

# **MARKETING ISSUES IN THE PRIVATE TERTIARY EDUCATION: THE CASE OF CYPRUS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Cyprus's higher education system is in transition and the role of the private higher education sector is under review. These internal changes are intended to market Cyprus's educational system more competitively. Our argument is presented in three stages; an initial exploration of the tertiary education market of Cyprus, then a consideration of educational marketing and the literature relevant to Cyprus. Finally we comment on the impact this analysis could have on the general brand – Cypriot Higher Education.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The operationalisation of marketing in Cyprus's private tertiary education system as 'increasing student numbers' is problematic from both an educationalist's and a marketer's perspective. Although the USA has embraced a specific professional stance as 'enrollment management' and the UK has taken a broader marketing orientation that clearly embraces recruitment neither has adopted a crude sales orientation approach which we detect in Cyprus. These different perspectives lead to differences in implementation for both domestic and international recruitment.

Cyprus's private higher education sector – influenced by both of these international traditions – is facing new challenges in terms of domestic demand, the need to increase international student recruitment, pressure of EU harmonization and the realization of the potential growth due to its geo-political location. This paper uses these insights on the readiness of private higher educational institutions to exploit national and regional markets as Cyprus seeks to become a regional centre of educational excellence. We find the sales orientation is unlikely to build a sustainable future but that it is maintained by short-term institutional goals and inappropriate government policies if growth is their objective.

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

Our argument is presented in three stages; an initial exploration of the tertiary education market of Cyprus, then a consideration of educational marketing and the literature relevant to Cyprus. Finally we comment on the impact this analysis could have on the general brand – Cypriot Higher Education. We will not be making the case for private versus public institutions in this paper but we follow Zumeta's assessment that nonprofit higher education "is a valuable to the nation" (1992:363) when referring to the USA.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

A focus group of University staff was conducted to seek an understanding and develop a language of the university's main marketing issues. The results of the focus group were used as a basis for developing and applying semi-structured interviews with the senior management team of other Colleges. The focus group consisted of five senior managers directly or indirectly responsible for the marketing of the university. It included the chief operating officer (CEO). Although the results can only be considered as tentative at this stage they do shed light on the marketing effectiveness of the private institutions of tertiary education in Cyprus.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Our research has shown that the marketing of Cypriot higher education is still product driven, which implies a sales rather than a marketing focus. There is often an awareness of the need to apply to holistic marketing philosophy but these aspirations are restricted by short-termism encouraged by the government's attitude to private education and the institution's own financial goals. This is problematic, for the realization of Cyprus as a centre of excellence is on the shoulders of the private colleges. We recommend that, like other European countries, the government either applies a fair market mechanism or it develops a strong marketing strategy that embraces all higher education institutions. Not to do this will ensure failure to match its goals, increasingly waste its marketing resources and, we predict, lead to decline in the number of students attending Cypriot institutions.

References Available on Request