Empowering institutions through information sharing: a perspective from a global organization

Eva Egron-Polak, Secretary General, International Association of Universities

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Outline

• Higher education - a fast changing sector locally and globally
• New leadership and management requirements
• Information: a necessary but insufficient resource for improving performance
• IAU’s 3 distinct areas of information sharing:
  – Descriptive mapping; Analytical and policy-oriented;
    Focused, research-based and unique
• A few concluding thoughts
Higher Education - a fast-changing sector locally and globally (I)

- New (and diverse) expectations in a more complex and multipolar world
  - demand for more and more equitable access
  - contribution to competitiveness, socio-economic development, innovation
  - offering solutions to grand challenges and responding to immediate local issues
  - providing education and skills needed for employability
  - improving transversal competencies of all graduates as professionals and as responsible and ethical citizens

- Digitalization and the ubiquitous presence of ICTs in Higher Education and research; open access movement

- Increased competition among institutions of higher education for reputation, for best students, for RESOURCES

- Internationalization of higher education in the context of overall globalization
These trends in higher education bring about *inter alia*:

- Expansion of the systems – more HEIs, but less per student investment from public sources
- Diversification and stratification of systems – public/private mix, research-oriented / teaching-oriented, specialized / comprehensive, mass / elite, online/face-to-face, etc.
- Pressure to increase quality and accountability (students, policy-makers, employers and general public)
- More focus on STEM disciplines to the detriment of others
- Recognition that teaching quality is difficult to assess – focus on learning outcomes, on graduation rates, on employment success of graduates
- A love affair with rankings, an easy way to understand complexity
New institutional leadership and management requirements

• Institutional autonomy more important than ever; but leadership is more complex
• Multiple missions require multiple and relevant performance criteria and readiness to accept multiple definitions of success
• Too much policy mimicry without ‘adjusting’ for local context and local needs
• Insufficient up-to-date professional development for all governance positions in HEIs
• Assumption that an excellent academic is also an excellent leader or manager
Information – necessary but insufficient for empowerment

• Monitoring of performance and quality assurance require good information and data
  - Indicators with regard to inputs (funds, student admissions, student-faculty ratios, infrastructure) and outputs – graduation rates, research publications, patents, etc.) are usually available
  - Measures of outcomes and impact (social return on investment, graduate satisfaction, productivity increases due to higher education, and learning achieved) are much more difficult to measure
  - Easier to measure what can be counted; not necessarily what counts = current unidimensional rankings
Capacity to lead is as important as information and indicators

In 2015 IAU launches: Leading Globally Engaged Universities (LGEU)
A unique professional development opportunity

- Small international cohort (20-25)
- Current or future heads of HEIs
- Peer-to-peer learning led by experts
- Gateway to learning about regional developments each time in different region
- Start of a global network of colleagues
IAU’s 3 focus areas for sharing information

Area 1 – descriptive mapping

The World Higher Education Database (WHED)

- Regularly updated, authoritative information on more than 18,000 higher education institutions and all national education systems
- Structured and validated information to allow comparisons
- Accessible online through the WHED portal (www.whed.net), and published as 3 volume annual Handbook, also the source for Guide to HE in Africa
- Used as reference for higher education institutions worldwide by students, admissions officers, heads of institutions, international officers as well as corporate HR personnel.
- IAU counts on HEIs to provide information to ensure accuracy and quality of information.

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IAU’s 3 focus areas for sharing information

Area 2 – Thematic policy monitoring and Press coverage

• Monthly **E-bulletin**, comprehensive source of links to online information on higher education policies, opportunities and news from international and regional agencies, national governments as well as institutions – covering the globe.

• A twice yearly magazine **IAU Horizons**, covering important higher education topics, always offering perspectives from all regions.

• Monthly **IAU Highlights from the Press**, focusing on a selection of articles on higher education in the world press.

• Quarterly peer-reviewed, indexed journal, **Higher Education Policy** presenting academic analyses and research on policy and management issues in higher education.

• Topical interactive portals: on **doctoral education in Africa** ([www.idea-phd.net](http://www.idea-phd.net)); on higher education and **sustainable development** ([www.hesd.net](http://www.hesd.net))
IAU’s 3 focus areas for sharing information

Area 3 – research and analysis concerning internationalization

IAU has published such analysis of global and regional trends of internationalization at the institutional level since 2003.

Most recent edition -2014 co-sponsored by:

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Information on internationalization – key for policy and strategy development

• Identification regional priorities worldwide, can lead to policy decisions at institutional and national levels

• Identification of perceived benefits, risks and obstacles can lead to different investment patterns

• Seeing replies from other institutions can help benchmarking and strategy adjustments
Top three ranked regional priorities for internationalization – regional results (n=798)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geographic priority region</th>
<th>Region of respondents</th>
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Key:
- **1st**
- **2nd**
- **3rd**
## Internationalization activities for which funding has increased in past three years - regional results

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Global</th>
<th>Africa</th>
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<tr>
<td>Strengthening international / intercultural content of curriculum</td>
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<td>International research collaboration</td>
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<td>Outgoing mobility opportunities for faculty / staff</td>
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<td>International student exchanges</td>
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<td>Recruiting fee paying international undergraduate students</td>
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<td>Recruiting fee paying international post-graduate students</td>
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<td>Marketing and promoting our institution internationally</td>
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<td>Off-shore provision of education</td>
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<td>Delivery of distance, online and/or e-learning education</td>
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<td>Developing joint and double/dual degree programmes</td>
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<td>International development and capacity building projects</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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* = funding has increased
A few concluding thoughts

• Information is useful only if it is relevant for its intended use - measuring research output will not improve teaching
• Information is useful only if the institutional leadership has autonomy to make full use of it for strategic planning and implementation of change
• External sources of data and information on policy are many, but these are no substitute for developing one’s own institutional data as a strategic tool for reform
• Collecting data is costly, time-consuming and requires commitment over time. Demonstrating how information is used for improvements will help overcome resistance to the process
• As all change requires buy-in by stakeholders, developing evidence (data)-based policies for transforming institutions requires collaboration
Thank You for Listening

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to find out more about (and join)

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