The role of elite universities in national higher education and research systems, and the challenges of prosecuting the case for concentrating public investment in their development

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University relations in national context
1. There is a coincidence of greater community needs, greater technical capacities, and greater social expectations (but not necessarily greater resources).

2. Demographic changes will increase the global competition for talent, food, water and energy while requiring new efficiencies in education and research in developed and developing economies.

3. Long-term research (both basic and applied) is moving out of enterprises and into universities and clusters of universities with enterprises.

4. Higher education graduates need to be prepared as generalists and specialists for national labour markets and global citizenship.

5. Higher education institutions are becoming overloaded with multiple missions.

6. Horizontal differences among higher education institutions are blurring, and vertical differences are becoming more stratified.

7. Leading performance requires group capacity as well as individual brilliance.

8. Mass higher education enables customisation.

9. In the distributed knowledge society universities are permeable and stable organisations.


11. Local support sustains global standing and global connections advantage local communities.
Difficulties of differentiation

• Selectivity (supporting the best wherever they are found) is necessary but insufficient without concentration (targeted funding to strengthen capability)
• Diversified higher education systems are not necessarily differentiated
• Governments prefer normative (formulaic) approaches, with level playing field assumptions
• University autonomy inclines to emulation of research-based prestige
• Concentration is seen to be self-serving on the part of those already advantaged and it relegates and holds back the less advantaged
• Preferential treatment leads to complacency, ossification and diminution of diverse contributions
• Support of the elite is anti-egalitarian and reproduces social inequality

Options for government policy

a. Drift options
b. Increased autonomy and operational flexibility for institutions
c. Specific-purpose programs
d. Competitive funding
e. Performance-based funding
f. Quality assessment
g. Classificatory and reporting schema
h. Structural designation
i. Market mechanisms
j. Mission-based funding negotiations
Positioning Imperatives for elite universities

i. Integrity
ii. Intensity
iii. Contributing to Inclusiveness
iv. Contributing to Innovation
v. Intra-national collaboration
vi. International partnerships
vii. Independent verification of performance quality