



The Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC) is aware that some librarians have been concerned by a recent report in the Sunday Post about the implementation of collaborative procurement contracts for the supply of library books and textbooks. The tenders for these contracts are being managed by procurement organisation, Scotland Excel, on behalf of local authorities throughout Scotland.

SLIC has been involved in lengthy discussions with Scotland Excel, both during the development of the library books contract and in the days following the press report. We would therefore like to take this opportunity to provide you with some further background on the collaborative procurement process which we hope will address some of the concerns that have been raised.

Scotland Excel is currently evaluating offers for two contracts, one for the supply and delivery of library books and the other for the supply and delivery of textbooks. The purchasing strategies for both contracts were developed by Scotland Excel in consultation with local authority stakeholders including procurement, education, and librarian staff. Additionally, Scotland Excel collaborated with SLIC on the development of the library book strategy to ensure customer needs were understood.

Further details of each tender are provided below:

1. Library Books

The contract strategy for library books has been developed around the existing supplier landscape. Approximately 75% of annual expenditure already flows through wholesalers based outside of Scotland, while smaller independent Scottish providers supply the majority of more specialised titles. There are not currently any major wholesale suppliers based within Scotland.

Although most local authorities are sourcing from the same wholesalers, they are not currently maximising the discounts that could be achieved through collaborative purchasing. The tender has been designed to address this, and also includes provision for more efficient selection and distribution services, thereby reducing the associated carbon footprint

Until the tenders are evaluated, it is not known how many suppliers will service the contract. However, no supplier will have a monopoly within the Scottish library sector as there will be scope to order outside of the contract where required. Any publications that are not available from contracted suppliers can be ordered from alternative sources, and it is envisaged that these specialist materials will continue to be sourced locally.

The method of selection for mainstream titles from contracted suppliers may be different for some libraries, as the tender requests that suppliers are able to offer the facility for selection and ordering via a website or similar electronic system.

However, the contract also includes a provision for value-added service services such as author events, book fairs and training. These will continue to be managed at local level, and there are no restrictions on the provision of these services by suppliers of specialist materials that fall outside of the scope of the contract.

Library books will be supplied already serviced to NAG standards where required and additional customised servicing can be arranged by each local authority.

2. Textbooks

The supplier landscape consists of large national publishers served by Scottish SME distributors/ resellers, as well as some Scottish SME publishers, and it is expected that contract will feature a similar mix of suppliers. The majority of spend on the contract will relate to the high volume, mainstream textbooks.

The tender also covers the supply of general books such as library books, and these have been included as a separate lot to ensure that suppliers who can service this particular requirement are able to bid separately for this part of the contract. However, where a supplier can offer textbooks and library books, there is scope to consolidate deliveries and reduce costs and carbon footprint.

Scotland Excel believes that the tender provides an opportunity for some suppliers to expand their business by bidding to serve a wider geographic area. Bids are being accepted from suppliers able to serve a minimum of five local authorities.

It is anticipated that the contract for textbooks will feature of number of suppliers from which local authorities can choose those which provide best value for their requirements. In addition, it is recognised that schools will continue to require specialist books and materials not covered by the contract, (estimated at c. £1m pa), which can be sourced by teachers and school librarians through separate arrangements.

Scotland Excel is also aware that the forthcoming Curriculum for Excellence may have an impact on the textbooks and other materials required by schools. At this stage, it has not been possible to quantify the likely impact; however there will be robust contract management processes in place to ensure that the contract remains fit for purpose throughout the period of validity.

In addition, any specialist materials that are required as a result of the implementation of the Curriculum for Excellence, and which are not available as part of the contract, can be sourced from alternative suppliers.

Scotland Excel is confident that a collaborative approach to the procurement of textbooks and library books provides an opportunity to enhance the discounts that can be achieved from major distributors, while continuing to leave scope for local authorities to work with smaller, specialist suppliers. Therefore, the contract will not limit the choice of materials available to libraries and schools.

If you have any specific enquiries in respect of the contracts for library books and textbooks, please do not hesitate to contact Scotland Excel on 0845 606 8726 or email contactus@scotland-excel.org.uk.