

Better prices, ethically traded

Darran Whatley tells Linked about a special project he's leading to tailor the existing lab consumables agreement for LUPC members

What's new about this framework?

Two things, actually. The first is to provide a transparent and easy-to-compare pricing that goes beyond the basic price list for lab equipment. The second is ethical trading practice. Let's talk about the pricing first.

The existing Inter-Regional Laboratory Framework Agreement for Consumables, led by SUPC, is based upon a list of frequently bought items by member institutions across the UK. When I analysed the lab materials our members buy and compared this to the products covered in the core list, I found few products matched.

This means LUPC members who call-off from this agreement need better and more transparent pricing for the products they buy not covered by the core list. This is exactly what I'm working to deliver by putting together a special LUPC tier for this framework. This tier will be tailored to the buying habits of the LUPC membership, for their exclusive use.

As we all know, there's more to buying well than getting a good price. It's about balancing quality, sustainability and good value. The original tender process looked carefully at suppliers' sustainability and carbon management policies, environmental impact, travel plans and even their community investment programmes; but the only question relating to ethical trading was whether they uphold the minimum standards set out by the International Labour Organisation.¹

Members using the agreement want to understand how suppliers on the framework approach their ethical trading responsibilities. To facilitate this, I've used the nine elements of the Ethical Trading Initiative Base Code to help me draw out information on how each supplier on the framework monitors, reports and audits their supply chain so we can give guidance on whether they meet recognised ethical trading standards.²



Why is it important?

Stakeholder groups within LUPC members, want their institution to think differently about who they buy products and services from and on what basis. These stakeholders often include: students, funding organisations, researchers and some of their own corporate services.

The most powerful tool for persuading suppliers to take ethical trade seriously, is to set out the business benefits as well as the moral imperative. By driving the ethical agenda, larger public companies attract investment as ethically motivated investors grow in number.

For many small businesses, the primary motivation for sourcing ethically is to appeal to the increasing number of 'conscientious consumers'. It enables them to set themselves apart from the competition by marketing themselves as 'ethical' and their products as 'fairly traded'.

Who's involved?

Across the 11 lots, there are 16 suppliers of lab consumables. I invited each of them to participate in this project, and the following companies responded:

- Alpha Labs
- Arco
- Dutscher
- Fisher Scientific
- Greiner

- Sarstedt
- Scientific Laboratory Suppliers
- Smith Scientific
- Starlabs
- VWR

What have they signed up to?

They have provided satisfactory non-core product contract prices, agreed to adopt the Ethical Trading Initiative Base Code and have provided details of monitoring, reporting and auditing systems of these base codes across their entire supply chain. In turn, we've agreed to promote these suppliers to our members.

What does this mean for members using the agreement?

It has several advantages:

1. It sets out contract pricing for non-core products;
2. Enables price comparison against price lists supplied via their own e-procurement systems;
3. Identifies framework suppliers who have adopted the Ethical Trading Initiative Base Code: <http://www.ethicaltrade.org/eti-base-code>;
4. Outlines how each of the above will monitor, report and audit suppliers across its entire supply chain.

What do we want members to do?

They should review the prices I secured for the items they buy which hadn't previously been included in the core list and spread the word about them to their lab buyers.

They should also remember to tell them about how the 10 suppliers I named earlier are adhering to Ethical Trading Initiative's base code.

For more information, see: www.lupc.ac.uk/list-of-agreements.html?AgreementId=2166

1. The International Labour Organization (ILO) is devoted to promoting social justice and internationally recognized human and labour rights. It aims to: promote rights at work, encourage decent employment opportunities, enhance social protection and strengthen dialogue on work-related issues. For more information, see: www.ilo.org

2. To read the Ethical Trading Initiative Base Code, visit: www.ethicaltrade.org/eti-base-code