The role of institutional research in support of planning

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Defining Institutional Research

• Saupe (1981) emphasises the functional aspect of IR- i.e. supporting institutional management by providing information which can be used in institutional planning, policy formulation, and decision making.

• Altbach and Kelly (1985) describe IR as ‘research conducted within a higher education institution for the purpose of collecting and analysing data concerning the programs and activities of the institution’.

• Sheehan (1980) views IR as the ‘study and analysis of the operations, environment, and process of higher education institutions for the purpose of supplying information for decisions in higher education’.
Maassen (1986) indicates that IR comprises several basic supportive activities. These are:

- Collecting data on institutional performance.
- Collecting data on the institutional environment.
- Analysing and interpreting the data collected.
- Transforming the results of the data into information for decision support in planning and management.

IR and institutional performance

- Monitoring academic quality at institutional (e.g. HEQC Audit) and academic programme (e.g. HEQC programme reviews) levels
- Monitoring levels of service delivery to staff and students (e.g. staff/student satisfaction surveys)
- Monitoring financial viability – subsidy income, tuition fees, private sources of income versus expenditure (e.g. balance sheets; income statements, etc.)
- Monitoring employability of graduates (surveys of alumni and employers; graduate tracking)
IR and institutional environment

- Effective strategic planning requires a strong IR capability to scan the environment for strategic opportunities and threats (external environment) and institutional strengths and weaknesses (internal environment).
- Situational analysis (SWOT) informs strategic planning
  - Internal environment:
    - HEQC Institutional Audit
    - HEQC Programme Reviews
    - IR surveys
    - Enrolment planning and IOP
  - External environment:
    - STEEP methodology
    - Analysis of 2020 scenarios
    - National, provincial and local environmental scanning

IR and interpreting data

- Guided by HE performance indicators at following levels:
  - International (ranking systems)
  - National (HE Funding Framework; DoE Enrolment Planning; HEQC Institutional Audit criteria)
  - Institutional (fitness of and for purpose)

- Examples:
  - Monitoring enrolments, admissions, registrations in diploma vs. degree and under- vs. postgraduate enrolments
  - Monitoring student intake profile in relation to retention and success rates
  - Monitoring success, graduation and throughput rates per qualification/programme and by variables such as race/gender/year of study/admissions profile
  - Monitoring staff qualifications profile
  - Monitoring staff and student equity profile
  - Monitoring staff outputs (research, M&D graduates, patents, contract research income, etc)
  - Monitoring regional economic impact (e.g. SMME development, technology transfer, job creation, etc.)
IR and management decision support

- **Completed:**
  - Designing new academic and administrative structures
  - Site allocation process
  - Vista Campus Development Plan
  - IOP and enrolment planning (including selection of academic growth areas)
  - Designing resource allocation model and staff workload model
  - IOP project plans
  - Harmonising conditions of service and salaries
  - Determining allowances for academic HoDs and Directors of Schools
  - Benchmarking

- **Underway:**
  - Norms and criteria for multi-track career path for academic staff (teaching, research & engagement)
  - Success rates linked to admissions profile – identifying and tracking “at risk” students
  - Residences as sites of learning
  - SANTED project – articulation and re-curriculation

Lessons learnt

- IR is an integral part of strategic planning, MIS and quality improvement – organisational structure and reporting lines should facilitate interdependency
- **Senior management support** for evidence-based decision-making
- Demonstrate/role model and **actively lobby** for value-adding role of IR in management decision support and strategic planning
- **Accessibility of information** emanating from IR
- Need for **capacity development** for institutional leadership to analyse information appropriately for decision-making purposes
- **Feedback loops** essential – IR must translate into strategies and concrete action steps to enhance legitimacy and buy-in
- **IR staff capacity** – specialised area; no formal qualification and “training” available in SA; too few institutional researchers
Thank you for your attention.

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