

Smarter hygiene:

Sustainability, simplicity and performance in education



Across the UK education sector, sustainability is no longer a long-term goal, it's an immediate priority.

Schools, colleges and universities are under increasing pressure to reduce their environmental impact, align with net-zero targets and demonstrate their commitment to ESG.

But while ambition is high, the path forward isn't always clear...

Executive Summary

While increasing importance is placed on sustainability, hygiene remains a non-negotiable within educational settings. Facilities teams must maintain excellent hygiene standards to protect students and staff, all while working within shrinking budgets and resourcing constraints. Procurement teams are under pressure to find solutions that tick every box: cost-effective, high-performing, easy to maintain and environmentally responsible.

Our latest survey of education procurement, site and facilities managers reveals this reality in detail. 88% say sustainability is important to their organisation, showing near-universal awareness. But meaningful change is still being held back by a few core challenges: 36% cite performance concerns with sustainable products and 35% say budget constraints are a barrier.

These findings highlight a clear trust gap. Education institutions want to act sustainably but remain sceptical about whether sustainable hygiene options can truly deliver on performance and cost. In high-pressure environments where decisions are often reviewed only once or twice a year, it's understandable that procurement teams are cautious. In fact, our data shows that only 0.8% of facilities update their hygiene product range more than once every six months. That makes first-time decisions critical.

Sustainable hygiene procurement is also still influenced by outdated assumptions. Products that look different, such as brown paper fibres or refillable systems, are sometimes perceived as less effective, despite rigorous performance credentials.

88%

say sustainability is important to their organisation, showing near-universal awareness.

This means suppliers must back up their sustainability claims with data, support, proof points and dependable results. Hygiene sits at the intersection of sustainability and performance. With the right suppliers and partners, schools can make real progress on their ESG goals without compromising on quality, safety or day-to-day efficiency.

At WEPA Professional UK, we understand these pressures. That's why our solutions are designed to deliver measurable sustainability benefits, uncompromising performance and reliable support that makes procurement simpler. With trusted products like Satino PureSoft and HYGINITY, we help schools turn intention into impact.

The growing importance of sustainability in educational facilities

The education sector has long been a driver of progressive thinking – and sustainability is no exception. Today, environmental responsibility is no longer a tick-box or ambition for the future. It's a core expectation shaping operational decisions and procurement strategies across primary, secondary, further and higher education institutions.

According to our recent survey, 88% of respondents say sustainability is important to their organisation, with 80% already having a sustainability strategy in place and a further 10% currently developing one. This data shows a clear and decisive shift from ambition to action. Sustainability is no longer confined to policy documents or the latest compliance checklists. It's being embedded into the procurement frameworks and operational reviews that guide everyday decision-making.

That said, the situation is not the same across the entire education sector. The survey revealed significant differences in how sustainability is being embedded across different institutions:

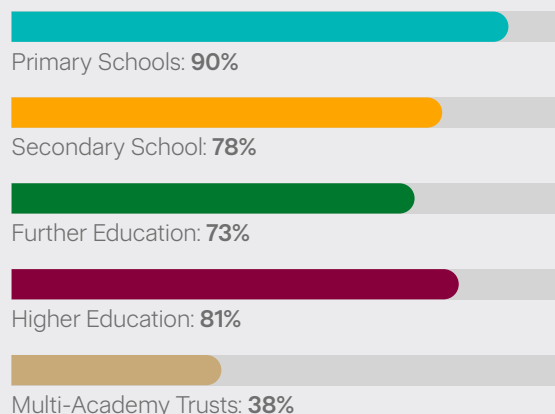
- Primary schools are leading the way, with 90% reporting formal sustainability targets – the highest of any group. These institutions often benefit from smaller teams and agile decision-making, enabling them to implement and adapt quickly.
- Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs), on the other hand, show a slower rollout, with only 38% currently reporting formal targets. This points to the added complexity of applying consistent strategy across multiple schools and buildings, often with centralised procurement teams managing a wide variety of needs.

Another standout finding is the link between sustainability strategy and supplier review frequency. 85% of institutions with a strategy in place review their suppliers every 6–11 months. This reflects an active and cyclical procurement culture, where performance

85%

of institutions with a strategy in place review their suppliers every 6–11 months.

Does your educational facility have specific formal sustainability targets or policies that influence procurement decisions?



is assessed regularly and progress against ESG goals must be demonstrated through every buying decision.

This places clear demands on suppliers. It is no longer sufficient to offer sustainability as a selling point. Products must be easy to implement and backed by reliable service. Hygiene systems, in particular, must combine functionality with environmental integrity.

In this context, our products and services at WEPA Professional UK are uniquely placed to help. From 100% recycled paper products to refillable dispensers and zero-plastic packaging, we offer the solutions education facilities teams need to align hygiene operations with sustainability goals without adding complexity or compromising quality.

Procurement priorities across hygiene and sustainability



When it comes to choosing hygiene solutions, facilities and site managers within education settings must navigate a complex landscape of priorities. From budgets and safety to sustainability and service, the expectations placed on these teams have never been higher.

Our survey reveals that the top three factors influencing hygiene product selection across all education settings are:

- Cost-effectiveness
- Supplier support and service
- Health and safety compliance

These core priorities reflect the practical pressures education institutions face. With tight budgets and high usage, hygiene products must deliver lasting value. With safety under constant scrutiny, products must meet strict health standards. And with limited time and capacity, suppliers must be easy to work with and responsive to needs.

Yet sustainability is now entering this mix as a key decision factor, especially in certain settings. 21% of Secondary schools say it's their top priority, showing how environmental values are influencing younger generations and the schools that serve them.

Meanwhile, 24% of Higher Education institutions prioritise ease of ordering and logistics, indicating the need for scalable, low-effort solutions across large estates.

MATs (Multi-Academy Trusts) represent a unique challenge, with 46% ranking cost-effectiveness as their top concern. For centrally managed networks, price consistency, product reliability and supply chain efficiency become key issues.

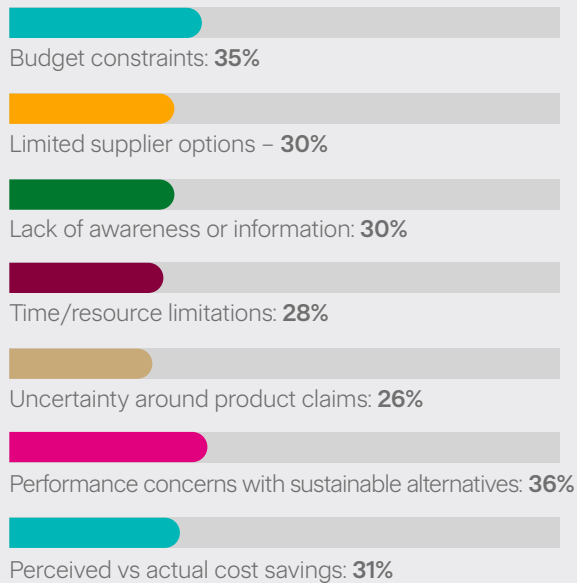
The survey also reveals an important insight: refillability and recyclability are valued more than formal certifications, with 35% of respondents ranking these tangible features as top priorities, compared to just 27% for third-party sustainability labels. This shows that buyers now want solutions they can see, measure and explain – not just logos on packaging.

This has implications for how suppliers position their products. Trust is built not through claims, but through proof. Education institutions want partners who understand their unique facility, and its needs and back up every promise with performance.

At WEPA Professional UK, we take this responsibility seriously. Our Satino and HYGINITY ranges are designed for real-world environments, combining sustainability with ease of use and cost-efficiency. We don't just sell products; we build partnerships that make hygiene smarter.

Key barriers to sustainable hygiene in education

What are the biggest barriers to making sustainable washroom procurement decisions?



If the education sector is so engaged in sustainability, what's holding it back?

Our survey shines a light on the main barriers that prevent schools, colleges and universities from making the switch to more sustainable hygiene systems. And the findings show that they are rooted in practical concerns and real-world constraints.

The most significant challenge is performance concerns. 36% of education buyers worry that sustainable alternatives won't match the quality of conventional products. This figure rises to 88% among institutions that already have sustainability strategies in place, suggesting that even the most proactive organisations are hesitant to act unless they can be sure performance won't be compromised.

Budget pressure comes next, cited by 35% of respondents. With procurement teams juggling multiple needs and the costs of materials and products still on

the rise, budget and money remain a central issue, with many sceptical that sustainable products will deliver a strong return on investment. 33% also say availability is a problem, highlighting supply chain gaps and procurement delays as barriers to wider adoption.

By institution type, these barriers take different forms:

- Further and Secondary Education institutions are most likely to cite performance and reliability concerns.
- While MATs highlight limited supplier options (46%) as their biggest challenge, showing the need for scalable, consistent procurement support across multiple sites.

Perceptions also play a key role. Many facilities managers associate brown or unbleached paper with lower quality, regardless of actual performance. This creates a barrier that suppliers must overcome with education and clear messaging.

So what can those working with education teams do to overcome these barriers and drive progression forward? The answer is support. When budgets are tight, 25% of schools facing financial pressure say supplier relationships become their top priority. That's a huge opportunity for suppliers to lead with service, not just product specs.

At WEPA Professional UK, we're working to close the gap between ambition and action. Through transparent claims, reliable product performance and hands-on support, we're helping education institutions make confident, sustainable hygiene decisions that deliver results.

Behaviour, mindset and decision-making

Procurement decisions within education aren't made in isolation, they're shaped by a complex mix of operational pressures, perceptions of risk and deeply held beliefs about what's possible. While most schools and colleges today prioritise sustainability, concerns around product performance and cost continue to hold decision-makers back from acting decisively.

One clear finding is that hygiene product ranges are rarely reviewed or refreshed. Only 0.8% of facilities update their hygiene systems more than once every six months. In a sector where procurement cycles tend to be long and inflexible, this makes the first supplier interaction critically important. Products must deliver immediate, consistent results, not just on hygiene, but also on sustainability claims. This is because buyers won't revisit these decisions quickly.

Interestingly, there's a strong link between sustainability commitment and operational confidence. Among respondents who class sustainability as 'very important', 55% rate their hygiene standards as excellent, compared to lower averages elsewhere. This indicates that sustainability is not a sideline issue, it actively drives higher performance expectations and operational standards.

Decision-making patterns reveal predictable rhythms. 50% of education facilities review their suppliers every 6–11 months, typically in line with academic planning, termly reviews or financial year-ends. Primary schools are the most responsive, with 55% reviewing within this window, a reflection of more agile structures and smaller teams. On the other hand, MATs conduct reviews less frequently, with 38% refreshing their contracts only every 2–3 years, likely due to complex sign-off procedures, centralised frameworks and longer-term agreements.

Beyond timing, priorities are clear: facilities managers consistently value hygiene performance, product reliability and supplier support above all else. In fact, while sustainability credentials matter, cost-

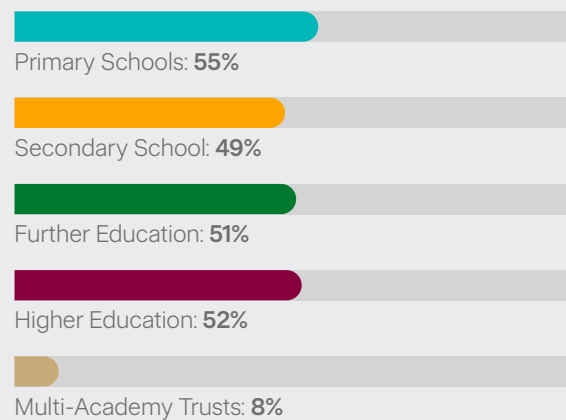
50%

of education facilities review their suppliers every 6-11 months.

effectiveness, health and safety compliance and trustworthy supplier relationships remain top procurement drivers. Even in financially constrained settings, decision-makers lean heavily on suppliers who can deliver transparency, flexibility and dependable service.

How often, if ever, do you review your products/suppliers?

Those who answered: Once every 6-11 months



Significantly, performance concerns are the biggest barrier to adopting sustainable hygiene products, cited by 36% of respondents. This was followed closely by budget pressures (35%) and uncertainty about actual versus perceived cost savings (31%). Suppliers must therefore work harder to bridge the trust gap and prove that sustainable choices won't compromise function, reliability or value.

Looking ahead



Across the education sector, sustainability is no longer an ambition, it's becoming an operational priority. Our research confirms that only 2% of schools, colleges and universities now report having no sustainability initiatives planned for the year ahead. This marks a decisive shift from intention to action, with hygiene systems playing a central role in that transition.

At the top of the agenda is a desire to bring people into the sustainability conversation. 44% of facilities intend to engage staff and students directly in initiatives over the next 12 months. This move reflects a growing understanding that cultural change happens when people are part of the process. Hygiene systems, recycling facilities and refillable products aren't just operational tools, they're visible, everyday opportunities to involve school communities in sustainability, prompting conversations and reinforcing positive habits.

Infrastructure upgrades are also a clear priority. 38% of respondents intend to improve their recycling systems, addressing one of the most visible and measurable aspects of environmental performance in education settings. Alongside this, 37% plan to introduce refillable hygiene product systems, reducing single-use waste and lowering operational costs. These decisions represent a move towards circular, low-waste models that offer both environmental and financial returns.

Only 2%

of education facilities report no sustainability initiatives for the year ahead

The specific priorities differ by education type:

- In primary schools, reducing single-use plastics is the most urgent concern, with 41% prioritising this issue. This focus is often driven by pupil-led campaigns and local community action, where younger students are already championing environmental causes.
- In higher education settings, refillable hygiene systems and community engagement are treated with equal importance, with 52% of institutions focusing on both. This dual emphasis reflects the reputational pressures and public-facing sustainability commitments that universities and colleges must uphold.
- Further education institutions are concentrating their efforts on improving recycling infrastructure, with 54% identifying this as their lead initiative, often driven by broader local authority and funding frameworks tied to net-zero targets.
- MATs, overseeing multiple schools, are taking a balanced, broad-based approach, spreading their efforts evenly across waste reduction, refillables, recycling infrastructure and cultural engagement initiatives.

These planned initiatives confirm that sustainability is no longer a standalone policy or poster campaign. It's becoming part of operational hygiene management and suppliers will be expected to help deliver that transition.

Actionable takeaways

Turning sustainability strategies into operational reality often falls to procurement leads and facilities managers. These roles face the added complexity of balancing tight budgets, hygiene performance, regulatory compliance and increasingly ambitious environmental targets. The path to greener and more efficient hygiene operations while meeting those competing demands operations starts with clear, manageable steps.



Conduct a procurement health check

Evaluate whether your hygiene products genuinely support your sustainability objectives. Begin by reviewing whether your existing hygiene products actively support your organisation's sustainability goals. Consider whether the products you use are made from renewable, biodegradable or recycled materials, and whether viable alternatives exist that could reduce waste or cut carbon emissions without compromising on performance.

Assess whether refillable systems are being used wherever possible. Single-use dispensers and packaging generate unnecessary waste, whereas switching to refillable, touch-free systems not only lowers environmental impact but also improves hygiene standards, particularly in busy education environments.

It's also important to review how often hygiene suppliers are being assessed. While the data shows that half of education settings already review suppliers every six to eleven months, MATs in particular should consider shortening their review cycles. Doing so can help avoid being tied into long-term contracts with underperforming or unsustainable suppliers.

In today's procurement environment, anecdotal claims are no longer sufficient. It's essential to demand clear, verifiable evidence of product performance, waste reduction achievements, lifecycle carbon footprints and operational efficiency improvements. This information enables informed, confident procurement decisions aligned with both operational needs and environmental objectives.



Audit your current systems

A simple audit of your current setup can quickly identify both immediate and longer-term improvements. Review product usage to uncover actionable improvements. Identify high-waste

products or inefficient systems and replace them with more sustainable alternatives. Look for simple adjustments like switching to touch-free dispensers or recycled paper products that can improve hygiene outcomes while reducing waste, often with minimal financial outlay.



Prioritise supplier partnerships, not just transactions

In an environment where 35% of facilities report time constraints and 33% struggle with product availability, supplier relationships matter.

Seek out partners who offer installation support, staff training, product trials and proactive account management.

This is especially vital for MATs, where 54% identified a lack of time for regular reviews and upgrades as a major barrier.



Ask smarter, sharper supplier questions

Modern hygiene procurement isn't just about price and availability. It's about understanding what products are made of, how they perform and the measurable impact they deliver. When choosing a hygiene supplier, ask:

- What is the environmental footprint of this product?
- What raw materials are used? (e.g. Miscanthus, recycled OCC)
- Can you provide data on usage, waste reduction and operational savings?
- What support services are available before and after installation?
- How can you help engage staff and students in our sustainability initiatives?

By taking these proactive, practical steps, procurement leads and facilities managers can confidently modernise hygiene operations while contributing meaningfully to their institution's sustainability ambitions. The key is working with suppliers who provide more than products, working with those who deliver credible data, practical support, operational efficiencies and partnerships that stand up to scrutiny.

How WEPA Professional UK can support



At WEPA Professional UK we understand that education providers operate in a unique environment where hygiene, budgets and sustainability must coexist. That's why our Satino by WEPA range is specifically designed for high-traffic environments where performance cannot be compromised.

Premium hygiene, proven sustainability

Our product innovations include Satino GreenGrow, made using Miscanthus grass, one of the most sustainable fresh fibres in the world. This innovation delivers natural softness and quality, while fitting seamlessly into a circular, low-carbon supply model. Produced in Western Europe, Satino GreenGrow combines rapid renewability with local sourcing to minimise transportation and ecological impact.

Our other flagship product, Satino PureSoft, is made from post-consumer recycled cardboard (OCC). This product provides extra softness without bleaching and uses up to 60% less fresh plastic in packaging, delivering both comfort and circularity. The resulting hygiene paper meets professional standards while significantly cutting down environmental footprint.

Cutting-edge dispensing with HYGINITY

Our HYGINITY dispenser series, developed in consultation with designers and microbiologists, sets new standards in form and function. These touch-free, refillable dispensers are intuitive to use, fast to

maintain and ideal for busy washrooms in schools, colleges, or university buildings. The HYGINITY system offers full recyclability at end of life, while their smart-ready technology supports future data integration and proactive maintenance. Their design quality is recognised by awards, including the European Product Design Award (2024) and the German Design Award (2025).

WEPA Professional UK's commitment to a circular economy extends across every product and process. From recyclable packaging to refillable systems and resource-efficient production, our approach helps education facilities move beyond aspirations and into measurable, operational sustainability.

More than a supplier, WEPA Professional UK is a partner. We offer comprehensive support services including installation, training, product trials and centralised procurement solutions for educational facilities. Our clients benefit from long-term, proactive account management and transparent reporting, helping them to meet both hygiene and sustainability goals with confidence.

Get in touch with
our team today to
see how we can
help you:

sales@wepa.co.uk

wepaprofessional.co.uk



Leading sustainable hygiene