

Academies Questionnaire

Main Report Findings:

- Schools know, and are very comfortable with, ESPO for our catalogue activity.
- ESPO is well respected by the majority of its customers. It is well trusted and delivers a good value, reliable and compliant service.
- Schools are not using frameworks to any significant extent and there is an opportunity for us to develop awareness in this area. Our findings would suggest that an obvious vehicle for us to promote frameworks is to feature them more prominently within the relevant sections of the general catalogue.
- Schools are continuing to convert to Academy status at a steady rate. There are indications within the responses (which are supported by our observations elsewhere) that where schools are converting to academy status they often subsequently fall under the umbrella of an Academy Trust group, or form collaborative groups of individual academies. The DfE, in their guidance to schools, is actively directing them towards collaborative procurement so as to achieve better 'deals'. From an ESPO perspective we need therefore to recognise that (a) procurement decisions may not always sit with individual establishments, and (b) collaborative groups will be seeking benefits beyond our conventional offer. ESPO needs to consider issues surrounding what we can do in addition to our standard offer (and that of our competitors) to make our offer attractive – this may take many forms – discount pricing, rebates, provision of MI, procurement support with further competitions, contract support and management etc. Some academy groups may place a higher value on service and support levels than they do on pricing for example.
- There is an appetite within schools to use electronic ordering systems to reduce school administrative time. This raises a particular concern in regard to academies. Traditionally schools have used the SIMS finance management system, supported by their LA. The SIMS system facilitates electronic ordering in a manner that offers benefit to both the school and to ESPO (and other suppliers). There are strong indications from ESPO's customer base that when schools convert to academy status they often change their finance software system. Many different finance software systems are appearing on the market, and there is no current comfort that any of these will support the desires of the DfE, Public Sector Buying Organisations (PSBOs) or indeed the academies themselves, who all want to promote the efficiencies of electronic ordering.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ESPO must increase awareness and use of frameworks within schools
- ESPO needs a mechanism by which information is captured routinely and on a proactive basis. Traditionally we have worked closely with our member authorities to identify procurement needs and formulate policy. From an education perspective the main stakeholders will now be the large academy trusts and

groups, and these are the customers upon which we should be focussing. One solution may be to seek to form an academies based focus group to assist with ongoing development of procurement processes in line with customer needs.

- ESPO should continue to develop its relationship with the DfE so as to obtain advance notice of changes in policy or Government initiatives. These can be built into business plans, marketing and procurement activity.
- In the immediate short term ESPO has a well respected, and well distributed, communication tool in the form of the ESPO Catalogue. This could be utilised to promote the broader ESPO offer, and in particular it could be used to promote the existence of frameworks (for both services and direct supply goods) and the ESPO Dealing Direct and Academies websites. By this, it is suggested that this is different from the existing supplier-led adverts for frameworks – as we can take some more control over the message if we also do something ourselves, to advertise ESPO and its services.
- ESPO must make frameworks easy to use – goods and services relevant to customer needs - call-off in preference to further competitions – use of plain English in User Guides – address the perceived complexity of the User Guides.
- Upon conversion to academy status there is a clear requirement for additional services. It is important for ESPO to concentrate our procurement resource on the provision of services that will be required on an on-going basis (eg insurance, legal, HR etc.). Where possible we should also support the one-off services required during the conversion process itself (eg consultancy), as the inclusion of this in our portfolio gives us a route into this market.
- This retrospective questionnaire exercise has identified areas that warrant immediate attention from ESPO. We should also investigate whether schools have an appetite for new procurements for exam fees, property maintenance and temporary staffing (and finance systems – see above).
- Proactively promote electronic ordering systems to reduce school and ESPO administrative time. Proactively (before they convert to academies) try to ensure that schools understand the implications of switching their finance systems. Consider investigating whether ESPO could offer a framework solution for finance software systems compatible with electronic ordering.
- Persevere with developing the ESPO website offering to improve ease of access and use, and customer appeal. Keep registration requirements and barriers to a minimum. Ensure search / indexing is clear and simple.

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