

# North Western Universities Purchasing Consortium (NWUPC )

NWUPC is a not-for-profit organisation owned by the 25 universities in the north west of England which are its full members. Here, Head of Strategic Procurement Sarah Dye talks about the challenges of transparency in complex supply chains, the importance of a collective voice, and engaging with suppliers.



Sarah Dye, Head of Strategic Procurement

## How does affiliation to Electronics watch support your responsible procurement work?

We are a member-owned organisation that operates within a wider partnership of UK University Purchasing Consortia (UKUPC) and in conjunction with other sector bodies in the UK. Collaboration is central to our mission to drive value through responsible procurement for our members and our stakeholders. Electronics Watch affiliation expands this network, giving us greater collective leverage to globally press for systemic change in our ICT supply chain. Affiliation offers us greater transparency about where our electronics equipment is made and the rights and conditions of electronics workers. It also offers us a network of peers and experts, learning together to implement the best responsible procurement practices.

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

The use of worker-led monitoring sets Electronics Watch apart from other tools that we deploy, many of which focus on verifying information provided directly from, or in collaboration with, our suppliers. Independent, local, continuous monitoring of such complex international supply chains offers a more credible picture of risks and violations of our sector code of conduct. In backing up this insight with the above-mentioned wider network and educational resources, Electronics Watch affiliation equips us with the knowledge and tools to meaningfully respond to concerns through a collective voice, supporting our strategic commitment to ensure supplier compliance with our code.

## What are the biggest lessons you and your colleagues have learned so far?

You cannot be a passive affiliate to Electronics Watch if you want to drive change. The model of collective pressure requires all affiliates to push consistent and continuous messages to the electronics sector. But this can be undermined by a shortage of time and resources. Gaining transparency within our supply chains is really challenging, made harder by the fact that we typically have an indirect relationship with OEMs.

Our contracts are often with resellers, who may support our commitments but can face many of the same challenges around resources and leverage as public procurers. The work that Electronics Watch has done in coordinating a dialogue between public authorities and resellers has been positive in facilitating the participation of as many parties as possible in improving transparency.

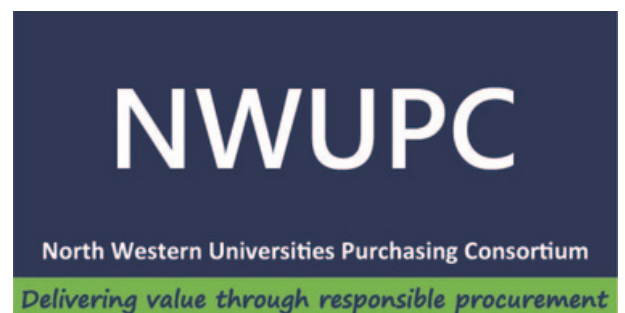
## What impact has your affiliation had?

Our affiliation has given us the confidence and resources to integrate due diligence clauses into relevant framework agreements. The focus now is on ensuring that this good work carries through into contract management to establish improved transparency for the facilities that produce the products bought through our agreements. A big part of this will be working with Electronics Watch to simplify the collection and sharing of product data from within our membership to ensure as much purchase data is available as possible, in a streamlined way that maximises disclosure. We will continue to support the activities of the relevant working groups to engage with suppliers who are reluctant to meet the levels of transparency that we expect. We are proud to be involved in the collective effort protect the rights of workers.

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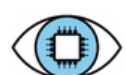
## How does being an affiliate of Electronics Watch support your responsible procurement work?

As discussed, Electronics Watch membership offers us valuable expertise in identifying and mitigating labour risks in our ICT supply chain, along with mechanisms through which we can challenge suppliers and push for effective remediation. This is supported both through the expertise of Electronics Watch and the active network of like-minded public authorities from whom we can learn.



## How have your practices evolved since affiliating to Electronics Watch?

One way that our practices have evolved is in raising our expectations for more transparent supply chains and greater insight into human rights risks across other procurement categories. As part of our supplier due diligence, we increasingly request more detailed information to support supply chain mapping, for example in our textiles supply chain we require disclosure down to producer.



Electronics Watch affiliation has supported this through the Knowledge Building Series which has helped upskill across some high volume, high cost categories beyond electronics. This series was opened up to our members so that the learning can be applied across the sector. An ongoing challenge, however, is the absence of worker-led monitoring mechanisms across all of these categories.

#### **What's next on your responsible public procurement journey?**

The UK university purchasing consortia have a shared responsible procurement strategy to maximise effectiveness. This focuses on our own services and on supporting our members across several strategic themes, including climate and ecological emergency and social value. A key part of this is understanding and assessing risks and performance within our supply chains. We are committed to undertaking an appropriate level of assessment based on supplier risk and would like to identify partners like Electronics Watch for other high risk categories. We are also focused on supplier development and training. We have majority micro small and medium enterprise (MSME) supply chains and seek to bring suppliers along with us on our responsible procurement journey.

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