

Are You Getting the Most from Your Laboratory Consumables Budget?

As a research-intensive institution, the University of Bath has a significant laboratory spend every year. Here, Greg Derrick, Contracts Manager at the university, explains why he uses SUPC's laboratory consumables agreement and how it has delivered considerable cost and time savings for the university.

The University of Bath, with a student body of over 15,000 and a research and grant portfolio surpassing £100 million, requires over 10,000 consumables, and a constant supply of laboratory products, to keep its research facilities running smoothly. After extensive work appraising the various routes to market, the University of Bath had several options open to them, but they chose to use the Southern Universities Purchasing Consortium (SUPC)-led Inter-Regional Laboratory Agreement (IRLA) for consumables.

IRLA went live in August 2014 and UK universities have already funnelled over £32 million through the agreement since its launch. On average, buyers of the consumables agreement can expect to save 18% above and beyond prices on the previous agreement. For Greg Derrick, Contracts Manager at the University of Bath, the £1.2 million that the university spends every year on laboratory items represents a significant portion of the university's influencable spend.



Derrick assessed the options open to the university and decided to use the SUPC agreement for **four key reasons**:

- Savings and value for money provided.
- Flexibility of the agreement to meet Bath's local requirements.
- Time savings achieved by not having to run their own tender.
- The extra weight that partnering with a consortium added to Bath's voice when working with suppliers.

"My first step was to do a thorough investigation with colleagues in our Science and Engineering Faculties to create a comprehensive list of stock items – high-spend items that we order in large quantities on a monthly basis" says



Derrick. *“By identifying what we ordered most, I was able to create a core list and conduct a further competition under the SUPC framework to single-source under each one of the consumables agreement’s eight lots.”* Using the consumables agreement in this way, saved Bath £7000 on its core list and continues to make much larger savings across the whole catalogue.

In addition to the general savings, Derrick said he valued the flexibility of the agreement, which allowed him to adjust his core list to reflect Bath’s unique requirements: *“Our core list differed from the list outlined under the SUPC agreement, but because the appointed suppliers were flexible in their approach, we could tailor our core list to meet our needs while still providing a commitment to spend with the supplier”.*

The time saved by using the agreement, rather than having to conduct his own tender, was also valuable: *“The fact that this agreement offers a choice of vetted suppliers saves a huge amount of time and avoids going through EU the tendering process.”*

A further advantage of buying through the consortium agreement is the stronger voice Bath can project because it is working in unity with others. Consortia agreements embody the *united we stand,*

divided we fall approach by representing mass spending potential in a single voice across the UK. *“One of the key benefits to using IRLA to purchase lab supplies is the fact that I have the support of SUPC and other institutions when it comes to working with suppliers. If a problem arises with a supplier, the individual buying power of the University of Bath may not garner the same quick and innovative response that I can achieve when I work through the consortium”* says Derrick.

The combination of cost savings, time savings, flexibility to meet local requirements, and the support of a consortium has made the SUPC-led laboratory consumables agreement a true sector success story. Click [here](#) to learn more about the Inter-Regional Laboratory Agreement for Consumables. If you have any questions, please cont SUPC at supc@reading.ac.uk or on 0118 935 7081.



Collectively, SUPC members spent over £26 million on laboratory consumables in 2013/14*. For many universities, particularly those with strong research programmes, laboratory-related purchases represent a huge proportion of an institution’s influencable spend. A consolidated national, yet flexible, approach to such a high-spend area ensures that universities get the most value for their money.

* Reported spend for SUPC members under the LK code