



Day 8: How UKUPC supports SMEs

At the start of 2021, there were just under 6m Small or Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs) in the United Kingdom. Members of the UK Universities Purchasing Consortia (UKUPC), recognise the valuable contribution these businesses make to our society and their local communities and the responsibility we hold in supporting them.

As consortia, our primary work is to deliver compliant framework agreements which meet the needs of our members, through this work we regularly engage with all of our suppliers. This can be through pre-tender engagement, throughout the tender process, during contract management activity or just generally in our market research. At every stage we have opportunities to learn but also to impart our knowledge to help develop our supply base.

Thinking specifically about SMEs, here are 4 things we are doing right now:

Listening

This is listed first because it is the most important of all. Through open conversation, where we welcome honest feedback, we are able to learn about the specific challenges SMEs face and how we can do better in our work.

For us, we take the opportunity to discuss the landscape of procurement in our sector, how our buyers and members procure products and services and the challenges they face, which supports SMEs in engaging with our members more effectively.

Sharing clear information on matters of importance

Public procurement can be seen to be complicated and so we work hard to provide advice and guidance documents, to not just our members but our suppliers too, which are useful and supportive.

We recently published the [UKUPC - Developing a carbon reduction plan for SMEs](#), this explains the areas of importance for our members and how SMEs can demonstrate what they are doing to help.

To be published imminently is a guide to tendering for SMEs. This explains, step by step, the considerations to be made at each stage of a bidding process and will help suppliers avoid the basic mistakes we see which stop them winning business.

Also due soon is a webinar series on developing a modern slavery statement for SMEs. Whilst we know that many SMEs are not legally required to publish a statement, we know the majority (like us) want to. The webinar series clearly explains the steps to take to be compliant, what to write and how to publish.

Lastly, we write to our SMEs directly when we find specific information to support them. For example, we highlighted that no suppliers should be paying to see tendering opportunities and gave instructions on how to register for information and find details for free on the Find a Tender Service. We also highlighted the Green Paper consultation with details on how to respond to ensure SME feedback would be considered by the Cabinet Office.

Lotting strategies

We know that changes to our lotting strategies (how we split up the requirements for products and services) in our tender documents makes a huge difference. We strategically plan to ensure that all suppliers have opportunities to bid and that no one supplier can dominate entire agreements.

Simplified tender processes

Nationally we work hard, using our combined experience, to continually improve our documentation and processes. Whilst we are bound by government regulation in using specific forms (for example the standard questionnaire) we try to use plain English, simple questions and reduce any onerous requirements to ensure that the process is fit for purpose and easy to respond to. We ask for feedback from all suppliers following tendering activity and use that feedback to ensure we do things better the next time we tender.

Each consortium has a website with clear contact details for all staff; we encourage SMEs to get in touch for a chat, let us know what is needed, and how we can help.