

Guidance Note on how to do business with SQA

Introduction

The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) is an executive non-departmental public body (NDPB) sponsored by the Scottish Government's Learning Directorate. It is the national accreditation and awarding body in Scotland and works in partnership with schools, colleges, universities and industry to provide high quality, flexible and relevant qualifications and assessments.

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 SQA 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 SQA 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

SQA 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 & Procedures e.g. Health & Safety / Equality
- ◆ Quality Assurance Standards
- ◆ Corporate Social Responsibility
- ◆ Financial Stability
- ◆ Insurance
- ◆ Technical 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. 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 account of all 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 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 SQA 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. SQA 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 exercises. Suppliers should contact the SQA Procurement contact if they wish to receive feedback.

A Single Point of Enquiry (SPoE) 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 any 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.

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