

Industry News



Public Procurement: New laws, better ways to find tenders, and how to improve your chances of winning

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Four years ago, GAMBICA was invited to submit members' feedback to a government consultation on public procurement. This was an important opportunity to represent the views of our members on how procurement processes could be made fairer, more transparent, and more accessible - especially for small and medium-sized businesses.

In February 2024, our input helped shape a major milestone: the **Procurement Act 2023** came into effect. This new legislation is designed to improve how public sector bodies buy goods and services. It aims to simplify the procurement process and make it more consistent, open, and fair. Importantly, the new rules are expected to be particularly beneficial to smaller businesses and organisations that have historically found it difficult to break into public contracts.

What's changing – and why it matters

One of the key goals of the Act is to increase access and reduce complexity in the procurement system. Among the most significant changes:

- Commercial frameworks will be more open and flexible. Under the old system, if a supplier missed the chance to join a framework agreement, they might be shut out of that market for several years. The new rules will help avoid such long lockouts and create more regular opportunities to join.
- Prompt payment provisions are being strengthened. More contracts will now fall under the requirement for public sector buyers to pay suppliers within 30 days. That's good news for cash flow and business stability.
- A brand-new central digital platform, 'Find a Tender', has been launched. It allows suppliers to search for tender opportunities more easily, and also stores their core business details. This means less time spent re-entering the same information when applying for different tenders.
- Perhaps most notably, the Act establishes a Procurement Review Unit (PRU). This new body will handle concerns about unfair or non-compliant procurement practices. Suppliers who feel they've been treated improperly now have a clearer route to raise issues and seek resolution.

What it means for GAMBICA members

In the past, GAMBICA has sometimes had to escalate member concerns about tenders or frameworks to the Cabinet Office. While we've had some success doing this, it was often a lengthy and uncertain process. The creation of the PRU could make it quicker and easier to address issues - and it will hopefully lead to more consistency and accountability in the system. We also welcome the PRU's emphasis on raising standards and professionalism in procurement processes across the public sector.

What's happening in Europe?

While these developments are taking place in the UK, there's also movement abroad. The European Commission has announced its intention to revise the EU's own procurement legislation. The announcement quickly triggered fears that the EU might follow countries like the US, China, and India in adopting a more protectionist approach - essentially putting European suppliers first in a way that could exclude others.

GAMBICA responded rapidly and strongly. We lobbied our European industry umbrella groups, arguing that such a 'Europe First' policy would be a serious misstep. We explained that it would not only fail to achieve its intended goals but would also place an even heavier regulatory burden on our sector. Thankfully, our position has been taken seriously and shared with EU policymakers - but the final outcome is still uncertain. We will continue to monitor developments closely and advocate on behalf of our members.

Making tender discovery easier and more targeted

Another challenge for many GAMBICA members is simply keeping up with the sheer volume of tenders published across

the UK public sector. Budget cutbacks, especially in higher education and science funding, mean that every opportunity counts - but sifting through thousands of irrelevant notices wastes valuable time.

To help solve this, GAMBICA has completely redesigned its tender alert service. We've partnered with a specialist provider that identifies all public tenders related to lab equipment and consumables, and also tracks upcoming lab builds and refurbishments - not just in the public sector, but also in the private sector.

Best of all, this new, enhanced tender service is being provided free of charge to all GAMBICA members. To make things even easier, we've also recruited a dedicated procurement specialist who reviews and filters the results on your behalf. This way, you only see the tenders that are genuinely relevant to your business - and you can avoid wasting time on unsuitable ones.

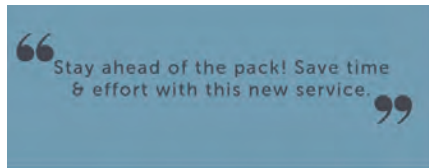
The rise of AI in the bidding process

Of course, finding the right tender is just the beginning. The next - and perhaps more challenging - step is writing a winning bid. Increasingly, organisations are turning to artificial intelligence tools to generate or refine their bid documents. As a result, the number of bids submitted for each opportunity is likely to increase.

This brings both opportunities and risks. AI tools can help draft clear, well-structured documents faster than ever before. But they can also be misused or relied on too heavily. And there's even a concern that some public sector buyers may be tempted to use AI to evaluate bids, leading to automated decision-making that lacks human judgment.

To help members stay ahead of the curve, GAMBICA has organised shared-cost training sessions on how to write better bids. We've brought in a highly experienced bid writing expert to deliver training courses focused on the new procurement environment. One of the first things we asked her was how she addresses the role of AI in modern bid writing.

Her response was reassuring: AI is a valuable tool - but only when used ethically and thoughtfully. In her sessions, she shows



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participants how AI can support the bid writing process from brainstorming to polishing the final draft, while also highlighting the limitations and risks. She places a strong emphasis on maintaining authenticity, accuracy, and compliance throughout.

Given how rapidly AI is becoming embedded in business operations, we expect this topic to be an ongoing area of focus in GAMBICA's training programme. AI is simply too powerful to ignore, but it also introduces risks that many companies may not yet fully understand. That's why training on how to use AI effectively and safely will be a key part of what we offer going forward.

If you'd like to find out more about GAMBICA's tender alert service, or if you're interested in attending one of our upcoming training courses, please don't hesitate to get in touch: jacqueline.balian@gambica.org.uk

And if you'd like to explore the new Procurement Act 2023 in more detail - including the obligations for public bodies to consult with industry earlier in the procurement process, and to report on the outcome of bids - you'll find the latest updates and guidance on GOV.UK - <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/information-and-guidance-for-suppliers>



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