

## THE NEXUS BETWEEN HIGHER ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

There is a growing recognition of the impact of human resource practices modelled on the private sector and the neoliberal logic of treating academics as producers of research with a cash value on the working conditions and the enjoyment of human rights. A number of changes that took place in the 1990s have resulted in transforming UK universities from places where enquiring minds engage in the pursuit and dissemination of knowledge and ideas into cold-hearted revenue generating businesses. This transformation brought upon 'robust management cultures', job insecurity and part-time academic contracts as well as discriminatory behaviours with little or no regard for internationally recognised human rights. And yet, as emanations of the state and public sector bodies, universities do not merely have the responsibility to observe and respect human rights – a responsibility that all private sector organisations have. They have a positive duty to mainstream human rights in all their activities and to protect employees and students from human rights' abuses. Critics might observe, here, that there is no agreed definition of the term 'abuse'. However, the *UN draft of internationally legally binding instrument to regulate, in international human rights law, the activities of transnational corporations and other business enterprises* defines human rights abuse as 'any harm committed by a State or a business enterprise, through acts or omissions in the context of business activities, against any person or group of persons, individually or collectively, including physical or mental injury, emotional suffering, economic loss or substantial impairment of their human rights, including their environmental rights'. This definition should assist universities in devising a clear human rights policy and ensuring that all their employees enjoy the rights they are entitled to. These range from the rights to health and fair and just working conditions, to non-discrimination, freedom of expression, respect for private and family life, the right to protection of personal data and equal human dignity.