit; and
- insufficient consideration of other models of public sector contract management.

Some of these problems have been rectified since that time. Others can be addressed in future tender rounds. It is critical that these proceed with a more structured process and sufficient time to undertake the processes properly.

Future tender rounds also need to:

- provide signals as to the services the Ministry wishes to purchase. This may necessitate consultation with local business communities (business development bodies, economic development agencies, business leaders, providers etc) in order to form a joint assessment of local demand; and
- provide the opportunity for the entrance of new providers and for new approaches to service delivery.

We do not consider this as representing any fundamental shift in the philosophy of the BIZ programme, which was about providers determining local needs. Rather, we see this as enhancing the process in order to ensure a balance between local demand, provider capacity and available funding.

Appropriateness of contracts (3.5)

Problems which are apparent in the contracts relate largely to the number of non-standard provisions, particularly in relation to performance measurement. Further standardisation is desirable with respect to:

- standardised reporting on all aspects of performance measurement, including client satisfaction and service quality;
- requirements for reporting within the timeframes set by the Ministry;
- requirements for providing all information required within reports; and
- satisfactory reports (eg about information systems etc) from compliance reviews.

Furthermore, contractual provisions are needed to manage non-compliance, including remedies when termination would be a disproportionate response, such as:

- *suspension clauses* – where payments could be suspended under explicitly-specified circumstances; and
- *contingent payments*, where a small proportion of the contractual payments would depend on compliance with contractual provisions about reporting.

There will be a continuing need for flexibility and variations in contracts according to local demand. The BIZ Unit's current process for dealing with contract variation requests appears to be effective, provided the Unit follows the procedures set out in the Key Procedural Manual.

Provider performance (3.6)

Considering future enhancements to the relationship between the Ministry and providers, the emphasis should now move to improving the competencies of providers. This should be addressed in a structured and planned fashion through a *provider development agenda*.

This approach needs 'buy-in' from providers, rather than the threat of contractual sanctions. It should build on the experience gained in the BIZ programme to date; the positive relationship between providers and the BIZ Unit; and the additional resources available through enhanced contract management systems (and possibly an additional contract manager).

Implementing 'quality of service' performance measures (eg relating to course design, standard of materials, quality management systems, competence of trainers etc) will provide an important part of this programme, with development undertaken jointly with providers, so

that there is common understanding and expectations about the use of these measures, and feedback to individual providers about their own performance relative to others in the programme.

Enhancements to performance by individual providers can be best promoted through extended networking and exchange of information amongst them about 'best practice'. While the success of such activities will depend upon the providers themselves assuming responsibility and 'ownership' for the outcomes, the BIZ Unit will be able to provide positive leadership, with the objectives of a provider development agenda providing a focus and a framework for these activities.

1 INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

This report has been prepared as part of an evaluation of the BIZ programme, undertaken for the Ministry of Economic Development by a consortium consisting of Business and Economic Research Ltd (BERL), the National Research Bureau and the Centre for SME Research, Massey University.

This part of the evaluation has been undertaken by BERL. Comments from other members of the project team undertaking different parts of the evaluation have been incorporated in this report (in particular, based on the *Analysis of BIZ Provider Interviews*).

1.1 Context

Before commencing with our examination of the various aspects of the reporting, management and implementation of the BIZ programme, it is useful to place it in context.

The policy for the BIZ programme was developed and implemented in 1998 and 1999 with a philosophy and an approach which was new to the Ministry. It included several features such as delivering services through private providers under contract, with providers themselves defining local needs and the types of services required to meet them. This policy had significant implications for all aspects of the implementation process and management of the programme.

One outcome of this is that both providers and the Ministry have had to do a lot of 'learning by doing' to establish effective methods of operating. This report is in large measure about reviewing the lessons which have been learnt during the last two years, identifying the enhancements which have already been made (including ongoing ones), and suggesting directions for the future.

1.2 Terms of Reference

This report focuses on management of the programme by the Ministry, covering the following sections of the specification of Evaluation Services:

6 Analysis of BIZ Provider Reports

6.1 *BERL must undertake an analysis of a representative range of BIZ provider reports and include the results in the evaluation. This analysis will include:*

- (a) *the relevance and usefulness of the information required and its adequacy for managing contracts and ensuring delivery of quality services;*
- (b) *Whether providers are meeting performance standards, targets and guidelines;*

- (c) *Differences in performance among providers and in the uptake of services and possible reasons for this;*
- (d) *The proportion of funding spent on provider administrative costs compared to funding spent on the provision of services; and*
- (e) *Whether providers are meeting reporting and data requirements adequately.*

7 Analysis of management and administration of the programme

7.1 *BERL is to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of the management and administration of the BIZ programme by the Ministry, to identify areas for improvement and include these results in the evaluation report. This will include, but not be limited to, considering:*

- (a) *The Ministry's administration and management systems for contract management and for dealing with BIZ providers generally;*
- (b) *The tendering process through which providers were selected;*
- (c) *The adequacy and appropriateness of contracts and performance measures used in them;*
- (d) *What measures are taken by the Ministry to monitor performance of providers and the effectiveness of these; and*
- (e) *The views of providers on the performance of BIZ Unit staff. #*

(# evaluated as part of the Analysis of BIZ Provider Interviews rather than in this report)

Each of these topics is considered in the following sections, which provide an overview of relevant information, and a discussion under each of the above topic headings. Sections 2 and 3 correspond with sections 6 and 7 respectively of the specification of Evaluation Services set out above.

We should stress that there is a considerable overlap between the issues relevant to each heading, so we have generally provided an extensive discussion at an early stage of the report, with reference back to the original discussion where the same or a similar issue appears later.

1.3 Methodology

We gathered information for this section of the evaluation in the following ways:

- We examined each contract, and collated a range of information from them.
- We obtained a copy of the database maintained by the BIZ Unit. The information contained in the database is described in section 2.1.
- We undertook three interviews with BIZ Unit staff members, and two interviews with the Economic Development Policy Unit (which has policy responsibility for business assistance programmes), to discuss various issues concerning the implementation and administration of the BIZ programme. We also attended a meeting in which the Ministry's auditors of BIZ providers discussed their findings.
- We examined a sample of provider reports and records of communications between providers and the Ministry. The purpose of this was to get a feel for the nature of the concerns and problems of providers, and how the BIZ Unit deals with issues as they arise. This was to form a basis for the questions we were to ask the BIZ Unit and the Economic Development Policy Unit.
- We obtained and analysed a large amount of information from the Ministry relating to the BIZ programme including, but not limited to:
 - Request for Proposal: Business Development Programme;¹
 - Request for Proposal: National Business Information Service;²
 - a copy of the Negotiation Report;³
 - BIZ Programme Provider Review;⁴
 - Evaluation Report: Business Development Programme⁵;
 - Assessing Awareness and Understanding of the New BIZ Programme;⁶
 - BIZ Development Unit Business Plan 2000/2001;⁷
 - A variety of Cabinet papers relating to the establishment of BIZ; and

¹ Ministry of Commerce (1998a)
² Ministry of Commerce (1998b)
³ Ministry of Commerce (1999a)
⁴ Ministry of Commerce (1999b)
⁵ Ministry of Commerce (1998c)
⁶ AC Nielsen (1999)
⁷ Ministry of Economic Development (2000)

- the BIZ Unit's Key Procedural Manual.
- We examined 36 compliance review reports for 31 BIZ providers. The insights gained from these formed the basis of questions we asked the BIZ Unit (see section 2.1 for a description of the compliance review process).

For the purpose of this evaluation, we did not distinguish between the sole BIZInfo provider and the remaining providers, given the contract management process does not treat BIZInfo differently to the remaining contracts. We have also avoided discussion about any individual provider and its relationship with the Ministry (which would be inevitable considering BIZInfo separately).⁸

1.4 Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Ministry staff, particularly Kay Switzer, Stephen Knuckey, and Gregory Crott and his colleagues at the BIZ Unit; and of fellow members of the Evaluation team. This report would not have been possible without their insightful comments, contribution of time and positive attitude.

Needless to say, the responsibility for the contents of this report is entirely BERL's.

⁸ However, BIZInfo is considered in some detail in the Mystery Shopper Trial, which surveyed its delivery; and in the Overview Report.

2 ANALYSIS OF BIZ PROVIDER REPORTS

2.1 Overview of reporting requirements

BIZ providers are contractually required to report to the Ministry of Economic Development on their performance and services delivered.

When the BIZ programme was first initiated, a standard method of reporting did not exist – it was up to providers to choose how they were to present their reports. The majority of providers attached reports to their invoices, which were normally sent to the Ministry on a monthly basis. Some contracts, however, provided for bi-monthly or three monthly invoicing, with corresponding reporting requirements.

In September 1999, the reporting requirements changed in that all providers were required to provide standard information on a quarterly basis. The shift to quarterly reporting was initiated to make the task of providing and managing reports less onerous for the providers and the BIZ Unit respectively.

Accompanying this change was the provision of standard report templates which simplified the reporting process for providers. This also gave rise to greater consistency in the reports, thereby making the Ministry's task of analysing and processing the reports more straightforward.

While providers are not contractually obliged to use the standard template, most choose to do so. The completed template forms can be sent back to the Ministry electronically if desired.

The reporting requirements fall into two distinct categories. The first can be labeled '*compliance reporting*'. Its purpose is to enable the Ministry to determine whether providers are meeting the performance measures contained in their contracts. Performance measures consist of tasks and targets that providers must fulfill, such as running a set number of courses, with a certain number of clients attending each service delivery.

The second reporting category can be labelled '*statistical reporting*'. This component consists of information relating to BIZ programme participants. The purpose of this is to enable the Ministry to obtain an overall profile of numbers and the distribution of programme participants. This information is reported to other parties, such as Ministers and BIZ Providers through *BIZ News*.⁹

The following outlines the information that is required under each of the two categories described above.

⁹ *BIZ News* is an internal newsletter for BIZ providers, produced and distributed by the BIZ Unit.

Compliance reporting

Providers are required to supply information about each workshop, seminar, course, network meeting, or one-on-one service, including:

- Its name;
- The location in which the service was delivered;
- The date of delivery; and
- The sex and ethnicity of each of the clients.

(An example of this template is attached as Appendix 1.)

Providers are required to supply information in quarterly reports in which they describe their actual performance compared with their performance standards (as per the contracts). This is to ensure that they are providing what they have been contracted to deliver. Explanations are required when performance standards as specified in the contracts are not met.

(An example of this template is attached as Appendix 2.)

Statistical reporting

Providers are required to report on:

- The number of places filled by individuals attending training/networking/one-on-one sessions;
- The number of unique Small/ Medium Enterprises (SMEs) represented at training/networking/one-on-one sessions by individuals, including:
 - The length of time that each has been in operation;
 - The number of people employed in each; and
 - Their Business Industry Classification Codes.

So if several people from one SME attend a course, they will each be counted in the number of places filled, but the SME will only be counted once in the other fields.

Note that at present, providers are not contractually obliged to provide the Ministry with this information.

(An example of this template is attached as Appendix 3.)

Compliance Reviews

In addition to the reporting requirements, every provider undergoes a compliance review at least once during the course of the contract period.¹⁰ The compliance reviews are carried out by auditors from the Ministry. In instances where problems are uncovered or where the Ministry has concerns about particular providers, the reviews may be undertaken more frequently.

Reviews include the following areas:

- Accuracy of information supplied by providers to the Ministry;
- Accuracy of financial information supplied to the Ministry, and value for money of the services delivered;
- Quality of materials, mentoring and courses delivered;
- Delivery against contractual delivery requirements;
- Needs assessments and target groups; and
- Performance monitoring systems.

(A copy of the compliance assessment programme is attached as Appendix 4.)

In addition, providers can be required to allow the Ministry, or any third party on its behalf, to observe their delivery of services.

Other reporting

As well as the standard information required on a quarterly basis, providers may also supply other information about performance. This information is specific to each provider; mostly in the form of measures of client satisfaction; and is typically in terms of its original contract, where not supplanted by the standard quarterly reporting.

¹⁰ Most BIZ provider contracts have a period of approximately two years.

2.2 The relevance and usefulness of the information required and its adequacy for managing contracts and ensuring delivery of quality services

Compliance and statistical reporting

The compliance component of the quarterly reports is required to enable the Ministry to determine whether providers are meeting their contractual obligations. The statistical requirements are necessary to give the Ministry's Economic Development Policy Unit a profile of BIZ programme participants, and therefore to make inferences about the effectiveness of the programme.

As well as the Ministry's requirements, it is important to be conscious of the burdens that reporting can place on providers, and we note that many have complained about these requirements.

Although the complaints are not specific on this point, we would expect that the programme information statistics relating to SMEs are the main source of difficulties, as these require more processing of client information than simple head-counts of people attending courses.

On balance, we do not consider that the current reporting requirements are excessive or too difficult to comply with. While gathering some of the data presents problems, the total amount of data does not appear excessive, providing suitable systems for capturing it are in place.

The Ministry has gone to some lengths to make the reporting as simple as possible by, for example, providing the standardised templates against which all providers can send back to the Ministry electronically. In order to facilitate the reporting process the BIZ Unit has given providers guidelines on how to produce and classify the data properly. Also, the BIZ Unit can be contacted if providers are having problems in this respect.

The BIZ Unit says that in addition to the current required information, it would like providers to include in their reports, the names of each participating SME. This would enable the Ministry to track each SME through the programme, to assess the level of follow-on training, etc.

This would require more work from providers, but should not be too onerous, as presumably they would need to record the names in order to produce information about SMEs. It should be noted, however, that providers have almost unanimously stated that they don't like changes to the reporting requirements (and apparently minor changes can necessitate significant modifications to information systems).

The use of this additional information would appear to be for statistical reporting and policy purposes rather than for contract management. Before proceeding with such a measure, the

Ministry needs to be confident that the benefits arising from the additional information would be great enough to justify the associated compliance costs. It does not appear to us that the Ministry is sufficiently clear as to how it would use this information to justify proceeding at this time.

(We do note that direct contact between the Ministry and BIZ clients would occur through the use of enhanced satisfaction measures discussed in section 3.2. This would not of itself require the Ministry to maintain a database of BIZ clients.)

Other reporting

With regard to the current reporting requirements, it should be noted that these only measure the *quantitative* aspects of service quality – i.e. the number of persons and SMEs to whom the services were provided. They do not enable judgements to be made (at the level of individual providers or the BIZ programme as a whole) about the *quality* of services delivered – in terms of whether the services were delivered professionally and provided clients with skills and information which enhanced their management capability - and do not distinguish between satisfactory, unsatisfactory and excellent services.

Measures of the quality of services are partially given through the compliance review process (but only to the extent that it ensures that minimum requirements are met) and the client satisfaction measures as reported to the Ministry by providers (about which we have considerable reservations, as they provide numerous avenues for introducing biases).

Nor are useful measures produced about costs of administration, and unit costs of services delivered.

We discuss additional reporting measures in section 3.2.

2.3 Whether providers are meeting performance standards, targets and guidelines; and

Differences in performance among providers and in the uptake of services and possible reasons for this

The quarterly reports are the key tool through which providers communicate to the Ministry about whether they are meeting their performance standards and targets.

In terms of performance standards, ethnicity targets are the aspect that providers are having the greatest level of difficulty in meeting. They are generally meeting the reporting requirements adequately (see section 2.5) and the client satisfaction targets, although as described in section 3.2 we do not consider this to be an effective measure of provider performance.

Fulfilment of performance standards relating to client targets

The targeted minimum number of clients to attend all BIZ courses, seminars and workshops between the commencement of BIZ contracts and 21 January 2000 was 32,314¹¹. The actual number obtained was 30,939 - a shortfall of 4.3%.

Eleven out of the 43 providers included in the BIZ Unit's database had shortfalls of at least 12% below minimum targeted numbers of clients. The only apparent pattern amongst this group was that a relatively high proportion were providers that delivered predominantly to Maori (four out of 11). There did not appear to be any patterns in terms of regional coverage or nature of the service offered.

According to the *Negotiation Report*,¹² a total of \$20.0 million was originally allocated for the BIZ programme for the first round of contracts, including \$6.1m for Maori, \$1.2m for Pacific Peoples and \$3.5m for women.

There are no equivalent targets for the proportion of clients from each target group over the programme as a whole, but a number of providers have such targets in their individual performance agreements.

We have divided the providers into groups that delivered to the target audiences of Maori, Pacific Peoples and Women.

Providers classified as deliverers to *Maori* audiences include those that are Maori owned and/or operated who are delivering (although not exclusively) predominantly to Maori; and those that have Maori client target levels of 40% or above. Ten providers fell into this category.

Actual client numbers in courses delivered by this group were 1.3% lower than targeted during the period from the commencement of the programme to 21 January 2000.

While this shortfall is lower than the overall shortfall across the BIZ programme (4.3%), out of the 11 providers with client levels at least 12% below their targeted levels, four were providers classified as being deliverers to Maori audiences.¹³

¹¹ These figures were obtained from the database maintained by the BIZ Unit, as described in the methodology section. Note that the database only includes information relating to courses, seminars and workshops. The actual number of clients contracted for overall would be greater than this, given that the programme also includes mentoring, networking, etc. The overall difference between clients contracted for and clients participating would also probably be different.

¹² Ministry of Commerce (1999a)

¹³ Two providers that fell within this category were not included in these statistics as the providers do not offer training courses, and the database from which this information was obtained only holds information relating to training courses.

From the commencement of contracts to 31 March 2000, Maori represented 24% of attendees at skills training sessions.¹⁴ Note that this includes Maori attending courses provided by both Maori and other providers.

We classified providers as being deliverers to *Pacific Peoples* according to the list contained in the *Evaluation Report*¹⁵ of providers with a “Pacific Peoples target group capability”. Eleven providers fell within this category.

In this group, actual client levels for the period between the commencement of contracts and 21 January 2000 were 16.8% below minimum target levels.¹⁶

From the initiation of the programme to 31 March 2000, Pacific Peoples represented 9% of attendees at skills training sessions, including those supplied by these 11 providers and others.¹⁷

Several providers with significant Pacific Peoples client targets that were interviewed in the course of this evaluation indicated that they had set their ethnicity targets based on the demographics of the population in their area. This may have led to unrealistic targets in that the percentage of Pacific Peoples-owned businesses is generally lower than their proportion in the population might suggest.

As BIZ is aimed at people already in businesses, this shortfall does not necessarily mean that the programme is failing to deliver to Pacific People – rather, different interventions may be needed to increase their participation in business activity.

Providers were classified as having an emphasis on *women* target groups if over 50% of their total programme was devoted solely to them. Eight providers fell within this category.

The actual number of clients obtained by these providers was 12.3% below the targeted minimum number of clients.

However, over the whole programme female participation is higher than male participation, when taking into account women who attend components of the programme not strictly aimed at them. In the period between the commencement of contracts and 31 March 2000, 61% of all skills training participants were female.¹⁸ Therefore, this shortfall should not necessarily be interpreted as a lack of interest by women in the BIZ programme.

¹⁴ Ministry of Economic Development (2000)

¹⁵ Ministry of Economic Development (1998c)

¹⁶ Two providers that fell within this category were not included in this analysis as they did not hold any courses, workshops or seminars and therefore were not included in the database from this information was obtained. The services carried out by these providers included mentoring, networking, and one-on-one diagnostic sessions.

¹⁷ Ministry of Economic Development (2000)

¹⁸ One of the providers that fell into this category was not included in this analysis as the course was ongoing and had not been completed by 21 January 2000.

Possible causes of differences between providers

Differences in performance have presented themselves in terms of differences in the ability of providers to meet the targeted number of clients. Other differences can be presented in terms of differences in the quality of the services that providers are delivering. There are no data available on service quality differences between providers as there are no systems in place to measure this¹⁹.

Providers offer different courses with different methods of delivery, to different target group audiences in different regions. Given the lack of consistency between what providers deliver, variations in their experience, and the lack of monitoring of the delivery content, significant differences in performance are not surprising.

The information that we examined does not provide any explanations as to the reasons for variations. However, a number of possible reasons can be given.

One possible reason for variations in performance is differences in the *effectiveness of marketing*. Each provider is responsible for its own marketing and generating clients for its BIZ services. Depending on the success of its marketing, and understanding of and linkages to target audiences, some providers would be more effective than others in filling courses. Indeed, many may have misread target audiences (as described earlier). These marketing problems could present themselves in variations between providers in their abilities to meet client number targets.

Another reason for differences in performance is *provider capability*, in that insufficient emphasis was placed on examining the capability of providers to market and deliver quality services during the tender process. The Ministry concedes that short implementation time frame prevented it from being able to perform this task as well as it would have liked (see section 3.4). As a result, the tender process may have contributed to variations in the quality of course providers, and therefore in the quantity and quality of the services delivered.

Providers also differ in *experience* in providing services like BIZ, and in the delivery of government-purchased outputs. For example, it would be expected that a polytechnic should be able to put together and deliver a training programme with relative ease, given that the provision of courses forms its core business activity. Some providers, however, did not have previous experience in the delivery of training programmes and could therefore be expected to experience more implementation and delivery problems.

Other differences in performance could have resulted from variations in the competence of *key staff* delivering the programmes. Loss of such staff during the duration of contracts could have affected performance, and indeed whether services could be provided at all.

¹⁹ The compliance reviews do not make comparisons between providers.

2.4 The proportion of funding spent on provider administrative costs compared to funding spent on the provision of services

We understand that the concern about administrative costs arose from a view that these had been excessive in some of the predecessors of the BIZ programme.

One of the BIZ Unit's objectives is to incur internal administration costs (policy advice and contract management) of less than 15% of total programme costs. The operating budget for the BIZ Unit is \$1.496 million in 1999/2000, which represents 10.8% of total programme costs including payments to providers.²⁰

There are also administrative costs incurred by providers in operating their services. To assess these, we recorded the proportion of funding that each provider allocated towards administrative costs, where this information was available. 34 providers had information relating to administration costs in their contracts. The following is based on these 34 providers.

These figures were obtained from the original contracts and do not take account of changes in the proportion of funding spent on administration that may have occurred due to contract variations. However, such changes are likely to have been small.

According to the payment schedules contained in each of the contracts, the average proportion of funding spent on administration costs by providers is around 13.5%. Amongst providers, these figures ranged from 2.7% through to 44.3%. There does not appear to be any correlation between the types of services delivered and the proportions of funding spent on administration.

In terms of providers with target group audiences of Maori, Pacific Peoples and women, Maori providers had an average level of administration costs of 13.2%, Pacific Peoples providers 10.4%, and women providers 23.8%. (Note that only four of the providers targeting women had the relevant information contained in their contracts. One of these providers had particularly high administrative costs, so this sample may not be a reliable indicator.)

From the available information for women providers, we have been unable to determine the reasons for variations in these costs. Differences could be the result of, but not limited to, differences in efficiency among providers, differences in accounting allocations, and variations in the effort and cost put into development of course materials.

In particular, the figures given by providers in their contracts relating to administrative costs may not be particularly reliable. It is possible that they are using different definitions of

²⁰ Ministry of Economic Development (2000). Note that costs of policy advice provided within the Ministry itself are not included in the above figures, but are unlikely to push the administrative proportion above 15% of the total.

‘administrative costs’ in their accounting allocations, therefore reducing the comparative value of the data.

The tender evaluation process was designed to ensure that the funding would not be given to providers that had comparatively high administration costs. The fact that there are large discrepancies in the amount of funding allocated to administration among providers could be an indication of a partial failure of the tender evaluation process to perform one of its intended functions.

The Ministry says that it negotiated lower administration costs with some providers. However, it is possible that this negotiation phase was not carried out consistently or as comprehensively as intended due to the compressed time frame for implementation of the BIZ programme.

Since the tender round, no action has been taken over provider administrative costs.

Our view is that monitoring provider administrative costs is less important than obtaining reliable data about unit costs of services delivered (see section 3.2). The Ministry needs to be satisfied that it is getting value for money from the total costs of the services which it purchases, and if it can be satisfied about this, the composition of the costs is a secondary issue.

For future tender rounds we consider that, if administrative costs are seen as a matter of continuing concern, the Ministry should provide clear definitions of administrative costs (for proposals and reporting), guidelines as to what it deems to be an acceptable range of costs, and require proposals to remain within that range or to justify variations. This should be a relatively straightforward exercise for the Ministry to undertake given that it now has benchmark administrative costs in place.

2.5 Whether providers are meeting reporting and data requirements adequately

Reporting performance

This can be assessed in terms of the timeliness, accuracy and completeness of the data supplied by providers in the reports. Overall, the BIZ Unit claims that providers are generally meeting the reporting and data requirements adequately on these three measures.

While there are differences between providers in terms of meeting reporting deadlines, the BIZ Unit states that there are no apparent patterns to the groups that send in late reports, ie they do not appear from a particular region, nor to deliver to a particular target group audience, nor to deliver particular types of services.

In terms of timeliness, the number of late reports has dropped substantially since the BIZ programme commenced, and the majority of providers are now meeting reporting deadlines.

This is probably because reporting requirements have become much clearer (see section 2.1), and because providers now have greater experience in preparing reports.

Although all reports arrive at the Ministry eventually, a small number (approximately 6 or 7 each quarter according to the BIZ Unit) do not arrive by deadlines and the Ministry is required to undertake a series of follow-up measures. If the Ministry wanted to further reduce the number of late reports, it could expand the coverage of performance standards contained in the contracts to include quarterly reports being sent to the Ministry by set deadlines.

The BIZ Unit says that a small number of providers are failing to fill out the section of the standardised reporting template relating to client details, i.e. the Business Industry Classification Codes of the clients. It is unlikely that this is due to the forms being too difficult to fill out, as the Ministry has produced guidelines on how to complete the forms. However, these data are more complex and difficult to gather than others required for reporting, and the most likely explanation is that some providers are unable or unwilling to set up their information systems to generate them. However, the number of providers that do not fill out the forms correctly has fallen over contract period, and most are now completing the templates.

Note that at present, providers are not contractually obliged to provide the Ministry with this information. Problems in this area of reporting could be solved by having contracts require providers fill out these forms completely as one of their contracted performance standards.

Reliability of the data

The BIZ Unit works on the assumption that the information it receives from clients is reliable. Compliance reviews are critical for establishing whether this is the case.

However, the compliance reviews recently carried out by the Ministry (which are to be carried out at least once throughout the course of the contract period) have highlighted a number of instances where the information given by providers to the Ministry has not been accurate. In most of these cases, the providers did not intentionally provide inaccurate information. Instead, the providers did not have their information systems set up in a way that captured the relevant information and translated them into reports correctly.

It was recently discovered that one provider had been intentionally falsifying information given to the Ministry. In response to this, the Ministry terminated the provider's contract and reported the matter to the Police.

In future, the Ministry could include timely, reliable, accurate and complete reporting as a contractual term within the required performance measures (with contractual remedies for providers failing to meet these requirements). This is discussed further in section 3.5.

3 ANALYSIS OF MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE BIZ PROGRAMME

3.1 Overview: programme management

Contract management

The BIZ Unit's major role in the BIZ programme is to manage the contracts of BIZ providers. Other roles include tendering and negotiating contracts, and providing the relevant Ministers and Ministry management with information relating to the programme.

The contracts are currently managed by two contract managers, with the manager of the BIZ Unit also taking on a small contract management role. Each contract manager is responsible for his/her own portfolio of contracts.

The contract managers take an active role in liaising with providers and developing a relationship of trust. Over the course of a year, between 1,500 and 1,800 contacts are made. This includes at least two visits to each provider each year, and numerous phone calls, emails, and letters. Each provider is contacted at least once a month. In addition, the BIZ Unit distributes information to providers via *BIZ News*, and encourages and in some cases organises networking sessions between BIZ providers.

The contract managers see their roles as follows:

- They are *points of contact* between the Government and providers, and convey the government's objectives to providers;
- They are *risk managers* in terms of financial and political risks to the government, and risk to the policy;
- They have a *problem identification* role in that they seek to discover providers' problems before they escalate, and provide support to curtail and control the problems;
- They are *brokers* between the community and the Government, communicating government policies and providing feedback on community concerns;
- They have a role in *disseminating useful information* to providers, and in promoting *information sharing* between providers;
- They aim to place the contracts into a *policy perspective* to allow the BIZ programme to meet the government objectives; and
- They have an *administrative* role in terms of, for example, dealing with bill payments, feedback and reporting.

Reporting processes

Providers report directly to their assigned contract managers. The contract managers carry out an initial audit of the contracts to ensure the providers have delivered according to their contracts. The contract managers then partially process and record this information in the manner of their choosing, but not consistently (see section 3.2).

The reports are then given to another BIZ Unit staff member for the second phase of processing. During this phase, the information is entered into a database where the reported information is matched against the invoices. The information contained in this database includes:

- The name of each provider and each of the workshops, seminars and courses they are contracted to run, including the date and location of the courses, minimum target numbers and target audiences;
- The actual number of course, workshop and seminar participants, including breakdowns of the sex and ethnicity of participants²¹;
- The total number of sessions delivered and places filled, with overall statistics on the gender and ethnicity of participants;
- Summary of the statistical data required in the reports (refer to section 2.1 for a description of these data).

This information is used for a variety of purposes including: matching against invoices when they arrive from providers; reporting to the senior Ministry management; feeding back to providers through *BIZ News*; and for use in external presentations.

Documentation of systems and procedures

The BIZ Unit has developed a Key Procedural Manual for staff to follow. This manual contains procedures and systems on how to deal with matters relating to:

- Key performance indicators
- Contract variation requests
- Invoices
- Provider compliance reviews
- Milestone reporting
- Relationship management
- Reporting

²¹ Broken down into the following categories: European, Maori, Pacific Islander, Asian and other.

Earlier reviews and surveys of the BIZ Programme

In August 1999 the '*BIZ Programme Provider Review*'²² was completed. This review was commissioned by the BIZ Unit in response to specific questions asked by the Minister of Business Development. Its purpose was to establish whether the appropriate SMEs were actually attending the programme, whether the programme was actually meeting their management skill enhancement needs, and whether those needs were changing over the short period of time the programme had operated.

The main findings of this review were that:

- Appropriate SMEs were attending the programme;
- The programme appeared to be meeting the management capability enhancement needs of SMEs;
- Providers were managing the higher than expected demand for places in their programmes by using waiting lists, applications for contract variations, prioritisation, suggesting alternative courses/providers and by undertaking business needs assessments. Undersubscription did not appear to be widespread;
- Future programmes could benefit from charging participants and allowing sponsorship;
- The relationship between BIZInfo and the BIZ Programme providers needed to be strengthened;
- A market gap for delivery of business start up assistance should be considered and dealt with;
- The BIZ Unit needed to increase the level of the communication with providers and reinforce the delivery requirements of the provider contracts;
- The types of organisations that the Ministry requires *not* to participate in the programme should be made clear to providers; and
- Contract managers need to be fully aware of the policy background of the programme in order to manage providers.

²² Ministry of Commerce (1999b)

A separate survey focusing on businesses' awareness of the programme was completed in August 1999 was 'Assessing Awareness and Understanding of the New BIZ Programme'²³. The main findings of this review were that:

- After three months in operation, there was a significant level of awareness of the BIZ programme;
- There was a positive level of interest in the services offered under BIZ, and interest appeared to be greater among businesses without established support links, women and Maori; and
- About half of the SMEs aware of BIZ said they didn't need its help. This was a barrier to be overcome if businesses are to benefit from what BIZ has to offer.

3.2 The Ministry's administration and management systems for contract management and for dealing with BIZ providers generally

Based on our observations of written materials and interviews with Ministry staff, we have formed the following conclusions:

Internal systems

In order to carry out the contract management process effectively, there is a need for good staff, and for systems that support and reinforce good practice. The staff appears to be competent and dedicated, and the provider surveys have generally highlighted this.

The systems as given in the Key Procedural Manual, to ensure that BIZ Unit staff carry out a range of tasks consistently, also appear to be very thorough and robust.

In addition, the Unit maintains easily retrievable, well documented hard copies of all contacts with clients. This information is stored in a way that ensures all members of the BIZ Unit have ready access to the documents.

However, contract management may have been hampered in the past by the absence of an internal electronic contract management system. The BIZ Unit has recently implemented an interim system. This will enhance efficiency by removing the need for contract managers to refer to original documentation (primarily the providers' contracts) each time they are required to deal with a provider.

Previously, all contract managers managed certain aspects of his/her contracts differently. For example, one contract manager had developed a comprehensive database to aid the initial processing of reports, while another contract manager carried out this task manually. Given

²³ AC Nielson (1999)

that each contract manager looks after his/her own contracts, this could have led to inconsistencies in the treatment of providers, which under a worst-case scenario could have led to unnecessary differences in performance among providers.

The computerised contract management system will not only enhance efficiency in the contract management process; it will also ensure consistency in the treatment of information by contract managers, and could be used as a tool to benchmark best practices. Furthermore, it will minimise the risks arising from potential inconsistencies in contract management processes.

A potential problem with the current contract management process is that there are weaker than desirable internal review procedures. The manager of the BIZ Unit would generally be expected to undertake this role. However, the BIZ Unit claims that lack of resourcing has resulted in the need for the manager to pursue a contract management role, restricting the amount of time available for reviewing the work of the contract managers.

We consider that in order for the contract management process to be more effective, additional staff resources need to be devoted to the BIZ Unit. One extra contract manager would free up the Unit manager's time, allowing the manager to devote more time to reviewing staff work.

Client satisfaction information

An important function of contract management revolves around ensuring that providers' outputs are meeting the aim of the programme in general.

A significant weakness in the system is the absence of quantified data about key aspects of the programme, in terms of service *quality* and *costs*, compared to service *volumes* which are monitored rigorously. Contract managers form judgements as to provider performance on quality and costs from observation of individual providers and in comparison with the group as a whole. While we have no reason to question their judgement, it would be preferable if these could be reinforced by quantified data.

Much reliance is placed on client satisfaction measurements, which many providers incorporate as a performance measure. Our view is that the current system for reporting client satisfaction is not providing a sufficiently robust measure.

Under the current system, clients fill out client satisfaction evaluation forms at the completion of a course and return the forms to the providers. Providers then analyse the forms and report back to the Ministry with the results.

However, there are a number of unsatisfactory features of this system. Firstly, the evaluation forms designed by the providers and are neither consistent nor necessarily professional. Allowing providers to decide on the content of the evaluation forms can introduce biases (accidentally or deliberately), through their being able to target questions to the areas they

feel will increase their reported levels of client satisfaction. This system could also give providers opportunities to falsify the results of the evaluation forms.

Moreover, completion is generally at the end of a course, when participants are on a 'high', before they have had a chance to consider the usefulness of a course in a measured way, and before they have tried to use the skills learnt for day-to-day business management.

If reliance is to be placed on client satisfaction measures, they need to be measured professionally, with providers left out of the client assessment stage as far as practicable. A standardised, professional evaluation form (possibly with additional questions tailored to meet the specifications of each provider) should be given to clients to be filled in and sent straight back to the Ministry. In order to ensure that an adequate response rate is obtained, pre-paid envelopes would need to be provided with the evaluation forms.

The forms completed by clients should, where practicable, lend themselves to computer reading to make data capture as easy as possible. Advantages of a more standardised evaluation process would include enabling the Ministry to:

- compare providers;
- provide consistent feedback to providers;
- determine a nationwide perspective; and
- determine which providers are not delivering as effectively as required.

Service quality information

We have more general concerns about adequate measures of service quality.

Relevant aspects of service quality are include whether service content (eg course materials) is:

- well targeted at client needs;
- competently designed and developed;
- delivered in a professional manner by suitable people; and
- subject to a robust system to ensure quality is maintained.

Ultimately, the test is whether the services provide the client with useful enhancements in management capability which can lead to business improvement.

The latter is difficult to measure with any confidence as a range of factors can influence the effective application of new skills (and surveys of BIZ clients undertaken during the course of this evaluation did not attempt to measure this directly, although the opinions of BIZ clients on the impact of their participation in BIZ were sought). However, the design and delivery aspects can be assessed professionally.

Client satisfaction measures can assess quality, but the value of this assessment may be limited when clients are inexperienced business people with limited awareness of their own needs and/or benchmarks against which to compare BIZ services.

The review of course materials undertaken as part of the compliance reviews is also of limited assistance, in that they only attempt a limited review of the materials, and more extensive reviews may be outside the professional expertise of the reviewers. This can at best enable a judgement to be made as to whether services are adequate or not.

We have not been able to form a confident assessment of service quality. However our general impression is that there do not appear to be services which are inadequate, but there is considerable variation in quality, ranging from 'satisfactory' to 'excellent'.

We observed for example that some providers had developed very good materials, e.g. where the service represented an extension of existing offerings (or in one instance, where an extensive development process was undertaken involving a significant commitment of money and senior staff). Others' materials could best be described as 'basic'.

Clearly, the ability of the BIZ Unit to monitor this aspect has been limited by the need to implement and operate contract management systems, within the time constraints the programme has operated under. However, this is an area for future development comprising:

- professional assessment of service quality;
- possibly setting standards and including these as contractual performance measures; and
- promoting improvements by providers by, for example, spreading 'best practice' amongst providers as a group.

Unit cost information

The costs per unit of services delivered (e.g. costs per course, per participant or per participant-day) are a fundamental measure of the cost-effectiveness of individual providers – *value for money* - and of the programme as a whole. The BIZ Unit considers that some providers appear to have very high unit costs relative to the services they are delivering, but does not have any robust comparable estimates of this.

While some contracts have unit costs specified in their schedules, others do not. Providers, to a large degree, prepared the schedules themselves, so whether or not unit costs are included in the contracts depends on whether providers offered to include this information.

The absence of unit cost measures may have arisen out of the tender/ negotiation process. The Ministry would not have had information with which to estimate acceptable unit costs before receiving proposals. Comparing unit costs in proposals was one of many issues to consider in a very short space of time, and the Ministry would have had limited scope to

negotiate over this when faced with limited choice amongst providers. Deriving unit cost measures has not subsequently been possible in light of other management priorities.

It must also be acknowledged that comparing unit costs is only valid when services are comparable, and with the considerable diversity in providers' services, deriving unit costs from which genuine comparisons can be made may be difficult or impossible.

Notwithstanding these difficulties, the absence of hard data on unit costs is a matter of some concern. We consider that the Ministry needs to firstly examine its available data on unit costs, and determine whether meaningful comparisons can be made; and attempt to derive bands of unit costs for 'comparable' services, to measure the performance of providers.

As contracts will effectively 'lock in' unit costs over the contract duration, this process needs to be undertaken before new contracts are signed.

Eligibility criteria for the programme

The eligibility criteria do not appear to have caused major difficulties to date (recognising that any criteria will always have definitional queries at the margin). The *BIZ Programme Provider Review*²⁴ revealed that 98% of BIZ clients attending the programme in the period preceding the review were eligible to attend the courses.

The Ministry states that it wanted to maintain flexibility in the programme, which is why it has not provided a definition of an eligible client. Instead, it has clarified which clients are *not* eligible. It wants to leave it up to providers to target the specific needs of the SME community in their delivery region. The BIZ Unit communicates descriptions of who is not eligible to attend BIZ programmes to providers.

We consider that consideration be given by the Ministry to establishing a positive definition of an eligible client for the purposes of this programme. This would aid the contract management process, and would add clarity to providers' perceptions of the aims of the BIZ programme.

Another potential problem in relation to eligibility is that some providers may inadvertently be delivering to ineligible clients. A way of overcoming this would be for the Ministry to supply all providers with standardised application forms that providers' prospective clients have to fill out. The forms will contain the need for certain information that providers can use to determine whether the applicants are eligible to attend.

²⁴ Ministry of Commerce (1999b): see section 3.2 for a further description of this review.

3.3 Overview: programme implementation

The predecessor to the BIZ programme was the Business Development Programme (BDP). The Cabinet agreed to a framework for the review of the BDP in December 1997 (CIE (97) M 37/8 and CAB (97) M 47/16A refer). This arose in response to a number of concerns about the BDP, including:

- It was costly to deliver and difficult to administer;
- There was a low level of awareness among the business sector of the BDP; and
- There were overlaps between the BDP and other public and private sector initiatives already in place.

The Ministry of Commerce undertook a consultation round with interested parties, an analysis of overseas SME assistance programmes, and a large literature search on impediments to business growth and development. The Ministry also looked at other government programmes that were in place and performed a gap analysis in order to determine the needs of the market.

Based on the research and the consultation rounds, the design and operational details of the BIZ programme were finalised just before mid-1998. Its philosophy and approach was new to the Ministry, including features such as delivering services through private providers under contract, with providers themselves defining local needs and the types of services required to meet them. This policy had significant implications for all aspects of the implementation process and management of the programme.

In August/September 1998 the Minister confirmed that he wanted the programme in operation by late December 1998/early January 1999. This timeframe was substantially shorter than the Ministry had anticipated, and resulted in a very rushed tender process.

In September 1998 the Ministry of Commerce sought expressions of interest from organisations to design and deliver business development services for SMEs. All organisations that sent in an expression of interest received a Request for Proposal (RFP). This document described the tender process and the format within which proposals were to be written. Proposals were to be with the Ministry by 13 November 1998.

A committee to manage the tender process was established. This committee was chaired by the Ministry of Commerce, and had members representing Te Puni Kokiri, the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs and Local Government New Zealand. This management committee established a team to evaluate the tender proposals.

The first step in the evaluation process involved an initial look through the proposals to ensure that they complied with the mandatory criteria as specified in the RFP. Proposals that didn't comply were removed.

Next, each proposal was assessed by the evaluation team on set criteria, shortlists of 'preferred providers' were produced, and reference checks were carried out on these providers.

Then, more thorough evaluations were carried out in terms of geographical coverage and target group allocations.

In terms of the geographical analysis, all proposals from a particular region were compared on a number of criteria, and based on this, preferred providers for each region were selected. In order to evaluate Maori, Women and Pacific Peoples target group providers, the following factors were analysed:

- the capacity of the proposed providers to effectively deliver to the stated target group; and
- the breadth and depth of services to be delivered.

The target group proposals were also evaluated on a geographical basis to ensure that a good spread resulted.

Following this, an analysis by cost was carried out.

At the completion of the evaluation phase, a negotiation process was carried out between the Ministry and the preferred providers. This was required because the Ministry had insufficient funding to purchase the complete programme recommended by the evaluation team. The negotiation process therefore involved changing the costs, coverage and targeting of the preferred providers.

The negotiation process began in early January 1999. This was to result in signed contracts by February 1999. There was a slippage with the proposed timeframe, and BIZ services commenced in April 1999.

For a fuller description of the evaluation and negotiation phase, refer to *Evaluation Report*²⁵ and *Negotiation Report*²⁶.

²⁵ Ministry of Commerce (1998c)

²⁶ Ministry of Commerce (1999a)

3.4 The tendering process through which providers were selected

The timeline of the tender process set out above was extremely compact, which we believe detrimentally affected programme implementation (notwithstanding the exertions of Ministry staff and providers).

Unsatisfactory aspects

A number of unsatisfactory aspects resulted from this timeline.

1) *An inadequate process for evaluating ‘need’ and ‘demand’ for BIZ services at the regional level.* This is critical as a major philosophical element of the programme was to determine priorities based on local demand. However, one step in the implementation process that was initially planned, but omitted because of the tight timeframes, was a second round of consultations between the Ministry and potential providers about local demand.

The Ministry had also hoped that potential providers would work together in the proposal preparation stage to facilitate a full delivery package in response to the needs of each region. However, providers simply did not have the time to do this, given that they only had about six weeks in which to prepare their proposals.

This meant that in the time available, providers may not have been able to undertake an adequate training needs analysis (and the view of staff involved in negotiations was that many of these appeared sketchy). Nor did they have sufficient time in which to take an innovative approach to designing BIZ programmes. This probably resulted in some providers tendering for the provisions of services they had previously delivered, rather than tailoring their programmes to the specific local needs of SMEs – ie to define ‘needs’ that their services could meet and disregard others.

Nor was the Ministry able to form its own assessment of local need, which was required to set priorities between competing bids in order to allocate available funds. The evaluation team had to rely heavily on what providers had stated in their proposals, and did not have sufficient time to verify the accuracy of the information provided.

From the Ministry’s perspective, it faced (and will continue to face) practical issues in terms of accountability for public money – which in this instance are best satisfied through robust processes for allocating funds – and the inevitability of having to set priorities when more funds are sought by providers than are available.

2) *A very truncated bidding and contract negotiation process.* While this was conducted professionally, and there is no evidence of inappropriate allocations being made in the time, the risk of erroneous decisions was accentuated by the timeframe. The negotiation team was forced to make very quick decisions during this phase, and the time constraints prevented them from being able to consider these decisions as thoroughly as desired.

This point is therefore included as a risk management issue. While we have not seen any evidence to suggest that problems have arisen because of this, we cannot confidently say that this is the case. Nor can the Ministry be confident that problems would not arise if the next tender round were to be repeated in such short timeframes.

3) *Inadequate contract provisions being included.* In particular, critical provisions relating to performance standards and measurement were defined by the providers themselves, with considerable inconsistencies. Standard provisions would have assisted subsequent contract management, and indeed would probably have been welcomed by providers.

4) *Insufficient planning for the operation of the BIZ Unit,* with no management systems in place when services were being provided initially. These had to be designed and implemented rapidly as the programme was operating. Many of the subsequent changes to contract management (e.g. standardised reporting requirements) should have been in place from the inception of the programme, rather than being developed through 'learning by doing'.

5) *Insufficient consideration of other models of contract management in the public sector.* While the process of determining demand from local sources is unusual, provision of public services through contracted parties outside government is not. As the Ministry itself has had little prior experience of such processes, we would expect that it would have tapped into the considerable expertise elsewhere in the public sector – which was also limited by the tight timeframes.

However there may have been some service delivery models in existence that the Ministry could have reviewed during the planning phases of the BIZ programme. In this context we understand that the Ministry did consider the health system and concluded that there were too many differences between health and business assistance for the health model to be of direct relevance. Although this may be true, the evaluation team ask whether consideration was also given to models of delivering training services that are more similar to BIZ - for example those funded by ETSA and CEG.

6) *The selection of providers.* The original tendering philosophy was that only very competent providers would be selected. However, in practice this seems not to have worked entirely. The tender process appears to have favoured providers with particular contact networks who may have been less competent deliverers than those without the contacts. More specifically, the tender process was based on a 'points system' where points were earned for targeting Maori, Pacific Peoples or women. Providers with the contacts and ability to target these groups were rewarded.

In addition to the above points, some providers have indicated they felt that they had too little control during the tender and negotiation phase. Indeed, many providers found that the Ministry wished to purchase only a small proportion of the services contained in their original proposals, and were not made aware of this until quite late in the process.

Providers have also been critical of the current process on the grounds that the Ministry is not close enough to clients in each of the regions to know what they will respond to in terms of assistance.

Future tender processes

We consider that benefits would arise if the Ministry entered future tender rounds with a clearer view of the type of services it wishes to purchase, and the amount of funding that it would expect to provide for certain outputs. The Ministry's assessment could be communicated to potential providers through a menu of possible services from which providers could choose the areas they feel best meet local needs and are best suited to their organisation.

If necessary the Ministry could undertake the consultations with local business communities (business development bodies, economic development agencies, business leaders, providers etc) to form a joint assessment of local demand. These consultations were a major omission from the initial implementation process.

We do not consider this as representing any fundamental shift in the philosophy of the BIZ programme, which was about providers determining local needs. Rather, we see this as enhancing the process in order to ensure a balance between local demand (assessed comprehensively), provider capacity and available funding.

The tendering process could be split in two, via relatively general expressions of interest, followed by requests for detailed proposals within specified guidelines (including indications of the services that the Ministry is interested in purchasing from each individual provider, and at what cost). This revision would allow providers to base their proposals around the delivery of the services that the Ministry is targeting, within available funding.

The next tender round also needs to be based on a framework that does not favour current providers and approaches over new providers and alternative approaches. There is a risk that current providers and the Ministry will develop a 'cosy relationship' which could make it difficult for new providers to enter the BIZ programme (given the experience that current providers have built up in complying with Ministry and contract obligations). If this were to occur, innovation would be inhibited and there is the risk that the BIZ programme could become somewhat 'stale'.

We also consider that future tender processes should recognise that the provision of specialised services could substantially enhance the value of the BIZ programme, and that in order to achieve this it may be necessary to provide contracts to less experienced or less competent providers. In such cases, the BIZ Unit may be required to give additional support to these providers to help them perform to an acceptable level. The tender process will need to take into account the costs and benefits associated with this outcome.

3.5 The adequacy and appropriateness of contracts and performance measures used in them

The contracts are in two parts:

- a set of standard terms and conditions
- a schedule of services to be provided, comprising a mixture of standard provisions and provisions specific to each provider

The contracts appear largely satisfactory. However, problems which are still apparent relate to the number of non-standard provisions. Many have been standardised during the course of the implementation process, but further standardisation is desirable.

Many of the standard provisions which we consider necessary have been outlined previously in this report. They include

- standardised reporting on all aspects of performance measurement, including client satisfaction and service quality;
- reporting within the timeframes required by the Ministry;
- providing all information required within reports; and
- satisfactory compliance reviews.

The main area where further adjustments to contracts may be required relate to the remedies when any of these requirements are not met. Contractual provisions are needed to manage non-compliance, including remedies such as suspension clauses and contingent payments, when termination would be a disproportionate response.

The BIZ Unit has indicated that it would like to see *suspension clauses* contained in the contracts, to enable it to suspend payment in instances of non-delivery or under-performance. When the BIZ Unit has suspended contracts in the past, this action has been somewhat ambiguous in contractual terms, and in effect it has had to rely on the goodwill of the affected provider to do this.

The situations in which the BIZ Unit may suspend payments need to be spelt out explicitly in the contracts, so both parties are clear about their obligations.

Another possible mechanism is to make part of the provider's fee *contingent* on meeting the reporting requirements in full. The contractual payment (or a component thereof) would then become 'X+Y dollars', where X dollars (the major portion) would be paid on completion of service delivery at agreed milestones, and Y dollars would depend on timely and complete reporting and a satisfactory compliance review. This 'Y' component would in effect become a contractual bonus.

Given the short time frame in which providers had to prepare their tender proposals, and the short time in which they had to carry out a needs analysis of their target audience, it is not surprising that contract variations have been required. The contract variation process is the tool through which flexibility is introduced to the contracts.

Assuming that the next tender round is not as rushed as the last one, providers will have a greater period of time in which to carry out a comprehensive needs analysis of the SME community in their region. This should reduce the need for contract variations. However, the requirement for flexibility will still exist due to the dynamic nature of business. There will still be a need (although hopefully reduced) for contracts to be flexible enough to be able to respond to the changing needs of the SME community.

The BIZ Unit's current process for dealing with contract variation requests appears to be effective, provided the Unit follows the procedures set out in the Key Procedural Manual.

3.6 What measures are taken by the Ministry to monitor performance of providers and the effectiveness of these measures

This has been extensively discussed elsewhere in this report. It would seem most useful to comment in this section on future enhancements to the relationship between the Ministry and providers.

As noted previously, performance in terms of service volumes – the number of services, clients and SMEs – is rigorously monitored; but monitoring of client satisfaction, quality of services delivered and unit costs is less satisfactory.

We should stress that this is not a criticism of practice to date; given the circumstances in which the BIZ programme was established, contract management and monitoring service volumes was clearly the key priority.

However, the emphasis for future development of the programme should now move to improving the competencies of providers. This should be addressed in a structured and planned fashion through a *provider development agenda*. We should stress that this approach needs 'buy-in' from providers, rather than the threat of contractual sanctions.

Three factors are critical to the success of such an agenda. Firstly, the experience of providers and the BIZ Unit means that they have some understanding of how the BIZ programme could be developed.

Secondly, the relationship of trust developed between providers and the BIZ Unit means that they are now in a position to work together to develop the programme, to an extent which would not have been possible in its early days.

Thirdly, the development of better contract management systems (and possibly, an additional contract manager) should free up resources from contract compliance for this agenda.

Implementing 'quality of service' performance measures will provide an important part of this agenda. The development of these measures needs to be undertaken jointly with providers, so that there is common understanding and expectations about the use of these measures.

The use of such measures will force all parties to consider service standards explicitly, and this will in itself promote improvements. In particular, supplying providers with information about their own performance relative to others in the programme (eg against the average and the best) will provide them with important feedback.

This feedback then needs to be complemented with actions to improve performance.

The BIZ Unit already promotes networking amongst providers in a variety of forms. Extending this would seem the best method for promoting exchange of information amongst them about 'best practice' about services – course content, materials, approaches etc.

A majority of providers has expressed a desire to extend these activities further, with the BIZ Unit providing positive leadership – although ultimately the success of such activities will depend upon the providers themselves assuming responsibility and 'ownership' for the outcomes. Improved quality of service and application of performance measures would provide a focus and a framework for extended networking and exchange of information.

APPENDIX 1: BIZ WORKSHOPS/SEMINARS/ COURSES REPORTING TEMPLATE

APPENDIX 2: BIZ PROVIDER QUARTERLY REPORTING TEMPLATE



QUARTERLY REPORTING TEMPLATE - EXAMPLE

QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE STANDARDS REPORTING: BIZ VENTURES LIMITED 1 April – 30 June 2000 Quarter

Service Name	Performance Standards (as per the contract)	Actual Performance (to be completed by provider)
<i>Marketing Workshop</i>		
	16 workshops delivered to general SMEs over contract period 2 by 30 June 1999 10 by 30 June 2000 4 by 1 February 2001	12 sessions delivered to date 2 by 30 June 1999 10 by 30 June 2000 Two delivered this quarter: 18 May – Riversdale 21 attendees ² 22 June – Ohai – 13 attendees ^{1, 2} – ¹ see report for explanation of low numbers for this workshop and the action proposed to address this. ² see sheet 1A for gender and ethnicity split
	Areas of delivery - 8 Riversdale - 8 Ohai	- 6 Riversdale - 6 Ohai -
	Minimum of 15 attendees at each session	Average attendees to date = 18
	Targets: 25% women 10% Maori of which 25% will be women	Targets to date = 43% women 8% Maori of which 26% are women ¹ see separate report for explanation of low Maori target numbers and the action proposed to address this.
	Each session covered areas identified in Description of Services	Confirmed
	Material supporting the Description of Services supplied to each attendee	Confirmed
	Each session 3 hours long	Confirmed
	2 people deliver service	Confirmed
	Service assessment forms completed by attendees at completion of each session	Confirmed except for 17 Aug workshop when assessment forms were posted back by attendees
	80% of attendees respond positively in service assessment form	91% of attendees responded positively to the workshop in the service assessment form

<i>Client Needs Assessments</i>	Performance Standards (as per the contract)	Actual Performance (to be completed by provider)
	<p>400 SME clients will participate in capability assessment interview to identify skill and knowledge gap and possible solutions of overcome these:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50 by 30 Jun 1999 • 250 by 30 Jun 2000 • 100 by 28 Feb 2001 	<p>300 completed to date</p> <p>50 completed by 30 Jun 1999 250 completed by 30 June 2000</p> <p>30 delivered this quarter: See Sheet 3A for gender and ethnicity split</p>
	Interview is a least 1 hour in duration	Confirmed Average time spent per client 1.25hours
	<p>Targets: 25% women 10% Maori of which 25% will be women</p>	<p>Targets to date: 45% women 9% Maori of which 16% are women</p> <p>¹see separate report for explanation of low Maori target numbers and the action proposed to address this.</p>
	Each client provided with a Workbook	Confirmed
	Service assessment forms completed by client at completion of interview	Confirmed
	80% of clients respond positively to the pre-assessment interview in service assessment form	92% of clients responded positively to the interview in the service assessment form
	Follow-up outcome at 3 months post – assessment indicate positive impact of assessment intervention	<p>135 post assessment follow-ups completed by 30 June 2000</p> <p>96% of clients reported a positive impact</p>

<i>Network Meetings</i>	Performance Standards (as per the contract)	Actual Performance (to be completed by provider)
	Newsletter collating network information produced bi-monthly <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 by 30 Jun 2000 • 3 by 31 Jan 2001 	6 produced by 30 June 2000
	One network meeting held per month in each location 12 in Riversdale by 30 June 2000 12 in Ohau by 30 June 2000 6 in Riversdale by 31 December 2000 6 in Ohau by 31 December 2000	12 held in Riversdale by 30 June 2000 11 held in Ohau by 30 June 2000 5 meetings held this quarter See Sheet 2A for gender and ethnicity split Please see separate report for explanation of underdelivery.
	Each session covered areas identified in Description of Services	Confirmed
	Targets: 25% women 10% Maori of which 25% will be women	Targets to date = 51% women 9% Maori of which 19% are women ¹ see separate report for explanation of low Maori target numbers and the action proposed to address this.
	Material supporting the Description of Services supplied to each attendee	Confirmed
	Each session minimum of 2 hours long	Confirmed
	Minimum of 20 attendees per meeting	Confirmed – average of 26 attendees to date

<i>Coaching</i>	Performance Standards (as per the contract)	Actual Performance (to be completed by provider)
	400 hours of mentoring to be delivered over the period of the contract <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 225 hours by 30 June 2000 • 175 hours by 28 Feb 2001 	225 hours delivered to date 225 hours delivered by 30 June 2000 9 participants received coaching this quarter 2 NZ E male, 4 NZ E female, 1 Maori female, 1 Maori male, 1 PI male
	Maximum 6 hours mentoring delivered per client	Confirmed Average time spent per client 4.75 hours
	Targets: 25% women 10% Maori of which 25% will be women	Targets to date = 48% women 11% Maori of which 20% are women ¹ see separate report for explanation of low Maori women target numbers and the action proposed to address this.
	Service assessment forms completed by client at completion of coaching	Confirmed
	80% of clients respond positively to the pre-assessment interview in service assessment form	95% of clients responded positively to the interview in the service assessment form

APPENDIX 3: BIZ SUMMARY REPORTING TEMPLATE

SHEET 1B

WORKSHOPS, SEMINARS, COURSES - DELIVERED FROM FROM 1 OCT TO 31 DEC 1999: SUMMARY

PROVIDER NAME:

TABLE ONE 1	
Number of PLACES FILLED by Individuals Attending Training	
3 Months ending 31 Dec	Number
Total as per Sheet 1A	
TOTAL	

TABLE THREE 3	
Length of Time That SME Has Been in Operation	
Years	Number
less than 1	
1-3	
4-6	
7-10	
plus 10	
TOTAL	

TABLE TWO 2	
Number of Unique SMEs ¹ Represented at Training Sessions by Individuals	
3 Months ending 31 Dec	Number
TOTAL	

TABLE FOUR 4	
Number of Persons Employed in the Business (can include the owner operating the business)	
No of Persons (FTE) ²	Number
0-5	
6-9	
10-19	
20-49	
50 & over	
TOTAL	

TABLE FIVE 5		
Business Industry Classification Codes (Top Level ANZSIC Codes) (Code the business - not the individual)		
Code	Industry Sector	Number
A	Agriculture, Forestry Fishing	
B	Mining	
C	Manufacturing	
D	Electricity, Gas & Water Supply	
E	Construction	
F	Wholesale Trade	
G	Retail Trade	
H	Accommodation, Cafes & Restaurants	
I	Transport & Storage	
J	Communication Services	
K	Finance & Insurance	
L	Property & Business Services	
M	Government Administration & Defence	
N	Education	
O	Health & Community Services	
P	Cultural & Recreational Services	
Q	Personal & Other Services	
TOTAL		

¹FTE = Full Time Equivalent

²Single SMEs - if both main business and unique SMEs within the organisation may have been provided to you via contacts, refer to 2000

APPENDIX 4: BIZ COMPLIANCE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT PROGRAMME

Compliance and Performance Assessment Programme (CAPA)

Detailed programme (Normal Risk)

Detailed programme for Greater than Normal Risk – testing quantities indicated in **BOLD CAPITALS** should be **doubled**.

Detailed programme for Much Greater than Normal Risk – testing quantities indicated in **BOLD CAPITALS** should be **trebled**.

Where performance or compliance does not meet expectations copies of the relevant source material should be requested and filed to provide an audit trail.

#	Step	Result	Comment/Reference
1	Review Of Current Reporting		
1a	Confirm the accuracy of information reported by the Service Provider to MOC	Select ONE report made to the MOC. On a random basis, select items to be agreed to supporting data, documentation to confirm the information's validity.	Yes / No / NA
2	Cost/Financial Information and Value for Money		
2a	Assess the timing of billings against the milestones billed.	Select ONE invoice from the Service Provider to MOC.	
		Ensure that any amounts billed for milestones (e.g. materials produced, courses delivered etc) were billed <u>after</u> these services had been delivered.	Yes / No / NA
2b	Review the costing information provided by the Service Provider's. Are these expenses valid?	Obtain a breakdown for ONE invoice billed by the Service Provider.	
		For the items on the invoice that represent rebilling/on-charging (i.e. recharging for items purchased by the Service Provider): - Ensure all items agree to the original purchase invoice.	Yes / No / NA

		For the items on the invoice that represent on-charging allocations by the Service Provider: - Review the allocations, are these appropriate and reasonable against the source of this allocation?	1 2 3 4 5 NA	
2c	Does the cost of the services to the Purchaser compared to those of the Service Provider represent value for money?	With reference to TWO invoices, assess, particularly with reference to other Service Provider's, the value for money that the Purchaser is obtaining for the fee. I.e. costs incurred by Service Provider relative to the fee paid by the Purchaser.	1 2 3 4 5 NA	
3	Quality			
3a	Assess the quality of the materials produced for courses.	Make ONE selection of an amount billed to MOC which represents charges for materials produced, and obtain the materials		
		Assess whether the materials exist and are of an acceptable quality in terms of presentation and layout etc.	1 2 3 4 5 NA	
		Consider the results of the interviews with recipients of training and refer to the 'Course Evaluation Forms'. Did the recipients consider the material to be of acceptable quality?	1 2 3 4 5 NA	
3b	Assess the quality of the mentoring provided. Was this of an appropriate standard at the appropriate level?	Make ONE selection of mentoring made.		
		Was there sufficient structure governing mentoring processes and documentation surrounding the participants in the mentoring process, key advice given, action points etc?	1 2 3 4 5 NA	
		Consider the results of the interviews with recipients of mentoring. Did the recipients consider the mentoring to be of acceptable quality and meeting their needs?	1 2 3 4 5 NA	

3c	Assess the quality of the courses delivered. Ensure these were pitched at a level appropriate to the audience (or conversely the audience was at an appropriate level for the course).	Select ONE course and make a selection of TWO individuals who attended the course.		
		Consider the results of the interviews with course attendees. Did the attendees consider the courses to be of acceptable quality and meeting their needs?	1 2 3 4 5 NA	
4	Delivery			
4a	Ensure the Service Provider has met the requirements specified of them in their contracts/proposals.	Obtain an understanding of significant parts of the Service Provider's methodology, e.g.: - # services to be provided per year - structure of services, method of delivery - service for duration specified - timing of development of services Specifically ensure the following by reviewing FOUR deliveries (generally mentoring or courses):		
		The qualified staff proposed have been used by the Service Provider at all times, or All exceptions where different staff have been used, were agreed with MOC, and their qualifications considered acceptable	Yes / No / NA	
		Have the required/specified number of staff been used at all times (e.g. x number of staff per course)	Yes / No / NA	
		Were the courses for the duration's specified, and were other services delivered to the required number of hours.	Yes / No / NA	
		From reviewing service reports, assess the level of consistency/compliance between what was achieved and what was proposed.	1 2 3 4 5 NA	

		Where Service Provider prepared reports are relied upon, assess the reliability of these reports.		
4b	Is the Service Provider operating solely within their contracted locality	Obtain a report that details the location of services provided. Assess whether all these locations (and/or the recipients of the service) are within the areas indicated in the SLA.	Yes / No	
		Where no such report is available, make a selection of TWO deliveries and make this assessment.		
4c	Is the Service Provider ensuring sufficient coverage within contracted locality	Obtain a report that details the location of services provided. Assess whether the services are sufficiently geographically spread to enable access to interested parties.	1 2 3 4 5 NA	
		Where no such report is available, discuss with management the geographic spread of courses. Is this spread sufficient?		
5	Needs Assessments and Target Groups			
5a	Ensure the criteria in the Needs Assessments are appropriate for their purpose.	Ensure the Service Provider has a Needs Assessment framework or standard questionnaire. Assess, with reference to other Service Providers the comprehensiveness of this framework	1 2 3 4 5 NA	
5b	Application of Needs Assessment	Make a selection of TWO individuals who have received performance assessments. Review the responses to the questions and assess whether the criteria in the Needs Assessment are being rigorously and appropriately applied.	1 2 3 4 5 NA	
		From the selections above, ensure that the services these individuals receive and those which the individual is entitled to.	Yes / No / NA	
5c	Outcomes of performance assessment	From the selections above, obtain information on the services the individual received. Ensure the services were received by the individual	1 2 3 4 5 NA	

		From interviews with recipients, assess their view of the Needs Assessment and how this had led to addressing their needs.	1 2 3 4 5 NA	
5d	Has the Service Provider achieved it's participation target for Maori and Pacific Island peoples and Women	Obtain the data collected detailing gender and ethnicity of recipients. Analyse this data (or review the Service Provider's analysis) and assess whether the Service Provider has met its target quantities/ratios for:		
		- Women	1 2 3 4 5 NA	
		- Pacific Island people	1 2 3 4 5 NA	
		- Maori	1 2 3 4 5 NA	
		Confirm the integrity of the data used by agreeing THREE individuals (of these target groups) data to information gathered during the Needs Assessment or to confirmation obtained during interviews.		
5e	Methods to achieve target groups goals	From discussions with management and observations of levels of expenditure on advertising etc, assess whether appropriate effort has been made to achieve the targets laid down in the contract for:		
		- Women	1 2 3 4 5 NA	
		- Pacific Island people	1 2 3 4 5 NA	
		- Maori	1 2 3 4 5 NA	
5f	Has the Service Provider met its general attendance targets?	Obtain the data collected detailing attendance's	Yes / No / NA	
		Assess whether the Service Provider has met all of its attendance targets and hours deliverable.		
5g	Verify that the number of people attending the course is correct.	Ensure representations of attendance on TWO courses are consistent with the invoices for catering per person, room hire per person etc. Agree to data obtained in interviews.	Yes / No / NA	

6	Performance Monitoring			
6a	Review data collection and analysis of performance	Obtain the data being collected by the Service Provider to assist in the assessment of the impact of the BIZ Programme.		
		Is the data being collected?	Yes / No / NA	
		Is this data consistent with what was represented in the proposal	1 2 3 4 5 NA	
		Is this data appropriate?	1 2 3 4 5 NA	
		Is this data being analysed? Discuss with management how the analysis is being used to modify the services delivered. Is this being used effectively?	1 2 3 4 5 NA	
6b	Review performance evaluation forms.	Ascertain whether <u>most</u> participants are completing evaluation forms?	Yes / No / NA	
		Review the processes the Service Provider has in place to analyse evaluation forms. Is there a process in place?	Yes / No / NA	
		Assess the results of the Service Provider analysis. Has the information been correctly obtained from the evaluation forms?	Yes / No / NA	
		Review the follow-up process employed by the Service Provider. Does this process include modifications to services to reflect responses in the evaluation forms?	1 2 3 4 5 NA	
		Where there is a service that has had poor reviews, ascertain whether anything has been done to address this issue and remedy the fault.	1 2 3 4 5 NA	

Participant Questionnaire

Question		Response
A	General	
	Ethnicity	
	Have you received services/assistance from [name of organisation] in the past [insert time in months] months?	
	What was your general impression of what was provided?	
B	Services Provided	
1	What services have you been provided through the BIZ programme in the past [insert time period] months:	
1a	Courses	
1b	Coaching	
1c	Networking	
1d	Needs Assessment	
C	Courses:	
1	What was the course?	
2	When was the course?	
3	Was the course of benefit to you?	
4	Was it aimed at a level appropriate to your needs?	
5	What was the duration of the course?	
6	Who took the course (number and names if possible)?	
7	Was the course material sufficient and of acceptable quality?	
8	What could be done better?	
D	Coaching	
1	Who provided the coaching to you?	
2	When was this provided?	
3	How many hours of mentoring did you receive?	
4	Was this persons skills appropriate to your needs?	
5	Was the coaching of benefit to you?	
6	What could be done better?	
E	Networking	
1	What networking opportunities have been provided to you?	
2	When did this occur?	
3	Do you consider these to be beneficial?	
4	What could be done better?	
F	Needs Assessment	
1	When did you receive your needs assessment?	
2	Who performed the needs assessment?	
3	What is your view of the needs assessment? Do you consider the criteria and questioning appropriate?	
4	What could be done better?	