WHAT IS 'A SUCCESSFUL UNIVERSITY'?

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Introduction

The aim of this paper is to provide a basis for discussion and debate on definitions, characteristics and criteria of measurement of a successful university. While the core mission of universities indisputably remains teaching and research (Shattock 2010), universities in the 21st century are increasingly called on to assume expanded roles as key players in knowledge societies and the knowledge economy. As universities take on these diverse roles, it becomes more difficult to agree on definitions and characteristics of success, and on valid and reliable criteria for measuring how successful they are. While this issue of defining success and its characteristics is implicit in many studies of various aspects of higher education, there is surprisingly little literature directly addressing the issue in a comprehensive and systematic way. As Shattock (2010: 7) has observed, "we feel instinctively we can recognise successful universities when we see them", but it can be challenging to provide justification and evidence for these judgements. This is especially true as universities seek to locate themselves within global systems, where global measures of certain aspects of success overshadow any other definitions or characteristics of success.

So what is a successful university? This paper does not provide a mapping of the literature on the topic, although this would be a useful exercise. Neither does it set out to provide a fixed definition of a successful university, as this is likely to bean impossible task. Instead, it explores characteristics and, where applicable, measures of success in higher education in terms of its main areas of activity, namely, research, teaching, student experience, knowledge economy, and social responsibility. For each area, there is discussion of what success in the area involves, together with some discussion of the criteria that are or can be used to evaluate success in this area, where applicable. Examples from different countries are also provided in each section.

While the five areas - research, teaching, student experience, knowledge economy, social responsibility - are treated separately in this paper, they evidently overlap in practice, such that success in one area is often closely connected to success in another. The interconnections between success in different areas need to be explored in depth, but this is beyond the scope of this paper.

Research

What does it mean to be a successful research university?

The most obvious answer, and the aspect of successful universities that has been most widely debated, is that it means achieving a place in world-class university rankings, or a high rating in national research assessments such as the Research Excellence Framework (REF) in the UK or the Performance Based Research Fund (PBRF) Quality Evaluation in New Zealand. At the global level, there is already a significant body of literature on world-class universities (e.g. Salmi 2009, Hazelkorn 2011), and the arguments will not be rehearsed again in detail in this paper. However, it is important to note that most of the world university rankings are very heavily dominated by research indicators, and that the aspiration to become a world-class university or to climb the ranks or retain a place has become such a firmly established part of the "successful research university" mindset that it is now prominent in university mission and vision statements (or, less frequently, national policies and targets) in, perhaps, the majority of countries in the world, from

Iceland to Indonesia[1]. Kazakhstan shares this vision, with the State Programme for Education Development 2011-2020 including the goal of having world-class universities by 2020.

Becoming a successful research university as measured by global rankings usually entails close attention to the criteria for such rankings, based mainly on research achievements and output. Thus, to take the example mentioned above, the University of Iceland policy urges an increase of publications in high-impact journals and tying promotions to publication in such journals (University of Iceland 2011).

At the same time, being a successful research university means more than just a ranking in the Times Higher, Shanghai Jiao Tong or QS rankings. It also means active involvement in global research networks and partnerships. More and more research universities are participating in global networks such as the Coimbra Group, the International Alliance of Research Universities, Universitas 21, the League of European Research Universities, and the Worldwide University Network. Such networks facilitate international research collaboration. According to Thomson Reuters' data base, nearly half of all influential research publications are published by international teams. Therefore, international collaboration is becoming a premise of success in research and innovation. The purpose of such networks and teams is not only to provide opportunities for research collaboration and interaction, but also, explicitly in some cases, to influence research policy. The function and power of these networks has not yet been thoroughly studied, but it is likely that they will become increasingly important, in the same way as other aspects of globalisation networks (Castells 2000; Ball 2012). Partnerships are equally important, and are an essential element of research university profiles in all parts of the world, although few universities work in such close strategic partnership with multiple international universities as Nazarbayev University.

Being a successful research university also requires the appointment and retention of high-quality, highly productive researchers, and researcher development through postgraduate research degrees. This creates a competitive market for researchers, which operates at a global level. Indeed, it is explicitly stated in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2013-14 explanation of methodology that "the top universities compete for the best faculty from around the globe", and 2.5% of the score is given for the ratio of international to national staff (Times Higher Education, undated). Any well-known ranking system considers research capacity as a fundamental indicator of a university. It may be characterised by various criteria such as Nobel Prize winners or the number of publications in reputed journals. The association of university success with a certain number of Nobel prizes or other respected awards is arguable, of course, but such indicators do clearly indicate the presence of well-established research traditions which create conditions for a qualitative growth of research capacity and research output. In turn, university research resources are a sine qua non of new knowledge and new technology. Therefore, a successful university should be the cornerstone of research and technology initiatives in the region.

Finally, it goes without saying that the capacity to obtain funding for and carry out high-quality research is essential to being a successful research university. While this is an obvious statement, it can actually be quite complex, in that it requires efficient systems and professional staff with the expertise to support research grant identification and applications, plus administration of grants and management of research support, collaboration and reporting procedures. It also requires conditions for successful research, from the ethos of the university to the securing

1 University of Iceland Vision and Strategy:"In 2006, the University of Iceland set itself the ambitious long-term goal to become one of the 100 leading universities in the world." http://english.hi.is/university/vision_and_strategy; Universitas Indonesia Goals:"UI's roadmap to be a world class university is an integrative and comprehensive approach covering internal strength and global competition analysis." *http://www.ui.oc.id/en/prople/poge/gools*

of time, equipment and research resources. Weiler, Guri-Rosenblit & Sawyerr (2008: 16) List the ingredients of research capacity as (1) capable researchers, (2) time, (3) infrastructure, (4) research climates, (5) funding, (6) structural conditions, (7) research ethics and (8) critical perspectives.

Networks, high-quality researchers and researcher development, and capacity to obtain funding for and implement research are all contributing factors to success in global rankings, and all these characteristics are part of what it means to be a successful research university, though this is by no means a complete list.

Teaching

What does it mean to be a successful teaching university?

Defining characteristics of a successful research university is relatively straightforward, as the indicators of success are, to a large extent, agreed. While almost all universities aspire to excellence in teaching, defining what it means to be a successful teaching university is slightly more difficult, although attempts have been made to standardise measures in this area. "Successful teaching" is dependent on assumptions about the role of the teacher, the education process, and the aims of learning.

In Europe and beyond,the Bologna Process and concomitant prevalence of learning outcomes based university education have done much to standardise some of these assumptions or, from an alternative perspective, impose a certain view of "successful teaching and learning" on universities with diverse expectations and practices in this area (Moutsios 2013: 39). The growing influence of publishers producing textbooks based on a European idea of successful teaching and international education providers explicitly or implicitly promoting a specific view of "successful" teaching and learning adds to the standardisation. Kazakhstan, for example, is heavily influenced in both respects. However, there is still substantial cultural variance in assumptions about what successful teaching is, and there is no global model of indicators of successful higher education teaching, such as exists for research in the form of global university rankings.

At transnational level, initiatives associated with the implementation of the Bologna Process provide an example of an attempt to define characteristics of (one view of) successful teaching, although all such initiatives are mediated through national and local lenses, and end results may bear little resemblance to original intentions. This is normative, but at national level in some countries, substantial effort has been invested in developing methods of empirically evaluating successful university teaching. For example, the Key Information Set (KIS) data in the UK provides open access information on student satisfaction with courses, methods of teaching and methods of assessment, percentage of the course taught in Welsh (where applicable) and so on (Unistats, undated). Anyone can access this government website, select courses they want to compare, and find out information such as:

- the percentage of students in the courses who agree that "staff are good at explaining things";
- the percentage who agree that "the criteria used in marking have been clear in advance";
- the percentage of time in the course spent on lectures and seminars each year;
- the percentage of assessment done by coursework, written examinations or practical exams each year.

The stated aim of providing KIS data is to help students identify what and where they would like to study, but the data obviously influence perceptions of what counts as successful teaching, and create a hierarchy of universities and courses according to whether they comply effectively with this model of teaching and assessment. In the UK, the standard definition of "successful

teaching" is bolstered by the Higher Education Academy, a national organisation that accredits qualifications in higher education teaching and learning provided by institutions for their staff, provides professional recognition for successful higher education teaching through a fellowship system, runs workshops and seminars related to higher education teaching and learning, provides grants for research and implementation projects related to successful teaching, organises postgraduate student surveys, and works to influence policy (Higher Education Academy, undated). This is just one example of how various initiatives within a higher education system serve to define successful teaching, then provide professional development and recognition and resources to standardise the definition and its implementation, through leveraging resources and influence. What remains debatable is the extent to which this particular view of successful teaching is culture-specific, and the extent to which it would be valid and useful across diverse cultures and societies.

Student Experience

What does it mean to be a successful university in terms of student experience?

This is closely connected to the previous section, and the same caveats about cultural diversity in assumptions and interpretations of what constitutes a successful university in terms of student experience apply. At the same time, university education is not just about successful teaching, and other factors play a major part in student experience for many students. Ways of capturing the success or otherwise of the student experience are still underdeveloped, although the KIS data referred to in the previous section do attempt to measure this in part through items on personal development (e.g. "My communication skills have improved."), and through statistics on employment/further study destinations and on average salaries six months after the end of the course. Such data, while useful, cannot possibly capture the richness and depth of successful student experience, and the use and development of such indicators is an area that requires much more study (Grebennikov & Shah 2013).

However, a large number of studies have been done on student perceptions of their university experience, and in addition to the academic learning experience, four areas in particular, categorised here as transition, extra-curricular engagement, environmental factors and personal attitudes/qualities, seem to contribute to a successful student experience.

The first category is transition. For a variety of reasons, many students experience "personal, cultural and political dislocation" (Testa & Egan 2014: 229) when they begin university. For example, working class students adapting to a middle class academic culture have to learn to negotiate new societal and cultural norms, often having to reassess their family/community values and become able to live in two worlds (Lehmann 2014). The same often applies to students of minority ethnic groups, mature students, students with disabilities and so on. Many students navigate the transition process smoothly and have very successful student experiences, but this is not true for all students. Another major transition issue is language. For students in many countries, starting university means switching to English as a medium of instruction, and this can be a major barrier to successful student experience for some students (Evans & Morrison 2011). Universities that facilitate successful student experience tend to be highly aware of transition issues, and provide support in dealing with them.

The second category in successful student experience is extra-curricular engagement. This takes many forms, and can obviously have a negative as well as positive impact on academic progress and success. In a study of students' extra-curricular activities and their contribution to employability in one university in the UK, for example, Thompson et al (2013) found that the majority of students are actively engaged in a range of extra-curricular activities, but that these were not necessarily contributing to academic success or employability. The question of whether extra-curricular activities need to contribute to academic success or employability

to be regarded as part of a successful student experience remains open. Increasingly, extra-curricular engagement takes place not just through organised activities, but through social media networks, and it has been argued that course/activity-related engagement on Facebook and other social networking sites helps students to work through identity politics and role conflict associated with being a student (Selwyn 2009).

The third category is environmental factors. This refers both to physical facilities and to services. In terms of physical facilities, a study on student perceptions of academic buildings in Malaysia revealed the following themes: comfort, health and safety, access and quality of facilities, space provision and adequacy, participation and inclusiveness, and interaction. The study found that the features most emphasised by students as important were thermal conditions, internet access, furniture, duration of access, refreshment facilities, and availability of discussion rooms (Muhammad, Sapri & Sipan 2014). Similar studies on student perceptions of services have been conducted, and improving easy access to all services is recognised as being important for the student experience (Buultjens & Robinson 2011).

The fourth and final category is personal attitudes and qualities. For example, in the study mentioned above on transition to English as a medium of instruction in Hong Kong, Evans & Morrison (2011) found that the main factors ensuring successful student transition and experience were strong motivation, hard work, effective learning strategies and supportive peer networks. While it can be argued that universities can do little to influence factors such as motivation and willingness to work hard, some studies have found that self-efficacy, which affects motivation and learning, can be enhanced by educational programmes, contributing to both academic and personal successful student experience (van Dinther, Dochy & Segers 2011).

Creating a successful university in terms of successful student experience thus requires attention to myriad factors apart from the teaching and learning process, from building design and services through facilitation of extra-curricular activities and networks, to personal support for all individuals.

Business/knowledge Economy

What does it mean to be a successful university in terms of engagement with business and the knowledge economy?

As Altbach (2009: 9) points out, there is now "universal recognition that higher education is a central element in the knowledge economy". Successful engagement of higher education in the knowledge economy can take diverse forms, from co-operation with local businesses and industries at various levels, to direct profit-making enterprises.

At the curriculum level, successful engagement with the knowledge economy can manifest itself through curriculum content, general skills taught across the curriculum, or programme design. In many - but not all - areas of study, there is an increased emphasis on aligning curriculum content with the requirements of employers or professional bodies. This is particularly true for subjects that prepare students for particular careers, such as nursing, teaching, engineering or accounting. Regardless of subject, most universities promote the development of skills required in the knowledge economy into the curriculum, for example, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, cultural competence, information literacy and ICT skills. More specifically, internships have long been part of university curricula in many places, but effective use of internships to strengthen synergy of university and the workplace in innovation and collaborative initiatives is a key concern of universities aiming to be successful in terms of engagement with the knowledge economy.

On a wider level, the phenomenon 'successful university'is part and parcel of the contribution of a higher education institution to the country's economy. To date, this characteristic is even more important as the economic growth of countries depends on knowledge and new

technologies. From this perspective, a university can be deemed successful when it contributes to the country's economy at local, regional or national level. Undoubtedly, solutions to regional challenges - be they socio-economic or technological - will be more successful if these issues are subject to comprehensive research and if decisions are substantiated by evidence.

Unquestionably, another fundamental feature of a successful university is its attractiveness for industry and business. Two aspects in this regard are worth noting specifically, the relevance of research innovation and recommendations for businesses as well as a demand for highly competent and qualified graduates for the industry. The contribution of business to implementation of research initiatives and proper R&D can be an indicator of demand of science technology. The highest hallmark of such demand is surely industrial implementation of a particular scientific concept. Again, it makes sense here to mention the extent and relativity of success. Even though there are no internationally patented innovations in Kazakhstan, for example, industry-demanded developments of technologies are in full force and significant progress is being made on the way towards research commercialisation. The discussed foundations being built to develop innovative technologies aimed at addressing industry issues in the region are a good sign of quite a high level of university success.

While universities have a long-established role in preparing students for the knowledge economy, their direct participation in the knowledge economy as commercial partners generally rests on much shallower foundations. For universities in many countries, financial autonomy in their own internal operations is still quite a novel concept, let alone managing the switch to being part of the neoliberal market economy. As Yusuf (2008:1168) observes,"while universities have a large hand in producing the human capital so vital for the functioning and growth of a knowledge-intensive economy, the evidence on their direct contribution to commercially viable technologies is much patchier". Increasingly, however, universities are taking an active role in this respect, not only through the sale of education (through high fees for international students or online education courses, for example), but also through commercial research and innovation projects, science parks and spin-out ventures, and the like (Wright et a1.2006).

Creating a successful university in terms of successful engagement with the knowledge economy thus involves careful attention to the education of students who will be key members of that knowledge economy, along with initiatives to ensure the success of the university itself as a key organisation within the knowledge economy, as a knowledge producer or knowledge broker.

Social Responsibility

What does it mean to be a successful university in terms of social responsibility?

Balancing the neoliberal economic imperative, the social role of universities has also been emphasised in recent decades. As Herrera (2008: 295) states:

The social responsibility of universities is what links scientific, technological, humanistic and artistic knowledge produced in the context of its application to local, national and global needs. Its primary objective is to promote the social utility of knowledge, thus contributing to improved quality of life.

The contribution of higher education and its research findings to improved quality of life in national context is not new, but the role of universities in promoting global social equity and improvement of quality of life at the global scale is still under-researched but developing momentum. The social responsibility of higher education institutions is diverse and wide-ranging,but three aspects will be briefly discussed in this section, namely, inclusion and widening participation, social responsibility and citizenship, and local, national and global development.

Inclusion and widening participation have risen on the agenda of many universities as the social responsibility arm of the massification of higher education. Increasingly, universities are

required to make their universities accessible to a much wider audience than the traditional elite universities and, by so doing, achieve wider dissemination of the "social utility of knowledge" mentioned above. Accessibility and inclusion include physical accessibility through building design and services and through mode of delivery and timetabling, financial accessibility through scholarship and loan schemes and so on, and social/cultural accessibility through measures to ensure that the university welcomes and meets the needs of diverse students. Having said that, inclusion is not achieved merely through widening participation and ensuring diversity, as success in inclusion as social responsibility requires much deeper structural and cultural transformations in all policies and activities of the university. As Tienda (2013:470) argues, "enrollment of a diverse student body is but a pragmatic first step toward the broader social goal of inclusion".

Another aspect of a successful socially responsible university is its role in educating students as active citizens of their communities, nation and the world. In most universities, the dynamism, creativity and enthusiasm of a substantial number of people who tend to have fewer constraints on their time and energy than many others in society represents a significant opportunity for mobilisation to really change communities and societies for the better. Increasingly, this is being applied not only at local level, but also at global level, with more and more universities incorporating "global citizenship" into their visions, missions and graduate attributes, and increasing attention in the academic literature to what this means theoretically and in practice (e.g. Stearns 2009,Thanosawan & Laws 2013).

Connected to this, for universities in many parts of the world, successful social responsibility means responsibility to society to produce graduates who make a direct contribution to local and/or national development. The mission statement of the National University of Lesotho is one which is mirrored by universities all over the world:

NUL's mission is to promote national advancement through innovative teaching, learning, research and professional services, producing high calibre and responsible graduates able to serve their communities with diligence[2].

The idea that "accumulation of human capital through education can improve the individual incomes that can in turn leverage the economic growth of a nation" (Oh, Choi & Choi 2013: 190) is a key element of human capital theory, of course, justifying the mission of universities to contribute to the economic development of their countries. The degree to which national governments try to plan and control this process varies. A point to be noted is the discussion of social responsibility and national development is that universities contribute to national development in many more ways than simply producing well-functioning cogs for the national economic machine. For example.although it is much more difficuLtto measure results,successful social responsibility for national development also includes education of future leaders capable of ethical questioning and decision-making, creation of inclusive and equitable cultures that facilitate development for everyone in society, and promotion of human development based on a capabilities approach (Sen 2009, Nussbaum 2011).

As Unterhalter & Carpentier (2010: 2) argue, "Higher education has the potential to reduce or increase inequalities depending on the form of policies institutions, governments, inter-government organisations and transnational associations implement". A university that is successful in terms of social responsibility reduces inequalities within its own institution, and actively exerts social responsibility to promote equitable development at local, national and global levels.

2 National University of Lesotho mission statement. *http://Www.nut.ts/*

Conclusion

To summarise, there is no single definition of a successful university. A successful university can be successful in many different ways. It can be a successful research university, featuring high in the world university rankings. It can be a successful teaching university, providing education that will serve students well for the rest of their lives. It can be successful from the point of view of student experience, changing the lives of its students in many different ways. It can be successful in terms of its engagement with industry and the knowledge economy, driving forward innovation. It can be successful in terms of social responsibility, playing a leading role in improving communities and societies at local, national or global levels. It can be successful in several of these spheres at the same time, or in other ways not discussed in this paper. Success depends on its own mission, and on the needs and priorities of the context in which it is situated. The university can be called successful if it achieves ambitious goals to become one of the best universities in the world. In order to attain this ambitious goal universities take a number of steps which ensure their success firstly on the institutional, regional and consequently national and global levels. This, in its turn, suggests that university success is a dynamic phenomenon and its characteristics are quite relative.

This discussion paper is intended as a starting point to debate the notion of a successful university, and a conclusion in the normal sense is thus probably not appropriate, as the paper marks the beginning rather than end of a collaborative exploration of the idea of the "successful university". This being the case, we would like to conclude the paper by offering a quote from Altbach (2011: 2), referring back to the definition of successful research universities as "world class":

All universities cannot be world class in the sense of competing for the top positions in the global rankings and league tables. But they can be world class in serving in the best way possible their particular mission, regions, or country. … In this sense, all universities can be world class if they are provided with wise leadership and the resources to their mission.

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