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Award

Strategic Digital Partner

The Education and Training Foundation

UK5: Transparency notice - Procurement Act 2023 - [view information about notice types](#)

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Scope

Reference

25-26.DDT-63

Description

Following an unsuccessful tender in 2024, The Education and Training Foundation (ETF) are moving to pursue a direct award as a follow-on to the original tender.

The move to a process for direct award was as a direct result of the reasons from the unsuccessful procurement in 2024.

Following the failed tender a temporary arrangement was put in place with the incumbent supplier, and a review of the market was then undertaken taking into consideration the particular requirements that led to the unsuccessful tender, and the extremely limited potential market.

This transparency notice reflects the process that was then needed to be followed.

Extensive market research was conducted to identify potential suppliers that could meet

the requirements, and then short-listing (detailed under procedure) was carried out based on the necessary capabilities, knowledge and experience.

The short-listed suppliers were approached as it was deemed that they were best placed to meet ETF's requirement to build a new website as single open front door with updated branding, consolidating the ETF and SET websites. In line with the agreed technology strategy, the website will be developed using Umbraco technology. While ETF will continue to use Microsoft Dynamics CRM, alternative membership solutions will also be explored.

The successfully appointed supplier will:

- Support ETF's digital transformation programme to achieve our desired target state by implementing and supporting a CMS solution, inheriting our existing membership portal, and build any necessary integrations into CRM for off-the-shelf membership solution, events and CPD with Dynamics CRM.
- To enhance a Single Sign On (SSO) solution, Azure B2C, across our digital estate.
- Be a strategic digital partner for the ETF who shares a vision and a roadmap for the future.
- Launch a CMS solution with strong digital architecture, navigation, useability, governance, and content management features.
- Ensure the CMS is integrated with Google Analytics ready for launch to align with ETF's reporting and insight needs.
- Meet relevant security, compliance, and accessibility standards.

In summary, this transparency notice is to specify the reasonable approach to move to a direct award following a failed procurement, taking into account the specific reasons for the previous unsuccessful tender, and the following thorough identification, and process for final selection of a suitable supplier (see procedure).

Contract 1. Strategic Digital Partner

Suppliers

Supplier not yet selected

Contract value

- £240,000 excluding VAT
- £300,000 including VAT

Above the relevant threshold

Earliest date the contract will be signed

30 May 2025

Contract dates (estimated)

- 2 June 2025 to 31 March 2026
- Possible extension to 31 March 2027
- 1 year, 9 months, 29 days

Description of possible extension:

The contract duration will be for an initial minimum 1-year term with a 1 year optional extension period.

Main procurement category

Services

Options

The right to additional purchases while the contract is valid.

The Education and Training Foundation (ETF) reserve the right to award a support contract to the successful awarded supplier.

CPV classifications

- 72421000 - Internet or intranet client application development services
- 72413000 - World wide web (www) site design services
- 72416000 - Application service providers
- 72253200 - Systems support services
- 72211000 - Programming services of systems and user software
- 72212220 - Internet and intranet software development services
- 72212445 - Customer Relation Management software development services

Contract locations

- UK - United Kingdom

Participation

Particular suitability

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SME)

Other information

Description of risks to contract performance

- Changes to legislation resulting in unplanned system adaptations e.g. new cyber threats
- Data security breach
- Significant changes in requirements driven by 'Commissioner' requirements
- Cleansing the data takes longer than anticipated
- Unexpected issues migrating data to a unified website platform
- Inability to complete the project in the specified time-frame
- Development costs are higher than originally planned
- Issues relating to ownership of intellectual property
- Necessary changes in scope

Conflicts assessment prepared/revised

Yes

Procedure

Procedure type

Direct award

Direct award justification

Switching to direct award

The Education and Training Foundation (ETF) is looking to award a contract following an incomplete procedure for the Strategic Digital Partner (Content Management System) published under the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 FTS/OJEU Ref: 20240321-000001 (2024/S 000-009142) On 21/03/2024 (XMLID=202395, Mail=TED32-XML07-20240321). Tenders or requests to participate were received and rejected.

Essential requirement detailed in the original tender that were not able to be fulfilled include:

- Digital partners should have an extensive portfolio of clients that are professional membership bodies
- Compliance with DfE authority to operate
- CRM 'MUST' requirements listed in Part 2 TRD excel spreadsheet.

Of the 112 suppliers who registered their interest in the bid, several withdrew for the following reasons:

- They didn't offer off-the-shelf platforms
- They felt their solution was not suitable
- They did not provide hosting, support and maintenance for Umbraco sites
- There was concern that there was an existing UX agency partner
- They had limited experience in the membership organisation space
- They felt the functional requirements lent themselves more to an off the shelf product rather than bespoke
- They felt they weren't the right technical fit.

Note, ETF felt that Umbraco was an essential requirement to avoid security breaches.

This incomplete procurement led ETF to identify suppliers that could be approached, switching the procurement process to a direct award. 21 suppliers who are Umbraco partners recommended on the Umbraco website (<https://umbraco.com/partners/?skill=§or=&country=&level=>) were considered for suitability. Suppliers were assessed on their ratings, whether they had membership experience (using dynamics) and whether they have worked in education. Out-of-the-box membership solutions suitable for the education sector was also considered. The list was shortlisted to 7 following this assessment. Digital agencies who cannot provide end-to-end solutions with Microsoft Dynamics off the shelf products were excluded.

In April (2025), ETF arranged a series of demonstrations in which suppliers were asked to showcase their membership functionality. Membership requirements were shared with all suppliers. Some suppliers offered both Umbraco services and membership functionality, while in other cases, suppliers were brought together to meet ETF's needs.

It is important to note that these sessions were not sales pitches but rather an opportunity for suppliers to demonstrate how their solution will meet ETF's specific requirements. No financial discussions were held during these sessions. Focus was primarily on scoring the solution against ETF's requirements.

ETF are switching to a direct award following a failed procurement.

Contracting authority

The Education and Training Foundation

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Organisation type: Public authority - sub-central government