



Evaluating SME experiences of Government procurement – Part Two

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENT

While SMEs should be encouraged to be proactive in seeking and winning Government contracts, there are several areas in which the Government could more actively facilitate this, or remove the barriers that SMEs currently experience.

Simplify and clarify the bidding process

The complexity of the bidding process impacts heavily upon SMEs. Thirty-five per cent of online respondents to the research conducted on behalf of BIS by research and recruitment consultancy FreshMinds said that they did not understand how to tender for a Government contract.

This places them at a disadvantage against larger suppliers that have more experience and resources to draw upon to produce suitable bids. Clearer communication around tender requirements is necessary to ensure SMEs correctly direct their time and resources towards appropriate opportunities.

Standardisation of both the Pre-Qualification Questionnaire (PQQ) and the tender process across a range of public bodies would also reduce the burden on SME resources. PQQs can be extremely valuable in establishing whether there is a good fit between supplier and purchaser, but only if *“they are well crafted by the commissioner.”* (FreshMinds interview with Jonathan Hirsch, Hirschworks, August 2008) Currently PQQs present a risk for SMEs as another formality in the process of procuring a good or service. A cross-agency standard PQQ would limit this risk.

Within the tendering process itself, the same information often has to be repeatedly resubmitted to different organisations, according to John Griffiths of consultancy firm Rocket Science. Mr Griffiths suggests creating tendering portals for similar organisations to hold businesses’ information, reducing the need to continually repeat information. In addition, the development of a simplified standard disclosure procedure to replace current extensive and often duplicate form filling and PQQ processes is necessary if SMEs are to be given a fair chance in bidding for Government contracts.

Supplier databases of accredited companies do exist, which could reduce the extent of repeat tendering an SME undertakes. BiP Solutions’ Select Accredited service, for example, aims to offer a simpler, more streamlined approach to accreditation and pre-qualification, as well as a database of suppliers and contractors. This is designed to help reduce the burden on businesses of repeatedly completing PQQs and allow access to opportunities within the public sector, while also providing important reassurance for buyers that potential suppliers comply with requirements and have been assessed against Government standards.

Reduce bureaucracy

The onerous bidding process is a major barrier to tendering for public procurement contracts, and 55 per cent of online respondents said that the time, effort and cost required to bid for Government contracts was more than their business could afford.

Many case study participants in this research struggle to comply with all the requirements set down in tenders, often with the feeling that these requirements are not all strictly necessary:

“They are asking things that don’t really affect how well you are going to provide the service...What they should want to know is whether you are good at your job, not whether you have the correct health and safety procedures in place.” (FreshMinds interview with Laurence Martin, Black Swan Training)

Sixteen per cent of online respondents believed that bids had failed because they did not meet supplier standards. A reduction in the compliance demands for smaller businesses – for example insurance levels, quality standards and health and safety requirements, or a reassessment of the ways for public sector organisations to judge whether potential private suppliers have appropriate offerings – should be examined.

Make the process more transparent

There is a need for more transparency in the selection process; there is a sense amongst SMEs that they must contend with a pre-existing preference for larger suppliers or the incumbent supplier, rendering the bidding process a ‘box-ticking exercise’ that enables the procuring body to play by the rules. Case study examples show that organisations still perceive that a procuring body has already chosen who they want to give the contract to but go ahead with the tendering process in order to appear fair. This perception of inherent bias in the process restricts SME competition for public contracts, as the time and cost implications of tendering negatively outweigh the potential for winning. Indeed, 44 per cent of online survey respondents who had bid for at least one public sector contract did not bid for further appropriate contracts because they did not think they could beat a larger supplier; and 39 per cent because they did not think they would win against an incumbent supplier.

In addition, despite the consensus that SMEs can deliver better value for money and more innovative solutions and that procurement departments and processes take this into account, the experience of SMEs is that practice based on old procurement policy persists. Selection of suppliers is still being made on the basis of low cost, rather than value for money. In addition, many tenders are still too prescriptive and do not allow for the unique and innovative solutions which SMEs are well placed to provide. Jane Grant at the Department of Environment commented:

“I still despair when I see tender processes which say if the bid is not compliant it will be rejected, because often what has been specified is not the best way of doing things.”

Provide more support for SMEs

Currently, only 17 per cent of online respondents have ever used a support scheme, and the perceived value of such schemes is poor. It would appear that traditional training and support is not producing the best outcome for SMEs and a reassessment of the methods used is necessary.

Best practice case studies in this report demonstrate the effectiveness of more innovative support in generating SME involvement in the public procurement process. The limited resources of SMEs can mean that it is difficult to justify time taken out of work to attend a standard seminar-type training session, but ‘Meet the Buyer’ events, for example, not only cultivate greater understanding of the procurement process and the information needed for a successful bid, but also allow SMEs to develop all-important personal relationships with buyers and constitute a business development opportunity.

The use of guides for SMEs should not be underestimated, and the success of the *Guide pratique pour la réponse des PME à la commande publique* in France highlights their effectiveness. This guide instructs SMEs on accessing information on business opportunities; familiarising themselves with the relevant regulations; and, most importantly, how to understand the real needs of authorities on the basis of the published tender documents and how to evaluate whether they have the capacity to actually execute the contract. The guide has been marked out by the European Code of Best Practices.

Introduce innovative measures such as performance bonds and contract banding to combat the perceived risk associated with SMEs

Despite procurement experts recognising the value and innovation that SMEs bring to the public sector, there is still a pervasive belief among SMEs that public procurement teams are reticent to award contracts to SMEs, on the basis that they present a higher risk than their larger competitors.

Risk aversion is a cultural as much as a procedural problem within the public sector. However, the use of performance guarantees can alleviate the perceived risk of using SMEs. Performance bonds are often used in the construction industry, and the availability of insurance for procurers against the risk of using an SME would allow public procurement professionals to be more willing to take risks and encourage more innovation within the procurement process.

SMEs are often not themselves aware of the risk that they present, therefore the ‘banding’ of contracts would also help SMEs to understand which contracts are appropriate.

International examples demonstrate that even greater measures can be taken to ensure that SMEs are not unfairly disadvantaged in the procurement process. The Small Business Act in the US, for example, requires that awards of any size shall be ‘set aside’ for small business participation when there is a reasonable expectation that offers will be obtained from at least two small businesses and awards will be made at fair market price. Each agency has a minimum percentage that it must spend with US small businesses. This example shows that the UK Government could be doing more to encourage and support SMEs.

Provide constructive and clear feedback on lost bids

SMEs receive feedback from the procuring body following an unsuccessful bid only in a minority of cases, with 44 per cent of online respondents stating that they have never received any feedback on failed tenders. Of those who have, only 16 per cent believe this feedback has helped them to learn about the public procurement process.

The inexperience of SMEs in bidding to the public sector can frequently result in their repeatedly making unsuccessful bids – comprehensive feedback can ensure that mistakes are not replicated in future bids. It is recognised that the provision of feedback might encourage SMEs to challenge commissioners’ decisions, therefore it is suggested that SMEs formally waive their right to contest the award of the contract in return for useful, tailored and specific feedback which will allow them to improve their tenders and expend their limited resources effectively in future.

Minimum standards for feedback should be put in place, and should include not only detailed feedback on areas where the supplier fell down, but also information on other opportunities relevant to the supplier.

Support the expertise of its procurement professionals

SMEs often feel that Government procurement professionals do not always have the right skills and experience to perform their role in a fair and informed manner. When asked how the procurement process could be improved 19 per cent of respondents felt that procurement teams needed more knowledge of the relevant supplier markets and 18 per cent believed they needed a better understanding of how SMEs operate.

Better training for procurement professionals in how to carry out successful, unbiased procurement will go some way to ensuring that SMEs are treated more fairly within the procurement process. Hugh Morgan-Williams of Canford – a distributor of broadcasting, security and infrastructure equipment – also believes that better financial knowledge amongst procurement professionals would encourage a more accurate determination of a company’s capacity to deliver on contracts rather than the current situation where the focus is purely on strict financial criteria.

In addition, procurement officers need to make the effort to understand the industry from which they are procuring, as the experience of SMEs is that the lack of industry expertise amongst procurement professionals limits the extent to which SMEs can communicate effectively, expert and innovative solutions to procurement teams.

Make delivery terms and conditions more adaptive to the needs of the supplier

Fifty per cent of SMEs find it significantly more difficult to deliver to Government agencies than to the private sector, predominantly because of the additional formalities required by public sector clients. Public sector bodies should aim to be more flexible in their operating terms and conditions to ensure that they do not disadvantage SMEs disproportionately. For example, timescales for payment could be shortened to ensure that SMEs are not put under excessive financial strain in delivering to Government bodies.

Through ensuring that public bodies deal with SMEs in a manner which is appropriate to the way that they have to conduct their business, it is hoped that SMEs will show more enthusiasm for working with public bodies and attempt to generate more business in this area in the future.

DEFINING PUBLIC PROCUREMENT

Procurement is the purchase of goods or services from third parties. This covers a wide spectrum, from commodities and contracted-out services to major IT systems and construction projects. Procurement is ‘public’ if performed by “Governments, regional and local public authorities or bodies governed by public law (financed, supervised or managed for more than 50 per cent by public authorities).”

The particular procurement process followed by a public sector agency will depend on the (financial) size of the contract being awarded. When this is above the European Union threshold then all organisations are bound by exactly the same EU Directives.

UNDERSTANDING THE EU THRESHOLD AND PROCUREMENT DIRECTIVES

As a member of the EU, the UK is subject to its laws. For larger contracts, public procurement is subject to EU Directives. Below these thresholds, public sector bodies must regulate themselves.

The EU Procurement Directives set out the legal framework for public procurement and these Directives have been implemented into national law in the UK by regulations. The current regulations came into force on 31 January 2006. These regulations do not extend to Scotland where separate, but similar, regulations have been made.

The purpose of the EU Procurement Directives is to open up the public procurement market and to ensure the free movement of supplies, services and works within the EU, with the ultimate aim of achieving better value for money. SMEs should be aware that, under EU Directives, companies from anywhere within the 27 Member States are equally allowed to bid for a UK contract. In practice, this

does not happen in most cases for smaller contracts.

Above these thresholds, all contracts must be advertised in the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU). However, a number of different competitive tendering processes may be followed depending on the complexity of the contract.

It is asserted that value for money will best be achieved by fair and open competition. To this end the tender process must comply with EU regulations, the most important principles being:

- equal treatment
- non-discrimination
- mutual recognition
- proportionality
- transparency

There are four competitive tender processes. When SMEs are bidding for public contracts it is important to establish what type of competitive tender process is being used. This will inform SMEs how long the process is going to be, how much communication is going to be possible between the commissioner and themselves and how many other people are likely to be bidding. For example, if you are invited to bid at the second stage of a restricted tender you are likely to have less competition than in an unrestricted procedure.

Open Procedure

Under the Open Procedure, all interested candidates who respond to an OJEU advertisement must be invited to tender. This procedure does not restrict who can bid in any way because it does not allow any form of prequalification or pre-selection.

Restricted Procedure

Interested parties are invited to respond to an OJEU advertisement by submitting an Expression of Interest. In this they show how their organisation can meet defined criteria in terms of technical capability and financial standing. Based on this information, a shortlist of candidates is then drawn up and invited to tender. Following this there is no scope to negotiate with tenderers following receipt of bids. This is the most commonly used procedure because it allows contracting authorities to restrict the number of candidates they consider.

Competitive Dialogue Procedure

This procedure is used for complicated procurements where flexibility is needed – for example, where the authority does not have the technical knowledge to describe the technical means which would satisfy its aims and objectives. Like the Restricted Procedure, a pre-selection stage is used, but the difference is that there then follows a dialogue stage where shortlisted parties are invited to discuss the tender with the authority. After this, the contenders are invited to submit their tender.

Competitive Negotiated Procedure

This procedure is used only where the others will not or have not worked. The guidelines give very specific circumstances when the procedure may be valid: competition is not viable or appropriate; other procedures have not produced an acceptable tender; work is needed for research and development purposes; or prior overall pricing is not possible. This route to procurement is rarely used.

UNDERSTANDING PROCUREMENT PRACTICE BELOW THE EU THRESHOLD

For many SMEs, smaller contracts will have more potential than larger ones. Although contracts below the EU threshold are not subject to EU law, the matter is complicated for SMEs because there is no particular policy which all public sector organisations in England are required to follow.

Having said that, even below the threshold the basic principles of the Directives of non-discrimination, equal treatment, transparency, mutual recognition and proportionality apply. All organisations responsible for spending public money “*have a duty to operate in an open and transparent way.*” For example, the Local Government Act

1972 states that local authorities must put in place standing orders for providing works, goods and services which encourage competition and regulate how suppliers are invited to provide quotes.

It is important that SMEs familiarise themselves with these rules because they need to be aware that the size of the contract will affect the method by which public organisations procure their services. They also need to be aware that there will be subtle variations between organisations – for example, where they set their limits so that a contract which does not need to be competitively tendered for in one borough might well be in another.

PUBLIC PROCUREMENT POLICY AND SMES

The Government recognises that SMEs make an invaluable contribution to the economy, particularly with respect to public procurement. It also recognises that there are a number of barriers which prevent SMEs participating in the procurement process. As a result, many public bodies have introduced measures aimed at assisting SMEs in accessing public contracts. However, it seems unclear, as yet, whether these are actually effective.

Many of the guidelines which have been issued on the subject describe what public bodies should do to encourage SMEs, but less well documented are specific examples of good practice – from either side.

Indeed, it could be said that an entirely inconsistent message is being given out. For example, the Better Regulation Commission suggests that: “*The guidance available from the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) on local Government procurement tends to emphasise procurement risks and compliance with procurement and other regulations and gives little practical guidance on how to encourage a diverse range of suppliers.*”

RECENT GOVERNMENT STRATEGY ON PUBLIC PROCUREMENT

The Treasury’s policy paper *Transforming Government Procurement* sets out the latest strategy for public procurement. It describes the successes which have followed from policy since the Gershon Review. It also describes what should be gained from public procurement going forward, and how this is to be delivered.

Transforming Government Procurement outlines three areas that must be taken into consideration within all Government procurement. It is important that SMEs understand what these targets are and think about how they can work to meet these targets.

The three areas seen as important for development in the future are:

- public service reform
- sustainable procurement
- innovation in public procurement

Public service reform

The Government aims to deliver the world-class public services that the British public demands. It sees procurement as a key route to delivering reform. This might be of particular relevance to SMEs because they are perceived to be leaders in innovation, which drives improvements in public service practice, and because it is recognised that they provide a high standard of service.

Sustainable procurement

The Government has defined goals for sustainable development. SMEs should be aware of these targets because it is conceivable that some SMEs will find it more difficult to conform to such environmental standards by virtue of their size. However, sustainable procurement targets might give SMEs local to the procuring body an advantage, as the body’s sustainability criteria might include being locally sourced.

Innovation in public procurement

The Government sees innovation within public procurement as the key to delivering high-quality public services. There is recognition that new products can potentially deliver better value for money than those that are tried and tested, and so a more outcome-based approach to procurement – rather than simply a cost-effective, single-solution approach – may be required. In theory, this is very positive for SMEs; not only are they acknowledged as the source of much innovation, but an outcome-based approach allows room for flexible methods of service delivery.

In addition, the Innovation Nation strategy published by the former Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) in March 2008 recognises the importance of innovation in stimulating growth within the UK economy and contributing to national prosperity. Reaching out to SMEs through public procurement will help to create demand for innovation and deliver social and economic benefits. In order to achieve this, an ‘Innovation Procurement Plan’ will form part of each Government department’s commercial strategy, “*setting out how it will drive innovation through procurement and use innovative procurement practices.*” (Innovation Nation, DIUS, March 2008)

GOVERNMENT RECOGNITION OF THE BENEFITS OF PROCURING FROM SMES

The Office of Government Commerce (OGC) and the Small Business Service – a branch of the former DTI, which ceased to exist in March 2007 – have produced several documents outlining the benefits of procuring public services or goods from SMEs.

These fall broadly into the following three categories:

Better value for money:

- Bringing in more suppliers will often bring greater competition to the marketplace, thereby reducing the costs of procurement from all suppliers;
- SMEs have lower administrative overheads and management costs than larger firms. Depending on the nature of the procurement, this can result in lower prices.

Better quality of service:

- SMEs have short management chains and approval routes, so they can respond quickly to changing requirements. SMEs may also be highly focused on particular markets, making them particularly responsive to changes in those markets;
- Business from large organisations is important to the SME. This can result in a better, and often more personal, level of service and in a better relationship with the supplier;
- The SME may also be more willing and able to tailor a product or service to meet specific customer needs than a large firm that sells an established offering;
- Many SMEs, including social enterprises, Voluntary and Community Organisations (VCOs) and Black and Minority Ethnic communities (BMEs), supply higher quality specialist products or services than larger suppliers, either because larger suppliers are discouraged by the limited demand, or because the SME has skills, originality and commitment in that field greater than those found in their large company competitors.

Innovation:

- SMEs can bring innovation through, for example, the early exploitation of new technology, providing products or services in new or underdeveloped markets, or by using innovation to differentiate themselves from established market players.

Despite outlining these potential benefits of SME involvement, the DTI was keen to point out that these are not necessarily true of all circumstances and that the size of the benefit might be hard to quantify, which may explain why the benefits are not necessarily recognised by public sector organisations. This is also perhaps because the gain from using smaller suppliers comes in the form of ‘willingness to go the extra mile’, in a range of areas, some of which are very niche, and is an intangible and unquantifiable quality.

SMALL BUSINESS RESEARCH INITIATIVE – GIVING SMES ACCESS TO RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT FUNDING

The Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI) was launched in 2001 and aimed to increase cross-departmental research and development spend with technology SMEs to 2.5 per cent by 2005. This funding is not given in the form of grants but is based on competitive tendering. It aims to encourage SMEs which are already in the market, and to create opportunities for new innovative (technology- or knowledge-based) businesses.

BIS figures show that all departments exceeded this target in the financial year 2006-07. However, there was a large variation in the extent to which this target was exceeded between departments, with the Department of Communities and Local Government, the Health and Safety Executive and the Department for Work and Pensions purchasing the largest proportion from SMEs.

In 2008 the programme was reformed to ‘increase its impact’. The programme has become more focused so that it more clearly defines the objectives departments are trying to meet. The reformed SBRI programme is managed by the Technology Strategy Board, a business-led Non Departmental Public Body.

Although the reformed programme is still in its infancy, it has potential to open up funding to SMEs with innovative offerings. Whilst the funding is not exclusively available to SMEs, it is envisaged that most of it will go to SMEs. It has the potential to be successful for two reasons: firstly, it gives SMEs access to finance for feasibility testing which it might not otherwise be able to access; and, secondly, because its lack of prescriptiveness allows room for SMEs which might otherwise find the public procurement process too constraining.

EXISTING GOVERNMENT SUPPORT FOR SMES

The Government is starting to offer more support to SMEs through, for example, good practice guides and online information sources. The following section covers a selection of these.

Small Business Friendly Concordat: good practice guidance

The Small Business (SME) Friendly Concordat is a voluntary, non-statutory Code of Practice which was developed in 2005 following the National Procurement Strategy for Local Government 2004. The purpose is to set out what small firms and others supplying local Government can expect when tendering for local authority contracts. It is intended to include steps that all contracting authorities can take to ensure that SMEs are treated equally.

The Small Business Friendly Concordat includes statements which increase the supplier base – for example, stating that it will publish on its website:

- guidance for suppliers on how to do business with councils
- details of forthcoming bidding opportunities
- contact details for each contract, with appropriate links to any regional site
- details of its key suppliers

The Concordat states that it will advertise contracts, using a range of publications and other means in order to encourage greater diversity and competition, since “*small businesses often experience difficulties in breaking into local government procurement.*”

It also makes statements that aim at developing the supply chain, including that it will:

- Work with Prime Contractors – both at tender stage and during the life of a contract – to establish the contribution that small firms, ethnic minority businesses, social enterprises and voluntary and community sector suppliers can play in the supply chain;
- Provide details of its Prime Contractors on its website.

The Concordat also advises that local authorities should work with SMEs to understand their capabilities, stating that it will give potential suppliers an opportunity to discuss the procurement in order to understand the requirements and assess their own suitability.

Supply2.gov.uk

The portal www.supply2.gov.uk was established in 2006 and is a Government-backed website which also has access to other sites with lower-value (under £100,000) contracts. All public bodies have been encouraged to advertise their contracts on supply2.gov.uk, which also has links to the Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI)'s research and design contracts.

Constructionline

Constructionline is a service which accredits construction companies for use by public sector organisations. Over half of all the 12,500 firms registered with Constructionline have an annual turnover of less than £1 million. Sole traders or small firms can join together and register as one supplier to bid for contracts which require combined skills. It also provides details of a helpline in the registration information. The registration fee depends on the size of the business registering.

Training in public procurement

The Government provides information on public procurement processes through Business Link, the publicly funded support service for businesses. The Government also provides training for businesses in public procurement through learndirect.

The OGC document *Tendering for Public Contracts – A Guide for Small Businesses* recommends that SMEs should look at sub-contracting opportunities. (The OGC has also published a guide giving examples of large businesses which seek help with central Government contracts) This is borne out by the latest BIS survey which suggests that, if sub-contracting is taken into consideration, SME share is increased.

However, the guide does point out that there is no single place for SMEs to go to find out about such opportunities. It might become more of a requirement for SMEs to tap into this market as centralised procuring becomes more commonplace.

THE PRE-QUALIFICATION QUESTIONNAIRE FOR BELOW-THRESHOLD PROCUREMENT

A simplified national Pre-Qualification Questionnaire (PQQ) for sub-EU threshold procurements was launched by the OGC in August 2005 (see www.ogc.gov.uk).

The PQQ is intended to enable public sector purchasers to identify the most suitable suppliers to invite to tender for contracts. The OGC is now working to encourage adoption of the questionnaire by procurers. The PQQ is intended to reduce the time businesses have to spend providing information when bidding for Government contracts. It will greatly reduce the work needed to reformat the same information for subsequent contracts.

PQQs can, however, add to the bureaucratic burden on SMEs that already find it difficult to bid once for a contract.

BEST PRACTICE IN PUBLIC PROCUREMENT ABROAD

There are examples of procurement practice from abroad which can help inform UK policy, in order to level the playing field for SMEs. Some of these come from within the EU, and thus have to conform to EU Procurement Directives; some are from further afield and reflect a culture generally more supportive of SMEs.

Best practice abroad: US

Small Business Innovation Research programme

The US has a long-standing set of policies to favour small businesses in public procurement, including the Small Business Innovation Research programme (SBIR) and 'Set Asides' – where, as previously noted, the Small Business Act requires awards to be set aside for small business participation under certain conditions. The US is generally acknowledged to have a more enterprising culture which is, as a result, more encouraging of SMEs.

The SBIR programme awards over \$2 billion in value across 4000 contracts to US small businesses each year. The value of SBIR

contracts tends to be significantly larger than UK grants with a common contract value around \$850k and no upper limit. In addition, the value of the SBIR contracts covers the total funding for the project and companies are permitted to apply for multiple contracts.

A number of efficiencies in the SBIR programme have contributed to its success since inception in 1982 and these are documented in the Centre for Business Research report.

These efficiencies include:

- complete transparency in terms of topics, award winners and amounts
- business ownership of the intellectual property developed
- companies do not have to be established until awards have been won
- 100% funding of all contract costs plus a profit element

Unlike the UK where small businesses are required to go through extensive application processes, the US Government enables SMEs to have easier access to funding and support. The SBIR programme is just one example of how the US Government provides financial support for small businesses to encourage an innovation-friendly culture.

Best practice abroad: Ireland

Encouraging collaboration

The Irish Central Border Area Network was established in 1995 as a group of councillors from the central Ireland/Northern Ireland border area *“to respond to the unique economic and social needs of the central border region.”*

It has recently concluded a two-year procurement programme which involved 107 small businesses across Ireland, which was part-funded by the EU and supported by Enterprise Ireland and local councils. The programme was designed to help companies get to grips with public sector procurement.

Not only did the programme provide businesses with 'individual, tailored training', it encouraged collaboration between businesses. Thus it was able to: *“create some remarkable results in terms of developing associate and cross-border links, developing staff and actually winning public sector tenders.”*

This opportunity for networking with other SMEs and the development of associate links, allowed SMEs to seriously consider securing public sector work as a future business strategy – many of them had never done so before. It is worth noting that these relationships are ongoing, not special-purpose vehicles, and so have the potential to be sustainable and continue providing opportunities to these SMEs into the future. Ultimately, the scheme has given the companies it involved the confidence and the tools needed to compete in the public sector procurement market.

Training procurement professionals

Like the UK, Ireland sees a more innovative approach to the purchasing of goods and services as key to better value procurement. It is acknowledged that it is not easy for SMEs to understand the needs of contracting authorities and that one way to address this is to provide training and guidance for authorities, putting special emphasis on the situation of SMEs. This will allow procurement officers to design award procedures which ensure SMEs can compete with larger companies on an equal footing.

Ireland's National Public Procurement Policy Unit (NPPPU) promotes a more strategic and professional procurement approach. The NPPPU endorses a variety of training programmes to address the building of the necessary expertise within contracting organisations. These include a postgraduate MBS course in Strategic Procurement at Dublin City University Business School, which commenced in September 2006. In addition, a new Certificate in Strategic Procurement has been introduced by the Institute of Public Administration, a public sector educational and training body.



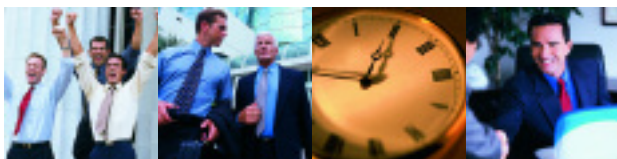
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The PASS consultancy's mission is to help you deliver the best in government procurement through:

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- Innovative approaches to knowledge transfer within government
- Joined-up government
- Improved performance indicators
- Strategic direction and performance
- Opportunities offered by e-government
- Capacity to deliver change to meet identified needs
- Continuous improvement of services and challenging poor performance
- Sustainable development within decision-making processes and delivery of services
- EU-compliant processes
- Best practice procurement training



PASS MARK HEALTH CHECK

The *PASS* service can help your organisation examine its current procurement organisational structures, strategies, processes, practices and related strengths and weaknesses. It delivers a detailed *PASS Mark Health Check Outcome Highlight Report (OHR)* that outlines areas of strength as well as those requiring further attention, and provides an outline *Project Initiation Document (PID)* designed to deliver a more effective and efficient tendering process that will help you achieve optimum performance and better value-for-money procurement.

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The key objective of public procurement professionals is to ensure that the most suitable supplier is selected to provide goods and services on terms which are likely to offer the best value for money. The *PASS* service helps you meet this requirement and deliver contracts that offer best value-for-money terms with suppliers who will execute them efficiently.

PASS TRAINING

Our consultants can provide you with bespoke training packages to suit your needs. Consultancy and training is available for the following: environmental purchasing, partnering, evaluation, e-government, supplier debriefing, UK legal processes and precedents, contract management, EU-compliant tendering and much more.

PASS ONLINE GUIDANCE

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PASS IN-HOUSE PRESENTATIONS

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For further information on the **PASS** service, contact our **PASS Team** on **0845 270 7055**, email pass@bipsolutions.com or visit www.bipsolutions.com/pass/