

Research Universities and their Regions

A new U21 Interest Group

The Universities of Auckland, Glasgow and Melbourne have established with the support of U21 an interest group of academics within the fields of Lifelong Learning, Regional Development and cognate disciplines to share strategic vision, best practice and engage in benchmarking activities. The focus of the group will be on effective knowledge transfer, 3rd mission activities, and other engagements that contribute to regional development and to the success of our institutions. This work would build on the work of PASCAL Observatory, a consortium with regional government and university members and strong links with the OECD (see <http://www.obs-pascal.com>). It has a European base in Glasgow, which has already undertaken substantial research into the role of Universities within their regions, both mapping and benchmarking practice through its PURE (Pascal Universities Regional Engagement) project.

Research Universities, active in the global arena, share common aspirations to contribute internationally, nationally and within their regions to intellectual, cultural, social and economic advancement. Within their regions they exist in juxtaposition with other Universities and Higher Education Institutions whose mission is less broad and founded more clearly within their geographical region. Whilst all U21 Universities feel a strong commitment to their geographical region they differ in how this commitment is expressed within their strategic documents, how it is executed, managed and monitored at an operational level and in how they engage with other HEIs within their region. There appears to be no clear picture of the way an international research university should or could engage with its region for its own and its region's best advantage. We hope to produce some clarity in this area from the work of the group.

In addition to the proposing universities, interest in involvement has already been expressed by UBC, UCD, University of Virginia and Lund University and the co-ordinators of the group welcome contact with interested colleagues in other U21 universities.

In preparation for the establishment of the group, the University of Glasgow has been undertaking its own studies of some U21 universities with visits to UBC, Lund and Virginia in recent months to overview the variety of external engagement in these universities. Below are some bullet points from two of our visits that give a flavour of our initial observations

- A well-developed innovation process especially in science and technology, but also increasingly involving social science and humanities. An extensive – even crowded – set of bodies to move ideas out to business development.

- Impressive incubation and business support arrangements to encourage entrepreneurship amongst students.
- The development of a Centre for Performing Arts into a major cultural venue for the city attracting prominent musicians and other artists from around the world with performances, sustained through sponsorship and partnerships with local businesses and organisations. This same process allowed the centre itself to develop as a major teaching centre, attracting international students in the performing arts.
- A cultural festival consisting of a series of public lectures on major social issues affecting the nation, promoted through a partnership with the leading national newspaper.
- A variety of outreach activities to widen access to students from disadvantaged areas/backgrounds with strong investment in monitoring and evaluation of these initiatives leading to targeting of future efforts.
- An annual learning festival in the community organised by the students but with participation by a range of academic departments.
- Strong senior management concern with regional engagement, but no one with specific responsibility for relations with the local city and region. (This will change as a result of our raising the issue during our visit!)

Further as a result of our visit to a third university, within one Faculty, three members of staff have already asked to use a benchmarking tool to which they were introduced to use to analyse projects concerned with economic development in their region within the fields of education, health and engineering.

The reports from these visits and other that will be organized in the future, and further planning will be the focus of a meeting in Glasgow in October 2009.

At a meeting in Melbourne in March 2010 the core group of network and other interested members of U21 will finalise its workplan, and thereafter the network will offer other U21 members the opportunity to contribute to its activities. We envisage being able to offer guidance on mapping and benchmarking tools for all U21 institutions in the form of online publications; virtual seminars focused on specific interest areas within external engagement; and ongoing bilateral and multilateral collaborations, included where available externally

funded work. We will produce an analytic paper reviewing the role of regional engagement across U21.

Rather than simply produce written and electronic reports, we envisage running two subsequent online seminars after the initial event using Adobe Connect. These will allow participation of all U21 members in real time. Further the seminars will be recorded for subsequent podcasting. Outputs from the face-to-face seminar and the two virtual seminars will also be made available in report form.

Overall co-ordination of the interest group will be undertaken at the PASCAL Observatory within the University of Glasgow.

Professor Michael Osborne, University of Glasgow
Professor Helen Hayes, University of Melbourne
Professor Susan Geerthuis, University of Auckland

Contact: m.osborne@educ.gla.ac.uk