

Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Statement 2024

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 2024, and the objectives for the financial year ending 31 July 2025 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 was founded as the London Mechanics Institute in 1823 by the philanthropist Dr George Birkbeck with the mission of providing access to education to anyone with the ability and drive to succeed, regardless of circumstance or background. Today, Birkbeck University has one of the most diverse student bodies of any university in the country and is proud of the value that this brings to the learning community.

For many years Birkbeck has uniquely provided 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. As Birkbeck is different from most higher education providers in the UK (who mostly teach young undergraduates during the day) government policy and other external factors often have a different, and unexpected, effect on Birkbeck.

Birkbeck introduced daytime teaching in September 2024 and now offers students the choice of studying in the daytime or evening on a selection of undergraduate and postgraduate courses. The University provides flexible learning (on campus and online) to enable students to fulfil their ambitions without putting life on hold.

Based in the heart of Bloomsbury, the University is a world-class research and teaching institution offering over 200 undergraduate and postgraduate programs, with research known for being cross-disciplinary, innovative and socially and politically engaged. 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.

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 £102 million, other operating

expenditure (including agency and contract staff costs but excluding staff costs) of £32 million and employed 1027 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 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 provides advice to staff and ensures 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 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 their skills and keep their knowledge current.

Our supply chains

Given the size and complexity 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 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 2023/24 there were 2980 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 in 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 consortiums, the main one being the London Universities Purchasing Consortium (LUPC). These memberships give us access to countrywide UKUPC 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 membership with the LUPC 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.

We use 30 UKUPC framework agreements. Our spend through these frameworks is as follows:

- Information and Communication Technology 39%
- Library 19%
- Professional services 15%
- Audio Visual 8%
- Estates 6%
- Travel 6%
- Laboratory 6%
- Office supplies and equipment 1%

The LUPC takes several actions to manage risks, depending on the risk level identified. It believes in long-term engagement with its framework suppliers on the issues of modern slavery and human trafficking, and wider human and labour rights in global supply chains. The consortium integrates requirements on these topics into the procurement life cycle, from initial evaluation via the Supplier Questionnaire (SQ), to tender drafting and evaluation, and throughout contract management.

Our progress

During the year we began performance reviews with some of our suppliers that have annual contract management reporting obligations and a commitment to eradicating modern slavery from their supply chains. We will continue to carry out these reviews in the coming year.

The LUPC issued PROC HE codes to all members to assist in determining the risk status for new suppliers. We applied these codes to our system, the result being that new suppliers in 2023/24 had mostly a low to moderate risk status. The suppliers that are showing to be higher risk will be engaged with during the coming year.

As our supply chain comprises more suppliers below the £36 million turnover modern slavery reporting threshold we will continue engaging with them to encourage them to remain committed to the Advanced Procurement for Universities and Colleges (APUC) and LUPC Supply Chain Code of conduct to ensure that their supply chain risks are mitigated. Where possible we will support smaller suppliers that require assistance with answering the questionnaire.

The LUPC has recently partnered with Unseen, a leading UK charity committed to stamping out slavery for good. Unseen issues quarterly statistical reports of modern slavery cases in the United Kingdom to LUPC members and provides a range of services to support businesses. We have undertaken some initial research on Unseen and plan to continue this in the coming year.

Our plans for the future

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

Our objectives for the coming year will be to:

- raise awareness of the BUFDG e-Learning module on a guide to modern slavery by involving wider University staff who engage in purchasing and procurement so they better understand our obligations under the Modern Slavery Act.
- complete training on protecting human rights in the supply chain developed by APUC and the University of Greenwich and extend this more widely to University staff that are involved in procurement activity.
- better understand our catering supply chain, engaged mainly through the TUCO framework, with a view to extending the use of Fairtrade suppliers.
- review our contractor induction process for estates and facilities related suppliers to incorporate information on the process of reporting concerns of modern slavery.
- update the contractual terms for lower value service contracts to include suitable terms addressing modern slavery and human trafficking.
- consider advertising a link to Unseen on our website, an anti-slavery charity running a Modern Slavery Helpline that has recently partnered with the LUPC. Unseen provides a way of confidentially and independently reporting exploitation.
- engage the suppliers identified as high-risk through the HE procurement codes and work with them to mitigate the risk of modern slavery in their supply chain.
- consider using the suite of procurement templates provided by the LUPC comprising selection questionnaires, invitation to tender and contract documentation to further strengthen our due diligence processes. The documentation will also be appropriate for use to comply with the requirements of the new procurement act 2023 which due to come into effect in February 2025.
- review recommendations made in the Government Procurement Policy Note 02/23, coming into effect in 2025, and how these can be incorporated into our existing processes.

Approved by

Board of Governors



Chair of Governors

For and on behalf of Birkbeck Universi

11 December 2024