

A quick guide to

tendering your school catering service



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The catering services tender process

If you're just starting out to tender for your school catering service, it can seem like a daunting, time-consuming and expensive process.

You have to be sure that your tender meets certain regulations and that you've followed the right procedures, included the correct questions and met specific timescales. You may not know what companies to consider, or who to ask for impartial and fair advice.

This framework – set up by the Food Delivery for Schools (FDfS)¹ project - means that the hard work has been done for you.

It's a register of pre-approved caterers, which you can use to select and appoint a supplier to deliver the service you want for your school. The framework will help you to run a mini-competition, to make sure that your contract goes to the company that best meets the needs of your pupils. Crucially, this means that you save time and money on the tender process.

The list will be reviewed every two years to make sure that it's always fit for purpose.

This guide will take you through the process, step-by-step.



¹The FDfS is a cross-government initiative managed by the Pro5 Group of five of the largest public buying organisations in the UK (CBC, ESPO, NEPO, WMS, YPO), working in partnership with the Department for Education and the School Food Trust.

Catering service framework

The catering service framework lists a range of caterers that have been assessed and approved as suitable for supplying school food services. All of the companies on the list were evaluated by a team from the FdFS project, which included representatives from the Department for Education and the School Food Trust. It allows you to contract with any of the companies listed using a quick and simple procedure.

The listed companies have all met a range of criteria designed to ensure that they will meet the needs of all Children's Services directorates and schools. They have demonstrated that they:

- » understand and comply with the national school food standards
- » procure food in a more sustainable way
- » operate sound food safety procedures
- » are fully compliant with legislation
- » are experienced in the provision of school catering services
- » are financially secure
- » offer a good range of service options, attractive menu choices and good value for money
- » are prepared to work flexibly and in partnership with schools to meet students' needs and help maximise the take up of meals
- » understand how schools are managed and their relationships with students, staff and parents/carers



What is the catering service mini-competition and how does it work?

Put simply, the mini-competition is a way of choosing the right caterer for your school's needs from a list of pre-approved companies. The list is set up on a regional and sub-regional basis, offering all schools a mix of up to nine regional and national suppliers.

Creating your mini-competition

The starting point for your mini-competition is completing a straightforward online questionnaire, created and managed by "Intenda". Simply enter **www.ukframeworks.co.uk** into your usual web browser to log on to the system, then follow the simple online guidance for how to create a user account.

You can specify exactly what you want from your new school food service and what's most important for your students. You can put in your requirements on quality, best value and other areas too. The software then issues an invitation to tender to the companies on the list, who will come back electronically with their bids for you to consider. This is your shortlist.

The Intenda system allows you to meet with bidders at your school during the tender process, and it is recommended that you opt to do this – it allows them to see your facilities and ask any questions, but equally importantly allows you to meet your potential new suppliers and to hear, first-hand, what they can do for you.

It's important that you treat all bidders fairly and share the same information with each of them. You may also wish to carry out a visit to another school that uses the same companies, to help form a view of how they operate.

Once the online evaluation panel processes have taken place (this normally takes around eight weeks if you want to form an evaluation panel, but considerably less if you don't) the software will apply the relevant weightings and generate a recommended supplier for you to approve.

What information should you include in the mini-competition?

The catering framework and mini-competition process take care of the time-consuming procedural and legal requirements, leaving you to get on with the important bit - what you want from your service, and how you want it to be delivered.

Before you start the mini-competition process it's vital that you know exactly what it is that you want from your caterer. A clear vision and a food policy will help you list your requirements clearly, so that companies bidding for your contract can offer you a service that meets your needs in the most cost-effective way.

Vision

This is the starting point for any successful specification, and should come from the senior leadership at your school. Think about what you want your new service to deliver – not just the practical elements, but also how you'll want it to fit with the ethos of your school, and the environment in which you want your students to eat. What do you want to do differently? What should stay the same? Is there anything new you want to try? Don't forget to talk to students and parents in developing your vision – they are your customers, so their views should shape your vision.

School Food Policy

This describes how your vision for your school food service fits with your approach to food in other aspects of school life. Do you run a cooking club? Do you hold food events for the community? Do you work with local suppliers or grow your own?

Specification

Your specification is the most important part of your mini-competition. Using your vision and food policy, this should:

- » explain the scope of your new school food service (i.e. is it for lunches only or for food at breaktime/after school/breakfast club too?)
- » clarify the day-to-day responsibilities of all parties involved e.g. your governors, your catering staff or any staff you want to contract through your new caterer, lunchtime supervisors, teachers and facilities staff
- » explain links with your food policy and the curriculum

Don't be too prescriptive – allow companies to be creative – but you should include details of the following:

- » the timing of and number of meal services you will need
- » how you would like your meals to be produced – such as cooked from fresh or 'cook-chill'
- » responsibilities and expectations for both you and your caterer
- » any special requirements your students have – such as religious diets or specific methods of production
- » your procurement preferences – do you want your ingredients sourced more sustainably? Do you want to specify that ingredients come from local suppliers, or that they are organic?
- » how waste will be disposed of
- » any staff training and recruitment requirements
- » your requirements for fuel efficiency

Evaluation criteria

It is important to think about your evaluation criteria, and to tell potential bidders what these are as part of the mini-competition process. The Intenda mini-competition system allows you to specify the relative 'weight' you wish to place on factors such as 'price' and 'quality' – but you are safe in the knowledge that all the suppliers have already demonstrated their expertise and credentials by being selected for the list in the first place.

Evaluation Panel

This is highly recommended, so that you can make the most informed choice and make sure your new caterer can provide the specifics you've asked for. A face-to-face meeting, conducted on site during the mini-competition process, will help you decide if you can work with a potential supplier and will make sure that they truly understand your requirements.

It is important to meet with all the suppliers who are invited to tender and who request such a meeting, to ensure the process is fair and that you explore all the options available to you. Things to consider for face-to-face meetings:

- » advise the companies of the time and date of the meeting as far in advance as possible. The Intenda system will prompt you for a date
- » treat all companies fairly – this means asking broadly similar questions, showing them the same things when you give them a tour of your kitchen, etc
- » ask them to bring the person who will manage the contract with them to the meeting, so that you can assess if you could form a good working relationship with them

When you are assessing tenders against your evaluation criteria, you will be able to take into account what you learned from the meetings held when suppliers visited your site.



Food Delivery for Schools (FDfS)

The catering service framework is being managed by the cross-government initiative Food Delivery for Schools (FDfS). This is supporting local authorities and schools to save time, resource and money in food procurement, and is helping to meet the government spending target of saving £81bn by 2014/2015.

The FDfS team includes the Pro5 Group of five of the largest public buying organisations in the UK, the Department for Education and the School Food Trust. They are combining their procurement expertise and knowledge of school food services to help schools and councils get the very best value for children.

How to access the framework

To access the framework please contact FDfS:

Phone: 01924 834802
Email: food@Pro5.org
www.ukframeworks.co.uk



The School Food Trust – how can we help you?

The School Food Trust offers a wide range of services and products to support schools with the improvement of all aspects of school food provision. Here are a few examples of what we can offer.

A quick guide to reviewing your school catering service This guide outlines the various options open to you for delivering school food, along with the advantages and challenges of each. It recommends the key things you need to consider and first steps if you want to make changes.

You'll find the guide on our website at:

www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk/resources/ryscs

Catering Service Review We can work with you to assess your existing school food provision and your whole school approach to school food. We can highlight ways in which you can improve your service for children, and make recommendations on how to do this.

Small Step Improvements (SSI) Programme This programme helps you find low-cost ways to get big improvements for your lunchtimes. Industry experts help you to develop small changes which can help you to increase your turnover, cut waste and queuing, make your dining room a more pleasant place to eat and improve your pupils' concentration and behaviour in the afternoons.

For more information, please visit:

www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk/ssi

“The theme of the programme, Small Steps, is important. You don't have to make gigantic changes - you can just look for small changes and they have a big impact.”

**Janet McKinnon, Business Manager,
Holy Family RC and CE College Heywood, Lancashire**

Making Room for Dinner Research with children proves that unappealing dining spaces are the main reason why many pupils still don't choose a school meal. Our experts can help you turn your canteen into a dining room where children want to spend their time. Tailored to suit your needs, we offer a comprehensive, on-site review of your current kitchen and/or dining environment, equipment and supporting processes. We produce a detailed report of recommendations and an action plan for you to implement.

For more information, please visit:

www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk/improvingkitchenanddiningspaces

Why work with us?

We are the experts on school food. Our board members range from food suppliers to head teachers and school cooks, catering companies and management experts. Our staff includes caterers and teachers, as well as experts in child nutrition and marketing.

We work directly with all local authorities and with thousands of schools to help them implement the changes needed and to find practical solutions that work.

We have five years' experience in advising government, at both national and local level, on all aspects of improving food in schools.

Contact us:

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Acknowledgements

The School Food Trust would like to thank the following organisations for their support in writing this guide:

- » Department for Education
- » Pro5 Group of five of the largest public buying organisations in the UK (CBC, ESPO, NEPO, WMS, YPO)
- » GDJ Consultancy
- » Intenda

Contact us:

To find how we can support your school please contact the School Food Trust:

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