Advanced Procurement for Universities and Colleges (APUC)

We talk to Angus Warren, Chief Executive of APUC, the procurement centre of expertise for Scotland's universities and colleges. He tells us about being one of Electronics Watch's founding affiliates; their achievements since then, and the value of collective influence.

Why did APUC decide to become a founding affiliate of Electronics Watch?

For APUC, becoming involved with Electronics Watch was a natural extension of our commitment to responsible procurement. Electronics supply chains are complex and global, and we recognised early on that individual public buyers could not meaningfully address labour and human rights risks on their own. What attracted us was the opportunity to work collectively, internationally, combining the purchasing influence of public bodies with independent insight from workers and civil society organisations in production regions. That fitted closely with APUC's collaborative model and our ambition to make responsible procurement deliverable, rather than simply a statement of intent. We are proud to support Electronics Watch from its early days.



Angus Warren, Chief Executive of APUC

What makes Electronics Watch different from other responsible procurement tools/resources available?

For us, the real difference is that Electronics Watch goes well beyond policies, questionnaires, and supplier self-reporting. APUC uses different tools for different purposes. Electronics Watch complements other responsible procurement tools and approaches by providing independent on-the-ground monitoring insight into working conditions within electronics supply chains. This is important because supplier disclosure and self-reporting do not always provide a complete picture of conditions further down complex supply chains. Electronics Watch also brings public buyers together to learn from one another and engage the market collectively.

That combination of worker voice, independent monitoring, practical procurement tools and collective buyer influence is what makes Electronics Watch particularly powerful for us at APUC.

What are the biggest lessons you and your colleagues have learned so far? What are the biggest challenges that you face or have faced?

Perhaps the biggest lesson has been that no single tool, questionnaire, or organisation can solve complex supply chain problems alone. Supplier disclosure is important, but information provided by suppliers does not always give public buyers the complete picture. Independent monitoring and worker voice provide another crucial perspective, while collaboration between buyers gives us greater opportunity to influence behaviour than acting individually. We have learned to view responsible procurement as a journey of continuous improvement, it is about asking better questions, improving transparency, engaging constructively with suppliers, following up where concerns arise and being willing to learn together. Progress is rarely instant, but sustained collaboration can lead to meaningful change.

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What progress or achievements are you most proud of at APUC?

We were very pleased to be able to play a key role in brand influencing in a high-profile case a few years ago which resulted in over 10,000 people being freed from bonded labour and receiving compensation, which very clearly demonstrates the immense value that Electronics Watch and public buyer collaboration brings.

We are also particularly proud that what began with a small number of committed organisations developed into an international, sector-wide movement. APUC, the University of Edinburgh and the University of Aberdeen were founding members of Electronics Watch. In 2017, APUC then became its first full procurement consortium affiliation, enabling all 44 of APUC's higher and further education institutions at the time to become consortium affiliates. That collaborative approach remains something we are very proud of. It means institutions do not have to tackle complex global supply chain issues individually.

More broadly, we are proud that human rights and supply chain transparency have become increasingly integrated into our procurement approach, alongside tools such as our Sustain Supply Chain Code of Conduct, commodity risk assessment and wider supplier due diligence through the Responsible Procurement Section 1 tool.

How does being an affiliate of Electronics Watch support your responsible procurement work? How have your organisation and practices evolved since affiliating to Electronics Watch?

The most important evolution for us has been towards a more connected model of risk identification, disclosure, due diligence, independent monitoring and contract management. Electronics Watch does not replace our other tools. It strengthens them by adding specialist expertise and worker-driven insight.

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Affiliation has also reinforced the importance of collaboration. Whether between Scottish institutions, other public buyers, suppliers or civil society organisations internationally, we achieve far more by sharing knowledge and using our collective influence than we could working independently.



Angus Warren (far left) with members of the APUC team at the 2024 Electronics Watch conference in Brussels, Belgium

As one of Electronics Watch's founding affiliates, how have you seen the organisation develop and evolve over the past decade?

It has been fantastic to see Electronics Watch develop from an ambitious idea into an established international network connecting public procurement with workers and civil society in electronics production regions. From an APUC perspective, one of the most encouraging developments has been its growing reach.

We have also seen the resources available to buyers develop significantly. Alongside worker-driven monitoring, affiliates now have access to practical contract conditions, disclosure tools, contractor guidance, remediation resources, and tools supporting organisations to assess and develop their human rights due diligence maturity. What is particularly positive is that the core principle has remained consistent: public buyers working collaboratively, informed by workers' experiences, to use procurement as a lever for better working conditions.

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