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Department of Education

Procurement Support for the Implementation of the Junior Cycle Schoolbook Scheme 2024/25

Frequently Asked Questions

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1. Introduction

This Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document has been developed to support schools with questions or queries arising from the implementation of the Junior Cycle School Book scheme. It is divided into sections based on the query type and will be updated as new queries are received from Schools through the lifecycle of the procurement exercise.

For more information, including supporting documentation and templates, please see the SPU website at: <https://www.spu.ie/schoolbooks-scheme/>

For further queries not covered in this FAQ document, please contact the support team by email at: JCSchoolbooks@education.gov.ie

2. Procurement

2.1 What is Public Procurement?

Public Procurement refers to the process by which public service bodies purchase goods, services or works from suppliers which they have selected for this purpose.

It ranges from the purchase of routine goods or services to large-scale contracts for infrastructural projects and involves a wide and diverse range of contracting authorities.

Procurement ensures transparency and that a competitive process takes place when spending public money.

2.2 Why do schools need to do a public procurement process?

Schools are publicly funded bodies. All publicly funded bodies, including schools, are obliged by law to follow public procurement rules and procedures when sourcing goods and services.

2.3/My school has never done a procurement process. Why do I have to do one now?

Schools are publicly funded bodies. All publicly funded bodies, including schools, are obliged by law to follow public procurement rules and procedures when sourcing goods and services.

The rules around Public Procurement for the Junior Cycle Schoolbook scheme are unchanged from existing obligations on schools. The scheme does not introduce any new requirements for schools.

2.4 What do CFT/RFT stand for?

A CFT is a 'Call for Tender' and is sometimes known as an 'RFT' or 'Request for Tender.'

It is a document that outlines the goods or services being sought by an organisation. It is called a CFT on eTenders.

2.5 What does RFQ stand for?

An RFQ is a 'Request for Quotation.' It is a process by which a school solicits select suppliers to submit pricing quotes for the chance to fulfil certain projects.

2.6 Why do schools need to follow a Call for Tender (CFT) process for orders over €50,000?

There are different rules that apply depending on the amount of money a publicly funded body is spending on goods or services; schools are considered publicly funded bodies.

The rules are defined by whether the total value of the contract (excluding VAT) is:

- Less than €5,000,
- Between €5,000 and €50,000
- Between €50,000 and €221,000,
- Above €221,000.

2.7 How do I determine if I need to do a CFT or an RFQ?

There are different rules that apply depending on the amount of money a publicly funded body is spending on goods or services; schools are considered publicly funded bodies.

Using the indicative pricing sheet for the purpose of determining if a tender is required, and the Post Primary School Quotation Template, you can scope your book requirements and price for your needs. This pricing will then determine which process you need to follow.

The rules are defined by whether the total value of the contract (excluding VAT) is:

- Less than €5,000,
- Between €5,000 and €50,000
- Between €50,000 and €221,000,
- Above €221,000.

Where the estimated spend is between €5,000 and €50,000, a Request for Quotes (RFQ) template can be used. A template is available at <https://www.spu.ie/schoolbooks-scheme/>.

If the estimated value exceeds €50,000 then school is required to issue a Call for Tender (CFT). A Tender Response Document (TRD) and Pricing Schedule will also be required. These will need to be published on eTenders. Templates are available at <https://www.spu.ie/schoolbooks-scheme/>.

2.8 Should my estimate on the cost of my books include or exclude VAT?

Your cost estimate should exclude VAT. School textbooks and workbooks are 0% VAT. Copy books are taxed at 23% VAT. Revenue guidance on VAT rates for printed matter can be found [here](#), and on electronic publications [here](#). However, the estimated value should be calculated exclusive of VAT for all items.

This means that your contract estimate may be different to the actual cost of the contract, which will be higher. Schools should ensure that they have not overcommitted when contracting for goods.

2.9 What is the standstill period post issue of the result to suppliers?

An eight-calendar day standstill period will apply, starting from the date of issue of the result letters to suppliers.

2.10 Why do I need to get three quotes for orders under €50,000?

Do quotes need to be written quotes or can they be verbal quotes?

Procurement is necessary to ensure transparency and that a competitive process takes place when spending public money. You need to seek a minimum of three quotes.

Contracts less than €5,000 can be awarded on the basis of verbal or written quotes from one or more competitive suppliers. For anything above €5,000, all quotes must be written. It is recommended that even where a verbal quote may suffice, a written quote is preferred.

Contracts between €5,000 and €50,000 can be awarded on the basis of responses to written specifications (for example, sent by email) from at least three suppliers or service providers.

Contracts under €50,000 (exclusive of VAT) may be awarded to the lowest cost provider based on written quotations from three suppliers.

A document specifying what is required, including a timeline for fulfilment of the order, may be included.

2.11 Do I have to purchase goods from the supplier with the lowest cost quote?

For contracts valued at less than €5,000, and between €5,000 and €50,000, it is recommended the only evaluation criteria is cost.

If a school follows this advice, contracts will be awarded to the lowest cost supplier.

Schools could choose to add other qualitative criteria to their request for quotes but will be responsible for managing this process itself.

For contracts estimated to be above €50,000, the Call for Tender (CFT) document on <https://www.spu.ie/schoolbooks-scheme> provides information on assessment criteria to be used.

2.12 What happens if a school receives only one response to its request for quotes?

It is considered best practice to receive at least three written quotes for contracts of estimated valued between €5,000 and €50,000. However, the obligation on public bodies is to seek three or more written quotes.

The school may either seek further quotes or evaluate the quote to ensure it meets the needs of the school and may award the contract to that respondent. It is recommended that schools seek another quote as this represents best practice.

2.13 If I request three quotes and only two quotes are received, can I decide to award the tender to one of the respondents?

Yes. Procurement rules specify that for contracts valued between €5,000 and €50,000, you must seek three or more written quotes. You may award the contract based on the responses received, even if it is less than the three required.

2.14 Can the Board of Management make a decision on procurement, in the best interest of the school to ensure the books are in place for September?

As outlined in Section 2 of the Procurement Guidance for Post-Primary Schools when a school engages with the procurement process, it needs to be mindful of the following spending thresholds:

A. Contracts less than €5,000 (excluding VAT)

Contracts less than €5,000 can be awarded on the basis of verbal or written quotes from one or more competitive supplier. It is recommended that even where a verbal quote may suffice, a written quote is preferred.

B. Contracts between €5,000 and €50,000 (excluding VAT)

Contracts between €5,000 and €50,000 can be awarded on the basis of responses to written specifications (for example, sent by email) to at least three suppliers or service providers. A document specifying what is required, including a timeline for fulfilment of the order, should be included.

A template Request for Quotes is available on <https://www.spu.ie/schoolbooks-scheme/>.

C. Contracts between €50,000 and €221,000 (excluding VAT)

It is necessary to advertise contracts in this category on eTenders.

Schools will be required to register on eTenders. A detailed guide on how to register and publish a guide on eTenders will be published for schools on <https://www.spu.ie/schoolbooksscheme/>. The Department of Education advises schools that tender competition should be advertised on eTenders for twenty-one calendar days.

These are national thresholds and may not be varied by schools Boards of Management.

2.15 Will the same funding be available next year and subsequent years? Will there be extra admin fee to recycle books?

This funding is a permanent measure. Schools should devise a system for monitoring items such as name tags/barcodes (where used) which are placed on each book in advance. Students and parents/guardians should be reminded of the need for schoolbooks and resources care and maintenance throughout the year.

Through the administration support grant, schools are provided with funding to support administration and implementation of the scheme. The specific duties are to be determined by the school management but can include placing orders with schoolbook shops and suppliers, checking delivery of orders from schoolbook shops and suppliers, covering schoolbooks, preparing, and tracking sets of schoolbooks and classroom resources for individual classes/students, liaising with schoolbook shops and suppliers and subject teachers.

Where a post-primary school does not need to pay a person or persons for additional administrative support to implement the new scheme, the school may use the Administration Support Grant for other administrative purposes associated with the new Junior Cycle Schoolbooks Scheme, including but not limited to, the purchase of a tracking/barcode system or the purchase of storage cabinets.

It is a matter for the school to decide the distribution pathway and monitoring of book assignments.

There will be no top up of the Administration Grant.

2.16 Where can I get advice on creating bundles for tendering?

Details of the different commodity types that may be purchased under this grant are available in section 2.1 of the procurement guidance document. It states that; *‘Goods can be split into separate contracts for procurement purposes. In respect of the Junior Cycle Schoolbooks Scheme, schools can procure goods under three main types: 1. Textbooks, including eBooks and workbooks 2. Non-Book Classroom Resources (the items listed in Appendix 2 in the Junior Cycle Schoolbook Scheme Guidance 2024/25) 3. Digital Devices (only schools that generate teacher led resources and content will have expenditure under this category).’*

2.17 Is this workload going to be remunerated for principals or will an additional allocation be given to principals so that they can access other people to do some of the work associated with procurement?

The Department recognises that, while many post-primary schools already operate book rental schemes of considerable scale, there is additional work associated with implementing this new scheme.

The Department has put in place a grant payment for schools, for administrative support in the 2024/25 school year.

This grant may be used to employ a person to work for a specified number of days in advance of, or during, the 2024/25 school year to carry out administrative work on the scheme. The daily rate sanctioned by the Department for this work is €160.62, which includes holiday pay. The Department will provide an additional 11.05% to cover the employer PRSI cost. The school must process the payment as it would the payment of any person conducting work for, or in, the school.

Although the rate is based on a daily rate, schools have the autonomy to use the equivalent number of hours over the course of the school year as they consider most suitable for their needs.

The specific duties are to be determined by the school management but can include placing orders with schoolbook shops and suppliers, checking delivery of orders from schoolbook shops and suppliers, covering schoolbooks, preparing, and tracking sets of schoolbooks and classroom resources for individual classes/students, liaising with schoolbook shops and suppliers and subject teachers.

2.18 Is the number of administrative support days allocated based on the whole school number or the number of Junior Cycle students?

The number of days allocated to schools under the Administration Support Grant are based on the Junior Cycle enrolment size as returned in September 2023.

2.19 Can the appointed administrator role be shared? Can it be a parent?

It is a matter for the principal / Board of Management who is assigned to the role for the administration of the schoolbooks scheme in their school. As outlined in the scheme guidance, it is in order to employ more than one person, for example secretary, parent, etc., to conduct the administrative work on the scheme.

Information on the Administration Support Grant is outlined in section 5.6 of the guidance document available at: www.gov.ie/schoolbookschemes

2.20 Can the timeline be updated to ensure Principal factors in their holidays?

From start to finish, the eTenders process (book requirements greater than €50K) usually takes 6- 8 weeks. Should the process be commenced immediately, it should not impact on holiday plans for schools.

2.21 Could the Government just pay the allocation to parents?

Providing funding directly to schools to purchase schoolbooks and classroom resources for students has many benefits for schools.

Post-primary schools will retain the discretion to implement the curriculum by choosing the schoolbooks and classroom resources that best meet the needs of their students.

All children and young people will now start the new school year having a full set of schoolbooks and core classroom resources. Where the funding allows, some schools may also be in a position to provide additional classroom resources.

Information on the Administration Support Grant is outlined in section 5.6 of the guidance document available at: www.gov.ie/schoolbookschemes.

Post-primary schools that previously operated book rental schemes will no longer need to collect book rental charges from parents/guardians of students in Junior Cycle years.

Schools will own the schoolbooks and classroom resources and they will be provided on loan to students for either the duration of a school year or for the entire three years of Junior Cycle.¹ Schoolbooks will be available for re-use in subsequent years. This means that post-primary schools will not usually need to buy a complete new set of schoolbooks for each school year. Schools may be able to achieve cost savings by purchasing in bulk and by re-using schoolbooks in future years.

2.22 Is there a template for a schoolbooks scheme policy that will guide us in creating our own?

There is no template policy document for schools. The schoolbooks will remain the property of the school and be on loan to students. School management may wish to consider if the schoolbooks, as school property, would fall under the school's Code of Behaviour policy.

2.23 Does the €309 per pupil follow them through Junior Cycle or will it be a reduced rate when they are in year 2 and 3?

Schools should be aware that the schoolbooks scheme for students in Junior Cycle is a permanent measure and the details for the 2024/25 school year are set out in the scheme guidance available at <https://www.gov.ie/schoolbookschemes> . A full evaluation of the first year of implementation of the scheme will be undertaken in consultation with the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform, in order to inform the guidance, implementation, costs and efficiency of the scheme for future years.

2.24 If I buy my books from three different publishers, do I need to do an CFT for each?

It is not in line with the requirements under procurement law to sub-divide goods (for example, books) into different contracts.

It is also not permitted to subdivide goods into different contracts for the purpose of reducing a contract's value.

This means that a school cannot run three competitions in a single academic year for textbooks, with each competition for books by a different publisher.

This may not apply in very limited circumstances (for example, specialty textbooks in the case of particular subjects; such as language books for modern foreign language short courses where it is known there is only a single supplier of the item).

Where a school is purchasing eBooks, and they are only available for purchase directly from one publisher, a school may purchase these directly from that publisher. It may be the case that a school uses eBooks from multiple publishers, and each publisher is the only seller of its own eBooks. In this instance, schools can purchase eBooks from each publisher directly by getting a quote for the required goods from each publisher.

2.25 How do I procure digital subscriptions that are only from one source?

As set out in section 2.2 of the Procurement Guidance for Post-Primary Schools *'Many schools now use eBooks either alongside, or instead of, conventional textbooks. The funding provided through the scheme can be used to purchase eBooks.*

Where a school only wishes to purchase an eBook, and it is only available for purchase directly from the publisher, a school may purchase these directly from that publisher. It may be the case that a school uses eBooks from multiple publishers, and each publisher is the only seller of its own eBook. In this instance, schools can purchase eBooks from each publisher directly by getting a quote for the required goods from each publisher.

Where a school is purchasing eBooks from a publisher directly, with no tender process, it must keep a record noting that there is only one possible supplier of the eBooks being purchased.

If it is possible to purchase the eBook from more than one seller, schools must follow the tender process for the relevant threshold.

Where schools use both physical textbooks and eBooks, physical textbooks should still be tendered for as its own contract, with public procurement rules as set out in this document and with the tender process for the relevant threshold followed, based on the estimated value of the contract.'

2.26 In the context of my own school, can you confirm that I can no longer purchase batches of books directly from the publishers?

It is not in line with the requirements under procurement law to sub-divide goods (for example, books) into different contracts.

It is also not permitted to subdivide goods into different contracts for the purpose of reducing a contract's value.

This means that a school cannot run three competitions for textbooks, with each competition for books by a different publisher.

This may not apply in very limited circumstances (for example, specialty textbooks in the case of particular subjects; such as language books for modern foreign language short courses where it is known there is only a single supplier of the item).

2.27 Do I need to do a single procurement process for all schoolbooks and classroom resources/stationery?

No. While it is not permitted to subdivide goods of the same type (for example, schoolbooks) into different contracts, it is acceptable to run different procurement processes for different types of goods. This means that a school can purchase stationery, art material and wood/metal work materials through a separate process to books.

2.28 Can you also use the grant to pay for barcoding system/covering for the books? or is this separate to the grant?

The scope of the Junior Cycle Schoolbooks Scheme focuses on schoolbooks, materials to write on, materials required for practical subjects and project support equipment where the costs for these items were previously borne by parents/guardians, either by purchasing the item or by paying a fee to the school for the item.

In the first instance the grant must be used to eliminate the cost of schoolbooks, and core classroom resources to parents/guardians.

Where the funding permits schools may use it towards the cost of a barcoding system and covering the books.

In addition, any surplus funding in 2024/25 school year associated with the Administration Support Grant may be used for other administrative purposes associated with the new Junior Cycle Schoolbooks Scheme, including but not limited to, the purchase of a tracking/barcode system or the purchase of storage cabinets.

2.29 What if we use materials as a textbook that are not available in book shops, for example, teacher handbooks?

In the first instance the grant must be used to eliminate the cost of schoolbooks, and core classroom resources to parents/guardians. The term 'schoolbooks' defined in the guidance includes the purchase of eBooks. Any additional online resources acquired using grant funding under this scheme must primarily be to fulfil the aim of reducing costs that would have been borne by parents/guardians, either by providing the item or paying a fee to the school to provide the item. The Department provides open access to digital resources through Scoilnet.ie, through which all primary and post-primary learners can access an array of resources.

Thereafter the grant should be used to eliminate costs of additional classroom resources. It is acknowledged that schools will vary in their approaches and their requirements in relation to the use of classroom resources. Additional classroom

resources cover resources used in Visual Art, Music, Home Economics, Graphics, Engineering, and so on.

In essence, additional classroom resources are the supporting materials for any Junior Cycle subject or short course required by students to complete projects and practical elements of the curriculum, beyond schoolbooks and core classroom resource.

It is important to note that additional classroom resources do not include any items currently provided in post-primary schools through existing funding streams, either from the Department of Education or from other Departments and agencies.

2.30 Can you use the grant given under the scheme to pay for subscription services?

Expenditure under additional classroom resources is limited to expenditure that, up to the commencement of the scheme, was borne by parents/guardians, either by providing the item or paying a fee to the school to provide the item.

Additional classroom resources do not include any items currently provided in post-primary schools through existing funding streams, either from the Department of Education or from other Departments and agencies.

Schools may use the funding for digital media support, which relates to teaching and learning within curricular requirements.

Decisions regarding the use of digital technology, such as eBooks, in schools is a matter for the board of management/ETB of each school. Schools are advised to consult with members of the school community including parents/guardians when planning for the introduction of digital technologies, with cost and other implications being fully considered.

2.31 What about non-book expenses borne by the parent / guardian?

2.31.1 Can you purchase Graphics equipment under the scheme? /

2.31.2 Are textiles, and other items for Home Economics included? Ingredients for cooking practicals? /

2.31.3 What about supplies for Woodwork/Technical Graphics? /

2.31.4 First-year students also used to pay the Art teacher for an Art Pack containing pencils, erasers, sketchbooks, watercolor paints, markers, ruler, sharpeners, and glue sticks. Is this now part of the book scheme?

In the first instance the grant must be used to eliminate the cost of schoolbooks, and core classroom resources to parents/guardians. The term 'schoolbooks' defined in

the guidance includes the purchase of eBooks. Any additional online resources acquired using grant funding under this scheme must primarily be to fulfil the aim of reducing costs that would have been borne by parents/guardians, either by providing the item or paying a fee to the school to provide the item. The Department provides open access to digital resources through Scoilnet.ie, through which all primary and post-primary learners can access an array of resources.

At a minimum the scheme will provide schoolbooks, and core related classroom resources for all students in Junior Cycle in post-primary schools in the free education system. It eliminates these costs for parents of young people enrolled in these schools. A detailed list of these minimum requirements has been outlined in section 4.2, 4.3 and Appendix 1 of the Schoolbooks Grant Guidance for Post Primary Schools 2024/25 which is available at <https://www.gov.ie/schoolbookschemes> .

Thereafter the grant should be used to eliminate costs of additional classroom resources (see section 4.3.2). Additional classroom resources may also include where funding permits, items provided by post-primary schools where a charge was previously levied on parents, for example, art materials and photocopying.

Expenditure under additional classroom resources is limited to expenditure that, up to the commencement of the scheme, was borne by parents/guardians, either by providing the item or paying a fee to the school to provide the item.

It is acknowledged that schools will vary in their approaches and their requirements in relation to the use of classroom resources. Additional classroom resources cover resources used in Visual Art, Music, Home Economics, Graphics, Engineering, and so on.

In essence, additional classroom resources are the supporting materials for any Junior Cycle subject or short course required by students to complete projects and practical elements of the curriculum, beyond schoolbooks and core classroom resource.

It is important to note that additional classroom resources do not include any items currently provided in post-primary schools through existing funding streams, either from the Department of Education or from other Departments and agencies.

2.32 My school offers taster subjects for the first term of first year. We do not know what books we need to buy yet. When should I start the procurement process, and how do I decide what my school needs to buy?

Schools should tender for all known and anticipated book requirements for the 2024/25 academic year. If at a later stage a further requirement is identified as not

being included under an earlier procurement exercise, then an additional RFQ/eTender procedure may be necessary, determined by the value of the outstanding requirements. Please be aware that this additional tender would take place within the terms of the monies received, no additional grant will be made available.

2.33 My school doesn't know all of its requirements right now. We have not decided what novels are being studied and won't until autumn. Do we have to estimate what books we will need or use now?

Schools should tender for all known and anticipated book requirements for the 2024/25 academic year. If at a later stage a further requirement is identified as not being included under an earlier procurement exercise, then an additional RFQ/eTender procedure may be necessary, determined by the value of the outstanding requirements. Please be aware that this additional tender would take place within the terms of the monies received, no additional grant will be made available.

2.34 Can you order extra books or materials, etc., for students for example joining at a later stage, for example, Term 2 in the new school year (international students)?

Purchasing of additional schoolbooks and additional classroom resources for pupils not currently enrolled in the school will be a matter for the Managerial Authorities of the School.

Please also refer to Section 5.5 Exceptional Circumstances in the Schoolbook Grant Guidance for post-primary schools 2024/25 available at [gov - Schoolbooks Scheme for Junior Cycle in Post-Primary Schools \(www.gov.ie\)](http://gov.ie/SchoolbooksScheme)

2.35 I have an existing contract with a local bookshop/bookseller/publisher. Do I have to do a procurement process? How do I manage my existing contract?

Please email details of your contract to jcschoolbooks@education.gov.ie.

2.36 Can local bookshops be prioritised?

2.36.1 My school has always supported the town's local bookshop. Can the funding be given to a local bookstore who then provides source, cover and distribute the books, etc., to the students at the end of August and as required throughout the year? /

2.36.2 Can we split the tender into year groups, for example, three tenders, thus allowing local suppliers to compete and avoid reaching the €50k e-tenders threshold?

Schools can choose to include book covering in a request for quotes or a call for tender. Schools can inform their local bookshop of the tender process and request they respond to it.

Schools are advised that it is not in line with the requirements under procurement law to sub-divide goods into different contracts. This means that a school cannot have separate contracts for schoolbooks based on year groups or subjects or particular publishers.

This may not apply in very limited circumstances (for example, specialty textbooks in the case of particular subjects; such as language books for modern foreign language short courses where it is known there is only a single supplier of the item).

2.37 Can I buy eBooks or physical books only?

2.37.1 My school buy books and eBooks. Can I order physical books with book shop and eBooks with publishers separately? /

2.37.2 eBooks on their own can only currently be purchased from the publishers directly. This means digital schools must buy the books to get the codes under the current scheme. These codes are not transferable and so books will need to be purchased every year. How does this sit with the idea that books are to be returned and reused?

The physical book comes with a code on the inside cover that can be scratched off and used to redeem a free eBook version.

Where a school only wishes to purchase an eBook, and it is only available for purchase directly from the publisher, a school may purchase these directly from that publisher. It may be the case that a school uses eBooks from multiple publishers, and each publisher is the only seller of its own eBook. In this instance, schools can purchase eBooks from each publisher directly by getting a quote for the required goods from each publisher.

Where a school is purchasing eBooks from a publisher directly, with no tender process, it must keep a record noting that there is only one possible supplier of the eBooks being purchased.

If it is possible to purchase the eBook from more than one seller, schools must follow the tender process for the relevant threshold.

Where schools use physical textbooks and eBooks and the eBook is provided free with the physical textbook, the physical textbooks should still be tendered for as its own contract. This process should follow public procurement rules as set out in the Procurement Guidance document and with the tender process for the relevant threshold followed, based on the estimated value of the contract.

Where schools use only eBooks but also use physical workbooks, the physical workbooks should still be tendered for as its own contract, with the tender process for the relevant threshold followed, based on the estimated value of the contract.

2.38 eBooks on their own can only currently be purchased from the publishers directly. This means digital schools must buy the books to get the codes under the current scheme. These codes are not transferable and so books will need to be purchased every year. How does this sit with the idea that books are to be returned and reused?

Where a school only wishes to purchase an eBook, and it is only available for purchase directly from the publisher, a school may purchase these directly from that publisher. It may be the case that a school uses eBooks from multiple publishers, and each publisher is the only seller of its own eBook. In this instance, schools can purchase eBooks from each publisher directly by getting a quote for the required goods from each publisher.

Where a school is purchasing eBooks from a publisher directly, with no tender process, it must keep a record noting that there is only one possible supplier of the eBooks being purchased.

Decisions regarding the use of digital technology, such as eBooks, in schools is a matter for the board of management/ETB of each school. Schools are advised to consult with members of the school community including parents/guardians when planning for the introduction of digital technologies, with cost and other implications being fully considered.

A full evaluation of the first year of implementation of the scheme will be undertaken in consultation with the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform, in order to inform the guidance, implementation, costs and efficiency of the scheme for future years.

2.39 My school uses eBooks by different publishers. These can only be purchased from the publishers. Can I purchase these separately from each publisher without getting quotes?

Where a school only wishes to purchase an eBook, and it is only available for purchase directly from the publisher, a school may purchase these directly from that publisher. It may be the case that a school uses eBooks from multiple publishers, and each publisher is the only seller of its own eBook. In this instance, schools can purchase eBooks from each publisher directly by getting a quote for the required goods from each publisher.

Where a school is purchasing eBooks from a publisher directly, with no tender process, it must keep a record noting that there is only one possible supplier of the eBooks being purchased.

If it is possible to purchase the eBook from more than one seller, schools must follow the tender process for the relevant threshold.

Where schools use physical textbooks and eBooks and the eBook is provided free with the physical textbook, the physical textbooks should still be tendered for as its own contract. This process should follow public procurement rules as set out in the Procurement Guidance document and with the tender process for the relevant threshold followed, based on the estimated value of the contract.

Where schools use only eBooks but also use physical workbooks, the physical workbooks should still be tendered for as its own contract, with the tender process for the relevant threshold followed, based on the estimated value of the contract.

2.40 Can we use surplus to purchase Offices 365 Licences (software) as a class resource? A cost typically paid by parents through contributions?

Schools may use the funding for digital media support, which relates to teaching and learning within curricular requirements.

Decisions regarding the use of digital technology, such as eBooks, in schools is a matter for the board of management/ETB of each school. Schools are advised to consult with members of the school community including parents/guardians when planning for the introduction of digital technologies, with cost and other implications being fully considered.

2.41 Examination papers for the next academic year are not yet available as the state examinations for 2024 have not yet taken place. Can I do a separate request for quotes during the year for these?

Schools should tender for all known and anticipated book requirements for the 2024/25 academic year. If at a later stage a further requirement is identified as not being included under an earlier procurement exercise, then an additional RFQ/eTender procedure may be necessary, determined by the value of the outstanding requirements. Please be aware that this additional tender would take place within the terms of the monies received, no additional grant will be made available.

2.42 We do our own barcoding and pay a yearly software fee can the grant be used for this?

In the first instance the grant must be used to eliminate the cost of schoolbooks, and core classroom resources to parents/guardians. The term 'schoolbooks' defined in the guidance includes the purchase of eBooks. Any additional online resources acquired using grant funding under this scheme must primarily be to fulfil the aim of reducing costs that would have been borne by parents/guardians, either by providing the item or paying a fee to the school to provide the item. The Department provides open access to digital resources through Scoilnet.ie, through which all primary and post-primary learners can access an array of resources.

At a minimum the scheme will provide schoolbooks, and core related classroom resources for all students in Junior Cycle in post-primary schools in the free education system. It eliminates these costs for parents of young people enrolled in these schools. A detailed list of these minimum requirements has been outlined in section 4.2, 4.3 and Appendix 1 of the Schoolbooks Grant Guidance for Post Primary Schools 2024/25 which is available at <https://www.gov.ie/schoolbookschemes> .

Thereafter the grant should be used to eliminate costs of additional classroom resources (see section 4.3.2). Additional classroom resources may also include, where funding permits, items provided by post-primary schools where a charge was previously levied on parents, for example, art materials and photocopying.

Expenditure under additional classroom resources is limited to expenditure that, up to the commencement of the scheme, was borne by parents/guardians, either by providing the item or paying a fee to the school to provide the item.

It is acknowledged that schools will vary in their approaches and their requirements in relation to the use of classroom resources. Additional classroom resources cover

resources used in Visual Art, Music, Home Economics, Graphics, Engineering, and so on.

In essence, additional classroom resources are the supporting materials for any Junior Cycle subject or short course required by students to complete projects and practical elements of the curriculum, beyond schoolbooks and core classroom resource.

It is important to note that additional classroom resources do not include any items currently provided in post-primary schools through existing funding streams, either from the Department of Education or from other Departments and agencies.

Where the funding permits schools may use it towards the cost of a barcoding system and covering the books.

2.43 Can we specify a particular type of covering for books and our preferred provider to ensure that it meets the standard of quality that we have been using for our book rental scheme?

As far as possible, schools should make every effort to reduce wastage under the scheme. Schools are expected to adopt a cost-conscious and environment-conscious approach to the selection of schoolbooks and classroom resources.

It is strongly recommended that a cover is placed on all schoolbooks. Schoolbook shops and suppliers may provide a book-covering service at a cost, or a school may decide to provide its own book-covering service or consider requesting parents/guardians and/or students to assist with this task. The nature of the covering would be a matter for school management to decide and would need to be considered in line with the grant funding provided to the school and the potential expenditure outlay.

2.44 How can I account for exact numbers when they cannot be known until the academic year has already begun?

2.44.1 In my school, students do not choose whether they study higher or ordinary level until they start second year. We will not have numbers until early September. What do I do in this situation? /

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It is recommended that you use estimates based on previous years.

2.45 If a student loses their books during the school year, does the scheme cover the cost of replacement books, or is it the responsibility of the students?

Each school will differ in the level of loss or damage of books experienced. It is up to individual schools to determine their approach to the replacement of books and resources.

A full evaluation of the first year of implementation of the scheme will be undertaken by the Department in consultation with the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform, in order to inform the guidance, implementation, costs and efficiency of the scheme for future years.

2.46 We have an established book rental scheme which includes a €50 deposit which is paid once when students start in 1st year and returned when students return all the books when they leave school. Can we still use this deposit system to ensure our books are returned?

The Junior Cycle Schoolbooks Scheme has been introduced to eliminate the cost of schoolbooks and core classroom resources for their families and will ease the financial burden facing families at back-to-school time.

Parents/guardians of students in Junior Cycle years will not be asked to purchase schoolbooks or to make a financial contribution to the school towards the cost of schoolbooks. All schoolbooks remain the property of the school and are provided on loan to students.

As schools own the books it is expected schools will put appropriate measures in place to protect schoolbooks and ensure they are available for re-use in subsequent years. Each school will differ in the level of loss or damage of books experienced. It is up to individual schools to determine their approach to the replacement of books and resources.

Parents/Guardians should be reminded that students are expected to take good care of their schoolbooks and classroom resources and keep them in good condition during the year.

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2.47 Are the Department encouraging all schools to consider putting in place book rental schemes for students in Transition year, fifth year and sixth year?

Up to and including the 2022/23 school year, an annual book grant issued to all recognised primary and post primary schools within the Free Education Scheme to provide assistance for books including the operation of book rental schemes. Under this scheme, as set out in Circular 0046/2013 (found here: <https://www.gov.ie/en/circular/0f30adef861f4c589e920fd2ae456fa6/>) the Department provided funding of €18.2 million in 2022 to all of these schools, including primary and post primary schools.

The 102 DEIS primary schools who participated in the pilot received €85 per capita, each year for the 3 years of the pilot. Post-primary schools will continue to receive funding under Circular 0046/2013 in respect of Senior Cycle students.

2.48 Previously, for Junior Cycle Careers, students had to pay the careers portal for the Reach Junior Cycle Programme textbook and online digital portfolio. Will these expenses now be included in the book scheme?

At a minimum the scheme will provide free schoolbooks, and certain related classroom resources for all students in Junior Cycle in recognised post-primary

schools in the free education system. It will eliminate the cost of school schoolbooks, and certain related classroom resources for parents of young people enrolled in these schools.

The term 'schoolbooks' includes all relevant textbooks, including eBooks, and workbooks necessary for completion of the curriculum for each subject. It also includes necessary additional texts such as novels and plays for English or books of past Junior Cycle examination papers for all subjects.

Schools may use the funding for digital media support, which relates to teaching and learning within curricular requirements.

Decisions regarding the use of digital technology, such as eBooks, in schools is a matter for the board of management/ETB of each school. Schools are advised to consult with members of the school community including parents/guardians when planning for the introduction of digital technologies, with cost and other implications being fully considered.

3. Supports

3.1 What support is available to me?

The Department understands that this is a challenging process for schools. A series of guidance documents have been, and are being, published on <https://www.spu.ie/schoolbooks-scheme/> and include:

- General procurement guidelines [20240409-Junior-Cycle-School-Books-Guidance-Document-v1.0.pdf \(spu.ie\)](#)
- Planning tools to assist in estimating the value of a contract [Pricing-Schedule-V1.1-11042024.xlsx \(live.com\)](#)
- Step-by-step guides for eTenders if schools are required to publish there [20240412-eTenders-Document-for-Schools-Create-Publish-Call-for-Tender-V1.0.pdf \(spu.ie\)](#)
- This includes template Call for Tender documents where schools only need to complete certain fields [CFT-Template-School-Books-V1.0-12042024.docx \(live.com\)](#)

This includes general procurement guidelines, planning tools to assist in estimating the value of a contract, and step-by-step guides for eTenders if schools are required to publish there. This includes template Call for Tender documents where schools only need to complete certain fields.

Videos with voiceover instructions for each have been developed for each area. All materials are available on the SPU website ([Schoolbooks Scheme - SPU](#)). In the event that there remain areas which are not clear, please contact the Level one team by e-mail (JCSchoolbooks@education.gov.ie) or telephone.

Additionally, the Department has made available a support desk to respond to queries and provide assistance to schools where possible. This is available by contacting jcschoolbooks@education.gov.ie.

3.2 How can schools have the capacity to deliver this scheme?

It is fully acknowledged that this is a challenging process. In order to help schools navigate the tender process, it has been broken down into stages;

- Assessing contract value
- Determining whether the RFQ or RFT route is appropriate
- RFQ documentation provided
- E-tender registration instruction guide available
- Partially complete tender documents (CfT, TRD, contract, etc.) furnished

- A guide to publishing the tender has been drafted
- Guidance on the remaining stages will be made available in advance of when they are required

Videos with voiceover instructions for each have been developed for each area. All materials are available on the SPU website ([Schoolbooks Scheme - SPU](#)). In the event that there remain areas which are not clear, please contact the Level one team by e-mail (JCschoolbooks@education.gov.ie) or telephone.

3.3 eTenders is not user friendly. Can the Department not publish the tender for me?

An administration support grant is being paid to schools to assist in operating this scheme.

A series of guidance documents and videos have been, and are being updated and published on [Schoolbooks Scheme - SPU](#)

This includes:

- General procurement guidelines [20240409-Junior-Cycle-School-Books-Guidance-Document-v1.0.pdf \(spu.ie\)](#)
- Planning tools to assist in estimating the value of a contract [Pricing-Schedule-V1.1-11042024.xlsx \(live.com\)](#)
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Additionally, the Department has made available a support desk to respond to queries and provide assistance to schools where possible.

3.4 How are schools notified about webinars?

The login details for webinars are issued through the Communications Unit in the Department of Education. These email invitations issue to the same email address that all previous communications correspondence has issued. Schools should check to see that emails are not being assigned to a spam folder.

It is intended that a recording of webinars will be uploaded to the SPU website for reference and viewing by schools that are not in a position to attend a webinar.

Details of all upcoming webinars will also be posted to the SPU website.

3.5 Will you offer guidance, solutions, or training on monitoring books and allocating up to ten books to each student while keeping track of who receives what?

All schoolbooks remain the property of the school and are provided on loan to students. Students should retain schoolbooks for one school year or for the duration of Junior Cycle (as applicable and determined by the school), at the end of which, they must be returned to the school.

Schools should devise a system for monitoring items such as name tags/barcodes (where used) which are placed on each book in advance. Students and parents/guardians should be reminded of the need for schoolbooks and resources care and maintenance throughout the year.

Through the administration support grant schools are provided with funding to support administration and implementation of the scheme. The specific duties are to be determined by the school management but can include placing orders with schoolbook shops and suppliers, checking delivery of orders from schoolbook shops and suppliers, covering schoolbooks, preparing, and tracking sets of schoolbooks and classroom resources for individual classes/students, consulting with schoolbook shops and suppliers and subject teachers.

Where a post-primary school does not need to pay a person or persons for additional administrative support to implement the new scheme, the school may use the Administration Support Grant for other administrative purposes associated with the new Junior Cycle Schoolbooks Scheme, including but not limited to, the purchase of a tracking/barcode system or the purchase of storage cabinets.

It is a matter for the school to decide the distribution pathway and monitoring of book assignments.

3.6 Can the ETB not provide schools with access to their framework?

It is not possible to extend the ETB framework to schools nationally.

3.7 Is there a specified response time to receive an email reply from the support team?

Due to the large volume of emails coming into us there is a slight delay in responding. We will get back to your email as quickly and efficiently as possible. We appreciate your patience.

4. E-tenders

4.1 I do not know if I have an e-tenders account already?

A guide on registering for e-Tenders has been published on the Schools Procurement Unit website at <https://www.spu.ie/schoolbooks-scheme/>.

This guide includes how to search for an existing Contracting Authority to see if your school is already registered.

The email address for eTenders is: [eTendering Popup \(etenders.gov.ie\)](mailto:etendering@eurodyn.com)

The eTenders Helpdesk is: irish-eproc-helpdesk@eurodyn.com

4.2 How do I register for e-tenders?

A guide on registering for eTenders has been published on the Schools Procurement Unit website at <https://www.spu.ie/schoolbooks-scheme/>.

4.3 I have registered for e-tenders, but I do not know how to upload my Call for Tender (CFT)/Request for Tender (RFT).

A guide on how to publish a CFT on eTenders has been published on the Schools Procurement Unit website at <https://www.spu.ie/schoolbooks-scheme/>.

This guide includes step-by-step instructions on how to publish a Call for Tender on eTenders.

4.4 What happens if a school receives only 1 response to eTenders?

It is considered best practice to receive at least three written quotes for contracts of estimated valued between €5,000 and €50,000. However, the obligation on public bodies is to seek three or more written quotes.

The school may either seek further quotes or evaluate the quote to ensure it meets the needs of the school and may award the contract to that respondent. It is recommended that schools seek another quote as this represents best practice.

4.5 What happens if a school receives no response to eTenders? Is there an option for extending or reopening the eTender?

In a situation where no tenders have been received on-foot of an open public procurement procedure, there are two options open to schools:

- (i) Re-tender – another open public procurement procedure advertised on eTenders.

(ii) Consider a negotiated procedure without prior publication.

The second option allows a school to engage directly with a supplier to purchase the books being sought. However, the terms of any agreement must be the same of those advertised in the Call for Tender that was published on eTenders.

Schools must keep a record of why this process was chosen, outlining that its published tender did not receive any respondents. Please note that schools can view what suppliers showed an interest in a tender on eTenders.

5. Primary Schools

5.1 I am a primary school principal. Do these rules apply to my school?

Schools are publicly funded bodies. All publicly funded bodies, including schools, are obliged by law to follow public procurement rules and procedures when sourcing goods and services.

The rules around public procurement for the schoolbook scheme are unchanged from existing obligations on schools. The scheme does not introduce any new requirements for schools.

Primary schools are typically significantly smaller than post-primary schools. Primary schools also receive less funding per pupil than post-primary schools receive per student. This means that it is less likely that primary schools will have reached the €50,000 threshold.

5.2 I did not do procurement last year. Am I in trouble?

All publicly funded bodies, including schools, are obliged by law to follow public procurement rules and procedures when sourcing goods and services.

6. Contracts

6.1 Can a multi-year contract be awarded (for example four years)? This would be a higher value contract but could be more enticing for suppliers.

Contracts awarded at this stage are to service book requirements for the academic year 2024/25 only.

No school should be seeking to award contracts above the value of their allocated grant.

Arrangement for 2025/26 and beyond are yet to be determined by the Department.