



Modern Slavery & Human Trafficking Statement

January 2024

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Introduction

Founded in 1495, the University of Aberdeen is Scotland's third oldest university and the fifth oldest in the UK. The principle of serving the public good is enshrined in the University's founding purpose, to 'be open to all and dedicated to the pursuit of truth in the service of others' and its strategic vision [Aberdeen 2040](#). In keeping with this principle, the University takes a zero-tolerance approach in relation to modern slavery and human trafficking in all its forms.

Today, the University employs over 3,600 staff and teaches over 14,000 students from over 130 countries around the world. In line with our Sustainability and Social Responsibility Policy, which aims to set best practice standards meeting or surpassing the requirements of legislation, this statement reflects our commitment to act ethically, transparently and with integrity in all our business dealings and relationships, to implement the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and to establish and maintain effective systems and controls which ensure the University is not contributing to modern slavery in any way.

For greater impact and socially responsible transformation, in line with the University's strategic vision 2040, it is committed to meeting the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Aiming to draw attention to the SDGs and aligning academic institutions with the work of the UN Global Compact, the [University of Aberdeen Business School is a signatory to the UN Principles for Responsible Management Education \(PRME\)](#).

Purpose of the Statement

This statement is made pursuant to Section 54(1) of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 and sets out the steps the University has taken and will take to identify and prevent such practices from taking place in any of its supply chain and in any part of its own business.

University Employees

The University Human Resources Policies set out our commitment to workplace rights at the University. The risk of modern slavery occurring in the University's workforce is mitigated by ensuring that staff are recruited following robust recruitment policies. We are rigorous in checking that all new recruits on our home campuses have the right to work in the UK. We also employ all staff and workers (temporary services/casual staff) on standard terms and conditions of employment.

The University adheres to the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 and implements its own Whistleblowing Policy regarding concerns about potential corruption, fraud, or other improper conduct or unethical behaviour within the University.

The University is an accredited Living Wage (Scotland) Employer that has been certified by the [Living Wage Foundation](#) and implemented the Accredited Living Wage rate.

A due diligence approach is taken with service providers who regularly work onsite at the University to pay the Living Wage and the University evaluates suppliers' approach to Fair Work Practices, in line with statutory guidance.

Supply Chains

The University of Aberdeen procures a wide range of goods, services and works. Our supply chains fall under the following main categories:

- Estates, Buildings and Facilities Management
- Laboratory Equipment
- Computer Supplies and Services
- Professional Services
- Utilities

The University is committed to ensuring that there is no modern slavery or human trafficking in our supply chains or in any part of our business. Each regulated procurement process conducted by the University requires tenderers to disclose whether the bidder or any member of their organisation with decision making powers has been convicted in the last five years of any offence under [Part 1 of the Human Trafficking and Exploitation \(Scotland\) Act 2015](#), or under any provision referred to in the Schedule to that Act. Tenderers that confirm such a conviction will be excluded from the process unless they can successfully demonstrate that they have taken sufficient measures to demonstrate compliance with this Act.

The University is a member of Advanced Procurement for Universities and Colleges Ltd (APUC), the procurement centre of expertise for Scotland's universities and colleges. We contributed to and adopted the [APUC Supply Chain Code of Conduct](#) as the University's Code of Conduct ensuring consistency in approach to the Supply Chain throughout the Sector. In asking relevant suppliers to

adopt the Supply Chain Code of Conduct we collaborate with others to demonstrate a commitment not to use forced, involuntary or underage labour.

Suppliers are encouraged to provide details of measures they take in relation to modern slavery in their supply chain, including any third-party accreditations and assessments to evidence this.

In 2014, the University of Aberdeen became a [founding member](#) of [Electronics Watch \(EW\)](#) and continues to support the organisation. EW is an organisation set up to drive improvements in labour conditions of IT supply chains and provides a structure compliant with legislation to investigate, monitor, and address labour issues in IT products supplied to public sector organisations. Suppliers provide details of the factories in which the ICT equipment bought by the University are produced, and EW works with civil society organisations in the countries where the factories are located to monitor working conditions. EW aligned terms and conditions have been embedded within APUC-awarded IT framework agreements used by the University.

The University IT hardware data shared with APUC is used to identify high risk areas and enable targeted worker monitoring. When issues are detected, APUC raises them directly with suppliers during contract management meetings.

We continue to have a significant programme of transnational education projects which includes overseas delivery with partner institutions and various articulation agreements with partners. These are based in countries that may have different labour standards and practices and different legal recourse for victims of exploitation. In accordance with our international partnership approval and governance procedures, we unequivocally reject any initiatives conflicting with this Statement. At the inception of all such projects with direction and oversight from our University Partnerships Committee and International Advisory Group, and drawing upon the expertise of Industry specialists, we conduct comprehensive risk assessments and due diligence checks on the partner and host country, including a thorough examination of the human rights landscape. Furthermore, we require our overseas partners to assess and address their own modern slavery risks, sharing their findings and actions with us.

Summary of Last Financial Year

This year, members of the Procurement Team attended Social Issues in Procurement Workshop 2023 provided by Sustainable Procurement Ltd (SPL). This was specifically arranged by APUC for Higher Education/Further Education institutions. At the workshop, SPL used the University of Aberdeen Modern Slavery Statement as an example of what a good Modern Slavery Statement should look like and what information should be included.

Members of the Procurement Team also accessed further awareness training which is available from the Scottish Government website: [Human trafficking - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/resources/information/human-trafficking/)

In line with the University's Procurement Policy & Procedures, suppliers continue to be sent [the University of Aberdeen Supply Chain Code of Conduct](#) and companies must confirm they adhere to the Code of Conduct, in order to enforce and promote sound social, ethical, environmental and economic practises.

The University Procurement Team has re-commenced work with [EcoVadis](#) through APUC to conduct part of our supply chain due diligence. EcoVadis has a well-developed methodology paired with a global team of expert analysts, which provides them with the ability to conduct individual sustainability performance assessments across all the relevant areas of our supplier/supply chain community. Suppliers are selected to be invited on a risk-based approach per category.

In overseas building projects, where we have an interest, we insist on rigorous standards of human and worker rights and have mechanisms in place to support this. Existing governance structures have been enhanced further to oversee the University's interest in the potential construction by its Qatari partner of a proposed second phase of its Qatar operation. A Human Rights and Equalities Group advises the Strategic Partnerships Board and oversees the development of the Phase 2 proposal and potential subsequent build of the new premises so we can be assured of an appropriate standard of human rights, consistent with this Statement.

With the advice of an external, independent specialist appointed to offer recommendations and training this Group has developed a Human Rights and Worker Welfare Standard which has been adopted by the Strategic Partnership Board for the Qatar endeavour for implementation across the Partnership's activities.

An academic from the University's Business School, Professor Muhammad Azizul Islam, has been nominated for [a Times Higher Education Award](#) for his work on exposing the hidden costs of the ready-made garment industry. His research, commissioned by the Modern Slavery PEC, explored conditions of women workers working in UK retailers' supply factories based in Bangladesh during Covid 19. The report provides recommendations for the UK Government, Bangladesh Government and stakeholders to eliminate exploitation of women from the global clothing supply chains.

Professor Islam has also been selected to join the [Global Reporting Initiative \(GRI\)](#) as one of 11 experts providing advice on human rights and labour-related standards to organisations around the world.

Next Steps

The Procurement Team continues to commit to undertaking all relevant training and awareness sessions, including the UKUPC Modern Slavery Series provided by APUC and the CIPS [Modern Slavery in Supply Chains](#).

The University Procurement will continue to progress work with EcoVadis, to identify and prioritise the high-risk categories and suppliers within the organisation's operations and supply chains. Thereafter, the Procurement Team will engage with those selected suppliers through EcoVadis in order to assess their sustainability/Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) performance worldwide. And will continue to use the University of Aberdeen Supply Chain Code of Conduct to help suppliers to understand the importance of compliance with ethical standards.

In the course of the next year, a range of proposed actions are being developed and assessed against other competing priorities. These relate predominantly to raising awareness of what modern slavery means in the University context and will focus on how we train and upskill staff and students and how research in this area can enhance our understanding and therefore our practices.

This will include continuing to make the Scottish Government Human Trafficking Guide available to all staff via a link on our website and incorporating Home Office videos and guides into our training material.



Chief Financial Officer
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