Multi-Campus University Management: Lessons from AUQA Audit Reports

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A large number of Australian universities have multiple campuses. To manage successful outcomes, these universities need to pay attention to particular issues. They include fragmentation, duplication, inconsistency and inequitability. This paper examines AUQA audit reports on multi-campus universities and distinguishes four classifications or types based upon their reported performance in key functions such as strategic planning, leadership, quality system, communications and support.

1. Introduction

In 2002, DETYA published a report on multi-partner campuses (Shoemaker et al, 2000). There has not been a study of multi-campus universities although universities work in ever more locations. Analysis of geographically dispersed organisations will help identify mechanisms required to assure quality in more than one location and associated issues. This paper provides an overview based upon available AUQA audit reports of multi-campus universities. It identifies four distinct models and characteristic issues and ways to address them.

2. Issues

Of 29 university audit reports on the AUQA web site (31 March 2006), 21 universities had more than one campus at the time of audit (see Appendix). ‘Campus’ does not include ‘study centres’ which are separately identified in the reports.

The issues of multi-campus institutions may include fragmentation, duplication, inconsistency and inequitability over a range of areas of activity. These problems are similar to those attributed to autonomous or devolved structures. They are exacerbated by the forces of geography. The levels of inconsistency give rise to this four-fold categorisation.

3. Models

Ewers describes five objectives to guide selection of a model for a multi-campus university (Ewers, 2000, p.5) around program quality, student service, efficiency and cost, and then:

The model should also strive to weaken the bureaucratic silos that often are a part of the academic world (Ewers, 2000, p.5).

Reducing barriers or deconstructing silos is a challenge for all universities, but for multi-campus universities it is probably a greater challenge. Barriers inherent in academic environments due to the long history of organisation by discipline also result from physical distance (sometimes within a single campus) or structures or practices that create a real or perceived sense of isolation. They can arise from different institutional origins of a merged university and funding models. How well university management systems deal with them influences success in achieving corporate goals.

The reports describe degrees of success according to which universities can be assigned to four different models. Success generally depends on the response to ‘the challenges of working across multiple locations’ or on ‘minimising the negative effects that this environment can bring’ (Deakin, p.8). It will rely on the robustness and effectiveness of key functions of leadership, planning and quality systems, communications and the provision of support services and infrastructure across the whole of the university, at all levels and in every campus.
'Lost in space' model

Illustrations for the conference presentation and the names given to the models were drawn from Astronomy. Many examples of the 'lost in space' (an alternative descriptor would be 'competing fiefdoms') model, which often arise from the merger of campuses with distinct institutional histories, exist. The campuses may demonstrate duplication and lack of strategic alignment, particularly in a newly-merged institution. A corporate campaign focused on melding all parts and sharing the vision with staff is necessary to reconcile competing fiefdoms, together with an effective communication strategy and the establishment of institution-wide systems to assure quality in teaching and to develop research and services.

AUQA reports describe a number of universities that have room for improvement on each of these fronts, but the overall candidate for the model is La Trobe University (LTU). The auditors expressed a 'particular interest in the multi-campus management issues' (LTU, p.3). They noted that the University has a ‘matrix-type management structure’ but that the group of executives, deans and campus leaders meets only five times a year and is considered by deans to be unduly focused 'on regional and campus issues … and that an additional forum is required that is principally for deans and concentrates on faculty issues' (LTU, p.10).

At the time of audit, LTU was involved in significant change at the Bendigo campus 'which has traditionally not been well integrated with the University's main campus at Bundoora in terms of systems or academic culture' (LTU, p.3). The auditors reported that:

> the strategic and operational opportunities and responsibilities of being a multi-campus university do not feature strongly in the consciousness of many parts of the University. The cross-campus focus of Schools is generally light, especially if they are not already operating on more than one campus (LTU, p.11).

Although, ‘From a quality assurance and quality enhancement perspective, a key issue for a multi-campus university is the adequacy of communication systems for disseminating, *inter alia*, policy and best practices, and for ensuring consistent implementation of policies and processes’ (LTU, p.11), LTU exhibited:

> no discernable culture of communication that integrates these devolved structures and decentralised campuses into a single, coherent university ... There is an opportunity for the University to specifically design a broad system of communication, incorporating structure, decision making processes and communication technologies, that integrates the University at all levels into a common culture (still allowing, of course, for appropriate subcultures at local and disciplinary levels) (LTU, p.11).

Despite work on developing a new approach to strategic planning, auditors found lower level processes less developed (LTU, p.14), 'the extent of devolution within the organisation generates risks of inconsistent interpretation and implementation of policy' (LTU, p.11) and a 'perceived imbalance in the manner in which campuses are treated from a planning and resourcing perspective' (LTU, p.12).

This paper did not intend to delve into evaluations of core activities but cannot ignore statements about sharing research culture and having research staffing across all campuses to support research goals. The LTU report cites 'a paucity of visitors, cross-disciplinary and/or cross-campus research collaboration, joint research seminars with colleagues at other campuses, etc.' (LTU, p.29).

In human resource management, Bendigo was not included in a new HR Division management restructure, remaining independent of a new Employee Relations Office, a Personnel Office and OH&S Unit. While AUQA recounts the University's rationale (to facilitate local ownership of the campus
change process in train), it questions how this ‘will consistently facilitate the University's quality assurance efforts’ (LTU, p.50).

Examples relate to both whole-of-university and single-campus situations. They are sufficient to suggest that LTU fits this model. It warranted the following affirmation:

La Trobe University needs to concentrate on developing an inclusive organisational culture across all its campuses, and especially between the Bundoora and Bendigo campuses, in order to successfully pursue its strategic goals (LTU, p.12).

Inequitability and inconsistency can be issues. Auditors of Sydney University commented:

on about 16 campuses of varying size and prominence ... There is disparity between these campuses in terms of the quality of the buildings and infrastructure. Staff and (in particular) students indicated concerns regarding the varying quality of infrastructure (such as teaching spaces and student accommodation) and availability of services (including access to library resources). In some cases, the problems were very specific, such as the need to travel between campuses to access people or resources, and student ID cards issued at some other campuses not being recognised at Camperdown/Darlington (Sydney, p.11).

They indicated that a planned university-wide system could remove the latter problem. The Follow-Up report is not available to track whether this change has occurred.

In relation to equitability in services, some universities such as Charles Sturt University (CSU, p.9), have parity between campuses as an institutional goal. The Sydney report remarks that while some students and staff have a sense of isolation and inability ‘to participate fully in the student life experience’, others at the smaller campuses ‘believe that they benefit from the more intimate, tight-knit study environment a smaller campus affords’ (Sydney, p.11). Meeting both needs is ‘the challenge for the University’ which, in its own review of administrative services identified the need to ‘take explicit account of its multi-campus, college and faculty structure when designing the delivery of administrative services’. The auditors affirmed this, pointing out the 'high level of coordination of policy dissemination and implementation if standards are to be applied consistently' through separate hubs of administrative service provision (Sydney, p.43).

Distance between campuses may demand travel allowances or video-conferencing and other communication facilities. Deakin which generally received a favourable report nevertheless was urged to:

explore the latest technology to enhance links across its five campuses, thus reducing the need for staff to spend as much time travelling as they do (Deakin, p.9).

The University of Tasmania report commented on the need to improve video-conferencing between campuses (Tasmania, p.21) to support teaching.

‘Planets in alignment’ model

Where corporate identity has been well developed and embedded, the opposite planets in alignment (or collaborative/partnership) model emerges. In looking for a prototype of this model there are many contenders. Generally they have in common a commendable strategic planning framework. Some examples are the University of South Australia, Queensland, James Cook, Melbourne, Charles Sturt and Deakin. There may be one main (often the original) campus, but all campuses work well together with appropriate structures that allow for local variation or flexibility.
To transcend physical and other boundaries and create a culture that integrates campuses, universities employ matrix management. UniSA was commended for its strong and effective management systems ‘aligned with objectives’ (UniSA, p.12). Auditors stated:

\[\text{With multiple campuses and modes, UniSA is a complex institution but it evinces an ability to operate across physical and operational boundaries (UniSA, p.12).}\]

Being aware of the context in which the multi-campus university operates, the University has developed systems that drive central processes in a consistent way across the whole.

CSU was commended for its successful commitment ‘to uphold the principle of ‘One University’ across the full range of its operations, through strategic planning, communications and cross-faculty services and academic collaboration’:

\[\text{Faculties maintain a presence on each of the main campuses, with Dean and Sub-Dean roles responsible for ensuring connections across the faculty. Administrative and academic support services also operate across campuses (CSU, p.9).}\]

A 'What's New and News' website with daily postings, online university-level meeting papers, a regular e-Bulletin from the Vice Chancellor and a fortnightly newsletter are some of the communications mechanisms employed (CSU, p.10).

At UniSA campuses are largely faculty/division specific, each with a Pro Vice Chancellor who heads an academic Division and has nominated responsibility for the campus. All are members of the Senior Management Group which meets weekly. Central administrative support services (Human Resources, Student and Academic Services, Flexible Learning Centre) have a local presence on all campuses. Staff cohorts such as HR Coordinators and School Executive Officers meet to discuss operations, new policy and to engage in context and planning events. Human Resources holds an annual planning day for central and local HR staff. Annual HR priorities are discussed against the framework of the University's corporate priorities. Such arrangements extending across and up and down an organisation help ensure policies are implemented consistently, that students and staff have equal access to support services, and resources are shared equitably (UniSA, pp.12, 41-42, 46-47).

Leadership is an important factor. The University of Queensland report states that ‘UQ benefits from strong leadership that provides clear strategic directions. Furthermore, there is a coherent set of mechanisms in place to realise the directions when they have been set’ (Queensland, p.15). Deakin University's Vice Chancellor was congratulated on establishing planning and quality processes that staff understand and apply successfully (Deakin, p.11). The CSU report describes the strong support of staff ‘for the manner in which the Vice-Chancellor and other senior executives are visible, accessible and responsive to staff’, all the more significant for ‘not all being located on the same campus and yet maintaining a high profile across all locations’ (CSU, p.10). At UniSA all senior managers including the Vice Chancellor attend corporate orientation for new staff and the auditors commented that junior staff really notice and appreciate this (UniSA, p.42).

Lack of leadership or the presence of leaders was noted in the audit report on the University of Newcastle (January 2003):

\[\text{leadership and staffing profile at Ourimbah, in particular, are currently insufficient to ensure that the Central Coast Campuses will fulfill the University’s strategic intentions independently of effective multi-campus interaction. The profile of the Senior Executive is low at the Central Coast Campuses, and the Pro Vice-Chancellor with responsibility for academic matters at Ourimbah is based at Callaghan. Research at Ourimbah is severely constrained by a junior staffing profile (most academic staff are at Lecturer A or B levels) and there is a very limited professorial presence to help provide research leadership (Newcastle, p.16).}\]
At Edith Cowan's (ECU) Bunbury campus, the auditors detected weak academic and research linkages between the Faculty there and other Faculties (ECU, p.15). This was attributed to ‘geographical distance’ and the arrangement of the campus into a single Faculty (Regional Professional Studies). As late as April 2005 at Newcastle ‘issues related to ‘tyranny of distance’ are still evident with some essential services still seeming to be remote and communication inadequate or slow’ (Follow-Up, Newcastle, p.3). Neither had the staff and research profile altered significantly.

'Satellite’ model

Ewers describes the characteristic associated with this model in terms of an ‘abused colony’ syndrome (Ewers, 2000, p.4), a relationship reminiscent of a mainland/off shore island situation. Within the multi-campus university, there is one smaller, perhaps remote, constituent part that is marginalised, largely forgotten, perhaps exploited. An example in the audit reports is the Ourimbah campus at Newcastle. The auditors commented ‘not all sites of the University currently enjoy parity of esteem’ with the main campus at Callaghan (Newcastle, p.2). A similar appraisal was made of the South West Campus of Edith Cowan University at Bunbury which according to auditors 'does not appear to enjoy parity of esteem with the rest of the University' (ECU, p.4).

Another case is the Coffs Harbour campus of Southern Cross University (SCU). The campus is shared with TAFE and a Senior Secondary College, as prescribed in the University's founding legislation. The auditors describe a very different picture from the DETYA report that referred to Coffs Harbour as a ‘stand-out in terms of seamless cooperation across three educational sectors’ (Shoemaker et al. 2000, p.xx). In 2003, AUQA found ‘quite serious campus planning and management issues and problems’ (SCU, p.31) including ‘SCU higher education students being denied access to resources, or being removed from facilities deemed ‘owned’ or ‘controlled’ by another of the tri-sector partners; the competition for resources caused by university-level students sharing some resources, facilities, and sometimes physical spaces with TAFE and senior secondary students’ (SCU, pp.32-33). The Follow-Up report on SCU shows the University is turning this around with appointment of a Pro Vice Chancellor (Academic) and Head of Campus at Coffs Harbour. Staff have been relocated there, the academic profile strengthened and articulation and collaboration with TAFE enhanced (Follow-Up, SCU, p.10). SCU has also improved communications with students ‘on-and-across different SCU campuses’ in response to a recommendation of the AUQA audit (Follow-Up, SCU, p.14).

An effective example of the ‘satellite’ campus is the Cradle Coast Campus of Tasmania (UTAS) for which the University was commended (Tasmania, pp.37-38). The campus was developed from what was formerly the ‘North-West Centre’. When audited, the area had the fastest growth rates within Tasmania and the new campus was the impetus for significant enhancement of educational and training opportunities for the northwest communities. In contrast to other examples in audit reports (LTU, Newcastle), UTAS established a significant research component there - $1.3 million Cradle Coast Centre for Food Innovation Systems in March 2005. Community education and engagement programs are innovative with ‘Island Minds - Returning Home’ bringing high-profile ex-patriots back to Tasmania.

'Birth of a new star’ model

A final model is the ‘birth of a new star’ (or ‘cuckoo in the nest’) - one campus within the group of campuses is overtaking or outgrowing the rest. One campus, perhaps identified with a particular academic division/faculty or school, expands exponentially.

Griffith's Gold Coast campus is an example. The auditors commented that a campus review conducted in 2000 included consideration of ‘the possibility of the campus becoming a university in its own right’ (Griffith, p.28). The review recommended continuation of the campus ‘as an integral part of the multi-campus Griffith University’ and the auditors commended Griffith in their 2004 report on the strong relationships with the Gold Coast community that have been developed through this campus (Griffith, p.29).
4. Conclusion

By categorising multi-campus universities according to the models, one can see more readily the challenges to organisational management and operations. In multi-campus universities conditions may lead to more separate development and atomisation that may hamper progress toward corporate goals. By analysing multi-campus universities one can identify potential weaknesses and ways to overcome them.

References

Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA): Audit Reports: Self-Accrediting Institutions. Audit reports and Follow-Up Reports referred to in the text are indicated according to the name of the university. Reports are available at: http://www.auqa.edu.au/qualityaudit/sai_reports/index.shtml


Appendix

AUQA audit reports on universities with multiple campuses at the time of the audit and available on the AUQA website at 31 March 2006:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Audit date</th>
<th>Report issued</th>
<th>Follow-Up report</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University of Southern Queensland</td>
<td>July 2002</td>
<td>Oct 2002</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Curtin University of Technology</td>
<td>Aug 2002</td>
<td>Oct 2002</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Australian Catholic University</td>
<td>Sept 2002</td>
<td>Dec 2002</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>University of Newcastle</td>
<td>Sept 2002</td>
<td>Jan 2003</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Swinburne University of Technology</td>
<td>Sept 2002</td>
<td>March 2003</td>
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<td>University of Adelaide</td>
<td>Oct 2002</td>
<td>March 2003</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>University of Queensland</td>
<td>June 2003</td>
<td>Sept 2003</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Southern Cross University</td>
<td>June 2003</td>
<td>Oct 2003</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology</td>
<td>July 2003</td>
<td>Dec 2003</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Griffith University</td>
<td>Oct 2003</td>
<td>April 2004</td>
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<tr>
<td>Edith Cowan University</td>
<td>March 2004</td>
<td>Oct 2004</td>
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<tr>
<td>University of South Australia</td>
<td>March 2004</td>
<td>Aug 2004</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>James Cook University</td>
<td>May 2004</td>
<td>Sept 2004</td>
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<tr>
<td>Charles Sturt University</td>
<td>July 2004</td>
<td>Nov 2004</td>
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<tr>
<td>University of Sydney</td>
<td>July 2004</td>
<td>Dec 2004</td>
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<tr>
<td>La Trobe University</td>
<td>Aug 2004</td>
<td>March 2005</td>
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<td>Deakin University</td>
<td>Oct 2004</td>
<td>Feb 2005</td>
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<tr>
<td>Queensland University of Technology</td>
<td>April 2005</td>
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<td>University of Wollongong</td>
<td>April 2005</td>
<td>Feb 2006</td>
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<td>University of Tasmania</td>
<td>Aug 2005</td>
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<tr>
<td>University of Melbourne</td>
<td>Aug 2005</td>
<td>Jan 2006</td>
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Surprisingly, a search of the AUQA Good Practice Database using 'multi-campus' yielded only 3 references that related to only 2 universities: Edith Cowan (Unit Plans); Australian Catholic University (Course and Unit Development); Australian Catholic University (Moderation of Assessment). This suggests that the AUQA audit reports might be more useful a resource than the Good Practice Database. Besides, one often learns as much from discussion of weaknesses as from best practice and the former are not left out of the reports.