

Sources of Public Sector Tenders and Contracts

Business Information Factsheet
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Introduction

In 2015/16, the public sector spent more than £200 billion buying goods and services from suppliers. Local authorities, government departments and agencies, the NHS, police authorities, prison authorities, universities, colleges and schools are just some of the bodies that procure by public tendering.

Small firms can benefit from tendering for public sector contracts, with recent UK Government and European (EU) initiatives making it easier to access and compete for them.

This factsheet lists online resources providing information about public sector tender opportunities and contracts. It includes EU websites, UK and national government portals and sector-specific resources. It also gives examples of commercial subscription services listing public sector contracts.

European resources

Tenders Electronic Daily (TED)

Under EU legislation, all European public sector contract opportunities valued over a certain threshold, apart from a small number of exempted services, must be listed in the 'Official Journal of the European Union' (OJEU). (The OJEU thresholds vary depending on the type of contract. Go to www.ojec.com/thresholds.aspx for details.)

These opportunities are published online via the Tenders Electronic Daily (TED) website. Registration is free and allows suppliers to access the full website content, personalise searches and receive e-mail alerts. Suppliers can also download an app to access contract opportunities via their smartphone.

Go to <http://ted.europa.eu/TED/main/HomePage.do> for more information.

Enterprise Europe Network (EEN)

The Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) helps small and medium-sized firms take advantage of business opportunities in the EU and beyond. Suppliers from the UK and the Republic of Ireland can submit a profile to the EEN's database of opportunities, which enables firms to find suppliers, technology transfer partners and research partners in more than 60 countries. Suppliers should contact their regional EEN office to submit their details.

Go to www.enterprise-europe.co.uk for more information.

UK Government resources (general)

Contracts Finder

Contracts Finder is an online database that enables suppliers to search for information about government agency and local authority procurement contracts worth more than £10,000. Registration is free and suppliers can sign up for e-mail notifications of public sector tender opportunities in their local area or in a particular sector.

Go to www.gov.uk/contracts-finder for more information.

Crown Commercial Service (CCS)

The Crown Commercial Service (CCS) is a government executive agency sponsored by the Cabinet Office. It is responsible for public sector procurement policy and direct buying. It publishes information for suppliers, including details of tenders awarded. These can be useful for small firms who are interested in approaching current suppliers about sub-contracting opportunities.

The CCS also publishes details of forthcoming tenders in its 'procurement pipeline' (<http://ccs-agreements.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/procurement-pipeline>). Suppliers must be registered on the CCS eSourcing Portal to respond to tenders. Suppliers will need a unique 9-digit identifier known as a D-U-N-S number before they can register. Firms can obtain a D-U-N-S number free of charge from www.dnb.co.uk/duns-number/lookup.html.

Go to www.gov.uk/government/publications/become-a-crown-commercial-service-supplier/becoming-a-supplier-through-the-crown-commercial-service-what-you-need-to-know for more information.

Government eMarketplace

The Government eMarketplace is an online marketplace that allows government departments and agencies to request quotes from suppliers for projects below the OJEU threshold without going through a formal tendering process. Registration is free, but firms will need to obtain a DUNS number before they can register.

Go to https://buyers.procserveonline.com/otis/preregistration/splash_page.html for more information.

Government departments

While many government departments procure goods and services through the CCS, others use a variety of channels and may publish detailed guidance on their departmental procurement policy. For example, the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) publishes information about how to bid for low-value DWP contracts and provides details of firms that may offer sub-contracting opportunities. Go to www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-work-pensions/about/procurement for more information.

The Department for Transport also publishes detailed guidance about its procurement policy. Go to www.gov.uk/government/collections/procurement-at-the-department-for-transport for more information.

Go to www.gov.uk/government/organisations for a full list of government departments.

Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI)

The Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI) enables small firms to compete for funding to develop and demonstrate innovative solutions to challenges set by specific public sector bodies. Winners receive an initial contract to demonstrate the feasibility of their idea. The SBRI gives firms the opportunity to work with a public sector buyer, while retaining their intellectual property rights.

Go to www.gov.uk/apply-funding-innovation#live-funding-competitions for details of current competitions.

National resources

The three UK National Assemblies and Executives advertise country-specific public sector contract opportunities on their dedicated websites.

Public Contracts Scotland

Public Contracts Scotland is an online portal providing access to details of public sector contract opportunities in Scotland. Suppliers can register free of charge to receive free e-mail alerts, download notices and attachments or respond with an expression of interest. The website also provides details of events that enable buyers and suppliers to meet each other in person. Public Contracts Scotland also delivers the Supplier Development Programme, which provides free training courses to help suppliers respond to tenders more successfully and improve their bids.

Go to www.publiccontractsscotland.gov.uk for more information.

Sell2Wales

Sell2Wales is an online portal providing details of public sector contracts in Wales. Registration is free and suppliers can be based in the UK or any member state of the World Trade Organization. Registered suppliers can set up a profile to promote their business to potential buyers and sign up for customised e-mail alerts.

Go to www.sell2wales.gov.wales for more information.

eSourcing NI

eSourcing NI is a tendering website that lists current public sector contract opportunities in Northern Ireland. Suppliers must register on the website to respond to a tender. The Central Procurement Directorate (CPD, www.finance-ni.gov.uk/topics/procurement) provides further information about the tendering process in Northern Ireland.

Go to <https://e-sourcingni.bravosolution.co.uk/web/login.shtml> to access eSourcing NI.

Sector-specific resources

Digital Marketplace

Digital Marketplace is an online portal that helps public sector organisations source cloud-based services such as web-hosting, accounts services or document-sharing tools. Suppliers of web- and cloud-based services can apply to register their details on the Digital Marketplace through the CCS's eSourcing Portal (<https://crowncommercialservice.bravosolution.co.uk/web/login.shtml>).

Go to www.digitalmarketplace.service.gov.uk for more information.

Constructionline

Constructionline is a national online portal of suppliers to the construction industry. To register, suppliers must meet a series of criteria and submit accounts, references and evidence of insurance. Registration fees vary according to the supplier's turnover and start from £78 per year. Registered suppliers are listed on the database and can access the Constructionline Opportunities Notice Board, where buyers advertise work leads and supply-chain opportunities. The website also features a 'supplier zone', which includes help, tips, resources and case studies for potential suppliers.

Go to www.constructionline.co.uk for more information.

NHS Supply Chain

The NHS Supply Chain website lists National Health Service contract opportunities online. Its supplier pages provide information about procurement opportunities, the tendering and contract process and how to work with the NHS supply chain.

Go to www.supplychain.nhs.uk/suppliers for more information.

Legal Aid Agency

The Legal Aid Agency (LAA) lists tender opportunities for legal aid contracts in crime, very high-cost cases and civil legal advice. Legal aid providers must register on the LAA's eTendering portal to view tender documents. Registration is free.

Go to www.gov.uk/legal-aid-tender-for-contracts for more information.

Further Education Colleges e-tendering website (in-tend)

The Further Education Colleges e-tendering website (in-tend) lists contracts and tender opportunities for further education colleges. Suppliers can register for free-to-access tender documents and express interest in tender opportunities.

Go to <https://in-tendhost.co.uk/fe/asp/FAQ> for more information.

Bluelight eTendering

The Bluelight eTendering portal lists contracts and tender opportunities for the police and fire and rescue services. Suppliers can search and respond to tender notices free of charge, as well as receive e-mail alerts about tender opportunities in their local area.

Go to <https://bluelight.eu-supply.com> for more information.

Local opportunities

Individual organisations often advertise contract opportunities on their websites. Contracts of low value may not be advertised at all, so firms may find it worthwhile researching relevant public sector organisations directly to find out about their procurement policies.

Local authorities

Local authority websites often feature detailed information about how they procure goods and services. While local authorities advertise high-value contracts through websites such as TED and Contracts Finder, they often have smaller contracts that they put out to tender. Working on smaller deals to begin with is a good way for suppliers to build up experience of applying for and fulfilling this type of contract.

A growing number of local authorities also list tender opportunities on regional procurement portals, such as YOR Tender, which lists tenders for Yorkshire and the Humber, and NEPO for the north east of England. These types of portals are a good way to access details of larger contracts covering multiple local authority areas or entire regions.

Go to www.gov.uk/find-your-local-council to search for local authority contact details.

Universities

Universities usually publish their procurement policies on their websites, with some listing contract opportunities or providing e-tendering portals.

Most universities are also members of a consortium which typically brings together universities in a particular region so they can use their combined purchasing power to make efficiencies and savings. These consortia often list tender opportunities on behalf of individual universities, as well as larger contracts covering multiple universities. Examples include the London Universities Purchasing Consortium and the Southern Universities Purchasing Consortium.

Go to www.gov.uk/check-a-university-is-officially-recognised/recognised-bodies for a list of universities in the UK.

Commercial resources

There are also a number of independent commercial resources that collate public sector contract opportunities. Examples include:

PublicTenders.net

PublicTenders.net provides customised e-mail alerts of OJEU and lower-value public sector contract opportunities. The website offers two subscription options: a standard subscription

costing £199 (excluding VAT) and a premium subscription costing £349 (excluding VAT). Premium subscribers receive e-mail reminders of tender deadlines and can create up to 20 customised e-mail alerts about new tenders.

Go to www.publictenders.net for more information.

mytenders

mytenders allows suppliers to search and respond to public sector tender notices free of charge. However, suppliers cannot set up e-mail alerts. Website users who wish to do so are directed to the premium subscription service, Tenders Direct.

Go to www.mytenders.org for more information.

Tenders Direct

Tenders Direct provides subscribers with daily e-mail alerts about OJEU and lower-value tender opportunities. A one-year subscription costs £995 (excluding VAT).

Go to www.tendersdirect.co.uk for more information.

Tracker

Tracker provides a range of online services, including public and private sector tender alerts, market intelligence, public sector spend analysis and market leads. Subscription costs vary depending on the services and region covered (UK and Ireland, Europe or global). Tracker offers a free one-month trial, and subscription options start from £1,375 per year.

Go to www.trackerintelligence.com for more information.

ProContract

ProContract allows suppliers to search for public, private and third sector tender notices free of charge. Suppliers receive daily e-mail alerts of tender opportunities in a particular sector or geographical area.

Go to <https://procontract.due-north.com/Register> for more information.

Hints and tips

- Trade or professional associations may provide useful information and advice about tendering for public sector contracts.
- Suppliers should only bid for projects that they are confident they can deliver efficiently.
- Suppliers must meet all deadlines outlined by the buyer during the tender process, ensure that all paperwork is returned on time and provide any extra information requested promptly.
- Suppliers should aim to match the buyer's requirements point by point in their bid.
- Suppliers can ask for feedback on the bids they submit and public sector organisations must respond within 20 days. Such information can help improve future bids.

- If a bid is successful, the price quoted in the tender is not open to further negotiation. This means it is essential for suppliers to cost their bids carefully and check them thoroughly. A simple error in a calculation could cost a supplier many thousands of pounds.
- Contracts with public organisations are governed by the Freedom of Information Act, so information must be made available to anyone who requests it. If a bid contains commercially sensitive information or 'trade secrets', the supplier should make that clear to the buyer and request a non-disclosure agreement if appropriate. For more information on such agreements, go to www.gov.uk/government/publications/non-disclosure-agreements.
- Suppliers can contact the Crown Commercial Service (CCS) Mystery Shopper scheme to raise concerns about public procurement practices, such as late payment or unfair contract terms. The CCS investigates all complaints made through the Mystery Shopper scheme and carries out proactive spot checks on individual procurement exercises. For more information, go to www.gov.uk/government/publications/mystery-shopper-scope-and-remit

Further information

Publications

'How to become a Crown Commercial Service supplier'

Crown Commercial Service (CCS)

Website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/become-a-crown-commercial-service-supplier

'Doing business with government: guide for SMEs'

Crown Commercial Service (CCS)

Website: www.gov.uk/doing-business-with-government-a-guide-for-smes

Useful contacts

The Crown Commercial Service (CCS) is a government executive agency that gives advice on procurement and provides commercial services to the public sector.

Tel: 0345 010 3503 (Supplier support)

Website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/crown-commercial-service

Contracts Finder is the government portal that provides small firms with information about public sector contract opportunities.

Website: www.gov.uk/contracts-finder

Wales

The National Procurement Service was set up to manage public sector procurement in Wales. Its website includes details of planned public sector contracts.

Tel: 0300 790 0170

Website: <http://nps.gov.wales/?lang=en>

Sell2Wales is an initiative that helps small firms to supply the public sector in Wales.

Website: www.sell2wales.gov.wales

Scotland

The Scottish Government's Procurement & Commercial Directorate sets the policy for public sector procurement in Scotland. Its website provides information for suppliers about selling to the public sector in Scotland.

Tel: (0141) 242 5466

Website: www.gov.scot/Topics/Government/Procurement

Public Contracts Scotland is an online portal providing information on opportunities to tender for contracts with Scottish public sector organisations.

Tel: 0800 222 9003

Website: www.publiccontractsscotland.gov.uk

Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) provides guidance and information on contract opportunities in Northern Ireland.

Tel: (028) 9081 6200

Website: www.finance-ni.gov.uk/central-procurement-directorate

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