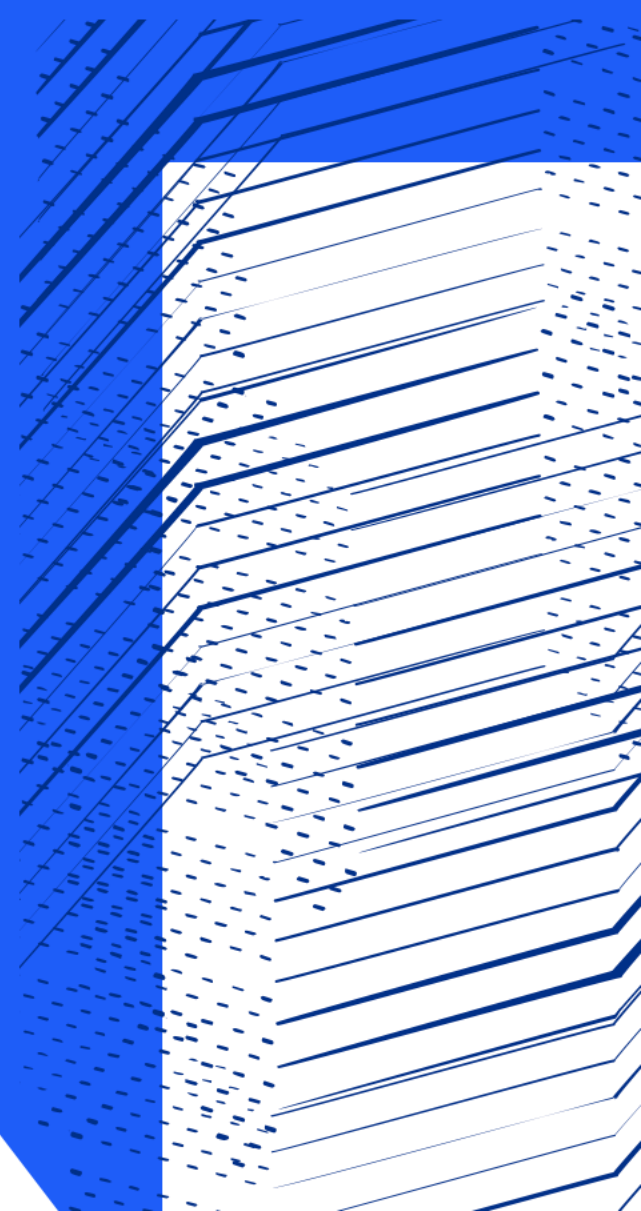




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Supplier Engagement Day

Alastair Dewhurst



Welcome

- Thank you for coming today.
- Attendance was much better than anticipated:
 - 30 STFC Staff
 - 14 Suppliers (28 reps)
 - 11 universities (19 staff)
- Purpose of today's meeting:
 - (Re-)Establish contacts with all Suppliers on the SSSNA framework
 - Demonstrate the STFC's commitment to fair competition
 - Technical discussions.
- I have not run a meeting like this before, I would appreciate any constructive feedback on how the day went after the event.

Meeting Format

- I will talk a little bit about tenders.
- Various technical experts will introduce what we are looking to purchase.
- Coffee should arrive at ~15:30 and discussions can begin.
- We have access to this room, the Thames room and the Quiet room.

13:00	Lunch Garden Room, The Cosener's House	13:00 - 14:00
14:00	Introduction Garden Room, The Cosener's House	Alastair Dewhurst 14:00 - 14:20
	Ceph Storage Garden Room, The Cosener's House	Thomas Byrne 14:20 - 14:30
	x86 Compute Garden Room, The Cosener's House	Thomas Birkett 14:30 - 14:40
	ARM Compute Garden Room, The Cosener's House	Emanuele Simili 14:40 - 14:50
	GPU Garden Room, The Cosener's House	Mr Martin Summers 14:50 - 15:00
15:00	JASMIN Garden Room, The Cosener's House	James Hannah 15:00 - 15:10
	Cybersecurity Garden Room, The Cosener's House	Dr David Crooks 15:10 - 15:20
	Network Garden Room, The Cosener's House	Jonathan Churchill 15:20 - 15:30
	Enterprise VMWare Garden Room, The Cosener's House	Martin Bly 15:30 - 15:40
	SCARF and Pearl Garden Room, The Cosener's House	Derek Ross et al. 15:40 - 15:50

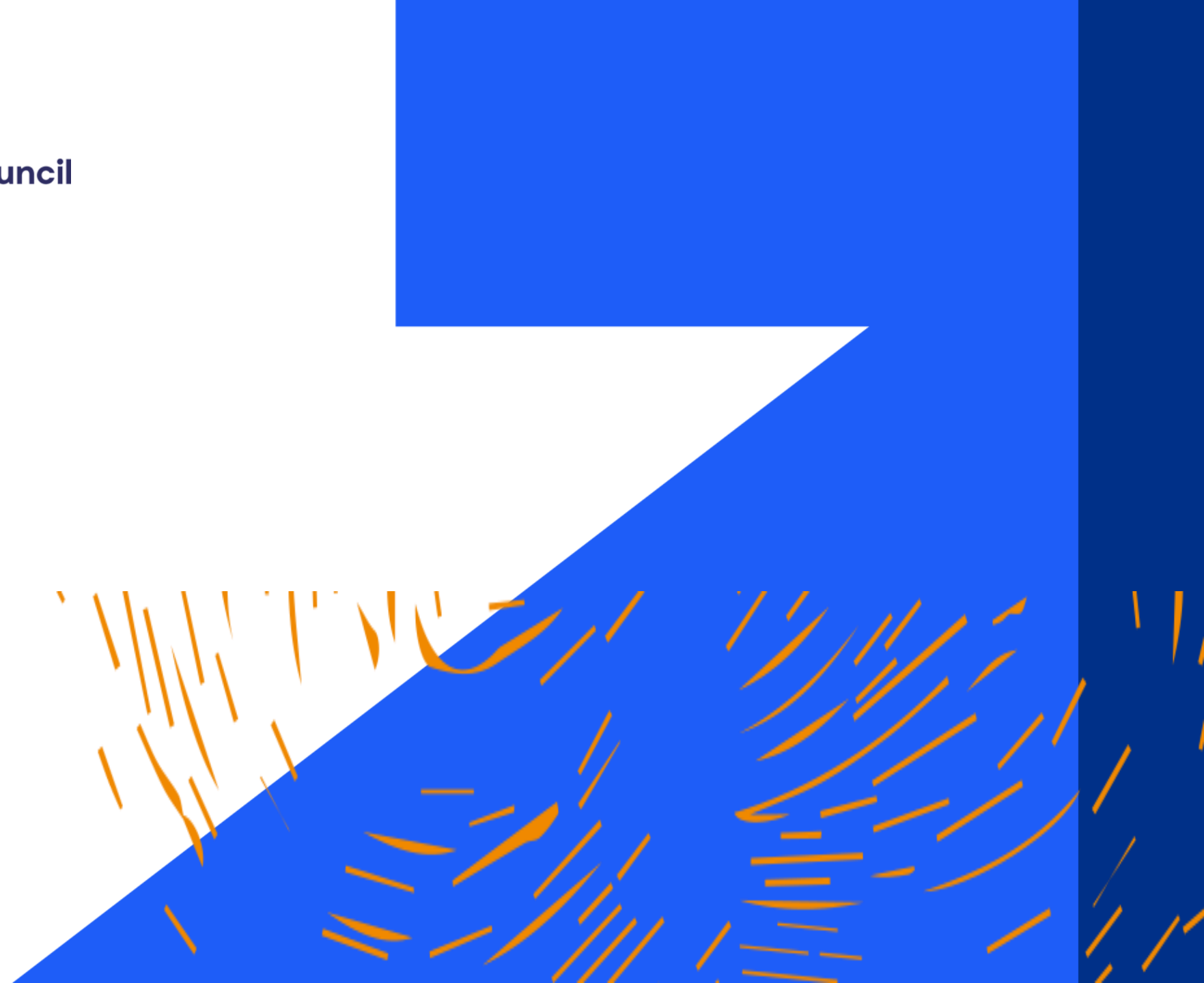
What does the STFC do?

- The Science and Technology Facilities Council is one of seven UK research councils that make up UKRI.
- STFC focuses on Particle Physics, Space and Astronomy.
- The Scientific Computing Department aims to provide the computing necessary to support world leading research.
- The majority of the scientific problems we are trying to solve require either:
 - High Throughput Computing
 - Data Intensive Computing



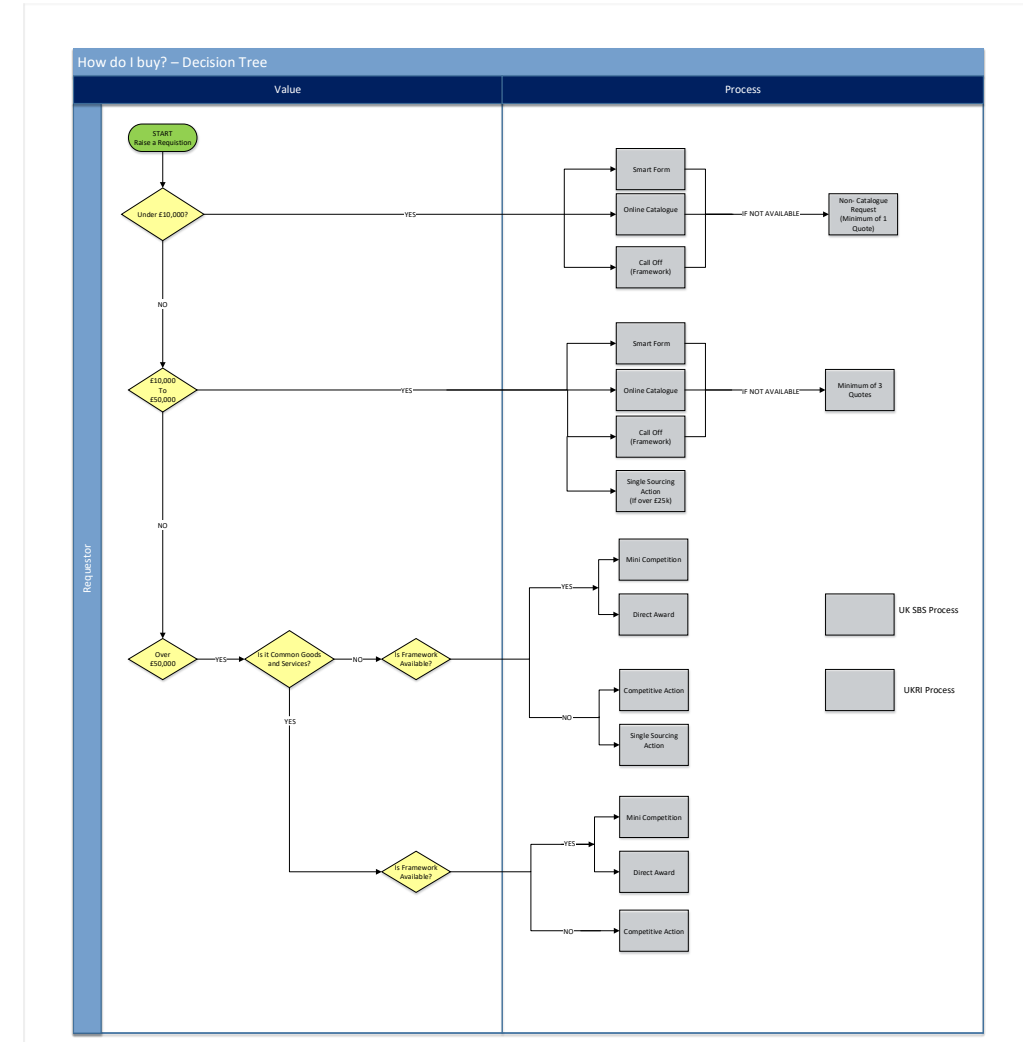
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Tenders



Routes to Market

- For contracts under £50k we can simply request 3 quotes.
- IT equipment is considered: “Common Goods and Services”
- Most large procurements will be via a framework through UK SBS.
- UK SBS is the Shared Business Service:
 - DDaT (Digital Data and Technology) run most procurements.



Why SSSNA?

- UKRI policy aims:

Achieve best possible value to UKRI and for the UK taxpayer, focusing on the optimisation of cost and maximisation of benefits including but not limited to; ensuring the delivery of good quality goods and services to the correct specification in a timely fashion.

- For procurements over £50k:

Seek value for money using open competition and adhere to PCR ... Placing a contract / order through an existing FTS / OJEU tendered framework contract (may require mini-tender exercise) must always be considered as the first option....

- Placing direct awards via frameworks is legal and in some cases the appropriate route to market.

- Mini-tenders are the recommended route to market.
- SSSNA is more aligned with what we do (compared to say the NHS digital solutions framework)

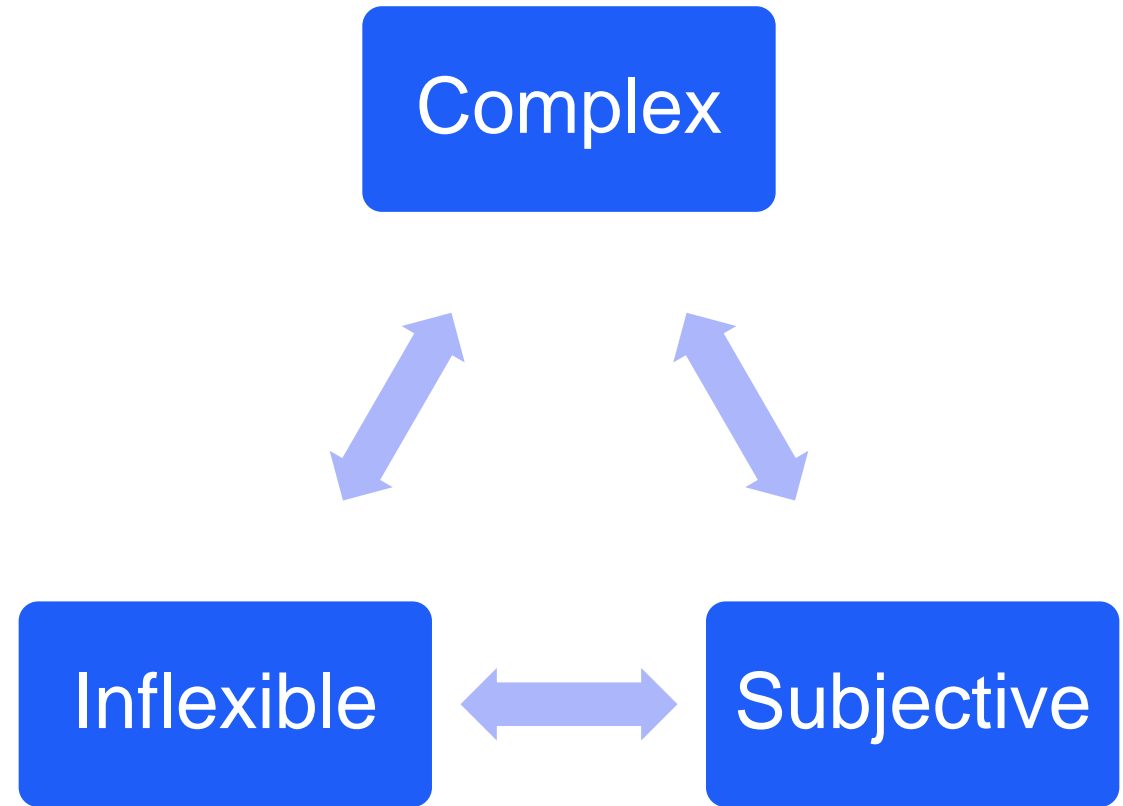
Tenders vs direct discussion

- When discussing specification directly with a supplier, the supplier:
 - Very responsive communication. Clarifying grey areas and understanding use cases.
 - Tries to upsell. New technology, better features.
- When a supplier looks at a tender:
 - No / very limited communication.
 - What is the minimum specification that meets the requirement.

Dual 7763 CPU (or similar top end CPU)
1024GB memory
480GB SSD for OS
6.4TB NVMe storage 3DWPD
25Gb/s NIC (Mellanox or Intel)

Tenders difficulties

- Provide a list of hard requirements:
 - Straightforward but inflexible.
- Have scored questions:
 - Allow comparison of different things but scoring is subjective.
- Trying to find a balance between the two can lead to the document becoming too complex.



The Plan

- We need to ensure we understand the available new technology for the coming year in advance.
 - Please arrange product demonstrations / technology roadmap discussions with us!
- I would like to review with each vendor our previous tender documents to identify what is unnecessarily restrictive or unclear and fix it.
- The aim would be to have wording that everyone understands and is comfortable with that covers the standard parts of our requirements such as: power, cooling, networking, warranty, delivery and installation, licensing, and payment terms.
- The only addition needed to the text would cover the specific technical requirements of that procurement.

Time line

- STFC is required to spend its budget to within 1% each year.
 - Additional capital normally comes available later each FY.
 - Hardware must be on STFC property before it can be receipted.
- Now – May: Discussion with suppliers
- June: Start formal tender process and confirm available funding.
- July: Launch tenders.
- September: Purchase Orders issued.
- November: Additional capital starts to be allocated.
 - Add to existing tenders / create new direct awards.
- December - January: Hardware delivered.
- March 31st 2024: Deadline for receipting all procurements.

Benchmarking & Validation

- For our largest procurements (> £1million) we are keen to ensure that any hardware will do what is required.
- We normally have experiment code that can be used for benchmarking / validation the hardware.
- We need to find a satisfactory balance between ensuring the hardware is fault free and making the process too complex for the supplier.
 - Eg. We often can't quite replicate benchmark values that suppliers get in their testing.



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Questions?