

# INFRASTRUCTURE WOMEN IN FOCUS



WIN NZ has been established to increase the visibility of women in the infrastructure sector. Every month we profile a different woman working in a different part of the industry. If you would like to be profiled, or would like to nominate someone to be profiled, please answer the questions below and send your picture through to [Tara](#).

**We'd like to introduce Alison Murray as our next Woman of Focus. Alison is a member of WIN Wellington.**



**ALISON MURRAY**  
DIRECTOR  
COMMERCIAL PROCUREMENT, EIS



## 1. What company or organisation do you work for and what is your role there?

I work for Education Infrastructure Service, a business group within the Ministry of Education. Education Infrastructure Service is responsible for the performance of the state school property portfolio. We are actively moving towards being a strategic asset manager for the Crown, and work with school boards of trustees, principals, and their communities to ensure learning spaces are appropriate for students and staff.

The following is an overview of the portfolio we manage:

- New Zealand has around 2,500 schools serving approximately 820,000 students;
- there are 330 state-integrated schools and around 100 private schools; and
- the Ministry-managed state school property estate includes around 2,100 schools with over 16,500 school buildings, 35,500 teaching spaces and approximately 8,000 hectares of land.

With a book value of \$19.6 billion and a replacement value of \$31.6 billion, the Crown school property estate is one of the Government's largest social asset portfolios.

I am the Group Manager of Infrastructure Procurement with responsibility for all infrastructure / asset management spend for school property. I have been in the role for the last 2 years and manage a team of approx. 45 procurement and commercial specialists based in teams placed in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch.

We have a significant work program to deliver and utilise a range of procurement solutions to help deliver this program, ensuring we maximise value and outcomes. In 2020 we launched a strategic procurement initiative which is being trialled as a *proof of concept* across several regions and includes 191 different projects with an estimated value of \$1.46 billion. The initiative aims to "take a best for project" approach to deliver projects based on their specific merits and challenges rather than following a standardised national process. Our suppliers have been at the heart of this work, helping to shape the approach.

## 2. Tell us about your career background and how you got to this position/role?

My whole working career has been procurement focused, within a variety of roles spanning the last 30 years (Yes, I turned 50 in February this year). When I started it was called Purchasing and orders/contracts were done on paper, in triplicate! My career in procurement began with my Business Degree in the UK over four years

including two work placements with Michelin Tyres, one being in the Purchasing department. I loved it - my career path was chosen. After University my first role was as a Graduate Buyer with Lucas Sumitomo Wiring Systems (wiring harnesses for cars), buying raw materials and electrical connectors. After three years as a Buyer I moved to Toyota Motor Manufacturing UK as a Procurement Specialist, responsible for the steel category. At 24 I was the first female steel buyer in car manufacturing working in Europe across all car manufacturers. It was a very male dominated industry to say the least. I'd be sitting in meetings with senior Sales Directors of European steel suppliers such as British Steel, Sollac, Thyssen Krupp etc, debating with national Sales Directors (all middle aged men), but Toyota backed me and I guess I never really lacked confidence in those situations. Toyota was regarded as a leading light, in both manufacturing and procurement, with a focus on strategic planning, supplier management, collaboration and acknowledging the importance of relationships. This ethos and approach stayed with me throughout my whole career.

After five years as a Procurement specialist with Toyota I decided to move industry sectors into Financial Services where Procurement was an emerging function. I joined Britannia Building Society (an organisation with strong shareholder and social responsibility values), in the role of Procurement Manager. I was responsible for a team of procurement specialists looking after Marketing and Print, and introduced supplier relationship management into the business.

Following a number of years with Britannia I switched industry sector again, this time to the public sector with the NHS working for a couple of collaborative procurement hubs (combining the spend of a large number of NHS trusts), in the West Midlands. I managed a number of teams and different categories of spend, developing opportunities to leverage spend and improve value. I was involved in several significant tenders for a range of services and goods. My last role with the NHS was as a Senior Contracts Manager responsible for negotiating annual agreements for services between NHS Primary Care Trusts and NHS Acute Trusts (hospitals). I managed a team covering trusts in Staffordshire and Shropshire with an annual spend in excess of £1billion.

In late 2009 an advert in a UK procurement magazine by the NZ Ministry of Economic Development seeking procurement professionals caught my attention. In August 2010 I moved to NZ, not only for the work opportunities but for the change in lifestyle. I began with Alcatel Lucent for six months before joining ACC in the role of Manager Health Contracting and Supply (HCS), responsible for health services with an annual spend of approx. \$2.5billion. I managed a team of over 40 people, including procurement, pricing and supplier management and clinical performance specialties. A challenging role and during my time managing the team, many significant service redesigns and tenders were undertaken.

In 2014 I decided I needed a change and a new challenge. Mid 2014 Laurence Pidcock (about to become the new GM Procurement for MBIE) brought me on as a contractor in a new procurement team he was building within the Education Infrastructure Service group of the Ministry of Education. I was brought in to set up a panel of Construction Project Managers and to implement supplier management initiatives across significant areas of spend for the group. And so, my journey with the Ministry of Education and infrastructure began. A journey which has seen the Ministry move from having a poor reputation with industry to being recognised as a leading infrastructure agency.

### **3. Tell us about a project are you currently working on and why it interests you?**

We have a significant work program and initiatives to deliver it, but one of my key projects for this year is about continuous improvement in terms of looking at how we streamline and improve undertaking procurement activities. We want to reassure our internal stakeholders (delivery teams) and suppliers that what we do is fit for purpose, appropriate to the project (scale, complexity and risk), and that the focus is on the outcomes we want, not just the mechanics of the process.

Why does this interest me? Well, I always have a drive to do things better and one of the barriers for suppliers to the Ministry and for schools involved in tenders for infrastructure procurement is the expectation that it will be a barrier or a difficult process. The information we ask for and how we assess it is crucial in delivering against a multitude of requirements not only for successful delivery of the project, but also the broader social outcomes e.g., sustainability, increased engagement of Maori and Pacifica businesses etc.

### **4. What's the hardest job you've ever done and why?**

The hardest job I have ever done was my time as a Senior Contracts Manager for the NHS. There is only a set envelope of money available, and the annual negotiations involved agreeing what volume of clinical procedures the money would cover. The role was about using data of historic clinical caseloads and projections of future requirements to negotiate and gain agreement between two parties. The data was often poor, and many difficult discussions were held regarding data quality over correct clinical coding. Choices had to be made, but ultimately you always knew there was never enough money to cover everything in terms of people's health and well-being. Somewhere the decisions being made would be impacting people's lives both in a good and bad way.

### **5. Can you think of one example where your "diversity" has materially affected the outcome of a work situation or project, either positively or negatively?**

I think one great example which comes to mind, is the work I led for the Ministry to negotiate a set of standard special conditions for CCCS with industry on behalf of the Ministry of Education and other key infrastructure agencies. I think as a woman, I was able to bring parties together enabling open discussion and debate, but with the ability to keep things on track and the end goal of a fair set of agreed specials in mind. I believe women have strong relationship skills and the ability to listen and adapt which I think was fundamental to this work.

I also think that my diversity in possessing different industry experience was of key importance in this work. The fundamental principles of relationships, collaboration, and trust I have learnt and applied throughout my career, no matter what the sector, are of the most important. They allow me to get past the technical aspects and to the root cause of why there might be disagreement, finding a solution everyone is generally comfortable with.

To learn more about opportunities for a career with The Ministry of Education click [here](#) or, you can connect with Alison on [LinkedIn](#).

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