



BUY RIGHT

**GUIDE FOR
SABBATICAL OFFICERS**

people & planet

student action on world poverty and the environment

INTRODUCTION

So you've got elected as a student representative. Well done! Now you have the power to implement meaningful change, not just to how your union works, but also to your university.

You'll already know that the way your union and university buy things - clothing, electronics, food and much more - affects the people who make those things. The products your university and student union buy are made across the world, often in countries like Bangladesh, Morocco or China.

You probably also already know that, sadly, workers in these countries often have their basic human rights violated. There is a constant stream of news stories about child labour, violent repression of attempts to unionise, wages that aren't enough to live on, and health-damaging working conditions, and these stories only scratch the surface. Workers in factories where human rights are not respected also routinely suffer sexual harassment and forced abortions, forced overtime, humiliating and unrealistic restrictions on toilet breaks, and race and sex discrimination.

What you might not know is that **you're in a position where you can make a big difference to workers in these countries**. Whether your university's products are produced in sweatshops, or in good, safe conditions where workers are fairly paid is something that you have some choice over. After all, it's students' fees that are being spent.

You can use your influence to ensure that some of the poorest people in the world have their basic human rights respected by their employers, by changing the way your university and union purchase their goods. Increasingly students and sabbs like you across the country are doing just that. This guide shows you how. With human rights, it's your university, your choice.

THIS GUIDE WILL

- Explain how the buying practices of your university affect people across the world.
- Show how that money can be spent in a way that gives a fair deal to the people that make things for universities, including Fairtrade and beyond.
- Show you how to use your position as a Sabbatical Officer (or other representative of students) to make these changes.
- Tell you who else is working on these issues, and where to get help, support and guidance.

WHAT EXACTLY ARE HUMAN RIGHTS?

166 countries are parties to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which declared that all people have the same basic rights, including the rights to life, to health, to freedom from slavery and freedom to associate with anyone they wished.

The International Labour Organization has clarified what basic rights all employees have, including freedom from forced labour and the freedom to form a union. These rights help to ensure that workers are fairly treated.

For more info see the British Institute for Human Rights website - bihr.org.uk

And the International Labour Organization website - ilo.org

HOW THE BUYING PRACTICES OF YOUR UNIVERSITY AFFECT PEOPLE ACROSS THE WORLD

As sabbatical officer you can influence the purchasing decisions of your university and students unions

Universities and student unions spend £8 billion per year buying products. Your university and SU is worth around 1% of this total – on average around £80 million. The effect you can have on the lives of thousands of people in the global south is huge.

The companies your university buys from employ people in the Global South. These employees are often working in a context of weak or weakly enforced regulation, low adherence to basic labour and other human rights, and low environmental standards

As your university and SU buy from these companies, you can tell them that you expect to see high standards of ethics and human rights adherence in their supply chains, and demand to see proof. If an organisation has large contracts, as your union and university will, with companies like Coke, Fruit of the Loom, Nestle, Eon and others, then it has 'economic leverage'. What this means is 'the purchaser pays, so the purchaser has the power'. This means it can insist on high standards of human rights, and put this requirement in contracts with the companies. If they don't stop violating their employees' rights, then you can take your union or university money to someone that will.

HOW TO SPEND UNIVERSITY AND UNION MONEY TO GIVE A FAIR DEAL TO WORKERS IN YOUR SUPPLY CHAINS

There are three simple ways you can transform the lives of workers in your union's or university's supply chain:

1) FAIRTRADE

Most unions and universities, thanks to the efforts of students and staff, now have Fairtrade Status, which covers some of the food, drink and clothing your union or university uses. It means that your union or university makes a commitment to selling Fairtrade products and using them for internal meetings too.

If a product has the FAIRTRADE Mark on it, the farmers that produced it are paid a fair price, plus a 'Fairtrade premium', which is invested in community development, like schools, roads and hospitals.

If your union shop is selling products that could be Fairtrade, switching them to Fairtrade can make a concrete difference to poor producers in the Global South. Most unions sell some Fairtrade food and drink, but could sell more. Many do not use Fairtrade cotton in their clothes and staff uniforms. Switching to Fairtrade cotton is a big step forward for fair treatment of farmers in this very exploitative industry. Students unions, and representatives of students like you are able to push their universities to do this. **To find out how see page 8 below.**

For more information see - fairtrade.org.uk

2) THE WORKER RIGHTS CONSORTIUM

One of the worst union and university supply chains is garments. Your union probably sells hoodies and other student clothes. The union and university buy many other garments, like staff uniforms, course-wear for arts and sciences, and even bedding for halls.

- Clothing production is one of the most notorious of sweatshop exploiting industries.
- Factories that pay poverty wages, have dangerous working conditions and long hours, and often employ children are endemic.
- 80% of workers in the garment industry are women, and they are often subject to human rights violations like forced labour, physical abuse, enforced abortions and denial of the right to join a union.

That is why campaigns by People & Planet, NUS, TUC War on Want, ActionAid, Labour behind the Label, Oxfam and others have so often focussed on the garment industry.

Now help is at hand. US students have created a monitoring organisation, overseen by students, university staff and labour rights experts, to monitor workers conditions, investigate for university purchasers, and support workers in claiming their basic rights.

The organisation is called the Worker Rights Consortium (WRC). 193 universities across Canada and the US have affiliated to it and now unions and universities across the UK are looking at affiliating in order to combat sweatshop abuses in their supply chains. **You could be one of the first to get your university and union to affiliate.**

HOW DOES THE WRC WORK?

- The WRC uses an international network of labour rights monitors to support garment workers in university supply chains and provides an early warning system for universities about human rights abuses that go on.

- When your union and university join, your suppliers have to disclose the locations of all their factories, and agree to respect their workers' human rights. If there are worker complaints then the WRC investigates them, and universities and unions can use this evidence to force the supplier to end the abuses. This gives the people who make our garments a voice in their own treatment, and together you and they can defend their rights.

- It costs money to monitor supply chains, and so the WRC asks unions and universities to pay £1000 fees per year between them, or £500 each if they affiliate separately. (Unless your university collects royalties from a licensing program, in which case the fee is 1% of the previous year's gross licensing revenue, and only if it's over £100,000.) This fee is a very tiny amount of a university or union budget.

- To affiliate you can contact Jim Cranshaw from People & Planet, their partner in the UK, buyright@peopleandplanet.org. See peopleandplanet.org/wrc and workersrights.org/ for more details.

PROMOTING POVERTY AWARE PROCUREMENT ON CAMPUS

Promoting Poverty Aware Procurement on Campus (PPAPC) is an exciting project, funded by the Department for International Development (DfID), which aims to use university purchasing to reduce poverty and human rights abuses, and to promote development in the Global South.

It has produced a range of materials that you can use to transform student union purchasing into pro-poor purchasing and persuade university heads of purchasing to do likewise. These include:

14 Commodity Information Sheets containing information on how you can procure everything from furniture to steel, electronics, food, banking and even construction in a way that helps to aid sustainable development, and protects the human rights of workers in university supply chains.

eauc.org.uk/commodity_information_sheets

Short snappy videos showing the value of pro-poor purchasing.

eauc.org.uk/poverty_aware_procurement_communications

A report explaining the technicalities of incorporating poverty and human rights concerns into university purchasing

eauc.org.uk/poverty_aware_reports

HOW TO USE YOUR POSITION AS A SABBATICAL OFFICER TO MAKE THESE CHANGES

As a sabbatical officer you are an elected representative of students. Students have always stood up for the rights of people in the global south, and usually want their elected representatives to do so too.

You can affect the purchasing policies of your university and student union in many ways.

Here are some questions you can ask your university:

Do you believe that as a purchaser, you have a responsibility to do everything within your power to prevent human rights abuses in your supply chains?

Do you have a policy in place to ensure that the human rights of workers in your supply chains are respected?

Garment workers are subject to human rights violations like forced labour, physical abuse, enforced abortions and denial of the right to join a union. What are you doing for the people that make garments for us?

Here are some solutions you could offer:

The university (or union) could join the Worker Rights Consortium, who would then monitor their garment supply chains and produce an investigation for the university if any workers allege human rights violations.

The university could write a policy committing itself to continuous reductions of human rights violations throughout its supply chains.

The university could put human rights in supply chains on to their sustainability or Fairtrade steering group agendas permanently.

The university could implement the Promoting Poverty Aware Procurement on Campus information sheets, transforming the way they buy things.

UNIVERSITIES

Governing committees

As a sabbatical officer you may sit on university governing councils, oversight committees, senate committees and other policy-making bodies (e.g. Finance Committees), as students have to have a voice in executive decisions about university policy. This includes procurement policy. You can use your position to ask questions, or to make the concrete proposals above.

Steering groups

As a sabb you, or a fellow sabb, often have membership on steering groups such as Sustainability Steering Groups, Fairtrade Steering Groups and environmental steering groups. You could ask for human rights in supply chains to be a 'permanent agenda item', or for there to be a 'permanent working group' set up within the steering group. That way the university will address the problems even after you've left your position.

Lobbying

Don't underestimate your ability to win hearts and minds at informal or formal events that you're invited to as a sabb. If you're sitting next to the Head of Purchasing, or the Vice Chancellor, why not use the opportunity to make a pitch?

STUDENTS UNIONS

Executive Committee/Trustee Board

As a Sabbatical Officer you are usually a member of your Student Union Executive Committee or Trustee Board. This Committee is responsible for oversight over what your union purchases, sometimes running into millions or tens of millions of pounds. You can ask questions, bring motions and make proposals at these committees.

Implementation

You are also responsible for ensuring the implementation of policy. There may already be commitments to human rights in your policy. You could find this out and push for their implementation.

Informally by building support in student unions with staff

As with universities, many of your opportunities to make change will be through informal occasions, or talking to staff and fellow sabbs.

With these tools you can choose human rights for the workers in your university's supply chains. Use your time as a sabbatical officer to change the lives of thousands of people, not just for now but for years after you've left.

Good arguments to use with your university.

WHY SHOULD WE BOTHER WITH THIS?

Government Policy: [The Department for Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs 2005 Sustainable Development Strategy of 2005](#) and [Department for International Development's 2009 White Paper](#) both say that public procurement should be used to aid sustainable development, including ethical trade.

Pioneer or Laggard?: Other pioneering universities are now switching to socially sustainable procurement. Soon they may all, if the government begins to require it. Don't let your university be the laggard at sustainable development, and get left behind. Oxford Brookes promoted being the [first Fairtrade Status University](#) ever since, therefore building up an excellent reputation.

Green League: [People & Planet's Green League](#) will now include a section on socially sustainable procurement. To maintain your position in the league in future you need to join the [Worker Rights Consortium](#), pass the ethical procurement policy, and form a steering group.

Values: The values of universities should include the promotion of human rights. We need to protect the human rights of the people who make the products we use. Students want it, as the number of signatures on your petition will show. Procurement staff in a [Environmental Association of Universities and Colleges](#) survey said they wanted to go even further than Fairtrade. Now we can all move forward together through our shared commitment to human rights.

BUT IT'LL BE TOO EXPENSIVE. WE'RE IN A RECESSION,

DON'T YA KNOW?

Cost: It often doesn't cost any more to switch to a more ethical product, it just takes knowledge about the effects procurement has on people in the Global South. Sometimes it may be more expensive. But procurement managers don't have to buy the 'cheapest' goods, but the 'best value', and part of that is social and environmental sustainability.

Reputation: Buying socially sustainable goods protects the university's reputation or 'brand' against risk. If the company is exposed by human rights groups in the future you may have to switch any way to protect your university's good reputation. Why not do it in advance, when you can control the potential damage to your reputation?

WHO ELSE IS WORKING ON THESE ISSUES, AND WHERE TO GET HELP, SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE

People & Planet's Buy Right campaign aims to change university practice and policy in favour of human rights and pro-poor purchasing. The campaign has a focus on clothing, but also suggests broad changes to university procurement in all categories.

People & Planet's Green League will monitor progress towards pro-poor, pro-human rights purchasing, and this can be a powerful motivator for change within universities.

To find out whether a **People & Planet group** at your university is running the campaign email Jim Cranshaw, Buy Right Campaigns Manager, on buyright@peopleandplanet.org

peopleandplanet.org/buyright

NUS has a proud history of campaigning on issues affecting wider UK society as well as promoting peace, justice and equality around the world. Students have been at the forefront of campaigns from the ethical and environmental issues to fighting the BNP.

For support at NUS email Susan Nash, Vice President for Society and Citizenship on Susan.Nash@nus.org.uk

officeronline.co.uk/society

NUSSL runs **Green Impact awards**, which reward progress on ethical procurement as well as other sustainability issues.

eauc.org.uk/how_green_impact_works

Labour Behind the Label is a campaign that supports garment workers' efforts world-wide to improve their working conditions, through awareness raising, information provision and building international solidarity between workers and consumers.

labourbehindthelabel.org

The Playfair coalition includes **NUS, the Trades Union Congress and Labour Behind the Label** and aims to highlight and challenge violations of workers' rights in company supply chains making sportswear for the Olympics. They also do educational work on campuses including, potentially, garment worker speaker tours.

playfair2012.org.uk