

Guidance note on how to do business with SQA

Introduction

The Scottish Qualifications Authority is an executive non-departmental public body (NDPB) sponsored by the Scottish Government Schools Directorate. It is the national body in Scotland responsible for the development, accreditation, assessment and certification of qualifications other than degrees.

The overall aim of SQA is to manage the qualifications system below degree level to allow students to fulfil their potential to participate in the economy, society and communities of Scotland.

In order to provide that service 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 SQA takes place within the framework of the EU directive¹ 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 2006² which aim to encourage competition and prohibit favouritism based on supplier location.

The regulations set out threshold values³ above which contract opportunities must be advertised in the OJEU.⁴

Further to this SQA has signed up to the Suppliers Charter⁵ — a joint undertaking with suppliers to improve and facilitate access to public contracts in Scotland.

Where to find contract opportunities

All SQA contract opportunities are advertised on the Scottish Government web portal: www.publiccontractsscotland.gov.uk.

Public Contracts Scotland⁶ 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. However, in some cases where there is a link to the contract, the Procurement team may ask for information relating to your business processes. For example, if a contract is for the provision of advice on Equality and Diversity, you could be asked how you deal with these issues in your own organisation.

The following areas among others may also be considered during a tender process:

- ◆ Policies & Procedures eg Health & Safety
- ◆ Quality Assurance Standards
- ◆ Business Probity issues
- ◆ Corporate Social Responsibility
- ◆ Financial Stability
- ◆ Insurance
- ◆ Capacity

How to increase your chances of success

Outlined below are some important tips to consider when competing for SQA 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 for a contract. If it is a particularly large contract then consider partnering or subcontracting. If it is within your capabilities then apply independently.
- ◆ 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, eg providing samples, site visits.

- ◆ Plan and cost the full extent of delivering the contract to ensure you have taken full account of overheads and resource implications.
- ◆ Always provide the information you are asked for and complete the documentation fully. If you are not sure 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 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 SQA before that this will be taken into account.
- ◆ Be patient as the procedure can take several weeks from advertising to award.
- ◆ Once the contract is awarded the management of the contract is critical and should be considered within any tender submission

Subcontracting

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

Feedback

It is important that suppliers seek and receive constructive feedback to help improve performance in future bidding exercises.

Some feedback on your tender will be given when you are notified of whether your bid has been successful or not. Feedback will be given on request for all contracts over the EC thresholds within 15 days.

For contracts under those values, SQA will provide debriefing as requested.

A Single Point of Enquiry (SPoE)⁷ has been established as an impartial point of contact for businesses where they can ask advice or raise concerns about public procurement practices in Scotland. It aims to provide businesses with advice on procurement legislation and practices and seek resolution of disputes regarding procurement practice.

Further information

Further information on SQA can be found on our website www.sqa.org.uk, together with contact details of the Procurement team.

References

All references contained within this document are detailed below;

¹ [EU Directive](#)

² [Public Contracts Scotland Regulations 2006](#)

³ [Threshold Values](#)

⁴ [OJEU](#)

⁵ [Suppliers Charter](#)

⁶ [Public Contracts Scotland](#)

⁷ [Single Point of Enquiry](#)

Further information can also be found on the Scottish Government website:

www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Government/Procurement