

SUPC Case Study: Oxford Brookes Promotional Products



Background

Arguably, the most effective procurement teams are those that identify an institutional need and provide a procurement solution that helps the institution save both time and money. The procurement team at Oxford Brookes University (OBU) did just this; leveraging the purchasing activity around OBU's 150th anniversary celebrations to save the institution £24,000. Here, we examine OBU's procurement exercise and hear from Director of Procurement Iain McWilliams about the benefits achieved.

In 2015, OBU started celebrating a proud achievement – its 150th anniversary of providing higher education in the UK. Its 150-year history has seen the institution grow from a small art school to one of the UK's leading modern universities that enjoys an international reputation for teaching excellence and innovation, as well as strong links with business and industry. The university as a whole, and individual departments within the university, would soon be starting the mass buying of promotional products with the 150th anniversary logo and branding to promote the institution to stakeholders. The Procurement team saw this as an excellent opportunity to save the institution funds and time, and to ensure branding was consistent across purchases through effective procurement.

Challenges and Outcomes

One of the first challenges the procurement team had to overcome was the devolved spend across OBU's many departments. The Procurement team found that various university departments were spending approximately £56K annually across several different promotional products suppliers. Because the spend was not aggregated, the university was missing out on significant savings that could otherwise be achieved through cumulative spend through a single supplier. After looking at the supply options through the open market, the team found that the national Promotional Products Framework Agreement, accessible through their SUPC membership, would best meet their needs.

The framework agreement was a good option for several reasons. First, the agreement offered considerable savings (approximately 20%) over going straight to the market. Second, because a regional purchasing consortium professionally tendered the agreement, it was guaranteed to be EU-compliant. Third, the agreement had been awarded on several criteria, including price of course, but also incorporating aspects like sustainability and ethical procurement initiatives. This allowed the OBU team to award to a supplier that they knew would offer an excellent price while adhering to sustainability and ethical values.

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- Nicola Anderton, key stakeholder at OBU

After conducting a mini-competition, the team identified Allwag as the supplier who could best meet the institution's needs. Allwag's competitive prices and excellent relationship management approach helped it stand out as the best choice for OBU. Because OBU were buying off a professionally tendered framework agreement in which sustainability was a key criterion, they felt confident that Allwag supported ethical and sustainable procurement, which is important to the institution. "OBU was the first fair trade university in 2003, so we wanted to ensure compliance with our high ethical standards" said Director of Procurement Iain McWilliams.

A second challenge to overcome was the inconsistent use of the OBU 150th anniversary logo and brand elements. As individual departments were using several different suppliers, each supplier was applying the brand guidelines in different ways. By using a single supplier who was well-versed in the university's branding, the institution was able to ensure all promotional products purchased adhered to the guidelines; this helped meet the needs of OBU's Communications Team as well as provide savings. "Having a single supplier has enabled us to invest in the relationship and gain a mutual understanding of lead times, feasibility and quality control. Allwag take orders from across the institution and are fast becoming brand experts. They immediately refer any queries or inconsistencies back to the central Comms. Team - helping us to deliver a strong brand consistently across all our merchandise." said Nicola Anderton Head of Communications at OBU.

Factors Impacting Success

Procurement identified consultation and stakeholder engagement as critical factors that impacting the success of the procurement exercise. As mentioned, one of the procurement team's key stakeholders was the Communications Team – a major purchaser of promotional products for the university and guardians of the university brand. By using the framework agreement to identify a single supplier who understood the brand guidelines well, the Communications Team could feel confident that branding would be used consistently. Using a single supplier also took the onus to look for suppliers, and ensure these suppliers followed brand guidelines, off devolved buyers across the institution. Anderton noted, "Going direct to our single supplier, safe in the knowledge that a good price is assured, saves us an enormous amount of time and effort. Whereas in the past, we had to chase around for quotes each time a new item was procured, this is now resolved with a quick call to our account manager."

The success of this procurement exercise has been an important step in demonstrating procurement's strategic importance to the university and has helped raise the profile of the function across the institution.

For more information on this exercise, please contact Director of Procurement at Oxford Brookes University, Iain McWilliams at imcwilliams@brookes.ac.uk or on 01865 483848.

For more information on SUPC and our agreements, visit www.supc.ac.uk or email supc@reading.ac.uk.

For more information on the Promotional Products Framework Agreement visit www.unibuy.com.

