MAPPING CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY ACTIVITIES AT OXFORD BROOKES UNIVERSITY

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose

This document is one in a series of documents outlining the activities that have been undertaken by Oxford Brookes University in developing a Corporate Responsibility Program (CRP). It reflects upon the processes we have undertaken in order to share good practice and to offer insights into what we have learned throughout the process. In doing this we hope to provide insights to others considering developing a CRP in their organisation.

This document is not intended to make recommendations on best practice as we acknowledge that each organisation has its own characteristics which may limit the usefulness of such an approach. But, rather, this is a record of the process we have undertaken and the learning we have gained from reflecting on this process, which we hope will be of some help for others developing a CRP in their organisation.

Oxford Brookes University

Oxford Brookes University situated in Oxford, UK, gained full university status in 1992. With 18,000 students and over 2,500 members of staff spread across four campuses, Oxford Brookes has built a reputation as the UK’s best new university since gaining university status. The University has a significant contribution to the local and national economy with an annual expenditure of more than £151million, contributing over £1million to the UK economy everyday.

Oxford Brookes University is one of a number of institutions in the higher education sector that is well respected for its work on sustainability. This is demonstrated by being the first university in the world to gain Fairtrade status in 2003 through to being ranked 3rd in the People and Planet Green League in 2009.
Introduction

May 2009 Launch of Corporate Responsibility Program by Vice Chancellor Janet Beer

May 2010 Publish first Sustainability Report

August 2008 Silver Ecocampus Award

May 2009 Launch of Corporate Responsibility Program by Vice Chancellor Janet Beer

Sept 2009 First university to gain the Gold Ecocampus Award

June 2007 4th in People and Planet Green League

June 2008 16th in People and Planet Green League

June 2009 3rd in People and Planet Green League

2003 One of the first universities to take part in a Carbon Trust pilot project

2004 Green Gown Award in the Transport Category

2006 Sustainable Travel Plan implemented

Dec 2007 Bronze Ecocampus award

2006/07 Green Gown Award for Continual Improvement

2003 World’s first Fairtrade University

2001 Oxfordshire Special Conservation Award for the Green Commuter Plan

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Mapping the scope of current CR activities taking place across the organisation may not be an essential step for every institution to undertake when developing a CR program, yet it has proved extremely useful for us at Oxford Brookes. By carrying out a mapping exercise it gave us a snapshot of the range of CR activities that were already taking place across the institution and gave us a feel for the spread of CR activities throughout the organisation. Added to this, it gave us an insight into the people who were running such initiatives, providing us with good contacts to further explore the range of CR initiatives taking place.

**The Mapping Process**

In implementing a CR program at Oxford Brookes University, we felt it necessary to establish the scope of CR activities already taking place within the organisation. This would allow us to build on the work that was already taking place across the institution and provide a good overview of how well engaged the University is with the CR agenda.

In order to gain a picture of what CR activities were taking place, and in what areas of the University, it was essential to create a central database for storing all the activities taking place. In order to facilitate interrogation of the database, the activities were classified into 6 CR themes. This would also aid us in identifying gaps in the CR activities taking place at Oxford Brookes.

**6 themes of CR at Oxford Brookes University**
- Community
- Curriculum
- Environment
- Marketplace
- Research and Knowledge Transfer
- Workplace

**Aims of the mapping exercise**
- Identify current activity in the field of CR across the institution
- Centralise records of CR initiatives
- Identify strengths and weaknesses in current CR activity
- Use the data to prioritise future actions on the CR programme
- Use the data to stimulate interest in the CR programme
- Celebrate CR activity internally and externally

In order to record the scope of CR activities taking place throughout the University, a variety of approaches was taken to gather the information, thus ensuring that as many activities were identified as possible. These involved web searches, questionnaires, workshops and promotion of the CR program to a wide range of audiences within the organisation. The process we undertook was broken down into 6 steps.
Step 1: Desk-based Research

A review of published promotional material both printed and web-based was carried out to identify CR activities that were deemed to fit into one of the 6 CR themes. This involved searching the University website and looking through promotional material and project documentation to identify any activities which could be included as a ‘Corporate Responsibility’ activity.

The review of the University website was thorough, involving searching every section, including the intranet. It was important at this stage to look beyond the front pages and search each level of the website within each department so as to identify as many CR activities as possible. The desk-based research produced approximately 80 examples of CR activities taking place across the University.

The desk-based research was very successful, yet one of the most important lessons we learned from this exercise arose from an initial lack of shared understanding of what CR means at Oxford Brookes. This meant that in the initial part of the desk-based research the decision on which activities were deemed to be a ‘Corporate Responsibility’ activity and which of the six CR theme(s) they could be categorised under rested with the personnel carrying out the desk-based research. This created the potential for CR activities to have been ‘missed out’. This could have been improved by ensuring all personnel involved in the exercise had a shared understanding of what CR means at Oxford Brookes.

What we did well
- Identification and categorisation of 6 CR themes
- Thorough web-based research
- Identified the range and depth of CR activities taking place

What we learned
- Create a shared understanding of what CR means to the institution among all personnel involved
- A purely desk-based approach will not reveal all CR activity

Step 2: Use existing research

Drawing upon existing research from within the University proved a useful tool in the mapping exercise. It brought to light numerous activities which had not been identified through the desk-based research and was a clear reminder that not all activities and initiatives are hosted on the University website or published in any University promotional material. In using existing research it ensured we did not devote time duplicating work and it helped us to identify personnel within the organisation who have an enormous amount of experience of collaborating and engaging with third sector organisations.

An interim report produced by Rachel Buxton entitled Oxford Brookes University and the Third Sector highlighted the vast range of activities taking place that are engaging with third sector organisations across the University. The report carries out a review of activity as at April 2009, revealing 55 examples of third sector activities taking place across the university. After cross-checking against the activities identified from the desk-based research to ensure entries were not duplicated, new activities were added into the CR database.

What we did well
- Identified in-house expertise
- Made use of existing, internal research

What we learned
- Not all activities may be time-based and so may no longer be running
- Not all CR activities will be published in University publications
Step 3: Promote the activity at the most senior level

To launch the CR programme, demonstrate senior level support and promote the program to uncover more activities for the mapping exercise, a presentation slot was secured at a Senior Management Team Training Day. At the event the Vice Chancellor (VC) promoted the concept of CR, what it means to Oxford Brookes and gave her commitment and support to the programme. The VC also spoke about the mapping exercise as a way of creating a clear overview of the current CR activities taking place throughout the University.

The VC was able to use her position to encourage the Senior Management Team to promote the CRP within their respective areas of influence and to raise awareness of the program. This would help awareness of the program filter down to all levels of the University. Approximately another 10 CR activities were identified as a direct result of this.

What we did well
- Communicated the CRP and its potential for enormous benefit to the University to the VC thoroughly and clearly
- Secured a slot at one the most senior, regular meetings
- Gained general senior level buy-in and enthusiasm for the program through the above

What we learned
- It’s important to get senior level support as early as possible
- A clear vision for the CRP prior to seeking senior level support is important

Step 4: Promote to academic schools and departments

Continuing promotion of the CR programme was done through the series of workshops which took place throughout the University, reaching over 200 members of staff and students. These were designed to engage staff from across the whole organisation, to include student representation and were designed to fit in with the existing platform of groups that already meet across the university; e.g. Investors in People groups, the Sustainable Travel Working Group etc.

The purpose of the workshops was to raise awareness of the CRP within the University, to identify more CR activities as part of the mapping exercise and to gather feedback and input from the University community to help shape the CRP. The workshops had to be designed to fit into an hour-long slot so as to fit in with the existing platform of groups and to take into account staff and students having busy diaries.

In order to introduce and communicate the CRP as well as gather ideas on the shaping of the CRP within an hour-long slot, we made the decision to produce a short film introducing the CRP at Oxford Brookes (see Step 5). The format of the workshops began with a brief introduction, followed by the CR film. This led to group discussion on three of the six impact areas which were identified prior to each workshop to ensure they were most relevant to the group which was meeting.

The workshops allowed for a number of new CR activities to be identified.

The second publication in this series outlines the materiality assessment in more detail, including the workshop process.

What we did well
- Used existing internal groups to reduce number of meetings
- Communicated the CRP to a large number of staff
- Gathered a number of previously unidentified CR activities

What we learned
- Some people wanted more information on sustainability at Brookes prior to the workshop
- Not everyone liked the workshop process
- Incentives are required to generate more student participation
- Face-to-face communication excellent for gathering CR activities
Step 5: Produce a promotional film

As part of implementing the CRP, we carried out a comprehensive series of workshops across the University. We produced a short film to use in the workshops in order to; give a brief introduction to the CRP at Oxford Brookes and to bring everyone up to a basic understanding of the CRP at the University.

The purpose of making a film was twofold. It allowed for us to demonstrate senior level support by having the Vice Chancellor introducing the CR program and providing the narrative throughout the film. This proved extremely useful for gaining extra credibility for the CR program with members of staff as it demonstrated high-level support for the CRP in the organisation.

The film was also very useful as an introduction to the CR workshops as it provided the context to the CRP and celebrated four current CR activities taking place across the university. These examples demonstrated the diversity of CR activities and allowed for the enthusiasm of those involved to be articulated through the film.

What we learned

- 10 minutes is a short time to deliver the concept of CR to a ‘new’ audience
- Having a visual representation helped to communicate the CRP and helps to meet all learning styles

What we did well

- Used our media students to produce the film, giving them vital experience
- Showcased a diverse range of activities taking place
- Made links with key personnel working on CR activities

Step 6: Organising the CR activities

When considering how to design and structure a system for centralising the CR activity taking place at Oxford Brookes, we needed to factor in the need to not only store the data, but how we could access, interrogate and ultimately present the data. This resulted in the decision to create a central database which would be searchable and, ultimately, be hosted online allowing new activities to be added and to help facilitate collaboration across the University.

The database was designed to allow us to interrogate the entries and produce visual representations of the spread and range of CR activities taking place across the University. The database allows us to gain an overall picture of CR activity taking place across the whole organisation and also allows us to identify what CR activities are taking place at the level of School, Department or even by the CR theme.

Figure 1: Graph of overall CR activities at Oxford Brookes University
Factors to consider for storing, presenting and accessing the CR activities

- We wanted to use the data to help shape the CRP
- We wanted to use the data to be easily used for reporting on external benchmarks
- We wanted the data to be easily searchable by our team and staff within the university
- We wanted to use the data to celebrate excellent activity
- We wanted the data to be available online

The intention is to host the CR database publicly on the university website, making it available for public viewing and accessible for staff to input their activities directly into the database. It is hoped that this will encourage interrogation of the database by those running projects and activities, therefore allowing for better cross-collaboration and information sharing on CR activities across the organisation. An online, publicly searchable database will aid transparency of the CRP and can help to demonstrate that Oxford Brookes is having a net positive impact to the communities it touches.

The process of setting up the central database proved to be organic and has allowed us to draw positives from the experience. We identified there were gaps in the information we provided in the brief for the design and functionality of the database. This can be overcome by ensuring that the brief is created by personnel who have a good understanding of Access software and will be a user of the database when it has been completed. This will help to reduce the time spent on tweaking the database during its construction and testing.

What we learned

- A good understanding of Access is required prior to creating the design brief
- Brief to be created by personnel who will be facilitating the database

What we did well

- Data required to complete and entry to the database allows for detailed interrogation
- Had a vision for what we want it to perform in the future

The graph in Figure 2 of the School of Social Sciences and Law is an example of the level we can go to analyse the coverage and range of CR activities taking place throughout the University. The example above shows a School whose range of CR activities is well spread across the six CR themes.
HOW CAN THE DATA SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY PROGRAM?

The data collected is valuable, not only for providing an overview of CR activities taking place, but allows us to identify parts of the CRP which may require extra attention. This may be that one of the 6 CR themes is under-represented, or that one area of the University is performing poorly with its engagement with the CRP. This can identify special requirements, i.e. this area requiring extra sessions to help to communicate the CRP.

Yet the most important aspect of having centralised this data is that the organisation is far better placed to celebrate the range and diversity of CR activities that are taking place. All too often excellent CR activities are not celebrated enough, which undervalues their contribution to the University and to the wider community. As further celebration and positive communication of CR activities takes place, the CRP will grow in reputation throughout the University and the communities it serves and will encourage greater participation in the program.

Celebrating the positive CR activities throughout the institution can have a number of benefits:

- Rewarding those departments and academics who have made the effort
- Encouraging a competitive element on CR initiatives throughout the university by making all of the data public and searchable
- Providing staff with a range of examples which they can learn from and imitate across the institution
- The very existence of the data can boost morale and lead to further debate and discussion on CR across the university
- Increase the positive reputation of the organisation

LEARNING FROM THE PROCESS

As part of the process of implementing a CRP the Sustainability Team has undertaken, and will continue to undertake, reflective learning in order to identify areas for improvement and for sharing best practice in the sector. The reflective process has proved valuable for bringing to light aspects which could be improved if we were to undertake the task again. It has also allowed us to celebrate the scope and diversity of CR activities already taking place across the university. This puts Oxford Brookes University in an excellent position to share our experience from undertaking the mapping exercise and, in turn, others to learn from our experience too.

SUMMARY

In order to implement a strong Corporate Responsibility Program, a mapping exercise was essential in order to have a snapshot of the current activities taking place across the University. This ensures that buy-in form those already undertaking CR activities will be improved and allows for a platform on which to build the CRP. This can then inform the short-term direction of the CRP.

Having never undertaken such a task previously, the process for mapping, recording and storing CR activities was as case of ‘learning by doing’. Despite this, however, the mapping exercise has proved successful, identifying more than 100 CR activities currently taking place, with more continually being identified. Further to this, the reflective learning process has allowed us to consolidate the learning we gained from the mapping exercise and, therefore, putting us in a stronger position for when we carry out a similar exercise again.
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