

[Home](#) ▾ [Education, training and skills](#) ▾ [Running and managing a school](#)
▾ [School buildings and land](#) ▾ [School buildings: construction framework 2025](#)



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Guidance

Construction framework handbook 2025

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Applies to England

Contents

[Introduction](#)

[Framework structure](#)

[Framework overview](#)

[Selecting a procurement route](#)

[Direct allocation procedure](#)

[Framework contract forms](#)

[Information management](#)

[Glossary of terms](#)

Introduction

The construction framework 2025 (CF25) was procured under the competitive flexible procurement procedure pursuant to the Procurement Act 2023 (PA23). The Department for Education (DfE) will periodically review, and reserves the right to

update, this guidance, including, without limitation, procurement routes, processes, and associated timelines, subject to the requirements of the regulations as amended or updated from time to time.

This guidance has been developed to enable framework users to access the construction framework 2025 effectively and efficiently.

How to access the construction framework 2025

The construction framework is available to:

- local authorities
- schools
- academies
- further education (FE) colleges
- universities
- other public bodies that provide educational and ancillary community facilities in England

The construction framework may also be used by other contracting authorities for the purpose of delivering their requirements in terms of wider publicly funded non-education buildings in England.

For all school schemes, regardless of the identity of the framework user, this handbook, the mini-competition documentation, and the requirements set out apply in full unless otherwise agreed by the DfE framework team.

Framework users procuring schemes involving other educational facilities not defined as a school may adapt the employer's requirements when producing their scheme requirements, but must follow the procurement route, and award options and criteria, as detailed in this handbook, and with reference to appendix A.

For publicly funded non-education buildings, the framework user may use their own specification to suit their requirements and may use an alternative form of contract (with approval of DfE) as set out in [Framework contract forms](#).

However, the framework user must follow the procurement route and award options and criteria as detailed in this handbook with reference to appendix A as applicable

(unless otherwise agreed with the DfE framework team).

Access to the construction framework is governed by DfE and all framework users must sign an access agreement.

There is no charge to use the construction framework (or any charges paid by framework members).

Standard framework documents and further instructions on process will be made available to framework users following signature of the access agreement.

To access the framework or to discuss any specific requirements, please contact dfconstruction.frameworks@education.gov.uk.

Framework structure

Construction framework 2025 will have 2 award options:

- mini-competition framework members in the lot will be invited to compete for the project or batch of schemes under a further competitive selection process under the framework in accordance with Section 46 of the act
- direct allocation - a framework member is invited to submit a proposal to deliver a scheme and will be used in accordance with Section 45(4)(b) of the act, the direct allocation process (after the first 12 months) is managed through the performance-based allocation process that is linked to the construction framework key performance indicators (KPIs)

Subject to the selected award option, and as described elsewhere in this document, 4 different procurement routes are available:

- engagement-based selection route (EBSR) – competitive engagement process consisting of a preliminary invitation to tender (PITT) and shortlisted ITT (2 contractors) - this is only available to be used on the high value band (HVB) of the construction framework and will be used for single and batched schemes
- submission-based selection route (SBSR) – 2 stage design and build process - this is available for use on the HVB and LVB of the construction framework, with agreement of the framework manager, and can be used for single and batched schemes
- direct allocation and future schemes, invitation to submit proposals (ISP) - 2-stage

design and build process, which is available to be used on the HVB and low value band (LVB) of the construction framework and can be used for single or batched schemes - an option for early supplier involvement (ESI) is available during the feasibility stage of the project, where ESI is not used, the contractor's involvement will commence at ISP

- option B: post planning approval competition - this will be available across all value bands of the construction framework 2025

Framework overview

Table 1: framework overview

Value band	Anticipated project value and size range*	Procurement route options***	Award options
High	DfE core: £12m** plus and, or above 2,600m ² new build gross internal floor area (GIFA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EBSR: design and build design competition • SBSR: design and build two stage • ISP: design and build two stage via direct allocation or follow-on scheme • Option B: post planning approval competition** 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mini-competition • direct allocation • batching available
Low	DfE core: £4.4m to £12m**, extended up to £15m and, or less than 2,600m ² new build GIFA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SBSR: design and build two stage • ISP: design and build two stage via direct allocation or follow-on scheme • Option B: post planning approval competition** 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mini-competition • direct allocation • batching available

*Schemes that fall within the 'core' values and within the identified new build GIFA will normally be awarded through that value band. However, where a project only satisfies one of the determining factors, or for capacity reasons based on volume of

actual pipeline of schemes, and having regard to complexity of the scheme, the authority may itself, and framework users may with the authority's agreement, undertake an award process in the value band they deem most appropriate based on capacity and volume of actual pipeline of schemes.

On a scheme-specific basis, where there have been no tenders, no suitable tenders, no requests to participate or no suitable requests to participate in a mini-competition within the relevant lot, then additional flexibilities apply:

- value band, the core values noted will not apply and the authority may, or the framework user may, with the authority's agreement in respect of suitability for the alternative value band, undertake an award process in respect of the scheme via the alternative value band
- the authority may, or the framework user may, with the authority's agreement, undertake the award process within the nearest geographical alternative regional lot within a value band

The authority may also, notwithstanding the value band value ranges set out, award schemes below the LVB core value range (£4.4 million) where:

- follow-on or connected works are required in respect of a scheme that has reached the final completion date, where the authority considers the works should, for value for money or technical reasons, be carried out by the same contractor
- due to the nature or urgency of the works in question, a new procurement exercise would cause significant inconvenience or additional cost to the authority
- urgency is required

**The threshold (core) value between the HVB and LVB (set in the table above at £12 million with extension to £15 million) will be updated annually each January from 2027 in line with the latest published building cost information service (BCIS) indices, upon which DfE funding is calculated. The base date and indices for these values will be set to align with the framework pricing principles.

***The authority may pilot or develop other procurement route options during the framework period, in accordance with regulations and having regard to its policy, pipeline and Government or Cabinet Office guidance.

** This route will include for a procurement at a later stage in the project process, the timing of which will be flexible and could incorporate varying levels of contractor design ranging from full design and build liability to traditional construct only.

The initial ranking of each contractor is based on the outcome of the tender process of the framework agreement. Rankings are used as part of the performance-based direct allocation procedure to determine allocation of directly allocated projects as required.

Rankings are revised subject to performance against KPIs on a 6 monthly basis following the first 12 months of framework operation.

Further information on the performance regime can be provided on request.

Regional structure

Identifying the regional lot

Once you have selected the value band, you can identify the regional lot based on the location of the scheme (see appendix B).

High value band - regional structure

- North
- South

Low value band - regional structure

- North East
- Yorkshire and the Humber
- East Midlands
- East of England
- London
- South East
- South West
- North West and West Midlands

Selecting a procurement route

Framework users should follow this guidance to select a procurement route.

Single scheme or batched?

Firstly, the framework user must decide whether the procurement is for a single scheme or a batch of 2 or more schemes.

Procurement of and batching of schemes will also be permitted and is intended to operate as:

- design and build schemes, which can be grouped into batches and would normally be awarded under mini-competition, but the authority may at its discretion allocate by direct allocation
- batches, which will be formed of sample schemes and future school schemes
- sample schemes, which will normally be competed in accordance with the process for the relevant procurement route, the winner of the sample scheme can, at a later date, be invited by the framework user to submit proposals to deliver the future school schemes, this process is governed by the future schools agreement
- the total size and value of schemes within a batch will, wherever possible, be consistent with the capacity of the framework members within the lot, the authority anticipates that the value band in which batches are awarded will normally be determined by the average value of the schemes in the batch and the lot geography, for example, a batch of 3 schemes at an average value of £9 million will normally be awarded through the LVB
- the authority may, in its discretion, offer framework members the opportunity to reduce their design and other fees based upon a batch of schemes
- the authority may, in order to ensure value for money and genuine competition, or otherwise with the agreement of relevant lot framework members, batch schemes across adjacent lots, provided that all eligible framework members within those lots are invited to a single mini-competition in respect of the batch

Selecting a value band

Secondly, the framework user should select the most appropriate value band for the procurement. This will be advised by the framework team and will be based on the anticipated project value and size range.

It is anticipated projects will proceed in the lowest permitted value band for their

scheme or batch.

If a procurement has failed within a value band, an adjacent band may be able to be extended to accommodate the scheme or batch. Please contact a framework manager to discuss this where appropriate.

Identifying the regional lot

Once the value band is selected, the framework user can identify the regional lot based on the location of the scheme (appendix C). The framework is divided into a number of lots which are categorised by geographical location and value. In the event of a lack of interest, procurement failure or with the express permission of the DfE framework team, the award process may be undertaken by the framework user within the nearest alternative geographical alternative regional lot within a value band.

Selecting an award option

The next step in appointing a contractor is to choose an award option. This is based on one of the 2 following options, which can be used for any scheme or schemes regardless of the value, lot or procurement route.

Award option 1 - mini-competition

This is the preferred procurement option, which should be considered first. All the contractors on the construction framework for the lot and value band in which the facility is to be built will be invited to submit their competitive tender for the scheme.

Award option 2 - direct allocation

For performance-based allocations - this option is available only with the approval of a DfE framework manager. A single contractor is invited to submit a proposal to deliver a scheme and will be bound by the limits of the framework commercial proposal where applicable. A contractor will be allocated to an opportunity in line with the KPI rankings and requirements of the performance-based allocation process.

For follow-on schemes a single contractor who was awarded a batch of schemes would be invited to submit proposals as governed by the future schools agreement.

Selecting a procurement option

The final step is for the framework user to choose a preferred procurement option from those available.

1. Engagement-based selection route (EBSR) - design and build competition

This option can be chosen for high value schemes or as the lead sample scheme for batches which fall into the HVB only. DfE reserves the right to use this option in other instances. This option is available when the framework user has carried out an initial feasibility study and the contractor is required to develop the design from RIBA plan of work (PoW) Stage 2 onwards.

The process will commence with a PITT process, which will be open to all suppliers within the lot, followed by client engagement meetings (CEMs) prior to an invitation to tender (ITT) submission, normally involving a maximum of 2 shortlisted contractors. On conclusion of ITT a selected panel member (SPM) is appointed.

2. Submission-based selection route (SBSR) - 2-stage design and build

This option can be chosen for single schemes or batches of schemes that are to be competitively tendered and fall into either the HVB or LVB. This option is available where the framework user has carried out an initial feasibility study and the contractor is required to develop the design from RIBA PoW Stage 2 onwards. The process will involve CEMs with one shortlisted contractor.

3. Direct allocation and future schemes, invitation to submit proposals (ISP) - 2-stage design and build

This option can be used for direct allocations and future schools under batched arrangements on HVB and LVB schemes. The selected panel member (SPM) may be engaged to support the feasibility and options appraisal processes, under an appointment for ESI. Where ESI is not required, or feasible, this option is also available and will follow the SBSR process with an ISP taking the place of an ITT. In this instance, the framework user will have completed the initial feasibility study and the contractor will be issued with the ISP.

4. Option B - post planning approval

This option can be chosen for a single scheme on all value bands. This option is chosen where the framework user has designed a scheme up to planning permission or beyond, and there is either a requirement for the contractor to take on the design from this later stage or in some cases where the contractor is required to construct only and the framework user will retain design liability.

Pipeline

Preceding each award option is a pipeline period of 4 weeks for mini-competition and a minimum of 2 weeks for direct allocation. Direct awards will only be allocated to a contractor once we have a confirmed expression of interest (EOI) date.

Framework users must not advertise a scheme under any other framework or procurement route whilst it is present on the construction framework pipeline.

Stage 1, indicative information (during feasibility study stage):

- framework user completes scheme notification form with available information and sets an indicative month (for example, August 2026)
- framework user secures any necessary approval within their programme
- framework user completes the [scheme notification form](#)
- framework team publishes the pipeline to framework contractors (weekly)
- framework user keeps the pipeline information up to date by notifying the framework management team

Stage 2, precise information:

- framework user completes the feasibility study and secures approval within their programme
- following which confirmation to proceed is provided to the framework team, who then set a precise date for EOI for all procurement routes from the next pipeline issue date (Friday)
- framework user updates the scheme notification form, the framework team sets a precise date for issue of the EOI:
 - mini-competition - at least 4 weeks' notice from the next pipeline issue date (Friday)
 - direct allocation - at least 1 weeks' notice from the next pipeline issue date (Friday)
- framework user secures any necessary approval within their programme
- all pipeline queries must be directed to dfepipeline.constructionframeworks@education.gov.uk.

Relevant framework documents:

- scheme notification form
- contractor contact details (sourced from DfE framework manager)

- framework direct allocation rankings (if applicable sourced from DfE framework team)

Direct allocation procedure

Once a direct allocation scheme is approved (by a DfE framework team manager) the scheme will be placed on the pipeline. Once we have a fixed EOI date, the framework team will approach the appropriate contractor under the performance-based direct allocation (PBDA) process. The EOI (comprising the feasibility study, cost plan and outline programme) will be issued to the contractor with a minimum of 5 days to respond.

Following the EOI stage the contractor will be invited to submit their proposals for the project. Should the panel member fail to provide an acceptable proposal, the framework user has the right to decline the proposal, subject to the approval of the DfE framework team, and approach the next highest ranking panel member. This process may, if that panel member fails to provide an acceptable proposal, continue to the next highest ranking panel member, and so on. In the event that scheme is offered to the appropriate lot by mini-competition instead, any panel member whose direct allocation submission has been declined will not be invited to take part.

Mini-competition timescales

The following sections and appendix A contain indicative timescales for mini-competition.

Framework contract forms

School schemes

Framework users must seek their own legal advice on compliance with the

Procurement Act 2023.

Schemes procured or wholly or substantially funded by DfE

All schemes involving a pre-construction stage will be awarded using the standard DfE pre-construction services agreement.

HVB schemes are awarded using the following scheme contracts with standard DfE amendments:

- joint contracts tribunal (JCT) 2024 design and build contract
- JCT 2024 standard building contract with or without quantities
- JCT 2024 target cost contract

LVB schemes are awarded using the following scheme contracts with standard DfE amendments:

- JCT 2024 design and build contract
- JCT 2024 intermediate works with or without contractor design

Other forms of scheme contract available for use include:

- JCT minor works 2024 (with or without contractor's design) with standard DfE amendments
- JCT measured term contract 2024 (with or without framework user amendments)

Framework users may only modify such scheme contracts in accordance with the footnotes and other guidance issued by DfE from time to time. Framework users may, with the agreement of DfE, utilise alternative standard form pricing options, including target cost and open book, and determine the extent of early supplier involvement appropriate to their scheme.

DfE may, in its discretion, introduce other forms of contracts for use on DfE procured or funded schemes.

Schemes not wholly or substantially funded by DfE

Framework users procuring educational facilities where DfE is not fully or substantially funding the scheme may use the following scheme contracts:

- the framework user's own pre-construction services agreement
- JCT 2016 or 2024 suite of contracts (with or without DfE or framework user modified terms)

- NEC 4 suite of contracts (with or without framework user modified terms)
- PPC2000 (amended 2013) standard form of contract for project partnering (with or without framework user modified terms)
- a model form alliance contract (for a number of batched schemes), with or without another form of contract as set out in this Schedule 3
- an integrated project insurance model
- any other model form construction contract

Employer's requirements

Framework users must use the DfE employer's requirements for school and FE college schemes.

Framework users may, for schemes other than school and FE college schemes, use their own employer's requirements and specification in place of the technical manual.

Framework rates

Framework users must not permit framework members to exceed fixed elements framework rates in their pricing as defined by the framework pricing rules.

Information management

DfE's approach to information management aligns with the BS EN ISO 19650 series, including the establishment of the required resources. These resources have been developed at DfE framework level for adaptation (as appropriate and within prescribed parameters) to reflect project specific requirements.

DfE's information management requirements include:

- exchange information requirements
- detailed exchange information requirements
- project's information protocol
- project's information standard
- project's information production methods and procedures

These requirements standardise the definition, generation, classification, and

exchange of data across an asset's lifecycle. They support improved design and construction quality, and collaboration across the supply chain. The requirements also ensure accurate and usable information is available throughout delivery and operation (in accordance with the [Building Safety Act 2022](#)) and in compliance with the specific policies within [The Construction Playbook](#) and the [Transforming Infrastructure Performance: Roadmap to 2030](#).

Glossary of terms

Term	Meaning
2025 construction framework or construction framework or CF25	The construction framework under which this handbook operates.
Access agreement	An agreement between the authority and a framework user enabling use of the framework by that framework user.
Authority	The Secretary of Estate for Education and as represented by the DfE.
Award process	Either direct allocation or mini-competition.
Batch (or batches)	A group of schemes which are subject to a single award process, consisting of: a sample scheme in respect of which a scheme contract will be awarded, and one or more further identified future school schemes in respect of each of which a future schools agreement will be awarded.
Client engagement meetings (CEMs)	Meetings that help inform and develop the contractor's design, as set out in the timeline appended to this handbook. These meetings are typically attended by, but not limited to, the framework user (including any of their advisors), end user, the contractor and members of its design team (and other parties deemed necessary by the framework user).

Construct only	Where the framework user has designed a scheme up to RIBA PoW Stage 4 and takes design responsibility for the final design, except works designed by the contractor which will be determined on a scheme-by-scheme basis. This option is chosen for works which do not require early contractor involvement.
DfE	Department for Education.
DfE framework team	The team that is responsible for the management and operation of the construction framework 2025.
DfE funding level	The DfE funding available for a scheme, calculated in accordance with the pricing rules and associated guidance.
Direct allocation	The process of directly awarding a scheme contract to a framework member in accordance with this handbook.
Early supplier involvement (ESI)	The appointment for panel members to provide advice and expertise to the framework user during the feasibility stage to support scheme development.
Engagement based selection route (EBSR)	Design and build procurement option where potential bidders are shortlisted from an initial PITT stage, following which a maximum of two contractors are engaged in a design competition at ITT process.
Employer's requirements	As defined in the scheme contracts.
Exchange information requirements	As defined in the building information modelling (BIM) protocol.
Feasibility study	A briefing document, prepared by the framework user, which includes a control option (design) and estimate to RIBA PoW Stage 1.
Framework agreement	Agreement or where the context requires an agreement in the same terms as this agreement in relation to another framework member.

Framework handbook	The Construction Framework 2025 Handbook published by the authority as amended by the authority from time to time.
Framework manager	A member of the DfE capital or framework team who is responsible for management of the construction framework.
Framework team	Team within DfE responsible for management of the construction framework.
Framework member(s), panel member(s) or contractors	The bidders who successfully tendered for the construction framework 2025 and entered into the framework agreement and a member of the panel of contractors appointed to each lot.
Framework users	Means one or more of the following bodies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the Authority - the Secretary of State for Education - any other government departments, their agencies, arm's length bodies and non-departmental bodies - local authorities in England listed on https://www.gov.uk/find-local-council, or any replacement list which may be published from time to time - primary, secondary and special educational needs (SEN) schools of any legal form (including for the avoidance of doubt academy trust companies) which are funded by one or more of the Secretary of State for Education, a local authority in England or a diocesan authority in England (or privately funded) - diocesan and other relevant faith authorities in England - University Technical Colleges, Institutes of Technology and City Technology Colleges in England - studio schools in England - Further Education colleges in England and any other institutions providing Further Education within the meaning of the Education Act 1996 or any replacement thereof - all education establishments in England on the Get Information about Schools (GIAS) register https://get-information-schools.service.gov.uk, (or any replacement list which may published from time to time) - universities and other institutions providing higher education within the meaning in the Education Reform Act 1988

- procurers of other wider educational and community facilities including but not limited to sure start provision, nursery and Early Years provision, day care, secure children's homes, libraries, leisure and health facilities and any providers of state funded education and any statutory successors and replacement or successor organisations to the above bodies created as a result of reorganisation or organisational change
- LocatED Property Limited (company number 10385637)
- any legal person owned or controlled by the bodies above (whether directly or through any intermediate body)

Future schemes or future schools	Any schemes or schools falling under a future schools agreement.
Future schools agreement	An agreement in the form issued by the authority (as may be updated from time to time by the authority) between a framework user and a framework member pursuant to which future school schemes in a batch may be awarded at the discretion of the framework user.
Future schools notice	A written notice from the employer to the contractor requiring the contractor to provide a future school scheme proposal in the form set out in schedule 2 of the future schools agreement.
GIFA	Gross internal floor area.
High value band	The high scheme value range set out under the framework structure section and appendix C of this handbook.
Invitation to tender (ITT) or Invitation to submit proposal (ISP)	An invitation to tender or invitation to submit proposal for a scheme issued in accordance with the mini-competition or direct allocation by a framework user.
Key performance indicators (KPIs)	The performance indicators as set out in the framework agreement.

Lots	The regional lots set out within appendix C of this document handbook.
Low value band	The low scheme value range set out under the framework structure section and appendix C of this handbook.
Mini-competition	The process of selection by a framework user of a panel member from the construction framework to carry out a scheme as set out in accordance with this handbook.
Preliminary invitation to tender (PITT)	A preliminary invitation to tender (PITT) for a scheme issued in accordance with the mini-competition by a framework user.
Pre-Construction Services Agreement (PCSA)	The pre-construction services agreement for each scheme in a form approved by DfE.
Pricing guidance	Appendix I to this document.
Pricing proposal	The schedules relating to cost, as issued at local competition stage, and to be provided by the panel member during the pre-construction period.
Principal building sub-contractors	As defined in the scheme contracts.
Procurement Act 2023 (PA23)	The Procurement Act 2023.
Professional team	The architects, structural and civil engineers, mechanical and electrical engineers, acoustic engineers and any other design consultants whom the contractor intends to use in the delivery of the design of schemes.
Project	The relevant framework user project director for a scheme.

director

Regulations The Procurement Regulations 2024.

Sample scheme The first scheme within a batch which will form the basis of a call-off under a mini-competition.

Scheme (collectively termed as schemes) A construction scheme for new or refurbished schools, and other educational buildings (including colleges and university buildings), together with community facilities or public buildings which are ancillary to such education facilities or form part of the development on the same site to be delivered under a separate scheme contract or construction schemes relating to wider publicly funded non-education buildings.

Scheme contracts The contract for the delivery of a scheme, in one of the forms approved by DfE.

School Any primary, secondary, special educational needs (SEN) schools (including UTCs, free schools and academies), pupil referral units, and any early years provision.

Scheme data All drawings, reports, documents, plans, software, formulae, calculations and other data relating to the carrying out of the works that are used by or on behalf of the contractor or its professional team or principal building sub- contractors and any sub-contractor or supplier of the contractor. Any other materials, documents or data acquired, brought into existence or used in relation to the works.

Selected panel member (SPM) The successful bidder selected via a mini-competition or direct allocation process.

Submission based selection route (SBSR) Design and build procurement approach where selection of the bidder is based on qualitative and cost assessment. No significant design work is undertaken until the selected panel member is appointed.

2 stage design and A procurement that does not include a preliminary tender shortlisting exercise of panel members at mini-competition in appointing an

build	SPM, where the framework user has carried out an initial feasibility study and the contractor is required to develop the design from RIBA stage 2 onwards.
Value band	Low or high value band as the case may be in relation to the relevant value band as set out in the framework agreement and as described in this handbook.
Works	All of the works (including any works necessary for obtaining access to any sites) and design to be undertaken in accordance with any scheme contract entered into by the framework user and the panel member and as more particularly defined in the scheme contract.

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