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"Higher Education Governance: Policy, Structures, Funding and Academic Staff"

Executive Summary

The impact of globalisation and the growing influence of market-oriented approach to institutional governance in the public sector have led to recent challenges to traditional approach to Higher Education governance. In sub-Saharan Africa, this challenge has been constructed in terms of the need for universities and other HE providers to make demonstrable contribution to economic growth and poverty reduction initiatives. In order to respond to this challenge, it has been argued that stakeholders need to rethink and reform the way HE institutions are run, so they are better positioned to provide value for money and adapt better to the realities of the 21st century.

There are two conflicting ideas about the role of universities in the 21st century. One is an idea that focuses on the function of universities as producers of pure knowledge, independent of societal conditions and challenges; the other focuses on the instrumental role of universities in producing knowledge to solve societal problems and promote economic growth. There is a need to synthesize these two ideas. Furthermore, in response to challenges and pressures to provide "value for money", many countries are encouraging a shift from traditional, inclusive mode of HE governance to a "new managerial" model. There are questions and concerns about how the new top-down model will impact academic autonomy and innovations.

The workshop featured sessions on Managing University Finances, Corporate Governance, UK Funding System for Research and Innovation, and Project Management. Drawing from the Wolverhampton model, the delegates explored how they can use Key Performance Indicators to evaluate and monitor the performance and overall health of their institutions. They also examined case studies from the University of Wolverhampton on successful bidding for external funding, which is especially relevant in the Nigerian context, where public HE providers in particular have been hampered by the challenge of inadequate funding.

Based on the training, recommendations were provided on developing new channels of communication and consultation with government and other key stakeholders to ensure that reforms in HE governance incorporate the need to provide value for money as well as the need to preserve institutional autonomy and academic freedom.

Introduction

Over the past few decades, higher education grown remarkably in its international scope (Enders, 2004), and in the way it has been affected by the dynamic forces of globalisation (Kennedy, 2003). The nation state is no longer the singular or dominant force determining the character and function of higher institutions. In order to remain relevant, HE institutions are compelled to adapt and respond to changes, challenges and opportunities that are essentially international in character. This response requires rethink and shift in traditional model of HE governance. Therefore, this training was presented in November 2014 to sensitize participating institutions and senior executives on current trends and best practices in HE governance.

This Knowledge Transfer Programme is part of CAEL's ongoing intervention in the areas of capacity building for leadership development and entrepreneurship education in Africa. Within the past five years, the centre has run training programmes focusing on corporate governance, quality assurance, entrepreneurship education and curriculum development, among others. More than 150 senior executives of higher institutions in Africa, including vice chancellors, provosts, and directors of centres, have participated in the training programmes. They represent more than 40 institutions of higher education, mostly from Nigeria.

Highlights of key issues in Higher Education governance

Higher Education (HE) institutions in the 21st century are grappling with a wide range of new challenges and pressures associated with the impact of globalisation and the prevailing realities of the market economy. In addition, considering most institutions of public learning are publicly funded, there is growing public awareness and interest in HE governance, as there are with governance of other public institutions in general. Moreover, there is a significant shift in the way universities' key function- production of knowledge and human capital- is conceived. Human capital is now conceived primarily as a key driver of economic growth(Kennedy, 2003). As such, universities and other HE providers are under increased scrutiny and pressure to produce graduates with necessary problem solving skills, capable of adding value in their chosen vocations and occupations.

The changing realities of the 21st century have had significant impacts on the principles and practice of university governance. In some countries like Australia, public universities are under increasing pressures to adopt a corporate approach to governance. This, it is argued, will enable them to be more accountable, achieve value for money, be more efficient in their use of resources, and show demonstrable contribution to the national economy (Christopher, 2014). However, other scholars have cautioned against full-blown embrace of this "new managerialism that is often identified as a key feature of entrepreneurial universities. They

argued that a top-down managerial approach will hinder academic autonomy and freedom which are critical to academic productivity and the generation of new ideas (Clark, 1998; Deem, 1998).

In the light of the foregoing, Kennedy (2003) has highlighted the need for the choice of governance approach and decision making structure in universities to be underpinned by extensive public deliberation. This public deliberation should be characterised by, among others, access to balanced information, an open agenda, freedom from coercion, and participation by an inclusive sample of citizens. In the UK, the Higher Education Code of Governance (Committee of University Chairs, 2014) key expectations that underpin HE governance:

1. Autonomy as the best guarantee of quality and international reputation.
2. Academic freedom and high-quality research, scholarship and teaching.
3. Protecting the collective student interest through good governance.
4. The publication of accurate and transparent information that is publicly accessible.
5. A recognition that accountability for funding derived directly from stakeholders requires HEIs to be clear that they are in a contract with stakeholders who pay for their service and expect clarity about what is received.
6. The achievement of equality of opportunity and diversity throughout the institution.
7. The principle that HE should be available to all those who are able to benefit from it.
8. Full and transparent accountability for public funding.

Like the rest of the world, but in more peculiar sets of circumstances, African countries are grappling with two opposing ideas of university education. One school of thought advocates for a pursuit of pure scholarship independent of social, political and economic conditions. The other concept emphasizes the instrumentality of knowledge for solving societal problems (Banya and Elu, 1997). In an environment characterised by widespread poverty and inequality, it is not surprising that the latter idea is gaining increasing popularity and traction in African countries. This emerging shift in public consciousness will affect the ways in which HE institutions are being run in the continent, in terms of management structure, measurement of performance, and funding, among others.

Training review

Participants explored the Nolan Principles of Public Life as key guiding principle of Higher Education Governance in the UK, and adopted by the University of Wolverhampton. These 7 principles are: a) Selflessness; b) Integrity; c) Objectivity; d) Accountability; e) Openness; f) Honesty; g) Leadership. In addition to this, the University of Wolverhampton also adopts the Higher Education Code of Governance, as set out by the Committee of University Chairs

(Committee of University Chairs, 2014). Participants were encouraged to reflect on how aspects of these documents can be applied to their national and institutional contexts.

The training also highlighted the roles and responsibilities of the governing board with respect to setting the university's strategic direction, oversight of university's finances, approval of major developments, and receipts of regular reports. The Academic Board, whose members also belong, and reports, to the governing board, is responsible matters of academic policy. Another key body within the governance structure at Wolverhampton is the audit committee, which liaises with internal and external auditors in order to make recommendations for the university's internal systems of controls, among other things.

Participants also explored how they can use Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to evaluate and monitor the overall health of their institutions. At the University of Wolverhampton, 15 such KPIs were adopted by the governing board: *student application, recruitment and retention; achievement and completion; academic and research quality; National Students Survey standing; equality and diversity; employability; international collaborations; financial health including income generation; space utilisation; performance of the estate; staffing; and carbon management.* (Butler, 2014).

Finally, using case studies of successful grants and funding obtained by the University of Wolverhampton, participants were taken through the process of seeking external funding for research. The training delegates also developed templates for managing and executing research projects.

Recommendations

Based on the training, the following recommendations were made to the institutions represented, and to the Nigerian government:

1. Development of a national code of conduct and principles guiding Higher Education Governance in Nigeria. This should be developed in consultation key stakeholders in government and the HE sector.
2. Development of Key Performance Indicators to monitor performance and identify challenges at the level of individual institutions.
3. Development of an integrated governance structure that incorporates the merits of both the inclusive and managerial model of HE governance.
4. Provision of a regular platform for public feedback on the activities and performance of publicly funded HE institutions.
5. Reform of financial management structures and processes at the institutional level to enhance transparency and accountability.

6. Aggressive development of strategies and opportunities for alternative sources of funding, to promote financial independence of the individual institutions and the freeing up of funds for research and innovation.

7. Establishment of Project Support Unit mandated with the responsibility of identifying and circulating external funding opportunities, and keeping up to date with funding policy and development. This draws from the project support model at the University of Wolverhampton.

8. Development of regional and international collaboration to facilitate knowledge exchange and keep up with global best practices in HE governance.

9. Adoption of suitable Equality and Diversity policy as a key component of the governance models in HE institutions. This will also help learners recognise the need to be aware of, and respect, diversity of religious and cultural beliefs.

10. Creation of national research councils and other agencies mandated with the responsibility of managing and allocating funds based on competitive bidding by institutions, research groups and individual researchers.

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