SPECIAL THEME

RECONSTRUCTING HIGHER EDUCATION

Editorial

Whatever the public is led to believe and whatever administrations would like to believe, higher education does not stand still. Few if any institutes do not develop new courses and many are involved in that activity which forms the cutting edge of later economic change as well as industrial development, to wit research. The fundamental question is not the capacity of higher education to develop; it is the speed at which it is called upon to do so. And it is also a question of who it is that determines whether that speed is sufficient and therefore who lays down the pace of change. If we accept this view of higher education, namely that it has a well tried capacity for transformation, then clearly reform is an endemic condition.

But, in many parts of the world, it is precisely the speed at which change may be brought about which is becoming a matter of urgency. If higher education does not keep pace with what are construed as key developments in the economy and industry, it becomes one factor among others which risks turning a technological lag into an economic gap, with all the consequences this brings with it for national development.

From this situation a further issue arises: how to develop those mechanisms which ensure that the acceleration of economic development is matched by a similar response by higher education. This issue is of a rather different order from the first and entails, very often, radical shifts in the structures of steering systems at the national level, alterations in patterns of institutional evaluation and from there, though this is by no means inevitable, brings about major redistribution within universities, of power and authority.

The scope of such developments goes far beyond what is usually understood by reform. Very often it entails recasting higher education's mission, quite apart from changing the ways in which higher education relates to government. What is involved – and readers may judge on the basis of the articles in this issue of *Higher Education Policy* – is little short of reconstructing the goals and values at the level of base units, be they departments or their equivalents.

In this issue of *Higher Education Policy*, a series of particular examples of the process of reconstruction have been brought together. Some, Cowen's article in particular, focuses upon the reconstruction of the British universities around the entrepreneurial ethic. This is a broad sweep and other contributions focus more particularly on specific aspects. Singh, for example, examines the challenges that certain Asian countries are facing in the area of science policy. Both Burn and Kallen analyse the way in which knowledge transfer through the mobility of students and staff along an East-West axis may contribute to the reconstruction of higher education systems in Central and Eastern Europe. Two articles, those of van Vught and Westerheijden and Dalichow, analyse what might be termed 'instruments of reconstruction', the first focusing on developments in the Netherlands, the second on the Member States of the European Community.

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