

# Sustainable procurement to achieve a strategic impact on policy, resources and the staff/student experience – University of Edinburgh

## Description

Procurement at the University of Edinburgh has been actively involved in a leadership role in terms of the Social Responsibility and Sustainability (SRS) policy of the university and its wider community for over 10 years. This has not only covered the sort of areas that would be considered as normal procurement operations but also included being part of the strategy steering group, leading student-staff partnerships on fair trade or workers' rights, and influencing policy within the sector, city and government overtly and informally.

The team has won recognition internally (e.g. the Principal's Medal for Outstanding Service to the Director of Procurement in 2011) and externally (e.g. the Gold Edinburgh Sustainability award for three years to its Printing Services). The service has also won recognition in Government Opportunities, eHealth, People & Planet Green League and Green Gown. It recently won the THELMA 2013 award for outstanding procurement team.

## Benefits

Students involved in People & Planet and the students unions have engaged directly with the Director of Procurement, working together on comments on procurement reforms, influencing the APUC sustainable supply chain policy and code of conduct, and investigating research interests on trade justice related topics in the academic community.

Procurement is taking a lead role in the city fair trade group, in working with the local (merged) college, and in influencing the Fair Trade Nation campaign by sharing experiences pan-sector and with NGOs.

Procurement regularly influences over 80% of non-pay and has demonstrated financial sustainability efficiencies of £8-£12m per annum in both cash and cost-avoidance. This is reported quarterly.

The resource management approach adopted has delivered:

- a sector-leading social responsibility and sustainability risk matrix, and impact assessment for spend categories

- whole-life costs of research-funded purchases, including asset management and waste reduction
- efficient stock buying of laboratory chemicals and consumables through eProcurement
- fair trade foods, beverages and apparel
- the building of stronger relationships (in catering, waste, energy, estates, research and IT to help reduce impacts)
- a global poverty and fair trade academic network (focusing on topics such as workers' rights and prison labour)
- sustainability of supply chains (working with students and APUC on a new code of conduct).

## Critical success factors

- The student-staff group working on fair trade issues recognising that procurement shares SRS aims.
- Pro-active engagement across all spend categories led by the Assistant Director of Procurement.
- A balancing of risks, impact and influence on SRS aspects alongside value for money and cost efficiency.
- Senior management engagement in SRS strategies, including across research, teaching and learning.
- Procurement being seen as a strategic partner in delivering the objectives of the University Strategic Plan.

## How procurement added strategic value

- By involving the Director of Procurement in policy teams, the University has gained another perspective.
- Procurement has contributed beyond the merely operational by offering ways to enhance student experiences and employability skills, and by opening up new opportunities to deliver the strategy.

- By enhancing the reputation of the University within the sector and the community on related themes, and by taking a lead in areas beyond its normal remit through engaging colleagues and the student community externally and internally.
- Procurement brought a practical approach to SRS into key decision making, whilst retaining a focus on value for money, efficiency and the quality of goods and services.

## Commendation

*“The University procurement team are leaders and help us think about social responsibility and sustainability in its widest sense, building it into our normal business choices. The team also lead and support others locally and in the sector on responsible procurement and related fair trade issues. I strongly commend their contribution to University strategic plans.”*  
Professor Mary Bownes – Senior Vice Principal External Engagement

Source: [‘Procurement as a strategic asset in higher education’](#) report produced for the Efficiency Exchange by John Lakin, July 2013.