

Briefing Note

What is the Qualified Provider Framework?

As of 31st October 2008, the LSC has 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?

Existing providers have two options, depending on their preferred category within the QPF and their own circumstances.

- Where a provider completed a pre qualified questionnaire relating to the 2008/09 academic year, in either the August 2007 or January 2008 PQQ rounds, and wishes to continue to receive tenders, they will need to log on to the LSC's e-tendering portal to check their details are correct. To reduce bureaucracy for providers, the LSC will pre populate the new PQQ with answers already supplied in previous rounds. This means that where a question remains the same, providers will simply have to confirm that their answer is correct. Where the answer is no longer accurate, providers will of course, be able to change it. Where there are new questions, providers will be asked to submit new answers. If these providers wish to receive tenders in January they will need to make these changes / confirm their answers freeze date on the 10th December. Alternatively, they can apply to pre-qualify at any point during the year and if successful, will be included in subsequent tendering rounds.
- Where a provider has not submitted a PQQ response in either the August 2007 or January 2008 PQQ rounds, and they wish to receive tenders from the LSC, they will need to log on to the e-tendering portal and apply to pre-qualify. If these providers wish to receive tenders in January they will need to apply to pre-qualify before the freeze date on the 10th December. Alternatively, they can apply to pre-qualify at any point during the year and if successful, will be included in subsequent tendering rounds.

Providers need only take action before 10th December if they wish to receive invitations to tender from the LSC in January 2009

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. As with existing providers, if these new providers wish to receive tenders in January 2009 they will need to apply to pre-qualify before the freeze date on the 10th December 2008. 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 first freeze date will be on **10th December**, which is 40 days after the QPF was advertised in the Official Journal of the European Union.

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.

Timescales

QPF open for business and PQQ launched	31 st October
First 'freeze' date – providers must have submitted a pre-qualification questionnaire or updated their existing data on the LSC e-tendering portal by this date to receive tenders in January	10 th December
Invitations to tender issued by the LSC	January 2009 *
Provider briefings on the content of invitations to tender	February 2009 *
Invitations to tender returned to the LSC	March 2009 *
Invitations to tender evaluated by the LSC	March 2009 *
Contract award	April 2009 *

* these dates will be confirmed at a later date. The LSC reserves the right to change these dates,

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. Notice will always be provided in these cases, allowing new providers enough time to apply to pre qualify.

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>

