

## The Procurement Trap Why Aviation Training Tenders Create Organizational Risk

### Executive Summary

In a limited number of organisations there is a practice to treat regulatory and vocational training as a commodity

- A line item to be negotiated by procurement departments through complex third-party tenders.
- This approach, while efficient for sourcing jet fuel or ground handling equipment, is fundamentally broken when applied to human competence.

This white paper argues that true optimization of aviation training is impossible through the traditional tender process. Drawing on industry insights from Steve Bentley FRAeS, CEO of Sofema Aviation Services, we explore why the "tender model" disconnects Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) from the solution, prioritizes price over partnership, and ultimately creates significant organisational risk by delivering "checkbox compliance" rather than operational excellence.

### The Fundamental Disconnect: Procurement vs. Pedagogy

In a typical aviation organization, a divide exists between those who understand the rules and those who buy the training. On one side, the Compliance Managers and SMEs navigate the complex regulatory environments of EASA, FAA, or ICAO daily.

- On the other, the Procurement Department manages the administrative burden of sourcing through rigid RFP (Request for Proposal) frameworks.
- When these two functions are separated by a third-party tender, the organization faces a "Knowledge Gap." Administrative friction increases because tenders add layers of bureaucracy managed by individuals who often have zero understanding of the specific subject matter.
- To a procurement generalist, "Part-CAMO Training" appears to be a check-the-box product easily sourced through a tender. However, from the SME's perspective, generic training represents a significant organizational risk. Unless the material is explicitly aligned with both the regulatory obligations and aligns with organization's CAME philosophy, Process and Procedure (Through review and assessment of the training to be selected), it remains a theoretical exercise that lacks the real-world application necessary to maintain safety and regulatory integrity.

### Why Tenders Fail: The Specialist's Perspective

Steve Bentley, a veteran with over 50 years in commercial aviation, suggests that the tender process is not just inefficient—it is actively detrimental to the client's long-term safety goals. He identifies three core areas where the tender model breaks down.

### Standardization Compromises Specialization

Aviation regulations are highly nuanced. A tender usually demands a "standard" solution to simplify the bidding process. However, effective training must be tailored to a client's specific operational manuals,

fleet types, and regional jurisdictions. By forcing a provider into a standardized box, the organization loses the very specialization it needs to mitigate operational risk.

## **Rigidity vs. Innovation**

The "fixed-point" nature of a tender contract is fundamentally at odds with the fluid nature of aviation law. When an organization locks into a long-term tender, they risk falling behind on critical updates like EASA Part-CAMO or new Cybersecurity standards. Instead of static, pre-packaged modules, organizations require agile training solutions that offer real-time revisions and interactive instructional design. By their nature, rigid tenders tend to filter out these sophisticated, responsive delivery methods, resulting in a standardized product that fails to keep pace with the evolving safety and compliance landscape.

## **The Partnership Paradigm: Beyond the Transactional Tender**

The fundamental flaw of the tender process is its inherent "transactional" nature. A tender is a cold exchange: a set of static requirements is met with a fixed price, usually resulting in a one-time contract that terminates once the certificates are issued. However, in a safety-critical environment, true regulatory assurance is never a one-time event. It is an ongoing dialogue.

When an organisation moves away from the tender model, they trade a vendor for a partner—a consultant who helps navigate audit findings, safety gaps, and the shifting sands of EASA, FAA, or ICAO regulations.

## **Transparency Through Direct Assessment: The "Guest Enrollment" Strategy**

In a transactional tender, the client often buys a "black box." They see a brochure and a price, but the actual quality of the instruction is hidden until after the contract is signed. Sofema Aviation Services (SAS) and Sofema Online (SOL) eliminate this organisational risk through transparency-driven engagement.

Rather than asking a client to trust a bid document, Sofema encourages a "try before you commit" philosophy. This is facilitated through guest enrollments for assessment purposes.

- By allowing an organisation's Compliance Manager or Subject Matter Expert (SME) to personally experience the material, the delivery style, and the depth of the content, the "black box" is opened.
- This direct engagement ensures that the decision-makers are choosing a solution based on technical merit and instructional quality, rather than just the lowest bid on a spreadsheet.

## **Aligning Training with Operational Reality: Job Roles and Learning Objectives**

A partnership allows for a level of granular alignment that a tender simply cannot accommodate. This is evidenced in how Sofema engages with clients to map training specifically to the operational needs of the organisation.

- **Job Role Training Requirements:** A generic tender asks for "Part-145 training." A partnership, however, looks at the specific requirements of the staff roles. By utilizing resources like the [Job Role Training Requirements guide](#), Sofema works with the client to identify exactly which competencies are needed for specific functions—whether it is technical records, maintenance planning, or quality auditing. This ensures that training is targeted and relevant, reducing waste and increasing competence.
- **Clear Learning Objectives:** In a transactional model, the objective is often just "completion." In a partnership, the focus shifts to outcomes. By reviewing [Course Learning Objectives](#) prior to enrollment, SMEs can ensure that the training will actually bridge the specific knowledge gaps identified within their organization. This consultative approach allows the training to be a tool for solving internal safety findings or audit non-conformities, rather than just a mandatory administrative exercise.

## The Consultant-Provider Relationship

When you engage directly with a specialist like Sofema, you are gaining more than an instructor; you are gaining a regulatory consultant. This partnership means that when a new regulation is released—such as the recent updates to Part-CAMO or Cybersecurity implementation—the provider is already working on how this affects *your* specific operations.

The ongoing dialogue allows for the training to be adjusted and varied. For example, a client can choose a course from the extensive portfolio and request a variation that incorporates their own specific procedures. This level of collaboration is restricted by the rigid boundaries of a tender, but it is the cornerstone of a partnership that seeks to build long-term regulatory assurance.

## Diving Deeper into Partnership

Optimization is achieved when the training provider is an extension of the organization's safety and compliance department. To explore how this collaborative model works in practice, and to view the full scope of how training can be mapped to specific organizational roles, visit [www.sassofia.com](http://www.sassofia.com) and [www.sofemaonline.com](http://www.sofemaonline.com).

The library of over 1,000 courses and the daily updates found in the Sofema blogs provide the technical depth necessary for any organization looking to move from a "transactional" mindset to a "partnership" model that truly mitigates organisational risk.

## The SME-Led Assessment: A Better Way

Optimization happens when you remove the middleman and put the Compliance Manager back in control of the strategy. Instead of an RFP, organizations should empower their SMEs to conduct a Technical Evaluation based on the following pillars:

- **Operational Context:** Can the provider adjust training to our specific CAME/MOE? This ensures the training is applicable to the actual day-to-day tasks of the staff.

- **Instructor Pedigree:** Does the instructor have actual "boots-on-the-ground" experience? Credibility is the primary driver of engagement with flight and engineering crews.
- **Retention Strategy:** Does the platform use advanced digital tools, Voice Over (VO) technology, or branching scenarios? Compliance is useless if the information is forgotten 48 hours after the certificate is issued.

## **The Real-World Impact: The Sofema Model**

To understand what optimization looks like when the tender process is bypassed, we can look at the 2025 performance of Sofema Aviation Services (SAS) and Sofema Online (SOL). In 2025, they enrolled over 40,000 delegates, with a target of 45,000 for 2026.

By opting out of the administratively heavy tender process, resources are redirected into content development and client support. This allows for the creation of highly cost-effective models like the Corporate Freedom Pass, where an entire team can access over 525 regulatory and vocational courses at a cost of below 4 Euro per training day. This is significantly more efficient than any tender-driven individual course buy.

The depth of this portfolio is what allows an organization to truly optimize. From Advanced Aircraft Maintenance Planning to EASA Part 21/CS25 Review for CAMO Staff and Maintenance Control Centre Repetitive Defect Management, the granularity of the courses ensures that every role in the organization is supported by specific, relevant knowledge.

## **Reclaiming the Training Strategy**

To move away from the broken tender model, aviation organizations should adopt a three-step approach to training optimization:

### **Empower the Knowledgeable**

Stop asking the purchasing department to choose the training. Ask the **Compliance and Training Managers**. They are the ones who "swim through the regulatory environment" and are best equipped to judge the technical accuracy and depth of a course.

### **Prioritize Engagement over "Bespoke" Waste**

Many organizations waste thousands of Euros asking for completely "bespoke" training that adds no real value. In reality, 99% of the required material already exists in high-quality, proven portfolios. The optimized approach is to choose the best existing product and request minor variations or "bolted-on" company-specific modules. This provides the necessary customization without the massive development costs.

### **Demand Trial Access**

A transparent provider will offer free-of-charge access for assessment purposes. If you cannot see the content before you buy it, you are incurring unnecessary organizational risk. Tenders often hide the

actual quality of the e-learning behind a polished PDF proposal. Direct engagement allows SMEs to vet the content first-hand.

### **Conclusion: The Path to Competence**

Optimization is not about finding a cheaper way to check a box; it is about reducing the **Time to Competence**. When an organization bypasses the third-party tender and allows its experts to engage directly with specialized providers, they gain lower costs by removing broker markups, improved safety through relevant training, and a partnership that evolves alongside the regulations.

For equipment and consumables, a tender is a perfect vehicle. But for **Regulatory Compliance and Competence Building**, it is a failed model.

### **Diving Deeper**

To truly understand the difference between transactional training and a partnership-based regulatory approach, we encourage you to dive deeper into the resources available online.

Visit [www.sassofia.com](http://www.sassofia.com) and [www.sofemaonline.com](http://www.sofemaonline.com) to explore a library of over 1,000 courses and read their extensive blogs, which provide daily insights into the evolving landscape of EASA, FAA, and ICAO regulations.

**The training strategy belongs to the experts. It's time to give it back.**

### **Next Steps for Leadership:**

- Request guest enrollment access for your Compliance Manager to vet the material directly.
- Review your current training matrix against the [Job Role Training Requirements](#) to identify gaps.
- Engage in a direct meeting with Sofema to discuss how existing products can be tailored to your specific MOE or CAME without the administrative burden of a tender.