

Briefing Note

What is the Qualified Provider Framework?

As of 31st October 2008, the LSC opened a Qualified Provider Framework (QPF) for providers of education and training services. The Qualified Provider Framework is a maintained list of all providers from which the LSC will secure education and training services. This list will incorporate those providers with whom the LSC will negotiate and/or invite to tender.

Why has the LSC introduced a Qualified Provider Framework?

There are a number of reasons the LSC has introduced the QPF:

- The Qualified Provider Framework will streamline the way the LSC commissions and contracts for provision and will remove barriers for new providers wishing to work with the LSC.
- The LSC has replaced its static pre-qualification questionnaire (PQQ) with a dynamic system that now allows providers to apply to pre-qualify at any point during the year, according to their business need and at a time convenient to them. It also allows an organisation to re-apply if their application is unsuccessful, subject to published rules of engagement.
- In order to follow best practice, the LSC has shifted the balance of questions that will be asked at stage 1 (PQQ) and stage 2 (ITT) through the introduction of the QPF. This will reduce provider effort by ensuring they are only invite to tender for appropriate provision based on the data supplied at pre qualification.

How will providers be categorised on the Qualified Provider Framework?

Providers will fall into 1 of three possible categories within the QPF:

- Category 1 Providers that are existing contract holders that DO NOT wish to tender for provision in other programme areas and have not successfully applied via the e-tendering portal. This does not override the LSC's published flexibilities for providers delivering Apprenticeship and Train to Gain provision.
- Category 2 Providers that are existing contract holders that DO wish to tender for provision in other programme areas and have successfully applied via the e-tendering portal.
- Category 3 Providers that are not existing contract holders but wish to tender for provision and have successfully applied via the e-tendering portal.

What do existing providers need to do?

- If you have already been contacted by the LSC to indicate that you have successfully qualified on the QPF you do not need to take action. Providers who have already applied and been advised that they are successful do not need to take any action until either the annual anniversary of their application or new information is available in respect of their Financial Accounts, OfSted grades or any significant changes to Business Standing.
- If you have already applied to the QPF but you have been advised by the LSC that you were unsuccessful and you would like to be invited to tender in the next round of tenders to be issued by the LSC you must submit completed 'Complete Me First' and 'Type 2 Prequalification' questionnaires by the next 'Freeze Date'. These applications will then be evaluated and successful providers invited to tender.
- Existing providers who have no interest in receiving invitations to tender do not need to take action. The LSC will continue to negotiate provision with these providers.
 - For further information and access to the e-tendering portal go to www.lsc.gov.uk and see the guide at the end of this briefing note.

What do new or potential providers need to do?

If a provider does not currently have a formal relationship with the LSC but would like to be considered in tendering rounds, they will need to access the LSC's e-tendering portal in order to apply to pre-qualify. If they are successful in pre-qualifying, they will then be invited to tender in future tendering rounds. If these new providers wish to receive tenders in the next tendering round they will need to apply to pre-qualify before the next published freeze date (see below). Alternatively, they can apply to pre-qualify at any point during the year and if successful, will be included in subsequent tendering rounds.

When can providers apply to pre-qualify?

The e-tendering portal will be "Always Open", this means that providers will be able to apply to pre-qualify at any time during the year. When the LSC identifies a need to tender for provision, it will temporarily freeze the list to new applicants in order for the tendering process to begin. The dates that the list will be frozen will be published well in advance; ensuring providers have sufficient opportunity to apply to pre-qualify before the list is frozen.

The next freeze date will be at **5pm Thursday 9th April, 2009.**

Please note that providers will still have access to the e-tendering portal during the freezes. However, where a successful application to pre-qualify is submitted during a published freeze period, the provider will not be added to the round of Tenders linked to the freeze period.

What happens once a provider has pre-qualified?

Once a provider has pre-qualified on the tendering portal they will be eligible to receive invitations to tender from the LSC.

How long will providers stay pre-qualified?

Once pre-qualified, providers will remain pre-qualified for up to 4 years, providing their qualifying standards are maintained. To monitor standards, the LSC will use both its published Quality Assurance and Intervention strategies, providers will also be required to confirm that the data submitted in the pre qualification questionnaire is up to date in an annual refresh process – annual reminders will be issued via the e-tendering portal.

How can providers be removed or suspended from the Qualified Provider Framework?

There will be triggers for the suspension or removal of providers from the Qualified Provider Framework. These will include poor quality, poor financial health or breaches in contract compliance. As the Framework for Excellence (FfE) is developed the triggers will align with the measures in the FfE and be published via the e-tendering portal.

If a provider has a contract with the LSC or is eligible to receive invitations to tender they will automatically be on the framework. If they wish to remove themselves they will be no longer be able to do business with the LSC.

Freeze Dates

When the LSC identifies a need to tender for provision, it will temporarily freeze the list to new applicants in order for the tendering process to begin. The dates that the list will be frozen will be published well in advance; ensuring providers have sufficient opportunity to apply to pre-qualify.

The next 'freeze' date is 5pm on Thursday 9th April 2009.

The LSC will only invite providers who are successfully pre-qualified to tender. Nationwide ITT rounds will normally take place in January, May and September. However, the LSC reserves the right to invite tenders at other points in the year to meet local and regional needs.

For more information

Further information can be found on the LSC's website at www.lsc.gov.uk

The e-tendering portal can be found at: <https://lsc.bravosolution.com>