

Fairtrade at Middlesex University



Leadership and strategy

Middlesex University gained its Fairtrade award status in 2017, but the Fairtrade journey accelerated in 2018 when we put ourselves forward to be one of the 12 universities and colleges that formed the “NUS and Fairtrade Foundation’s Universities and Colleges Award” pilot scheme.

The pilot scheme was introduced to help set new standards for universities and colleges to work towards to gain Fairtrade award status. As a result of this partnership and being such active members within the pilot scheme, we were given several fantastic opportunities to promote Fairtrade, as well as access to some unique experiences. For example, we were selected to represent universities at the All-Party Parliamentary Group conference as guests at the Palace of Westminster. We were also given the opportunity to host a Fairtrade banana producer who had been flown from Panama especially to visit selected universities and host a talk on how Fairtrade has helped and secured a future for his family, the story of which reached the University’s United Nations Principles for Responsible Management Education 2018 report.

Following the success of the pilot scheme and after receiving the two-star award status, our Fairtrade lead, Jo Williamson, was asked run a workshop about being a part of the pilot scheme. The workshop was for other universities looking to achieve Fairtrade status at the Environmental Association of Universities and Colleges conference.

We have rewritten several of our key policies in order to strengthen our standard, such as the Fairtrade Policy and the Sustainable Food Policy. In addition, we ensured that Fairtrade formed a key requirement in recent tenders for important corporate contracts for student merchandise and catering services, so giving staff and students a greater opportunity to support the Fairtrade Foundation.

We also set up a Fairtrade steering group to help challenge our commitment to Fairtrade and coordinate events and initiatives. Action plans created and discussed by the steering group help us continue to push our boundaries. Since 2018 we’ve accomplished two key actions set out within the action plan:

- to achieve the two-star award status; and
- to dedicate one outlet at the university to be recognised as a Fairtrade outlet.

Developing prospects for our students is at the forefront of our commitment to Fairtrade. We have provided paid and voluntary opportunities for students – such as photography students and alumni – to capture photos at Fairtrade events, and have student writers and bloggers who follow our progress and report through our student channels. Other students have volunteered to conduct audits to review our efforts to embed and promote Fairtrade and our wider ethical consumption.



Student auditors receive full training – delivered by SOS-UK and the Fairtrade Foundation – at which they learn about trade justice issues and how those issues apply to the university, as well as developing their professional and analytical skills. The process teaches volunteers how to conduct an audit, and they then get the opportunity to conduct the audit of the university with other volunteers.

In 2018 Alexia Raphaëlle Ndongo-She and Najma Gabeire – who both study MA International Relations – volunteered to be our student auditors. Alexia told us “I have previously completed a degree in Psychology and currently in International Relations so I have a good, in-depth understanding of social and ethical issues, but also a keen interest in these. I believe that I would be a suitable student auditor for the Fairtrade Award because whilst I have no direct experience in such a role, I have an interest in it. Combined with the fact that I am generally a quick and passionate learner, I believe that I will be able to work and learn accordingly; and most certainly excel in the task.”

Middlesex University is committed to continue developing the work of Fairtrade within the university, and we want to reach out to a wider audience. Sharing our experiences and knowledge and providing cross-institutional support allows us and others to grow; sharing challenges and tackling them with others make for a better, more refined process as well as developing relationships.



Your achievements

Congratulations! This year you achieved Fairtrade University (2 star) by completing 45 criteria and gaining 405 points. Here’s how you scored within each category, and how you compared to others across the pilot:

Middlesex University			
Section	Number of criteria achieved	Average across the pilot	Total available
Mandatory	11	10	11
Leadership and Strategy	5	3	6
Campaigning and Influencing	9	5	11
Procurement, Retail and Catering	12	6	13
Research and Curriculum	4	1	5
Outcomes	2	2	4
Innovative Interventions	2	1	4
Total criteria	45	N/A	54
Total points	405	259	570

We have formed a Fairtrade Networking Group which extends to over 16 universities across the UK and has 29 members. The group provides a platform and support network where members can share tips on how to achieve Fairtrade award status, circulate ideas about effective campaigning and receive support during the award renewal process. The group can also support and guide universities looking to apply to the award scheme for the first time.

The active participation of senior members of the Middlesex Fairtrade Steering Group is hugely beneficial. Trevor Alexander, Unison International Officer and Co-Chair of Barnet Multi Faith Forum, is an active member and was co-lead for Fairtrade at the university from 2017 to 2018, providing opportunities for relationship building with wider-Barnet networks such as the Multi Faith Forum and interfaith.

In 2019, Sam Jackson, Head of Procurement, Insurance and Contract Management at the university, joined the steering group. Sam is the support for Fairtrade through our procurement channels. The procurement team is regularly audited using an industry-standard Procurement Maturity Assessment and achieved the highest score for corporate and social responsibility, improving from 47% to 67% in the recent assessment. In their report, the auditor said that we incorporate social action and associated social benefit into our procurement activities and we have achieved, for example, the Fairtrade Accreditation.

Below is a summary of our achievements highlighted by the Fairtrade University Award assessment in 2018.



Campaigning

Our campaigning work has expanded considerably over the past two years, from small pop-up tea and coffee stands where campaigners just spoke to students to now being asked to form partnerships across departments for wider event-based activities such as:

- University open days
- North London Fair
- Wellbeing events
- Supporting LGBT+EE Coffee mornings
- Freshers Fair
- Student Success Festival
- Fairtrade Fair

Campaigning at the university has become a staple part of events across campus, educating our next generation on the struggles that farmers face and the huge impact of purchasing Fairtrade items.

The Fairtrade Fair was created as a way of celebrating the start of Fairtrade Fortnight, creating a unique and specific way of highlighting the university’s commitment, as well as our award status. The fair has become a much more community-based event, encouraging other local Fairtrade campaigners and the local community to join us. The fair creates opportunities to integrate other university departments – it was also the reasoning behind the creation of the MDX OneVoice Choir. The choir was put together to demonstrate the power of committing to each other, solidarity and collaboration. Members of the choir have really felt the mental health benefits of singing. One member – Anna Spyrou, the Prospective Student Events Manager – said “I joined the choir because I love to sing and it was a good way to do something I love and meet new people at work in a fun, inclusive environment. You don’t need to be the best singer. I enjoyed meeting new people, and singing in the quad, although scary at first, gave me such a buzz.”

Research and curriculum

Being able to measure the impact of having Fairtrade at the university provides great insight, allowing the Fairtrade team to identify where improvements can be made. In 2018/2019 a couple of benchmarking exercises took place following standard Fairtrade data collection.

From these exercises we learnt that all of the people who were asked thought Fairtrade was a good idea. Of these, 85% felt that Fairtrade was fair to both producers and consumers, 43% of people said they didn’t know what Fairtrade work the university was involved in.



These data findings have enabled the Fairtrade team to plan for future events and identify key messaging on which to focus, with a bespoke ‘Fairtrade at Middlesex’ leaflet being produced to give out at all events where Fairtrade is present. The leaflets also formed part of the Student Success Festival goodie bags, with around 1,000 being given away during the two-day event.

The Brief Cases at Middlesex initiative was created in collaboration with Jo Williamson (the lead on the university’s Fairtrade projects), Veronica Heaven (MD at The Heaven Company) and Middlesex University’s MA Programme Leader, Dr Meri Juntti. Brief Cases at Middlesex is offered as a work-based learning option on the MA Global Governance and Sustainable Development course, providing students with an opportunity to build links with industry and get experience of helping to develop socially and environmentally sustainable solutions for companies.

Successful completion of the Brief Cases at Middlesex initiative resulted in one of our students attending the industry awards held with media partner, Earth Island, hosted at Cafe De Paris in central London. The successful student, Rea, attended the sit-down gala event and received her recognition watched by industry delegates last month.

At the same event, another Middlesex student received ‘Highly Commended’ status. His name was read out and visuals from his work were displayed for the audience to see at the ceremony.

The Brief Cases at Middlesex initiative is now looking to do a piece highlighting the outcomes from the pilot and will look to coordinate with the Fairtrade team.

Innovation

Our Fairtrade team use the Fairtrade principles to work towards creating better impacts as well as bringing innovation with the approach.

Fairtrade events are opportunities where we can create moments that our students will remember.

For the 25th anniversary of the Fairtrade logo, the university put on a Fairtrade Awareness Fair, which featured a surprise Flash Mob performance. The Fairtrade team worked alongside lecturers of psychology Lucy Irving, Mark Coulson and lecturer of dance Sian Hopkins. Mark, Lucy and their students measured witness mood before and after the event in order to gauge the affective response to the Flash Mob performance.

Mark, who has worked at the university for 26 years, said “It was a fantastic event and one of the highpoints of my time here.”

A total of 536 responses were recorded, 391 before the Flash Mob and 145 after. Data showed that indeed people did report an elevated mood after the performance. The design was very simple and represents one of the first formal evaluations of the Flash Mob phenomena.

The MDX OneVoice Choir also brought another element to the event, designed to lift the spirits of those attending the fair, by choosing songs specifically to empower and bring joy.