

Procurement audit

Federal Food Safety and Veterinary Office

Key facts

The Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) audited the procurements and contracts between the Federal Food Safety and Veterinary Office (FSVO) and the University of Bern – one of the FSVO's largest suppliers. Its contract volume amounted to CHF 20.8 million (around 16%) in a total volume of CHF 130 million between 2016 and 2019. Using a sample of 19 cases and a contract volume of CHF 14.3 million (around 69%), the SFAO audited the FSVO's procurement practices relating to the University of Bern over this period. The procurement organisation and processes were also audited.

The FSVO has implemented some changes; this is a positive development, but there is still room for improvement.

The positive impact of the Procurement and Contracts Group should be reinforced

By setting up the Procurement and Contracts Group (PCG) in 2016 and ensuring a rule-compliant tender process for research projects from 2018 onwards, the FSVO has taken the first important steps to bring about change in the area of procurements; the SFAO views this as positive.

However, these efforts need to be taken further. The PCG needs more support in the FSVO organisation. It must be better embedded in the organisation chart, the signature regulations and the procurement specifications. In future, the archiving structure for all procurement types should be based on the PCG's specifications.

Additional important evidence is required for starting the award procedure

The directive on procurement in the Federal Department of Home Affairs stipulates that the requisite procurement documentation must comply with the directives of the Federal Office for Buildings and Logistics.

Some key written evidence required by the directives is not being produced by the FSVO. The SFAO therefore recommends that standardised templates be created and that the approval of this evidence be included in the signature regulations. It is advisable for important quality assurance milestones to be additionally signed off by the Head of the PCG (or his/her deputy).

Complete implementation of procurement specifications must be ensured

Awareness of the recusal principle should be raised within the FSVO. People working in veterinary medicine in Switzerland often know each other. This presents a challenge for procurements, and awareness must be increased, in order to avoid creating the impression of a conflict of interest.

The audit sample was composed largely of research projects. Special provisions apply to the procurement of research projects in the FSVO. Public procurements in this area have been awarded in accordance with procurement law only since 2018. As a result, there are a number of observations concerning procurements prior to 2018. In addition, the following shortcomings were observed.

In 13 cases in the sample, there were either no tenders or only a few available. There are no specifications available for the negotiated procedures exceeding the threshold. For one public procurement (after 2018), there were shortcomings in the evaluation report.

There were shortcomings in the form and substance of the contracts audited, such as non-compliance with the signature regulations, a lack of information on contract components, and derogations from the general terms and conditions and the rules on ongoing updates. The FSVO is in the process of overhauling its contract templates.

The FSVO still uses the previous practice for awarding research projects under an invitation to tender; as a result, usually only one tender is submitted. In future, it must be ensured that at least three tenders are obtained for the evaluation.

Ordering requirements are needed

The FSVO does not draw up any ordering requirements. The SFAO recommends that they be introduced, in line with widespread Federal Administration practice.

For research projects, care must be taken in future to ensure that the reports and their evaluations are always available in full, in order to monitor the services received. At the time of the audit, three reports and five evaluations were missing.

Invoices must be better documented by means of supporting documentation.

Original text in German