

The 9-Month Planning Guide for School Catering Contracts

Month 1: Evaluate Current Arrangements

Review the current contract: Assess the terms, performance, and costs of your current catering contract.

Identify renewal dates: Mark key dates, such as the contract end date and notice period, to ensure no deadlines are missed.

Analyse catering needs: Consider student preferences, nutritional guidelines, and any changes required in meal provision.

Month 2: Understand Your Budget and Compliance Needs

Estimate the contract value: If the total contract value exceeds the threshold, you must follow the full procurement regulations.

Set your budget: Determine the maximum budget for the contract, factoring in potential TUPE costs.

Consult procurement experts: Engage a procurement consultancy like Education Buying to help you navigate legal and compliance requirements.

Draft your timeline: Build a procurement timeline that includes key milestones, such as tender preparation, advertisement, evaluation, and contract award.

Month 3: Determine Procurement Approach

Open tender process – Running a full tender process from scratch allows you to invite bids from any supplier, ensuring competition. However, this is time-consuming and requires expertise to ensure compliance with procurement regulations.

Consider using a Framework or DPS: These pre-approved supplier lists simplify the tendering process and ensure compliance with procurement rules. Education Buying offers a Catering DPS that can save time and ensure a compliant process.

Month 4: Gather Key Information (Including TUPE Data)

Request TUPE information: Work with your current catering provider to gather accurate TUPE data, including employee details such as roles, salaries, and terms of employment.

Define contract scope: Specify the catering services required, including meal plans, dietary requirements, and any additional expectations, such as locally sourced ingredients.

Month 5: Draft Tender Documents

Prepare a specification: Create a detailed service specification document outlining the school's requirements.

Develop evaluation criteria: Establish how bids will be assessed, including price, quality, and social value considerations.

Ensure compliance: Check that all documents align with procurement regulations if the contract is above threshold.

Month 6: Advertise the Opportunity

Publish the tender: If the contract value is above threshold, advertise the tender on the Find a Tender service and any other relevant platforms.

Engage suppliers: If using a DPS or framework, invite pre-approved suppliers to participate in the process.

Month 7: Evaluate Bids, Award the Contract, and Begin TUPE Preparations

Shortlist and evaluate: Assess supplier bids against your evaluation criteria, ensuring a fair and transparent process.

Conduct clarifications: Allow suppliers to clarify any aspects of their bids before final decisions.

Award the contract: Notify the successful supplier and begin the transition process.

Initiate TUPE discussions: Engage with both the outgoing and incoming suppliers to begin the TUPE transfer process, ensuring compliance and clear communication with affected staff.

Month 8: Plan the Mobilisation Phase

Finalise TUPE transfer: Ensure all necessary TUPE processes are completed, protecting employee rights and ensuring a smooth handover.

Coordinate with the new provider: Work closely with the new catering provider to organise staff onboarding, training, and equipment delivery.

Set performance expectations: Agree on service standards, KPIs, and reporting mechanisms to ensure a seamless start to the contract.

Month 9: Implement the Contract

Begin service delivery: Ensure the catering service starts on the agreed date with minimal disruption.

Monitor performance: Establish performance metrics and regular review meetings to ensure the supplier meets the agreed standards.