Social Responsibility
Executive Summary for Employers

Education researchers at Pearson are conducting a series of summaries around Pearson's Personal and Social Capabilities (PSCs), the nonacademic skills that support employability. This review focuses on teaching and assessing the skill of social responsibility in K–12 and college classrooms. Social responsibility skills are valued by employers and can contribute to more caring and just communities; however, students may be graduating with limited competence in these skills. What follows is a summary of the most significant findings.

What Does Social Responsibility Look Like?

Social responsibility is broadly defined as taking responsibility to behave ethically and with sensitivity toward social, cultural, civic, and environmental issues. Synthesizing across several frameworks for social responsibility, Pearson has defined social responsibility as consisting of four core dimensions of competence:

1. **Multicultural:** Is knowledgeable about different cultural identities and sensitive toward cultural differences.

2. **Ethical:** Demonstrates knowledge and awareness of ethical standards and issues, and applies ethical reasoning and standards to make decisions in ethically ambiguous situations.

3. **Civic:** Is an informed and active citizen at the local, national, and global level, and understands and acts on issues of local, national, and global significance.

4. **Environmental:** Is knowledgeable about current issues of environmental significance, is concerned about the well-being of the planet, and engages in sustainable behaviors.

Why Is Social Responsibility Important?

Social responsibility is identified as an important skill that employers expect in their hires and as a crucial factor for developing ethical, just, and well-functioning societies. Research suggests that a focus on developing social responsibility is important for several reasons:

- Employers agree that social responsibility should be taught to college students regardless of their area of study. Aspects of social responsibility that are particularly important to employers include intercultural skills, ethical judgment and decision-making, and civic knowledge, skills, and judgment.

- Participating in social responsibility at a young age is associated with better outcomes in adulthood, including higher life satisfaction, higher educational attainment, and more civic engagement.

- Building a nation's social responsibility has the potential to create a more involved citizenry and communities that work for justice and the well-being of all people.

Is There a Skills Gap?

Recent large-scale surveys demonstrate the importance employers place on social responsibility. A survey of employers conducted on behalf of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) found agreement among employers that social responsibility should be taught to college students, regardless of their field of study. Employers specifically cited the following aspects of social responsibility:

- knowing how to solve problems with people whose views are different than their own;

- building civic knowledge, skills, and judgment;

- gaining intercultural skills.

Additionally, accreditation and professional competence guidelines indicate the emphasis professionals in many fields place on social responsibility. For example, the American Chemical Society's Guidelines for Chemistry Programs in Two-Year and Community Colleges (2015) details the importance of ethics to the academic and professional success of chemists.

Despite the documented importance of social responsibility, recent graduates may be lacking in these areas. A survey conducted on behalf of the AAC&U found that 81 percent of employers rated "ethical judgment and decision-making" as very important in hiring decisions, but only 30 percent thought recent college graduates were well prepared in this area. Likewise, 56 percent rated "the ability to analyze and solve problems with people from different backgrounds and cultures" as very important, but only 18 percent rated recent college graduates as well prepared.

How Can Employers Support Skill Development?

Stronger alignment between K–12, higher education, and employer stakeholders will help students fully develop the social responsibility skills they need before transitioning to the workforce. Employers can sit on advisory boards or work with educational institutions to develop programs for teaching social responsibility. In these positions, employers can communicate what experiences will allow students to practice the aspects of social responsibility that will be important in a specific field. These experiences may be particularly effective when integrated into "Capstone" or other transition-oriented courses for older students preparing to enter the workforce.

Employers can support social responsibility in their employees by communicating the value they place on socially responsible behaviors. Employers can establish clear guidelines around ethical behavior and diversity and inclusion and can adopt sustainability initiatives. Additionally, employers can offer additional time off for employees to participate in volunteer or community-service opportunities. Employers can also utilize recruitment, hiring, and compensation strategies to reward candidates who demonstrate strong social responsibility. For current employees, businesses can develop formal social responsibility training programs that are made widely available or support their employees in seeking out external professional development in these areas. Overall, these practices will help incentivize the development and practice of social responsibility.