From compliance to self-knowledge to international rankings: new roles for institutional research in SA?

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Agenda

- Introduction: IR in South Africa the past 20 years
- IR for compliance: increased ministerial regulation and quality assurance
- IR for self-knowledge: missed opportunities?
- IR in quality rankings and competition
- Notions of university excellence: flagship and research-intensive universities
- Conclusion: Future roles for IR: towards knowledge-based management

Introduction: IR in South Africa the past twenty years

- Fitting to reflect on SAAIR and on practice of institutional research

- Also consider way forward for IR over the next twenty years

- Jan Botha's illustration of how IR developed in synergy with HE policy development

- Expecting increasing reporting requirements at system level

- Expecting increasing demands for IR to be used for evidence-based decision support in institutions

- To what extent and in what manner has IR contributed to or effected change at institutional and system level?

- One obvious example: rankings - different conceptualisations of excellence

IR for compliance: increased regulation and QA

- After 1994 it soon became clear that, in spite of policies and legislation SA HE was unable to match the needs of society in social, political and economic transition

- Also, neither government nor institutions had the necessary baseline information or analytical tools to translate the proposed solutions (policies) into solutions (implementation) – 'policy vacuum'

- National Plan for Higher Education (2002) spelt out 16 outcomes and strategies to achieve them

- Badat (2009) suggests that this may have been consequence of potentially negative features of emerging new institutional landscape – growth in black enrolments at HWUs, declining enrolments at HBUs, mission drift through programme creep, destructive competition.

IR for compliance: increased regulation and QA (2)

- Gathering and implementation of data at system and institutional level gained momentum

- Three steering mechanisms: planning, funding and quality assurance required a proliferation of institutional information to be collected and becoming available in the public sphere

PLANNING	3 yr rolling plans, PQMs, merger plans, enrolment plans
FUNDING	New funding formula, HEMIS
QUALITY ASSURANCE	Programme accreditation, institutional audits, national reviews

IR for compliance: increased regulation and QA (3)

- Trend towards adopting more business-like management style was global one.

- Typical tools: management by strategic plan, centralised organs of decision-making, streamlined committee systems, decentralised budgeting – departments becoming 'cost centres', performance management, development of management information systems, etc.

- Key characteristic of HE in second decade after democracy was r increase in information available on HE and tools to extract it.

- At system level this enabled more accurate targets for state steering.

- At institutional level data could now be used to develop institutional research capable of enhancing self-knowledge and informing internal management and decision-making

# IR for compliance: increased regulation and QA (4)

- Are reporting requirements becoming draconian?

- Latest Regulations for Reporting by Public Higher Education institutions (gazetted in June 2014 for implementation January 2015) requires Annual Performance Plan with SMART key performance indicators and performance target consisting of 12 different reports with prescribed content and form, Mid-year Performance report and implementation manual.

IR for self-knowledge: missed opportunities?

- At system level the various sources and forms of data (audit reports, programme accreditation profiles and HEMIS data) put together could serve as important source of information about the state of individual HEIs

- This could serve as early warning system for the DoE

- In 2008 attempts at a more co-operative information sharing approach between the CHE and DoE started to be facilitated.

- Changes in leading roleplayers led to this collaboration breaking down.
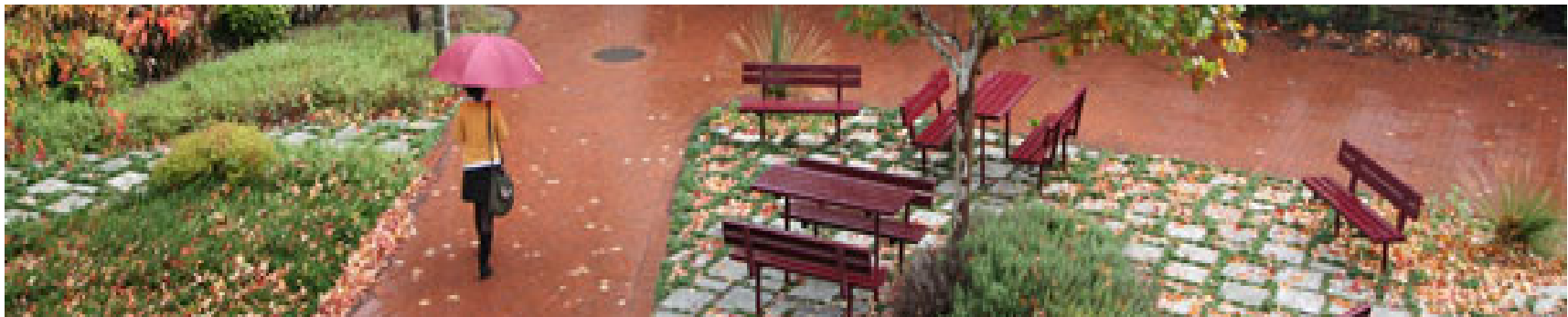
IR for self-knowledge: missed opportunities? (2)

- At institutional level it seems as if some institutions benefited more from these opportunities for self-scrutiny, external assessment and systematic reporting than others.

- Comparative research showed that an improvement-oriented approach to QA necessitates institutional capacity to manage and improve its own processes (Botha et al 2008).

- Other research showed that QA policies are likely to succeed when they are mediated by astute institutional leadership under certain conditions – they are much more likely to hold for institutions that are strong and well-managed and where a managerial culture is widely accepted, and less likely to hold in contexts where improvement is most needed (Luckett 2006).

IR for self-knowledge: missed opportunities? (3)

- Unpublished meta-analysis of assessor reports of institutions placed under administration over past 10 years also illustrates this.

- How effective are these processes (assessors and administrators) to effect change and improvement?

- To what extent are troubled institutions able to gather, interpret and utilize institutional information for improvement?

- Increased reporting demands have not led to more knowledge-based leadership and management in institutions with weak administrative systems and a paucity of capacity and expertise for institutional research.

- Rather tended to cause administrative overload and leadership crises.

IR in quality rankings and competition: the notion of 'world-class' universities

- The availability of data and institutional information in public domain has enabled university rankings to flourish.

- At the individual level rankings are a resource for prospective students, providing comparisons of institutional performance that facilitate their choices.

- Better students and staff apply, donations by alumni and other donors rise.

- Rankings establish and publish reputation, as a world-class university.

- Popular among political decision-makers because they reduce complexity and are an indicator of scientific and technological capacity and productive potential.

Chasing rankings: a common pastime of all universities?

COMPARING THE TABLES

QS WORLD UNIVERSITY RANKINGS*
1 Cambridge University, UK
2 Harvard University, US
3 Yale University, US
4 University College London, UK
5 Massachusetts Institute of Technology, US

TOP 5 AUSTRALIAN
20 Australian National University
37 University of Sydney
38 University of Melbourne
43 University of Queensland
46 University of New South Wales

WORLD ACADEMIC RANKING
1 Harvard University
2 University of California, Berkeley, US
3 Stanford University, US
4 Massachusetts Institute of Technology
5 Cambridge University

TOP 5 AUSTRALIAN
59 Australian National University
62 University of Melbourne
92 University of Sydney
101-150 University of Queensland
101-150 University of Western Australia

TIMES HIGHER EDUCATION WORLD RANKINGS
1 Harvard University
2 California Institute of Technology
3 Massachusetts Institute of Technology
4 Stanford University
5 Princeton University, US

TOP 5 AUSTRALIAN
36 University of Melbourne
43 Australian National University
71 University of Sydney
73 University of Adelaide
81 University of Queensland

* All rankings for this year

13

IR in quality rankings and competition: the notion of 'world-class' univs (2)

- Yet, criteria used in different rankings are highly contentious – relevance of criteria is problematic, particularly in developing world.

- Presuppose flawless information, identical interpretations and reduce complex qualitative processes to metrics.

- "They count what is measured rather than measure what counts" (Locke, 2014).

- "The pursuit of status will be the death of the university as we know it" (Brown 2014).

IR in quality rankings and competition: the notion of 'world-class' univs (3)

- Professor Danie Visser, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research at UCT, says while UCT continues to perform well in international rankings, it is important to look at their context. "None of the rankings give a perfect view of a university," says Professor Visser. "In particular, they do not take into account some of the crucial roles universities play developing countries. They do not, for instance, measure the extent of a university's social engagement - its responsiveness to the communities around us and in the rest of Southern Africa - or the degree to which a university develops capacity in Africa, growing the next generation of researchers. Both of these are crucial to UCT's mission."

Different notions of university excellence: flagship and research-intensive universities

- We therefore argue for moving away from rankings and the notion of 'world-class' as the only notions of university excellence.

- Douglass (2014): 'world-class' represents a very narrow band of what it means to be a leading university, while 'flagship' universities aspire to be leading institutions in nations or societies and to meet the needs of the society they serve.

- The 'flagship' notion does not ignore international standards of excellence, but is firmly grounded in national and regional service – proposes set of characteristics and responsibilities that de-emphasize rankings and help to broaden the focus to relevancy and responsibility.

- Cloete et al. (2011): study of 8 African flagship universities highlights common characteristics of flagship universities.

Common characteristics of flagship universities

- Comprehensive and research institutions focused on being regionally and nationally relevant;

- Highly selective in admissions, yet broadly accessible to be representative of socio-economic and racial/ethnic demography of the country;

- Broadly engaged in regional/national economic development and public service in some form across disciplines;

- Intent on educating and providing talented leaders;

- Sufficiently autonomous and sufficiently financed to be leaders in knowledge generation and thought;

- **Have an internal culture of evidence-based management and a constant search for institutional self-improvement.**

A third notion of excellence: research-intensive universities

- Research universities around the world part of an active community of institutions that share the same values, foci and missions.

- Committed to the creation and dissemination of knowledge in a range of disciplines and fields.

- Feature appropriate infrastructure that permits advanced studies, research and research dissemination at the highest level.

- Have strong ties with non-university research institutes, non-fluctuating research budgets and institutional autonomy to make research sustainable.

- In low- and middle-income countries they have a crucial role to play in differentiated HE systems in making it possible for their countries to join the global knowledge society and to be competitive in sophisticated knowledge economies.

- Stellenbosch University as a case in time.

Future roles for IR: towards knowledge-based management

- Uncritically accepting a ranking system's criteria and simply aiming for a higher ranking as an end in itself can be harmful to SA universities – a system designed to measure performance then dictates what that performance should be – a case of the tail wagging the dog.

- Assuming that the concepts of 'flagship' universities and research-intensive universities are acceptable notions of quality within a differentiated SA HE system, we argue for an appropriate utilisation of IR resources within a **broader focus on quality and development and beyond merely aiming at meeting and performing on ranking criteria.**

Future roles for IR: towards knowledge-based management (2)

- At **the system level** the increase in knowledge provides a necessary condition for knowledge-based steering of a differentiated, developing HE system.

- This requires:

  - ✓ Development of individualised, clear and accurate targets

  - ✓ System-level diagnostics of institutional performance providing early warning signals of looming crises

  - ✓ Fine-tuning of steering mechanisms to provide for a differentiated landscape of higher education provision

  - ✓ More effective, accountable and transparent forms of steering.

Future roles for IR: towards knowledge-based management (3)

- At **the institutional level** the centrality of knowledge in post-managerialist management needs to be made explicit and agreed upon.

- This presupposes the following:

  - ✓ Ability of connecting different institutional databases

  - ✓ Availability of sufficient expertise in HEMIS

  - ✓ Careful utilisation of national and international level data for benchmarking purposes

  - ✓ Strong capability for institutional research that can produce new and relevant knowledge AND can intergrate knowledge produced in different part of the institution

  - ✓ The distribution of appropriate information

  - ✓ The development of the capability to use it at different institutional levels.

Thank you for your kind attention!

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