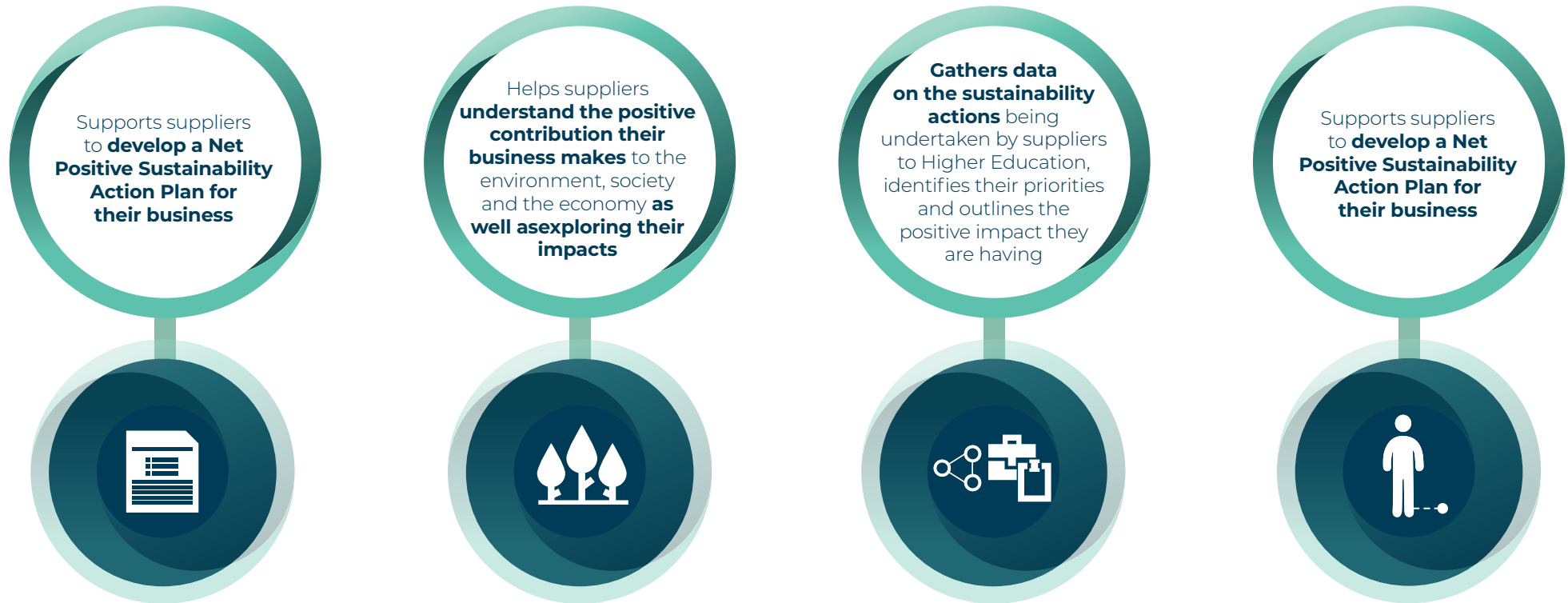


## About this project

Since March 2016 UK universities and purchasing consortia have been inviting their suppliers to access an innovative, online Supplier Engagement Tool which:



Here we share how the Higher Education sector is using this approach to lead the way!

# SUSTAINABILITY IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION SUPPLY CHAIN

NUMBER OF SUSTAINABILITY ACTIONS:



## What does it look like for a supplier?

- 1** The supplier provides some basic company information (size, location, type of activity etc.)
- 2** They explore and prioritise issues relevant to their business (using a NETpositive approach)
- 3** The tool automatically generates a bespoke Sustainability Action Plan, which can be further updated and customised

The Sustainability Action Plan generated is not only free but also based on the very latest sustainability thinking.

This includes environmental, social and economic impacts that are both positive and negative

QUOTES FROM SUPPLIERS

"Really nice and simple to use; I have seen a few of these types of thing over the years, and this is by far the best. Simple and concise, but still focuses our minds on constant improvement. We try to be as proactive as possible within the constraints of our business and what our end users will accept, but there is always more we can do."  
**Davin Miller, Sales Manager New England Biolabs UK Ltd**

"We have now completed this sustainability plan tool. I found the process interesting and a positive way of continuing to realise the areas in which we are doing well, the areas [in which] we could improve and also a framework for developing a plan for this improvement."  
**John Davey, Director Ideas Agency Ltd**

"The tool proved a great prompt to help us consider our approach to sustainability. We were able to use it as part of our ISO14001 submission and have built it into our formal systems now."  
**Kevin Ashby, Director, All Purpose Ltd**

# TAKING A LEAD ON MODERN SLAVERY

## OF THE 2500 REGISTERED TO THE TOOL:

Since the introduction of the Modern Slavery Act (2015) organisations with a turnover of over £36 million have been busy producing statements outlining their response to the Act.

Although only larger organisations are currently obliged to produce statements, we believe that SME's will be significantly impacted as scrutiny of supply chains intensifies. The HE sector has long been committed to pro-active engagement with SME's in their supply chain and so this issue can be an opportunity to support good practice at the same time as reducing risk.

The Supplier Engagement Tool is already helping to establish baselines, gather evidence and demonstrate practical examples of how different businesses are responding to the challenges presented by the Modern Slavery Act.

Data generated by use of the Supplier Engagement Tool in the HE Sector already tells us that:



The Higher Education sector is leading the way with its ability to demonstrate how businesses (especially SMEs) are responding to the challenge of eradicating Modern Slavery. This baseline allows the sector to understand the scale of the challenge and even identify where it might help!

Using the evidence from the Tool institutions can turn 'supplier engagement' into 'supplier development' allowing the Higher Education Sector to support its supply chain to do even more on this key issue with targeted awareness and engagement activities.

# COMMITMENT TO ACTION

Compliance issues all too often focus on the detail of policy rather than the reality of practice.

The Tool supports the Higher Education sector to better understand what its supply chain is **doing** rather than what it is **saying**.

Understanding the priority issues for the businesses supplying the sector puts HE in a stronger position to have meaningful dialogue, provide appropriate challenge and support and ensure positive contributions are identified along the way. By using the Tool to develop their Sustainability Action Plans suppliers have told us:

## Their 5 most selected issues:

- We are keen to communicate with our customers
- We keep up to date with the new technology or approaches to working so we can identify innovation or gains in efficiencies
- Improving staff wellbeing and mental health is important to us
- We are always looking for ways to win new business
- We make work accessible to people from all backgrounds

## Their 5 least selected issues:

- Our business activities generate food waste
- We could do more to improve the formal relationships with our staff
- Modern Slavery is an issue for every business and we need to explore it
- We have opportunity to enhance or support biodiversity
- We could do more work with smaller businesses and/or the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSEs) sector

We can use this information to determine how closely our institutional or sector-wide priorities are aligned with those of our suppliers.

## Their 10 most completed actions:

- Ensure your staff can be responsive
- Understand that communication is a two-way process
- Keep up-to-date with new developments within your sector
- Explore your sustainable travel options
- Offer sustainable travel options
- Develop an environmental or sustainability policy
- Understand the travel impacts of your business
- Ensure your business is 'tender ready'
- Join an apprentice scheme
- Provide short-term work placements

We can use this as evidence to inform ongoing engagement with the supply chain. As a result, the Higher Education sector is well positioned to target precious resources into meaningful engagement with its suppliers.

All of this at the same time as telling a powerful positive story!

## Their 10 least completed actions

- Make links between sustainability and any trade union activity
- Share the stories of your products with customers and clients
- Implement an MSME and VCSE outreach programme
- Look to remove waste completely from your business
- Review your procurement practices to support access by MSME and VCSEs
- Develop opportunities to support the victims of Modern Slavery
- Volunteer to support biodiversity in your local area
- Undertake a waste audit
- Develop a pathway to net-zero carbon
- Develop your suppliers don't just assess them!