

# **Statement on Eradicating Modern Slavery in Supply Chains**

**For calendar year January to December 2023**

**Issued pursuant to Section 54 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015**

[The Modern Slavery Act 2015](#)

**As part of The Open University's commitment to create a society where people are treated with dignity and respect, we are publishing this statement to provide an insight into what the University is doing and is planning to do to help eradicate modern slavery.**

## **Slavery in the 21st century:**

Slavery isn't merely a historical relic. The latest Global Estimates indicate that 50 million people were living in modern slavery in 2021. Of these people, 28 million were in forced labour and 22 million were trapped in forced marriage.

Unfortunately, the number of people in modern slavery has risen significantly in the last five years. In 2021, 10 million more people were in modern slavery compared to 2016 global estimates. Although modern slavery can exist in any

supply chain it has been identified that manufacturing, construction, agriculture and hospitality are higher risk supply chains.

In 2021, 12,727 referrals were made into the National Referral Mechanism. This represents a 20% increase on referrals made in 2020. This is especially significant given the continued impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic this year. In addition, the number of potential victims identified but who have not consented to an NRM referral and have consequently been referred into the Duty to Notify process has also increased, from 2,175 referrals in 2020 to 3,190 in 2021. The Modern Slavery and Exploitation Helpline received 8489 calls, webforms and app submissions in 2021, a 6% increase on contacts in 2020

### **About the Open University:**

The Open University, founded in 1969, has a mission to be open to people, places, methods and ideas. We promote educational opportunity and social justice by providing high-quality university education to all who wish to realise their ambitions and fulfil their potential.

### **Our Supply Chain**

In 2021-22, the University spent over £120m on goods and services from over 3,000 suppliers. 90% of this spend was for goods and services in these spend categories:

- Marketing & Communications;
- Consultancy Services;
- IT software & hardware;

- Course materials production and
- Estates management services, including catering, guarding and cleaning.

## **What we are doing to eradicate modern slavery in our supply chains:**

The University [Equality Scheme 2022-2026](#) states that we are creating an inclusive university community and a society where people are treated with dignity and respect, where inequalities are challenged and where we anticipate, and respond positively to different needs and circumstances so that everyone can achieve their potential. It is in this context that we have based our approach to eradicating modern slavery in the supply chains with which we are involved.

Collaborative procurement is through SUPC (Southern University Purchasing Consortium) whose slavery statement can be found by following the below link. SUPC is an operating division of Southern Universities Management Services Ltd.

[SUPC Modern Slavery Statement](#)

## **Since 2017 The Open University has:**

1. Developed and published a [Modern Slavery Policy in 2017](#)
2. Requested information from our major suppliers in high risk spend categories such as offshore tech services, laptops/desktops and IT peripherals, cleaning, catering, workwear and stationery on tackling modern slavery in their supply chains. This was done via a questionnaire and 12 responses were received in 2019

3. Updated The OU [Procurement policy](#) to specifically address modern slavery and wider equality and diversity.
4. Updated procurement processes and tender documentation to ensure the risk of modern slavery is considered appropriately for major sourcing projects.
5. Guaranteed that at least the living wage is paid by the OU contractors for catering, cleaning and guarding services.
6. Provided guidance and support to staff involved in major procurement projects and will continue to develop guidance for smaller contracts.
7. Put in place a [Whistleblowing Policy](#) (effective from December 2021) which encourages staff to highlight concerns of malpractice and we adhere to the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998.
8. Put in place recruitment policies and procedures which provide advice on fair, efficient and effective practice in the recruitment and selection of all categories of staff.
9. Completed modern slavery awareness online training by Procurement Services, Estates and IT staff.
10. Obtained approval from the Vice-Chancellor's Executive (VCE) and Finance Committee to introduce The Sustain Supplier Code of Conduct when sourcing goods and services, which will allow the OU to gain commitment and compliance from suppliers, with respect to their own organisation and their supply chain.

## **Achievements for 2022:**

- The OU Procurement Services team has continued to ensure that bidders continue to self-certify their compliance through tendering procedures.
- All tenders and contracts above £60k require a sourcing strategy, which ensures that the Procurement Services Team have continued to identify, assess and monitor potential risk areas when for higher value procurement projects, to mitigate the risk of slavery and human traffic occurring.
- 16 key staff within Procurement and Estates have completed two separate HEPA training courses;
  - A Guide to Modern Slavery
  - Protecting Human Rights in the Supply Chain.
- The Supplier Code of Conduct has been rolled out through tenders managed by the Procurement Services Team.

## **In 2023 the Open University will:**

- Adopt the [NETpositive Supplier Engagement Tool](#) and roll out to the OU's suppliers totalling 90% of total spend.
- Widen the roll out of the [Sustain Supplier Code of Conduct](#) to the OU's suppliers totalling 90% of total spend.
- Periodically screen high-risk OU suppliers to review their modern slavery training for staff and that their own modern slavery policies are up to date.

- Set up a Modern Slavery Working Group to review the effectiveness of the Statement, training and other measures taken to combat slavery and human trafficking on a periodic basis.

Any breaches of the policies outlined in this Statement may result in the University taking disciplinary action and/or terminating its relationship with an organisation or supplier.

This Statement was approved by the Vice Chancellors Executive at its meeting on 23rd February 2023.

Signed by:

A handwritten signature in grey ink that reads "T Blackman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Prof. Tim Blackman

Vice Chancellor