

Universitas 21 and Regional Engagement - A Report and Future Work Plan.

Background and Purpose

Following the receipt of funding from U21, an interest group has been set up by the Universities of Auckland, Glasgow and Melbourne, supported initially by UBC and Lund University around the theme of research universities and their regional engagement. The focus of U 21's mission is on educational development, mobility of students and every category of staff, research and knowledge transfer and the core systems and processes that support such activity; the work of this group will feed into the development of this mission.

This document is the report of a first meeting of the group hosted at the University of Melbourne in March 2010 following a number of informal discussions and meetings. All other U21 universities were invited and that resulted in attendance by a representative of the University of Queensland. The meeting also benefited from the attendance of representatives of RMIT Melbourne and Helsinki City, involved centrally in the PASCAL Observatory's PURE project at the University of Glasgow, which was the stimulus for the initiation of the network, and whose methodologies will in part inform the work of the group. In Appendix 2, detail of the PURE project is provided.

Participation by the other member institutions of U21 will be invited in the future and they will be encouraged to play a role in the further concretization of the agenda of the group and in the refinement of its work plan.

The purpose of the group is to drive excellence and innovation in regional engagement through discovering the means by which global universities engage most effectively with their geographical regions for mutual benefit and added value.

The aim is to discover how best and in what form a commitment to Regional Engagement by U21 members can:

- Meet economic, social, cultural, environmental needs
- Enhance the learning, research and engagement agenda of the University and
- Benefit both the university and the community.

Background

Universitas 21 institutions have many features in common such as strong and deep research agenda, an internationally recognised profile and excellent teaching and learning. Most member universities whilst being active in the global arena also express a strong commitment to their

geographical region, whether that is within large metropolitan areas or situated around a regional campus.

Currently, there appears to be no common understanding or recognised best practice for how an international research and teaching university could engage with its region for its own and the region's best advantage. U21 universities differ widely in how their regional commitment is articulated, executed, managed and monitored and in how they engage with other Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) within their locality. It seems that while significant work is evident, it is largely uncoordinated and sometimes appears to be unconnected to the mission of the university internally and not well recognised externally.

An agenda setting meeting

The proposals developed here were grounded on some preparatory work amongst some U21 members in benchmarking engagement and observations of practice. This included reports from visits undertaken by John Tibbitt and Mike Osborne from the University of Glasgow to both Lund University and UBC. Reports from these visits are available. A further visit from the University of Glasgow has been made to the University of Virginia in connection with this work. Reports on these visits and a paper presented by Professor Bruce Wilson, Co-Director of PASCAL at its RMIT office were discussed.

Representatives with responsibility for some aspect of regional engagement from the Universities of Melbourne, Queensland, Auckland, Glasgow and British Columbia at the meeting undertook preliminary talks and agreed a possible future work plan. The meeting also served as a development opportunity for those directly involved and was an opportunity to share experiences and identify wider collaborative opportunities. The University of Lund is also part of the core group, but their representative was unable to attend the meeting.

The benefits of engagement for U21 Universities

The group noted the benefits of engagement to research intensive universities as being:

- Greater recognition, prestige and external credibility
- Wider horizons - new opportunities for researchers and students
- Meeting the requirements of government policy agendas.

The following tables adapted from papers prepared by the University of Melbourne, Knowledge Transfer and Partnerships Office, provide more specific examples of benefit.

Research benefits

- Increased capacity to identify and meet significant research challenges through:
 - New contacts, networks and opportunities for innovation
 - Ability to refine and verify findings with external partners
 - Application of research to real issues/greater value to society
- Greater speed to market/publication/application
- Increased competitiveness/greater share of research resources
- Closer ties with government and industry
- Staff exchange, secondment, internship, joint appointments
- New funding and resources e.g. equipment, information, data, opportunities for cost savings/shared costs
- Greater interdisciplinary opportunities

Teaching and learning benefits

- Improved learning experience linked to business/professional outcomes through:
 - Industry placements and volunteer opportunities
 - Networks across industry
 - Increase student mobility
- Better equip students to:
 - Handle complex societal issues and become effective global citizens
 - Make informed professional choices
 - Build professional network
 - Work collaboratively and in teams
- Real and relevant curricula

Regional benefits

- Enhanced esteem and reputation for the university and the region
- Economic success for the region driven by university contribution to innovation and creativity
- Interconnections with groups and agencies to inform policy and research agenda
- Able to anticipate and respond quickly to emerging issues and urgent needs e.g. Melbourne's disaster recovery
- Greater awareness of cultural diversity and regional needs. Able to meet societal needs and work for the public good
- Enhance the attractiveness of the region as a place to live and work
- Enhancement of human and social capital

The U 21 regional engagement work plan

There is considerable experience and there are many examples of excellence within the U 21 universities and through sharing practices and collaboration the engagement agenda has the potential to add greater value to the universities' core mission and objectives. By necessity, however, priorities across the plethora of these activities were drawn up.

Priorities

Priority areas were identified as:

1. ***Structures and management*** – There is a need to identify the structures and processes that most effectively drive and support high impact engagement activities within prestigious universities.
2. ***Assessing the value of regional engagement and collaboration*** through indicators and benchmarks – Guidance on assessing partnerships and projects is needed to ensure that the costs and benefits of engagement can at least be approximated and that informed choices can be made by universities.
3. ***Stimulating, funding and delivering major research initiatives*** through regional partnerships. Benchmarking tools and guidance are needed on the most effective means of engaging with regions to advance ambitious research agenda.
4. ***The student experience*** – A broader understanding is required of ways to engage with regions with the purpose of enhancing the learning experience of students, stimulating higher level learning and developing research skills.

Approach and Next Steps

The approach will be to address these priorities through ongoing bilateral and multilateral collaborations.

Much can be done through effective sharing of information and exchange of practice. Members of the group will also seek external funding, which will accelerate the pace and enhance the rigour of the work. This may for example include schemes that allow for bilateral and multi-lateral research that exist between the UK's ESRC and equivalent agencies in Australia, Hong Kong, Ireland and England¹.

Case studies of exemplar major disciplines (e.g. medicine and health sciences), benchmarking exercises, best practice development, qualitative and quantitative investigations, audits and reviews could all contribute to addressing the priority areas and so develop innovation and good practice.

In particular the group would welcome contributions from Medical Schools within U21 around studies of their contribution to health and well being at regional level. Medical schools in a number of U21 institutions exemplify excellence in engagement and outreach, and there are good opportunities to link to the existing Deans and Heads of Health Sciences network.

Progress will be disseminated and stimulated through:

- The development of publications, guidance, tools and mapping for all U21 institutions during 2010 – 2012, all subject to the availability of resources which will be sought both internally at member institutions and from external sources.
- 2 Virtual seminars using Adobe Connect Pro, open to all U21 members in 2010 and 2011 that focus on specific interest areas within external engagement. It is envisaged that these seminars will be concerned with 1/Processes of Engagement and 2/Impact and Benefits of Engagement, and in both cases pre-recorded video presentations will be created – these and ensuing synchronous discussions will be podcast. Graduate students in a variety of disciplines will be encouraged to take part in discussions. One of these seminars may be linked to a presentation of the group at the 7th International Workshop on Higher Education Reform, organized by the Centre for Policy Studies in Higher Education and Training at St. John's College at the University of British Columbia

¹ See

<http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/opportunities/international/BilateralAgreements.aspx>

from 7-8 October 2010

- An analytical paper reviewing the role of regional engagement across U 21 to be published in 2011.

Membership

While membership will be open to all U21 Universities, involvement at the time of writing is limited to the universities attending the agenda setting meeting, and the University of Lund. All representatives attending the agenda-setting meeting expressed their interest in the priorities.

An effort will be made later in 2010 to invite wider active involvement in the work plan, and it will be requested that this paper be considered by the U21 Board and endorsed.

It will also be requested that a summary of this paper will made available through a U21 newsletter, and that the group be formally a 'collaborative group' of the organization and there be profiled on the U21 website.

Consultation and dissemination would begin later in 2010 and would target all U21 Universities through U21 contacts and members of staff identified as having responsibilities for regional engagement. It has been agreed that specific members of the group will make direct personal contacts with each of the other U21 members.

Professor Mike Osborne for the University of Glasgow

Professor Susan Geertshuis for the University of Auckland

Helen Hayes for the University of Melbourne

Professor Helen Chenery for the University of Queensland

Professor Hans Schuetze for the University of British Columbia

Appendix 1

Attendees:

Professor Helen Chenery, University of Queensland

Professor Chris Duke, University of Glasgow

Professor Susan Geertshuis, University of Auckland

Professor Helen Hayes, University of Melbourne

Professor Hans Schuetze, University of British Columbia

Mr John Tibbitt, University of Glasgow

Observers:

Dr Ilpo Laitinen, City of Helsinki

Professor Bruce Wilson, RMIT

Apologies

Dr Mina O'Dowd, Lund University

Professor Michael Osborne, University of Glasgow

Appendix 2

The PASCAL Universities Regional Engagement (PURE) project

Background

The project concerns the Higher Education system of regions (including both universities and HE component of VET) and its engagement with those regions. It is a development from work of an OECD programme conducted by the Institutional Management of Higher Education (IMHE) in collaboration with the Directorate of Territorial Development and Public Governance. The thematic review project "Supporting the contribution of HEIs to regional development" embraced 14 regions across 12 countries. The study was based on regional self-evaluations and international peer reviews. Reports of the 14 regions have been published on the public domain. The final synthesis report, *Higher Education and Regions – Globally Competitive, Locally Engaged*, was published in 2007 and is available in English, French and Spanish (see http://www.oecd.org/document/48/0,3343,en_2649_35961291_39872432_1_1_1_1,00.html). The study provided guidance in policy and practice for higher education

institutions and regional and national governments and assisted with capacity building in each country/region.

Among the conclusions of this first phase of studies is that the potential of higher education institutions to contribute to the economic, social and cultural development of their regions is far from being fully realised. The report of this phase analyses the barriers to improvement, and suggests that universities should adopt a wide agenda of regional development - economic, social or cultural. It recommends that greater autonomy and better incentives be given to institutions and their staff to engage with small and medium-sized business. It also recommends that countries should provide a more supportive environment for university-enterprise co-operation including regulatory and tax environment.

The report also suggests that instead of focusing on the supply-side of knowledge transfer, countries should develop business demand for university interaction. Universities themselves should become more entrepreneurial, widen their service portfolio and address the needs of wider range of firms and employers. The report emphasises the importance of “knowledge transfer on legs” - i.e. the students and graduates who can be one of the most effective mechanisms for knowledge transfer.

The feedback from the 14 regions involved in that study was positive: the project has improved the ability of the regions and HEIs to share experience, interact, work together and communicate. Partnerships within the regions have been strengthened. An overwhelming majority of the regions were satisfied both with the quality and timeliness of the international peer review.

Current Work

The PASCAL International Observatory Pascal (see <http://www.obs-pascal.com>) is an organisation with a strong panel of expert Associates, including OECD lead and other evaluators. PASCAL grew out of OECD’s work in Regional Development from the late nineties, and was created at the International OECD Conference convened in Melbourne with the State of Victoria and RMIT University in 2002. Its work has expanded through Europe where it has a European base at the University of Glasgow, a US base at Northern Illinois University and an Australian administrative HQ at RMIT University, Melbourne. Its strong Panel of Associates includes Peer Reviewers from 12 of the fourteen OECD 2004-07 Project regions (19 of the 56 reviewer positions), and several members of Self-Evaluation Review teams.

PASCAL has extended and developed previous work to a series of new regions, who are currently engaged in a two-year study from 1 January 2009 to 31 December 2010. The project entitled, the **PASCAL Universities Regional Engagement (PURE)** project takes further several important issues identified but not fully addressed in 2004-07 with 15 regions around the world in a first cohort and others in a second.

Further details of the work being undertaken by PASCAL and information relating to new areas of work for PURE may be found at <http://www.obs-pascal.com/node/855>.