



University of Essex



# **Sustainable Purchasing**

**A guide to buying with the climate and ecological emergency in mind**

---

Authors: Sustainability, Central Procurement Unit  
Publication date: November 2022  
Version: 1.0

# Table of Contents

<b>Sustainable Purchasing</b>	<b>1</b>
<hr/>	
A guide to buying with the climate and ecological emergency in mind	1
Purchasing vs. Procurement	1
To buy, or not to buy?	1
Think Sustainability	2
Check for green flags	3

# Sustainable Purchasing

## A guide to buying with the climate and ecological emergency in mind

In December 2020 the University of Essex declared a [climate and ecological emergency](#), joining many other organisations around the world in our recognition of the urgent action needed to reduce our impacts on the environment. The university makes vital contributions through education and research, but our operations of course have wide-ranging impacts on the environment and we must all seek ways to reduce these. The [Sustainability Sub-Strategy and Climate Action Plan 2021-26](#) sets out our current ambitions, including a commitment to reach net zero carbon emissions (scope 1 and 2, ie on site energy use) by 2035. We will also be setting a target for scope 3 emissions reduction – these are all the emissions in our supply and value chains – for example the purchase of goods and services, business travel and commuting, investments, waste management and leased assets. There are of course wider impacts beyond emissions in our supply chains, but for the purpose of this guidance we are focusing on environmental aspects.

The purpose of this guidance is to help purchasing decision-makers to think differently – to ‘think environment’ – when determining what to buy. While we have aimed to address the most common considerations, the range of options out there means it’s not exhaustive. If you have a question that isn’t covered by this advice, please contact the Sustainability team to discuss – [sustainability@essex.ac.uk](mailto:sustainability@essex.ac.uk).

### Purchasing vs. Procurement

Purchasing is a sub-process of procurement. A procurement process may have taken place that then allows you to make your purchasing decisions; for example, we have specific contracts with Office Depot for stationery, and Showcase for furniture, both of which ensure our specifications are met in terms of quality, pricing and sustainability. The procurement process includes essential steps to ensure contracts are awarded in a fair and robust. Much of the advice in this guidance will help to inform choices for many procurement process, but it can all be applied when making purchasing decisions, however large or small.

### To buy, or not to buy?

When thinking sustainably, the most important thing to ask yourself first is ‘Do I/we really need to buy this?’. More ‘stuff’ ultimately means more of the planet’s resources being used, so where possible borrowing or reusing is a great alternative; particularly if you only need something temporarily. For example, if you need an item of furniture, try making a request through [small-ads](#), or contact the [Estates team](#) to find out if what you need is available. You can also think differently and challenge the status quo – perhaps you have always bought things to give out at events, but do they definitely add

value? Consider how experience can be enhanced without products, and remember the saying that “the best things in life aren’t things”.

## **Think Sustainability**

Of course in many circumstances, purchasing is absolutely necessary – resources help us to do our jobs and fulfil our contributions to delivering excellence in education and research. This guidance focuses on buying better, rather than trying to advocate for no buying at all!

There are a huge variety of products and services that are purchased as part of University operations, so there is no one-size-fits-all approach. However, to help shape your thinking, we have suggested the considerations below to help inform what you buy.

### ■ Longevity and robustness

- Think about how long a product will last. What do you need it for? What materials is it made from? The cheapest products may not be of good enough quality to last, or do the job you need it to – it can be a false economy (“buy cheap, buy twice”). Check product reviews if they are available.
- Can you make things last longer by design? For example, if you are buying promotional materials for Welcome Week, don’t include the year, if possible, so that any leftover items can be reused again in future.

### ■ Where does it come from?

- The miles a product travels to get to you add to its impact. Locally produced items mean that impact is lower. Using local suppliers can make a difference but be aware that a range of suppliers all over the UK may well be sourcing products from around the world. It can be hard to avoid well-travelled products in our globalised world but keep an eye out for UK-made items.
- If you are buying from regular suppliers such as Amazon or Office Depot, consider grouping orders together to reduce the number of deliveries necessary.

### ■ Use approved suppliers

- Many University-approved suppliers will show you more eco-friendly choices (for example Office Depot, Key and Diversity for travel choices, Showcase for furniture), so always check who we already work with. (Contact your Finance Administrator or the Central Procurement team if you are not sure).

### ■ Check energy efficiency

- For electrical items, check their energy efficiency rating, as this will impact the running costs over the life of the product.

- Disposal, waste and recycling
  - How will something be disposed of at the end of its life – is it recyclable?
  - Will there be a cost to its disposal – and if so, who bears this?
  - What packaging is used? For large items, will the supplier remove packaging, either for recycling or reuse?

## Check for green flags

There are many accreditation/certification schemes and marques to signify the sustainability of products and suppliers, and are useful for identifying products/services that have demonstrable eco-credentials. Environmental management systems demonstrate that an organisation adheres to a range of environmental practices. These can include:

- [ISO 14001 Environmental Management](#) – a widely recognised environmental management scheme
- [BS 8555 Environmental Management](#) – a six phase process to demonstrate environmental commitments
- [CHAS Environmental Certification Scheme](#) – Suppliers will be accredited based on key criteria
- [BM TRADA](#) – Sustainable supply chain certification

### Certified



Corporation

**B. Corp:** Companies have to achieve a minimum score on their B Impact Assessment, against criteria on environment, workers, community and customers.

<https://www.bcorporation.net/en-us/>



**Cradle to Cradle:** certifies clothing, textiles, fashion accessories, building products, home décor, personal care and cleaning products. Safety, circularity and responsibility of materials and products are assessed across 5 categories of sustainability performance (material health, product circularity, clean air and climate protection, water and soil stewardship, social fairness) <https://www.c2ccertified.org/>



**Energy Star:** Used on office equipment to show that a product has achieved energy efficiency standards set by the EU <https://www.energystar.gov/products/how-product-earns-energy-star-label>



**Fairtrade:** ensures a set of standards are met in the production and supply of a product or ingredient. Focuses on workers' rights, safer working conditions and fairer pay for farmers and workers, supporting ethical purchasing.



**Forest Stewardship Council (FSC):** for paper products and wood, this shows that the raw wood comes from forests that are managed “in a way that preserves biological diversity and benefits the lives of local people and workers, while ensuring it sustains economic viability.” <https://uk.fsc.org/what-is-fsc>

For information and support on your sustainability journey, please contact [sustainability@essex.ac.uk](mailto:sustainability@essex.ac.uk)

For information and support on procurement and purchasing, please contact [procure@essex.ac.uk](mailto:procure@essex.ac.uk)