

# Guide to Public Sector Tendering

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### Introduction

Submitting a tender is common practice for businesses supplying goods or services to other businesses or the public sector.

At a basic level you expect to **quote** for a job or write a letter saying why you should be given the business.

More **formal tenders** often apply to bigger jobs or for supply contracts spread over time. Public sector work in particular - ranging from your local council or hospital to a central government department - has specific tendering processes.

Even if you don't win the work this time, writing a tender can clarify your aims, strengths and weaknesses and you can learn for next time by asking for feedback on your bid. It raises your profile with the customer and helps you learn about customers' needs.

This guide explains how to identify potential contracts, what to include in your tender and how to write it for the best chance of success.

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### Finding out about private and public contracts

You can find out about **private sector contracts** in a number of ways:

- build contacts with potential customers
- advertise in local and national newspapers
- advertise in trade and professional magazines covering your area of

business

- research contracts outside your business sector which may produce secondary contracts for you, eg if a new office block is built, it will need desks, carpets, signage, stationery, cleaning and laundry
- follow up press and other reports - a company may be expanding or sub-contracting part of a big order
- network and pick up information from other businesses

You can identify **public sector contracts** by:

- Following up contract notices published in newspapers and trade magazines.
- Searching Contracts Finder for government tender notices - [find government opportunities, tenders and contracts on Contracts Finder - Opens in a new window.](#)
- Finding out about the **Small Business Research Initiative** (SBRI). This provides funding for innovative products that could help solve a specific problem a government department or public sector organisation wants to solve. Successful applicants receive a **development contract** for the full cost of demonstrating the feasibility of their technology and the opportunity for subsequent funding for prototype development, whilst retaining the intellectual property. See our page on [the Small Business Research Initiative](#) in our guide on [support networks and facilities for innovation and R&D.](#)
- [Contact your local Enterprise Europe Network on the Enterprise Europe Network website - Opens in a new window.](#)

If you are interested in high value public sector contracts available in other European Union (EU) countries, you can search on the **Tenders Electronic Daily** (TED) website. This is the online version of the **Official Journal of the European Union** - where all contracts worth more than specified **EU procurement thresholds** are advertised.

You can [find information on non-EU public sector contracts on the UK Trade & Investment website \(registration required\) - Opens in a new window.](#)

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### Should you bid for a tender?

Preparing tenders can help you to win big orders but it can be time-consuming, cost money and tie up valuable resources. If you don't get the contract, the money and time spent is usually lost - so consider the key points below before setting out to tender.

#### Key points to consider before tendering

- Get hold of the bid documents and analyse them.
- Make sure you can match the technical, skill and experience requirements.
- Do you meet the necessary requirements - eg environmental and diversity?
- How much will it cost to prepare your bid?
- Would the work fit in with your strategy and positioning of your business?
- Estimate the costs of fulfilling the contract and whether or not you'd make enough money to justify it.
- Assess how the contract would affect your other work, staffing and ability to take on other new business.

You also need to consider how important the customer is to your business. Is this a good potential client or one you don't want to offend by not tendering? Consider how it would look from the client's point of view.

You can find out more about public sector contract opportunities and the tendering process involved in our guide [overview on selling to government](#).

[Search for government opportunities, tenders and contracts on Contracts Finder - Opens in a new window.](#)

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### Find out what the client wants

In order to gain a clearer understanding of a potential client's requirements, see if you can arrange a meeting or have a telephone conversation with them before you start work on the tender. You should always raise questions by phone or email if tender documents are unclear - on anything from deadlines to how you'd get paid.

Make sure the client is serious and that you're not there just to make up the numbers or to test the market. Sometimes customers may just be fishing for ideas they'll then use for themselves. You can prevent this from happening by requesting customers to sign a non-disclosure agreement before presenting your tender. See our guide on [non-disclosure agreements](#). But don't forget many clients genuinely want you to make a **creative contribution** and provide ideas.

If you're selling to the public sector, you can find advice on the processes involved in our guide [overview on selling to government](#).

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### What to put in your tender

Make sure you match the bid specification and answer all the questions.

Summarise your bid and explain why it answers the client's needs. Write this last but put it at the beginning of your tender.

### Crucial rules for your tender documentation

- **Focus on the client** - talk about their needs and how you can solve their problems. When you write about yourself, it's to prove you have the skills, experience and organisation to fulfil the client's requirements.
- Help the client by coming up with **ideas** - from alternative ways of doing things to how to tackle possible worries about future maintenance and staffing implications.
- If the client has provided a **qualification document**, make sure that you cover everything in the document.
- **Value for money** and not price alone decides most bids. Try to bring something to the work that can't be done by the client or your competitors. Emphasise business benefits, service improvements, risk reduction, low maintenance, quality, reliability, previous satisfied customers, lifetime costs etc.
- Analyse all the cost and **pricing factors** of the contract. Don't ignore fixed costs such as pay for staff who could be working on something else.
- Consider whether to include some **protection of your information** from future disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act. You may wish to indicate which

information you consider to be a 'trade secret' or is likely to prejudice your commercial interests if disclosed. You could also include a non-disclosure agreement. See our guide on [non-disclosure agreements](#).

- **Contract management** - show you have the resources to do the work in a cost-effective way to meet the client's needs, hit deadlines and respond flexibly to changing situations.
- Show you have thought about - and can manage - potential financial, commercial and legal **risks** that could cause contract failure.
- Give details of **your team**. Emphasise strengths - CVs or tailored biographies should highlight successes with similar projects as well as qualifications and experience.

- state the purpose and origin of the bid
- summarise your work as a contractor, past experience and credentials for this job
- say how you'll carry out the work, and how and when you will meet the client's needs
- explain the benefits and value for money of your bid
- detail when and how goods and services are to be delivered, and provide a timetable
- demonstrate your team's skills, experience of similar work and their responsibilities if you win the contract
- explain how you will manage the project
- give details of your pricing and any aftercare arrangements within the price
- be practical and identify potential problems, but do not make promises that are clearly impossible for you to deliver

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### Writing your tender

Once you have decided to bid, you'll need to decide how you'll manage the bid:

- Who gathers information and does research?
- Who co-ordinates all the material you need?
- Who writes the drafts?
- Who checks them?
- How will the rest of your firm's work get done?

A good starting point is to make a list of all the questions you would ask if a company was submitting a tender to provide a product or service to you.

Clients will expect you to:

Include a **covering letter** that responds to the bid invitation, summarises your main message and explains how the documents are organised.

You should also be aware that information from your tender may be disclosed in the future under the **Freedom of Information Act**. This gives anyone, including your competitors, the general right to see information held by public authorities - including the information in your tender.

You should clearly indicate which information is commercially confidential. If the information is particularly sensitive, you might want to ask for a non-disclosure agreement. See our guide on [non-disclosure agreements](#).

For advice on tendering for public sector contracts, see our guide [overview on selling to government](#).

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### Tips on editing your tender

It is well worth spending some time looking at the presentation of your tender. Here are some tips on editing and supplying your tender:

- Keep sentences and paragraphs short, punchy and business-like.
- Use bullet points and headings to break up text.
- Decide on a typeface, layout and type size - not too small - and stick to them.
- Make sure everything is consistent. Are CVs all presented in the same way?
- Be careful when cutting and pasting text to make sure the format stays the same.
- Make sure you have developed a logical argument.
- Read everything again. Then get a colleague to read it - checking for meaning, typing mistakes and omissions.
- Use appendices for supporting additional information.
- Produce a front cover with the project title, date, name of the organisation requesting the tender and that of your own firm.
- Number paragraphs and provide a contents page so material can be easily found.
- Consider getting it printed and bound professionally - if the client has asked for hard copies rather than submission via email.

Above all, make sure the tender is delivered on time - it is unlikely that organisations will consider your tender if it arrives after the closing date. You may want to deliver it yourself, by hand, to ensure it arrives safely, or by courier for secure delivery. Alternatively, contact the organisation to check they have received it.

For advice on tendering for public sector contracts, see our guide [overview on selling to government](#).

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### Here's how I select and bid for tenders

**Phoebe Hart**

#### **JJ Group - Opens in a new window**

#### **Phoebe's top tips:**

- "Know your strengths and weaknesses before you start."
- "Have a plan for selecting tenders to go for."
- "Nominate a central co-ordinator."

The JJ Group is a full service marketing and new media agency based in Oxford. Established in 1989, the company's current clients include Volvo, British Gas and the Department for Work and Pensions. Marketing manager Phoebe Hart explains how a structured approach to tendering helps the company win new business.

#### **What I did**

#### **Have a plan**

"We set up a dedicated team to co-ordinate tenders as part of our growth strategy. We began by reviewing recent contracts,

analysing revenue versus costs. We also identified which market sectors and company types we wanted to target. It's important to be specific so you don't waste resources chasing tenders that don't fit overall business objectives.

"There are lots of ways to find out about contracts. As well as being members of relevant professional bodies, we monitor the trade press, attend networking events and use an online tool for tracking public sector contracts."

### **Allocate responsibilities**

"At the outset of a tender we pick a team to work on it, balancing skills required against existing workloads. We always allocate the people who will actually work on the business if we win it, and we include their CVs in the tender document.

"We hold meetings at key stages and map critical paths so everyone knows what they have to produce and when. When several people are contributing to a document, it's also important to give one person responsibility for the final edit, or you can end up with disparate styles."

### **Prepare the pitch**

"Our golden rule is to focus on what the client is asking for. Sometimes that's clear from their brief, but you can't afford to guess or get too carried away with your own ideas. If we have queries, we contact the client, which also helps to build a rapport before the tender document is submitted.

"Most tender briefs come with a budget to work to. We regularly benchmark ourselves against similar-sized agencies so we know our pricing is competitive.

"Tender documents will be read by several people within an organisation, each with a different perspective. We structure ours so that they're easy to read and the client can quickly reference the part they're interested in.

"If a presentation is required, we adapt and add to the original document, so we're not just re-hashing what the client has already read."

### **What I'd do differently**

#### **Be selective**

"In the early stages, the scatter-gun approach prevailed and we wasted time and money tendering for contracts we shouldn't have considered. Nowadays we're more selective."

#### **Understand the public sector**

"When we first started bidding for public sector contracts, we didn't realise the difference in processes and timescales compared with the private sector. We now understand the level of detail required and the time we need to allocate."

**[Read more case studies that describe first hand how people tackle real-life challenges and opportunities.](#)**

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### **Related guides on [businesslink.gov.uk](https://businesslink.gov.uk)**

Winning the Contract online course on the learndirect business website | **[Price your product or service](#)** | **[Overview on selling to government](#)** | **[Here's how having an up-to-date business plan helped my](#)**



**business | Here's how I identified and reached the right sales targets |**

**on the Chartered Institute of Marketing website - Opens in a new window**

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Related web sites you might find useful

**Search for government opportunities, tenders and contracts on Contracts Finder - Opens in a new window**

**Tendering for government contracts information on the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills website - Opens in a new window**

**Competitive Tendering Skills course on the Chartered Institute of Marketing website - Opens in a new window**

**EU-wide procurement notices on the TED website (registration required) - Opens in a new window**

**SBRI opportunities on the Technology Strategy Board website - Opens in a new window**

**Local Enterprise Europe Network information on the Enterprise Europe Network website - Opens in a new window**

**Public sector contracts located outside the EU on the UK Trade & Investment website (registration required) - Opens in a new window**

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## Price lists, estimates, quotations and tenders

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[Prepare a price list](#)

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[Prepare a written estimate](#)

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[Prepare a written quotation](#)

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[Prepare a price for a tender](#)

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[Win contracts at the right price](#)

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### Introduction

Every business has to give its customers prices for its products or services. There are several ways you can do this.

Many businesses, such as hairdressers, pubs and restaurants use a **standardised** price list that remains the same for every customer. Other businesses, such as mechanics, painters and decorators, have to provide **tailored** prices for the specific products or services a customer wants to buy. This is usually done with an **estimate** or a **quotation**. Larger, more complicated projects are often priced on the basis of a detailed **tender** document drawn up by the customer.

This guide outlines how to present your prices to your customers. It tells you how to create a price list, describes the difference between a quotation and an estimate, details how to prepare quotations and estimates and describes how to price a tender for a contract.

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### Prepare a price list

Most businesses will need to draw up a price list at some stage. If you sell a fixed range of products, this may be the only form of pricing you need. This type of standard price list can also be used as the basis for pricing your non-standard orders.

Special pricing rules apply to certain types of business including retailers, restaurants, pubs and garages. [Read about special pricing rules on the Trading Standards Institute website - Opens in a new window.](#)

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## Price lists, estimates, quotations and tenders

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Under the Sale of Goods Act 1979, the price you give is only an **offer to treat** - you can't be forced to sell at that price. However, your customers will expect you to honour the prices on your price list.

It's a good idea to **date your price lists** - particularly if your customer is likely to keep it for a long time. You should make it clear when any special offers expire. It can also be useful to include a clause at the end of the price list stating that prices are subject to change.

If your business sells to consumers, you should list all prices inclusive of **VAT**. If you sell to other businesses, it is common practice to give prices excluding VAT. However, you should clearly state that this is what you have done.

You should make clear whether any **delivery, packing or postage** costs are included in your prices. Additionally, although you don't have to indicate discounts for bulk purchases on your price list, it might attract more business.

Clarity is important - the clearer your price list is, the less scope there is for misinterpretation, misunderstanding or confusion.

You may be able to use **software** packages to help you draw up complex price lists.

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### The difference between a quotation and an estimate

It's impossible for some businesses to give standard prices for goods and services. This may be because the skills, time and materials required for each job vary

depending on different customers' needs.

This situation is more common in some trades than others - decorators or builders, for example, rarely do exactly the same job twice. When it's not possible to work from a standard price list, you have to give a quotation or an estimate instead.

A **quotation** is a fixed price offer that can't be changed once accepted by the customer. This holds true even if you have to carry out much more work than you expected. If you think this is likely to happen, it makes more sense to give an estimate. You can also specify in the quotation precisely what it covers, and that variations outside of this will be subject to additional charges.

An **estimate** is an educated guess at what a job may cost - but it isn't binding. To take account of possible unforeseen developments, you should provide several estimates based on various circumstances, including the worst-case scenario. This will prevent your customer from being surprised by the costs.

To work out a quote or estimate you need to know your **fixed and variable costs**. These include the cost-per-hour of manual labour and the cost of the materials you'll require. Your quote or estimate is then calculated according to what you think the job will involve.

You should provide all your quotes and estimates in writing and include a detailed breakdown. This will help to avoid any disputes about what work is included in your overall price. You should state clearly whether it is a quotation or an estimate.

You may also wish to set an **expiry date**.

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## Price lists, estimates, quotations and tenders

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Your quote or estimate will no longer be valid after this time.

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### Prepare a written estimate

When you prepare an estimate it's good practice to give the customer a **written copy**, including a full **breakdown** of costs.

Your estimate should include the:

- overall price
- breakdown, listing the components of the price
- schedule, detailing when work will be done or products delivered
- terms and conditions
- time period the estimate is valid for
- payment terms or schedule

You must include your full business contact details in your estimates. If you have headed paper, it's a good idea to put your estimates on this.

Where applicable you should also include the VAT component of your price.

It is advisable to get **signed acceptance** of your estimate and to make sure your customer is clear about what has been agreed.

Include a disclaimer stating clearly that the estimate's price is **subject to change**. Agree in advance how any variations will be costed. These can arise if the client changes their requirements or if a job turns out to be more complicated than expected.

In some cases, businesses supply an initial estimate, then a final quotation once the detail of the job is known.

If you think price complications are likely to arise, it's a good idea to supply **a number of estimates** based on different scenarios. This will help to avoid any disputes with your client as the work progresses. Make it clear what is included in the estimate, and what is not.

When you start to work or supply, you should keep good records of any cost over-runs, along with how and why they occur.

**Software packages** can help you identify the costs involved in the work that you're providing an estimate for. Specialist packages include Sage 50 Job Costing, but many accounting and spreadsheet packages can also be used for this purpose.

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### Prepare a written quotation

Quotations commit you to the price you specify, so they are usually used when:

- the work you're quoting for has clear requirements - in terms of time, labour, materials, etc
- your costs are stable
- you're confident the work won't turn out to be more complicated than expected

It's good practice to give your customers a **written quotation**. This should include the:

- overall price
- breakdown of the components of the price, indicating what is covered and what is not
- period the quotation is valid for
- schedule for when the work will be done or products delivered

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## Price lists, estimates, quotations and tenders

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- full contact details of your business
- payment terms or schedule
- how any modifications or changes the customer requests will be controlled and priced once the project is underway

It's also advisable to get your customer's **written confirmation** that they're happy with the price you have quoted and the work that this includes. This should be done before you carry out the work, or provide the goods or services.

If the job changes substantially after you start work, it's a good idea to revise your quotation and get it agreed before you finish the job.

Computer **software** can be used to help you determine the costs involved in any work for which you're drawing up a quotation. Specialist software packages include Sage 50 Job Costing, but many other accounting and spreadsheet packages can be used for this.

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### Prepare a price for a tender

If you provide goods or services to other businesses or the public sector, you may have to compete for contracts by submitting a tender. Although value for money can be an important component of many tenders, the way you **price your bid** can also make the difference between winning or losing business.

Although price is important, there are many other factors that your potential customer may be looking for, from your ability to meet their operational needs to your environmental credentials. The more you can find out in advance about their

requirements, the better you can tailor your tender accordingly.

As with quotations, you're committed to the price you submit in a tender if it is accepted.

Before you price a tender, **check the instructions** in your client's bid specification. These will usually detail how the costs should be displayed so that bids are easier to compare.

You may be asked to provide:

- a breakdown of component costs at each stage of the project - eg weekly or monthly
- staff time and costs
- management time and costs
- administration time and costs
- estimates of reimbursable expenses

Even if a detailed breakdown isn't asked for, it's in your interest to provide one. It can help you to win contracts by showing your client you're offering good value. For more advice on how to price contracts, read the page in this guide on how to **win contracts at the right price**.

In your tender document, your overall price should be set out in both words and figures. It should be clear which currency you are dealing in and whether your price includes VAT.

You should also state how long your prices will be valid for. It can sometimes take a long time for tender decisions to be made - by which time your costs may have increased.

It is a good idea to add a **contingency** for

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## Price lists, estimates, quotations and tenders

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any unexpected costs or additional work that may arise. Explain where and why you have included this in your bid.

See our guide on how to [tender for a contract](#).

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### Win contracts at the right price

Pricing a tender for the first time can be difficult as you will have no benchmark or idea of what competitors might bid.

Price is important when submitting a tender, but don't lose sight of the quality you will provide when deciding on it.

Clients often consider the **lifetime cost** of the products and services they buy. This includes their initial purchase cost, along with other factors such as maintenance costs, downtime costs (if there's a breakdown) and the cost of consumables and disposal.

Make sure you **don't bid too low** just to get your foot in the door. Clients will be suspicious of abnormally low bids - they may doubt the level of quality you can deliver for such a price. Remember that once you have committed to a very low price, you may find it difficult to increase your prices with this client in the future.

It is therefore better to price your tender realistically, and ensure that you focus on the benefits that you can provide to a customer. Get this right and many customers will be willing to pay the price required, even if it is slightly higher than your competitors.

Try to think about the value of your goods or

services from the **customer's point of view**, not your own. If you are the only quality provider of something a client really needs, it may be more valuable than you think. Your price should reflect this.

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Related web sites you might find useful

[Download a price marking good practice guide from the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills website \(PDF, 148K\)](#) - [Opens in a new window](#)

[Pricing and profit strategies courses on the Chartered Institute of Marketing website](#) - [Opens in a new window](#)

[Fundamentals of Pricing course on the Chartered Institute of Marketing website](#) - [Opens in a new window](#)

[Price marking of goods for retail sale on the Trading Standards Institute website](#) - [Opens in a new window](#)

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## Price lists, estimates, quotations and tenders

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## Overview on selling to government

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[E-procurement](#)

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### Introduction

Selling products or services to government bodies is a significant **opportunity** for all businesses. In 2009-10 the UK's public sector spent about £236 billion on goods and services.

The government is committed to helping small and medium-sized businesses get access to this market and compete successfully for public sector contracts. One of its main initiatives is **Contracts Finder**. This free online service lets you search for all government opportunities worth more than £10,000, and sign up for email alerts.

The Department for Business, Innovation & Skills recently updated its free e-learning course - **Winning the Contract** - based on feedback from small businesses, government buyers and social enterprises. This can help you gain an understanding about public procurement and how to bid for public sector contracts.

Public sector organisations can make good customers. They have to employ tendering processes that are transparent, provide essential information to potential suppliers and ensure a fair chance for small businesses.

They also have to be fair and honest in the way they choose suppliers and pay promptly within agreed contract terms.

This guide explains where you can find out about potential contracts, outlines the kind of procurement processes you may have to follow and tells you where to find out more.

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### What opportunities are available?



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## Overview on selling to government

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All businesses (including small and medium-sized enterprises) have a wide range of opportunities to sell to public sector organisations. Whether you sell stationery, office furniture, medical supplies, IT equipment, catering services, training courses or other services, there's likely to be a market for your product or service within government. There are also opportunities for subcontractors to benefit from high-value public sector contracts that have been won by other, larger businesses.

Potential customers could include:

- central government departments and agencies
- devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland
- local authorities
- the National Health Service
- police service
- armed forces
- universities
- colleges
- prisons

Key central government departments that purchase from businesses include HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC), the Department for Transport, Communities and Local Government, the Ministry of Defence, the Department for Education, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS).

### The tendering process

One of the key ways in which the public sector buys - or procures - goods and services is via tender. The tendering process involves the buyer - in this case a public sector organisation - setting out their requirements. Potential suppliers can then

submit a bid showing how they could meet those requirements and at what cost.

Public sector bodies have strict procedures they must follow when procuring - to ensure the process is fair and open to scrutiny.

**Search for opportunities to supply goods and services, and get email alerts, using our Contracts Finder - Opens in a new window.**

**Local authorities** - such as councils - can also be a good source of orders for small and medium-sized businesses.

Many of these organisations have booklets or websites which set out their specific needs and explain how you can become a supplier.

You should also remember that acting as a subcontractor to a large company which has won a high-value contract can be an effective way of getting government orders.

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### Where to find out about contracts

The main source of central government opportunities is **Contracts Finder**. This free service lets you search for lower-value contracts - those worth more than £10,000 - as well as higher-value opportunities typically worth more than £100,000.

Contracts Finder is used by departments and agencies across the UK's central government and by a growing number of local authorities.

You can search for opportunities on Contracts finder by price, type and location,

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## Overview on selling to government

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as well as setting up email alerts to notify you when new opportunities suitable for your business are added to the system. Contracts Finder also allows suppliers to register their details so that potential buyers within government can contact businesses directly when they are looking for a product or service.

**Search for opportunities to supply goods and services, and get email alerts, using our Contracts Finder - Opens in a new window.**

To find out more about what you can do, see our guide on how to **download our introductory guide to Contracts Finder for suppliers (PDF, 999K) - Opens in a new window.**

### Other online sources of public sector opportunities

Many public sector organisations - particularly local authorities - have approved lists of potential suppliers to tender for contracts below the EU limit. They must review these regularly to include new suppliers and check current suppliers are providing value for money.

Other places to find out about public sector opportunities include:

- **Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU).** Contracts within the EU worth more than the EU thresholds for central government and all other public sector bodies for services, supplies and works must be advertised in the OJEU. Some public sector bodies choose to advertise lower-value contracts here too. **Find more information on the OJEU website - Opens in a new window.**
- **Tenders Electronic Daily (TED).** This is an online supplement to the OJEU and can be accessed free of charge. **Search for tenders on the TED website - Opens in a new window.**
- **UK Trade and Investment.** You can also **find out about public-sector contracts located outside of the EU on the UK Trade & Investment website (registration required) - Opens in a new window.**
- **National, local or trade press.** Contracts below the EU limits are sometimes advertised in the national, local or trade press. **See details of regional and local newspapers at the Newspaper Society website - Opens in a new window.** Your trade association may be able to tell you about relevant trade publications. **Find details of your nearest trade association at the Trade Association Forum website - Opens in a new window.**
- **Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI).** SBRI provides funding for innovative products that could help solve a specific problem a government department or public sector organisation wants to solve. Successful applicants receive a **development contract** for the full cost of demonstrating the feasibility
- **CompeteFor.** This is the chosen website for the publication of London 2012 Olympic Games-related contract opportunities. It acts as a brokerage service between buyers throughout the London 2012 supply chain, and potential suppliers. **Find contract opportunities on the CompeteFor website (registration required) - Opens in a new**

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of their technology and the opportunity for subsequent funding for prototype development, whilst retaining the intellectual property. Read more about SBRI in our page on [the Small Business Research Initiative](#) in our guide on [support networks and facilities for innovation and R&D](#).

- **Commercial outlets.** These will charge a small fee to search for contracts for you.

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### The procurement process

When bidding for a public sector contract you'll probably have to go through an official procurement process with a set timetable. The more the contract is worth, the more time-consuming the process is likely to be.

Complex projects are negotiated under the competitive dialogue procedure, which may take longer than the set timetable process. See the page in this guide on [procurement regulations for public sector contracts](#).

It's essential to give all the **information** required and to meet the relevant **deadlines** at each stage of the process.

Once you have identified a potential contract, assess whether your business can carry it out - and whether it makes **financial sense** to do so. Contact the relevant organisation for more information on what the contract involves.

Some contracts involve a formal **Expression of Interest** - a pre-qualification stage used to identify realistic candidates for the contract. You may be asked for information about the financial position of your business and details of your

experience and references.

You can [download a model pre-qualification questionnaire developed by the Cabinet Office from the Cabinet Office website \(DOC, 117K\) - Opens in a new window](#)

If you get through the pre-qualification stage, you may then receive an **Invitation to Tender** or contract notice inviting you to bid for the contract.

These bid documents set out the key criteria you need to meet, and tell you how to submit your tender. You'll need to show that you can fulfil the contract and meet all the client's needs. Make sure at all stages that you give responses for each question you are asked. If you are unable to complete all the questions, contact the organisation to discuss this.

Contracts are awarded on the basis of **value for money** - which means getting the right balance between the price and quality of the product or service being offered. It can also involve factors such as lifetime costs and maintenance arrangements.

Remember that all contracts with public bodies are subject to the **Freedom of Information Act** and information must be disclosed to anyone who asks for it, unless it is exempt (for example, as a trade secret). You can [download guidance on contract information that is exempt from the Freedom of Information Act from the Information Commissioner's Office \(ICO\) website \(PDF, 48K\) - Opens in a new window](#).

Therefore, when you provide information to a public body, you should clearly indicate

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## Overview on selling to government

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which information is commercially confidential. If the information is particularly sensitive, you might want to ask for a non-disclosure agreement to be part of any negotiations. See our guide on [non-disclosure agreements](#).

Remember that the price you offer in a tender will be binding if your bid is successful.

If you're unsuccessful in a tender and want to find out why, public sector bodies must give you feedback within 20 working days if requested. Information about the contract is subject to the Freedom of Information Act, so that you have a right to ask for detailed information about the bidding process - but you may have to pay for it.

For more information on the tendering process, see our guide on how to [tender for a contract](#).

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### Procurement regulations for public sector contracts

Public procurement regulations apply to all public sector contracts over set values, or 'thresholds'. [Download Official Journal of the European Union \(OJEU\) threshold values from the Cabinet Office website \(PDF, 86K\) - Opens in a new window](#).

The Regulations are designed to ensure free and fair access to, and competition for, public sector contracts. They set down procedures and standards for choosing tenderers and awarding contracts.

Normally, all public contracts that are above threshold must be advertised in the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU), via

a contract notice. These notices are published in the online version of the OJEU - Tenders Electronic Daily (TED). The Contracts Finder service also publishes contract notices taken directly from TED.

[Search for contract notices on the TED website - Opens in a new window](#).

### Procurement procedures

There are four procurement procedures used to award contracts - the Contract Notice will state which one is being used. These procedures are:

- The **open procedure**. In this procedure all interested parties are asked to return tenders by a set date. These are evaluated and contract(s) awarded to the winning party/parties. This procedure is often used by local authorities.
- The **restricted procedure**. In this procedure this is a two-stage process. In the first selection stage (often involving a Pre-Qualification Questionnaire) a short list of suppliers is identified. In the second stage, suppliers are invited to respond to an Invitation to Tender (ITT) and the tenders evaluated. Finally, the contract(s) is/are awarded.
- The **competitive dialogue procedure**. This procedure is used for more complex procurements. Following the OJEU Contract Notice and a selection process, the authority negotiates with companies to develop suitable solution(s) and on which chosen companies will be invited to tender. After the ITT is issued no further negotiation is allowed, only discussion about

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## Overview on selling to government

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clarifying or fine-tuning the tender.

An award is subsequently made.

- The **negotiated procedure**. This procedure is only used in limited circumstances. In this procedure the public sector body may enter into contract negotiations with one or more suppliers.

### Framework agreements

Framework agreements are set up by public sector bodies with suppliers to provide goods, works or services according to certain requirements - eg price, quality, quantity. Frameworks can be arranged centrally by one public body for itself and/or for a number of other public bodies.

Those bodies that are party to the framework can then order (or 'call-off') the goods, works or services if and when required. If there is more than one supplier, then a mini-competition may be held to identify the best supplier.

A contract is only formed when an order is placed for a specific requirement. The public sector body is not committed to using the framework. Framework agreements are subject to safeguards and do not normally last for more than four years.

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### E-procurement

Public sector organisations are increasingly using **e-procurement** for contracts in order to boost efficiency. E-procurement involves the use of electronic methods in every stage of the purchasing process, including:

- advertising contracts
- managing contracts
- evaluating tenders

- paying suppliers
- reverse auctions - where the lowest bidder wins
- dynamic purchasing systems - an open electronic catalogue where prices can be updated without introducing a new tender

E-procurement can benefit suppliers in a number of ways. It can:

- reduce paperwork
- improve efficiency
- help you process orders more quickly
- speed up payment

An example of e-procurement in action is the use of the **Government Procurement Card (GPC)**. This Visa charge card allows central government departments and agencies to purchase low-value goods and services directly from suppliers. This can either be in person, over the phone, fax or by email or possibly through a website.

The card removes much of the paperwork normally involved in supplying public sector organisations. It also speeds up payment as your account is credited within two to four days.

Another example is the increasing use of reverse e-auctions, a procurement technique that utilises secured internet-based technology. Bidders compete against each other, in real time, on the basis of either cost alone or on the most economically advantageous tender. For more information on e-auctions, see our guide on **e-marketplaces, online auctions and exchanges**.

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[Winning the Contract - a free online public procurement course](#)

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## Overview on selling to government

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Knowing how the public sector buys its supplies and services can put your business in a stronger position to win contracts. It can also help you decide which opportunities you should be going for - and understand the procurement processes that are used.

The learndirect website offers a free online course - *Winning the Contract* - that will help you develop the skills and knowledge needed to bid successfully for public sector contracts. It explains:

- the advantages and disadvantages of dealing with public bodies
- how contract values affect the way new opportunities are advertised, and the processes used to evaluate bidders' responses and award the contract
- the different approaches to working with the public sector - such as forming consortia and social enterprises, and subcontracting from existing suppliers
- how to use Contracts Finder and other services to search for contract opportunities
- where to find other useful resources, including government publications and 'meet the buyer' events

**[Access the free Winning the Contract course on the learndirect website - Opens in a new window.](#)**

### How the course is delivered

*Winning the Contract* has been developed with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. The course is divided into six modules, each covering a particular topic. It takes a maximum of four hours to complete all six modules. Your progress is saved whenever you exit the course - giving

you the flexibility to learn at your own pace.

The entire course was reviewed and updated in spring 2011, based on feedback from small businesses, government buyers and social enterprises.

You can start the course straight away and use it at any time - provided you have access to a computer with an internet connection. The course is available for six months from the date you first access it.

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## Resolving public sector tendering problems

### In the UK

If you experience problems with public procurement processes with government departments, you can contact the Supplier Feedback Service, part of the Cabinet Office's Efficiency and Reform Group (ERG). They have published guidance on preventing poor procurement practice and can help to resolve issues that you may not be able to solve directly with the relevant department.

**[Download information about the Supplier Feedback Service from the Cabinet Office website \(PDF, 93K\) - Opens in a new window.](#)**

You can **[send details of your problem to the Supplier Feedback Service using the Supplier Feedback Service form on the Cabinet Office website - Opens in a new window.](#)** Or, if you don't want your identity revealed to the contracting authority, you can raise concerns anonymously as a 'mystery shopper', by emailing the enquiry, with as much detail as possible, to

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## Overview on selling to government

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[servicedesk@cabinet-office.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:servicedesk@cabinet-office.gsi.gov.uk)

### In the EU

Competing for a public procurement contract in the European Union is a demanding process. However, there are a number of ways in which you can maximise your prospects of winning a contract. A competitive bid is essential as are best quality goods and services. You also need to ensure that you have the export potential, by assessing the readiness of your business as a whole and that of your product or service. See our guide on [exporting - an overview](#).

Approaching export support services such as UK Trade & Investment or Business Link will help your business realise its export potential. Thorough market research will also ensure you are well informed about your target market or sector. See our guide on [researching and entering overseas markets](#).

While there are many steps you can take to make the tendering process go smoothly, you may also experience obstacles that are beyond your control. If problems do arise, you may choose to lodge a complaint with a national court or other type of review body. However, this approach is formal and can be time-consuming.

An informal alternative is the Public Procurement Network (PPN). This is a free service which is designed to resolve misunderstandings and discrimination claims quickly before a procurement contract is signed.

[Find out about resolving cross-border procurement problems on the Public Procurement Network website - Opens in](#)

[a new window](#).

If approaching the PPN does not solve the problem, you can choose to take more formal action or use the SOLVIT system, an online problem-solving network, which is monitored by the European Commission.

[Read information about SOLVIT on the Europa website - Opens in a new window](#).

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Related guides on [businesslink.gov.uk](http://businesslink.gov.uk)

[Tender for a contract](#) | Online course about winning the contract on the [learndirect business website](#) |

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Related web sites you might find useful

[Winning the Contract - online course for securing a public sector contract on the learndirect business website - Opens in a new window](#)

[Search for government opportunities, tenders and contracts on Contracts Finder - Opens in a new window](#)

[Improving access to public sector contracts for smaller businesses on the Cabinet Office website - Opens in a new window](#)

[Tendering for government contracts guide for small businesses on the BIS website - Opens in a new window](#)

[Tenders search on the TED website -](#)

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## Overview on selling to government

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**Opens in a new window**

**Download guidance on contract information that is exempt from the Freedom of Information Act from the ICO website (PDF, 148K) - Opens in a new window**

**Download OJEU threshold values from the Cabinet Office website (PDF, 86K) - Opens in a new window**

**Download information about the Supplier Feedback Service from the Cabinet Office website (PDF, 93K) - Opens in a new window**

**Cross-border procurement issue resolution on the Public Procurement Network website - Opens in a new window**

**UK companies international trade support on the UK Trade & Investment website - Opens in a new window**

**SOLVIT information on the Europa website - Opens in a new window**



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# Find government opportunities, tenders and contracts on Contracts Finder

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## Subjects covered in this guide

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[Introduction](#)

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[How to search Contracts Finder and set up email alerts](#)

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[Find potential opportunities \(pipeline notices\) on Contracts Finder](#)

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[Which documents and information are available on Contracts Finder](#)

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[Set up a supplier profile on Contracts Finder](#)

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[Online help with using Contracts Finder](#)

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[How Contracts Finder sources government procurement opportunities](#)

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[Find reports, downloads and RSS feeds about government procurement on Contracts Finder](#)

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[Related guides on \[businesslink.gov.uk\]\(http://businesslink.gov.uk\)](#)

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[Related web sites you might find useful](#)

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*You can find this guide by navigating to:*

*Home > Grow your business > Suppliers: overview of tendering for contracts > Find government opportunities, tenders and contracts on Contracts Finder*

## Introduction

Contracts Finder is one of a series of government measures aimed at making it easier for suppliers, in particular small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), to find and apply for public sector contracts. It is the main source of government opportunities worth more than £10,000.

You can search Contracts Finder for:

- **Live opportunities** with central government departments including their agencies, non-departmental public bodies, NHS bodies and local authorities, prime contractors to government departments as well as the wider public sector.
- **Closed tender and contract documents** published by central government departments including their agencies, non-departmental public bodies, and NHS bodies and trading funds. Publishing these documents enables suppliers and the public to understand what government buys and so supports the Government's transparency agenda.
- **Pipeline notices** - potential opportunities that might be offered by public sector organisations in the next few years

This guide describes the benefits of Contracts Finder and what you can use it for. It explains how to search for documents, set up email alerts and create your own supplier profile.

For detailed guidance about getting the most from Contracts Finder we recommend you [download the introductory guide to](#)

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## Find government opportunities, tenders and contracts on Contracts Finder

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[Contracts Finder for suppliers \(PDF, 999K\) - Opens in a new window.](#)

### How to search Contracts Finder and set up email alerts

#### Search

Contracts Finder is designed around its flexible search facility which lets you - as a business or a member of the public - find procurement opportunities with central government departments, their agencies, non-departmental public bodies, NHS bodies and local authorities, prime contractors to government departments and the wider public sector.

There are two search boxes on the Search page, allowing you to search for either live opportunities or closed tenders. In both you can search using one or more of the following criteria:

- keywords - any specific or general word or phrase included in the document summary
- location - opportunities within a given distance of a specified location, eg your business address
- minimum and/or maximum values - eg contracts worth £10,000 and more
- contract reference number – the government buyer's own reference number

If you're interested in searching for opportunities that might be offered in the future, see the page in this guide on how to [find potential opportunities \(pipeline notices\) on Contracts Finder](#).

Once you've searched you can use the **quick filters** in the left hand column on the

Search results page to narrow down your search - for example, by showing only live opportunities.

For a more detailed explanation of Contracts Finder's search functions - and answers to frequently asked questions - [download an introductory guide to Contracts Finder for suppliers \(PDF, 999K\) - Opens in a new window.](#)

#### Saved searches

Once you've fine tuned your search criteria, you can **save your searches** and set up email alerts to be sent whenever suits you. To do this you need to be registered with Contracts Finder and have a Government Gateway user ID and password.

You can log in or register to Government Gateway by clicking on the **Login/Register** link at the top right of any Contracts Finder page.

You can set up any number of saved searches, give them names, and manage them through the My Profile page you will be able to access once you've registered. The searches can be as general or as specific as you wish. For example, you could save a search for a particular type of work to be delivered in a specified location, provided it is above a minimum value. Saving a search can save you time as there's no need to keep selecting the same search criteria each time you revisit the site.

#### Email alerts

Once you have saved a search, you can set up email alerts to tell you whenever new notices are added to the system which meet your search criteria.

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## Find government opportunities, tenders and contracts on Contracts Finder

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The email alerts are very flexible. You can choose how often you receive them and how much detail they include. Alerts can also be sent to you if a notice is updated or withdrawn, or when the contract has been awarded. As with saving your searches, you need to be registered with Government Gateway to create email alerts.

First run a search, then click on the 'Save and email me later' tab. At this point you will be prompted to log in if you already have a Government Gateway account, or create a new account, if you don't have one.

### Watched contracts

If you find an opportunity that interests you, you can save it to your **watch this contract** facility. When you log in, you can review the status of your watched contracts, or ask Contracts Finder to email you if new information is added to a watched contract or if it is awarded.

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### Find potential opportunities (pipeline notices) on Contracts Finder

Pipeline notices describe **potential opportunities** that might be offered by public sector organisations in the next few years. These notices can help your business plan ahead, giving you time to bring in additional capacity or form partnerships that can make you better placed to compete for any contracts that are offered.

Each pipeline notice is given a confidence rating - either low, medium or high - that indicates how likely it is that a contract notice for the specified value will be advertised in the future.

### Search pipeline notices by type on the Contracts Finder website - Opens in a new window.

Bear in mind that when a public sector organisation publishes a pipeline notice, it does not necessarily mean that an opportunity will be offered in the future. You can refer to the 'Confidence' level alongside each notice to get an idea of how likely it is that a contract notice will be issued.

Not all pipelines published by government are available on Contracts Finder. The service includes links to sources of information about these other pipelines.

Pipeline notices on Contracts Finder include the following information:

- **Project/requirement** - the title of the pipeline notice, and the name of the public sector organisation that has published it.
- **Publication date** - when the notice was added to Contracts Finder.
- **Approach to market** - this indicates whether any future contract that might arise from this notice would be offered as part of an existing framework agreement, or as a new procurement.
- **Confidence** - this is the public sector organisation's opinion of how likely it is that the requirement outlined in the pipeline notice will result in a contract being issued and according to the year-by-year spend profile.
- **Value** - this shows the estimated value of the potential opportunity over the next three financial years.
- **Capital cost** - the total cost needed to fulfil the project or requirement - eg for building a new office block, the

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## Find government opportunities, tenders and contracts on Contracts Finder

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capital cost would be the combined purchase costs of land, buildings, construction and equipment, plus the cost of labour used for construction.

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### Which documents and information are available on Contracts Finder

#### Who is publishing on Contracts Finder

Central government departments, their agencies, non-departmental public bodies and NHS bodies are using Contracts Finder to publish details of procurement opportunities, tenders and contracts. Local government bodies are being encouraged to make their opportunities available on the service and the same facility will be made available to prime contractors over the coming months.

#### Values

Contracts Finder has details of:

- **low value** opportunities – those worth £10,000 and above
- **high value** opportunities typically worth over £100,000

You can specify minimum and maximum values when searching for documents by using the 'Value of the contract' box on the Advanced search page. Government buyers can highlight SME-friendly opportunities as 'items more suitable for small suppliers' and you can use the quick filter on the left of Search results page to look for these. Immediately below it is a filter to help find opportunities suited to voluntary and charitable sector organisations.

### Search for government opportunities, tenders and contracts on Contracts

#### Finder - Opens in a new window.

#### Live opportunities

There are two search boxes on the Contracts Finder search page, one for live opportunities, one for the published documentation relating to closed opportunities.

Live opportunity notices typically include:

- details of low value contract opportunities, ie those that fall below the relevant Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) threshold that are either posted directly onto Contracts Finder or imported from other e-tendering services
- contract notices published in the OJEU

Each notice will contain some or all of the following:

- a short description of the requirement, its value and other relevant information
- details of the deadline for response and what this deadline relates to (eg expressions of interest or completion of the tender documents)
- details of who to contact or where further information on how to tender can be obtained
- tender documents

Where opportunities have been imported from other e-tendering service providers you may have to register with that service in order to bid for the work.

You can also search for tentative notices. These are used by buyers to signal their

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## Find government opportunities, tenders and contracts on Contracts Finder

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intention to publish details of future work so that industry can gear up their ability to deliver the requirement once it goes to market.

### Potential opportunities (pipeline notices)

You can also use Contracts Finder to find **potential opportunities** that might be offered in the next few years. Public sector organisations publish these 'pipeline notices' to give suppliers advance information about possible future contracts, so that they can plan ahead accordingly.

For more about pipeline notices see the page in this guide on [how to find potential opportunities \(pipeline notices\) on Contracts Finder](#).

[Search pipeline notices by type on the Contracts Finder website - Opens in a new window.](#)

### Closed opportunities

Closed opportunities are no longer open for bidding because the procurement process has moved on to the next stage. Tender and contract documents for these procurements are being published as part of the government's transparency agenda - see our guide on [transparency in government procurement and contracting](#).

### At the contract award stage

Contracts Finder publishes contract documentation for central government contracts worth more than £10,000. There are a few exceptions to this rule, for example where the contract arises from a framework awarded prior to July 2010 which did not include the intention to publish contract documents in its terms and

conditions. The information for awarded contracts includes:

- who the contract was awarded to
- the value of the contract
- the criteria the government buyer applied when awarding the contract
- a copy of the contract, and any other contractual documents, eg specification, terms and conditions, invitation to tender documents etc
- whether or not the supplier(s) might subcontract some of the work

Similar information can be found for published tenders.

### More about document types

You can find out more about each type of document on Contracts Finder in our downloadable guide for suppliers. The guide also explains how to get the most from the search and email alerts functions, and answers some frequently asked questions.

[Download an introductory guide to Contracts Finder for suppliers \(PDF, 999K\) - Opens in a new window.](#)

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### Set up a supplier profile on Contracts Finder

You can set up a personalised **profile** for your business on Contracts Finder. This will be a personalised homepage containing details of any contract notices you're watching, your saved searches, and your email subscriptions.

To do this you need to register with Government Gateway. Click on the Login/Register button at the top right hand

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## Find government opportunities, tenders and contracts on Contracts Finder

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corner of every Contracts Finder page to create a user ID. Once you have registered and logged in you'll notice the 'My profile' tab has appeared at the top of each page. This is where you can manage your supplier profile from.

Your supplier profile can be set up to describe the types of opportunities you're interested in, the locations you can carry out work in, and the minimum or maximum contract value you're looking for.

You can choose to make your profile visible to other registered users on Contracts Finder. They might be in a position to offer you subcontract work or team up with you as a delivery partner for certain contracts.

As a registered user you can also add your business details to the **Supplier Directory**. Government buyers can use this facility to find out about your services and potentially consult you about emerging requirements.

### Manage other users in your business

Contracts Finder lets you set up multiple users under your business account. Each registered supplier has an 'administrator' who can create related accounts for other users. This means several people from one business can use the service and create their own saved searches and email alerts. You can also use your profile page to view searches that others have set up.

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### Online help with using Contracts Finder

To get the most from Contracts Finder we recommend you download the introductory guide for suppliers. This guide offers

practical advice on tailoring the search and email functions to suit your needs, and answers frequently asked questions. The guide comes in an easy to print format so you can keep it on your desk for reference when you're using the system.

[Download an introductory guide to Contracts Finder for suppliers \(PDF, 999K\) - Opens in a new window.](#)

### Online help

Pop-up messages are used throughout Contracts Finder to explain key phrases and concepts. Click on any of the green question mark icons to find tips and advice.

You can find additional guidance by clicking on the 'Help and resources' link at the top right of every Contracts Finder page. This takes you to a series of drop-down menus where you can refine your search for the particular problem you need to solve, or you can complete the Ask us a question form.

### Guidance on tendering for contracts

If your business hasn't worked with the public sector before, see our guide an [overview on selling to government](#) for advice on what to expect. You could also take the free online course - Winning the Contract - that will help you develop the skills and knowledge needed to bid successfully for public sector contracts.

[Access the free Winning the Contract course on the learndirect website \(registration required\) - Opens in a new window.](#)

You can find tips on writing tenders and improving your chances of winning contracts

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## Find government opportunities, tenders and contracts on Contracts Finder

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in our guide on how to [tender for a contract](#).

### How Contracts Finder sources government procurement opportunities

#### Government departments

Contracts Finder is the main online source of government opportunities worth more than £10,000. These opportunities are sourced from government departments themselves or via other procurement systems used by the public sector. Contracts Finder now offers the option for prime contractors to publish sub-contracting opportunities. These subcontracting opportunities will not be carried out under government procurement rules.

#### Tenders Electronic Daily (TED)

Contracts Finder is automatically updated every weekday night with new notices published in TED - the online version of the supplement to the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU). These include almost all UK public sector contracts over thresholds set by the European Union (EU), typically £113,000. Combining TED's higher value contracts with the lower value opportunities means Contracts Finder covers the full value range of government contracts.

#### Local government

Local government bodies - such as borough councils and unitary authorities - are being encouraged to publish details of their lower-value opportunities on Contracts Finder. Any higher-value contract notices they publish in the OJEU already appear on

Contracts Finder.

#### Other sources

Other online procurement systems apart from Contracts Finder will continue to be available, including:

- **Constructionline** - the UK register of pre-qualified construction services, which has a register of current opportunities. See the page on [where to find public sector contracts](#) in our guide on [tendering for a public sector contract in the construction sector](#).
- **CompeteFor** - the official source of contract opportunities linked to the London 2012 Games and other major public and private sector buying organisations, such as Transport for London, Crossrail and the Metropolitan Police. See our guide on how to [tender for London 2012 Olympic Games contracts](#).

#### Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

The devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have their own dedicated public sector procurement portals. These are:

- **Sell2Wales** - an initiative from the Welsh Government. [Find out about the benefits of registering your business on the Sell2Wales website - Opens in a new window.](#)
- **Public Contracts Scotland** - for opportunities with the Scottish Government, NHS Scotland, local authorities and other public bodies. [Search or browse current opportunities on the Public Contracts Scotland website -](#)

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## Find government opportunities, tenders and contracts on Contracts Finder

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### **Opens in a new window.**

- eSourcing NI - you can register to view opportunities from public sector bodies in Northern Ireland. **Find out how to register on the eSourcing NI website - Opens in a new window.**

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### Find reports, downloads and RSS feeds about government procurement on Contracts Finder

Notices published by government departments, their agencies, the wider public sector and prime contractors are held in the Contracts Finder database. You can access and manipulate this data in various formats and incorporate it into your business systems. You can download weekly activity reports, subscribe to RSS feeds, or access recent and historic data as XML or CSV format.

#### **Summary of contracts published by government department**

This report shows the total number of various items published on Contracts Finder by each central government department, including:

- tender document summaries
- contract document summaries
- live opportunities

The information is published in Comma Separated Values (CSV) format - a text file that can be read by Microsoft Excel and many other applications. The file size will increase over time as more notices are added to Contracts Finder.

#### **Download a summary of how many**

**procurement contracts government departments have published on Contracts Finder (CSV) - Opens in a new window.**

#### **Buyer groups**

A list of the buyer groups set up by departments and agencies on Contracts Finder is also available. **Download a list of buyer groups registered on Contracts Finder (CSV) - Opens in a new window.**

#### **Detailed analysis**

If you want to see more details or to analyse the data yourself you can access more information in XML or RSS formats on the Contracts Finder data feed page. The data can be processed by software applications to create news feeds and customised reports.

**Find reports, downloads and RSS feeds about government procurement on the Contracts Finder website - Opens in a new window.**

#### **Other data published by government**

Many other government data and information sets are being published as part of the wider government transparency agenda. You can **find out about free re-use of national and local data on the data.gov.uk website - Opens in a new window.**

For more information about the government's transparency commitment, see our guide on **transparency in government procurement and contracting.**

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### Related guides on



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## Find government opportunities, tenders and contracts on Contracts Finder

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[businesslink.gov.uk](http://businesslink.gov.uk)

[Download an introductory guide to Contracts Finder for suppliers \(PDF, 999K\) - Opens in a new window](#) | [Overview on selling to government](#) | [Tender for a contract](#) | [Download a summary of how many procurement contracts government departments have published on Contracts Finder \(CSV\) - Opens in a new window](#) | [Download a list of buyer groups registered on Contracts Finder \(CSV\) - Opens in a new window](#) | [Transparency in government procurement and contracting](#) |

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Related web sites you might find useful

[Download Sell2Wales information from the Welsh Assembly Government website \(PDF, 288K\) - Opens in a new window](#)

[Search for government opportunities, tenders and contracts on Contracts Finder - Opens in a new window](#)

[Search for government opportunities, tenders and contracts on Contracts Finder - Opens in a new window](#)

[Search pipeline notices by type on the Contracts Finder website - Opens in a new window](#)

[Government policy on transparency in procurement and contracting guidance on the Cabinet Office website - Opens in a new window](#)

[Browse Contracts Finder help topics for](#)

[businesses and the public - Opens in a new window](#)

[Winning the Contract online public procurement course on the learndirect website \(registration required\) - Opens in a new window](#)

[Higher-value public sector contract opportunities on the TED website - Opens in a new window](#)

[Sell2Wales - selling to the public sector - Opens in a new window](#)

[Supplier Development Service - Opens in a new window](#)

[Reports, downloads and RSS feeds about government procurement on the Contracts Finder website - Opens in a new window](#)

[Examples of software applications using government data on the data.gov.uk website - Opens in a new window](#)

[Open Government Licence terms and conditions on the National Archives website - Opens in a new window](#)

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# Transparency in government procurement and contracting

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## Subjects covered in this guide

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[Introduction](#)

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[What 'transparent government' means](#)

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[Use Contracts Finder to access documents published under the transparency commitment](#)

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[View statistics for procurement notices published by government departments and agencies](#)

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[Related guides on \[businesslink.gov.uk\]\(http://businesslink.gov.uk\)](#)

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[Related web sites you might find useful](#)

*You can find this guide by navigating to:*

*Home > Sales and marketing > Suppliers: overview of tendering for contracts > Transparency in government procurement and contracting*

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## Introduction

The government has set out the need to be more transparent across its operations. It wants citizens and businesses to be able to hold public bodies and politicians to account.

You can find this procurement information and contract documents on Contracts Finder. The documents will help you understand what government buys and the processes it uses. This information could help you improve your chances of winning government contracts in the future.

This guide describes the types of document published by government departments, agencies and the NHS under the government's transparency commitment, and explains how you can access them on Contracts Finder.

It is one of three guides about Contracts Finder. The other two explain:

- how to **find government opportunities, tenders and contracts on Contracts Finder**
- how government buyers can **publish opportunities, tenders and contract documents on Contracts Finder**

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## What 'transparent government' means

Transparent government is about allowing people to see how their taxes are spent and what they deliver. The government believes that making more information available to the public will make it easier for people to

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# Transparency in government procurement and contracting

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hold public bodies and politicians to account. It also believes that this will help government at all levels to deliver better value for money.

Transparency applies both to central government - including departments and their agencies - and local government, such as councils.

Examples of commitments that the government has made to achieving greater transparency include:

- Publishing all new central government tender documents for contracts over £10,000 online and free of charge.
- Making all councils publish items of spending above £500, and publish contracts and tender documents in full. These will normally be available on the council's own website. You can [find local authorities in England on the Directgov website - Opens in a new window.](#)
- Creating a new 'right to data', so that government-held datasets can be requested and used by the public.
- Publishing the salaries and expenses of senior civil servants.

The government's transparency requirements relating to procurement apply to:

- all central government departments, including their agencies
- all non-departmental public bodies ('quangos')
- National Health Service bodies and trading funds

The requirements do not apply to the

devolved administrations in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

You can [find out more about transparent government on the Number10.gov.uk website - Opens in a new window.](#)

## Benefits to business

Greater transparency is good news for all businesses, especially small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). It helps you get a better understanding of what public bodies spend money on, and what they look for when choosing suppliers. This should put SMEs in a stronger position to compete for public sector contracts, and to bring new ideas and solutions to the table.

Making government data available will help businesses exploit new commercial opportunities by offering innovative services. For example, a business could use information published by a council about when and where it makes household recycling collections to decide whether it might be viable to offer a commercial service in certain areas. You can [find out more about free re-use of national and local data on the Data.gov.uk website - Opens in a new window.](#)

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## Use Contracts Finder to access documents published under the transparency commitment

On the Contracts Finder Welcome page are two boxes allowing you either to search for 'Live opportunities to tender for' or to 'See what is being bought by government'. If you want documents relating to closed opportunities, published under the

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# Transparency in government procurement and contracting

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government's transparency commitment, then search in the latter, right-hand box.

## Filters

You can use the filters on the left of the Search results page to search by:

- contracts more suitable for smaller suppliers
- tender documents
- contract (post award) documents
- contracts more suitable for voluntary and charitable sector organisations
- value of the contract
- location
- what the notice is for
- whether it's published in English or Welsh
- date of publication

## Document types

Each listing contains a short description of the notice's requirement, its value, details of the contracting authority, location and other key information. The listing (or notice) can also have a number of documents attached, including:

- pre-qualification questionnaires
- tender documentation
- sample contracts or finalised contract schedules
- plans of the work being tendered for

Bid documents received from suppliers won't usually be published. This is because only the tender documents prepared by the contracting body are covered by the transparency commitment.

See the page [documents required for publishing closed tenders and contract](#)

[documents on Contracts Finder](#) in our guide [publish opportunities, tenders and contract documents on Contracts Finder](#) for a full list of the information government buyers are able to publish.

Some documents may contain **redactions**. These are changes to the text that are made to remove sensitive or confidential information - such as names and personal details - for reasons of national security, or for other legal reasons.

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## View statistics for procurement notices published by government departments and agencies

You can download an overview of procurement activity for all government departments and agencies that have published notices on Contracts Finder. A list of buyer groups registered on Contracts Finder is also available. Both documents are updated weekly.

They show the progress being made by each department toward meeting the government's commitment to transparency in procurement and contracting.

## Summary of contracts published by government departments

The report is in table format. It shows - for each central government department - the total number of various items published on Contracts Finder, including:

- tender document summaries
- contract document summaries
- live opportunities

The information is published in Comma

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# Transparency in government procurement and contracting

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Separated Values (CSV) format – a text file that can be read by Microsoft Excel and many other applications. The file size will increase over time as more notices are added to Contracts Finder.

**[Download a summary of how many procurement contracts government departments have published on Contracts Finder \(CSV\) - Opens in a new window.](#)**

## Buyer groups

A list of the buyer groups set up by departments and agencies on Contracts Finder is also available. **[Download a list of buyer groups registered on Contracts Finder \(CSV\) - Opens in a new window.](#)**

## Departmental performance against Transparency commitments

Tables reflecting departmental performance with respect to procurement and contracting transparency are published monthly on the Cabinet Office website.

**[Read transparency progress reports on the Cabinet Office website - Opens in a new window.](#)**

## Detailed analysis

If you want to see more details or to analyse the data yourself, you can access more information in CSV, XML or RSS formats on the Contracts Finder data feed page. The data can be processed by software applications to create news feeds and customised reports.

**[Find reports, downloads and RSS feeds about government procurement on the Contracts Finder website - Opens in a](#)**

**[new window.](#)**

## Using the data

If you're a developer or a business interested in using the data accessible from the system, you can **[download Contracts Finder data feeds: business and developer guidance \(PDF, 533K\) - Opens in a new window.](#)**

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Related guides on [businesslink.gov.uk](http://businesslink.gov.uk)

**[Download an introductory guide to Contracts Finder for suppliers \(PDF, 999K\) - Opens in a new window](#) | [Publish opportunities, tenders and contract documents on Contracts Finder](#) | [Download a summary of how many procurement contracts government departments have published on Contracts Finder \(CSV\) - Opens in a new window](#) | [Download a list of buyer groups registered on Contracts Finder \(CSV\) - Opens in a new window](#) | [Download Contracts Finder data feeds: business and developer guidance on using the data \(PDF, 533K\) - Opens in a new window](#) |**

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Related web sites you might find useful

**[Transparent government information on the Number10.gov.uk website - Opens in a new window](#)**

**[National and local data usage and licensing on the Data.gov.uk website - Opens in a new window](#)**

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## Transparency in government procurement and contracting

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