



Country case: Example of user-centred processes in public procurement in the UK



Public Procurement Principle: **Access, Participation**



Procurement Stage: **All stages**



Audience: **Policy makers, Procuring entity, Private sector**

Description

The Mystery Shopper Service (United Kingdom)

The Mystery Shopper Service was launched in 2011 as part of a range of measures aimed at increasing and facilitating the participation of SMEs in public procurement. Its purpose is to provide public procurement suppliers with a structured channel at the central level that economic operators can use to report on the quality of the contracting authorities' practices and escalate issues they may have experienced when participating in a procurement procedure.

In particular, the Mystery Shopper Service helps to detect practices that are not friendly to SMEs, provides recommendations to contracting authorities/entities and monitors their implementation.

In addition to educating contracting authorities through the provision of recommendations, the service conducts on-the-spot checks to verify whether a contracting authority previously investigated is properly applying the recommended measures. The Mystery Shopper Service also proactively verifies that contracting authorities use practices that are compliant with the various procurement policy notes prepared by the Crown Commercial Service and aimed at facilitating SME participation in procurement.

To make use of the Mystery Shopper Service, an economic operator needs to send a request that is first analysed by the Mystery Shopper team. If the request is deemed eligible, it becomes a case for investigation. Once the investigation has started, and depending on the seriousness of the case and whether it is located at central or local level, the service will provide its help within two or three months.

Results of investigated cases are evaluated and published on the Mystery Shopper service webpage. Since its inception, the service received the highest number of cases during 2013 and 2014. Since then, the service has experienced a reduction in the number of cases. This could indicate that contracting authorities are changing their current practices toward economic operators and are using more SMEfriendly practices.

Source: OECD (2020), [System Change in Slovenia: Making Public Procurement More Effective](#), OECD Publishing, Paris

