



Procurement Certification in Serbia: A Case Study



This case tells the story of the introduction of the Public Procurement Certification scheme in Serbia. Managed by the Public Procurement Office, the compulsory certification is one of a number of initiatives towards professionalising procurement.



Jelena Pavlović sits in her office in the City of Pančevo in Serbia where she is Director of Public Procurement. The City of Pančevo has a population of around 80,000 people and is located around 15 km northeast of the Serbian capital, Belgrade.

The City of Pančevo created the Procurement Unit in 2009 responding to the requirements of the new Procurement Law which was passed at the end of 2008. Originally the Procurement

Unit consisted of 2 staff members, although now it has expanded to 5. The Unit is responsible for planning and conducting procurement of goods, services and works on behalf of various departments in the Municipality such as the city administration, the city council, the Mayor's office and the municipality government. The Unit is therefore responsible for buying anything and everything from office stationery to cleaning services.

The Serbian Public Procurement Law requires certification of procurement officers in public sector organizations over a certain size. The Certification scheme is run by the Public Procurement Office and was launched in December 2010. Within the first 10 months of operation more than 700 procurement officers have been certified.

Earlier this year Jelena, along with 4 of her staff, attended an intensive 3 day training course based on the official curriculum developed by the Public Procurement Office. In the following weeks the five colleagues met every Saturday to study together: despite being entitled to take 7 days paid study leave, they preferred to use weekends due to their heavy workload. While, some of the team have many years experience in procurement, others were new to the function. The study group not only supported the less experienced colleagues, but strengthened the team spirit. All five passed the exam at the first attempt thereby becoming some of the first Certified Procurement Officers in Serbia.

To become certified, a procurement officer has to score 75% or more in a 2 hour 15 minute written exam consisting of 45 questions testing both their knowledge of the legal and regulatory framework as well as their professional judgement. The exam is extremely challenging and only around 60% of candidates pass on first sitting.

Back in Belgrade, Daliborka Srećkov, who works in the Public Procurement Office, is busy handling applications for the next batch of candidates. Daliborka manages the certification process with the assistance of a secure and effective software system. Not only does the software manage the administrative aspects of the Certification process, but it also securely stores the database of potential exam questions. Two hours prior to each exam, the software generates the list of questions: though in a different order for each candidate to prevent copying. The exam papers don't include the candidates' names, but an anonymous identification number to ensure confidentiality and integrity. When asked what the highlight of her job is, Daliborka doesn't hesitate: *"the feedback from those who pass is amazing – sometimes they are screaming down the phone with excitement when I tell them they have passed!"*.

Public Procurement Office Director, Pedrag Jovanović, adds: *"Those who become certified are very enthusiastic; it is a real recognition of their efforts. After all, procurement is a very demanding role, and usually no-one praises them on a day to day basis. We organize a big certification ceremony where they get the recognition they deserve and which raises the profile of procurement in the country"*.



Director Pedrag Jovanović with a group of proud procurement officers, displaying their certificates.

The Public Procurement Office is now planning to introduce an Advanced Certificate in order to provide continuing professional development for public procurement officers.

Jelena Pavolvić in Pančevo has no doubts that she will take the Advanced Certificate when it is available. As well as the increased recognition and motivation resulting from becoming certified after almost 10 years working in public procurement, she tells that one of the best things has been the strong professional network she has gained by attending various events in connection with the Certification process. *"I regularly call or email procurement colleagues in other City Administrations to discuss challenges or how to apply the rules in a particular procurement case"*.

As a result Jelena and some of these colleagues are now taking the initiative to start a Procurement Association to further expand professional networking opportunities and promote the procurement profession in Serbia.

The benefits of introducing the Public Procurement Certification scheme in Serbia have gone way beyond the initial objectives. Certification not only contributes to developing the knowledge of procurement officers, but has resulted in increased motivation and development of a professional network. In addition, it is contributing to improved recognition of procurement as a profession and not just an administrative function within the public sector. More information is available on the Public Procurement Office of Serbia [website](#).