



WEBINAR

on

THE FUTURE OF UNIVERSITY SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

08th September, 2020

Organized by

e-Learning Centre, University of Hyderabad, India

India Dialogue, University of East Anglia, UK

Higher Education Division of UK India Business Council

University Social Responsibility is an umbrella concept that brings together diverse efforts to strengthen educational inclusion and academic internationalism. As a space of dialogue, innovation, and policy reform, USR fosters new kinds of institutional responsiveness and inter-sectoral awareness. Both of these are deemed necessary to evolve our knowledge economies so that they flourish and become both impactful and sustainable.

The aim of the webinar was to highlight the role of social and global responsibility in defining the partnership priorities and social commitments of Higher Education Institutions not only in India and the UK, but across the globe also. Hence, this webinar offered an opportunity for universities in the UK, India and beyond to share their insights and how they are contributing to USR.

The webinar was began with a keynote speech by Prof. Pankaj Mittal, Secretary General of the Association of Indian Universities. She has mentioned how Indian universities are supporting local communities and, therefore, fostering social responsibility. USR is now known nationwide in India with universities across the country supporting communities and villages through research and teaching. She stressed the importance of giving recognition to teachers and students for USR. She noted that without this recognition, USR will not flourish in the desired way.

Introducing the present initiative taken by University of Hyderabad, University of East Anglia and UK India Business Council, Dr Rycroft (India Dialogue, UK) emphasised the shifts that need to take place as the USR agenda moves from dialogue to implementation. In looking at the future of USR, the UN's 2030 Agenda is significant here because it asks universities to commit to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Underpinning the SDGs are five principles: people centric approach to education and development; planetary engagement; poverty reduction; partnerships for peace; and sustainable partnerships for international cooperation.

The other participating universities in this webinar included Prof.B.Rajashekhar and Prof.G.S.Prasad (University of Hyderabad, India), Prof.Gurinder Singh (Amity University, India), Prof.Richard Harvey (University of East Anglia, UK), Prof.Yinghwei Chen (Asia University, Taiwan), Prof.Tilak P D Gamage (University of Ruhuna, Sri Lanka), Prof.Andrew Philominraj and Dr.Ranjeeva Ranjan (Universidad Catolica del Maule, Chile). Prof.Balasubramanyam Chandramohan (University of London, UK) was discussant of the webinar. Ms.Tara Panjwani, Associate Director, UKIBC has moderated the webinar.

Overall, contributors sought to find bridges between these principles and current activities undertaken by respective universities and relevant stakeholders. The speakers have shared the experience of disseminating USR in their universities both structurally and academically.

A question to keep in mind when considering USR is ‘What can universities do for society?’ Many universities are responding this question by instilling entrepreneurship and creativity into their students. Through supporting students and communities’ skill sets, the hope is that this will contribute to innovative solutions that will benefit society.

Those universities which participated in this webinar shared information on a vast array of interesting case studies to highlight the ways they are contributing to USR. A few examples include providing scholarships to those in need, including funding for about 1,000 female students; sending students overseas to support community service; student volunteering; helping graduates find jobs; providing opportunities for students to raise money; participating in sustainability activities; devising new curriculum and coursework; including practitioners as teachers; and applying AI to USR to solve social problems.



USR can, and should, involve different kinds of academic corporations and/or approaches, presenting an opportunity for colleagues to be resourceful in how they approach it. At the moment, really good work is happening, but much of it needs to find greater synergy with the high principles mentioned. They have also welcomed the idea of establishing International

Consortium on USR. The USR Consortium is the mechanism for bringing all this good work into a shared framework for enhanced institutional cooperation.

Concluding the discussion, Prof.J.Prabhakar Rao has described USR as an ‘intellectual vaccine,’ meaning the spread of ideas, or raw injection of ideas, into society by research. There is a further importance on finding the right way to implement these ideas. It is important to note that USR is a dynamic, not static, concept, that will continue to evolve with our ever-changing social, scientific and technological advancements.

It is also proposed that India’s new National Education Policy (NEP-2020) needs to be looked from the angle of USR. In this connection, he proposed a webinar on this topic in collaboration with Association of Indian Universities. At the end, Prof.J.Prabhakar Rao has thanked all the participants.