Catering Supplies and Services Procurement Category – incorporating SRS considerations

What this category includes:

Procurement in the Catering Supplies and Services category covers a wide range of goods and services, including:

- Beers, Wines, Spirits and Alcoholic Drinks
- Bakery Products
- Dairy Produce
- Frozen Foods
- Groceries (Dried Goods)
- Large Catering Equipment
- Catering Equipment, Maintenance and Repair
- Meat (Fresh)
- Soft and Non-alcoholic Drinks
- Tableware, Crockery, Cutlery (Small Equipment)
- Vending Equipment, Consumables and Charges
- Fruit and Vegetables (Fresh)
- Fish and Seafood (Fresh)
- Confectionary, Sweet and Savoury
- Catering Services, Outsourced
- Hot Beverage (Products and Machines)

Total category spend – £3.1M p.a.

Note: This briefing summarises social responsibility and sustainability (SRS) risks and opportunities associated with catering procurement and provision at the University of Edinburgh, which is managed by the Department for Accommodation, Catering and Events. University departments are also regularly known to make use of unapproved external catering suppliers. This practice is considered high risk because the University has no knowledge of or oversight over these providers. There are plans to engage with departments about this issue over the coming year.

Key issues

Activities associated with producing, processing, trading, transporting, selling, consuming and disposing of food and drink are collectively known as the ‘food system’ and have a profound impact on global environmental and socioeconomic sustainability.

The last half of the 20th century saw increased food production, improving food security and reducing poverty. However, the current food system is also associated with environmental degradation, high greenhouse gas emissions, wastage, exploitation and poor public health.

The major challenge for the food system now is to provide sufficient, safe, appropriate and nutritious food for all people, justly and fairly, without compromising the ability of future generations to feed themselves. This briefing considers the many SRS impacts of the global food system and how University food provision and procurement and support this goal.

Climate change

The total food system is responsible for between 19 - 29% of the human-caused greenhouse gas emissions that drive climate change. Animal agriculture (meat and dairy farming) is the biggest source of emissions, primarily from the methane released by livestock, the inputs to produce feed and land use change (e.g. deforestation for grazing and growing feed).

Intensive crop production also emits significant greenhouse gases, from the energy used to manufacture synthetic fertilisers, soil management practices and, again, land use change. Alcoholic drinks, bakery products, groceries, hot beverages, confectionary and fruits and vegetables are therefore considered high risk.

Fossil fuels are used to manufacture, package, process, chill and transport foods through often long and complex supply chains. Storing chilled and frozen foods is energy intensive and estimated to be responsible for a third of hydrofluorocarbon (HFC) emissions. All University refrigeration equipment is disposed of in line with legislation, but we could
Next steps

1. Further research the University’s impact on and strategies to mitigate climate change from catering supplies and services, in particular from animal products, agricultural production, transportation and cold chain

2. Reduce our impact from procuring and serving meat. This could include replacing some meat with other protein sources (serving less, and better, meat), replacing red meat with white meat, reducing portion sizes, using more of the animal (‘nose to tail’ cooking) and sourcing locally

3. Purchase more local, seasonal fruit & veg produced to agroecological standards. In the UK there are two main schemes certifying produce farmed according to agroecological principles; LEAF Marque (promotes integrated pest and crop management but still allows synthetic inputs) and organic certification (does not allow synthetic inputs)

4. Engage with suppliers around ingredients known to have a negative impact on climate change and / or other SRS areas (e.g. palm oil, cocoa, coffee, tea and sugar)

5. Increase local supply of meat, fish & seafood, fruit & veg and confectionery

6. Source confectionery produced to Fairtrade environmental standards and develop an agreed approach to sustainable palm oil

7. Work with suppliers to explore efficiency gains in transportation and storage

8. Install plug-in timers / motion sensors on existing vending and beverage machines. New catering equipment and replacement parts that are purchased by the University have the highest energy efficiency rating

Materials and hazardous materials

Hazardous materials & emissions: Water, air and soil pollution can arise at many points in the food system; including from livestock & fish farming, the application of fertilisers & pesticides and food processing. All categories are thought to be high risk.

Biosecurity: Bioaccumulation of toxins in the food chain, particularly in fish, is a concern. So are the health impacts of pesticides on farm workers as well as consumers.

Scarcity and security of supply: The food system is the dominant user of a number of natural resources globally, and crucially depends on a number of renewable and non-renewable natural resources such as land, soil fertility, water, biodiversity, minerals and fossil fuels. Food security is threatened by the current unsustainable use of these resources and by climate change. Political & economic factors also play a role.

Agroecological methods, new technologies (e.g. drip irrigation, low till and precision agriculture) and new varieties have the potential to improve resource efficiency and reduce the environmental impacts of food production.

Next steps

1. Further research the University’s impact on and strategies to mitigate pollution from catering supplies and services

2. Further research the supply scarcity and security risks in University supply chains

3. Source produce farmed to agroecological standards
Waste

Globally, a third of all food is lost or wasted. In the UK, consumers are responsible for approximately 40% of food waste. Upstream of consumers, food can be wasted for cosmetic reasons or overproduction due to demand uncertainty. Perishable items like fruits & vegetables, bakery, fish & seafood, meat and dairy are particularly high risk of being lost throughout the supply chain.

Front and back of house food waste from University catering outlets is collected separately and recycled through anaerobic digestion. Food waste arising outwith catering outlets is not currently recycled.

Packaging waste arises within most categories. Although the catering team recycles back of house packaging and products are bought in bulk to reduce waste, packaging and disposables are still a significant source of waste for the University. Bottled water and coffee cups are a particular concern. Coffee cups are not currently recyclable.

There are concerns with bycatch waste from fishing, but there may not be scope to affect this.

Next steps

1. Further research the University’s impact on and strategies to mitigate waste from catering supplies and services, particularly waste arising upstream & from production
2. Look into opportunities to purchase fruit & veg that might otherwise be rejected for cosmetic reasons
3. Engage with suppliers around opportunities to use less packaging, more recycled packaging and circular economy
4. Increase the provision of plumbed in water fountains to encourage a switch from soft drinks and bottled water. Ensure drinking water provision is included in the new Estates Development Guidelines
5. Increase the use of reusable coffee cups and reduce the use of plastic pods in machines
6. Continue to run the Love Food Hate Waste campaign. Investigate further opportunities to reduce food waste and improve recycling rates, in partnership with the Waste team

Biodiversity

Agriculture is estimated to be responsible for 60% of global terrestrial biodiversity loss. The main driver is the conversion of forests and grasslands for livestock, animals feed (e.g. soy) and commodities like cocoa, tea, coffee, sugar and palm oil.

Overfishing and practices like trawling and dredging harm marine biodiversity. At the same time, aquaculture can also impact the environment (e.g. habitat destruction (for prawn farming, disease and invasive species). To safeguard sustainability, the University only purchases fish from the MCS list of fish to eat. There may be other ways to reduce the SRS risks in fish & seafood supply chains.

Agricultural biodiversity itself is also a concern. 90% of food energy and protein now comes from only 15 plant and 8 animal species. The reliance on so few species has consequences for food security (diversity enables species to adapt to disease and environmental change), nutrition and culture.

Next steps

1. Further research the University’s impact on and strategies to support biodiversity in catering supplies and services, particularly in relation to land use change and monoculture
2. Explore ways to expand the variety of grains, pulses, meat, fruit & veg and fish & seafood served at the University
3. Reduce the number of products containing ingredients linked to deforestation
Next steps

1. Source higher welfare meat, subject to price
2. Engage with suppliers to ensure free range eggs are used in bought-in products and explore higher welfare meat
3. Further research the use of antibiotics and hormones University meat supply chains

Water

Food production accounts for roughly 70% of the world’s fresh water usage. Food processing also consumes significant amounts of water. Demands on the world’s fresh water resources is unsustainable.

It is useful to think about the University’s impact in terms of ‘virtual water’; the amount of water that is embedded in food and other products through irrigation, processing and packaging. The UK is currently the 6th largest net importer of virtual water for agriculture, consuming vast amounts of water in the form of meat, dairy, soya, oil seed, rice, coffee and cocoa, which are often produced in water scarce countries.

In-house, water is also used and potentially wasted in preparing food, making hot beverages, using equipment and cleaning.

Next steps

1. Further research the University’s impact on and strategies to conserve water in catering supplies and services, particularly switching to less water intensive products from less water-scarce regions
2. Look at scope to refurbish or replace older catering equipment with more water efficient models

Animal welfare

Animal welfare issues in livestock and fish farming include the conditions in which animals are raised (e.g. stocking density and access to outdoor space), breeding for yield & fast growth and slaughter methods. Standards vary greatly depending on the farming system.

The UK’s animal welfare legislation largely comes from the EU. UK standards are higher in some cases, but the minimum requirements are not considered high welfare.

Higher welfare schemes like RSPCA Assured offer a number of welfare benefits relative to standard industry practice. Compassion in World Farming ranks organic farming as the best for animal welfare.

Concerns were raised about the use of antibiotics and hormones in meat, dairy and aquaculture.

The University’s eggs are free range. Roughly two thirds of University meat is Red Tractor certified. Red Tractor certifies the food was produced to certain standards for food safety, hygiene, traceability and the environment. It reflects standard industry practice in the UK.

Any categories that contain animal products, including dairy, meat, bakery, groceries, fish & seafood, vending, confectionary and hot beverages are potentially risky.

Communities and Employment, skills and training

Public sector food procurement is an opportunity to support local economies, high quality employment, thriving communities, good health and environmental sustainability.

The University already endeavours to source from Scotland where possible (e.g. beef, dairy, bakery, alcohol, confectionary and non-alcoholic drinks) and uses local maintenance for catering and vending equipment. Edinburgh First, the commercial arm of
the Department for Accommodation, Catering and Events, is accredited by Visit Scotland’s Taste our Best scheme.

We note the trend towards more consolidated and intensive farming impacts rural communities and the rural economy.

**Next steps**

1. Support opportunities for local suppliers / SMEs to participate in tenders, particularly for meat, dairy, fruit & veg and seafood. SME access is already fairly well established for confectionary but we will also look to continue expanding this
2. There are opportunities to buy more Scottish meat from family farms, subject to price
3. There is potential to increase use of local hot beverage processors and distributors
4. Investigate local manufacturers and suppliers of equipment parts. Replacements are thought to be produced internationally

**Health and wellbeing**

The way food is produced, distributed, marketed, priced and consumed has a significant impact on health.

A 2015 survey found that the majority of University of Edinburgh students were not eating 5 portions of fruit & veg a day. The University aims to provide balanced, nutritious options, with Healthy Living and Food for the Brain Awards in place across all outlets.

Processed foods like confectionary, bakery, soft drinks and some grocery products are high risk categories because these foods can contain high amounts of sugar, salt, fat additives, preservatives, colourings and flavourings, which can negatively impact on health. Alcohol consumption also affects the health of individuals and communities.

There were also concerns about pesticide residues, hormones in milk, the health impacts of processed meat and lack of oily fish in modern diets.

The way food is processed and cooked affects its nutritional value.

**Next steps**

1. Continue designing balanced menus and promoting healthy options.
2. Take action to improve drinking water provision (see above)
3. When opportunities arise, replace old catering equipment with newer models that better preserve the nutritional value of food
4. Raise awareness of the health effects of overconsuming alcohol and soft drinks
5. Clearly specify the raw material content of baked goods (e.g. avoiding bleached flours)
6. Look into healthier confectionary options
7. Explore introducing traffic lights and ingredient labelling on University products. In line with new legislation, GDA nutritional and allergen information is available online for all products.
8. Explore flexible ‘grab and go’ options (e.g. veggie salad boxes with the option to add meat or cheese separately).
9. Explore opportunities for ‘choice editing’ (e.g. excluding fizzy drinks from meal deals)

**Security and crime**

Complex global supply chains are vulnerable to fraud and crime. Fish & seafood, grocery and meat are thought to be particularly vulnerable.

While food fraud is usually considered to be for economic gain (e.g. product substitution or mislabelling country of origin), recent cases have also highlighted food safety concerns. Shorter supply chains are more transparent and have other benefits, like reducing waste. Farm assurance labels and certifications (e.g. Red Tractor) also enable traceability.

There is also a risk of theft of cash from vending machines and outlets, and therefore a risk to surrounding staff/students.
Exploitation and human rights abuses are known to exist in food and drink supply chains. A large proportion of modern slavery and 60% of child labour is found in agriculture, fishing and food processing.

Modern slavery has been identified in the supply chains of some of the biggest food companies for commodities including cocoa, tomatoes, seafood, sugar, fruit & veg and coffee. Other documented abuses include paying below the minimum wage, denying pay, unpaid overtime, unsafe working conditions and gender discrimination. All categories are considered high risk. The University has produced a Modern Slavery Statement and action plan.

Additionally, crops like sugar and palm oil have been implicated in land rights violations of poor and indigenous communities. While food companies are not usually direct land holders, they are collectively major buyers of these commodities.

Fairtrade is one approach that ensures better prices, decent working conditions and fair terms of trade for farmers and workers. The University is committed to promoting fair trade wherever possible, we continue to expand our use of fair trade products in catering.

Equality

There are likely to be equality rights issues in catering supply chains (e.g. gender discrimination, mentioned above). Further research is needed. There are also concerns with the rise of food poverty and health inequalities across the UK.

Fair work

The porous and seasonal nature of the UK agricultural labour market makes it susceptible to illegal activity. Investigations have found evidence of exploitation, including deception, non-payment or underpayment of wages, intimidation, debt bondage and inhumane living conditions. In 2013, 22% of the UK’s potential forced labour victims referred to services came from the food industry, maritime or agricultural sectors. The victims are mainly low-paid migrants from Europe.

Although not illegal, food sector jobs can be low paid, insecure and / or employ workers on temporarily contracts that do not always include protections or benefits afforded to full time workers. The University pays the living wage to all its catering staff.

Next steps

1. Reaffirm the traceability of all University meat sources. One way to achieve this is through assurance schemes

Fairly and ethically traded

Next steps

1. Further research the fair work risks in University catering supply chains, across all categories (e.g. brewing and distilling)
2. Engage with suppliers around paying the Scottish living wage and zero hour contracts