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Planning

Project to Improve School Food Procurement Practices

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

UK2: Preliminary market engagement notice - Procurement Act 2023 - [view information about notice types](#)

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Procurement identifier (OCID): ocds-h6vhtk-0569c3

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Scope

Description

This project would set out to encourage best practice in school food procurement and support a wide range of positive outcomes, including improving the quality and sustainability of food sourced, reducing food waste, engaging children with the food system, improving access to Small-Medium Enterprises, and encouraging local economic growth. It would also directly contribute to the Food Strategy outcomes. The project objectives are: 1. Encourage food procurement best practice in the education sector - this would include: a. Sourcing of food in education settings which is seasonal, produced to higher environmental standards, and higher animal welfare standards (going above UK regulatory baseline but allowing for equivalence in other countries). b. Reducing food waste throughout education food procurement supply chains. c. Provision of food in education settings which is healthy and nutritious and accounts for the specific needs of the consumer. d. Sourcing of food in education settings from a diverse range of suppliers, particularly SMEs and VCSEs, with an aim to increase resilience, encourage food producers to innovate and help support the economic, social and environmental well-being of the relevant area (as per the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012). 2. Support food education for pupils in a way which engages them with the opportunities and

challenges across the food system, with the aim of teaching pupils about the importance of food, how it affects health, and about the relationship between food and farming (e.g. by setting up a school vegetable garden, conducting farm visits, providing cooking lessons, and adding aspects of food education to the curriculum). 3. Increase the transparency of and traceability within food supply chains in education settings to: a. Help improve accessibility for SMEs by addressing information failures whereby suppliers lack knowledge and understanding of how to access opportunities in the public sector and procurers are unsure of how to buy from local SMEs. b. Review compliance with the School Food Standards and the information available to enable evidencing compliance. c. Drive continuous improvement, including to overcome barriers to compliance with nutritional and food procurement rules and regulations. d. Build our understanding of what food is bought, served, sold and wasted. Defra has estimated a provisional budget of £5-8 million for the project. However, the specific level of funding has not yet been finalised and could be subject to change as we refine the requirement for this project

Contract dates (estimated)

- 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2028
- 2 years

Main procurement category

Services

CPV classifications

- 55524000 - School catering services
- 80490000 - Operation of an educational centre

Contract locations

- UK - United Kingdom

Engagement

Engagement deadline

14 August 2025

Engagement process description

Defra is seeking expressions of interests in delivering a project to support schools in England improve their food procurement standards and catering practices. Interested suppliers are asked to register their interest by completing the following form: <https://forms.cloud.microsoft/e/m89KSDYv9x> This should be completed and submitted no later than 17:00 on the 14/08/2025. If you have any questions or issues with the form, please email emily.hayes@defra.gov.uk.

Submission

Publication date of tender notice (estimated)

1 October 2025

Contracting authority

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

- Public Procurement Organisation Number: PNBD-3289-CDGX

Seacole Building, 2 Marsham Street

London

SW1P 4DF

United Kingdom

Contact name: Defra group Commercial

Email: emily.hayes@defra.gov.uk

Website: <https://defra-family.force.com/s/Welcome>

Region: UKI32 - Westminster

Organisation type: Public authority - central government