

## **HEPA initiatives to reduce packaging in higher education institutions.**

During 2020, and likely as a direct affect of the pandemic, online product sales increased by 36%, the highest growth rate in 13 years.<sup>1</sup> This increase highlighted three important sustainability issues:

- the excessive waste of packaging which goes way beyond product protection,
- the use of non-recycled or recyclable packaging materials,
- the multiple separate deliveries from certain on-line retailers for a single order.

Translate this to the volume of packaging delivered to a university campus annually, and there are clearly sustainability concerns that need to be addressed. Procurement professionals, in collaboration with internal customers and suppliers, are well poised to do this.

Over the last 12 months, members of the HEPA Responsible Procurement Group have developed a plan to provide resources and activities to support teams in reducing packaging, increasing recycled content and reducing deliveries.

One of the first considerations for the group was how to identify which categories should be prioritised. Helen Baker, Procurement Director at the University of the West of England offered assistance, and their sustainability team, Paul Roberts and Jennifer Fawcett-Thorne set to work updating the existing sustainability risk analysis [tool](#). New columns were added for packaging (specifically plastics, cardboard and polystyrene), additionally liabilities for suppliers for reporting volumes under the [Packaging Waste: Producer Responsibilities](#) were highlighted.

The [tool](#) is useful for buyers developing a sourcing or procurement plan to identify the potential to reduce, recycle, reuse, or eliminate packaging through the life of the contract. Additionally, it can be used to identify where questions on the sustainability credentials of packaging might form part of the tender evaluation criteria.

### **Next steps**

Over the last few years, the subject of plastic waste has been highlighted widely by leading environmental pressure groups. The UK Government has announced that from April 2022, the [Plastics Packaging Tax](#) will be introduced with a £200 per tonne tax<sup>2</sup> rate for packaging with less than 30% recycled plastic. The HEPA Sustainable Packaging Group suggest that Universities should consider encouraging suppliers to adopt WRAP's UK Plastic Pact targets which are:

1. Eliminate problematic or unnecessary single-use packaging through redesign, innovation or alternative (reuse) delivery model.
2. 100% of plastics packaging to be reusable, recyclable, or compostable.
3. 70% of plastics packaging effectively recycled or composted.
4. 30% average recycled content across all plastic packaging.

Many institutions have focussed already on eliminating single use plastics wherever possible however there is much more that can be done. The use of any material that is either excessive in terms of volume or has to go through a complex recycling process in order to be reused is also wasteful.

Questions to ask yourselves:

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<sup>1</sup> Data from the Interactive Media in Retail Group (IMRG)

- Can you encourage suppliers to reduce the volume of packaging supplied with its products without compromising the integrity and quality of its products?
- Can the supplier develop permanent or reusable packaging and collect for reuse?

If these alternatives are not possible, packaging should be from a sustainable source and fully recyclable or have a high recycled content.

Some of the future actions for the group are to develop packaging specification guidance for procurement staff and also develop template evaluation criteria, model answers and suggested packaging KPI's.

Whilst the group will undertake research to develop these tools, if anyone has any relevant content or useful links, please send to [Debbie Shore](#) who will collate and share appropriately.