

CLARIFICATION DOCUMENT

Please note clarifications may be provided in response to queries submitted and/or at the Contracting Authority's own volition and discretion. Submitted queries may have to be modified for publication purposes.

Contracting Authority:	Pobal
Title of competition:	0384 Provision of Microsoft Services support and associated services
Procedure	Open Procedure
eTenders Ref:	6688382
Closing date and time for Queries:	Friday 14 th November 2025 at 12.00 noon (Irish time)
Closing date and time for Submissions:	Monday 1 December 2025 at 12.00 noon (Irish time)
<i>This Clarification relates specifically to Questions 18 - 51. For completeness, it contains previously answered questions.</i>	
Clarification Number:	4
Issue Date:	Thursday, 13 November 2025

Question #1: Please confirm who the incumbent service provider is.

Answer #1: The proposed new service contract is broader than that currently being provided. Therefore, there is no incumbent for the proposed service.

Question #2: Please advise if submissions from tenderers who meet 4 of the 6 required Microsoft CSP accreditations will be considered, or must all accreditations be met?

Answer #2: It is sufficient to be a Microsoft Gold Partner and hold at least one of the Microsoft Cloud Solution Partner designations. Candidates are invited to comment on the status of any accreditations they are actively seeking and / or planning to seek

Question #3: We would appreciate clarification regarding the Technical Capacity Requirements, specifically under the Quality Assurance section.

We would like to better understand the following statement:

"In addition, the tenderer must hold be all of the following:

- Microsoft Gold Partner
- Microsoft Cloud Solution Partner (CSP) i.e. Infrastructure, Data and AI, Digital and App Innovation, Security, Modern Work and Business Applications"

Could you please confirm whether the reference to "Microsoft Cloud Solution Partner (CSP)" is intended to mean the Microsoft Solution Partner designations under the Microsoft AI Cloud Partner Program?

If so, could you clarify:

- Is the tenderer required to hold all six Solution Partner designations (Infrastructure, Data and AI, Digital and App Innovation, Security, Modern Work, and Business Applications)?
- Or is it sufficient to be a Microsoft Gold Partner and hold at least one of the Solution Partner designations?

Answer #3: Please refer to Answer #2.

Question #4:

In section "4.4 Technical Capacity Requirements" Supplier has to provide information about Technical Personnel. There are asked 20 specialists. Can one expert cover more than one role?

Answer #4:

As per the Tender Response Document Section A7 Personnel & Skills:

"Minimum requirement to remain eligible in the competition: Tenderers must demonstrate access to at least the minimum numbers of skilled personnel stated. Please note that the skills outlined may reside in the same person."

Question #5:

Could the Contracting Authority please confirm whether the section titled 'Capability of your organisation to provide skilled resources and expertise to deliver the required services' is included within the 30-page limit specified for Criterion D – Quality, expertise and structure of the team proposed, or if it has a separate page allowance?

Answer #5:

Capability of your organisation to provide skilled resources and expertise to deliver the required services should be included in the 30-page limit specified for Criterion D.

Question #6:

Provided it is stated in the Tender Documentation:

"While the majority of any resource-based services can be delivered remotely, the Contracting Authority may request some resource-based services to be delivered in person, on site in the Contracting Authority offices"

Could the Contracting Authority please indicate the expected percentage of resource-based services that will need to be delivered on-site at Pobal's offices, and what advance notice will typically be provided for on-site delivery?

Answer #6:

Tenderers can assume that there will be requirement for services to be delivered on site at least 2 days per month with a minimum of 2 days' notice in each case.

Question #7:

Under Section 4.4 - Quality Assurance, you have mentioned that tenderer must hold the below certifications:

- Microsoft Gold Partner
- Microsoft Cloud Solution Partner (CSP) i.e. Infrastructure, Data and AI, Digital and App Innovation, Security, Modern Work and Business Applications

However, Microsoft the gold partner program is no longer available from January 22, 2025. Under Microsoft CSP - we have 5/6 of the above-mentioned certifications.

Answer #7:

In relation to the Microsoft Gold Partner program, as this is no longer available, you should indicate in your tender response:

- If you are a legacy Microsoft Gold Partner
- If you have transitioned to a new Microsoft partner programme
- Or if you have an equivalent Microsoft relationship

Please also refer to Answer #2

Question #8

Can you please share additional contextual information about the 5 categories in which Pobal is split – Pobal (Internal), Early Years Programme (EYP), Pobal Services, Sports Capital Programme, Special Advocate Programme? In particular, could you please share, for each of the 5 categories:

- a. General information about its goals and scope of work
- b. Number of users
- c. If they share the same tenant or have separated tenants.
- d. List of solutions that will be in the scope of the service, including high level functional description, architecture and criticality?

Answer #8:

Please see appendix 4 Technical Overview. Tenderers should note that this document must be requested via eTenders.

Question #9:

Can you confirm that is within the scope of the RFT the monitoring of cloud / SaaS production environments, but outside of scope the maintenance of these cloud / SaaS environments?

Answer #9:

Please refer to Section 3.2.2 in the RFT

Question #10:

Within section 3.2.3.1 you refer that there is a set of critical production services that will require 24x7 support, referring to section 3.1.5 for additional information about these critical services. However within section 3.1.5 there is no such information. Can you please clarify?

Answer #10:

Please see appendix 4 Technical Overview. Tenderers should note that this document must be requested via eTenders.

Question #11:

Within section 3.2.3.1 you provide information about the monthly number of expected P1/P2 /P3 incidents per month. Can you please provide a breakdown of the expected incidents per each of the 5 categories?

Answer #11:

Tenderers should use the information that has been provided, no further breakdown is available.

Question #12:

Within section 3.2.3.1 you provide information about the monthly number of expected P1/P2 /P3 service request per month. Can you please provide a breakdown of the expected service request per each of the 5 categories?

Answer #12:

Tenderers should use the information that has been provided, no further breakdown is available.

Question #13:

Can you please provide additional information about the solutions / applications that will be included in the service and for which we will have to provide a transition plan. Relevant information, per application include:

- a. High level functional description;
- b. High level architecture
- c. Level of customizations - high / medium / none
- d. Criticality
- e. Complexity of the application – high / medium / low
- f. Number of users
- g. Usage metrics
- h. Is the application well documented
- i. Will the current provider be available for shadowing / reverse shadowing activities

Answer #13:

Please see appendix 4 Technical Overview. Tenderers should note that this document must be requested via eTenders. Tenderers should note that no further breakdown is available.

Question #14:

Within section 3.2.7 you refer that tenderers are required to provide a proposed draft SLA. This proposed SLA must be presented within the 10 pages limit for responding to criterion C? Or can it be summited as an annex?

Answer #14:

Tenderers may append a proposed sample SLA, which should be clearly referenced to Criterion C and this will not be counted towards the page limit for this criterion.

Question #15:

Can you please clarify what's expected for the role "M365 Solution/Applications Specialist". Is it correct to understand that it refers to a specialist in Microsoft 365 services like SharePoint, Teams, Power Platform, Exchange, and related productivity and collaboration tools? Or are you looking for a cloud native solutions/ applications specialist?

Answer #15:

Yes, it is correct to understand that it refers to a specialist in Microsoft 365 services like SharePoint, Teams, Power Platform, Exchange, and related productivity and collaboration tools.

Question #16:

Within section 3.4.3 you refer that pricing must be provided for daily out of hours rate. However within the Pricing Schedule we don't find any place to fill the price of the out of hours rate. Can you please clarify?

Answer #16:

The out of hours rate should be included in the comments section and will not form part of the total cost or the evaluation.

Question #17:

Within appendix A of the RFT document you provide an SLA for support incidents and requests. Can you please clarify the scope of remote support and remote diagnostics that are referred to in the second table (4_Pobal 0384 Microsoft Services RFT.pdf_ Page 38)?

Answer #17:

Tenderers should use the information that has been provided, no further breakdown is available and in response to Criterion C Contract management approach - should outline your approach and methodology to incident management.

Question #18:

In the case where the Tenderer is a grouping, what element of the Selection Criteria must be completed by all members of the grouping? A1 only?

Answer #18:

If the Tenderer is a grouping, the Lead Tenderer and all members of the grouping must fill out Section A1.

If the grouping is relying on the members of the grouping for any aspect of the Selection criteria e.g. Turnover; resources; previous experience; Quality Assurance, the relevant member should fill in the relevant details in the relevant section.

Question #19:

CLARIFICATION: P1 SLA Coverage

The RFT requires a 1-hour P1 Response, but the Pricing Schedule limits Standard Support to 09:00 to 17:30. Please confirm whether the P1 SLA (1-hour Response, 4-hour Resolution) is required 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

Answer #19:

Section 3.2.3.1 states:

The majority of Production services will require standard support hours of 09:00 to 17:30 (Irish Standard Time) Monday to Friday (Irish business days), with occasional out of hours support required.

Any support for non-Production environments will be the standard support hours of 09:00 to 17:30 (Irish Standard Time) Monday to Friday (Irish business days).

There are a set of critical Production services that will require 24 / 7 support – again, these are included in the Technical overview – see Section 3.1.5.

Question #20:

CLARIFICATION: Hosting Requirement

The Service Management Costs sheets state the contract is "to host, support, maintain and develop..." Please confirm whether hosting of any Microsoft Services is required. If so, which applications/servers and what hosting platform (Azure, On-Premise) are in scope? Another section of the RFP document says hosted is required, please confirm which is correct, the RFP or excel sheet (Excel sheet says hosting required)

Answer #20:

No hosting is required – this is a typo.

Section 3.2.3.3 states:

While the Contracting Authority does not require any services to be hosted, confirmation is required that the storage and processing of, including access to, the personal data of Contracting Authority staff and Contracting Authority client data will be carried out in the EEA by the appointed service provider.

Question #21:

CLARIFICATION: Transition Cost Mechanism

Please confirm that the Transition/Migration cost will be priced as a separate, one-time project fee (in the Trans Migration Costs sheet) and will not be required to be absorbed into the fixed annual Service Management Costs.

Answer #21:

This is correct.

Question #22:

Monitoring Tooling: Provision and Ownership

a) What is the current Monitoring Software used by the incumbent?

b) Will Pobal transfer the license/tool ownership to the new vendor, or is the new vendor expected to provide and fully license their own Service Monitoring tooling for the contract duration (Fixed Cost Line 1)?

Answer #22:

- A) There is no (availability) monitoring software used at the moment
- B) The new vendor needs to provide their own Monitoring software – Pobal will ensure the relevant access is provided

Question #23:

Patching Tooling and Third-Party Applications

- a) What tooling (e.g., MECM, Intune, etc.) is currently used for Patch Management, and is this tool owned by Pobal or the incumbent?
- b) Which specific third-party applications (non-Microsoft) are required to be patched as part of the Service Maintenance scope, and what is the typical patching schedule?

Answer #23:

- a) The patching tool is not being disclosed but is a widely used global product. The tool is owned by the provider of a subset of services. The new vendor needs to provide their own patching tool – Pobal will ensure the relevant access is provided
- b) Tenderers can assume that there are no non-Microsoft applications to be patched. There is no prescribed patching schedule from Pobal – tenderers must use their professional expertise and experience

Question #24:

Transition Documentation

Please confirm that the incumbent supplier will provide full, up-to-date Runbooks and Operational Procedures (including escalation matrices and configuration details) to facilitate the knowledge transfer during the Transition phase.

Answer#24:

See answer #1 but any relevant information will be provided to the winning tenderer

Question #25:

CLARIFICATION: Cloud/SaaS Maintenance Scope

please Confirm that the fixed-price responsibility for Cloud/SaaS (e.g., M365, Entra ID) is strictly limited to Monitoring, Alerting, and Escalation to Microsoft/third parties, and excludes maintenance, patching, and remedial configuration fixes.

Answer#25:

This is correct.

Section 3.2.2 states

Maintenance of all of the Contracting Authority cloud based / SaaS Microsoft environments are provided by other suppliers and is out of scope.

Question #26:

CLARIFICATION: Implementation vs. Advice

Pobal to Confirm that the assessment, recommendation, and review of performance is fixed-price, but the Implementation of recommendations (the work) will be purchased separately via the Rate Card (Resource-Based Services).

Answer #26:

This is correct.

Question #27:

Can Pobal please confirm the expected standard transition duration assumption as to when the contract will be taken over by the new vendor

Answer #27:

Pobal have no transition duration assumptions – tenderers must use their professional expertise and experience.

Question #28:

Can Pobal please detail the current patching process and outline what Patching Procedure Documentation will be provided to the new supplier

Answer #27:

See answer #23; Any relevant information will be provided to the new supplier once the contract commences.

Question #29:

In relation to Audit/Compliance (Quarterly Meetings), Can Pobal confirm that the requirement is limited to reporting on the compliance of services maintained by the Service Partner, and excludes a formal, full-scope regulatory audit.

Answer #29:

This is correct.

Question #30:

Can Pobal please provide the required Response/Resolution times for P1/P2/P3 incidents. Technical Overview/Inventory: The number of servers, hybrid connections, and specialized components that require maintenance.

Answer #30:

See Appendix A for SLA; see answer #8 for technical information.

Question #31:

In relation to the Transition/Migration Plan, what is the size of the environment so we can determine the duration and complexity of the handover, knowledge transfer, and parallel running.

Answer #31:

See answer #8

Question #32:

Service Credits / Penalties

Please confirm the structure and mechanism for Service Credits or Penalties that would apply if the defined SLAs (Response/Resolution times) are missed.

Answer #32:

Pobal have no Service Credits or penalties assumptions – tenderers can propose models based on their professional expertise and experience

Question #33:

Project Volume & Rate Card

The Rate Card lists notional days (e.g., 50 days for PM). Please confirm that Pobal guarantees no minimum annual purchase volume for the Rate Card, and that the notional days are for evaluation purposes only.

Answer #33:

Please read the note no. 3 on the Rate Card tab of the Pricing Schedule

“The figures below are notional volumes and provide no guarantee of work to be awarded under this framework agreement. It is being used purely to enable assessment of the notional cost for the framework agreement and ensure certainty of rates for work under the framework”

Question #34:

Service Separation / Program Split

The Pricing Schedule separates costs into five programmes (Internal, EYP, Sports Cap, etc.). Please confirm if these programmes are five logically separated environments requiring five separate documentation/transition efforts, or if they are simply cost centres within a single, unified environment

Answer #34:

These programmes are five logically separated environments

Question #35:

Patching Tooling and Third-Party Applications

- a) What tooling is currently used for Patch Management (e.g., MECM, Intune, etc.)?
- b) Which specific third-party applications (non-Microsoft) are required to be patched as part of the Service Maintenance scope, and what is the typical patching schedule?

Answer #35:

See answer #23

Question #36:

Third-Party Integrations

Are there any mission-critical, non-Microsoft applications (e.g., specific HR, Finance, or Grants systems) that are tightly integrated with the Microsoft services (e.g., for Entra ID/SSO) that must be accounted for during patching/maintenance?

Answer #36:

See Answer #8

Question #37:

Transition Documentation (Handover)

Please confirm that the incumbent supplier will provide full, up-to-date Runbooks and Operational Procedures to facilitate the knowledge transfer during the Transition phase.

Answer #37:

See answer #24

Question #38:

CLARIFICATION: Implementation vs. Advice

Confirm that the assessment, recommendation, and review of performance is fixed-price, but the Implementation of recommendations will be purchased separately via the Rate Card (Resource-Based Services).

Answer #38:

See answer #26

Question #39:

Reporting Frequency and Format

What is the mandatory reporting frequency and format required for Service Performance (KPIs/SLAs) and Financial Spend (Rate Card utilization)? Is monthly reporting sufficient, or is weekly reporting on performance required during the first 60 days of the contract?

Answer #39:

Monthly is sufficient but tenderers can propose any frequency based on their professional expertise and experience.

Question #40:

Is the incumbent Service Provider participating in this Request for Tender

Answer #40:

See Answer #1:

Question #41:

Travel, Subsistence, and Expenses

Are all travel, subsistence, and expenses for staff required to work on-site (if any) assumed to be included in the fixed annual Service Management Costs, or can these be charged separately via the Other Costs sheet?

Answer #41:

Any costs for tenderer staff need to be included in the fixed annual Service Management Costs and / or the Daily Rates.

Question #42:

Service Separation / Program Split & Cost Allocation

- a) Please confirm if the underlying technical environments are logically separated requiring unique transition efforts.
- b) Please provide the approximate percentage split of the total asset inventory (servers, endpoints, M365 seats) across these five programmes.

Answer #42:

- a) See answer #34
- b) See Answer #8

Question #43:

Support Interaction Model (L1/L2 Split) Given Pobal's internal ICT staff exist, please confirm the functional split of support: Is the contracted Service Provider role solely for L2/L3 support and maintenance, with Pobal's internal ICT staff managing all L1 Service Desk functions (e.g., initial logging, password resets)?

Answer #43:

For the purposes of the tenderer response, assume Pobal covers L1; the Service Provider covers L2 / L3. The specifics of the support model will be finalised with the winning tenderer post contract award

Question #44:

Misclassified Incident Escalation

What is the agreed-upon process and metric for handling incidents that are misclassified or repeatedly escalated by Pobal's internal ICT staff, but which are ultimately determined to be L1/Internal issues?

Answer #44:

This topic, and any other topics that require discussion, will be dealt with under the meetings described in section 3.2.5.2 in the RFT

Question #45:

Change Control Cost

What is the required minimum lead time and associated cost (fixed fee or Rate Card) for managing a Change Request (Section 9 of Framework Agreement)?

Answer #45:

There is no required minimum lead time or associated cost for managing a Change Request. The specifics of the change control model will be finalised with the winning tenderer post contract award. This topic, and any other topics that require discussion, will be dealt with under the meetings described in section 3.2.5.2 in the RFT

Question #46:

Change Request Scope Definition (Critical)

To accurately price the fixed annual fee, please clarify the distinction between: a) Minor Changes (covered by the fixed annual fee, e.g., standard configuration changes). b) Project Changes (e.g., Pobal mention development of new Power Platform, flows, major security architecture changes) that will be charged as projects via the Rate Card. Please provide a man-day/hour threshold (e.g., 4 hours/1 man-day) that separates these two categories.

Answer #46:

Changes below 4 hours is considered BAU; any above is Project Change. The specifics of the change control model will be finalised with the winning tenderer post contract award. This topic, and any other topics that require discussion, will be dealt with under the meetings described in section 3.2.5.2 in the RFT

Question #47:

Historical Incident/Ticket Data

Please provide the last 12 months of aggregated Service Desk data, broken down by the five separate programmes, including: a) Total monthly ticket volume. b) Breakdown of tickets by Severity/Priority (P1, P2, P3). c) Breakdown of tickets by support level required (L2 vs. L3/Vendor).

Answer #47:

See answer #11

Question #48

Support Interaction Model (L1/L2 Split)

Is the contracted Service Provider role solely for L2/L3 support and maintenance, with Pobal's internal ICT staff managing all L1 Service Desk functions (e.g., initial logging, password resets) within Pobal's own Service Desk/ITSM tool?

Answer #48:

See answer #43

Question #49:

Custom/Developer Tooling Access

For custom applications (e.g., Power Platform, Azure Functions), what level of access and licensing will be granted for development, debugging, and troubleshooting, and will Pobal provide environment variables and source code access?

Answer #49:

Pobal will provide necessary access and support required to enable the Service Provider to deliver the service

Question #50:

We are requesting an extension of the submission deadline

Answer #50:

Tender submission deadline has been extended by 7 days to 1st December 2025 at 12.00 noon (Irish time).

Question #51:

Also with regard to Section 3.2.3.3 Hosting.

While the Contracting Authority does not require any services to be hosted, confirmation is required that the storage and processing of, including access to, the personal data of Contracting Authority staff and Contracting Authority client data will be carried out in the EEA by the appointed service provider. This is a mandatory requirement.

Can you please confirm if Out of Hours monitoring is permitted from New Zealand as New Zealand continues to maintain its EEA (GDPR) adequacy status, allowing for the free flow of personal data from the EU.

Adequacy relating to: The European Commission may grant countries adequacy status if it considers they have a level of data protection that is adequate to the GDPR. Adequacy status means that countries can receive personal data from the European Union (EU) without further special measures needing to be implemented (i.e. additional contractual measures).

Answer #51:

Due to the nature of the data we process on behalf of our Departmental Clients, all data must be processed within the EEA by the appointed service provider.