A CALL FOR MORE SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP WITHIN UTRECHT UNIVERSITY

March 23, 2011

DEAR UNIVERSITY,

Society and the challenges it faces are rapidly changing, growing and becoming more complex. This creates an urgent need for students and universities to take their responsibility and step up to these challenges.

In a globalizing world we can no longer rely on government alone to solve our social problems. As the market's power increases, so does its responsibility towards the society in which it operates.

Traditionally, entrepreneurs transform the marketplace by disrupting and rearranging the underlying mechanisms of supply and demand. In doing so, they ensure that the market succeeds where it previously failed thereby increasing economic value. In the last decades, these principles of entrepreneurship have also been applied to solve social problems and increase social value.

This new way of thinking has been dubbed social entrepreneurship. This proposal, written by students of Utrecht University, calls for more opportunities to explore this new way of thinking. This, we believe, will benefit the students, the university and the society at large.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

These are the challenges and opportunities we would like to see addressed:

Putting Knowledge into Practice

The famous writer Anton Chekhov expressed it clearly: "knowledge is of no value unless you put it into practice". This is exactly what we crave, to put our knowledge into practice. The university has countless students that are highly motivated, have strong ideals and a fresh perspective on society. It is in everyone's best interest that these qualities are not left untapped. The university should provide their students more tools to apply their knowledge in practice.

Valorising Social Knowledge

While Utrecht University has had significant success in valorising technical knowledge, there is still much potential for translating social knowledge into something of value for our society. Social entrepreneurship can serve as an important tool for realizing this translation.

Returning the Favor

Society invests a lot in education. Many students are aware of their privileges and feel the need to give something back. Whilst this is a goal of many student organizations, the proposed cuts of the government will likely lead to a diminished participation in these organizations. Therefore, the university should provide students the opportunity to give back to society within their curriculum.

Corporate Social Responsability

With around 8000 employees Utrecht University is a large company, and as every company it has Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Students, faculty members and staff all have a role to play in making their university a socially responsible university. Again, students should be given the opportunity to contribute to this as part of their studies.

"SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP: A NEW CHALLENGE"

During the course "Social Entrepreneurship: A New Challenge" (USG4240) we have explored the possibilities of putting our knowledge into practice. This proposal is a testament to our experience. We firmly believe in the added value social entrepreneurship can create.

Now, more than ever, society and universities should connect through students to provide innovative solutions to pressing social issues.

With kind regards,

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