



University of Essex

UN Global Compact:

Communication on Engagement



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Period of Coverage

From academic year beginning in October 2018 to academic year ending July 2020.

Statement of Continued Support by the Vice Chancellor

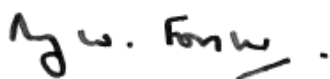
The University of Essex reaffirms its commitment to sustainability, to responsible business practices, and to participating in the United Nations Global Compact. In addition to participating as a successful international business, as an academic institution we can contribute through our research and educational resources, through helping to increase understanding and awareness of responsible citizenship, and contributing towards shaping the business leaders of the future.

We are committed to embracing, supporting and enacting within our sphere of influence the UN Global Compact Principles in the areas of human rights, labour standards, the environment and anti-corruption:

1. To support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights;
2. To ensure that our business is not complicit in human rights abuses;
3. To uphold the freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right of collective bargaining;
4. To support the elimination of all forms of forced and compulsory labour;
5. To support the effective abolition of child labour;
6. To support the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation;
7. To support a precautionary approach to environmental challenges;
8. To undertake initiatives to promote greater environmental responsibility;
9. To encourage the development and diffusion of environmentally friendly technologies;
10. To work against corruption in all its forms, including extortion and bribery.

In taking part in the programme, we are committed to continuing to align our operations and strategies with the Principles of the Global Compact programme.

In this Communication of Engagement, we describe the actions that we have taken during the academic year beginning October 2018 to the academic year ending July 2020 to support the UN Global Compact and its Principles. We also commit to sharing this information with our stakeholders using our primary channels of communication.



Professor Anthony Forster
Vice-Chancellor
University of Essex

Description of Actions

Human Rights

- The University of Essex is one of the most international universities in the world, with close to 140 countries represented in our student community, and we attract leading academics from around the world. But the diversity of our community is more than where our staff and students come from. More than 1,000 of our staff and students identify as LGBT+, more than 1,300 have declared a disability, and many members of our community follow a religion or belief. We recognise the value that diversity brings and we have a zero tolerance approach to sexual violence, racism, harassment and hate crime, having committed to the Race Equality Charter as a member institution in May 2017.
- Scholars from the Human Rights Centre and School of Law have produced a publication on [Covid-19, Law and Human Rights](#). This volume collects a series of essays from legal scholars considering the impact of Covid-19 on the theory and practice of law and human rights. The assembled papers collectively seek to engage with academic and practitioner communities and aims to positively contribute to attempts to “build back better” once a globally available vaccine for Covid-19 has been produced and distributed.
- In September 2019, the Essex Human Rights Centre created a new podcast series called [RightsCast](#), which examines current events from the perspective of human rights and explores how to achieve social change. The series offers a forum for different voices on campus and from around the world, and has featured topics ranging from newly decided court cases, conflict-related investigations, and the role of human rights in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Professor Clara Sandoval was instrumental in winning a landmark judgment ([Azul Rojas Marín v Perú](#)) at the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACtHR) supporting the human rights of LGBTQI people across the continent. The case marked the first time in history that the IACtHR considered a case of discriminatory torture, and ultimately resulted in a decision that held Peru responsible for the violation of a range of rights.
- The Human Rights Centre held an event in November 2019 commemorating the International Day for Tolerance, featuring speakers from academia, civil society, and the UN. The event focused on promoting inclusion, respect for diversity, and religious tolerance.
- The Human Rights Centre commemorated Human Rights Day in December 2019 by hosting a special panel event on Human Rights and Global Challenges.
- The Human Rights Centre hosted several events as part of Holocaust Memorial Week in January 2020.
- The Essex Human Rights, Big Data, and Technology project and the Human Rights Centre have partnered with the Permanent Mission of Denmark, the Permanent Mission of Netherlands and the Permanent Mission of Norway to the UN in Geneva, Universal Rights Group, Geneva Academy, Geneva Rights Platform, World Jewish Congress, The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Ferney-Voltaire and Geneva Internet Platform to provide a new Webinar/Webchat discussion forum entitled [RightOn](#). RightOn provides a

regular series of publicly accessible webinars which explore an exciting range of topical human rights issues, including many of those raised by COVID-19.

- The Essex Armed Conflict and Acute Crisis Hub, led by Professor Noam Lubell, released new [Guidelines on Investigating Violations of IHL: Law, Policy, and Good Practice](#) at the UN General Assembly's First and Sixth Commissions in October 2019. The *Guidelines* are set to become the international benchmark for effective investigations into violations of international humanitarian law in all conflicts around the world.
- The Essex Armed Conflict Hub also held a two-day workshop in July 2019 on Gender Perspectives on Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism Responses: A Dialogue on the Sahel Region, the Horn of Africa and Northern Africa.
- The Essex Autonomy Project cooperated with the National Mental Health Capacity Forum (NMCF) to host a series of three webinars for frontline professionals who are struggling with clinical, ethical and legal challenges associated with administering the Mental Capacity Act, whilst also ensuring adequate respect for the human rights of persons with impaired decision-making capacity, in the context of the pandemic. The Essex Autonomy Project also held Summer Schools and delivered additional training to social workers, psychiatrists, activists, and researchers from around the world.
- The Essex Business and Human Rights project hosted a side event at the 2020 UN Forum on Business and Human Rights focusing on business and human rights in armed conflict. The Essex Business and Human Rights project also hosted the Global Business and Human Rights Scholars Association Annual Conference in September 2019; a workshop of the UK Business and Human Rights Scholars' Network in March 2019; and the Global Business and Human rights Association and Teaching Business and Human Rights Forums in September 2019.
- The Essex Business and Human Rights Project published a report in April 2019 on the business and human rights responsibilities of institutional investors when investing in businesses operating in occupied territories. The report, commissioned by the Norwegian Union of Municipal and General Employees and Norwegian People's Aid, focuses on how the Norwegian state pension fund (also known as the Norwegian Oil Fund) has addressed the human rights impacts caused or contributed to by non-Palestinian companies operating in Area C of the West Bank.
- The Essex Business and Human Rights Project also contributed submissions to the UK Supreme Court supporting the application of the Plaintiffs in the case of *Okpabi and others v Royal Dutch Shell Plc and another* [2018] EWCA Civ 191 in May and June 2019. The letters were signed by leading academics and practitioners specialising in business and human rights. The case concerns a mass tort claim by 40,000 Nigerian farmers and fishermen against Royal Dutch Shell and its Nigerian subsidiary SPDC arising from the pollution caused by oil leaks from the company's pipelines.
- The Essex Transitional Justice Network organised a panel discussion in January 2020 on Litigating Transitional Justice Issues, a seminar in February 2020 on Economic and Other Third Party Actors in the Colombian Special Jurisdiction for Peace, and another panel discussion in February 2020 on the Participation of Third Parties in the Special Jurisdiction for Peace in Colombia.
- The Essex Human Rights and Big Data Project, led by Professor Lorna McGregor, delivered over 30 keynote and panel presentations around the world in Spring 2020 alone. These have included: co-organising an expert meeting on business and human rights and access to a remedy in Seoul, South Korea, with Human Asia, the UN Office for the High

Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and Korea University; an expert meeting in London on misinformation and human rights with the Carter Center and OHCHR; and an expert meeting on taking a human rights based-approach to open source investigations with the Human Rights Center at UC Berkeley.

- The Essex Human Rights and Big Data Project also released a number of key publications, including [The Universal Declaration of Human Rights at 70: Putting Human Rights at the Heart of the Design, Development and Deployment of Artificial Intelligence](#), which was discussed at a side event at the 40th session of the Human Rights Council, and made a range of policy submissions within the UK and internationally, such as to the UK Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Consultation on the Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation and the UN Secretary-General High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation.
- Sam Dubberley, a research consultant of the HRBDT and Special Adviser in the Crisis Response team at Amnesty International, and Dr Daragh Murray, a Senior Lecturer at the School of Law and a co-investigators in HRBDT, along with Dr Alexa Koenig, the executive Director of the Human Rights Center at UC Berkeley, recently published their edited collection: 'Digital Witness: Using Open Source Information for Human Rights Investigation, Documentation, and Accountability' (OUP, 2020). This book was considered a first of its kind as it teaches the methods and best- practice of using open source information for human rights investigations.

Labour

- There are a number of policies in place to ensure non-discrimination amongst our labour force and in hiring:
 - Our Essential Training Policy (published in 2017) requires all employees, regardless of role or responsibility (including graduate teaching roles) to complete Equality and Diversity Essentials training. All reporting managers must also complete Managing Diversity training and Recruitment and Selection training. All Chairs of recruitment panels and members of University committees must complete Unconscious Bias training.
 - Our Resourcing Guidance (published in 2017) sets out our principles for recruitment and selection: inclusivity, values-based, fairness, and consistency. We integrate these principles in a number of ways including: using positive action statements to seek to address imbalances in our workforce; ensuring recruitment literature is appealing to people with as wide a range of backgrounds, cultures, skills, and experiences as possible, identifying candidates whose individual values and behaviours align with those of the University; ensure selection panels are as diverse as possible in their composition.
 - Our policy on Harassment and Bullying sets out a zero tolerance approach, and describes the behaviours that are expected from all members of the community, as well as what is not acceptable. In order to combat harassment and bullying, the University has appointed and trained a network of Harassment Support Workers who can receive complaints, offer advice, and take follow-up actions via the Harassment Report and Support Service.

Environment

- University of Essex School of Law hosted a workshop on 'Human Rights and Climate Change: From Conceptual to Practical Perspectives' in April 2020.
- In October 2019 the University switched its electricity contract to a provider that produces 100% renewable energy. This covers all three Essex campuses and supports the University's efforts to continually reduce its carbon emissions.
- Our new Essex Business School building includes smart technology intended to lower the carbon emissions from the School.

Anti-Corruption

- The University maintains anti-corruption/anti-bribery guidance. The guidance makes clear that the University has a zero-tolerance approach toward corrupt activities. It applies to all employees, including consultants, contractors, trainees, volunteers, agents, agency staff, sponsors, and all other persons associated with the universities and any of its subsidiaries or their employers, no matter where they are located (within or outside the UK).
- Two Essex Business School academics, Professor Thankom Arun and Dr Pawan Adhikari, are working on a competency project in Kerala, which is the first of its kind in India and central to the training strategy of the Kerala government. The underperformance of public administrators in the delivery of assigned jobs in India has been attributed to a lack of clarity of tasks to be performed by administrators. In order to address this issue, which has resulted in a perceived gap between citizens' expectations and accountability in practice, the state of Kerala has undertaken a Competency Framework project, with which Professor Arun has been involved since its inception in 2016.

Measurements of Outcomes

Human Rights

- The *Covid-19, Law and Human Rights* publication has been distributed online, free of charge under a Creative Common license, and has been downloaded and referred to multiple times by scholars and the public.
- The RightsCast has produced more than two dozen episodes to date, and has been downloaded and listened to by people from across the globe.
- The Essex Autonomy Project webinars were highly successful, with the first webinar reaching capacity registration of 500 participants, making it the largest single EAP-hosted event in the ten-year history of the project.
- The Global Business and Human Rights Scholars Association Annual Conference organised by the Essex Business and Human Rights Project hosted over 100 scholars from around the globe.

Labour

- The University of Essex was named a Stonewall Top 100 Employer in 2019 and 2020 recognising our work to ensure an inclusive environment for our LGBT+ staff.
- The University of Essex is an Athena SWAN Bronze institution award holder, recognizing the steps we are taking to promote gender equality. 10 of our departments also hold Athena SWAN awards, and we have committed all departments to hold a Bronze award. The University will be submitting an application for a Silver award in November 2021.

Environment

- The University's new Essex Business School includes smart technology intended to improve on the baseline carbon emissions by being "lean" (reducing carbon emissions from the baseline by 18% via energy efficient measures), being "green" (offsetting carbon emissions by over 20% through renewable technologies and being Clean by utilising CHP).
- We have solar panels on 11 buildings across Colchester campus and we currently generate approximately 2.5% of our own electricity on-site through these solar panels, and there are projects under way to install more.

Anti-Corruption

- All staff of the University and all budget holders (any member of staff who has been given delegated budgetary authority or funds to manage) are required to comply with the anti-corruption regulation. This involves, among other things, ensuring that all staff complete a training session on the University's anti-corruption policies. The Competency Framework project has resulted in significant changes in the structuring of traditional human resource management.

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- The Competency Framework standards are being piloted in three Keralan state departments where they have already led to significant policy changes. They have contributed towards the creation of a higher quality and more accountable public service for citizens and have the potential to make a significant improvement to governance in the state. The success of the project in Kerala has been recognised by the government of India, which has expressed an interest in extending the study to the national level.