

**Executive Summary of dissertation research carried out by MSc student John Coghill,  
as part of a placement in the Department for Social Responsibility and Sustainability,  
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The use of profits from mineral resources to fund conflict and human rights abuses in the Global South can be a significant obstacle to peace and development. This problem has been particularly prevalent in the DRC where armed groups draw on mineral resources as a source of funding. In recognition of this challenge, the University of Edinburgh adopted a conflict minerals policy in 2016, committing to “eradicate conflict minerals from the goods it buys” (2017: 1). In order to meet this commitment, it is crucial for the University to understand where good practice regarding conflict minerals currently takes place amongst its suppliers and where further engagement is needed. The conflict minerals considered by this research are 3TG and cobalt from the covered countries (the DRC and its neighbours).

University suppliers in the IT and vehicle sectors are the focus of this research. The IT sector is a primary user of both 3TG and cobalt and is known to have taken steps to tackle the problem of conflict minerals in its supply chains. The vehicle sector is also an important user of these minerals but its responsible sourcing practices are less widely discussed. Therefore, a focus on these industries and a comparison between them can provide useful findings on conflict minerals in University supply chains. Seven suppliers to be researched were identified from data provided by the University Procurement Office and a press article relating to University vehicle-purchasing. The research consisted of a documentary analysis of existing resources produced by suppliers regarding responsible sourcing. A complete record of vehicle suppliers was difficult to obtain and it is therefore recommended that **the University should maintain more easily accessible and comprehensive supplier data.**

The research found that University IT suppliers possess extensive policies and reporting information regarding responsible mineral sourcing, confirming the view that they are industry-leaders in this field. Thus, it can be determined that significant good practice regarding conflict minerals is taking place amongst these suppliers. However, the research found that there is divergence within the sector. Apple, has been recognised as the best worldwide performer regarding responsible sourcing of 3TG and this is supported by the

findings. Furthermore, both Apple and Dell have demonstrated commitments to development extending beyond responsible sourcing alone. Xerox, on the other hand, have, for example, had lower sub-tier supplier participation in recognised industry programs such as the CMRT and the RMAP. Regarding responsible cobalt sourcing, while Apple again have emerged as the strongest performer, with 100% participation of cobalt smelters in third party audits, practices across the sector as a whole lag behind those for 3TG with many of the relevant mechanisms and processes still in development. Therefore, it is recommended that **the University should work with other large-scale consumers of IT products to exercise leverage over the sector to encourage companies to keep pace with the best industry-practice on both 3TG and cobalt sourcing.**

While University vehicle suppliers did demonstrate broad commitments to responsible sourcing, in general these did not reach the same extent as those of the IT suppliers. While the companies direct their own sub-tier suppliers to follow certain policies, these requirements are not as stringent as those imposed by IT suppliers. Furthermore, the companies provide limited information on the action which they will specifically undertake in this regard. Regarding reporting, only one of the suppliers is subject to the Dodd-Frank Act's conflict minerals provisions. Therefore, the information reported by vehicle suppliers is much more limited than that provided by IT suppliers. This is true even of the supplier which does produce a Dodd-Frank Act-mandated SEC filing. Overall, the information (and lack of) that can be discerned from vehicle supplier reporting suggests that they do not thoroughly trace their 3TG supply chains to the same extent as IT suppliers. It is recommended that **the University work with other large-scale purchasers of vehicles to engage with suppliers and encourage them to improve both their conflict minerals practices and reporting.**

Background research has indicated that there is a possible tension between environmental sustainability and social sustainability. The increased demand for minerals such as cobalt which arises as a result of greater production of electric vehicles can have negative human rights implications for mining communities. Vehicle suppliers should therefore take this into account and ensure responsible sourcing of cobalt. However, the research found that only one supplier made direct reference to responsible cobalt sourcing and even this was limited. It is thus recommended that **the University give greater consideration to the tension between the environmental and social implications of increased electric vehicle use and engage with vehicle suppliers to encourage them to adequately address this issue.**

Implementing the recommendations highlighted by this research will allow the University to further its commitment to social responsibility and sustainability and contribute towards enabling a conclusion that it is doing what might reasonably be expected to keep conflict minerals out of its supply chains.