Why Schools Should Rethink Frameworks and Explore Independent Sourcing

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Are You Missing Out on the Best Deals for Your School?

You need 30 new laptops before the next term, but budgets are tight. A **DfE-approved framework** offers a quick, compliant way to purchase them—but is it **the cheapest option**?

With the **Procurement Act 2023 now in effect**, schools no longer have to rely solely on frameworks to ensure compliance. Greater flexibility, increased supplier choice, and better value for money are now possible through independent sourcing. The question is, are you making the most of these changes?

The Procurement Act 2023: A New Era for School Procurement

The Procurement Act 2023 is transforming the way schools purchase essential resources. Previously, many schools relied on frameworks out of necessity, as they provided a pre-approved supplier list and compliance assurance. However, these frameworks often limited supplier options and didn’t always offer the lowest prices.

With the new Act, schools now have greater freedom to source goods and services independently while still ensuring transparency, fair competition, and compliance. This means:

- **A wider range of suppliers** – Schools can now work with small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and local businesses rather than being restricted to large, national suppliers.
- **Increased competition** – More supplier options mean better pricing and service levels.
- **Simplified procurement rules** – The process of obtaining quotes and selecting suppliers is now more straightforward.
- **Emphasis on social value** – Schools are encouraged to prioritise sustainability, ethical sourcing, and community benefits when making purchasing decisions.

By embracing these changes, schools can take control of their budgets and secure better deals—without compromising on quality or compliance.

Are Frameworks Always the Best Option?

There's no doubt that frameworks provide an easy route to procurement. They help schools:

- **Save time** by reducing the need for lengthy procurement processes.
- **Ensure compliance** through pre-vetted suppliers.
- **Minimise risk** with legally sound contracts.

However, these benefits come at a potential cost:

- **Higher prices due to admin fees** – Frameworks include additional charges that may inflate overall costs.
- **Limited supplier options** – Schools may be missing out on better deals from vendors not listed in framework agreements.
- **Lack of flexibility** – Some frameworks restrict product choice and service terms, leaving schools with fewer options.
- **Exclusion of new and innovative suppliers** – Emerging businesses, especially SMEs, often struggle to be included in frameworks despite offering competitive pricing and tailored solutions.

With the Procurement Act 2023 providing more flexibility, school leaders now

have a real opportunity to step outside the framework-first mindset and explore smarter ways to purchase.

Independent Sourcing: The Key to Unlocking Hidden Savings

So, when should schools ditch the framework approach and consider sourcing independently?

- If **better pricing is a priority**, independent suppliers may offer lower costs than framework providers.
- If **a local supplier offers more tailored services**, frameworks may not be the best fit.
- If schools **need more flexibility**, direct sourcing allows for custom contracts and better-negotiated terms.
- If schools **want to support SMEs**, sourcing outside frameworks helps stimulate competition and strengthen supplier diversity.

With increased autonomy under the Procurement Act 2023, school leaders now have the freedom to make cost-effective decisions that benefit both their budgets and their students.

How to Source Independently (Without Breaking the Rules!)

The Procurement Act 2023 does not mean abandoning compliance—it simply means schools now have more ways to meet legal requirements while securing better value.

1 Get Multiple Quotes

The new procurement rules make it easier for schools to request multiple quotes without excessive bureaucracy.

For low to medium value purchases, schools should obtain at least three quotes to ensure fair competition and value for money.

For high-value purchases, schools must follow a structured process, but they are not required to use frameworks—meaning they can engage a wider range of suppliers while still meeting legal requirements.

With the introduction of a centralised digital procurement system, it is now easier

to compare quotes, check supplier credibility, and document purchasing decisions to ensure transparency.

 Top Tip: Many suppliers are willing to **negotiate pricing**, offer **bulk discounts**, or provide **added value services** such as **free delivery, extended warranties, or ongoing support**. Always ask suppliers **what they can do to improve their offer**.

2 Negotiate for Extra Value

 "Most schools don't realise that suppliers will negotiate. Ask for discounts on bulk orders, free maintenance, or extended warranties."
— James H., School Business Manager, West Midlands

By **negotiating smartly**, schools can save thousands on procurement. Schools should:

- **Ask for better pricing** – Independent suppliers are often more flexible than framework vendors.
- **Secure extended warranties** – Many suppliers will offer longer coverage for free.
- **Request service add-ons** – Some vendors include free training or maintenance as part of the deal.

Independent sourcing gives schools more control over what they get for their money.

3 Ensure Compliance & Transparency

One of the biggest misconceptions is that sourcing independently is riskier than using frameworks.

The Procurement Act 2023 introduces stronger contract management and supply chain transparency to make independent sourcing just as secure as framework agreements.

To stay compliant, schools should:

- **Keep clear records** of purchasing decisions, including why a supplier was chosen.

- **Use the centralised procurement system** to track spending and prevent fraud or inefficiency.
- **Ensure suppliers meet ethical and environmental standards**, prioritising social value in procurement decisions.

These best practices allow schools to negotiate directly with suppliers while maintaining accountability.

Final Thought: Are You Leaving Money on the Table?

The Procurement Act 2023 has changed school procurement for good. Schools are no longer bound by frameworks—they can now choose suppliers based on value, service, and quality.

Before your next purchase, ask yourself:

 "Could I get a better deal outside of a framework?"

The answer could free up thousands in your school budget—money that can be better spent on students and staff.

Need Help Finding the Right Suppliers?

School leaders can contact **The School Supply Network** to be connected with suppliers that align with their needs—whether you're looking for better pricing, local options, or ethical sourcing.