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Department of Social Protection



Údarás Sábháilteachta Bia NA hÉIREANN
Food Safety AUTHORITY OF IRELAND



An Roinn Oideachais
agus Óige
Department of Education
and Youth



Procurement Support for the Provision of Hot Meals to Primary Schools

School Meals Scheme 2026/27

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Document Control

Version No.	Details of Change	Changed Sections	Date
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Contents

DOCUMENT CONTROL	2
PROCUREMENT.....	8
Procurement Rules / Spending Thresholds / Contract Value	8
1. What are the procurement requirements for the provision of School Meals?	8
2. How should I estimate the contract value?	8
3. How can the value of the contract be determined when student numbers rise and fall?	8
4. Do we have to tender every year?	8
5. If you put in the 3-year value, can you still just award a 1-year contract and not be tied to one company for three years?	8
6. Do I have to tender if the estimated value of my contract is less than €50,000 over the 3 years?	9
7. If we cannot get 3 written responses to our requests for a contract less than €50,000, do we need to request more responses using the SPU template?.....	9
8. If we have less than 28 pupils is there a form/process that we need to fill in/do to obtain 3 written proposals?	9
9. My 1-year contract is less than €50,000, can I proceed without procurement?	9
10. How are new enrolments handled within the contract during the term?	9
11. Why do we need to do a procurement process when the price is the same from all providers?	10
12. Can I follow the same guidance for publishing a tender if my estimated contract value is above €750,000?	10
13. Our school is happy with the current service provider. Can we continue on a rolling contract?	10
14. If a school ran a procurement process last year, do they have to do it again this year?	10
It depends on the duration of the contract your school has in place. If your contract was for one year plus one, plus one, with a max duration of three years but you only have completed one year of your contract you must formerly advise the contractor if you are extending the contract to year two. This must be done prior to year one expiring.	10
15. How does a school know if they need to tender for a new contract?	10
16. As a former non-DEIS pilot school with a continuation letter, we wish to change service provider now, what should we do?.....	11
17. Is the process only for new schools joining hot meals, or do current participant schools also need to complete it?	11
18. We are not happy with our current service provider, and our plan is to move in the near future. What should we do?	11
19. Does my school need to have received funding approval prior to commencing the procurement process?	11
20. Only one service provider is willing to service our school . What do we put onto the eTenders for this? ..	11
21. There is only one company that provides hot meals in the area. Do we still have to publish a tender? ..	11
22. Could this process be simplified? Could there be a template with more of the information filled in?	12

- 23. What provisions are made for small schools in relation to no service providers wanting to provide hot meals to them? 12
- 24. Should we survey parents on hot vs cold lunches before going to tender, and do schools have a choice between hot or cold? 12
- 25. What happens if a service provider delivers hot meals but does not provide an operative to clean the tables? Should the school's own cleaner take responsibility for this? At present, our tables are only cleaned once a week after ordinary lunches. Is daily table cleaning mandatory under the scheme? 12
- 26. For schools who are new to hot school meals, do we input the number of pupils based on September 2025 or for what we currently have on roll for this coming school year? 12

Procurement Documents 13

- 27. There are nearly 100 pages of documentation in the CFT. Do we only amend the areas highlighted in yellow or with brackets? 13
- 28. Do we note 182 school days even if we are starting in January? 13
- 29. What's the school's 'legal name'? The name used by the Department of Education and Youth? 13
- 30. If our funding includes snacks, do we include snack costs in the hot meals calculator? 13
- 31. Will the presentation slides be available after the webinar? 14
- 32. If we are satisfied with our current service provider, can we use their standards as the basis of procurement? 14
- 33. Are there plans for larger portions for senior pupils and smaller portions for younger pupils? 14

Site Visit / Previous Engagement..... 14

- 34. A service provider visited our school before the tender process. Do they have to visit the school again during the tender process?..... 14
- 35. We currently have a service provider in place. Do they need to attend the site visit? 14
- 36. We are receiving many site visit requests. Do we have to facilitate them all? 14
- 37. Last year, we had companies out. Do we need to start this process again or can we continue on with the process? 15
- 38. How can schools select the correct service delivery model without a site visit first? 15

Service Delivery Model / Property Licence Documents 15

- 39. Service Delivery Model - are we limited to one? 15
- 40. We are in a rural area, I don't think we will have any business that will be able to deliver hot meals, but I don't see a space in our school that could be adapted to reheat meals. Will we procure for a number of different types of delivery? 15
- 41. When going to tender, can you put 2 options for delivery, that is a pod on the school ground and also an area within the school. The tendering company can then decide which suits. Or do we have to pick one only beforehand? 15
- 42. Is it possible to select more than one Service Delivery Model option if you are unsure if your available space is suitable or not?..... 15
- 43. As the mandatory site visits only happen after you have chosen your Service Delivery Model option, what do you do if you are unsure whether an available space is suitable in space or otherwise? 15
- 44. Can you clarify the difference between a servery onsite and using another space in the school for reheating pre-made lunches?..... 16
- 45. Some pupils only want cold food—can we offer both cold and hot options? 16

46.	Can you clarify when a property licence and deed of renunciation is required i.e. which Service Delivery Model requires these documents?	16
47.	Can we procure Service Delivery Model 1 (hot drop) and then change to another model as our circumstances change?	16
48.	This is our first time to have hot meals. Is Option 1 recommended for first timers' schools?	17
49.	If you go with an option and do not receive any tenders, do we then try another option?	17
50.	How do you know if you should select hot meals or cold lunches?	17
51.	Is it compulsory to provide hot meals now?	17
52.	Can service providers leave hot meals at the school door for staff to distribute, or must they deliver to each classroom?	17
53.	Who pays for adjustments to make a room suitable for meal service?	17
54.	If a pod/modular catering unit is required, where do we apply for funding?	17
55.	If opting for an external pod/catering unit, does this require planning permission?	18
56.	Unsure if the kitchen off the Halla Spóirt is suitable—how should we assess suitability?	18
57.	Do we need space for refrigeration as well as ovens?	18
58.	Our school has a small kitchen off a GP Room. How do we know if the space is sufficient for the hot meals scheme?	18
59.	Regardless of the service delivery model, does our school require a new dedicated room or area for the regeneration of Hot Meals?	19
60.	When is it appropriate to consider a new dedicated room or area for the regeneration of Hot Meals in my school?	19
Evaluation Process / Appointment of Service Provider		19
61.	As the costs are fixed why do we have to conduct a tender process?	19
62.	Can I appoint a service provider based on the food taste? We have received food samples; how can we assess them? Are we allowed to organise food tasting with the companies that organised site visits?	20
63.	Do I have to evaluate the proposals if the estimated value of my contract is less than €50,000?	20
64.	Do we have to provide feedback in the individual result letters to each Tenderer?	20
Joint Procurement		20
65.	Can a number of schools come together to do a single procurement process	20
Utilities		20
66.	Who estimates the additional cost of electricity?	20
67.	If a school does not have three-phase electricity, they will not be able to run the ovens needed for heating on site. What can we do?	21
Insurance		21
68.	Do I need to contact my insurance company about hot drop food? If so, what exactly should I ask them to do, provide written confirmation or carry out an in-person assessment of the school?	21
ETENDERS / OJEU		22
eTenders Account		22

69. We have recently used eTenders for another tender project (e.g. Minor Works). Can we use the same account to publish a tender for School Meals? 22

Publishing a Tender / Tender Process 22

70. How long is the process for publishing a tender on eTenders? 22
71. Can I save a draft of my CfT on eTenders and finish the publication at another time? 23
72. If you start the publication process on eTenders and don't get a chance to finish it in one sitting, can you save what you have done and come back to it later? 23
73. Evaluation Mechanism: what option for this field on eTenders? 23
74. Do we need to upload the whole CFT documents, including the TRD and appendices on eTenders? .. 23
75. My school only received 1 tender, is that ok? 23
76. Is there a step-by-step video available for this process so we can follow it when doing this for real - and if so, where can we access it?..... 23
77. What website is this video on? 23

Expression of Interest 24

78. We have received some Expressions of Interest. Should we invite them all to attend to a site visit? 24

Unlocking Tenders / Accessing Submissions 24

79. We have received a tender submission. How can we access it? 24

OJEU 24

80. What's the difference between eTenders and OJEU? 24

FOOD BUSINESS OPERATORS (FBOS) 25

81. What is a Food Business Operator (FBO)? 25
82. Why should School Boards of Management not sign contracts that make them FBOs? 25
83. What statutory compliance and certification are FBOs responsible for, in the School Meals Programme? 25
84. What are the FBO's responsibilities regarding catering equipment? 25
85. Who is responsible for the costs associated with providing School Meals facilities? 25
86. Who is responsible for food waste management? 25
87. Can children still take leftovers home so parents can see what was eaten?..... 26
88. Can you confirm that when we use all the mandatory procurement templates and documents, the service provider is automatically the FBO and responsible for all food law requirements, etc., and not the school? 26

SCHOOL STAFF AND FBO STAFF 26

89. Can school representatives or staff be involved in food handling activities? 26
90. Can school staff accept payments, gifts, or inducements from tenderers or FBOs? 27
91. What are the requirements for FBO staff working in schools? 27

CONTRACT MANAGEMENT 27

- 92. What is the role of Boards of Management once the contract is signed? 27
- 93. How should Boards of Management manage meal orders and invoices? 27
- 94. How does the contract template support contract management? 28
- 95. What happens if an FBO consistently fails to meet KPIs? 28

FOOD QUALITY 28

- 96. How should schools monitor food quality? 28
- 97. What should schools do if they have concerns about nutrition standards or food quality? 28

FUNDING / BANK ACCOUNT / SLA 29

- 98. Do we need to open a separate bank account for the programme? 29
- 99. We set up a new bank account for lunches—should we send details to the Department now, or complete procurement first? 29

Procurement Rules / Spending Thresholds / Contract Value

1. What are the procurement requirements for the provision of School Meals?

In line with National Public Procurement Rules, for contracts with an estimated value of less than €50,000, a minimum of 3 written proposals is required. For contracts valued between €50,000 and €750,000, a tender must be published on the eTenders platform. If the contract value is more than €750,000, a tender must be published on both eTenders and Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU).

2. How should I estimate the contract value?

The contract value must be estimated over three years the maximum term of the contract. The contract term in the CFT template for tender process provides that schools are tendering for a 1-year contract with the possibility to extend the contract for a further two 1-year terms, up to a maximum of 3 years. The school should multiply the number of students times 182 (number of days per year) times 3 (the number of years, including all possible extensions) times €3.20 (the Hot Meal payment rate).

Schools can use the Calculator available at the [Hot Meals page](#) on the SPU website to estimate their contract value.

3. How can the value of the contract be determined when student numbers rise and fall?

The contract value is based on the current number of students enrolled in the school as the potential total number of meals to be ordered and it is clearly stated in the CFT, Appendix 2, documents that this is an estimate: *“Tenderers should note that it is not mandatory for students in the school to avail of the Hot Meals on any given day or at all and that the successful Tenderer will only be paid for meals requested by parents/guardians. Estimated volumes provided in this CFT are indicative only and are subject to fluctuation. The exact number of students availing of the meals will vary on a week-to-week basis.”*

Please note: In some cases, similar questions have been grouped together with a single response provided below.

4. Do we have to tender every year?

5. If you put in the 3-year value, can you still just award a 1-year contract and not be tied to one company for three years?

Please note that the CFT is for a 1-year contract with the possibility to extend the contract for a further two 1-year terms, up to a maximum of 3 years, as per extracts from sections 1.4 and 1.5 of the CFT below:

“1.4 Any Services Contract that may result from this Competition will be issued for a term of one (1) year (“the Term”).”

“1.5 The Contracting Authority reserves the right to extend the Term for a period or periods of up to one (1) year with a maximum of two (2) such extension or extensions on the same terms and conditions, subject to the Contracting Authority’s obligations at law.”

The contract on offer will be for 3 years with an in-built break mechanism after each year. The topic of Contract Management will be addressed at a dedicated webinar in 2026.

6. Do I have to tender if the estimated value of my contract is less than €50,000 over the 3 years?

In line with National Public Procurement Rules, for contracts with an estimated value of less than €50,000, a procurement still needs to be carried out using the less than €50k CFT. Please refer to the [Hot Meals page](#) on the SPU website for further guidance.

7. If we cannot get 3 written responses to our requests for a contract less than €50,000, do we need to request more responses using the SPU template?

The school must seek a minimum of three written proposals. If the school receives less than three responses, the school can evaluate the proposals received and award a contract thereafter to the best valid proposal.

8. If we have less than 28 pupils is there a form/process that we need to fill in/do to obtain 3 written proposals?

Yes, the less than €50k CFT. Please visit the [Hot Meals page](#) on the SPU website for guidance.

9. My 1-year contract is less than €50,000, can I proceed without procurement?

No, per the guidance, your contract value must be estimated over a 3-year maximum term and even if your 3-year contract was under 50k as per public procurement rules a procurement still needs to be carried out using the less than €50k CFT. Please visit the [Hot Meals page](#) on the SPU website for guidance.

10. How are new enrolments handled within the contract during the term?

Department of Education & Youth enrolment figures are used for the initial calculation for funding. Schools at the end of the academic year can seek a review of their funding if they have had a substantial increase in pupil numbers and have insufficient funds. The contract value is based on the current number of students as the potential total number of meals to be ordered and it is clearly stated in the CFT, Appendix 2, document that this is an estimate: *“Tenderers should note that it is not mandatory for students in the school to avail of the Hot Meals on any given day or at all and that the successful Tenderer will only be paid for meals requested by students/their parents/guardians. Estimated volumes provided in this CFT are*

indicative only and are subject to fluctuation. The exact number of students availing of the meals will vary on a week-to-week basis.”

11. Why do we need to do a procurement process when the price is the same from all providers?

As schools are defined as Public Sector Bodies they must adhere to National and European Public procurement guides and regulations and which clearly states that there must be a competitive process when awarding contracts to service providers and expending public monies.

12. Can I follow the same guidance for publishing a tender if my estimated contract value is above €750,000?

Specific document templates and guidance for publishing tenders above the €750,000 threshold will be available on the [Hot Meals page](#) on the SPU website.

13. Our school is happy with the current service provider. Can we continue on a rolling contract?

No, you must comply with Public Procurement rules and do a compliant tender.

14. If a school ran a procurement process last year, do they have to do it again this year?

It depends on the duration of the contract your school has in place. If your contract was for one year plus one, plus one, with a max duration of three years but you only have completed one year of your contract you must formerly advise the contractor if you are extending the contract to year two. This must be done prior to year one expiring.

15. How does a school know if they need to tender for a new contract?

1. **Original Procurement Compliance:** How the initial contract was awarded (i.e., if it followed proper public procurement procedures).
2. **Contract Term:** All public contracts have a defined term, meaning they are only valid until the agreed-upon end date, after which a new procurement process must be completed.
3. **Value of the Contract:** The contract is only valid for the total value as estimated in the original procurement process. If the spending reaches that limit before the end of the contract term, the contract is exhausted, and a new procurement process must be started.

If the original process was not procurement compliant, or if the contract term has expired, or if the total value has been exhausted, a new, compliant procurement process must be conducted. You must apply for funding annually to DSP.

16. As a former non-DEIS pilot school with a continuation letter, we wish to change service provider now, what should we do?

All contracts must have a start and end date. If out of contract, you must complete a procurement process using the new template documentation available at the [Hot Meals page](#) on the SPU website.

17. Is the process only for new schools joining hot meals, or do current participant schools also need to complete it?

New schools and schools currently out of contract must use the new template documentation available at the [Hot Meals page](#) on the SPU website.

18. We are not happy with our current service provider, and our plan is to move in the near future. What should we do?

The school is advised to retender now.

19. Does my school need to have received funding approval prior to commencing the procurement process?

Schools must complete their procurement process using the procurement documentation on the SPU website prior to applying to DSP for funding.

Please visit the [Hot Meals page](#) on the SPU website for guidance.

Please note: In some cases, similar questions have been grouped together with a single response provided below.

20. Only one service provider is willing to service our school . What do we put onto the eTenders for this?

21. There is only one company that provides hot meals in the area. Do we still have to publish a tender?

We completely understand that anecdotal evidence or individual experience may suggest that there is only one company available to provide the required services. However, this previous knowledge does not remove the requirement to formally advertise the opportunity on eTenders when the contract value is above €50,000. By publishing a tender, the school, as a contracting authority, fulfils its due diligence obligation to formally test the market and identify all viable service providers.

A school will not know how many service providers will tender until they open the tender box. If the school gets only one valid Tender which meets the award criteria a school can award the contract to that service provider. In all cases where a contract is in excess of €50,000, you must advertise a tender on the eTenders platform.

22. Could this process be simplified? Could there be a template with more of the information filled in?

No, DEY has developed a CFT where a school only needs to insert the bare minimum of details relevant to their school only. Every effort has been made to simplify the process with the production of written and video guidance for all tasks, available on the [Hot Meals pages](#) on the SPU website. The clear advice is to follow this guidance closely because it will enable you to successfully complete the list of tasks. The edits required to the tender documents have been reduced to the absolute minimum, in terms of time and input.

23. What provisions are made for small schools in relation to no service providers wanting to provide hot meals to them?

Schools can opt to apply for the cold lunch option. They should contact DSP helpdesk - school.meals@welfare.ie.

24. Should we survey parents on hot vs cold lunches before going to tender, and do schools have a choice between hot or cold?

This is a decision for the school. Schools can choose to opt in or out of either the hot meal or cold lunch but cannot have a mix of both. There are no minimum number of pupils is required. Full school enrolment numbers should be used in the tender.

25. What happens if a service provider delivers hot meals but does not provide an operative to clean the tables? Should the school's own cleaner take responsibility for this? At present, our tables are only cleaned once a week after ordinary lunches. Is daily table cleaning mandatory under the scheme?

The CFT does not provide for student desks to be cleaned by the service provider. Desks should be cleaned as they are currently being cleaned in schools.

26. For schools who are new to hot school meals, do we input the number of pupils based on September 2025 or for what we currently have on roll for this coming school year?

Use your enrolment figures for 2026/2027.

Procurement Documents

27. There are nearly 100 pages of documentation in the CFT. Do we only amend the areas highlighted in yellow or with brackets?

The only parts of the contract that should be edited are the areas highlighted in yellow or that have an instruction against it.

In respect of the contract (within the CFT) this does not need to be edited before publishing the Tender. It will have to be completed prior to signing the contract with the winning party, though.

Schools must not edit or delete any sections of the CFT for tender publication other than:

- Cover page
- Page 3
- Page 4
- Schedule F

If you choose Option 1 (Meals Pre-Prepared Off-site and Delivered Ready to Eat) you will not need to include a property licence and deed of renunciation among your published procurement document suite. If, however, you choose any of options 2, 3, or 4, you will need to include these documents. The particular licence template for the ownership model of your school, and deed of renunciation, can be found on the [Hot Meals pages](#) on the SPU website.

Complete the Hot Meals CFT and TRD – Video Guide, available on the [Hot Meals pages](#) on the SPU website, covers all sections that must be completed.

28. Do we note 182 school days even if we are starting in January?

Yes.

Please note: In some cases, similar questions have been grouped together with a single response provided below.

29. What's the school's 'legal name'? The name used by the Department of Education and Youth?

It's the official name of the school, don't use shortened versions as they are not legally binding.

30. If our funding includes snacks, do we include snack costs in the hot meals calculator?

No, the calculator is designed for hot meals only.

31. Will the presentation slides be available after the webinar?

A recording of the webinar is available on the [Hot Meals page](#) on the SPU website.

32. If we are satisfied with our current service provider, can we use their standards as the basis of procurement?

No. It is compulsory to use the new procurement template documentation, available in the SPU website.

33. Are there plans for larger portions for senior pupils and smaller portions for younger pupils?

The Department of Social Protection has appointed a dietician who will review the nutritional guidelines.

Site Visit / Previous Engagement

34. A service provider visited our school before the tender process. Do they have to visit the school again during the tender process?

Yes, they do. Any visits to the school campus by prospective service providers that occur outside of the procurement process/timeline have no standing within the formal tendering process and cannot be recognised as site visits.

35. We currently have a service provider in place. Do they need to attend the site visit?

Yes, they do. Any prior engagement or local knowledge/familiarity with/by the incumbent service provider can have no standing within the formal tendering process and cannot be recognised as site visits.

36. We are receiving many site visit requests. Do we have to facilitate them all?

Site visits are mandatory as per tender documentation. Therefore, yes, the school must facilitate all prospective tenderers (service providers) who request an appointment to visit the school. For the avoidance of doubt, an Expression of Interest is not a request for a site visit appointment. You can refer to sections 2.20 and 3.3 of your CFT document to read more about it. The school has discretion when scheduling the timing of site visits and, for its own operational reasons, can arrange group visits i.e. schedule more than one service provider to attend at the same timeslot.

37. Last year, we had companies out. Do we need to start this process again or can we continue on with the process?

Any previous engagement or visits to the school campus by prospective service providers that occurred outside of the procurement process/timeline have no standing within the formal tendering process and cannot be recognised as site visits for a new procurement process.

38. How can schools select the correct service delivery model without a site visit first?

The site visit is not to select the correct delivery model, it is to ensure Tenderers understand the site and are aware of any building works needed before they tender. The site visit is mandatory. Schools must decide which service delivery model is appropriate for their school by reading the Department of Education and Youth's SDG02 TN-06 Guidance, before publishing their Tender.

Service Delivery Model / Property Licence Documents

Please note: In some cases, similar questions have been grouped together with a single response provided below.

39. Service Delivery Model - are we limited to one?

40. We are in a rural area, I don't think we will have any business that will be able to deliver hot meals, but I don't see a space in our school that could be adapted to reheat meals. Will we procure for a number of different types of delivery?

41. When going to tender, can you put 2 options for delivery, that is a pod on the school ground and also an area within the school. The tendering company can then decide which suits. Or do we have to pick one only beforehand?

42. Is it possible to select more than one Service Delivery Model option if you are unsure if your available space is suitable or not?

43. As the mandatory site visits only happen after you have chosen your Service Delivery Model option, what do you do if you are unsure whether an available space is suitable in space or otherwise?

Schools must choose only one service delivery model to enable a fair and like-for-like comparison of all service providers. Having first read the Department of Education and Youth's SDG02 TN-06 Guidance for Existing Primary Schools in Relation to Facilities for Provision of School Meals, found [here](#), you will decide upon the service delivery model which best meets the needs of your school (see page 4 of the template CFT). The Department's Technical Guidance provides information on what are the technical requirements that the School Meals provider must adhere to for each of the delivery options. Schools can use this guidance to assess which option is most suited to their school based on their own specific existing school facilities, space available and context. Only

where adequate space provision is available within the school building should the 'internal regeneration' option be considered. Otherwise, one of the other delivery options should be explored. It is Mandatory for the School Meals provider to visit your school as part of the tender process to assess how they will comply with the technical requirements based on the specified delivery option.

44. Can you clarify the difference between a servery onsite and using another space in the school for reheating pre-made lunches?

External pods or mobile units in compliance with the Department's Technical Guidance, Building Regulations and Food Safety requirements could provide facilities for hot meals regeneration installed on school sites where a suitable external space is available. Subject to available and appropriate space requirements, it may be feasible for the regeneration heating of meals to take place within an existing school building either in an existing servery or in another space which is suitable to be adapted in accordance with the Department's Technical Guidance, Building Regulations and Food Safety requirements.

45. Some pupils only want cold food—can we offer both cold and hot options?

No, only one meal club can be provided at lunch time so the school must decide on which meal club - the cold lunch option or hot meals.

46. Can you clarify when a property licence and deed of renunciation is required i.e. which Service Delivery Model requires these documents?

Having first read the Department of Education and Youth's SDG02 TN-06 Guidance for Existing Primary Schools in Relation to Facilities for Provision of School Meals, found [here](#), you will decide upon the service delivery model which best meets the needs of your school (see page 4 of the template CFT). If you choose Option 1 (Meals Pre-Prepared Off-site and Delivered Ready to Eat) you will not need to include a property licence and deed of renunciation among your published procurement document suite. If, however, you choose any of options 2, 3, or 4, you will need to include these documents. The particular licence template for the ownership model of your school, and deed of renunciation, can be found on the [Hot Meals pages](#) on the SPU website.

47. Can we procure Service Delivery Model 1 (hot drop) and then change to another model as our circumstances change?

The contract will be for service delivery model 1. Do not extend the contract for another year and retender for the appropriate Service Delivery Model prior to the current contract expiring, ensuring there is no gap in service delivery between contracts.

48. This is our first time to have hot meals. Is Option 1 recommended for first timers' schools?

That's a decision for the school to make. Having first read the Department of Education and Youth's SDG02 TN-06 Guidance for Existing Primary Schools in Relation to Facilities for Provision of School Meals, found [here](#), you will decide upon the service delivery model which best meets the needs of your school (see page 4 of the template CFT).

49. If you go with an option and do not receive any tenders, do we then try another option?

School must retender choosing another appropriate service delivery model option, or contact school.meals@welfare.ie for further advice, if considering applying for cold lunches.

50. How do you know if you should select hot meals or cold lunches?

That is a decision that rests solely with the school. School should consult with its stakeholders including students, parents and guardians before making the choice. Schools should also read the Department of Education and Youth's SDG02 TN-06 Guidance for Existing Primary Schools in Relation to Facilities for Provision of School Meals, found [here](#).

51. Is it compulsory to provide hot meals now?

No, it is not mandatory. The school may choose to opt into the scheme.

52. Can service providers leave hot meals at the school door for staff to distribute, or must they deliver to each classroom?

The FBO is required to distribute the food ordered to all classrooms in the school. Teachers under the "in loco parentis" can put the food onto each student's desk. School staff unless they are contracted separately with the FBO cannot carry out any activities related to food handling.

53. Who pays for adjustments to make a room suitable for meal service?

The successful service provider.

54. If a pod/modular catering unit is required, where do we apply for funding?

The successful service provider is responsible for all works and the costs for same. No funding is required to be sought by the school.

55. If opting for an external pod/catering unit, does this require planning permission?

An external pod or catering unit may require planning permission. The Hot Meals provider must consult with the Local Planning Authority if planning permission is required. The location, composition, installation and maintenance of external pods are required to be in full compliance with statutory Building Regulation and Safety, Health and Welfare at Work legislation and meet the requirements set out in the Department of Education Technical Note Guidance SDG02 TN-06. The Hot Meals provider will be responsible for applying for statutory consents and all associated fees.

56. Unsure if the kitchen off the Halla Spóirt is suitable—how should we assess suitability?

This existing servery may be adequate. The area required for hot meals in existing schools will be dependent on your specific school size and the types of equipment required by your service provider to facilitate the provision of hot meals.

The Department's Technical Guidance provides information on what are the technical requirements that the School Meals provider must adhere to.

Schools can use this guidance to assess their own specific existing school facilities, space available and context.

Food Business Operators are responsible for determining the appropriate space and equipment specification in line with the volume of meals to be served, ensuring that the setup meets requirements under food legislation, building regulations, Safety, Health and Welfare at Work legislation and the Department of Education Technical Note Guidance SDG02 TN-06 .

57. Do we need space for refrigeration as well as ovens?

This will depend on your Hot Meals service provider. In some cases, refrigeration units in addition to regeneration ovens are provided by your service provider. There are also appliances which provide refrigeration and regeneration within the same unit. The Hot Meals service provider is responsible for determining the appropriate space and equipment specification in line with the volume of meals to be served, ensuring that the setup meets requirements under food legislation and building regulations Safety, Health and Welfare at Work legislation and the Department of Education Technical Note Guidance SDG02 TN-06.

58. Our school has a small kitchen off a GP Room. How do we know if the space is sufficient for the hot meals scheme?

The area required for hot meals in existing schools will be dependent on your specific school size and the types of equipment required by your service provider to facilitate the provision of hot meals.

The Department's Technical Guidance provides information on what are the technical requirements that the School Meals provider must adhere to.

Schools can use this guidance to assess their own specific existing school facilities, space available and context.

Food Business Operators are responsible for determining the appropriate space and equipment specification in line with the volume of meals to be served, ensuring that the setup meets requirements under food legislation and building regulations Safety, Health and Welfare at Work legislation and the Department of Education Technical Note Guidance SDG02 TN-06.

59. Regardless of the service delivery model, does our school require a new dedicated room or area for the regeneration of Hot Meals?

No, there are a number of delivery options which do not require a new dedicated room or area for the regeneration of Hot Meals in your school. This includes the option for Hot Meals to be delivered direct to desks (sometimes referred to as 'Hot Drop').

Regeneration heating facilities can also be installed in an existing suitable servery/kitchen area or in external pods/ mobile units if you have a suitable location on your school grounds.

60. When is it appropriate to consider a new dedicated room or area for the regeneration of Hot Meals in my school?

Subject to available and appropriate space requirements, it may be feasible for the regeneration heating of Hot Meals to take place within an existing school building. Only where adequate and appropriate space provision is available should the internal regeneration option be considered; otherwise, other delivery options should be explored.

Evaluation Process / Appointment of Service Provider

Please note: In some cases, similar questions have been grouped together with a single response provided below.

61. As the costs are fixed why do we have to conduct a tender process?

Schools must adhere to the National and EU procurement rules, guides and regulations in relation to public procurement.

While the DSP school meal scheme sets the fees per meal type, and therefore cost is not evaluated, the award criteria for procuring Hot Meals are set out in section 3.3 of the CFT document and are fixed. In simple terms, it means that tenders will be evaluated against criteria other than cost, e.g. qualitative criteria.

62. Can I appoint a service provider based on the food taste? We have received food samples; how can we assess them? Are we allowed to organise food tasting with the companies that organised site visits?

No, food tasting does not form part of the evaluation process. The tender process is a paper-based exercise, and tenders or proposals must be evaluated against the award criteria stated in the CFT in order to select the most advantageous proposal.

The successful Tenderer will agree all menu options including special dietary requirements and food intolerances and allergies (for example lactose-free, gluten-free); requirements due to religious observance (for example halal); vegetarian and vegan, with the school upon award of contract.

63. Do I have to evaluate the proposals if the estimated value of my contract is less than €50,000?

Yes. The evaluation process is essential to ensure that the school is selecting the most advantageous proposal and also to guarantee that the appointed service provider complies with all requirements regarding food law, building regulations, health and safety, etc.

64. Do we have to provide feedback in the individual result letters to each Tenderer?

Yes, in addition to providing scores, an individual statement (by criterion) of the reason(s), where the unsuccessful tenderer scored less than the successful tenderer in a criteria **must be provided**. If adequate reasons are not provided to each unsuccessful tenderer, then the entire process may be open to delay, cancelation of the entire competition and a legal challenge.

Joint Procurement

65. Can a number of schools come together to do a single procurement process

Yes, a joint procurement can be undertaken by a number of schools.

For help and advice in this specific case, visit www.spu.ie and complete the 'Contact Us' form.

Utilities

66. Who estimates the additional cost of electricity?

Both parties. Please see extract from the CFT document: "Where meals are prepared or reheated on-site and school utilities are used; a contribution agreement will be negotiated between the school and successful Tenderer which shall cover the full energy usage

(including Electricity and Gas) and any water charges incurred in the provision of the Services.”

67. If a school does not have three-phase electricity, they will not be able to run the ovens needed for heating on site. What can we do?

Three Phase electricity is the preference if available however most of the service providers can provide equipment for hot meals regeneration using single phase supply.

Insurance

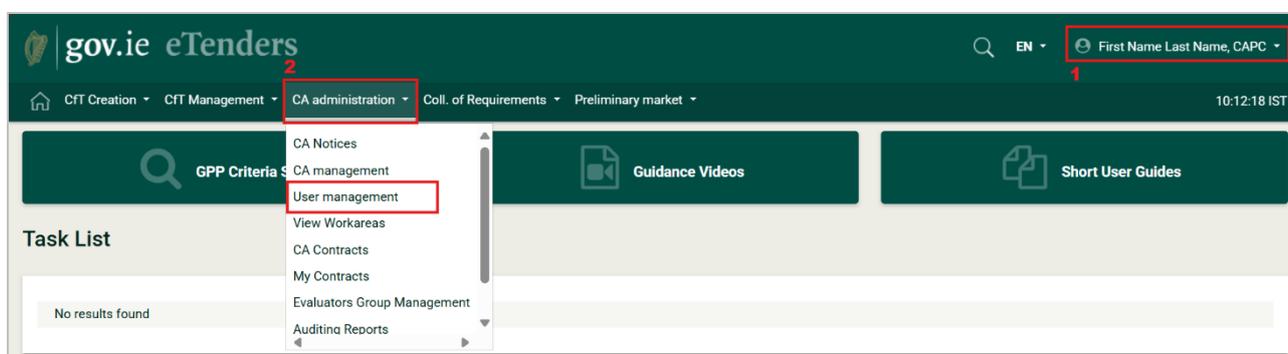
68. Do I need to contact my insurance company about hot drop food? If so, what exactly should I ask them to do, provide written confirmation or carry out an in-person assessment of the school?

Schools are advised to contact their insurance provider to make them aware of the service delivery model option the school will be procuring irrespective of the service delivery model chosen.

eTenders Account

69. We have recently used eTenders for another tender project (e.g. Minor Works). Can we use the same account to publish a tender for School Meals?

Yes. If it is an active school's account in the new eTenders platform (launched May 2023), and which has a CAPC role assigned to it, then it can be used to create and publish a CfT for School Meals or any other call for tenders that the school requires. The role assigned to the profile is visible on the top right corner, next to the account's contact name (see figure below, at position number 1). Alternatively, it can be checked by accessing the page "User management", under the menu "CA administration" (see figure below, at position number 2).



Further information on setting up an eTenders account is available at the [eTenders Guides page](#) of the SPU website.

Publishing a Tender / Tender Process

70. How long is the process for publishing a tender on eTenders?

An indicative timeframe for completing this process is approximately 3 hours for someone with no prior experience with eTenders. Please make sure you allow sufficient time to complete all tasks at one sitting. Please note that if you appoint a service provider on foot of an eTenders public procurement process, the arrangement is intended to cover service provision over a 3-year period, and therefore the process will not have to be repeated until 3 years hence.

Please note: In some cases, similar questions have been grouped together with a single response provided below.

71. Can I save a draft of my CFT on eTenders and finish the publication at another time?

72. If you start the publication process on eTenders and don't get a chance to finish it in one sitting, can you save what you have done and come back to it later?

Yes. However, it is recommended to complete all tasks at one sitting to avoid inconsistencies with the dates/timeline of the tender process. Most importantly, all dates stated within your tender documents, and on the eTenders Workspace, must match exactly.

73. Evaluation Mechanism: what option for this field on eTenders?

On eTenders, you must select 'Most Economically Advantageous Tender (MEAT)' as the Evaluation Mechanism. Both written and video guide entitled **Create & Publish a Call for Tender for Hot Meals on eTenders** available at the [Hot Meals page](#) on the SPU website contain recommended input for this and all other fields. Please refer to the guide which is appropriate to your contract value.

74. Do we need to upload the whole CFT documents, including the TRD and appendices on eTenders?

Yes, schools must upload the completed CFT and TRD (all pages included), and any other applicable documents (Property Licence and Deed of Renunciation if you have chosen Service delivery models 2 to 4); and the European Single Procurement Document – ESPD where the contract value is above the €750,000 threshold. You will need to refer to the written and video guidance appropriate to your estimated contract value, to be found in the [Hot Meals pages](#) on the SPU website, for both completing the procurement documents and for the process of publishing them on eTenders. The clear advice is to follow this guidance closely because it will enable you to successfully complete the list of tasks.

75. My school only received 1 tender, is that ok?

Yes, there is no minimum number of tenders required to be received. If only one tender is received and it's a valid tender, i.e. it meets the minimum selection and award criteria requirements set out in the CFT, then a contract can be awarded.

Please note: In some cases, similar questions have been grouped together with a single response provided below.

76. Is there a step-by-step video available for this process so we can follow it when doing this for real - and if so, where can we access it?

77. What website is this video on?

Written and video guidance for all tasks is available on the [Hot Meals pages](#) on the SPU website. The clear advice is to follow this guidance closely because it will enable you to

successfully complete the list of tasks. The edits required to the tender documents have been reduced to the absolute minimum, in terms of time and input.

Expression of Interest

78. We have received some Expressions of Interest. Should we invite them all to attend to a site visit?

No. Expressions of Interest mean that potential tenderers (service providers) are reading the school's tender documentation. It does not mean that they will all submit a tender, and there is no action required from the school in this regard.

It is up to the potential Tenderers, who are planning to bid, to contact the school to arrange to attend the mandatory site visit. Your school's contact detail must be set out in table 1 of the Hot meals CFT.

Unlocking Tenders / Accessing Submissions

79. We have received a tender submission. How can we access it?

All submissions will only be accessible for download 30 minutes after the tender deadline has passed. Until then, no submissions can be accessed. Guidance will be available at the appropriate time on the [Hot Meals page](#) on the SPU website.

OJEU

80. What's the difference between eTenders and OJEU?

OJEU stands for The Official Journal of the European Union, a platform where tenders above the €216,000 threshold must be published, in addition to the eTenders platform. As school meals are covered under the light touch regime, the publishing threshold is €750,000.00.

Once the school follows all steps of the guide Create & Publish a Call for Tenders for Hot Meals (above €750k), available in the [Above €750k Procurement Threshold page on the SPU website](#), the tender will be published on eTenders, and eTenders will link with OJEU so it will be automatically published there as well. It is important to note that, in this case, the tender will be "pending publication" until it is up on OJEU, then the status will change to "published". This can take a few days.

FOOD BUSINESS OPERATORS (FBOs)

81. What is a Food Business Operator (FBO)?

According to Regulation (EC) No 178/2002 of the European Parliament and of the Council Art.3 (3), a 'food business operator' means the natural or legal persons responsible for ensuring that the requirements of food law are met within the food business under their control.

82. Why should School Boards of Management not sign contracts that make them FBOs?

This is to protect schools and to ensure that schools do not become Food Business Operators (FBOs) and incur the additional legal responsibilities that would ensue. The service provider must be the FBO.

83. What statutory compliance and certification are FBOs responsible for, in the School Meals Programme?

The FBO is responsible for statutory compliance and certification, including building regulations, fire safety, and food safety requirements relating to any works or installations needed for providing School Meals in existing schools. FBOs must comply with Building Regulations, Statutory & Planning Compliance, Fire Safety, Food Hygiene Standards, Health & Safety, Services & electrical capacity, Waste management, and ensure there is no compromise of existing school's educational facilities. FBOs must also comply with Food Law, specifically hygiene, food labelling, and allergen controls.

84. What are the FBO's responsibilities regarding catering equipment?

The FBO is responsible for the safety, upkeep, and statutory maintenance checks of all catering equipment they provide.

85. Who is responsible for the costs associated with providing School Meals facilities?

All costs associated with the provision of School Meals, including the installation, running, and maintenance of food regeneration facilities in existing schools' buildings, are to be borne by the FBO.

86. Who is responsible for food waste management?

The successful Tenderer is responsible for the sustainable and safe removal of all food waste on a daily basis and recyclable material removed at times agreed with the school.

It is important to note that under no circumstances are students allowed to take uneaten food home. This measure ensures that meals provided by the Food Business Operators are consumed under appropriate conditions and prevents the risk of foodborne illness associated with leftover meals being stored or transported outside controlled temperature conditions.

87. Can children still take leftovers home so parents can see what was eaten?

No. Under no circumstances are students allowed to take uneaten food home. This measure ensures that meals provided by the Food Business Operators are consumed under appropriate conditions and prevents the risk of foodborne illness associated with leftover meals being stored or transported outside controlled temperature conditions.

Hot school meals are produced and validated to be safe for their intended use, namely storage under refrigerated conditions, reheating once, consumed immediately, and prior to the stated Use-By-Date date. Where meals are removed from this controlled process — for example, carried home without appropriate temperature control and subsequently reheated again — the risk of microbial growth increases significantly.

Such practices may render the food unsafe and present a risk of foodborne illness.

88. Can you confirm that when we use all the mandatory procurement templates and documents, the service provider is automatically the FBO and responsible for all food law requirements, etc., and not the school?

When the CFT including the Contract is used correctly the FBO has fully responsibility for the delivery of the Service regardless of the service delivery model.

SCHOOL STAFF AND FBO STAFF

89. Can school representatives or staff be involved in food handling activities?

For the avoidance of doubt, members of school staff, whether teaching or support staff (including caretakers), are not permitted to undertake or assist with the delivery of the Services, whether for pay or otherwise, during their contracted school hours.

School staff may assist the successful Tenderer in placing Hot Meals on their student's desk only. For the avoidance of doubt, this "in loco parentis" activity must not extend to the responsibility for or activities involving the storage or maintenance of temperature control of the meals by non-FBO contracted staff.

Subject to the foregoing, and any terms and conditions of their contract of employment with the school/Contracting Authority, a person who is also a member of school staff is free to seek employment with the successful Tenderer in their private and personal capacity outside of their school duties PROVIDED ALWAYS that such person shall be employed by and be an employee of the successful Tenderer for all purposes during the course of such

secondary employment. In addition, such member of school staff shall not act nor hold themselves out as a school employee during the course of such secondary employment.

The successful Tenderer shall ensure that each such employee shall enter into a separate contract of employment with the successful Tenderer with regard to such secondary employment in accordance with applicable employment and labour laws. In addition, the successful Tenderer shall ensure that each such employee is provided with all necessary training, supervision and monitoring as is required for all employees under this CFT and the Services Contract, including but not limited to training in line with Food legislation and the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005.

For the avoidance of doubt, where a member of school staff is employed by the successful Tenderer, they may not work for the successful Tenderer during their contracted school hours for which they are employed by the school.

90. Can school staff accept payments, gifts, or inducements from tenderers or FBOs?

Absolutely not. In line with Public Procurement best-practice, school staff must not accept pay, gifts, cash, or any other inducements from tenderers or FBOs.

91. What are the requirements for FBO staff working in schools?

As per section 6 of appendix 1 of the CFT, FBOs must provide fully trained and Garda vetted staff, including evidence documentation as required and set out in the CFT document, to conduct any work related to the provision of School Meals on the school premises.

CONTRACT MANAGEMENT

92. What is the role of Boards of Management once the contract is signed?

Boards of Management must ensure that the school manages the performance of the FBO to ensure consistency and quality of the service in the provision of school meals, including logistics and quality/variety of food.

93. How should Boards of Management manage meal orders and invoices?

Boards of Management must ensure the school monitors and records the number of meals ordered and delivered and reconciles this against service provider invoices before payment is made.

94. How does the contract template support contract management?

The CFT clearly articulates the requirements that the successful tenderer must deliver over the term of the contract. Apart from service delivery requirements set out in Appendix 1, schools must also use the KPIs set out in Appendix 1 to monitor the performance of the successful tenderer and to meet with them regularly to ensure the contract is being delivered.

95. What happens if an FBO consistently fails to meet KPIs?

If the FBO continuously fails to achieve the agreed KPIs, the FBO must provide a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) on request from the school, by way of confronting sub-optimal or non-performance of the contract. If the FBO fails to successfully complete the PIP to the school's satisfaction, the school has the right to terminate the contract, under the termination clauses as stated in the CFT and Service Contract. The school also has the right not to extend the contract if it is not satisfied with the performance of the successful Tenderer.

FOOD QUALITY

96. How should schools monitor food quality?

Schools must monitor the ongoing quality of the meals provided to ensure that they adhere to the Healthy Ireland Nutrition Standards for School Meals and/or Nutrition Standards Hot School Meals.

97. What should schools do if they have concerns about nutrition standards or food quality?

Any concerns regarding nutrition standards or food quality should be immediately raised with the FBO and measured against the agreed KPIs. If the FBO continuously fails to achieve the KPIs, the FBO must provide a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) on request from the school. If the FBO fails to successfully complete the PIP to the school's satisfaction, the school has the right to terminate the contract, under the termination clauses as stated in the CFT and Service Contract.

FUNDING / BANK ACCOUNT / SLA

98. Do we need to open a separate bank account for the programme?

Yes. , if approved for funding of over €10,000 per academic year

99. We set up a new bank account for lunches—should we send details to the Department now, or complete procurement first?

You should complete procurement first and then submit your completed application for funding to the Department of Social Protection.

Any queries related to scheme, e.g. funding approval, bank account, Department of Social Protection’s SLA, etc, should be directed to the School Meals Section of the DSP. Please see their contact details below:

Website: www.gov.ie/SchoolMealsScheme/

Email: School.meals@welfare.ie

Telephone: 071 9138625

There is separate list of FAQs for general School Meals available on the Department of Social Protection Website at [School Meals Scheme: Your questions answered](#).

[End of FAQ document].