

Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Statement 2023

Introduction

The following statement is published in accordance with section 54(1) part 6 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015. It is intended to communicate the activities undertaken during the financial year ended 31 July 2023, and the objectives for the financial year ending 31 July 2024 in our continued efforts to ensure that slavery and human trafficking is not taking place in our supply chain.

Modern slavery is a crime and a violation of fundamental human rights. It takes various forms, such as slavery, servitude, forced and compulsory labour and human trafficking, all of which have in common the deprivation of a person's liberty by another to exploit them for personal or commercial gain.

Organisational structure

Birkbeck is a unique institution providing access to degree education for working Londoners through the provision of teaching in the evening. Consequently, most of our students are mature and have jobs, caring or other responsibilities during the day. The fact that we are different from most higher education providers in the UK (who mostly teach young undergraduates during the day) often means that Government policy and other external factors have a different, and often unexpected, influence on Birkbeck. Based in the heart of Bloomsbury, we are a leading research university and a vibrant learning community offering over 200 undergraduate and postgraduate programs. Academic activities were previously organised into five schools, in August 2023 academic activities were restructured into three faculties. The faculties are subdivided into Schools and are supported by various central services.

Founded in 1823 by the philanthropist Dr George Birkbeck, the university is a body incorporated by Royal Charter and an exempt charity under the terms of the Charities Act 2011. Under the Charities Act, universities are overseen by the Office for Students as principal regulator with the responsibility for ensuring that universities fulfil their obligations under Charity Law.

During the year the university reported annual turnover of £110 million, other operating expenditure (including agency and contract staff costs but excluding staff costs) of £31 million and employed 1129 full time equivalent staff.

Our mission

The principal aims of Birkbeck are to:

- provide flexible and part-time higher education courses which meet the changing educational, cultural, personal and career needs of students of all ages: in particular, those who live or work in the London region

- enable mature students from diverse social and educational backgrounds to participate in our courses
- make available the results of research, and the expertise acquired, through teaching, publication, partnerships with other organisations and the promotion of civic and public debate.
- maintain and develop excellence in research and provide the highest quality research training in all our subject areas.

Our commitment

Our workplace policies and procedures demonstrate our commitment to acting ethically and with integrity in all our business relationships. We continue to implement and enforce effective systems and controls and use all reasonable endeavours to ensure that slavery and human trafficking are not taking place in our supply chain.

A range of policies and procedures set out our commitment to workplace rights and ensure that our employees are treated fairly with dignity and respect. These policies, which are reviewed regularly, include, but are not limited to:

- [Equality and Diversity](#) - sets out the University's legal obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and the various ways in which we meet our duties
- [Gender pay gap](#) - looks at pay disparity across the organisation
- [Dignity at Work and Study](#) - supports our provision of an inclusive working and learning environment
- [Disciplinary and dismissal procedure](#) – encourages staff to improve and maintain the required level of conduct
- [Public Interest Disclosure \(“Whistleblowing”\)](#) - enables staff to report improper conduct or unethical behaviour
- [Anti-Bribery and Corruption Policy](#) - sets out our responsibilities and position on bribery and corruption.

Our Human Resources department provide advice to staff and ensure our people policies and procedures, including those related to recruitment of staff, are consistently applied across the institution.

We use the London single pay spine structure and are accredited as a London Living Wage employer (since 2015). We are committed to paying staff at least the London Living Wage.

To identify possible inconsistencies between policy and practice we undertake institution-wide staff surveys. These include questions about the experiences of staff in relation to instances of bullying/harassment/discrimination and the ability to manage work-life issues as employees of the College. The results are compared against past surveys and sector benchmarks. Action plans are developed to make improvements where required. The survey results, analysis and actions are included in the institutional Athena SWAN submission.

Staff are expected to uphold the seven principles of behaviour on Standards in Public Life ('Nolan Principles') within all day-to-day activities. This includes our clear commitment to a zero-tolerance approach to modern slavery.

Specialist training is undertaken by certain staff whose primary job function is procurement. Staff are either qualified Members of the Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply (MCIPS) or will be actively working towards the qualification. Additional training is available for these staff to widen skills and keep their knowledge current.

Our supply chains

We have been working for several years to understand our suppliers and the supply chain risks. Given the size of our supply chain we recognise that embedded somewhere within parts of our extended supply chains some form of human exploitation could be present. This fact strengthens our commitment to work with our suppliers to take steps to prevent such abuses from happening.

As a complex business we have a large and diverse supply base to enable us to carry out our wide range of academic and campus support operations. During 2022-23 we had 2761 active suppliers on our finance system. This supplier list is not static and new suppliers are on-boarded throughout the year.

Our expectations from our supply chain are made clear within our tender documentation, and in our ongoing engagement with our suppliers. Our due diligence processes enable us to manage our suppliers and their products to ensure we contract with suitable and responsible suppliers. The bulk of our spending is with a cohort of formally contracted suppliers. Each of these is appointed either directly by us or through an eligible public sector framework agreement. Our evaluation of suppliers considers the capability and capacity of organisations to supply what we require and includes assessment of, amongst other things, their supply chain practices and adherence to modern slavery legislation.

We are members of a number of purchasing consortia, the main being the London Universities Purchasing Consortium (LUPC). These memberships give us access to countrywide frameworks and consortia negotiated contracts, which we use where appropriate.

The LUPC is committed to supporting international human rights standards, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) and the UK Government's National Action Plan to implement the UNGPs. Through our LUPC membership we are an associate member of Electronics Watch (EW), a membership body which works to achieve respect for labour rights in the global electronics industry through socially responsible public purchasing in Europe. Sector wide collaboration reinforces the positive behaviours regarding social, ethical, economic and environmental practices expected from our suppliers.

In 2022 7% of our general operating expenditure was through LUPC framework agreements. The spend is categorised by LUPC as follows:

- Estates 14% - high risk

- Professional Services 13% - high risk
- Audio Visual 5% - high risk
- Travel 3% - high risk
- Library 22% - low risk
- Laboratory 5% - high risk
- ICT 38% - high risk

Suppliers that are part of a framework agreement undergo intensive due diligence during the tender selection process where it is mandatory to provide details of their modern-day slavery statement. LUPC reviews all updated statements for approved framework suppliers annually.

Our progress

During the year we continued our work on supply chain mapping to better understand risk areas. We also reviewed our procurement policies and procedures to ensure any further due diligence considerations identified as a result of the work on the supply chain mapping is incorporated. We raised awareness of modern slavery amongst staff by encouraging those involved in sourcing and tendering activities to complete the British Universities Finance Directors Group (BUFDG) e-learning courses on a Guide to Modern Slavery and Protecting Human Rights in the Supply Chain. In addition:

- we published a post in the internal newsletter with the aim of raising awareness of modern slavery across the University community. The post included a link to the BUFDG e-learning course for staff to learn more about the subject. The post included information about the work of the Modern Slavery group and the University's objectives.
- the Government Modern Slavery Assessment Tool (MSAT) was shared with some of our contracted suppliers who were already engaged and trialing the tool. The suppliers all provided appropriate feedback on the capabilities and characteristics of the tool.

Our plans for the future

Over the coming year we will continue to monitor and map our supply chains and apply all due diligence in a spirit of openness and transparency with our supplier partners to reduce any risk of modern slavery and human trafficking.

We will continue to ensure our modern slavery statement is prominently displayed on our website along with previous statements.

Our key objectives for the coming year will be to:

- engage with suppliers with a turnover of less than £36m who do not publish their own statements and encourage them to demonstrate their commitment to the Advanced Procurement for Universities and Colleges (APUC) and LUPC Supply Chain Code of conduct. Further information about the chain of conduct can be found on the LUPCs website.
- continue to review of our due diligence processes to include supplier pre-selection, evaluation of tender submissions and introducing standards for monitoring due diligence through ongoing contract management.

- continue raising awareness of the BUFDG e-Learning module available and encourage wider University staff involved in purchasing and procurement to understand our obligations under the Modern Slavery Act. Deans and Directors will encourage staff within their areas to complete the module and completion rate will be reported in the next statement.
- keep under review our contractual and tender documentation to ensure ongoing compliance with the Modern Slavery Act 2015 and encourage suppliers and stakeholders work with us in tackling modern slavery.
- embed the use of LUPC PROC HE codes in our new supplier registration processes to identify if further due diligence is required. The codes, which are an initiative of the Responsible Procurement Group of the Higher Education Procurement Association (HEPA), identify suppliers trading commodities where potential for modern slavery and human trafficking is a higher risk.

Approved by

Board of Governors

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'F. G.' followed by a long, sweeping diagonal stroke.

Chair of Governors

For and on behalf of Birkbeck, University of London

November 2023