The Pursuit of ‘Scale and Focus’ at the University of Adelaide

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Universities are not isolated entities. They exist in a context and, as such, must serve their community and respond to a variety of external pressures over which they may have little control.
Australia in the world

- Population: 21M
- No. of universities: 38
- No. research-intensive universities: 8
- No. university students: ~960,000
South Australia in the world

- Population: 1.6M, 1.1M in Adelaide City
- No. of universities: 3
- No. research-intensive universities: 1
- No. university students: ~68,000

Adelaide

Life Impact  The University of Adelaide
Our political context

- Australia is Federation of 6 states and 2 territories
- Federal funding
- State legislation to govern universities
- Limited State financial support for specific activities, especially research
Our drivers

• Despite increasing Federal oversight, universities are relatively free to develop and manipulate their:
  • Strategic planning
  • Budgets (within limitations)
  • Structures
  • International student profiles
Challenges facing the Go8

- Operating at international standards of excellence
- Renewing the academic workforce
- Maintaining community relevance
Higher Education in Australia

- The late 1980’s saw a major rationalisation of the higher education and the creation of the Australian Unified National System
- Move to mass higher education
- Convergence towards comprehensive institutions
- Uniformity, an obstacle to specialisation
Global Rankings – incentive or distraction?
Our rankings

International

- SJTU 197 in 2007 (Only two Australian universities, Melbourne and ANU in top 100)
- THES 105 in 2006 (seven Australian universities in the top 100)

National

- Melbourne Institute 8
- Swedish ranking 8
Research Quality Framework

- Driving more change than rankings
- The goal of excellence remains
- Providing very clear evidence of areas of international excellence within Australian universities
- Promoting differentiation (undoing the 1980s)
- Providing guidance to strategic planning
Strategic Planning

- A plan-driven approach with quality assurance
- ‘Scale and focus’: concentrating resources to support areas of international excellence and national priorities
- Striking the right balance between existing and emerging research strengths
- Change management!
University of Adelaide actions

• Budgets
  - Targeted expenditure, incentives

• Research Strategy
  - Competition, leverage potential, performance
  - Professional commercialisation and funding
University of Adelaide actions

• Fellowships
  – Recruiting ‘high flyers’, building teams

• PhD Students
  – Quality support, new scholarships, revision of pathways

• Internationalisation
  – Cooperation and collaboration
Concluding questions

- Can we remain a Research-Intensive University? (Targeted excellence and hard decisions)
- Can we aspire to be a ‘world-class’ University?
- Will we become a ‘world class’ University? (Funding, context)
One challenge – renewing the workforce

Figure 6. Composition of age-sex structure of academic staff of The University of Adelaide, 2003 and all Australian academic staff, 2001
Source: The University of Adelaide and ABS 2001 census.