

# Sustainability and corporate social responsibility in universities



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Essay Title: Universities " cannot be sustainable without being socially responsible" To what extent do you agree and why?

## Introduction

Society is changing rapidly and people are facing different challenges every day. For example, the issue of sustainable development, environmental pollution and social justice etc. Many concepts and issues are grouped into social responsibility, including, environmental responsibility, human rights, diversity management, sustainability and philanthropy (Amaeshi & Adi, 2006), which means social responsibility could be a complex area.

Sustainability is the ability to meet our own needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The definition of sustainability is wide and there are three pillars of sustainability:

environment, economy and society. Environmental sustainability means maintaining ecological integrity and protecting the earth's environment.

Economic sustainability is the use of economic systems is intact and people are free to have access to financial and other resources to meet their needs.

Social sustainability means that people's basic human rights and basic necessities are guaranteed, all human beings can be treated with respect and without discrimination. Inequality and climate change have become increasingly social discussed topics in recent years, such global sustainability problems need to be effectively solved to create a more equitable social environment and a more environmentally friendly living environment so as to create a sustainable future for human society. According to Kahle (2018) et al., universities are able to play an important role in addressing

sustainability challenges, as they are places where our future citizens

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receive critical education, knowledge production and self-development. Thus I agree that universities cannot be sustainable without being socially responsible. University as an intermediary to cultivate future talents to society, has the responsibility to educate their students about what it means to be socially responsible and how to take social responsibility to in order to achieve the long-term sustainability. This paper aims to discuss why universities should take social responsibility into their mission statement and the influence of being socially responsible to universities. And how CSR promotes sustainability and where it may not be established. Also, this paper will present different universities' strategies for social responsibility.

### Main Body

Corporate social responsibility is a way for companies to take responsibility for the social and environmental impacts of their business activities, it is usually used by businesses to boost their brand images and reputations. For instance, Lufthansa was the first airline to run regular commercial flights powered particularly with biofuel, which could help airlines reduce carbon emissions.

University social responsibility covers many different fields: strengthen civic duty and active citizenship; students and staff are encouraged to provide social services to local communities to foster civic awareness; expand human knowledge through quality research on countries, people and education (Vasilescu, R. et al, 2010). Many universities in the UK add social responsibility into their mission statement. Nottingham University Business School has developed a financial literacy volunteer program to support

young people to understand how to manage their personal finances, which called Cheese Matters. The project has been developed in partnership with a small number of local businesses (Capital One, Eversheds and Ikano Bank) and the project is delivered by business school students and staff. This is a fantastic way for not only universities but also businesses to contribute to society and interact with different groups (age, culture, career) while providing an opportunity to share the personal financial experience. In addition, volunteers can further develop their self-confidence, expressiveness and adaptability. By understanding and serving the needs of the local community, can expand the influence of university in the local area. And by community engagement and volunteering, can develop the skill of student and promote civic responsibility and make students citizens with a sense of social responsibility, establishing good relationships with local businesses. The link between businesses and university might strengthen because they can find practical applications for research innovation. According to Ingram (2014), it is also possible to develop new income streams through consulting and other opportunities when a university has collaboration with businesses.

Some university studies may be linked to human well-being, such as health and environmental issues, these research results can be used to improve societal conditions. (i. e. Develop environmental friendly material and new energy to reduce pollution). Once the university has contributed some revolutionary technologies to the society, the reputation of the university will also increase, UK as a highly education industrialized country, once the reputation of the university has increased, the number of students who apply

for the university not only from domestic but also from overseas is also likely to increase, because university ranking could be one of the factors when students choosing a university. If the amount of application is low during the admission season for a university, then the university will not have many options when selecting students and may lose some highly qualified students. Also, these research will attract investments from society, because some organizations may be interested in using those research results to reduce business costs and build their CSR images as well. And it is also possible to increase government funding for the university. Therefore, the university can have more budget to develop their campus, or buy some research facilities to support their studies. which could increase the university's sustainability.

According to Weiss (2016), Christie Lee, director of student-community engagement at Nanyang Technological University, indicates that universities should not let their pursuit of corporate social responsibility policies mislead their fundamental purpose, which is to educate. Friedman (1962) argues that management has a responsibility to maximize the profits of its owners or shareholders, he argued that social problems were not issues of concern to business people and should be addressed through the free functioning of free market systems. Moreover, this view states that if social problems cannot be fixed by the free market, then its responsibility lies not with the enterprise but with the government and legislation.

Although there is an argument that CSR dilutes universities' primary purpose, and could higher the costs of scientific research and human resources. However, Smith (2003) believes that companies can establish <https://assignbuster.com/sustainability-and-corporate-social-responsibility-in-universities/>

their competitive advantages through CSR strategy. By conceiving the uniqueness of CSR, this uniqueness can be used as the basis for companies to distinguish themselves from competitors, thus forming their competitive advantages.

Considering that students and teachers may not have the initiative to pursue CSR, The University of Washington has established Diversity and Inclusion Grants to encourage students and teachers to actively undertake social responsibilities, in order to foster a friendly organizational culture where everyone is valued and respected. The University of Edinburgh has put forward the concept and content of social responsibility and sustainable development to the comprehensive school management, policy making, curriculum teaching, scientific research and social services, so that teachers and students can become advocates, practitioners and leaders of social responsibility and sustainable development, the university has also established a social responsibility management team and an executive team with the direct participation of senior leaders, and recruited a team of coordinators at the basic level, so as to transfer the concept of social responsibility to the most grass-roots units of the university. Through official websites, blogs, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and other media inside and outside the university to disseminate information about policies, knowledge and project activities to teachers, students and the public, the influence of social responsibility has become increasingly prominent.

However, if a university does not take social responsibility, it will be perceived as selfish, it does not contribute value to society, and the reputation of the university will also be damaged.

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## Conclusion

Universities should actively undertake social responsibilities, not only for their own development, but also for the development of the whole society. There is a win-win perspective if universities can successfully undertake their social responsibility, because universities can have a better reputation and attract more investment to achieve sustainability, and the society can benefit from what university provide and achieve long-term sustainable development. There is no essential conflict between the traditional responsibilities of universities and what is now called social responsibility. The tasks of traditional universities are education, creating knowledge and protecting knowledge, even those that cannot be applied immediately should be applied and protected. From the current point of view, universities should also have social responsibilities, which should be more responsible for local communities and the needs of society. In particular, as a place to store knowledge, we need to ensure that this knowledge can be applied to solve social and community problems. For example, it can provide laboratory research results and technology transfer. But universities need to be managed in new ways and with new ideas. The university should closely combine its own advantages and social responsibility issues, and seek for the focus points that are consistent with its own reality, match its own resources and correspond to its own advantages.

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