

Submission for the University of Waikato Strategy Discussions: July 2013

Introduction

I am no expert in the distinctions to be made between the layers of the triangle we find in the circulated strategy papers. I find the current abstract strategy quite satisfactory, but thinking in more concrete terms is desirable if, “what will we say publically about our future plans in 2014” is one of goals of the current exercise (DVC June 2013).

The initial strategy was informal, but in practice it was to develop a range of programmes, schools, faculties and degrees which would well serve the students mostly from the University’s catchment, and which would attract a sufficient proportion of those students to support the programmes. This vision and strategy was realized quite often against the opposition of the other NZ universities and/or government. So senior managers had to husband resources from current income and assign them to new and untested developments.

That this first 50 year strategy succeeded is a testament to the vision, courage and hard work of many. One suspects however that, as an “adult”, the organization will be able to think more clearly about its future, and be more certain about future paths, once it has made up its own mind.

Where the world is heading

Any new strategy must reflect the nature and direction of human progress. This is a difficult task, but some trends seem obvious:

- A growing world population, especially in Asia and Africa, reaching 10 billion in the next 50 years. Water will become an extremely scarce resource, with the potential to spark small and large regional conflicts.
- A growing arms trade with major western nations developing economies which depend on weapons expenditure, in part to defend and enhance their economic interests.
- A growing gap between rich and poor, not only between developed and developing nations but also within nations.
- Aging populations, based on advances in medical care, but also requiring significant new medical needs expenditure. There will be major advances in medical science.
- Growing unemployment as automated production increases and demand for goods possibly saturates. Increased leisure, but with very uneven ability of citizens to enjoy that leisure.
- Continued growth in the strength and power of multinational corporations and their ability to dominate nation states.
- Growth in the number and size of free trade groupings, and a continued inability to complete UN based trade “rounds”.
- Continued encroachment of IT based security systems, both by governments and private corporations.
- Further wonderful developments in science and technology. Wonderful creativity in the arts. New insights in the social sciences and education. Improved business practices and robustness. Improvements in agricultural sustainability.
- A continued increase in political passivity as citizens increasingly feel they are unable to make a difference.
- Climate change. Etc etc.

Waikato's aspirations

Clearly this is too much for any one institution to deal with or, maybe even comprehend. However, we are very much part of the world family of universities and, in the next 50 years, will make many contributions, large and small, to the issues listed above and to other global issues.

So the University plans to continue to contribute to world progress, solving the great national and international problems of our day.

To derive a concrete strategy it makes sense to consider the major features of the current state and environment of the University:

- A region with a population of over 1 million, but just one university.
- At the heart of NZ's dairy industry and near the centre of NZ's horticultural and forestry industries.
- Close to well established CRI's, Agresearch, Landcare, Hortresearch, NIWA.
- Near the second largest general hospital campus in the southern hemisphere.
- The closest university to major NZ energy sources, hydro, thermal, geothermal and wind.
- Close to NZ's largest port.
- A excellent relationship to Tainui as well as other Maori tribes.
- A university with a good range of well developed fundamental sciences and arts and professional schools.
- An outstanding award winning park-land campus.
- Well developed and maintained teaching, research, cultural, and leisure buildings and resources, including library and IT facilities.
- Dedicated and successful academic and non-academic staff.
- Effective and renewed internal organization structures.
- A perennial shortage of resources for development and existing and new programmes.
- A government using budgetary control to subvert the autonomy provisions in the Education Amendment Act 1989.

New Academic Staff

In the early years it was difficult to attract academic staff. Clearly a new university with no established reputation was not seen as attractive. That has changed, and although a small number of lesser qualified staff remain from those years, new appointees are often selected from outstanding international fields. This must continue.

Media Strategy

University size is an important parameter. For over 20 following its establishment, the University feared closure. It was only after the merger with the then Hamilton Teachers College that this supposed threat disappeared. We need to grow more in terms of income derivation, upward mobility for the people of our region, and effective use of existing facilities. However there is a student quality issue, where the University of Auckland makes extraordinary efforts to attract the best and the brightest students from secondary schools in our region. I find no evidence that students receive a better education at that institution, or do less well after graduation, but you would not think so when observing their self-promotion. So a more effective, strong and enhanced media strategy/plan is needed, in spite of all of the efforts in this direction which have and are being made.

For example very little was made of the 10th anniversary of the establishment of engineering degrees.

Subject Teaching Overlaps

Internal differences between disciplines, their relationships and overlaps need to be addressed. Indeed I would say in my 42 years here attempting to reach agreement with other subjects about their mathematics needs and why they should not be teaching mathematics themselves, has wasted more of my time and energy than anything else. There must be many other examples of this frustration. As far as staff are concerned, they could be using that time and energy on improved teaching and research. For students, they should receive tuition from excellent teachers with good research backgrounds in their disciplines. No senior administrator has been prepared to grapple with the particular issue of “subject teaching overlap”, but significantly reduced overlap could become a hallmark of Waikato in the next 50 years. A revised budget model would ensure subject’s did not teach papers where there was another better placed to do so. The temptation of course to teach “out of discipline supporting papers” is strong, given the paramount place of EFTS’s for Faculty and thence subject income.

Tainui

We need a Tainui strategy/plan. Suffice it to say I was a lone voice on the University’s Finance Committee who asked for University discussion of the issues and threats which might ensue when the land claim settlement was near completion. From the beginning this has been a problem for successive senior University staff. The money for the lease assigned by government was always too small, so now has to come out of our income. It implies a reduction in the amount of this income available for teaching and research, disadvantaging Waikato in relation to other NZ universities. The best strategy for Waikato and Tainui I would think would be for a government grant cash settlement, or for the money to pay the lease to be “reset” by Treasury at a realistic level. Otherwise each student at Waikato is paying directly for the settlement and students at other NZ university are paying nothing directly at all. This is unfair discrimination.

The Campus

The upgrade to the Student Centre (aka Library) is impressive, as is the further development of the lake side shopping precinct. The Gate 8 internal road realignment also brings about a significant improvement to the campus and facilities. And we can look forward (and talk about in 2014) the new Law/Management building, under planning and construction. However, we need to continue this strategy/planning of continuous improvement. The temporary buildings SW of the current Law complex are an eyesore. They are placed in one of the most visible parts of the front of the campus, so should be moved, if not demolished. A long term plan to upgrade the swimming pool, through public subscription and joint development with local schools, making it an all-weather, all-year amenity, might also be considered – it would certainly appeal to Waikato citizens.

New connections

We need to plan to connect better to the important entities in our catchment. Attempts have been made over the years, for example a development in forestry was on the right track. My own and Alfred Sneyd’s ECNZ project. However these relationships are demanding, hard to sustain over long periods, can take an academic’s attention away from first rate international research, and hard to

assign doctoral students, since they are often very focused. What we don't need is staff feverishly chasing small grants, spending large amounts of personal energy which should be devoted to better teaching and research. I understand a new approach is being taken to the research component of this issue, based now in the Faculty of Science and Engineering, which looks very promising. It will require resources.

New Students

However, substantial long-term developments like the existing Faculties and Schools, survive and thrive when there is a healthy stream of students. It hard to believe we have exhausted our potential here and consideration must be given, in particular, to agriculture and medicine – two areas which have an extremely strong presence in our immediate region, and which we hardly serve at all, by way of professional education. There are some small beginnings in agriculture. Any substantial development would take years to plan with many stakeholders and competitors to sort out – but that is what planning/strategizing is all about! To begin with a study of what is happening at Rurakura – they are being downsized again and would I am certain welcome our positive interaction and support, either through the new hub or otherwise. Setting up a cross-Faculty committee in each of the areas chosen for possible long term teaching development would make sense, so that relating to outside bodies can be done in a professional manner.

Medicine

Regarding medicine, the new joint scholarship provision with the Waikato Clinical School of the University of Auckland is an excellent toe-in-the-water, as have been the research projects of a number of our staff. However Auckland had exhibited its independence by developing substantial facilities, parallel to many of our own, on the Pembroke St campus of the WHB. A close relationship would implying sharing of facilities and maybe even some teaching – for example we have difficulty with physiology. Again a strategy/planning committee is needed to explore possibilities. The foundation for any improvements, as it was in the establishment of Law, would need to happen first with some limited interaction with Auckland, at the Vice-Chancellor or Deputy Vice-Chancellor level.

Resources

Underlying and supporting all potential developments of course is the need for better resources. We can rely on governments of all persuasions to be fair-weather-friends. The good work of the University Foundation must continue and continue to be an integral part of future planning. We have been frequently outsmarted I think by our competitors with deeper pockets, so finding new sources of income, will be essential. For example money flowing into student scholarships from those major entities like Fonterra, Tainui, Gallaghers, as well as individuals. We are prevented from running a significantly expanded PhD programme because of the small number of available scholarships. I know at times it appears it is the small number of qualified candidates, but the two components are tightly related. A substantial and well-advertised masters and PhD scholarship programme would attract good candidates. Of all potential areas for development during the next 50 years, this is for me the most desirable.

Kevin Broughan

Professor of Mathematics

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