

Social Responsibility in Higher Education Institutions: The Example of Mentor Youth Guidance Programme by the University of Nicosia

Katerina Odyssea Georgaki
University of Nicosia, Cyprus

Andri Anastasiou
University of Nicosia, Cyprus

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Higher education institutions and universities represent a vital part of any society and are continuously faced with numerous new environmental and social challenges. Universities are moving toward corporatization, which calls for them to be good corporate citizens. In order to meet the expectations of the stakeholders, they need to adopt a social responsibility strategy just like other organizations. This chapter discusses how universities could achieve development, sustainability, and competitiveness through applying university social responsibility (USR). It presents a case study of USR, namely UNIC Mentor Youth Guidance Programme applied by the University of Nicosia in Cyprus. The initiative connects university students to at-risk youth, so that they act as agents of social change and mentors. The chapter describes the benefits, long-term effects, and impact of this particular USR activity, both for the organization itself and the various stakeholders.

INTRODUCTION

In the modern era when the world desperately needs to be successful in achieving global Sustainable Development, it is essential that organisations turn their focus on societal well-being rather than just conventional business success. Organisations operate and conduct activities that impact their surroundings (stakeholders, society, and other influenced parties). Are organisations becoming more aware of their impact in society and their stakeholders' expectations? What motivates organisations to commit to

their social responsibility? These are some of the main issues addressed by Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) which has been discussed as a concept since the second half of the 20th Century (Mehran et al., 2011). “Corporate Social Responsibility is the continuing commitment by businesses to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as of the local community and society at large” (CSR: Meeting Changing Expectations, 1999).

Similarly to organisations and companies, social responsibility also applies to higher education institutions and universities. Although their role in any society is vital, resource limitations, political influences and competitive pressures are commonplace with implications for the way in which a university can fulfil its role in society (Nagy & Robb, 2008). The mass expansion of higher education, the decrease of public funding for higher education, the change on how higher education is provided, its internationalisation and commercialisation as well as changes brought by ICT development, are mapped as the challenges that higher education has been facing and have been identified by researchers (Vasilescu et al., 2010; Barbaln, Daxner & Ivosevic, 2007; Eckstein, 2003).

While several observers of higher education argue that a recent change in the higher education system refers to the issue of “corporatisation”, the introduction and adaptation of higher education institutions to the concept of social responsibility gains interest (Vasilescu et al., 2010). Universities can no longer fulfil their social responsibilities in isolation from the business sector (Alzyoud & Bani-Hani, 2015; Amorim et al., 2017). Whereas universities have traditionally undertaken activities that contribute to and support communities in which they are located, corporatisation can lead to discourses that draw on parallels between contemporary university and business corporations (Black & Chile, 2015).

Parker’s (2002) research identifies that the traditional role of universities is under threat. He suggests that core values of universities now include financial viability, vocational relevance, industry relationships, market share, public profile and customer/client relations, scholarships, knowledge development and transmission, and critical inquiry have been transformed into exploitable intellectual capital for the pursuit of the “new enterprise university”.

Nagy and Robb (2008) raise the question whether universities can be good corporate citizens and discuss the term ‘corporate university’. Their work emphasises that the application of corporate citizenship to universities, serves to highlight the duality of these higher education institutions which operate like corporations, yet have more obvious, historically based, obligations to society. They suggest that as corporations are becoming more aware of the long-term benefits of a societal role for business entities, universities appear to be moving in the opposite direction.

Vasilescu et al. (2010) discuss the shifting from ‘Corporate Social University’ to ‘University Social Responsibility’, by presenting the conceptual framework of Social Responsibility and the university as a special type of organisation which needs to adopt a social responsibility strategy just like the other organisations, in order to meet the expectations of the stakeholders (present and future students, supporters, etc).

This chapter examines the integration of University Social Responsibility (USR) strategies as the means to achieve balance between social roles, needs, responsibilities, the rapidly changing environment and numerous challenges of higher education institutions and universities. By describing the case study of implementation the particular mentoring programme by the University of Nicosia in Cyprus, the chapter provides an insight of how a private higher education institution can implement an innovative USR practice, which goes beyond compliance with laws and regulations for its lawful operation, promotes the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG’s), involves service to society and compliments rather than

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