

CSR as a model for sustainable development of relations between business and universities

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Abstract

In the context of a mutual increase in distrust between society, government institutions and commercial structures, it is difficult to build a model of relationships based on responsibility. It is necessary to come to an understanding that the corporate social responsibility (CSR) of business will allow reaching a qualitatively new level of relations with society and partners. Given the lack of public demand for the study of CSR, universities, usually, do not show their own initiative, because they are dependent on demand from applicants. The situation may change dramatically if there is a steady interest in CSR issues among businesses, which, as a future employer, will generate demand among applicants, to which universities will gradually respond. In this regard, we conducted a study of the role of agricultural holdings as the leading export-oriented enterprises of Ukraine in the development of CSR education in Ukraine. In our article we conducted research based on open access information and questionnaires of high rank universities of Ukraine about driven forces to develop CSR education.

Keywords: CSR, university, business, agroholdings, Ukraine, corporate social responsibility

JEL Classification: D21, D81, F29, Q13, Q16

1. Introduction

Ukraine is now in a state of large-scale economic reforms, which provide for the construction of qualitatively new relations between the state, society and business. The Strategy for Sustainable Development of Ukraine declares the social responsibility of the business community, companies and individual business representatives, the measure of this responsibility and its content. However, corporate social responsibility is perceived by the society in a very narrow way and essentially boils down to certain charitable activities that business is engaged in. This perception is largely due to the lack of both knowledge in this area and the positive experience of society as a whole. After all, it so happened historically that most of the functions of social security were once performed by the state, and now everyone should perform: both the state and the corporate sector, but this does not happen. In the context of a mutual increase in distrust between society, government institutions and commercial structures, it is difficult to build a model of relationships based on responsibility. It is necessary to come to an understanding that the corporate social responsibility of business will allow reaching a qualitatively new level of relations with society and partners, which will lead to both an increase in profits and a stable position in the market, even in an unstable environment, and, as a result, will allow the country's economy to a qualitatively new level and overcome the crisis trends that have been observed in recent years. In the context of a

crisis of confidence in government institutions, in social infrastructure, in commercial organizations, a new generation of managers who will eventually come to leadership positions will have the opportunity to build a new model. And in understanding the effectiveness of building such a model, educational institutions can play a decisive role. Given the lack of public demand for the study of CSR, universities, as a rule, do not show their own initiative, because they are dependent on demand from applicants. International organizations have a certain influence on the study of these issues, which, with the help of grant projects, increase interest in the study of this area. These trends are confirmed by our study of institutions of higher education. The situation may change dramatically if there is a steady interest in CSR issues among businesses, which, as a future employer, will generate demand among applicants, to which universities will gradually respond. In this regard, we conducted a study of the role of agricultural holdings as the leading export-oriented enterprises of Ukraine in the development of CSR education in Ukraine using the examples of the educational project “Agrokebety” - a joint project of agribusiness and the university.

1.1. Stakeholders of CSR development in Ukraine

To address the issue of stakeholders, it is necessary to understand who influences CSR in Ukraine and how strong this influence is.

Figure 1: Stakeholders of CSR development in Ukraine



Source: own survey

Based on the study of many articles, our own survey of educational institutions and business representatives, as well as our own observations, we believe that international organizations and international businesses have the greatest influence on the development of CSR in Ukraine among the stakeholders identified by us. It is international organizations and business practices in developed countries that help to develop CSR through financing, information support, non-profit projects. The active promotion of CSR by these stakeholders

encourages other entities in the Ukrainian market to implement the best CSR practices and improve corporate culture in general.

It should be noted that the influence of society on the development of CSR is not, at the moment, significant in Ukraine. The influence of local civic organizations on the activities of companies in a particular territory is observed. But in general, civil society is just emerging in Ukraine. The level of awareness and interest in CSR is low, which is due to the low level of social protection of the population.

A small part of educational institutions promote the basic principles of CSR, this mainly concerns the largest classical universities in Ukraine. It should be noted that the implementation of such training programs and modules was mainly influenced by international organizations. Below in the article we will consider this issue in more detail.

The main driving force for the implementation of CSR principles are:

- creating a good reputation for companies that are engaged in “harmful production” (for example, metallurgical plants, manufacturers of chemical products);
- conditionally “socially obligated companies”, namely companies that are engaged in the production of tobacco products, alcohol and medicines;
- export-oriented companies that become major players in foreign markets and must meet certain standards.

Of course, for the further development of CSR, it is necessary, first of all, for companies to be aware of what it can give them and understand the essence of this concept. Nevertheless, in most cases, CSR is associated primarily with charitable activities, which does not give a full understanding of the business why it is needed and what it can give the company in the long term. The driving force could be educational institutions that could disseminate the necessary knowledge about CSR for both the new generation of managers and the current one. But the level of inclusion of CSR and related disciplines with this area in educational programs remains extremely low. The main reason is that education, as a rule, reacts with changes to the already existing demand of applicants, less often employers. Moreover, as a rule, this happens with a large lag, dictated first by the need for demand and only subsequent educational decisions. Such behavior is quite adequate to the realities of the market, since the proactive position of universities on the implementation of, for example, CSR, if it does not find the right response from the applicant, will be a failure, and accordingly, it will require the early formation of demand through massive information support, which is financially beyond the power of an individual university.

CSR is the future of modern society, but at the moment, society and counterparties are only beginning to understand the issues of a culture of interaction.

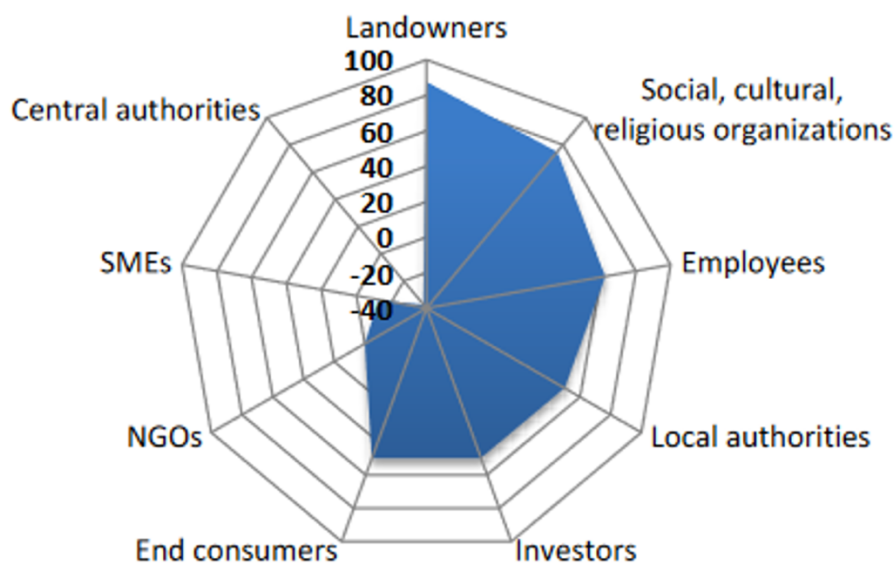
1.2. Current Trends of Corporate Social Responsibility in Ukrainian Agribusiness

For countries in transition to a market economy as Ukraine is instrumental motivations take on a much broader meaning than a mere justification of immediate tangible benefits over costs. The scope and magnitude of the problems that Ukrainian agrohholdings face arise from bottlenecks in the institutional environment that often make market transactions not only costly but also impossible. Illegal takeovers, shareholder rights violations and uncertain access to land, finance and qualified labor are the repercussions of insecure property rights, weak contract enforcement, corruption and nepotism. These circumstances impel firms to opt for voluntary engagement in actions that go beyond legal prescriptions, in particular with

regard to corporate disclosure. More importantly, these actions bear the potential to have positive spillover effects in the form of the institutionalization of transparent business practices and, in the context of a weak institutional environment, represent instrumental endeavors of firms. In this way, firms not only adapt to fluctuations in the business environment associated with information asymmetries and competition but also change the business environment through institution building. The likelihood of these processes spurring the design of robust institutional systems depends largely on the weaknesses, i.e. incompleteness, or capture of existing institutions (Gagalyuk et al., 2021).

In 2017 was carried out the complex research on CSR in Agribusinesses in Ukraine by Dr. Taras Gagalyuk and Dr. Franziska Schaft (Gagalyuk et al., 2016). On the basis of their survey they defined the main stakeholders of agroholdings' CSR (Fig.2).

Figure 2: Main stakeholders of argoholdings' CSR in Ukraine



Source: Gagalyuk et al. (2016)

So, we can see that the biggest influence on CSR development in argoholdings is from landowners and this trend is permanent till today because of opening land market. Social, cultural and religious organizations are the key instruments of setting the communication with local communities, that's why agroholdings have to take into account their needs, the same reasons are common to the building strong relations with local authorities, that are driven force for argoholdings' CSR development. Employees have huge influence of agroholdings' CSR, because there are deficits of qualified labour, since agrarian sphere doesn't belong to prestige profession among youth from the one hand, from another hand, there is a big damage of different kinds of frauds since quite low quality level of life in rural areas. The essential role of CSR development of agroholdings plays investors and end consumers, it's obvious since these players are the key resource of any organization.

Nowadays, the main efforts of agroholdings in Ukraine taken to the following areas of CSR: community development, employee relations, environment protection and product quality. At the same time practically undeveloped have remained the areas of diversity, corporate governance, supplier management and transparency (Gagalyuk et al., 2016)

2. Data and Methods

To determine the essence of corporate social responsibility, the authors conducted a study of scientific papers Abramov R. (2005), Beljavska K.S. (2011), Berezina O.Ju. (2010), Barney, J. (1991, 2001), Bourgeois, L. J. (1981), Carroll, A. B. (1999), Christensen, L. J. et al (2007). When describing the features of corporate culture in Ukraine, authors made own conclusion and analyzed the works of scientists Ghrishnova O.A. (2011), Karlin M. et al (2007), Petrashko L. (2011). Also, the authors studied the results of sociological surveys of public opinion regarding the understanding and attitude to the social responsibility of business, presented in the article Balakirjeva O.M., Ghalustjan Ju.M. (2007).

When determining the stakeholders in the development of CSR and the role of Ukrainian educational institutions in this process, the authors used their own observations and the few works of Ukrainian scientists who studied the development of CSR and the role of universities in this process, namely Hrynkevych, O et al (2020), Bodnarchuk, O et al (2019).

When authors defined the Current Trends of Corporate Social Responsibility in Ukrainian Agribusiness we made the conclusions on the basis of the results of research, carried out Gagalyuk, T et al (2016, 2021).

To determine the motive for the inclusion of CSR and related areas in the curricula of educational institutions, the authors studied the curricula of the leading universities of Ukraine on their official websites, as well as questionnaires sent to administrative staff and university teachers by e-mail.

When studying the role of agricultural holdings in the study of CSR in higher education institutions, the authors studied the curricula for the master's program "Administrative Management" of the National University of Life and Environmental Sciences of Ukraine before and after the launch of the Agrokebety project jointly with agribusiness, conducted a comparative analysis. To understand the results of changing the program in terms of including CSR issues and related areas, a survey of students was conducted.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Inclusion of CSR in curricula at universities in Ukraine

Over the past decade, the question of the need to study the corporate social responsibility of business has been increasingly raised. There is widespread criticism in American literature of current business school curricula that do not pay attention to this area. In Ukraine, at the moment, the inclusion of corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a discipline, or at least an element of the traditional course, is targeted. Many people associate the study of CSR with some kind of charitable activities of the company, which significantly narrows the interest in studying this area in the conditions of an unstable external environment for the activities of business entities and a decline in the standard of living of the population. In fact, CSR is based primarily on responsibility, the company's responsibility to all stakeholders. A correct understanding of the basics will allow building a qualitatively new module of entrepreneurship, which will allow reaching the highest level of development of the Ukrainian economy. This understanding, first of all, should be laid at the level of education.

We studied the curricula of 20 leading universities in Ukraine, available on their official websites. Further, we sent out questionnaires to the departments that were engaged in the promotion of CSR in order to understand the reasons for including CSR in the curricula.

Before starting the study, the following hypotheses were made:

- (1) Ukrainian higher education institutions that are actively involved in corporate social responsibility issues have a higher level of graduate employment;
- (2) Institutions of higher education in Ukraine, which have specialties focused on the further employment of graduates in international companies, are likely to actively introduce CSR into the educational process.

A survey of both the management and the teaching staff of higher education institutions showed the fallacy of the first statement. Due to the non-prevalence of CSR in Ukraine and the lack of formed demand from companies for knowledge in this area, the presence or absence of CSR studies does not currently affect the level of employment of graduates in Ukraine.

The second statement turned out to be difficult both to refute and to confirm. The study found that graduates with majors that would typically lead to further employment in international companies rarely actually find jobs in such companies. Only 1% of graduates of such specialties later worked in international companies.

Also, it has been suggested that higher education programs that teach groups of foreign students are likely to include elements of CSR in their curricula, but this statement turned out to be only partially true, since it was very dependent on the country of origin of the student. Thus, students from African countries were generally not interested in studying disciplines in the direction of CSR, while students from Asian countries were interested in the presence of CSR in their curricula, especially at the master's level.

We will pay special attention to the state educational institutions of Ukraine and the prevalence of their implementation of CSR in the educational process. It is these institutions that have become the driving force for introducing CSR into the educational process. According to the results of the study, no significant difference was found between the degree of implementation of CSR in classical and specialized universities.

In the course of the study, an unambiguous relationship began to be traced between the level of development of the international activities of the university and the study of CSR. Thus, it turned out those higher education institutions that have been or are participants in international cooperation projects over the past 10 years are actively introducing CSR and related areas into educational programs, holding specialized conferences, round tables, webinars, and choosing CSR as a direction for research. The more developed international cooperation, the greater the level of study of CSR at all levels, including in the publications of the teaching staff, and in thesis.

3.2. How agroholdings develop CSR training in Ukraine (on the example of the educational project "Agrokebety")

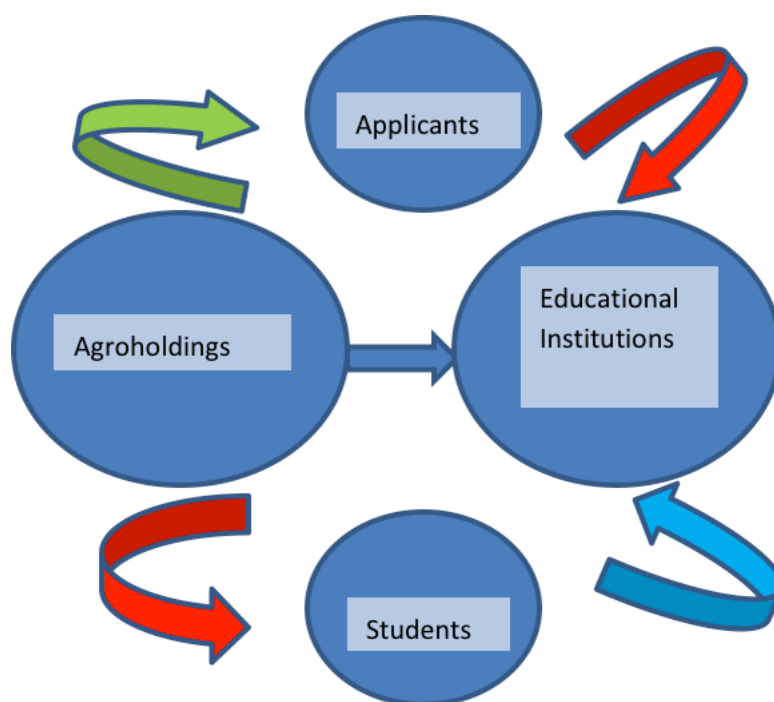
In the previous part of the study, we concluded that, in general, Ukrainian universities are not yet interested in studying CSR. Usually, universities with the support of international organizations are the main driving force for the targeted development of this area. The lack of interest of applicants and the significant interest of business do not contribute to the popularization of CSR ideas.

However, since export-oriented enterprises are forced to comply with international business standards, their level of involvement and interest in CSR and related areas far exceeds the interest of companies that work exclusively for the domestic market. The strongest export-oriented industry in Ukraine at the moment is agriculture, which is beginning to form a request for the study of this area of large agricultural holdings.

In our opinion, the distinguishing features of agribusiness in Ukraine from companies in other industries are not only the need to comply with international standards in the field of corporate culture and CSR, in connection with integrating to the world markets, but also an exceptional understanding of the importance and necessity of developing a corporate social culture. It is agricultural holdings that are faced with high requirements and expectations in the local areas of doing business, which requires them to consider the costs of developing CSR rather as a necessary investment, especially in the context of the imperfection of the land and labor market in view of the institutional changes that are currently taking place in Ukraine.

Let's consider possible directions of influence of agroholdings on universities and content the curricula with elements in which agroholdings are interested (Fig.3).

Figure 3: Scheme of agroholdings' possibilities to influence on educational content for the students



Source: own research

Any enterprises, as well as agricultural holdings, have the greatest direct influence on the inclusion of certain competencies and on the content of curricula during direct work with the university, when representatives of agricultural holdings are included as consultants and / or coordinators of educational programs. Basically, such an initiative mainly comes from universities, as they want to graduate students who will easily find a job after graduation. The potential of agricultural holdings in this area has not yet been fully realized, but this could be a good basis for combating the shortage of highly qualified personnel in this area. It should be noted that a number of agricultural holdings, for example, MHP, cover the lack of specialists with the qualifications they need by opening their own training programs, bypassing universities, which as a long-term strategy requires much higher costs compared to the synergistic effect that can be achieved between business and universities when creating a common educational product.

Agricultural holdings have an indirect impact on the content of educational programs on students who undergo internship or practical trainings in agricultural enterprises. Throughout

the practice, students directly see what knowledge and competencies are required of them and in the future make efforts to obtain them, thereby influencing the content of the programs when choosing disciplines and motivating universities to include certain courses for training specialists.

Also, agricultural holdings have an indirect impact on the content of educational programs on applicants when they choose a university, specialty, program content. Basically, this happens through the media by popularizing the agrarian sector in principle, highlighting the expectations of agricultural holdings from future graduates. An important role in the choice of applicants is played by parents, especially those who already work in the agricultural sector. The choice of applicants has the greatest impact on the offer of universities, but, unfortunately, at the moment there is no balance between the needs of the market and the prestige in the eyes of society in the agrarian sector. Also, the opinion of applicants is influenced by the level of publicity and transparency of agricultural holdings, the vacancies they post, but this area is still underestimated by agricultural holdings, in the analysis of the main trends in the development of CSR of agricultural holdings, we mentioned that business transparency is not the key for agricultural holdings at the moment.

To understand the importance of including CSR components in educational programs for business and to assess the prospects for disseminating such experience for Ukraine, we conducted a study of the educational project of a number of universities and agricultural holdings – “Agrokebety”.

Partners of the Project from agrarian sphere are following: agroholding Myronivsky Hliboproduct (MHP), New Holland Agriculture, «IMK», Bayer, «Gals Agro», Limagrain, group of companies HORSCH, LNZ Group, HarvEast, «Syngenta», company SE «Amazone – Ukraine», what is the subsidiary AMAZONEN-WERKE H. Dreyer GmbH & Co. KG, KUHN, “Avgust”, Lidea, Agrohub — platform for the development of agricultural innovations, NVC «Agroosvita», SmartFarming – integrator of technologies in the agricultural sphere, that specializes in improving the efficiency and competitiveness of the agricultural business, AgroPortal.ua - online resource about the agro-industrial complex of Ukraine, Destra - agency for internet marketing, that specializes in the promotion of agricultural products and businesses.

Partners of the Project from educational sphere are following: Kherson State Agrarian and Economic University, National University of Life and Environmental Sciences of Ukraine, Sumy National Agrarian University, Tavria State Agrotechnological University, Lugansk National Agrarian University, Nikolaev National Agrarian University.

To assess the presence or absence of a CSR component in the educational program, we will use the manifestations of CSR in the external and internal environment.

As a basis for studying the impact of agricultural holdings on CSR education, we took the full-time educational program “Administrative Management”, which is the basis of the new educational project of cooperation between business and education “Agrokebety”, which was first introduced at the initiative of UCAB in 2019 at the National University of Life and Environmental Sciences of Ukraine. To understand the transformation of this program under the influence of agricultural holdings, we will compare the program of 2017 and 2020 and consider whether there have been changes in the program at the initiative of agricultural holdings related to the inclusion of CSR components in training.

In 2017, the full-time program “Administrative Management” included 27 disciplines, which were focused mainly on management, finance and economics. Of the 27 disciplines, 12 are compulsory and 15 are students' choice. According to the results of the study of discipline

programs, it is obvious that the issues of sustainable development, ecology, relationships with stakeholders, the state, building relationships with personnel were practically not considered. As disciplines with separate topics in the field of CSR, only “International Agricultural Marketing Strategies”, “Management Consulting”, “International Agribusiness” and “HR Management” can be distinguished, which accounted for 14.8% of the total number of disciplines. Moreover, only one of them – “Strategies for International Agricultural Marketing” is compulsory, the rest are optional. Thus, only 8.3% of the compulsory block and 20% of the selective block relate to CSR issues. As a result of students' choice, only 1 out of 3 optional disciplines with elements of CSR was chosen by the majority of students - this is “International Agribusiness”, which reduces the level of final study of CSR issues.

In 2020, we see crucial changes in the Administrative Management program, as a result of the implementation of the Agroketety project together with business on its basis. The program began to include 21 disciplines; the focus of the program has changed - now it is organizational behavior, smart technologies in agricultural management, business ethics. Of the 21 disciplines, 9 are compulsory and 12 are optional. Agricultural holdings have begun to consider the direction of CSR not as a cost that they must incur in the local areas of activity, but as an investment that will allow them to take a stable position in the future. Disciplines appear in the program, with separate CSR modules and the inclusion of CSR indicators in the system of key performance indicators of the enterprise, such disciplines include: “Team building and personnel management”, “Monitoring and evaluation of company performance”, “Business modeling and project management”, “Modern Approaches and Tools of Management”, “Organizational Behavior and Leadership”, - these are 5 disciplines of the compulsory block; “Smart technologies in agricultural management”, “Business planning”, “Business strategies and marketing solutions”, “Land-legal relations in agribusiness”, “Ethics of business communication and rhetoric”, “International agricultural marketing strategies”, “Management consulting”, “Cross-cultural management”, “Psychology of management and conflictology”, “Strategic management”. Thus, 55.6% of the block of compulsory disciplines affects different areas of CSR and 83.3% of the optional block, respectively.

Based on the results of the students' choice, 6 out of 10 selective disciplines with elements of CSR were chosen by the majority of students - these are “Smart technologies in agricultural management”, “Business planning”, “Land-legal relations in agribusiness”, “Cross-cultural management”, “Psychology of management and conflictology”, “Strategic management”.

At the end of the third semester, after completing training and a 6-month training and production practice in agricultural holdings under the guidance of mentors, representatives of the top management of companies, the authors conducted a survey to understand the importance of CSR by students and their conclusions about the importance of this area for agricultural holdings and their future work in them. The survey involved 26 students of this program.

22 students or 84.6% chose 5 or more components, which indicates a broad understanding of CSR. At the beginning of the training, the result of an oral survey showed that students perceived CSR as a company's charity and concern for the environment. Thus, their understanding of CSR and its components has expanded as a result of the training.

25 students or 96.1% believe that a company should be socially responsible. At the beginning of the training, the result of the oral survey showed that only 6 students believed that the company should be socially responsible. This change occurred due to the expansion of the understanding of a “socially responsible company”, the internship at agricultural holdings within the framework of the program, as well as the evolution of one's own convictions.

21 students or 80.7% believe that the company in which they did their internship is socially responsible. 24 students or 92.3% believe that CSR knowledge will be useful for their future career.

Thus, we can conclude that Ukrainian agricultural holdings understand the need to be socially responsible, special attention is paid to personnel policy and the development of local communities, because companies understand that this is their long-term investment. They also transfer this need as requirements for the knowledge of their future employees, which are reflected in the joint training program and are confirmed by the analysis of curricula and student surveys at the end of training.

4. Conclusion

The level of CSR study in higher education institutions of Ukraine remains quite low. The main reasons for this are the lack of demand in the national market for such education. The importance of CSR as a system of interaction between the state, the population and the commercial sector, enshrined in the Development Strategy of Ukraine, is still declarative.

Educational institutions can become the driving force behind the development and promotion of the main directions of CSR. At the same time, higher education institutions must respond to demand from applicants in order to remain competitive. A significant role is played by various international projects that increase the interest and the number of studies in the field of promoting CSR, but they are not enough.

The demand from applicants and the development of CSR education in Ukraine, both at public and private universities, will be quite strongly influenced by the demand for the study of this topic from businesses as future employers, which we showed on the example of a joint educational project of agricultural holdings and the National University of Bioresources and Nature Management of Ukraine .

Thus, given the formation of a specific demand from business for the training of specialists endowed with knowledge about CSR, the situation will change dramatically, which is confirmed by our research. In further studies, we will take a broader and deeper look at the role of educational institutions in the development of CSR in Ukraine.

At the moment, only the first stages of the study of the level of study of CSR and related areas in Ukraine have been carried out, the results of the study showed that if there is an interest in business in specialists with knowledge in the field of CSR, the offer of universities will change and they will begin to actively include CSR and related areas in training programs.

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