

Reusing surplus ICT equipment as far as possible

From destruction to reuse

The Dutch central government is a major user of ICT. Each year around 30,000 items of data-carrying ICT equipment are declared surplus. The State Property Service is responsible for processing this equipment. Although at present the surplus equipment is still destroyed, the intention is that in the future, more emphasis will be placed on reuse.

The State Property Service operates as part of the Ministry of Finance. The organisation saves, destroys or sells government property and seized goods. The processing of surplus ICT equipment is also a responsibility of the State Property Service. 'From the point of view of data security, costs and the environment, we have always chosen to destroy this equipment, using a shredder, and have sold the scrap as effectively as possible to the market,' explains Director Ton Huisman. 'But is that really the best way? And couldn't it perhaps be done differently, in order to give a hand to the circular economy?'

Alternatives

That question was reason enough for the Property Service to survey possible alternatives for processing data-carrying ICT equipment. This survey showed that much of this equipment can be cleaned, in a certified process, and then reused. 'That's good to know, of course,' Huisman says. 'The fact that this could be done more cheaply than is the case at present is also an advantage. Perhaps there is even a return in the pipeline. In addition, this alternative has a better score for consequences for the environment. One minor reservation is that in central government, we always have to deal with a certain percentage of equipment on which confidential or highly confidential information is processed. This equipment cannot be cleaned and reused, but has to be destroyed.'

Shredder

The survey opens the way for a different working method at the State Property Service. 'We are now strongly considering cleaning up surplus data-carrying ICT equipment and then providing for its disposal to the market. How that would work? It is actually very simple. We connect all data-carrying ICT equipment that comes in to an analyser. This scans the PC and then produces an analysis report. This shows, for example, that the computer can be cleaned and sold, because it contains a good processor. Or the analysis could show that the PC cannot be sold or cannot be properly cleaned, because it contains certain blocks. If cleaning is not possible or the data carrier cannot be sold, the equipment still goes to the shredder and then to a raw materials recycling company.'

Returns

In a pilot project, the State Property Service also investigated the financial possibilities. 'We charge the Ministries costs for the destruction of their surplus ICT equipment,' Huisman says. 'As a result, not all data-carrying ICT equipment is handed in to us, because some departments think the costs are too high. On the basis of the volumes we receive each year - about 30,000 items - and the number of FTEs within central government, we have calculated that 10% to 25% "leaks away" via other channels. With the pilot project, we therefore wanted to determine whether the proceeds of selling the cleaned data-carrying equipment would be enough to cover the costs we charge the Ministries.' Unfortunately, this proved not to be the case. 'The problem was actually that the number of data-

carrying appliances that could be re-sold proved to be less than we originally estimated. This is a shame, because some proceeds can certainly be raised.’ Huisman gives some examples. ‘A good computer will raise a few hundred euros, while smartphones that run on Android raise 30 to 50 euros. The raw material recycling also raises money. And, for example, we sell separate monitors to the market.’

Awareness

Naturally, the State Property Service will also consider ways to increase the percentage of re-saleable data carriers. ‘Because departments now still have to pay for disposing of surplus items, these are seen as worthless and are also treated as such,’ explains Huisman. ‘If the surplus equipment is treated with more care, this also ultimately leads to more re-usable equipment. This is therefore something we do want to aim for.’ Awareness in the government departments plays an important role in this. ‘We have to make people thoroughly aware that it is important to treat the equipment with care, so that it still has a value after a number of years. It is also important to return the PC to us complete with the original feed cable, mouse and keyboard, and including all the necessary access codes. Otherwise reuse is not possible.’ According to Huisman, it also pays to consider responsibility and ownership. ‘How easily does a department issue equipment to the employees? For example, is it really necessary to replace older PCs? And who is responsible if equipment is damaged? If an organisation covers all of this itself, users will treat their tablets or computers with less care. Another option is to reward employees if they do treat equipment with care. In short, there are enough possibilities to increase the number of data carriers that can be resold.’

Break-even

Huisman also hopes for an overhaul of the cost system. ‘Instead of 17.50 euros, we could also charge the Ministries 10 euros per returned unit. That is quite a substantial reduction. In that way you can ensure that the departments return more equipment to us. You could also build in another grade. And at the end of the year, we will consider how this works out financially.’ With a contribution of 10 euros per data carrier, the State Property Service could probably break even. ‘If we do more than that, we could adjust the prices for the following year. We also pay the surplus back to the Ministries. In that way you create goodwill and, hopefully, departments will continually hand in more equipment to us.’

REBus and circular procurement

REBus Netherlands aims to inspire purchasers and market participants to think about retaining the value of raw materials in the whole supply chain from the very first request for a product or service, including the possibilities for reuse and recycling. REBus stimulates the exploration of new business models that contribute to a longer service life of the materials to be used. This takes place in pilots through joint learning and knowledge-sharing.

More information on REBus and circular procurement can be found at the [PIANOo website](#).