



UN Global Compact

Communication of Engagement

October 2015

About the University of Essex

Achieving excellence in education and research for 50 years, the University of Essex has established a global reputation. With three subjects ranked in the top 100 in the world, we are an international community for original thinkers who believe in challenging convention and seek to change the world for the better. We rank in the top 20 UK universities for research excellence, and we are consistently top for politics, while our students have voted us second in the UK for student satisfaction.

“We are an internationally-oriented, research intensive university with a commitment to excellence in research and research-led teaching, to the personal development of all our students, and to offering an outstanding campus-based student experience.”

Professor Anthony Forster, Vice-Chancellor

Our strengths

Research excellence

Essex ranks in the top 20 UK universities for research excellence and the top four for social science research in the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF).

Student satisfaction

The University achieved an overall satisfaction rating of 92% in the National Student Survey (NSS) 2015, placing Essex second out of mainstream English universities.

International perspective

We are one of the UK's most internationally diverse campus-based universities with students drawn from more than 130 countries.

The University of Essex's commitment to excellence in research and excellence in education means the principles of the UN Global Compact are reflected in a wide range of our activities. In this report we have chosen to focus especially on the work of the Essex Business and Human Rights areas of engagement as this exemplifies Essex's approach of using the principles to inform practical actions.

Contribution of the Essex Business and Human Rights (EBHR) to the objectives of the UN Global Compact

EBHR is part of the University of Essex's human rights activities, notable features of which include:

- Award of the Queen's Anniversary Prize 2009 for work in Human Rights
- Academic staff of international standing, many of whom have practical involvement in human rights work
- Extensive programs and knowledge of international corporate activity, trade and investment
- Almost 2,000 alumni and colleagues active in human rights
- Strong capacity to supervise consultancy and research contracts, with a university research income of £22.6m and turnover of £172.2m in 2013-2014

In its consultancy, training and research, EBHR focuses on the interaction between human rights, environmental concerns, and business activity both in the UK and abroad. We combine university and external resources in treating concrete problems that face businesses, civil society advocates, and governments.

With project expertise acquired over the past decade, EBHR is experienced at dealing with practical problems aided by the latest academic research. Along with its own staff, it operates with a network of members around the world who have been trained at the renowned Essex human rights programs.

What EBHR offers

Consultancy

Members of EBHR are able to bring to bear an integrated set of tools for the analysis of practical problems - drawing on law, finance, and the social sciences. We have experience in consultancy on projects in various part of the world, including Europe, Africa, the Near East, and Latin America. Work covers issues ranging from the analysis of investment agreements between multinational companies and host governments, through to the impacts of corporate governance strategies in corporate groups. Examples of our projects, and their links with the **core principles of the Global Compact** are given below.

Assistance with Litigation

EBHR participates in the formulation of submissions to courts in both domestic and foreign jurisdictions:

- A current example of this work is the submission of a brief that invokes the elements of **Principle 2 of the Global Compact**, directed at preventing complicity by businesses in human rights violations. The case involves the responsibility of a German multinational clothing company that is claimed by victim's representatives to bear partial responsibility for a fire in a clothing factory in Pakistan that has killed 270 people.
- A previous brief before a tribunal dealt with issues in **Principles 1, 7 and 8 of the Global Compact**. Members of the EBHR submitted a brief to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in a case concerning the involvement of a UK company in the projected Phulbari Coal Mine in Bangladesh, examining the human rights responsibilities of the company in a project predicted to displace 40,000 people. It raises directly issues about environmental protection as articulated by **Principles 7 and 8**, as well as the need for states and business to be proactive in preventing human rights abuses as contemplated by **Principle 1**.

Advice on ethical investment

EBHR has on several occasions advised the Swedish ethical investment firm, GES on labour issues raised by several companies in which it has holdings. The issues have dealt with Freedom of Association, child labour, and forced labour as contained in **Principles 3, 4 and 5 of the Global Compact**.

Design of Contracts and Legislation

EBHR is particularly interested in proactive approaches to human rights and environmental problems raised by business. To that end members have been involved in the formulation of policies that can lead to improved codes of practice, to amended legislation or regulation, improved contracts and other measures designed to prevent problems arising.

Research

EBHR assists with the formulation of research ideas and links with possible funding sources. Projects envisaged include those via partnerships with both academic and non-academic bodies, in the UK and abroad.

Training

EBHR offers short courses to lawyers, NGOs, businesses, and governments on particular areas that require a specialist focus. As an example, training was given to Members of the Parliamentary Committee on Natural Resources, Parliament of Uganda, who completed a three-day training programme on Legislative Oversight of the Extractive Industries in January 2012.

Student involvement and career development

EBHR has developed different streams of research for students, to which they are invited to contribute by in-depth analyses of core themes of importance to Business and Human Rights. These analyses will be made available on the EBHR website. In addition, students are invited to contribute to research on a number of the projects mentioned above emerging from requests from non-academic bodies.

This activity has given students valuable experience for later work, and many have made the career choice to work in this field. Every year there is a reunion of former students on the Essex Masters Course on Business and Human Rights at the UN Forum in Geneva, which approximately 20 students attend. In addition there is a larger network of former students working in this area that operates throughout the year.

Further current and recently completed EBHR projects

Treaty on Business and Human Rights

EBHR is one of three sponsors, together with Notre Dame University and the Business and Human Rights Resource Centre, which provide an on-going forum in London to discuss and develop potential options for a global treaty on Business and Human Rights.

EBHR will be presenting an analysis of an aspect of treaty strategy at a meeting of the International Commission of Jurists in Geneva on 19 November 2015, and has led meetings on this issue since 2014.

This work is a contribution to **Principle 1 of the Global Compact**, and the EBHR's particular focus is on the need – articulated in the elaboration of **Principle 1** - to find an appropriate balance between the initiatives of government and of private business, which can be the subject of coordination by an international treaty.

UN Forum on Business and Human Rights 16-18 November 2015

EBHR will be presenting at a side panel at this event on the role of universities in developing the Business and Human Rights agenda. Essex University is one of the world leaders in teaching this subject, and Professor Leader, the Director of EBHR, is on the governing board of the Teaching Business and Human Rights Forum which brings together law schools from around the world, and is coordinated at Columbia University, New York.

Critique of OECD complaints mechanism

In cooperation with Amnesty International, EBHR is preparing an assessment of the UK's implementation of its responsibility as a member of the OECD to control the human rights impacts of its companies. The objective is to make recommendations to the UK Government as a result of the investigation. It invokes the core elements of **Principle 1**.

International supply chain guidance

EBHR has agreed to formulate materials for the introduction of a system for monitoring human rights due diligence in supply chains for the International Maritime Purchasing Association (IMPA). IMPA has formed IMPA Act, an association of ship purchasers and suppliers working to become sustainability frontrunners by working towards compliance with internationally endorsed standards. Essex students, under supervision, are involved in the formulation of these guidelines. This is one of the most extensive and diverse supply chains in the world, and involves **Principles 1 to 10**, depending on the places and sectors from which supplies are sourced.

Partnership on the Right to Water

EBHR has formed a partnership with Aguaconsult, a consultancy with the objective to formulate and implement standards for access to water. EBHR's subject knowledge expertise in the emerging human rights standards complements Aguaconsult's technical expertise. Essex University staff and students will be involved in this project. This work will develop aspects of **Principles 1 and 2**, as well as the environmental protection dimension in **Principles 7 to 9**.

Human Rights, Big Data and Technology

EBHR will lead a sub-section of a major research project run by Essex's Human Rights Centre. We will focus on strategies for regulation of business in the gathering and deployment of very large-scale data. It is work that will be relevant to **Principles 1 and 2**.

Tortious responsibility of parent companies

EBHR co-hosted a side-event at the UN Forum on Business and Human Rights in Geneva, 1-3 December 2014, which explored the new legal controls over parent companies in multinational corporate groups that are beginning to emerge in member states.

Afghanistan mining – example of earlier projects

EBHR work in Afghanistan is relevant to **Principles 1, 7, 8, and 10**. In 2013, EBHR developed proposals for amendments to current Minerals Law, and analysed the human rights impact of an investment agreement between the government of Afghanistan and a Chinese mining consortium. Both projects were undertaken in collaboration with campaigning non-governmental organisation Global Witness. About this work, Annie Dunnebacke, Deputy Campaigns Director at Global Witness, commented: "With the support of EBHR, Global Witness has produced the first and so far only in-depth reports on Afghanistan's first mining agreements... We are starting to see real changes in the understanding of the risks surrounding extractives development in Afghanistan ... The EBHR's contribution to Global Witness' Afghanistan campaign has been substantial."

Our continuing commitment to the UN Global Compact

The University of Essex is proud to commit to the **ten principles of the UN Global Compact** via research, knowledge exchange and teaching in the coming years and on the basis of the activities presented in this report.

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