

6. Recommendations for policy-makers

Regional engagement of HEIs depends to a large extent on the role a HEI chooses to assume for itself, which is driven by a range of factors including internal leadership, institution size, age and history. **Policy-makers should consider these factors and their impact when designing strategies to involve HEIs in regional development.**

The model of higher education implicit in many approaches to conceptualizing the role of HEIs in regional engagement is often that of a single, large, 'full service' anchor institution with a long history of deep ties to its place is rarely the case in practice. Our research demonstrates the reality is often characterized by high levels of heterogeneity of higher education configurations between places. **Policy-makers should understand this high level of diversity and avoid duplicating 'one-size-fits-all' approaches or models of success from other places.**

In places with multiple HEIs, universities may take on different roles in regional development, depending on their individual characteristics and their perceived position compared to the other HEIs in the region. **Policy-makers should not therefore treat the sector as a homogenous whole, but rather understand the specificities of its component parts and design policies and programmes that play to the strengths and motivations of individual institutions to maximize their contribution.**

We recommend policy-makers use the ORPHIC framework, policy makers can work with HEIs in their region to understand and map their various roles and contributions. This will help identify gaps and overlaps, which funding programmes can help address by incentivizing HEIs to play new or enhanced roles in line with regional strategies for development.

The importance of the character of the regional context to the contribution HEIs can make to regional development should not be underestimated. **Policy-makers**

should consider these factors in design of regional programmes and incentivize HEIs to take part in activities that support the development of resilience and adaptive capacity.

There is no single blueprint for the role of a HEI in regional development over time – it will evolve over time in response to external pressures and internal changes.

Policy-makers need a flexible framework to understand the role and contribution HEIs can make to regional development which should be regularly reviewed and revised in response to changing circumstances.

Much of the rhetoric on the role of HEIs in regional development is over-optimistic. It ascribes an excessively prominent role for HEIs than evidence would suggest is warranted, and which downplays the significance of the challenges in achieving mutually beneficial outcomes. Ambitious programmes for engaging HEIs in regional development that are not grounded in reality will be at best ineffectual, but may even lead to the widening of disparities between the region and other places. **More modest, but realistic, programmes may prove more effective in the longer term.**