

Guidance note on how to do business with the Scottish Funding Council (SFC)

Introduction

The Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council is the national body responsible for allocating public funds for learning and teaching, skills development, research, innovation and other costs such as staff, buildings and equipment in Scotland's 19 universities and 26 colleges. We invest our funding, around £1.9 billion each year, in ways that support the Scottish Government's national priorities. We are more commonly known as the Scottish Funding Council or SFC.

In order to provide our services effectively we look to work with suppliers who provide cost effective goods and services of a high quality. Contracts will be awarded to suppliers who demonstrate the best value for money – that is the optimum combination of whole life costs and quality.

This guidance document provides an overview of how to tender for our public contracts and maximise your chances of success.

Principles of public sector contracting

Procurement at SFC takes place within the framework of the EU Procurement Directive which is based on five key principles which always apply to public sector procurement, regardless of contract value:

- Equal treatment.
- Transparency.
- Proportionality.
- Mutual recognition.
- Confidentiality.

These are incorporated into the Public Contracts (Scotland) Regulations 2006 which aim to encourage competition. The regulations set out threshold values above which contract opportunities must be advertised in the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU).

Further to this SFC has signed up to the Suppliers Charter – a joint undertaking with suppliers to improve and facilitate access to public contracts in Scotland.

Where to find contract opportunities

SFC contract opportunities are advertised on the Scottish Government web portal: www.publiccontractsscotland.gov.uk. Public Contracts Scotland represents a free and easy way to access details of all public sector contract opportunities in Scotland.

What information will I have to provide?

You should expect to provide information on how you would deliver the specific requirements of a contract, including relevant previous experience. The following areas may also be considered during a tender process:

- Policies and procedures e.g. Health and Safety/Equality.
- Quality Assurance standards.
- Financial Stability.
- Insurance.
- Technical Capacity.

How to increase your chances of success

Outlined below are some important tips to consider when competing for SFC contracts:

- Investigate your sector and only bid for work that you are sure that you can do. If you are an SME do not assume that you will be ineligible. If it is a particularly large contract then consider partnering or subcontracting.
- Make sure you know early in the procedure what format you have to use to complete the tender documents, ensure you know what timescales you are working to and what additional tasks may be involved in participation, e.g. providing samples.
- Plan and cost the full extent of delivering the contract to ensure you have taken into account all overheads and resource implications.
- Always provide the information you are asked for and complete the documentation fully. If you are unsure of anything, contact the Procurement team in good time.
- Remember that at the Invitation to tender stage you are being evaluated on how well you would be able to deliver the goods or services required in line with the criteria given. Pay close attention to the evaluation criteria and complete your tender accordingly.

- Remember that your bid will be evaluated only on the information that you provide as part of the tender process. Do not assume if you have worked for SFC before that this will be taken into account. You should detail all relevant experience in your tender documentation.
- Be patient as the procedure can take several weeks/months from advertising to award.

Sub-contracting

Many of the highest-value public sector contracts go to large companies who have the cost advantage of a powerful supply chain. SFC may provide information about the main supplier/s who has won a contract, enabling new or smaller companies to contact them direct regarding subcontracting opportunities.

Feedback

It is important that suppliers seek and receive constructive feedback to help improve performance in future bidding exercise. Suppliers should contact the SFC Procurement contact if they wish to receive feedback.

Further Information

Further information of SFC can be found on our website www.sfc.ac.uk together with contact details of the Procurement team.

Further information on public procurement in Scotland can be found on the Scottish Government website including information on the Procurement Journey which facilitates best practice and consistency across the public sector:
www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Government/Procurement.