

Self-evaluation of institutional capacity to respond to regional needs

There are a number of possible dimensions to a self-evaluation:

- *Synthesis*: Does university recognize that by its very nature the territorial development process is broadly based embracing economic, technology, environmental, social, cultural and political agendas? University is capable of contribution to this process across a broad front, not least by highlighting the interconnections across these various areas. Indeed regional engagement provides an opportunity for reasserting the unity of the university as a place-based institution.
- *Focus*: What is the distinctive contribution of the university to the regional agenda? Notwithstanding the potential breadth of its contribution the university will need to prioritize those areas where it can make the most cost-effective contribution to the development of the region.
- *Geographical identity*: What are the unique features of the region to which the university can contribute? While there are global, economic, technological, social and cultural drivers of the development processes, these interact very differently with specific regional development trajectories. The university will need to develop a collectively understanding of its region in order to identify particular opportunities for engagement.
- *Regional policy*: What are the main drivers of regional policy? Regional and national agencies have a suite of policies to address regional development. The university needs to understand these policies and identify areas where it can support and reinforce these policy objectives.
- *Teaching and learning*: Has regional labour market intelligence influenced the shape of teaching and learning programmes? Whilst mechanisms are being put in place in some universities to respond to the regional research agenda, less progress appears to have been made on linking teaching and learning to regional needs.
- *Mainstream*: Has regional engagement become part of the academic mainstream of the university? Whilst many universities have established gatekeeper functions (*e.g.* Regional Development Offices) it remains unclear how far this has influenced mainstream teaching and research.
- *Communications*: Are regional needs and priorities communicated through the university? In addition to strategic engagement, there will be opportunities for regional engagement generated externally and internally that will need to be communicated around the institution. Newsletters, electronic mail and established fora provide an opportunity for such communication.
- *Research and intelligence*: Is the university providing the region with intelligence for its forward planning? In order to shape the regional development agenda the university will need to draw upon its global network and external information and tailor this to regional needs.
- *Responsiveness*: Is the university able to respond quickly to unanticipated regional needs? Economic development is opportunistic as well as strategic. If windows of opportunity (*e.g.* release of a new technology, mobile investment projects, new fiscal incentives, new regulatory regimes) are not seized regionally the advantages will be taken up elsewhere. The university will have to put mechanisms in place to respond, for example with new courses and research programmes.
- *Leadership*: What role does the university play in regional leadership? In addition to responding to established policy, universities have the capacity to set regional and national agendas. This involves more than injecting good ideas into the policy process; it also requires building the institutional capacity to take these ideas forward.
- *Collaboration*: Are procedures in place to support inter-university collaboration? All universities in a region have an interest in raising participation in the lifelong learning process. "Growing the market" is to be preferred to mercantilism and this will involve collaboration within and between levels in the education system, including schools and colleges.
- *Partnerships*: Are the objectives of partnerships clear? Partnerships are for the long-term and need to move beyond the identification of additional sources of funding to dialogue that affects the behaviour of participants.
- *Institutional cultures*: Are the institutional cultures and working practices of HEIs and other regional partners similar enough to allow active engagement and dialogue? Moreover, transdisciplinary units are an important route through which working practices which encourage greater regional engagement can be embedded in the institutional culture. Answers to these questions are likely to point to changes in organizational structure and processes and these are discussed below.