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Living Lab project summary – modern slavery approaches among University suppliers

Description of the paper

This paper provides a brief overview of a project undertaken by graduate Claudine Dalinghaus on placement in the SRS Department in early 2017.

Objectives

- Research and identify key risks (where they occur in the supply chains, and geographically) in construction and food industries
- Identify and assess multi-stakeholder initiatives and standards related specifically to modern slavery in construction and food/catering
- Work with colleagues to gain up to date picture of who the University's key suppliers are in the specified areas (construction and food/catering)
- Assess these suppliers' modern slavery statements/commitments, and evidence of action taken to mitigate modern slavery risks – drawing on the methodology used by the Business and Human Rights Resource Centre
- Make recommendations as to how the University can further engage with the identified suppliers on modern slavery (what should we ask of them in terms of commitments/mitigating strategies, evidence of action, standards adhered to)

Findings and recommendations

A detailed report was shared internally with relevant colleagues. Wide-ranging examples of modern slavery cases and risks in the food and construction industries were researched and highlighted. Forty-nine (representing top 80% spend) suppliers were assessed based on publicly available statements or documentation requested by email. Overall, it was found that not all companies that are covered by the UK Modern Slavery Act (2015) had published a Modern Slavery Statement, and for those that had, not all were available on the front page of the website, as required by legislation. This should be monitored in future years. Many statements were quite general in terms of information on their supply chains and risk mitigation practices, and similar content could be found across different companies. This points to a potential opportunity for universities to engage with their suppliers to raise awareness of modern slavery risk and best practice. The report also included suggested questions regarding modern slavery that could be asked of suppliers during the contract management stage. A list of codes and standards related to human rights issues in the food and construction industries was provided in the report.