

Promoting equality through sustainable procurement

Recently, University of Edinburgh staff, including Andy Kordiak and Peter Hayakawa from the University Procurement Office, participated in intensive trainings and discussions on ways to promote equality through public procurement for those who share protected characteristics (including age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation). UK public bodies like the University of Edinburgh collectively spend billions of pounds annually through purchasing with third party suppliers, and thus have a lot of potential influence with industry to promote equality and better working conditions. These half-day sessions led by the Equalities and Humans Rights Commission (EHRC) were aimed at partners of Scotland's City Region Deals, a set of agreements between Scottish Government, the UK Government and local governments and other public partners to strategically improve regional economies. The University of Edinburgh is key partner of the Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region Deal (ESESCRD) leading its Data Driven Innovation Programme; through this the region's councils and higher education institutions have committed to deliver inclusive growth, combining economic growth with greater equality and opportunities for all, through a series of major investments. One big challenge is to leverage the major pipeline of procurement spend to achieve a collaborative, common approach to promoting inclusion and equality in supply chains.

The training was wide-ranging, but EHRC highlighted the often overlooked duties in the 2010 UK Equality Act to take positive action to promote equality in organisational activity, rather than the better-known duties to avoid discriminatory

behaviour. EHRC and attendees discussed allowable ways to take positive actions to promote equality, for instance, gender parity in industries like construction or health and social care. The University has worked over the last years with partners, in particular the University's Staff Pride Network, to incorporate equality in its procurement, for instance highlighting equality duties in supplier documentation and requiring information and positive action from suppliers, but we will look forward working more closely with regional partners and organisations like EHRC, with the aim to increase the impact of measures like these. As a first step after the training, the University Procurement Office supplemented the Scottish Government Equality in Procurement measures that we currently refer to in our sustainable procurement process with EHRC's guidance on Responsible Procurement of Cleaning Services for this high risk area.