

2020 proved to be a challenging year for all - for individuals, businesses and nations as a whole. Like most companies, we faced many new challenges that demanded our attention; none was more important than protecting the safety, health and welfare of all our colleagues across the UK, and those who work overseas within our supply chain.

UK

Despite the challenges presented by the pandemic, our commitment to deliver our UK colleague support programme was unwavering throughout 2020. This programme, which is available to all colleagues irrespective of length of service or their role within our business, starts with a comprehensive suite of colleague benefits, which includes interest-free crisis loans, 8% non-contributory pension contributions,

a healthcare cash plan, profit share, and the awarding of extra annual leave in return for customer satisfaction. It extends to personalised one-to-one support to meet the individual requirements of colleagues. This ranges from providing a companion for medical appointments and arranging counselling or coaching, to signposting and arranging assistance from external agencies and support services.

OVERSEAS

As a result of the pandemic, we faced many additional ethical trade challenges within our supply chain. In response to these, we took appropriate and swift action, as summarised below:

SAFETY	LOCKDOWNS	DIALOGUE
<p>Invested in safety screens for suppliers.</p> <p>Over 300,000 facemasks distributed free of charge.</p>	<p>Zero cancelled orders.</p> <p>All payments to agreed payment terms.</p>	<p>On-site presence throughout the pandemic.</p> <p>Monthly contact meetings.</p>
<p>Local health and safety practices were followed by all suppliers, and were appropriately monitored by our directly employed on-site colleagues. Their presence allowed us to monitor and give direct support to all operations, as required.</p> <p>Our support included funding PPE for all Rowlinson supplier colleagues and customers, and providing additional funding for screening of workstations at our key Tier 1 supplier.</p>	<p>With the exception of Egypt, all our overseas operations experienced some form of lockdown during 2020. However, we were able to maintain regular contact with all our operations, and work collaboratively to ensure minimal disruption to our suppliers and our own business. Our measures included the non-cancellation of all orders throughout the pandemic and we upheld the agreed payment terms (no delayed payments) for all our Tier 1 suppliers.</p> <p>In addition to safeguarding everyone's wellbeing, our approach was to act with patience, understanding and ongoing dialogue, as operations reopened in a limited capacity to respect Covid-19 safety measures.</p>	<p>It helped all our overseas colleagues enormously that we maintained a presence at all key Tier 1 suppliers throughout the pandemic while they were operational.</p> <p>Coupled with this, we instigated monthly virtual senior management meetings between Rowlinson and Tier 1 suppliers to understand the needs of our suppliers, and support that we can offer.</p>

Despite the challenges faced, we were able to continue the vast majority of our ethical initiatives throughout 2020, all of which we believe are increasingly important in the current climate.

KEY INITIATIVES	
After more than two years of membership and assessment, we became a full member of the Ethical Trading Initiative.	Strengthen our understanding of the supply chain with further mapping at Tier 3 level.
Refine our Cotton Policy to include provision for ensuring no Uyghur cotton is used in our supply chain.	Continue to support and build on the Grievance mechanisms in place at our primary Tier 1 supplier in Bangladesh, by providing the Amader Kotha helpline.
The informal establishment of a Worker Participation Committee in Egypt.	Additional training to prepare staff for Worker Participation Committee elections in Bangladesh for early 2021.
Continue structural safety work in Bangladesh to ensure completion of the Detailed Engineering Assessment for the Readymade Sustainability Council (RSC) initiative.	Water filter awards in November 2020 to Bangladesh staff continued uninterrupted bringing the total number of colleagues to 95% now in possession of a water filter system.
Monthly Period Poverty initiative, with more than 2500 sanitary products distributed to female colleagues in Bangladesh.	

We took the decision to delay our annual internal social audits until early 2021 and as always follow-up on these where appropriate with our scheduled SMETA audits. Through 2020, we have explored and established new online systems for audit reporting, which are being implemented throughout 2021.

We are so proud of all our achievements to date. Our mission to be the leading supplier of schoolwear in the UK remains in place and by achieving this through our values of trust, care and to be better we can continue to grow for the greater good.



Neil Ward
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Rowlinson Knitwear Limited