

UKUPC provides urgent resources for NHS

The UK Universities Purchasing Consortia (UKUPC), their members and supply chains are providing much needed personal protective equipment (PPE) and purchasing expertise to the NHS, Government and other bodies during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A national higher education & further education sector Covid-19 response group including UKUPC, Crescent Purchasing Consortium (CPC), British Universities Finance Directors Group (BUFDG), the Higher Education Procurement Association (HEPA), and the Association of University Directors of Estates (AUDE) has been set up to respond to urgent requests in support of NHS procurement. UKUPC are also working with Universities UK, the representative organisation for the UK's universities, to ensure requests to the sector are directed to the most appropriate channels.

Equipment required so far has included face masks, alcohol hand sanitiser, personal eye protection, respirators and surgical theatre gowns, as well as disposable aprons and gloves.

The response to the initial request for assistance from UKUPC members has been immense, with over 150 offers of PPE and equipment being received. These were either then directed to the UK government teams or to local NHS Trusts, as appropriate, with the vast majority being donated. UKUPC have also co-ordinated a call out for volunteer staff to help with procurement. The HE and FE sector has really stepped up, with more than 20 buyers responding within 24 hours. A team of 13 buyers, mostly with PPE/NHS procurement experience, has now started working with the UK Government's PPE teams.

In an effort to ensure supplies and support are provided quickly, BUFDG has sent out a request to finance directors for one key contact from each of its member institutions, to be the primary liaison with consortia and government. UKUPC is actively working with contacts from the Cabinet Office and regional PBOs (Public Benefit Organisations) to streamline requirements and get help to where it is most needed.

London Universities Purchasing Consortium's director, Don Bowman, who is leading the coordinated national effort on behalf of UKUPC in England, says: "The response from the sector is something to be proud of, with collaborative procurement at the heart of what UKUPC stands for."

In Scotland, UKUPC member, APUC, is working as part of a Scottish cross-sector coordinated programme (NHS National Procurement, the Scottish Government and Scotland Excel for local authorities). Head of Estates Category, Andy Anderson, has been coordinating the sector's supply chain/stockholding response between HE/FE institutions and other sectors. This includes contacting all institutions to confirm operational status, ability to receive deliveries and confirming ongoing essential requirement for PPE and hygiene products.

APUC continues to liaise with all institutions to review existing volumes of these products that may be available for re-prioritisation, most likely to NHS and Social Care Services and is feeding back to the central register, held by NHS Scotland for action as appropriate.

Angus Warren, APUC's chief executive says: "This work is ongoing and APUC aims to keep all these dialogue channels open and current for as long as needed, to provide maximum support both to our institutions and to health and other key services at this challenging time."

The Higher Education Purchasing Consortium Wales (HEPCW) is engaging with the National Procurement Service (NPS) in Wales to help co-ordinate the response to the pandemic. Any requests from Welsh NHS Health Boards and the Cabinet Office are passed on to HEPCW's members to establish if they can assist.

UKUPC (UK Universities Purchasing Consortia) is the evolved convergence of eight UK Consortia; APUC, HEPCW, LUPC, NEUPC, NWUPC, SUPC, TEC and TUCO who created a formal partnership to support collaborative procurement within Higher Education.

UKUPC works together to share knowledge and best practice, to support each other and the wider procurement community.

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