

Statement on Eradicating Modern Slavery in Supply Chains

For calendar year January to December 2021

Issued pursuant to Section 54 of 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 to help eradicate modern slavery.

Slavery in the 21st century:

Slavery isn't merely a historical relic. According to statistics from the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in November 2017 It is estimated that there are 40 million victims of modern slavery around the world¹, 25 million in forced labour and 15 million people in forced marriage worldwide. Although modern slavery can exist in any supply chain it has been identified that manufacturing, construction, agriculture and hospitality are higher risk supply chains. The most robust current estimate of the scale of modern slavery in the UK was produced by the Home Office in 2014. The estimate suggested that there were between 10,000 and 13,000 potential victims of modern slavery in the UK in 2013.²

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.

In 2020-21, the University spent over £100m on goods and services from over 3,500 third-party suppliers. The largest categories of spend were in the areas of marketing, consultancy, IT software & hardware, course materials production and various estates management services, including catering, guarding and cleaning.

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

The University equality scheme 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.

So far the Open University has:

1. Assembled a compliance team who are responsible for delivering the actions set out in this statement.

¹ International Labour Organisation (ILO) 2017

² UK Annual Report on Modern Slavery 2017 – Home Office

2. Developed and published a Modern Slavery Policy.
3. Put a process in place to periodically assess how our major suppliers in high risk spend categories are tackling modern slavery in their supply chains.
4. Updated its Procurement policy to specifically address modern slavery and wider equality and diversity.
5. Updated procurement processes and tender documentation to ensure the risk of modern slavery is considered appropriately for major sourcing projects.
6. Guaranteed that at least the living wage is paid by its contractors for catering, cleaning and guarding services.
7. Provided guidance and support to staff involved in major procurement projects and will continue to develop guidance for smaller contracts.
8. Put in place a Whistleblowing Policy which encourages staff to highlight concerns of malpractice.
9. 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.
10. Modern slavery awareness online training completed by Procurement staff.

In 2021 the Open University will:

1. Further raise awareness amongst staff, through continued work with HE consortia/HEPA;
2. Continue to identify, assess and monitor potential risk areas when developing sourcing strategies for major procurement projects, to mitigate the risk of slavery and human traffic occurring;
3. Request bidders self-certify their compliance with the Act through the tender process;
4. Periodically review the Modern Slavery Policy to ensure it remains up to date;
5. Monitor ongoing training requirements and improve awareness.
6. Introduce a Supplier Code of Conduct.

Signed by:



Tim Blackman
Vice Chancellor