

Achilles Experiences

Achilles THEMiS is one of the tools the University of Ulster uses to navigate the complexities of public procurement



The University of Ulster is a multi-campus university located in Northern Ireland. It is the second largest university in Ireland and its course provision is the largest in Northern Ireland. The procurement team consists of Head of Procurement, Procurement Officer, three senior buyers and three clerical staff who manage a non-pay, influenceable spend of around £40million per annum.

Challenge

The University of Ulster started using Achilles THEMiS 12 years ago. The Purchasing Officer at the time recognised that it provided both a comprehensive repository of knowledge and advice about European public procurement rules and regulations, and the ability to advertise the university's contract notices.

The university procurement office has been using Achilles THEMiS ever since to steer through the public procurement maze.

Process

Dipping into the Achilles THEMiS toolkit allows the university procurement team to keep on top of everything from common procurement vocabulary (CPV) codes, EU directives, to procurement thresholds.

The benefit of using THEMiS was well illustrated when Ronan Rafferty, Procurement Officer at the University, managed a recent tender competition following the Competitive Dialogue procedure. This complex procedure, which came into effect with the Public Contracts Regulations (Amended, 2006), is structured into three stages: a pre-qualification questionnaire to create a shortlist of suppliers, an invitation to the shortlisted suppliers to participate in a lengthy, in-depth dialogue, followed by an invitation to tender.

'As this was the first time the university had used this procedure I had to conduct some research on how to implement the procedure in a legally compliant manner and Achilles THEMiS was my first port of call,' says Ronan. 'Achilles THEMiS has a comprehensive library of documentation and workflows to guide you through a range of procurement processes including the four

main EU tender procedures,' says Ronan. 'Projects like these are often complex with strict procurement rules and they require a thorough engagement with the market to establish your needs and assess the options, so Achilles THEMiS was invaluable in seeing it through.'

Results

Achilles THEMiS allows Ulster's procurement team to carry out their job with confidence and makes the daunting task of continued compliance in the dynamic world of EU public procurement much more manageable.

Repository of information. 'The Achilles THEMiS toolkit has everything you want to know in one place online,' says Ronan. 'It has good information on procedures, CPV codes, framework agreements, corporate social responsibility and good advice about how to encourage small and medium-sized businesses to tender, which is important when many bureaucratic tendering processes cut them out.'

Up to speed. Achilles training courses ensure that Ronan and the procurement team are one step ahead of shifting rules and regulations. 'There are some new EU directives coming downstream soon, which will be a new regime to understand and factor into our procedures, but the Achilles training will help us prepare for them,' says Ronan.

Intelligent procurement. The Achilles THEMiS Library keeps Ulster's procurement team up-to-date with European, UK and Irish court cases and EU procurement legislation, directives and regulations, allowing the procurement team at Ulster to make more

informed decisions and ensure continued compliance. 'You have to be aware of case law,' explains Ronan. 'It can influence how you frame and manage a tender competition, ensuring compliance, and a fair and well managed experience for those who respond to the tender and therefore helping to avoid the possibility of a legal challenge.'

Advice on tap. Managing a lot of complex EU-level procurement projects, Ulster's procurement team frequently uses the Ask Achilles tool to get answers from Achilles' specialist advisors. 'Things change all the time and you often encounter specific legal quandaries, so, rather than going to a solicitor each time, we ask Achilles. They always come back quickly with an answer.'

'Ultimately, it's just an excellent source of information,' says Ronan. 'All the legal advice and reference data and best practice information you need is there. It's good value for money.'

"Achilles THEMiS is a key resource for the latest and greatest on case law, EU directives and procurement best practices."

Ronan Rafferty, Procurement Officer
University of Ulster

