



An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí
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 2025/26

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Document Control

Version No.	Details of Change	Changed Sections	Date
1.0	Document reviewed for publication	All	15 th August 2025
1.1	Question regarding School Staff updated	School Staff and FBO Staff	20 th August 2025
1.2	Questions reviewed and questions added	Procurement Process	28 th August 2025
1.3	Questions reviewed and questions added	Procurement, eTenders/OJEU	9 th September 2025
1.4	Questions reviewed and questions added	Procurement, Property License, Site Visits, Service Delivery Model, Utilities, and FBO	11 th September 2025
1.5	Questions reviewed and questions added	Procurement, Property License, Site Visits, Service Delivery Model, Insurance	12 th September 2025
1.6	Questions reviewed and questions added	Site visits, Procurement, Evaluation	15 th October 2025
1.7	Questions reviewed and answers	FBO Staff, Procurement and eTenders/OJEU	24 th November 2025

Contents

DOCUMENT CONTROL	2
PROCUREMENT.....	9
Procurement Rules / Spending Thresholds / Contract Value	9
1. What are the procurement requirements for the provision of School Meals / Hot Meals?	9
2. How should I estimate the contract value?	9
3. How can the value of the contract be determined when student numbers rise and fall?	9
4. Do we have to tender every year?	9
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?	9
6. Do I have to tender if the estimated value of my contract is less than €50,000?	10
7. If we cannot get 3 written proposals for a contract less than €50,000, is requesting 3 tenders adequate?	10
8. If we have less than 28 pupils is there a form/process that we need to fill in/do to obtain 3 written quotes?	10
9. My 1-year contract is less than €50,000, can I proceed without procurement?	10
10. How are new enrolments handled within the contract during the term?	10
11. With hot meals capped at €3.20 per child, what is the purpose of tendering and going through the process of 3 quotes?	11
12. Why there is a need for all this tendering when the price is the same from all providers?	11
13. Can I follow the same guidance for publishing a tender if my estimated contract value is above €750,000?	11
14. Our school is happy with the current service provider. Can we continue on a rolling contract?	12
15. We currently have a service provider in place. Can we renew our contract with them instead of going to tender?	12
16. If a school ran a procurement process last year, do they have to do it again this year?	12
17. We had a contract with a service provider of hot meals last year. We are using the same service provider this year. Do we now have to re-tender?	12
18. We've recommenced with last year's company (year 3 of our participation in the SMS) - the tendering wasn't mandatory when we signed up. We will now enter into an Amalgamation next year. Do I need to go through a procurement process, as we have only 1 year as ourselves left?	12
19. If you are starting year two of a three-year contract, do you need to start a new contract? In relation to this, do you need to engage with the procurement process at this point?	12
20. What if we secured a contract last April but the service provider hasn't begun supply yet due to the new guidelines, can we go with a new service provider via eTenders as soon as possible?	12
21. As we have a contract, when do we need to do a new procurement/tender?	12
22. As a former non-DEIS pilot school with a continuation letter, we wish to change supplier now, what should we do?	13
23. Is the process only for new schools joining hot meals, or do current participant schools also need to complete it?	13

24.	We are not happy with our current supplier, and our plan is to move in the near future. Our contract is out this November. What should we do?	13
25.	We have applied and received notification that we been approved our funding. Do we have to do anything?	13
26.	Only one service provider is willing to service us. What do we put onto the eTenders for this?	13
27.	Could this process be simplified? Could there be a template with more of the information filled in?	13
28.	What provisions are made for small schools in relation to no suppliers wanting to provide hot meals to them?.....	14
29.	Hot lunch supply has begun—do we need procurement for a new contract from January to June 2026?	14
30.	We started hot lunches in Term 3 last year—do we still need to run an eTenders now?	14
31.	Should we survey parents on hot vs cold lunches before going to tender, and do schools have a choice between hot or cold?	14
32.	What happens if a supplier 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?.....	14
33.	For schools who are new to this do you input the number of pupils based on September 2024 or for what you currently have on roll for this school year-2025/2026?	14
34.	There is only one company that provides hot meals in the area. Do we still have to publish a tender?	14

Procurement Documents 15

35.	There are nearly 100 pages of documentation in the CFT. Do we only amend the areas highlighted in yellow or with brackets?	15
36.	Do we note 182 school days even if we are starting in January?	15
37.	In the CFT document for contracts between €50,000 and €750,000 it says, 'Insert the tender closing date - must be a minimum of 21 calendar days after the Competition Publication Date'. If the closing date for application is 12 th September 2025, what date should we write here?	15
38.	Is the 12 th September 2025 a submission date for eTenders only? We are a small school and will not be going through eTenders.....	16
39.	What happens if you miss the 12 th September 2025 date? Does it simply push back the date to later after Christmas or does it rule out the possibility of hot meals completely for this academic year?	16
40.	Would you be able to clarify the time commitment required to read the documents, prepare the CFT/TRD, liaise with companies, evaluate tenders, ensure compliance, and monitor the service?	16
41.	What's the school's 'legal name'? The name used by the Department of Education and Youth?	16
42.	If our funding includes snacks, do we include snack costs in the hot meals calculator?	16
43.	Will the presentation slides be available after the webinar?	16
44.	If very happy with our supplier, can we use their standards as the basis of procurement?	16
45.	Are there plans for larger portions for senior pupils and smaller for younger pupils?.....	16

Site Visit / Previous Engagement..... 17

46.	A service provider visited our school before the tender process. Do they have to visit the school again during the tender process?.....	17
47.	We currently have a service provider in place. Do they need to attend the site visit?	17
48.	We are receiving many site visit requests. Do we have to facilitate them all?	17

49.	Last year, we had companies out. Do we need to start this process again or can we continue on with the process?	17
50.	How can schools select the correct service delivery model without a site visit first?	17
Service Delivery Model / Property Licence Documents		18
51.	Service Delivery Model - are we limited to one?	18
52.	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?	18
53.	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?	18
54.	Is it possible to select more than one Service Delivery Model option if you are unsure if your available space is suitable or not?	18
55.	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?	18
56.	Can you clarify the difference between a servery onsite and using another space in the school for reheating pre-made lunches?	18
57.	Some pupils only want cold food—can we offer both cold and hot options?	19
58.	Can you clarify when a property licence and deed of renunciation is required i.e. which Service Delivery Model requires these documents?	19
59.	We are starting with Service Delivery Model 1 (hot drop) as we have building works going on for next 12 - 18 months. Can we then change to setting up cooking facilities once these works are complete?	19
60.	This is our first time to have hot meals. Is Option 1 recommended for first timers' schools?	19
61.	If you go with option one and we do not receive any tenders, do we then try another option?	19
62.	How do you know if you should select hot meals or cold lunches?	20
63.	Is it compulsory to provide hot meals now?	20
64.	For how long is the cold meal option available?	20
65.	Can suppliers leave hot meals at the school door for staff to distribute, or must they deliver to each classroom?	20
66.	Who pays for adjustments to make a room suitable for meal service?	20
67.	If a pod/modular catering unit is required, where do we apply for funding?	20
68.	If opting for an external pod/catering unit, does this require planning permission?	20
69.	Unsure if the kitchen off the Halla Spóirt is suitable—how should we assess suitability?	20
70.	Do we need space for refrigeration as well as ovens?	21
71.	Our school has a small 9m ² kitchen off a GP Room and 200 pupils enrolled. Is this kitchen space sufficient for the hot meals scheme?	21
72.	Regardless of the service delivery model, does our school require a new dedicated room or area for the regeneration of Hot Meals?	21
73.	When is it appropriate to consider a new dedicated room or area for the regeneration of Hot Meals in my school?	22
Evaluation Process / Appointment of Service Provider		22
74.	How do we make sure our criteria (aside from price) are seen by the supplier?	22

75.	What is meant by MEAT? Sounds like the same as lowest price. I was told the price per pupil is fixed so when marking the tender are we allowed to select on other criteria and if so, what are the allowable criteria?	22
76.	So quality is irrelevant; it's all down to price?	22
77.	Do you have to go with the cheapest tender?	22
78.	Can I appoint a service provider based on the food taste?	22
79.	Do I have to evaluate the proposals if the estimated value of my contract is less than €50,000?	22
80.	Do we have to provide feedback in the result letter?	22
81.	Can we provide scores only in the result letters?	23
82.	Can we do food sampling / food tasting? We have received food samples; how can we assess them? Are we allowed to organise food tasting with the companies that organised site visits?	23
Joint Procurement		23
83.	We are a new school with a small number of students and located on the same site as an existing school and have only been able to access school meals because of the larger primary school. Procurement is difficult as we rely on the other school to secure a contract and essentially have to "piggyback" from this contract for school meals. How can we do this in line with policy?	23
Utilities		23
84.	Who estimates the additional cost of electricity?	23
85.	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?	24
Insurance		24
86.	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?	24
ETENDERS / OJEU		25
eTenders Account.....		25
87.	We have recently used eTenders for another tender project (e.g. Minor Works). Can we use the same account to publish a tender for Hot Meals?	25
Publishing a Tender / Tender Process		25
88.	How long is the process for publishing a tender on eTenders?	25
89.	Can I save a draft of my CfT on eTenders and finish the publication at another time?	26
90.	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?	26
91.	Evaluation Mechanism: what option for this field on eTenders?	26
92.	Do we need to upload the whole CFT document, including appendices?	26
93.	Do we need to upload the TRD at the time we upload the CFT document on eTenders?	26
94.	When you publish the tender, do you need to obtain a certain number of tenders from potential service providers?	26
95.	What happens if there is only one reply (tender submission) on eTenders?	26
96.	If I select the Hot Drop option and receive no tenders, are we back square one again?	27

97.	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?	27
98.	What website is this video on?	27
Expression of Interest		27
99.	We have received some Expressions of Interest. Should we invite them all to attend to a site visit?	27
Unlocking Tenders / Accessing Submissions		27
100.	We have received a tender submission. How can we access it?	27
OJEU		27
101.	What's the difference between eTenders and OJEU?	27
FOOD BUSINESS OPERATORS (FBOS)		29
102.	What is a Food Business Operator (FBO)?	29
103.	Why should School Boards of Management not sign contracts that make them FBOs?	29
104.	What statutory compliance and certification are FBOs responsible for, in the School Meals Programme?	29
105.	What are the FBO's responsibilities regarding catering equipment?	29
106.	Who is responsible for the costs associated with providing School Meals facilities?	29
107.	Who must be responsible for food waste management?	29
108.	Can students take uneaten food home?	30
109.	Can children still take leftovers home so parents can see what was eaten?	30
110.	Can you confirm that when we use all the mandatory procurement templates and documents, the supplier is automatically the FBO and responsible for all food law requirements, etc., and not the school?	30
SCHOOL STAFF AND FBO STAFF		31
111.	Can school representatives or staff be involved in food handling activities?	31
112.	Can school staff accept payments, gifts, or inducements from tenderers or FBOs?	31
113.	What are the requirements for FBO staff working in schools?	31
CONTRACT MANAGEMENT		32
114.	What is the role of Boards of Management once the contract is signed?	32
115.	How should Boards of Management manage meal orders and invoices?	32
116.	How does the contract template support contract management?	32
117.	What happens if an FBO consistently fails to meet KPIs?	32
FOOD QUALITY		33
118.	How should schools monitor food quality?	33

119. What should schools do if they have concerns about nutrition standards or food quality?	33
--	----

FUNDING / BANK ACCOUNT / SLA.....	34
--	-----------

120. Do we need to open a separate bank account for the programme?	34
--	----

121. We set up a new bank account for lunches—should we send details to the Department now, or complete procurement first?	34
--	----

Procurement Rules / Spending Thresholds / Contract Value

1. What are the procurement requirements for the provision of School Meals / Hot 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 the term of the contract, including any possible extensions. 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. In this case, 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 Hot Meals Calculator available [here](#) 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 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.”*

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 2 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?

In line with National Public Procurement Rules, for contracts with an estimated value of less than €50,000, a minimum of 3 written proposals must be sought. Please refer to the [Hot Meals page](#) on the SPU website for further guidance.

7. If we cannot get 3 written proposals for a contract less than €50,000, is requesting 3 tenders adequate?

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 quotes?

Yes, the less than €50k CFT. Please visit www.spu.ie/hot-meals 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 www.spu.ie/hot-meals 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.

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

11. With hot meals capped at €3.20 per child, what is the purpose of tendering and going through the process of 3 quotes?

12. Why there is a need for all this tendering when the price is the same from all providers?

Public procurement law defines that there must be a competitive process when awarding contracts to suppliers and expending public monies.

13. 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.

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

14. Our school is happy with the current service provider. Can we continue on a rolling contract?
15. We currently have a service provider in place. Can we renew our contract with them instead of going to tender?
16. If a school ran a procurement process last year, do they have to do it again this year?
17. We had a contract with a service provider of hot meals last year. We are using the same service provider this year. Do we now have to re-tender?
18. We've recommenced with last year's company (year 3 of our participation in the SMS) - the tendering wasn't mandatory when we signed up. We will now enter into an Amalgamation next year. Do I need to go through a procurement process, as we have only 1 year as ourselves left?
19. If you are starting year two of a three-year contract, do you need to start a new contract? In relation to this, do you need to engage with the procurement process at this point?
20. What if we secured a contract last April but the service provider hasn't begun supply yet due to the new guidelines, can we go with a new service provider via eTenders as soon as possible?
21. As we have a contract, when do we need to do a new procurement/tender?

Whether you can continue with your current service provider depends on three key factors:

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.

22. As a former non-DEIS pilot school with a continuation letter, we wish to change supplier 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 of the SPU website](#).

23. 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 School Procurement Unit template documentation.

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

24. We are not happy with our current supplier, and our plan is to move in the near future. Our contract is out this November. What should we do?

The school is advised to retender now.

25. We have applied and received notification that we been approved our funding. Do we have to do anything?

Please visit the SPU website for guidance: www.spu.ie/hot-meals.

26. Only one service provider is willing to service us. What do we put onto the eTenders for this?

A school will not know how many suppliers 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 supplier. In all cases where a contract is in excess of €50,000, you must advertise a tender on the eTenders platform.

27. 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 bear 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.

28. What provisions are made for small schools in relation to no suppliers 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.

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

29. Hot lunch supply has begun—do we need procurement for a new contract from January to June 2026?

30. We started hot lunches in Term 3 last year—do we still need to run an eTenders now?

Follow the advice sent to your school by the Department of Social Protection in July 2025.

31. 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.

32. What happens if a supplier 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 supplier. Desks should be cleaned as they are currently being cleaned in schools.

33. For schools who are new to this do you input the number of pupils based on September 2024 or for what you currently have on roll for this school year- 2025/2026?

Use your enrolment figures for 2025/2026.

34. 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.

Procurement Documents

35. 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 has an instruction against it.

The contract 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 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 of the SPU website, covers all sections that must be completed.

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

Yes.

37. In the CFT document for contracts between €50,000 and €750,000 it says, 'Insert the tender closing date - must be a minimum of 21 calendar days after the Competition Publication Date'. If the closing date for application is 12th September 2025, what date should we write here?

The tender closing date or tender deadline must follow the minimum timeline as stated in the CFT and procurement guidance (21 days for tenders below the €750,000 threshold and 30 days for tenders above this threshold). Schools are advised to publish their tender (i.e. commence the procurement process) by the 12th September to progress achieving Hot Meals from January 2026.

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

38. Is the 12th September 2025 a submission date for eTenders only? We are a small school and will not be going through eTenders.

39. What happens if you miss the 12th September 2025 date? Does it simply push back the date to later after Christmas or does it rule out the possibility of hot meals completely for this academic year?

This date is to be considered as a guidance date only for commencing your procurement process with the aim to have the provision of service starting from January 2026.

40. Would you be able to clarify the time commitment required to read the documents, prepare the CFT/TRD, liaise with companies, evaluate tenders, ensure compliance, and monitor the service?

Unfortunately, schools have to adhere to all the steps in public procurement which takes time. The process has been streamlined as much as possible for schools.

41. 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.

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

No, the calculator is designed for hot meals only.

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

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

44. If very happy with our supplier, 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.

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

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

Site Visit / Previous Engagement

46. 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.

47. 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.

48. 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.

49. 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.

50. 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, its 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.

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

52. 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?

53. 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?

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

55. 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.

When Schools are completing table 1 in the CFT they must put in the number of students enrolled in the school. The CFT states that the '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. Tenderers should note that it is not mandatory for students in the school to avail of 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'.

56. 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.

57. 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.

58. 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](#).

59. We are starting with Service Delivery Model 1 (hot drop) as we have building works going on for next 12 - 18 months. Can we then change to setting up cooking facilities once these works are complete?

The contract will be for option 1. The school can retender for other Service Delivery Model when the contract is expiring.

60. 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).

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

It is open to the school to apply for any other suitable service delivery option (2 to 4) or to apply for cold lunches instead.

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

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.

63. Is it compulsory to provide hot meals now?

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

64. For how long is the cold meal option available?

Follow the advice sent to your school by the Department of Social Protection in July 2025. Should your school wish to continue with the cold lunch option, it can do so but must carry out appropriate procurement.

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

Schools should familiarise themselves with the 4 delivery models as set out in the CFT and technical guidance.

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

The successful supplier.

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

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

68. 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 should consult with the Local Planning Authority. The location, composition, installation and maintenance of external pods are required to be in full compliance with statutory (Planning, Fire Safety and DAC) regulations. The Hot Meals provider will be responsible for applying for statutory consents and all associated fees, contributions and meeting of conditions.

69. 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 supplier 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.

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

This will depend on your Hot Meals supplier. In some cases, refrigeration units in addition to regeneration ovens are provided by your supplier. There are also appliances which provide refrigeration and regeneration within the same unit. The Hot Meals supplier 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.

71. Our school has a small 9m² kitchen off a GP Room and 200 pupils enrolled. Is this kitchen space sufficient for the hot meals scheme?

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 supplier 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.

72. 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.

73. 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.

74. How do we make sure our criteria (aside from price) are seen by the supplier?

75. What is meant by MEAT? Sounds like the same as lowest price. I was told the price per pupil is fixed so when marking the tender are we allowed to select on other criteria and if so, what are the allowable criteria?

76. So quality is irrelevant; it's all down to price?

77. Do you have to go with the cheapest tender?

As the DSP school meal scheme sets the fees per meal type, the cost is not evaluated. The evaluation mechanism for procuring Hot Meals is Most Economically Advantageous Tender (MEAT). In simple terms, it means that tenders will be evaluated against criteria other than cost only, e.g. qualitative criteria. The award criteria for procuring Hot Meals are set out in section 3.3 of the CFT document (table starting on page 21) and are fixed.

78. Can I appoint a service provider based on the food taste?

No. 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.

79. 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.

80. Do we have to provide feedback in the result letter?

Yes. The valid award of contracts is intertwined with providing adequate reasons for procurement decisions (i.e. the rationale for awarding marks). A sufficiently bespoke statement (by criterion) of reasons must be provided to each unsuccessful tender. If

adequate reasons are not provided, then the entire process may be open to a legal challenge.

81. Can we provide scores only in the result letters?

No. The valid award of contracts is intertwined with providing adequate reasons for procurement decisions (i.e. the rationale for awarding marks). A sufficiently bespoke statement (by criterion) of reasons must be provided to each unsuccessful tender. If adequate reasons are not provided, then the entire process may be open to a legal challenge.

82. Can we do food sampling / food tasting? We have received food samples; how can we assess them? Are we allowed to organise food tasting with the companies that organised site visits?

Please note that the tender process is a paper-based exercise, and tenders must be evaluated solely against the award criteria stated in the CFT in order to select the most advantageous tender. Food samples and/or food tastings are not part of the award criteria and, therefore, cannot be part of the tender process. Please see section 3.3 of CFT for details on the award criteria.

Joint Procurement

83. We are a new school with a small number of students and located on the same site as an existing school and have only been able to access school meals because of the larger primary school. Procurement is difficult as we rely on the other school to secure a contract and essentially have to "piggyback" from this contract for school meals. How can we do this in line with policy?

As part of a joint initiative, it is possible for a large school to include the needs of the smaller school within their tender documents. For help and advice in this specific case, visit www.spu.ie and complete the 'Contact Us' form.

Utilities

84. Who estimates the additional cost of electricity?

Both parties. Please see extract from the CFT document: "Where meals are prepared or re-heated* 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."

85. 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 suppliers can provide equipment for hot meals regeneration using single phase supply.

Insurance

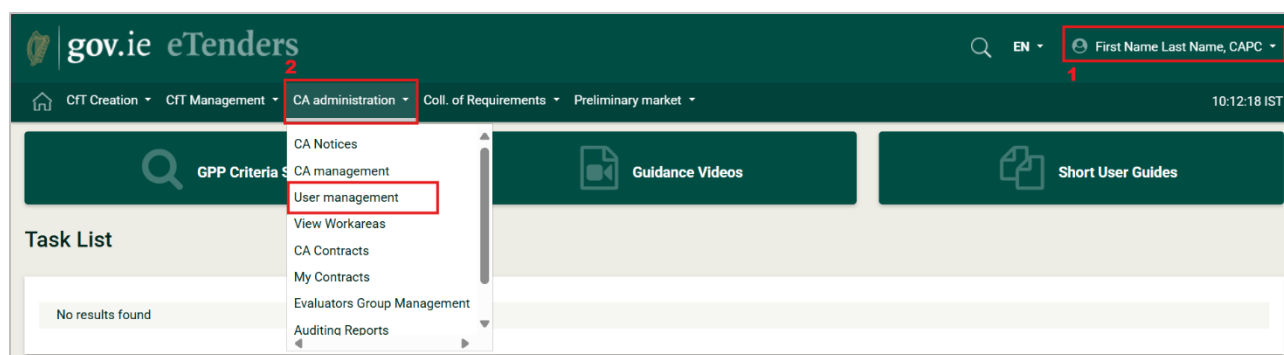
86. Do I need to contact my insurance company about hot drop food? If so, what exactly should I ask them to do, provide written confirmation or carry out an in-person assessment of the school?

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

eTenders Account

87. We have recently used eTenders for another tender project (e.g. Minor Works). Can we use the same account to publish a tender for Hot 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 Hot 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 [SPU Introduction to eTenders page](#).

Publishing a Tender / Tender Process

88. 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.

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

90. 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.

91. 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 **How to Create & Publish a Call for Tender for Hot Meals on eTenders** available in the [Hot Meals pages 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.

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

92. Do we need to upload the whole CFT document, including appendices?

93. Do we need to upload the TRD at the time we upload the CFT document on eTenders?

Yes, schools must upload complete CFT and TRD (all pages included), and any other applicable documents (Property Licence and Deed of Renunciation where meals are being prepared or heated in the school's premises; 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.

94. When you publish the tender, do you need to obtain a certain number of tenders from potential service providers?

There is no minimum number of tenders to be received.

95. What happens if there is only one reply (tender submission) on eTenders?

If it's a valid proposal, that meets the minimum requirements threshold at evaluation, then a contract can be awarded.

96. If I select the Hot Drop option and receive no tenders, are we back square one again?

It is open to the school to retender for any other suitable service delivery option (2 to 4) or to apply for cold lunches instead.

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

97. 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?

98. 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

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

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 needed from the school in this regard.

Unlocking Tenders / Accessing Submissions

100. 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

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

OJEU stands for The Official Journal of the European Union, a platform where tenders above the €221,000 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)

102. 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.

103. 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.

104. 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.

105. 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.

106. 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.

107. Who must be responsible for food waste management?

The FBO is responsible for waste prevention and for the management of all food waste and recycling arising from the provision of School Meals as is outlined in the new CFT., and all associated costs are to be borne by the FBO.

108. Can students take uneaten food home?

No, hot school meals are not allowed to be taken home in any circumstances.

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

No. 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, and on this basis the Interdepartmental Group recommended that meals must be consumed at school at the point of service as intended.

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

When the CFT is used correctly the FBO has fully responsibility.

School Staff and FBO Staff

111. 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.

112. 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.

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

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

114. 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.

115. 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.

116. How does the contract template support contract management?

The contract template includes Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that schools should use to measure the FBO's performance over the contract term.

117. 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.

Food Quality

118. 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.

119. 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

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

Yes.

121. 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 with form SMLPS1b.

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].