

The Supply Chain Network – Making Opportunities, Visible, Accessible and Winnable!

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

The tendering process can be daunting for both experienced and inexperienced bidders. We've collated some FAQs which we hope will help clarify matters for you. To keep things simple, we've divided them into 3 themes:

- [Finding opportunities](#)
- [Understanding how to bid](#)
- [Improving your chances of winning](#)

If you have any further questions, please contact us and we'll help you out.

You can find more information on terminology used in tenders in the accompanying Aide Memoire resource.

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Finding Opportunities

1. Where can I find out about public sector tender opportunities?

There are two main portals where public sector opportunities are advertised: [Contracts Finder](#) and [Find a Tender](#).

Both are free online government portals which allow suppliers of goods and services to search for information about contracts.

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- [Contracts Finder](#) advertises contracts worth over £10,000 (excluding VAT) with the government and its agencies.
- [Find a Tender](#) advertises contracts usually above £118,000 in the UK's public and utilities sectors.

You can use both portals to:

- Search for contract opportunities in different sectors.
- Find out what's coming up in the future.
- Look up details of previous tenders and contracts.

On both portals you can register to create an account to get email updates and save your searches. You can still search and apply for contracts without an account.

[Procontract Due North](#) is another useful portal which also includes opportunities from the third sector and some private sector organisations. Registration with this portal will also ensure emails about opportunities get emailed to you and will increase your business's visibility to potential buyers.

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2. There are many procurement portals out there. Some of them are free whilst others charge a fee. Which should I use?

It's up to you! The free portals (e.g. [Contracts Finder](#) and [Find a Tender](#)) will provide you with the essential information about opportunities in your business area, and are searchable. Payable portals sometimes offer supplementary services; however, they can be expensive and before committing you should assess whether your business will truly use all of the services that a 'paid for' portal offers, or you could be wasting your money.

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Understanding how to bid

3. Is there any point in small businesses and sole traders bidding for a public sector contract?

Yes! Small businesses make up the majority of the UK business population. SMEs (Small and Medium sized Enterprise with fewer than 250 employees). In 2020, SMEs accounted for 99.9% of the UK's business population (6.0 million businesses). The government is committed to supporting start-ups and small businesses directly or via the supply chain, through public procurement. By 2022 the Government wants to



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spend £1 in every £3 with an SME. Contract notices advertising a tender will always state whether an opportunity is suitable for a small business.

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4. Can I bid jointly for a with another company or organisation?

Yes you can, but the legal entity that will be supplying the buyer must be named as the bidder in your tender response. This 'prime contractor' will manage the joint venture of / consortium between the companies that are bidding together. It will take overall responsibility for the delivery of the contract.

If you are not sure, it's always best to check with the buyer that they are happy with the arrangement you are proposing via a clarification question as soon as possible in the tender process or ideally ask the question before the tender comes to market.

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5. Will my bid be rejected if I can't provide all the information that the customer is asking for?

Probably. Responding to tenders is a competitive process. If you don't answer one of the mandatory questions in the tender, you will be submitting a non-compliant bid which stands every chance of being rejected by the buyer.

If you don't understand the question, (e.g., it may be poorly worded) you should consider asking a clarification question requesting clarity or an indication of what the question is requiring of bidders.

If you are just not able to answer the question because you don't have the technical or professional knowledge, capability or experience, you should consider whether this is a suitable opportunity for you.

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6. Will my tender response be accepted if I'm only a minute late submitting it?

No. If you miss the published deadline for submitting your tender response it will normally be rejected from the process. If submitting it through a portal the portal may automatically refuse to accept anything submitted after the deadline. It is very important that you allow plenty of time to submit your bid to account for any IT problems, delays in uploading, etc. Don't leave submission to the last moment.

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7. The tender documentation contains information that appears to be incorrect and unclear. Should I assume that this will be cleared up after award?

No. You should raise a clarification question as soon as possible explaining the issue or inaccuracy and ask the buyer to provide the correct information or to clarify what they mean. Sometimes mistakes are made in procurement documentation and it is essential that it is pointed out to the procurement team.

You will not be penalised for pointing out mistakes and inaccuracies or asking for clarification. You may, however, be penalised if you win a contract and cannot deliver because your assumptions during the bid were based on incorrect or unclear information. It is your responsibility as a bidder to know the details of what you're bidding for.

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8. I'm having problems understanding the tender. Can I just contact the buyer by email or telephone?

No! There will be a process for raising clarification process, and this process will be defined within the tender documents (usually in Instructions to Tenderers). Failure to follow the defined procedure may result in you being excluded from the tender process.

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9. The tender requires us to have several Policies that we don't have. Can we still take part in the tender process?

Yes. Procurement procedures now more frequently require bidders to commit that they will have specific procedures available for scrutiny if they win the contract. If you don't have the policies, you can still participate, however you should ensure that you develop the named policies since they are clearly a requirement for the business area that you are seeking to win contracts in. Good policies and procedures will also help you build good tender responses.

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10. The tender instructions state that they want answers to be provided within the tender document, but there's no space for answers in the document. What should I do?



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As with any aspect where the tender is asking for something that seems impossible to comply with, you should ask a clarification question. This will ensure that you do the right thing and submit a compliant bid.

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11. The tender timeline is extremely short and there are bank holidays during the timeline. I don't think we can produce a good tender in that amount of time. Should I withdraw?

No! Tender timelines can quite frequently be short and sometimes bank holidays are forgotten about when the timetable is being put together. If the timetable is genuinely short, including bank holidays, consider raising a clarification question to request an extension. All bidders will be subject to the same pressures regarding the timeline.

However, avoid asking for an extension unless it's a reasonable request (i.e., not just for the sake of it). Bidders who ask for extensions when they might not be necessary can give the buyer doubt that their service delivery might be questionable (i.e., if they can't do a bid in the time required, will they be able to fulfil a contract when time is tight?).

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12. The instructions give strict word limits which mean that we can't give much detail in our answer. We're thinking of adding attachments to give greater detail – is that ok?

The buyer's approach to bidders' attachments will be specified in Instructions to Tenderers. You should include your response in the word limit allowed, perhaps using diagrams where appropriate and where these are not word counted. If in doubt, always check the Instructions to Tenderers (or raise a clarification question if no information about attachments is provided) to ensure material in attachments is not excluded from marks.

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Improving your chances of winning

13. How much time can I expect to spend on a tender submission?

It will vary. It all depends on the nature of the procurement process and the complexity of the tender requirement. The key is to start your tender response as early as possible after publication as it will always take longer than you expect.



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14. What steps can I take to make it easier to respond to a tender?

Get 'bid ready!' The better prepared you are for a tender, the easier it will be:

- Ensure you know as much as possible about the buyer.
- Find out as much as possible about their requirements and pain points before the tender is released so that you can prepare a solution that will inform your responses.
- Ensure your policies and procedures are complete and up to date (they will most likely support your responses).
- Get case studies, testimonials and evidential data about your business to hand so that you can use it in your bid.
- Identify the likely competition, its strengths and weaknesses and how you can counter these in your bid.
- Ensure everyone in your organisation is aware of and committed to the bid as early as possible, ideally before it comes to market.
- If you need extra help from a specialist to complete your bid (e.g., help from specialist bid writers), identify the type of support needed and book it as early as possible so that it can get to know your business and 'hit the ground running' to support you.

Once the tender has been released:

- Read through ALL the tender documents promptly and fully.
- Trial run any spreadsheets you're required to complete and submit to ensure they work.
- Call for a kick off meeting to take place shortly after bid release for all involved in your bid to identify and acknowledge roles and responsibilities in your bid, and set a timetable for completing the tender which identifies bottlenecks and can manage these.
- Use the Kick Off to identify any issues in the buyer's requirements / specification; raise clarification questions as early as possible.

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15. There is a Bidders' Event in the bid timetable. Do I really need to go (I'm quite busy!)?

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You should always do your best to go to any Bidders' Event within the tender's process, or at least send a representative.

Bidders' Events are important opportunities for the buyer to explain to bidders what they want to achieve as a result of the procurement and how they envision the procurement process proceeding. Sometimes Bidders' Events are an opportunity to visit relevant facilities associated with the tender. Questions are often raised by bidders during the event. Although the buyer should keep a record of questions asked and will publish them later it's not quite the same as being there, since by attending you'll see which of your competitors are asking which questions – valuable information because it indicates areas where they may have or lack knowledge about the buyer or opportunity.

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16. Business is really busy, but a golden opportunity has come out to tender. I want to bid but don't have time. What should I do?

Firstly, consider your capacity: if you're really busy already, will you have enough time to deliver another contract effectively without letting the new client (or your existing clients) down? Secondly look at the tender itself. If you don't have time to write your bid but have sufficient budget to engage someone to help you out, consider hiring an experienced bid writer who could work with you to produce your bid. They will still need time input from you to understand the content that will need to be written, but the result should be a high quality bid being written whilst you continue with your day-to-day work.

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17. We're submitting many tenders, but our win rate is very low so we're thinking about giving up. Should we give up?

The following steps are worth considering to help you take steps towards improving your success in tendering for business.

- Firstly, ensure you're bidding on the opportunities that you stand the best chance of winning. These should be in line with your business strategy and ones that you can produce evidence in your bid that you are a reputable, capable, experienced supplier.
- Secondly, make sure you're looking at the feedback you're provided with when you get the award decision. If you'd like more information about how the buyer scored your bid, ask if you can have more feedback. You can then use this to improve on future answers.



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- iii. Thirdly, ensure that you prepare effectively for future tenders – see '[What steps can I take to make it easier to respond to a tender?](#)' above.
 - iv. Fourthly, ensure you allocate sufficient time and the right team to produce your tender. A committed, motivated team with a full understanding of the tender's requirements will go a long way to improve your chances of success.
 - v. Finally, if you've tried these steps, consider commissioning a bid professional to review your approach to tendering. They may identify factors that are obstacles to your win potential.
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18. If I failed in a previous tender with a buyer, will I still be considered for future tenders with that buyer?

Yes. Provided you meet the relevant tender qualification requirements, failure in a previous tender should not exclude you from responding to a new tender.

You should always ensure that you receive feedback about your bid from the buyer (even when you are successful). Acting on feedback from an unsuccessful tender improves your chances of success next time.

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