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, p.122).

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, globally-focused 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 within the global market and is international in perspective, 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**: 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**: 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**: Research is conducted increasingly through bi-lateral, inter-regional and global networks, with inter-locking innovation systems because complex problems require collaborative solutions;

**Biodiversity**: 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