Vocational Education and Universities: Building Collaboration and Pathways for Local/Regional Development

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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 viewpoint 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’
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