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Vocational Education and Universities: building collaboration and pathways for local/regional development

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‘Rather than more World-class Universities, what we really need in countries everywhere are more world-class technical institutes, world-class community colleges, world-class colleges of agriculture, world-class teachers colleges, and world-class regional state universities. The United States doesn’t have a world-class higher education system because it has many world-class universities; instead it has world-class universities because it has a world-class higher education system.’

(Birnbaum, 2007)

Global Regions and Higher Education

- As the distribution of economic activity has gone global, regions now compete on global terrain (Florida, 2008);
- Successful cities/mega-regions:
  - Depend on specialized clusters of HE and research institutes that interact with creative enterprise, exchanging ideas and personnel (OECD, 2006),
  - Have HEIs that either already have, or are growing, an international reputation and have close relationships with businesses based on the particular specialism of the institution (Hutton, 2006),
  - Because most OECD countries face talent shortages, successful cities attract international students and researchers (OECD, 2006, p122).

Creating a World-Class System

- Open and competitive system, offering the widest chance to the broadest number of students. It should not be a vehicle for perpetuating social and economic inequality;
- Diverse and coherent portfolio of horizontally differentiated high performing, regionally-engaged institutions – providing a breadth of educational, research and student experiences;
- Develop knowledge and skills that citizens need to contribute to society throughout their lives, while attracting international talent. This means ensuring the right scale and quality;
- Graduates should be able to succeed in the labour market, fuel and sustain personal, social and economic development, and underpin civil society;
- Operates successfully within the global market, international in perspective, and responsive to change – systematically benchmarking objectives and performance worldwide.

Diversity is Broad

- *Institutional mission and core tasks*: emphasis on teaching, basic and applied research, services, continuing education or professional development, outreach;
- *Research*: spectrum from basic/fundamental to national/policy relevance, across all disciplines, and curiosity driven & user-led, multi/inter-disciplinary;
- *Student profile*: ethnic, religious, or social background, gender, qualifications;
- *Staff profile*: ethnic, religious background, gender, previous academic and professional qualifications, functional emphasis, e.g., time spent on education, research, continuing education, innovation services;
- *Internal organisation*: governance, functional orientation of different units, funding mechanisms, reward structures;
- *Programme and pedagogical profile*: programme level (professional and academic diversity of disciplines and their interactions, pedagogical programme profiles.

(adapted from Reichart, EUA, 2009)

Learning Lessons

Strategies of successful mega-regions (*e.g.* Florida, Sassen)**:** attract the key resources of talent and capital, in sufficient quantity, to support state-of-the-art buildings and social networking infrastructure essential to enable 'firms and markets to have global operations';

Innovation clusters (*e.g.* Porter, Nelson, Lundvall, Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff)**:** Competitive advantage is built through developing clusters of activity, because innovation results from 'interactions within a network of different actors' and is rarely 'the result of efforts within a single firm;

Mode 2 research networks (*e.g.* Gibbons, Nowotny *et al*.)**:** Research is conducted increasingly through bi-lateral, inter-regional and global networks, with inter-locking innovation systems because complex problems require collaborative solutions;

Biodiversity (*e.g.* Rosen, Wilson): Within the eco-system, each species plays a critical role, mutually supporting each other, without which the entire system may collapse.

Victoria, Australia

- Structure of tertiary 'system'
  - TAFE: vocational tertiary/post-secondary education colleges/institutes;
  - Dual-Sector Universities: universities offering vocational/university programmes;
  - (classical) Universities: undertaking research/awarding higher degrees.
- Articulation between TAFE/university improving but remains a challenge:
  - Post-1988 universities admit most low-SES students; Go8 admit least;
  - ~11% of commencing university students offered places in 2007 on the basis of TAFE award, with higher rates, from dual-sector universities;
- Good practice:
  - Credit transfer arrangements between TAFE/universities, RPL or advanced entry
  - Cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder collaborations, e.g. educational campuses & mix-used development (e.g. Monash@ Gippsland, GOTAFE/LaTrobe @ Shepparton, Swinburne UoT/Knox City Council: Knox Central Urban Design Framework)

Catalonia, Spain

- Structure of tertiary 'system'
  - Principally university system w/ emphasis on classical academic provision;
  - Higher vocational schools w/ 13% of the age cohort concentrated in services sector;
  - Specialist institutions, e.g. arts, music
- Articulation between Higher Vocational/university is a challenge:
  - Students enrol on a particular programme but can be difficult to transfer to another programme or field of study or institution;
  - Limited data available on level and performance.
- Good practice:
  - Higher Vocational Schools are located immediately adjacent to UVR, UdG and the UdL campuses;
  - Pre-university initiative introduces students to university (e.g. UAB)

Challenges

- Performance funding models usually measure and reward HEIs on student entry qualifications and graduation rates, etc. – which discourages recruitment of low SES, advanced entry, etc. students;
- Universities have been slow to change curriculum and pedagogy to respond to the transformation from elite to mass to universal education;
- University leaders tend to be rewarded on the basis of making their institutions more elite – moving up in rankings.
- However, such practices while understandable from an institutional view-point are not acceptable from a societal viewpoint:

  ‘From a society point of view, a tertiary education system is therefore more valuable if it can accept and educate students with a lower scholastic aptitude without compromising quality’

  Ederer, P., P. Schuller and S. Willms, 2008, *University Systems Ranking: Citizens and Society in the Age of the Knowledge, Lisbon Council, p. 11.*

Best practice

- Qualifications Framework;
- Formal articulation procedures at state/national level rather than simply at programme or institutional level;
  - Flexible programmes and curriculum
  - Advanced Entry/Recognition of Prior Learning/Accumulation and credit transfer
- Targeted Summer Programme – introduce students to education/research activity
- Shared Educational Campus:
  - Between multi-level institutions, e.g. secondary, FE and HE;
  - Mixed-used development between FE/HE and city/industry.
- Tertiary Education Council