

Credentials for procurement professionals

Summary

Across the EU, MS are introducing various measures to improve the skills and competencies of procurement practitioners, such as competency frameworks, mandatory certifications, training strategies and e-learnings. Professionalisation of procurement practitioners is viewed as increasingly important to ensure that procurement is carried out in compliance with regulations, and delivers value for money.

To professionalise procurers, some MS have introduced a mandatory certification in public procurement, which allows practitioners to carry out their function. The certification generally covers a broad spectrum of legal and regulatory topics, as well as economic aspects of procurement such as market knowledge, needs analysis and supplier analysis. In specific cases, the requirement to attend a standardised training and obtain a certification is a pre-condition for being allowed to carry out the job. Furthermore, MS may require that at least one certified practitioner validates a procurement procedure.

Other MS have introduced a competency framework for practitioners, which defines the essential skills and knowledge that public buyers need to perform their role. By defining the curriculum of necessary skills and competencies, and training public buyers accordingly, they do not only have a solid understanding of the legal requirements, but are also able to achieve better results in procuring. Defining a competency framework is also useful for the long-term development of skills needed for the job, e.g. for designing training and capacity building activities adapted to the specific needs of practitioners. Such a competency framework may vary in scope; for instance, from a standard curriculum established at national level, to one defined at organisational level, for instance, as part of the human resource policy of a central purchasing body.

Finally, training is a key element of professionalisation. In most cases, competency frameworks and mandatory certifications go hand in hand with a predefined training programme culminating in a final examination to ensure that procurers effectively master the skills defined in the curriculum. Furthermore, MS are also introducing innovative ways to effectively train staff, such as learning portals, e-learning modules, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and similar programmes.

Key success factors and potential pitfalls (1)

Allow external certified expertise

If a certified practitioner must sign off on a procurement procedure, it may not be feasible for every possible contracting authority to have such a professional on the payroll, especially for those that procure only occasionally. Instead, allowing contracting authorities to make use of external certified expertise in case of need is a more effective way to ensure that procurement is conducted by skilled professionals.

Promote the value of the certification

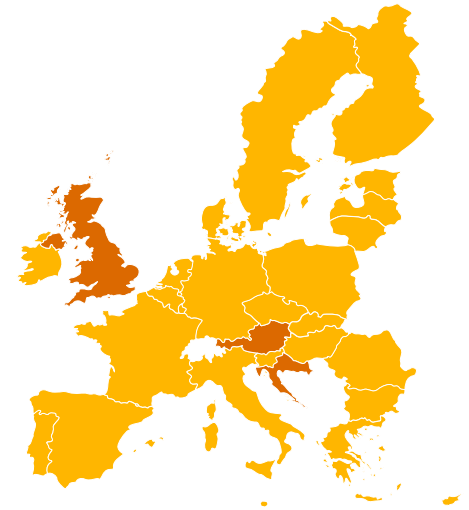
Well-trained and certified procurers gain a professional qualification, which is valuable and can be monetised on the market. This should be promoted as an incentive to fully commit to skills development and continuous learning.

Teach the tricks of the job

Experienced practitioners should not only to teach procurement rules, but also practical tips and tricks to procure better based on their experience.

Good Practice Examples

- ✓ Austria
- ✓ Croatia
- ✓ United Kingdom



Impact

Promote professionalisation



Defining the curriculum of skills and knowledge in procurement and ensuring that practitioners obtain the defined set of competencies is key to a professionalised procurement workforce.

Furthermore, the definition of skills and knowledge also helps to outline career paths in public procurement, thus increasing the attractiveness of the procurement function for professionals, such as jurists and financial officers.

Ensure better compliance



The basic competencies of a procurement professional taught as part of the curriculum include thorough knowledge of procurement regulation, thus reducing the risks of non-compliance.

Enhance value for money



By improving the competencies of procurement professionals through an advanced certification, they are more competent to procure better results and achieve greater value for money. Specifically, they are skilled in consulting with the market, applying strategic planning to procurement, managing risks, negotiating, etc.

Advance modernisation and digitisation



Participation in e-learning training contributes to a wider acceptance of information and communication technology tools by public procurement practitioners, which ultimately fosters the modernisation of public administrations.

Key success factors and potential pitfalls (2)

Make use of in-house trainers

The rules and culture of the public administration must be taken into account when teaching public procurement. In-house trainers are often in the best position to provide nuanced knowledge of what needs to be considered when procuring in a public administration.

Insufficient number of skilled trainers

Trainers are essential to a capacity-building exercise kick-started by a competency framework. However, there may be a lack of trainers or trainers may not be sufficiently skilled themselves, notably with respect to more advanced aspects of procurement, e.g. green, innovation, socially responsible procurement.

Going beyond minimum qualifications

While a certification scheme provides you with the basics of procurement regulation, e.g. choice of procedures, certified practitioners may not be fully skilled in developing or assessing technical specifications.

Practice, practice, practice

Once the training is completed, it is key that the newly-trained procurers are given a professional opportunity to apply their skills in practice. Coaching provided by mentors can help ensure that staff stays motivated to develop-by-doing their professional capacity.

Ensure a tailored certification process

E-learning training that offers an accreditation and certification system cannot be transferred from one MS to another and should fit with MS

Related Good Practices

- Specialised procurement trainings for judges
- Teach SMEs how to tender

Input

Cost – €€€

- High set-up and maintenance in case the competency framework is mandatory and part of national reform
- Low set-up and maintenance in case the competency framework is indicative
- Medium set-up and low maintenance for e-learning



Time – 6 to 12 months



Complexity – High

For mandatory certification:

- Need to consult stakeholders on the reform
- Implementing legal changes and provide guidance on how to enact them
- Set-up of nation-wide certification scheme with a pre-defined curriculum
- Need to quickly develop capacity, e.g. by training the trainer



For competency framework at organisation level:

- Bringing in the right stakeholders to design the competency framework
- Finding a balance between in-house and external training expertise

For e-learning:

- Creation of the e-learning content material
- Development of the e-learning platform
- Testing phase of the platform and IT process definition

Case Studies (1)

Austria – Public Procurement Academy

In Austria, the central purchasing body Bundesbeschaffung (BBG) set up the Public Procurement Academy to train its own buyers. When joining the BBG, all employees are enrolled in a 2.5 years training programme, which provides a 'certificate of certified public procurement professional' at the end of curriculum. BBG launched the Academy and its customised training programmes to professionalise their staff with the specific skills needed to conduct public procurement. In fact, BBG usually recruits professionals with product-related expertise, who often lack specific knowledge about the workings of the public administration. To bring new employees up to speed, the BBG Academy designed an initial 10-day onboarding programme, which provides the essential knowledge and skills for newly recruited employees to start their job.

Following the onboarding, employees follow the main 40 days training programme, which is divided into a basic and an advanced curriculum, and culminates with the receipt of the certification as a public procurement professional. To obtain the certificate, employees have to write and defend a thesis in front of the BBG's management based on challenges and problems of their daily routine. The training includes various aspects of procurement, such as legal, economic and purchasing issues, covering the key phases of the procurement cycle, i.e. pre-award, tender phase and post-award. Particular attention is paid to the development of soft skills like communication and negotiation. Training is provided by both in-house and external experts to give a balanced perspective on procurement in the context of a central purchasing body and outside of it.

In addition to these training programmes, BBG focuses on continuous learning throughout a procurer's career. Indeed, buyers at BBG regularly assess their own competencies with a view of identifying gaps in their training needs. Based on the self-assessment and the evaluation of the employee's line manager, an ad hoc training plan is set up for each buyer.

Croatia – Certifying procurement practitioners*

In the context of accession to the EU, Croatia recognised the need for large-scale capacity building in public procurement, as the majority of its public administration staff had limited knowledge about public procurement legislation. Furthermore, Croatia's geographic fragmentation posed a barrier to a capacity building effort delivered from a central institution.

To address these challenges, the Ministry of the Economy, Entrepreneurship and Crafts launched a nation-wide certification scheme for procurement practitioners. The scheme aimed at creating a critical mass of people knowledgeable about procurement laws, bylaws, and rules for the implementation of EU funds. Essentially, the Croatian procurement law requires that for any public procurement procedure worth more than EUR 26,000 for services and goods or EUR 66,000 for works, a Public Procurement Committee must be nominated and it must include at least one certified procurement practitioner.

To be certified, a civil servant must go through a 50-hour training covering the main elements of procurement legislation and practice. At the end of the training, there is a test to obtain the certification of procurement practitioner, which is valid for three years. An additional 32-hour curriculum must be completed to renew the certification. Approximately 75% of those who take the exam receive the certification. The main certification costs EUR 500, while the renewal course costs EUR 150.

The role of the certified procurer is to be involved in all the steps of the procedure, keep track of other people involved in the procurement, and make sure that the procedure is conducted correctly. While there is no personal liability, the certified practitioner faces reputational damage in case of proceedings launched against the contracting authority in relation to a procedure in which she/he was involved. Importantly, a contracting authority is not required to have a certified procurer on its payroll at all times, but can request the services of a certified procurer on an ad-hoc basis.

The Ministry of the Economy, Entrepreneurship and Crafts is responsible for certifying the trainers, who in turn train the certified procurers. Training providers can come from the private or public sector. The Ministry is also responsible for making sure that procurement procedures have in fact involved a certified practitioner. To do so, the Ministry conducts regular checks. In case the rules are not enforced, the contracting authority is fined.

Since the introduction of the certification programme, a network of 5,000 certified procurers has developed, whose members are listed on the Ministry's website. Among these, around 35 certified procurers are recognised as high-profile experts and are in high demand. Furthermore, the certification has spurred the creation of a new profession, as certified practitioners may exercise their function as external consultants.

The World Bank's iNET initiative – procurement learning portal¹

The World Bank has a long-standing history of promoting procurement as a profession. Recently, it has elaborated a new procurement policy framework built around several initiatives. One of these initiatives is Information, Network, Education, Transaction in procurement² (iNET), which conducts outreach to public procurement experts to facilitate knowledge exchange.

The education component of iNET provides affordable and quality learning opportunities for procurement practitioners, as well as students who want to pursue a career in public procurement. It consists in a dedicated procurement learning portal,³ which is maintained by the World Bank in cooperation with the Charter for Public Procurement Studies (CPPS). Through this learning portal, procurement professionals from around the world can access a number of learning courses and networking opportunities.

One such course is the Certificate Program in Public Procurement (CPPP), a MOOC offered free of charge. The course includes a mix of e-learning, self-study, and social learning, and is available in 6 languages. It is organised around three modules:

- Introduction to public procurement including management concepts and techniques;
- Public procurement operations; and
- Good governance in public procurement.

At the end of each module an assessment has to be completed. Upon completion of the three modules, a certificate is delivered to users who have achieved a score of over 60%. The CPPP foresees a commitment of 13 weeks and any person interested in the training can register to participate.

Another programme proposed on the portal is the Certificate Programme in Contract Management (CPCM), which provides an in-depth knowledge and understanding of contract management principles and good practices. The structure of the programme follows the contract management lifecycle, i.e. from planning and resource management, to managing risk and managing performance. The assessment structure is similar to the CPPP programme.

*Feasibility study on implementing credentials for procurement professionals through a certification scheme based on the Croatian case study - available on the [e-library of public procurement good practices](#).

 Contact

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¹ See: www.procurementlearning.org ² World Bank, "Procurement iNET" (2017), see: <https://www.procurementinet.org/about-procurement-inet/> ³ See: www.procurementlearning.org