flood of new deadlines.

Many IT professionals think that the timetable outlined in the document is impossible to meet. There is no indication of how the NHS will recruit people with the skills to complete the projects. Salaries within the health sector are generally about half what they are in the private sector, so retaining staff is a problem.

One target of 95% of general practices connected to NHSNet by the end of March has been dismissed by some GPs, who state that having a connection is not the same as being able to use the system.

**Timetable:**

- **March 2001** 95% general practices and 25% trusts to have NHSNet
- **March 2002** desktop connections for NHS clinical staff to basic e-mail, browsing and directory services, and roll out of NHS cryptography support services to begin.
- **March 2003** migration to national standards for e-mail, browsing and office systems completed and all NHS staff to have desktop access. Clinical information systems start to use the SNOMED clinical terms
- **March 2004** major national payroll/HR systems implemented
- **2005** a networked NHS with booking systems in place, electronic transfer of records within primary care, all acute NHS trusts with electronic patient records and first generation health records

**Skills shortage in implementing Building the Information Core - Implementing the NHS plan**

The Chief Executive of the NHS Information Authority, Nigel Bell, has said that the skills shortage in implementing *Building the Information Core - Implementing the NHS Plan* is a massive issue; ‘if we do not find a way around it we will not have the skills or sheer capacity to do all the things we want to do’.

NHS IT professionals have complained that there is a significant lack of IT skills, because staff tend to train up and then move on to better paid jobs in the private sector. If the staff are not available it can cost two or three times as much to bring in consultants to do the job - which has an impact on the value to the taxpayer. The same problems are obvious within local government, with 70% of those leaving local authority IT jobs moving on to better paid jobs in the private sector, which also have better career prospects.

**NHS to adopt BS7799 security code**

The NHS has formally adopted the BS7799 code of practice for information security and laid down a tight deadline for it to be implemented.

All health organisations will have to have compared existing practice to the national standard by June and produce a compliance audit by December. This is a huge challenge as BS7799 is the security standard for government departments, but in the two years since its launch only 37 organisations had gained accreditation.

The failure of the NHS to deliver secure communications has been a major source of frustration and the key component of the new strategy reported above is that a full public key infrastructure (PKI) will be available for use across the NHS by April 2002. Any problems with the PKI development could hold up the development of full networking.

A new cryptography strategy warns that any organisation considering an interim solution must ensure that any strategy has ‘an appropriate fit with expected cryptography standards or is capable of cost-effective replacement or upgrade’.

**Preconceptions about women and men still hamper women’s progress in IT jobs**

Recent research in a software company, which claimed it valued social skills as highly as technical skills, has shown that gender, not skills, is still what counts in IT.

If men have the social skills needed in systems analysis and consultancy they are seen as having great social acumen to deal with changing situations. Women on the other hand are described as ‘nice’. If techie men are loners they are described as wizards and highly intelligent whereas techie women are seen as boring and withdrawn.

Men and women bring with them the social status that accords to their gender in the outside world says the researcher, Ruth Woodfield, a lecturer at Sussex University who has spent years researching the role of women in IT.

At work, whatever you do and the skills you perform are never judged completely objectively. There is a need for objective measuring of skills