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**Social Work Education in Private Universities:
Concerns and Challenges**

During the last two decades the policies of privatization have included traditional areas of services offered by the public sector, including higher education. Following these trends the Government of Cyprus has recently enacted legislation for the establishment of private for profit-Universities.

Currently, there are also three Universities operating under governmental – publicly financed - auspices.

The underlying philosophy is that this existence of Private Universities will increase competition between the public and the private sector and also offer opportunities for Cypriot students to study at home rather than go abroad. In each of the three private Universities, an undergraduate social work program has been in operation. No such program exists in the public universities so far.

This paper will explore the implications for training of social workers in institutions which operate as profit making enterprises. By their very nature, private Universities must recruit sufficient numbers so that at a minimum, the costs involved in operating a program are covered in the long run. This may potentially mean admission policies which encourage applications from students with low academic performance, as well as lacking personality traits and skills relevant to social work practice.

In Cyprus there is currently shortage of proper field work placements, as well as, qualified field instructors. This situation sooner or later may create tensions not only among teaching staff but also among students of the respective social work programs. Under such circumstances faculty members could become negative professional role models, not only for our students but also for the broader social work professional community.

Although there are potentially disadvantages resulting from unfair competition practices and profit making motives of such institutions, there are also areas of collaboration between the three programs which could act as a safeguard to administrative coercive policies. Under the direction of the Public Welfare Services policies can be developed with regard to admission criteria, the qualifications of field placements and field instructors. Thus the Public Welfare services Directorate could set standards and policy guidelines, acting as a regulatory mechanism to ensure minimum standards for the academic program, as well as, the duration and quality of field work training.

On the other hand, like any other private enterprise, private universities realize that in the long run their sustainability depends on the quality of the programs they offer. This means that they must seek the best possible students, as well as, the most qualified staff, who by virtue of their qualifications, teaching and research capabilities, will promote a positive image of the program.

Therefore, it is important to explore what are the quality assurance mechanisms, how well these are enforced, what is the role of the government in the continuous assessment of the level of the academic performance of the private Universities.