



THE CLARIFICATION QUESTIONS CHEAT SHEET

How to use the tender Q&A window to win marks, not give them away

An AssuredBid bid-readiness resource

Most providers treat clarification questions as a formality, or skip them altogether. The strongest bidders use the question window as a tool. They use it to close gaps in their understanding, surface hidden requirements, and read the competition. This one-pager covers how to ask well, what to avoid, and how to mine the answers everyone else generates.

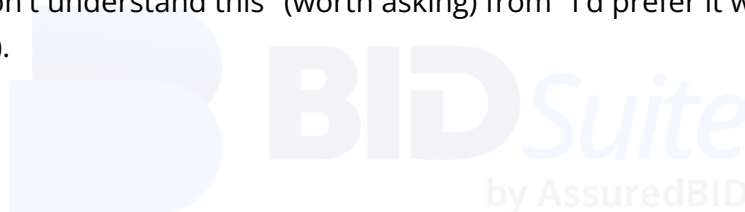
The mechanic that matters: The Procurement Act 2023 builds in a parity-of-information principle. Authorities must give all bidders the same information at the same time. In practice this usually means questions and answers get published to all bidders, often anonymised. Always check how your specific tender handles clarifications though, because the exact process is set out in the instructions to bidders. The takeaway is the same either way: assume anything you ask, and anything you're told, reaches the whole field. Your question can tip off competitors, and their questions can hand you free intelligence. So treat every published Q&A as part of the tender pack.

Before you ask anything

A good clarification question starts with having read everything. Half of all the questions providers ask are already answered in the specification, the contract terms, or the instructions to bidders. Asking them just signals you haven't read the pack.

Work through this first:

- Read the full ITT, specification, contract terms, pricing schedule and all appendices from start to finish before you draft a single question.
- Note genuine ambiguities, contradictions between documents, and anything that materially affects price or deliverability.
- Separate "I don't understand this" (worth asking) from "I'd prefer it were different" (not a clarification).



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- Check the deadline for questions and the deadline for the authority's responses. They are usually different, and late answers can leave you bidding blind.
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What is worth asking

Ask questions that protect your price, reduce your delivery risk, or unlock a better answer. The best clarifications tend to fall into a few categories.

Question type	Why it's worth asking	Example
Genuine ambiguity	Removes a guess that could cost you on price or compliance.	"Does the staffing ratio in Section 4.2 apply overnight as well as daytime?"
Contradiction between documents	Forces the authority to resolve a conflict in writing, which protects you later.	"The spec states X but the contract terms state Y. Which takes precedence?"
Hidden or unstated requirement	Surfaces scope that affects cost before you commit to a price.	"Is the provider expected to fund transport, or is this commissioned separately?"
Evaluation clarity	Helps you put your effort where the marks actually are.	"Will the social value response be scored separately or within the quality envelope?"
Practical deliverability	Confirms an assumption that changes your mobilisation plan.	"What is the expected contract start date and mobilisation period?"

What to avoid asking

Some questions cost you more than they gain. Avoid these.

- **Questions that reveal a weakness.** "Would a provider without prior children's services experience be eligible?" tells the authority, and every competitor, exactly what you lack.

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- **Questions that telegraph your strategy.** If your win theme is a novel staffing model, don't ask a question that hands competitors the idea before submission.
 - **Questions already answered in the pack.** These signal you haven't read it and they waste your credibility.
 - **Questions you can answer with a reasonable assumption.** State the assumption in your bid instead. It shows judgement.
 - **Negotiation by another name.** The Q&A window is for clarifying the requirement, not for arguing that the price, terms or timetable should change.
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How to phrase a question so it doesn't backfire

Your wording may be published to all bidders, usually anonymised but not always. So phrase every question to be neutral and factual. The goal is to get the information you need without revealing who is asking or why.

- Keep it neutral and factual. Strip out anything that identifies your organisation or hints at your approach.
- Ask one thing per question. Bundled questions get partial answers.
- Reference the exact document, section and paragraph so the answer comes back precise.
- Frame around the requirement, not your circumstances. Ask "Is X required?" rather than "We don't currently do X, is that a problem?"
- Avoid leading questions that give away the answer you're hoping for.

Weak (reveals you): "We're a small provider and couldn't meet a £10m turnover threshold. Is there flexibility?"

Strong (neutral): "Please confirm the minimum annual turnover requirement and whether it applies at group or entity level."

Mining everyone else's questions

This is where the discipline pays off. When the authority publishes its consolidated answers, you get a free read on the whole field.

- Read every published Q&A, not just the answers to your own questions.

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- Look for questions that reveal a requirement you'd misread or missed completely, then adjust your response.
 - Watch for clarifications that change or correct the documents. These often update the spec, and you have to respond to the new version.
 - Note where lots of bidders are confused about the same thing. It usually points to something genuinely important or heavily weighted.
 - Use the timing of answers. If a key clarification lands close to the deadline, build some slack into your schedule so you can act on it.
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The discipline in one line

Ask only what protects your price, reduces your risk, or sharpens your answer, phrased so neutrally that a competitor reading it learns nothing about you. Then read every answer the field generates as if it were written for you.

Need a second pair of eyes on your bid?

AssuredBid reviews tender packs, drafts clarification questions, and helps care and housing providers turn the Q&A window into a competitive advantage. Talk to us before your next deadline.

Get in touch: www.assuredbid.com

This resource is general guidance for the care and supported housing sector and is not legal advice. Procurement rules and individual tender instructions vary, so always follow the specific instructions in your tender documents. © AssuredBid.

