

Case Study 3:

A Purchasing Advisory Service for Schools - PASS

Cambridgeshire's Purchasing Advisory Service for Schools (PASS) originated as a DfES funded project to develop a procurement handbook for schools. The successful project resulted not only in the Handbook but also a comprehensive electronic toolkit on a CD Rom enabling LEAs to create their own service. This was published by CIPFA and issued to every LEA in the country in 2004.



PASS continued as a valued service beyond the end of the project, and regularly helps schools procure quality goods and services, as well as resolving contractual difficulties that may arise. We have trained heads, bursars, school admin staff and governors of more than 135 schools, and have provided advice and support many of our 252 schools in the 3½ years the service has been running.

PASS Supporting Schools



A large part of PASS's role involves **working with Cambridgeshire's purchasing consortium**, the Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation (ESPO), to provide schools with access to a range of procurement options for a variety of goods and services. These options provide choice to schools (as Ofsted desires), while saving them time and minimising risk by ensuring that quality, value for money solutions are on offer.

As part of the DfES Whiteboard Expansion Scheme in 2004, Cambridgeshire schools received a grant of £500,000 towards purchasing and installing whiteboards in classrooms. PASS benchmarked the DfES-endorsed BECTA contracts and found that the contract they had set up through ESPO (using the same suppliers as the BECTA contract) was significantly cheaper. By securing permission from the DfES to use this alternative contract, we saved £72,000 which was used to fit more equipment in schools, directly benefiting the children who attend.

Property Maintenance in Local Government is risky issue, as recent high-profile



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incidents – such as an unmaintained air conditioning unit in Barrow-in-Furness that spread fatal Legionnaires Disease, and the gas cooker at a school in Bristol that exploded because of lack of maintenance – demonstrate clearly. Schools have a duty to ensure that their property is well maintained, but financial pressures and lack of knowledge on the subject can mean that it is often not seen as a priority. This can expose both the school and the Council to substantial risk.

Feedback to PASS from a number of schools indicated the problems they were having in securing a competent property management service. In response, PASS led a procurement exercise to set up framework contracts with suitable providers who could demonstrate their competence. Following consultation with the Council's Schools Forum (comprising Councillors, Headteachers and Bursars) and the School Property Managers forum (started by PASS) on their requirements, an EU compliant tender process was conducted in collaboration with ESPO and the County Council's Property Management Team.



Developing the knowledge and skills of school purchasers is essential if they are to manage the additional responsibilities they are being given. PASS run training sessions for purchasers, new headteachers, and governors throughout the year, and cover basic skills as well as specialist topics.

Finding the time to **review procurement activity** and identify improvements can be difficult for schools. To assist them to identify areas where savings can be made in terms of procurement and contract management, PASS have designed a simple assessment tool. This combines a self-assessment form with a follow-up visit from a member of the PASS team. By completing the pre-visit self-assessment, PASS are able to research the types of contracts that the school has in place before the visit, making the impact of the assessment that much greater.



The activities that PASS undertake support teachers and school staff to focus on their main activity – education. By ensuring schools have the necessary skills and access to value for money contracts, PASS help schools to make best use of their funding, so that as much as possible goes into facilities, materials and most importantly, teaching.

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