

RESILIENT AND SUSTAINABLE FUTURE: ESG IN HIGHER EDUCATION

This monograph explores how higher education institutions can integrate sustainability and ESG principles, even in the most challenging conditions. The resilience of Ukrainian universities in wartime serves as a testament to the critical role of education in fostering long-term sustainability, societal stability, and post-war recovery. More than just an academic study, this monograph captures a pivotal moment in history, offering the world an unprecedented perspective on resilience in higher education. At a time when Ukrainian universities, faculty, researchers, and students continue to operate under extraordinary circumstances, it is essential for the international academic community to support and collaborate with them in sustaining education, advancing research, and rebuilding the country's future.

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With a unique blend of theoretical insights and practical case studies, this monograph highlights the role of universities in promoting sustainability, resilience, and inclusive governance. Notably, it presents case studies of universities located on the front line, which, despite the ongoing war, remain committed to their mission - providing education, conducting research, and above all, envisioning a better future.

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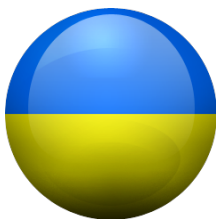
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Chapter 10.

Implementation of the Governance principle on the example of Alfred Nobel University

Oxana Bayer¹ and Alina Yudina²

Introduction

Dnipro is the largest city bordering the occupied Ukrainian territories. It has become a large humanitarian and logistics hub that determines all spheres of life, particularly education. Daily shelling threats and sirens make offline classes impossible, shelters are a necessity, and many participants stay abroad in safety.

Alfred Nobel University (ANU) is a small private university with around 2000 students and 150 staff members. After the full-scale invasion in 2022, ANU lost nearly a third of its students, many of whom had gone abroad and, with time, quit their alma mater. ANU management and personnel needed to take a good command of the situation to keep themselves afloat (ANU, 2024). Let us see in detail what was done related to the “G” component of ESG principles.

The fact that ANU is a private university makes it stand out from the other cases presented here. According to ANU's corporate culture, it is, first and foremost, an educational institution, but notwithstanding that, this is a business, and businesses should make money.

Governance is a universally acknowledged dimension in a company's activity that plays a crucial role in creating a foundation for its long-time sustainable business practices. As Dayal (2023) states, it refers to:

- the internal structure of the company, in particular, a set of its principles, processes, procedures, and practices guiding how the company is governed;

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- the composition of its board and transparency of its actions;
- the framework, structure, and ethics in decision-making that ensure the company acts responsibly and in the best interests of its stakeholders. We are going to analyze all three points mentioned here in more detail.

Huang et al. (2022), when investigating the Governance ESG Factor, include the following items: the university authority in preparing the vision and mission; planning; regulation; performance; dissemination of programs and achievements to stakeholders; study programs' authority to manage curriculum and research; freedom for lecturers to apply lecture methods and materials, as well as carry out research and community service; and the involvement of supporting staff in preparing, implementing, and evaluating university programs related to ESG. Five indicators support Governance Concerns: University Autonomy, Academic Freedom, Professor Authority, Staff Empowerment, and Information Transparency.

There are several principles for the implementation of the governance component.

1. Efficient management implies the **accountability** of the company's actions and its **transparency** in operation. Such policies breed stakeholders' trust in the company's responsibility and clarity. For instance, in (Mo & Wang, 2023) there is substantial analysis of how clear and fully HEI in China represent governance structure on their web-pages, including gender and ethnic group information of the highest governance body members, annual reports, communication of critical concerns, remuneration policies, and other dimensions. Christie (2024) complements these factors with clarity in corporate governance, corruption and money laundering, adherence to business ethics and elimination of fraud.

2. The practices of proactivity in operational and reputational **risk identification and management** (including those relating to "E" and "S" parts of the ESG system) implemented through the governance of the company help prevent their potential negative impact and, again, ensure sustainability.

3. The body of **the board of directors** is critical for the company for the formulation of its strategic direction, evaluation of risks and potentials, and ensuring achievement of ESG objectives.

4. Efficient governance is impossible without a strong team of leaders and good **management**. These personalities are responsible for providing into life the directives of the board, ensuring they conform with the principles of ESG (including the level of day-to-day operations). According to Krambia-Kapardis et al. (2023), good leaders are open to allocating power, give clear ethical directions, and apply efforts to build sincerity and equality. Huang et al. (2022) investigate the characteristics of an efficient ESG leader and single out their five indicators: the Rector/Leader's Leadership, Vision and Mission, Resource Input, ESG Education, and Culture and Consensus. Let us analyze the case of ANU to see how it implements the principles discussed above.

Restructuring of the University

In the case of ANU, together with the challenges of the Russian Federation's full-scale invasion, there was a change of the Rector in 2022. The new University head completed an audit of the University and assembled a new team of leaders who shared his values. Primarily, this is openness and striving to do open and honest work and make money. The administration is now transferred to the KPI system and included in the income sharing, encouraging them to take responsibility for project results and increasing their productivity and motivation to achieve common goals. The ANU board includes the Rector, Vice-Rector for Quality Assurance, Vice-Rector for Science and International Cooperation, Vice-Rector for Technical Specialities, and Deputy Rector for Commercial Affairs in 2024. Female employees represent 57 % of the administration. All nine of the university's departments are headed by female professors. Out of 17 structural subdivisions present in the University, there are female heads in 15, which makes 88 % (ANU, 2024).

ANU was completely restructured: if formerly there were 28 bodies within the university that were subordinate directly to the Rector, now there was a new efficient business organization structure (Fig. 10.1). In particular, one department was liquidated, three departments changed their names to reflect current demands, three structural subdivisions were reorganized, and one structural subdivision was created. Several departments previously financed by the ANU were given to outsourcing. The ANU Statute was

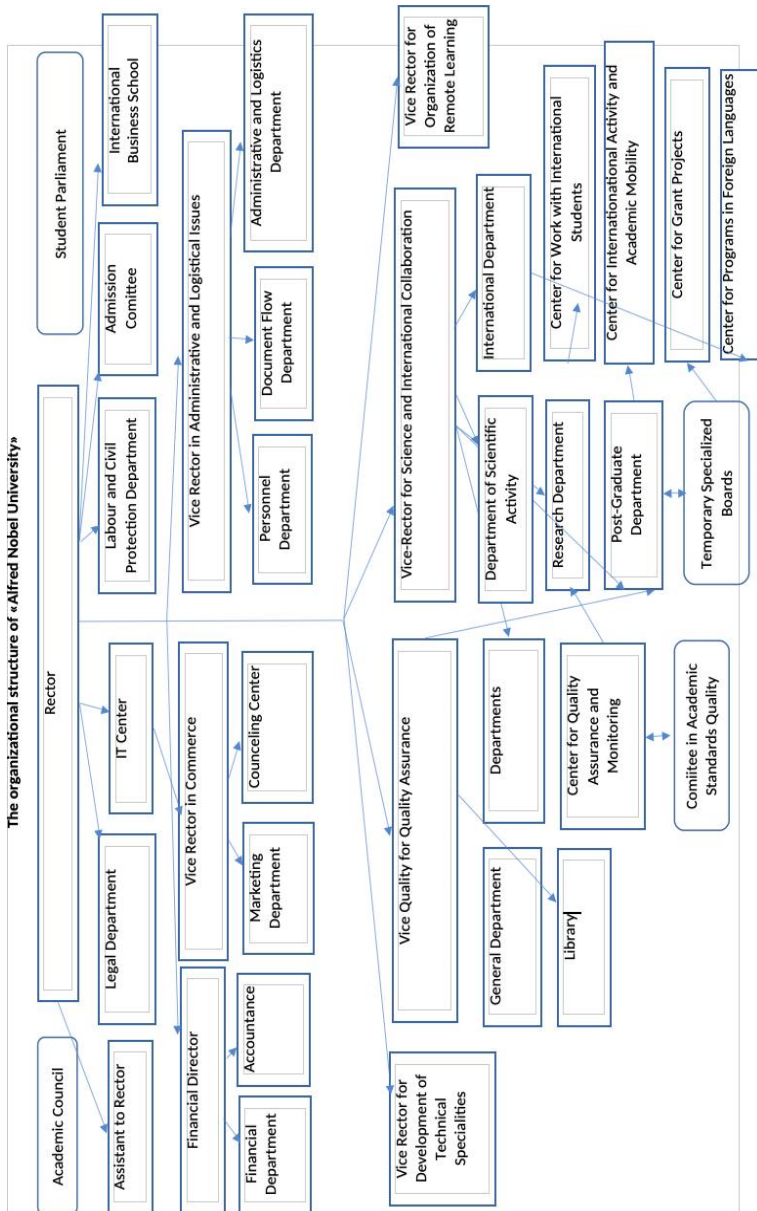


Fig. 10.1. Organizational structure of Alfred Nobel University

altered (Statut vyschoho navchal'noho zakladu "Universytet imeni Al'freda Nobelya", 2022) and the Collective Treaty amended (Kollektyvnyi dohovir vyschoho navchal'noho zakladu "Universytet imeni Al'freda Nobelya" for 2023–2027, 2022).

From 2022 to 2023, the organizational structure of the University changed dramatically. By now, ANU is structured as an efficient business organization. The managerial structure includes the following bodies.

Rector to whom Legal Department, IT Center, Labour and Civil Protection Department, Admission Committee, International Business School, and Vice Rectors are subordinates.

Vice Rector in Commerce to whom Marketing Department and Councelling Center are subordinate.

Vice Rector in Administrative and Logistical Issues to whom Personnel Department, Document Flow Department, Department of Administrative and Logistical Issues are subordinate.

Financial Director to whom Financial Department and Accountance Department are subordinate.

Vice Rector in Quality Assurance to whom the General Department, Library, Center of Quality Assurance, and Management and Departments are subordinate.

Vice Rector Vice-Rector for Science and International Collaboration to whom Department of Scientific Activity, Research Department, Post-Graduate Department, Department of International Activity and Academic Mobility are subordinate.

Vice-Rector for Development of Technical Specialities.

Vice-Rector for Organization of Remote Learning.

These actions align with the University philosophy (Kholod & Prusak, 2024) presented on the ANU's official webpage: there is no need to manage professionals. It is important to give them an opportunity to work so that they can do their best and develop their potential. Altogether, a successful team is a result of harmonious interaction, trust, and common efforts. Going back to the basic principles for the implementation of the good governance, the following of them are given below.

A well-structured and coherent framework based on the company's mission and values must be created for decision-making.

“As the keepers of knowledge, it is incumbent for higher education leaders to determine if decision-making processes reflect the institution’s community” (Esteves-Miranda et al., 2021, p. 77). It is to promote not only short-term profits and benefits but also ensure lasting influences on the environment, society, and stakeholders. With it, better decisions and more robust strategies are more likely to appear.

According to ESG, companies must **engage with stakeholders** and consider their interests. This implies understanding their needs and expectations, which will make it possible to build stronger, mutually profitable relations. Let us see the way in functions in the case of ANU.

Collaboration with ANU Stakeholders

The full-scale invasion was the starting point of the bigger activity of the Student Parliament of Alfred Nobel University, serving as an example of efficient collaboration with one of the university’s stakeholders. In particular, the need to be active and influence the situation brought by the war consequences made active Student Parliament members come forward with many initiatives as for the changes in the life on campus. Namely, these are activities with collecting funds for AFU ammunition and supplies represented on ANU official Instagram page, organizing and active participation in classes of tactic medicine (Uchast' u treningu z taktychnoi medytsyny predstavnykiv parlamentu ta rektoratu vud Sviatoslava Tsvetkova. February 3, 2024), participation in patriotic rallies (Fig. 10.2)

Crucial changes in communication with students as ANU stakeholders are brought about by the fact that the University functions as a business structure. The Dnipro region and Ukraine highly value the contributions of ANU, particularly its high-quality graduates, who are in great demand. The University staff proudly regards these graduates as trusted partners. It eases communication and allows us to adapt curricula and contents of the academic process faster. The University implemented paid internships from the first year of studies, and new majors appeared, such as electronic commerce and engineering of unmanned aerial vehicles. Modernization of outdated majors is also in process.

To implement the interaction process with the ANU stakeholders, a series of strategic sessions were carried out, in which key problems

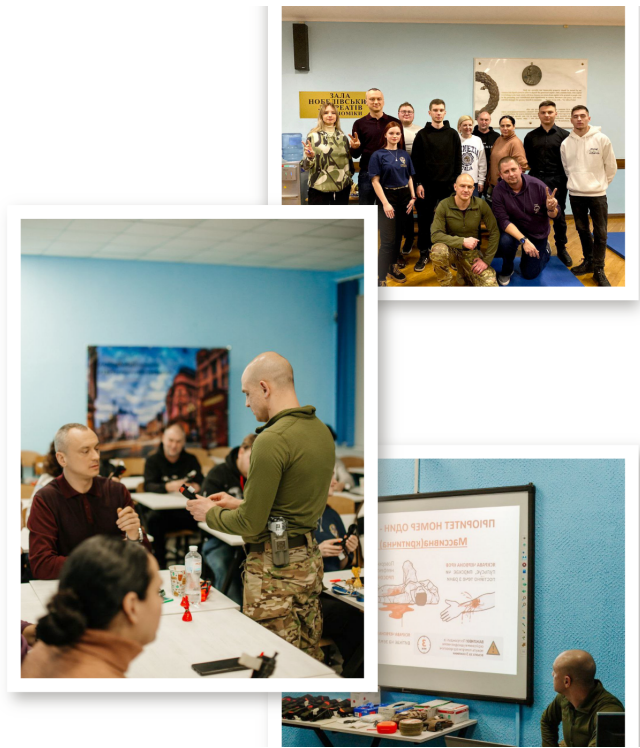


Fig. 10.2. Representatives of the Student Parliament and the ANU administration participate in the class of tactic medicine. February 3, 2024

Source: ANU (2024)

were revealed, and variants of solutions were proposed. The ANU personnel participated – namely, 40 representatives of all strategic divisions of ANU (out of nearly 200). For example, the situation with a massive drop in students was reformulated and re-evaluated. Except for the stress of short-term educational programs for ANU students and broader audiences, it was decided to attract more actively non-Ukrainian beneficiaries. It was decided that ANU could be profitable not only through educational services but also through counseling and research. Another stress that was made is on ANU staff as their brands so that with

themselves and their active professional and research activity they could be the university advertisement. Specific steps were brainstormed on how to move to achieve this priority (for instance, active social media self-representation). Let us return to defining the key principles of the good governance implementation.

New Ethics and Integrity

ESG implies **ethical behaviors and integrity** in all company life domains. In particular, this may mean fair treatment towards employees, respecting their rights, remuneration, and elimination of corruption (Mo & Wang, 2023). Altogether, these measures ensure a positive reputation with the stakeholders, eventually bringing their trust and loyalty. The latter two points are well-described in the monitoring process of communication with stakeholders in Christie (2024). The author gives several questions addressed to stakeholders to get their feedback as for their implementation, for instance: How could you rate transparency of information and decision-making processes on campus? To what extent do you feel informed about campus policies and decisions? How satisfied are you with the level of disclosure regarding campus policies and procedures? In your opinion, how well does the university uphold ethical standards in its operations and decision-making? What areas do you believe the campus could improve regarding transparency and disclosure?

Sustainable governance promotes **long-term perspectives** beyond immediate profits. Instead, efficient leaders may focus on creating enduring value for all the stakeholders.

Education Process

With the full-scale invasion, ANU widened the British and French long-term partnerships and received the status of the education provider within the Deep Tech Initiative, a part of the European Institute of Innovations and Technologies program. In response to the war and within the partnership and support of the French institutions (“France-Ukraine Exchange” Federation (Guéret, France), the Regional Directorate of Central and Eastern Europe of the World Agency of Francophone Universities, André Lalande Rehabilitation and functional readaptation center

(Noth, France), the Céleste-Obernai Hospital Center (Céleste, France), and Alliance Francaise Dnipro), at the beginning of 2024, ANU launched and coordinated an international project for preparation of Ukrainian psychologists and rehabilitologists for work with people with amputated limbs (Fig. 10.3). For two years ANU has been a member of the Francophone University Agency and is determined at further development of this partnership and the project mentioned above in particular. New professional internships are planned already as well as open lectures and webinars for exchange of experience.



Fig. 10.3. Participants of the international project “Réabilitologues – 2024” in Andre Lalande Rehabilitation and Functional Adaptation Center (Noth, France), January, 2024

Source: ANU (2024)

Under the conditions of war and the unstable socio-economic situation in Ukraine, ANU continues to accredit its academic programs through national accreditation bodies. In April 2023, the BA program “Computer Sciences” and in December 2023, the MA program “Computer Sciences” were accredited. The University is currently in the process of preparation for accreditation by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, AACSB. Most experts consider it the highest achievement in the direction of quality assurance of the educational process, research activity, and student life.

Altogether, the actions mentioned above served well in the successful implementation of ESG ideology for a particular university, ANU, in our case. Dayal (2023) also defines how strong governance contributes to the success of ESG.

1. It ensures that the company’s **board and management are aligned with ESG objectives**. If the latter are deeply woven into the company’s mission, they become its overall well-conceived strategy and drive the company towards ESG success, and this is exactly what we see in the provided examples.

2. Proactive environmental, social, and governance **risk identification and management** help companies not get involved in potential controversies and keep their reputation. In the ANU case, strategic sessions, regular quality evaluation procedures, and staff meetings help identify and prevent current and potential risks.

3. Effective governance practices put efforts into **dialogue with stakeholders** that enable them to understand better the concerns and expectations of their employees and communities. It leads to the creation of value for all the parties involved. In return, companies who stay in dialogue with their stakeholders are more likely to adapt to a rapidly changing environment. In ANU, as we have seen, continuous efforts are applied to keep dialogues with students, staff, and potential employers.

4. Effective governance implies thorough ESG **data collection and consistent performance reporting**. This allows progress to be tracked and provides management with clear data for communication with stakeholders.

Conclusions

In the case of Alfred Nobel University, we have fully seen the implementation of the “G” (governmental) component following the ESG ideology. Reacting to the full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation of our country, coping with all the subsequent challenges not only to keep afloat but to stay a profitable business organization, it optimized its administrative infrastructure, cleared out its set of principles, put efforts into keeping its actions transparent, and the governance system and ethical considerations in decision-making. The results of these actions contributed to the stable position of the university on the market in the time of the ongoing war, good positions in Ukraine's common university ranking, and leading positions in private university ranking, in particular.

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