

# **Self-assessment and strategic planning.**

**South African Higher Education**

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# National Context

- ❖ South African HE system has three steering mechanisms in the achievement of national policy goals: planning; funding and quality assurance.
- ❖ Moreover a restructuring of the HE system through mergers and re-designation of HEIs has introduced mission differentiation in the system.
- ❖ All three steering instruments required that institutions engaged in strategic planning.
- ❖ Theoretically, at least they should also be aligned.
- ❖ However, while planning and funding are controlled by the DoE; quality resides outside government.

# Tensions

- ❖ Strategic planning seen as a manifestation of managerialism. Provoked considerable resistance among academics.
- ❖ Quality assurance seen as a technology which undermines intellectual life, academic freedom and strengthened management.
- ❖ How to combine the two and not be thrown out of HEIs.

# EVOLUTION

- ❖ Calmer and resigned HE system which understand that in order to be able to be accountable levels of planning become necessary.
- ❖ In a context of competition for students and resources, strategic planning becomes an important tool for survival.
- ❖ The HEQC audit system in focusing on institutional mission and identity compels institutions to look into strategic planning in general and in relation to the three core functions of teaching and learning, research and community engagement.

# Fitness for purpose and planning

- ❖ Institutions' missions usually make broad statements about identity and mission definition, e.g. engaged university; developmental university, research-led university etc.
- ❖ These are interrogated by the agency in terms of strategic planning; implications for quality; and specific translations in the core functions including resourcing, monitoring, performance indicators and benchmarks.
- ❖ In the specific case of teaching and learning the range of questions in South Africa go from issues of equity in terms of staff and students; redress in terms of success and throughput rates; quality of the educative experience, quality of teaching; quality of learning support.

# Self-evaluation

- ❖ Because planning is become a system wide issue, audits are often used to assess strategy before developing new strategic plans.
- ❖ The depths with which exercise is taken vary but HEIs have understood that audits involved the whole of the institution and can help to look into direction and purpose.
- ❖ Institutions have often stated that the audit is not for the HEQC but for themselves.
- ❖ Institutions have requested extra time to respond to the audit report to bring in line the recommendations and suggestions made in the context of the audit into their strategic plans.

# RISKS

- ❖ Planning is reduced to a management exercise with little or not participation of departments.
- ❖ Planning produces a document that is not alive and use by the whole institution in terms of specific tasks and responsibilities.
- ❖ Institutions might lose sight of the fact that in the end planning is a medium to become a better institution which produces better graduates and better research.
- ❖ The agency responsibility in this regard is enormous.

# QUESTIONS

- How are quality assurance and planning aligned in your HE system?
- What is the role of your agency in relation to strategic planning at HEIs?
- Have you conducted any research on the impact of quality on planning and vice versa? What are the conclusions.
- Are there best practices in this regard which could be generalised?