

Introduction:-

Whether you are going to seek a number of quotations or need to tender for the product or service you want to buy, it is important to write a good specification so that suppliers understand exactly what you are looking for. Preparation of the specification should involve close communication between the budget holder, users and technical experts.

There are basically 3 types of specifications: -

a. Functional Specification:

This is a clear indication of the purpose, function, application and performance standards expected of the supplied material or service during its operational life.

b. Technical / Design Specification:

This details the characteristics of the product to be purchased. It can also include how the product is to be manufactured, and details the physical dimensions including the materials to be used.(Most often used in Works contracts).

c. Combination

This will include both Functional and Technical features. This is the recommended type that should be used for the purchase of goods/services.

What should a specification include:

These requirements can be classified as:

- Mandatory: the supplier must meet these requirements
 - Desirable: the supplier can bring certain benefits; however, they are not essential.
 - Information: information required for evaluation, however, this information is not transferred to the contract.
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- Describe your requirement clearly, concisely and logically. This information should not be discriminatory, please use generic specification terms – the use of brand names is not allowed.
 - Provide for maximum competition i.e. contain enough information to allow bidders to submit a compliant response
 - State clear and concise acceptance criteria
 - Allow for equal opportunity
 - Form the basis of the contract which will allow the organisation to obtain best value for money
 - be “fit for purpose” to achieve the identified need.
 - Set out detailed requirements that the supplier must meet, e.g.

For goods/equipment, information should be provided about:

- Technical requirements
- Quantity required
- Required date
- Delivery – to one location or various locations?
- Delivery – in bulk or on a call off basis or a delivery timetable?
- Packaging Requirements
- Testing/commissioning requirements
- Installation requirements?

- Are there any necessary modifications to be made to existing systems?
- If so, who will undertake these modifications?
- What on-going warranty/support/maintenance is required?
- What response or fix time is required?
- What training is required – by whom, venue for training, number of people to be trained, are training manuals needed (how many), what outcome do you want from the training?
- Who will be the contact people in both user and supplier establishments?

For Service contracts, information should be provided should include:

- The time-scale of the project?
- Delivery milestones including timeframe and specific targets/quality standards
- Roles and Responsibilities
- Reporting requirements
- Who will provide project management
- what are the Terms of Reference
- what is the implementation schedule
- For consultancy assignments, which are not project based, such as those involving the delivery of a service, a written description of duties, responsibilities and expected outputs must be provided. The outputs should be measurable and payment should be on the basis of affirmation that the required level of service has been delivered

The specification should not:

- Over-specify the requirement.
- Be so stringent as to result in unnecessary costs.
- Discriminate in any way.
- Be ambiguous.
- Result in the purchase of a good/service that is not appropriate to the requirement.
- Be “slanted” i.e. they can be viewed as preferring a particular supplier. Such practices leaves the University open to litigation from suppliers as they are seen as unfair and limiting competition.

Use of Brand Names

The use of brand names is not allowed as EU legislation deems this is restricting competition. Every effort should be made to ensure that the wording used is not unnecessarily restrictive in the sense that it could be construed to have been drafted in such a way as to limit the number of potential suppliers or favour a particular supplier. Specifications should detail the specific qualities and requirements sought, and any appropriate available benchmarking methodologies that will be applied when comparing offerings, rather than names, types of technologies or characteristics of a particular brand. If there is no alternative but to state standards, then “or equivalent” must be used after each one. To stay out of court, we recommend NEVER using brand names or basing a specification on a particular brand/product!

Standards

When quoting standards for equipment e.g. BS, ISO, CE the buyer must also use the term or equivalent after the standard to ensure that competition is not limited.

The National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) advice regarding electrical equipment manufacturer's obligations and the CE Mark can be found at:

<http://www.nsai.ie/index.cfm/area/page/information/ManufacturesObligations>

Tips To Writing A Specification

- **Basic Description**: Detail what the equipment should do - a small explanation.
- **Delivery Date**: This is the date that you expect the equipment to be delivered by. The date quoted must be realistic i.e. allow for manufacture and delivery on site to NUI Galway. The delivery date must be set after the tender closing and take into consideration tender evaluation and award periods and of course the standard delivery timelines for the equipment. If you have unrealistic delivery dates quoted you may pay extra for the equipment as the supplier may have to rush production, etc.
- **Abbreviations**: When using abbreviations please detail the word in full with the abbreviation in brackets e.g. Electron Multiplying Charge Coupled Device (EMCCD). After that it is ok to use abbreviations.
- **Installation**: Installation requirements should be detailed clearly e.g. *Instrument to be delivered and commissioned with on-site installation (including pc & software) and start-up checks.*
- **Temperatures**: If equipment is temperature controlled – state min/max temperature settings required
- **Fully equipped**: This is an ambiguous term. You must state the exact requirements, as your expectations with regard to fully equipped may not be the same as the suppliers!
- **Software Updates**: If stating software should be updated periodically – it should be detailed what the minimum requirement should be (e.g. 6 – 12 months as your periodical expectation may not equal the suppliers view on periodical). Or software can be upgraded with maintenance schedule.
- **Maintenance / Service**: State clearly how often the equipment requires maintenance e.g. every 6 or 12 months.
- **Accessories**: Never state to include accessories – you should always detail required accessories.
- **PC/Software/Camera**: If a pc/software/camera etc is required with the equipment you should detail a minimum specification for this equipment as you do not want to receive your equipment and have a pc/software/camera attached which is poor. For example *The Camera system should be an Electron Multiplying Charge Coupled Device (EMCCD) suitable for ultra-low light imaging. Minimum 512x512 pixels. 10MHz pixel readout rate minimum, 16 bit digitisation. Thermoelectric cooling to at least -80°C for low noise. The PC have to have the following minimum specifications: 2.0 GHz main processor (dual core preferred), 2048MB RAM, 500 GB hard drive, 256MB graphics card, DVD burner for archiving of data. The software should allow for ...*
- **Performance**: The specification should include performance rather than design or descriptive characteristics.

Please note: -

If during the evaluation process, an item is chosen as preferred that is “materially different” than that which was specified in the ITT document, the Budget Holder is obliged to re-issue a modified specification to all suppliers otherwise the unsuccessful suppliers have a right to have the contract rescinded.