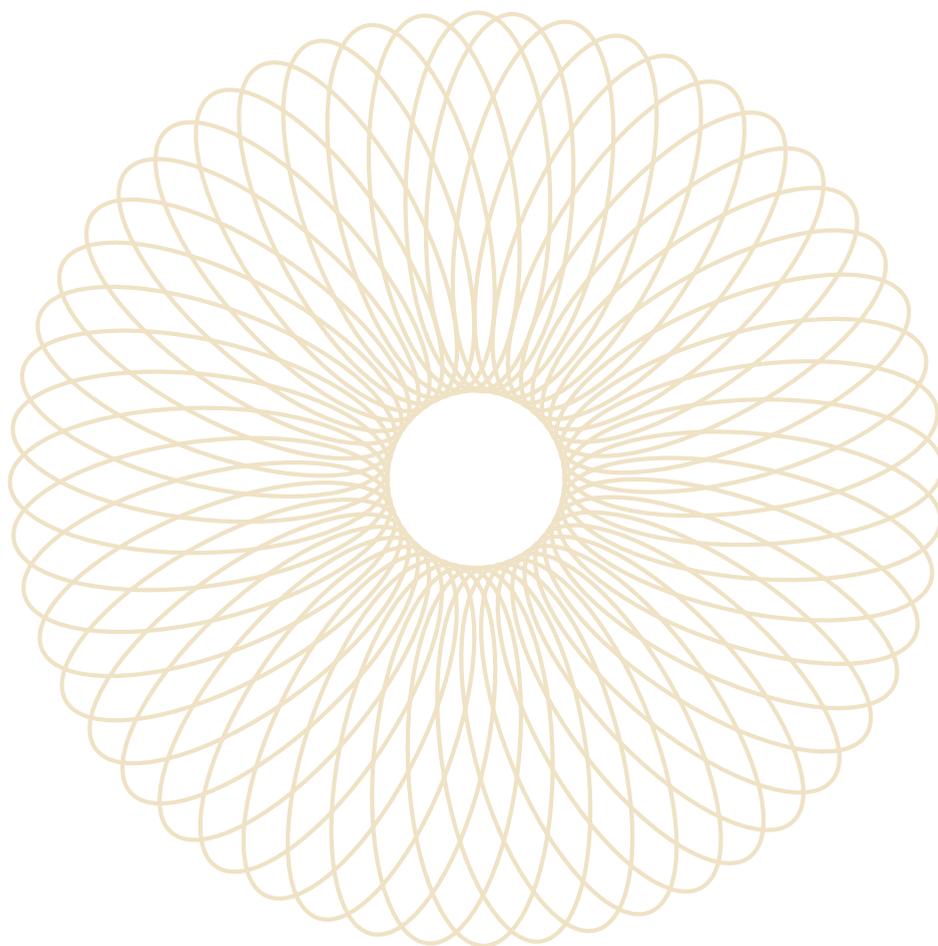


# GOOD PRACTICE

## IN STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR ACADEMIC UNITS IN IRISH UNIVERSITIES

A series of booklets produced by  
the Irish Universities Quality Board

# 4



IRISH UNIVERSITIES  
QUALITY BOARD

National Guidelines  
2008



### *Irish Universities Quality Board*

The Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) was established by the seven Irish universities in 2002 to increase the level of inter-university co-operation in developing their quality assurance procedures and processes, in line with best international systems and to represent the Irish university quality assurance system nationally and internationally. IUQB has been delegated with the statutory responsibility for organising the periodic review of the effectiveness of the quality assurance systems in place in the seven Irish universities.

### *Sectoral Projects*

This booklet is one of a series produced by IUQB, the aim of which is to establish and publish good practice for Irish universities in the key areas of Teaching and Learning, Research, Strategic Planning/Management and Administration. This is in keeping with the IUQB aim to increase the level of inter-university co-operation in developing quality assurance processes. Each booklet is the result of an inter-university project on a topic selected, organised and driven by the Board with the close collaboration of the universities, and funded by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) Quality Assurance Programme, funded under the National Development Plan (NDP) 2000-2006. The selection of the projects is based on recommendations for improvement contained in the reviews of departments and faculties required by the Universities Act 1997 and also arising from recommendations from institutional reviews of the universities.

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*\*No 1: Good Practice in the Organisation of PhD Programmes in Irish Universities (2005)*

*No 2: Good Practice in the Organisation of Student Support Services in Irish Universities (2006)*

*No 3: Good Practice for Institutional Research in Irish Higher Education (2008)*

*\*Reprinted 2006*



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# Academic Units who Participated in this Project‡

## **Dublin City University**

School of Biotechnology

School of Applied Language and Intercultural Studies

## **National University of Ireland, Galway**

Department of Earth and Ocean Sciences

\*Modern Languages

## **National University of Ireland, Maynooth**

Department of Computer Science

Department of Economics

## **Trinity College Dublin**

School of Nursing and Midwifery

School of English

## **University College Cork**

Department of Geology

Department of Applied Social Studies

## **University College Dublin**

School of Electrical, Electronic and Mechanical Engineering

School of Philosophy

## **University of Limerick**

Department of Electronic and Computing Engineering

Department of Languages and Cultural Studies

‡ A list of those who participated from each academic unit and the project leaders is provided in Appendix 1

\*This included the Departments of French, German, Italian, and Spanish.





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## List of Abbreviations

ARAM	Academic Resource Allocation Model
EU	European Union
GREP	Graduate Research Education Programme
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IRCHSS	Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences
IRCSET	Irish Research Council for Science, Engineering and Technology
IUA	Irish Universities Association
IUQB	Irish Universities Quality Board
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
KT	Knowledge Transfer
NDP	National Development Plan
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OIP	Organisational Improvement Plan
PRTL	Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions
QA/QI	Quality Assurance/Quality Improvement
RAM	Resource Allocation Model
RPQ	Research Performance and Quality
SIF	Strategic Innovation Fund
SMT	Senior Management Team
SSR	Student Staff Ratio
SSTI	Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats





# Introduction

1. This publication is intended to fulfil a variety of functions:
  - it provides guidelines, indications of good practice and examples for the use of heads of academic units and their colleagues who are obligated to produce strategic plans within their specific university context;
  - it provides recommendations of good practice to those at the centre of universities whose responsibility it is to develop institution-wide strategic plans and ensure these are effectively decanted to faculty and academic unit level. Such recommendations will encompass the organisational and policy framework in which the design of plans takes place; the processes of interaction with units; the structure of plans and supporting data; and the support which units would need to produce and implement good quality plans;
  - it emphasises the inter-connectedness of reviews and strategic planning;
  - in arriving at the above, it implicitly and explicitly provides a critique of existing practices, and suggestions as to how difficulties may be resolved; it emphasizes the inter-connectedness of reviews and strategic planning;
  - it identifies and discusses some principal contemporary policy issues in strategic planning for Irish universities;
  - it is hoped the guidelines will have applicability across the entire Irish tertiary sector.
2. The publication focuses principally on the strategic planning of academic units within the general context of university-wide strategic planning. It is not intended, therefore to be a handbook of university strategic planning per se. However, there are significant implications for university-wide strategic planning processes, and the support which needs to be given to units by central university units in the design and realisation of unit strategic plans.
3. It should be noted that the appendices contain generic templates for use and adaptation in specific situations. The IUQB website ([www.iuqb.ie](http://www.iuqb.ie)) has these and additional material, from the individual universities who participated in this project, which is likely to be extremely helpful. Appendix 2 gives the complete list of material which is made available to the reader on the IUQB website.
4. The term “academic unit” is used in the text for reasons of consistency, though it is well appreciated that alternative terms like “School” and “Department” may also be used in some settings.
5. The use of this publication in universities can thus take several forms. It is recommended that all relevant senior officers, deans and heads have copies for reference. In each university:
  - there is a case for workshops, both during and particularly towards the end of a strategic planning cycle, to consider learnings from the previous cycle’s experience, and to use this publication as a template for discussing the nature of the exercise soon to start. The headings in Chapters 2 – 7 would conveniently form the agenda for such workshops and it may be that external facilitators would also be helpful;

- the instruments indicated in this publication and on the IUQB website ([www.iuqb.ie](http://www.iuqb.ie)) can be taken for use as they stand, or modified as appropriate for use in particular settings. However, it should be noted that to maximise the advantages of a fully comprehensive system, all elements should be deployed. Given the increasing sophistication of strategic planning in most Irish universities, these should not pose a problem;
  - it is suggested that this publication should also be used as part of the preparations for putting together supportive documentation for external submissions, for example, for the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions (PRTL), Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF) and Research Council Awards.
6. It also needs to be borne in mind that unit strategic plans have different audiences
- the unit members themselves: their need is for a fairly detailed plan which indicates precisely what is intended and who is responsible for delivering what;
  - the university: central organs and faculties need to be convinced through the plan and its implementation that the unit has fully engaged with university strategic imperatives in ways appropriate to its profile and possibilities, and is able to manage itself with integrity, creativity and confidence, thus justifying continuing expenditure and support. The need is for a comprehensive and reasonably detailed plan;
  - external bodies: these would include:
    - » stakeholders/customers/employers who need assurance that it is an organisation worthy of continuing support (a public confidence building exercise);
    - » other academic units in other universities, especially internationally, who are being wooed as strategic partners for student mobility or joint research;
    - » funding agencies (HEA, research councils, European Union (EU) etc.) who want clear evidence that any grant of money for projects fits into an overall developmental framework, and that it is not just a one-off whim; that any grant will be managed by a stable competent organisation who will deliver the desired outcomes.

The implication is that variants of the plan may have to be produced to satisfy the agendas and presentational needs of the different audiences. This is, of course, time consuming, but regrettably, seems increasingly necessary.

7. Given the systematic and comprehensive nature of what is being advocated in this publication, it would be tempting for universities or units to delay the active initiation of strategic planning, until all the elements were in place. Whilst this may be logically appealing, it is stressed that an incremental approach is better than none at all. Also, there are likely to be many decisions which could not wait indefinitely. The advice would certainly be to learn from experience.

### **Origins of the project**

8. This project on Strategic Planning in Academic Units was established following an application in 2003 by the IUQB on behalf of the seven Irish universities to the HEA Quality Assurance Programme, funded under the National Development Plan (NDP) 2000-2006.



The project emerged from recognition within the university sector that there is a real need for strategic planning in Irish universities at the level of academic units, that is at departmental or school level. Many peer review group reports, arising from quality reviews of departments or faculties, highlighted the need for strategic planning in academic units. Whilst the seven Irish universities all have institutional strategic plans in place, academic units which form the basic structural unit of a university were not always required to develop their own individual plans. A gap can thereby develop in the institutional strategic planning process as there is no means whereby academic units can inform institutional plans from a 'bottom-up' perspective, nor is there any real means whereby university management can determine or ensure that institutional aims and objectives, as identified in the institutional strategic plan, are implemented.

#### **Nature of the project**

9. This project proposed to explore issues of strategic planning across the Irish universities and make practical recommendations for improvements. The focus was on working with academic units at the level of departments or schools in order to ensure that the resulting national guidelines would be informed from a 'bottom-up' perspective. To achieve a balanced view, a humanity and a science academic unit from each of the seven Irish universities participated in this project. Each unit undertook to develop a strategic plan.

#### ***Aim:***

To support the organisation, efficiency and quality of strategic planning in academic units in Irish universities.

#### ***Objectives:***

- To identify current practice, nationally and internationally
- To select good practices relevant to the Irish context
- To prepare national guidelines of good practice

#### ***Methodology***

The following were the range of activities undertaken:

- analysis and evaluation of the quality assurance/quality improvement (QA/QI) recommendations from the internal quality assurance reviews of academic units in all seven universities to identify common themes;
- analysis and evaluation of the quality assurance/quality improvement recommendations from the IUQB/HEA jointly-commissioned external review of quality assurance procedures in the Irish university sector and the external reviews of the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures in the individual universities to identify sectoral themes;

- a preliminary template for the project; designed following discussions with the project consultant Professor John Davies;
- a national meeting held with key stakeholders and relevant university officers to discuss the national approach and to agree a format for the management of the process at the institutional level;
- each university nominated two academic units, one from the humanities and another from the sciences, to participate in the project;
- Professor John Davies and the IUQB Quality Enhancement Manager visited each university to meet with senior management and, with the participant academic units together with the institutional project leaders, to provide training and to initiate the process of strategic planning in each unit;
- academic units developed their strategic plans; a near-final draft of each of the strategic plans developed was submitted for consideration by Professor John Davies;
- a second meeting was held with each of the academic units and the project leaders at which Professor John Davies provided substantive feedback and advice on the draft plan submitted. Academic units finalised their plans;
- participants were surveyed in order to assess the degree of success and the level of engagement with the strategic planning process;
- findings and feedback which were received through each of the meetings with university and academic unit personnel; findings from an analysis of the strategic plans which were developed; findings from the questionnaire which was distributed to participants; an evaluation of the key quality assurance/quality improvement recommendations which related to strategic planning from the internal and external quality review reports; and an overview of key national developments: were used to inform the preparation of a draft booklet of good practice;
- the draft booklet was presented to key national stakeholders and participants in the project;
- feedback on the draft booklet was used to inform the national guidelines of good practice;
- a pre-publication draft of the national guidelines of good practice was distributed to key stakeholders and targeted experts for feedback;
- national guidelines of good practice were published.



# The Guidelines

## **Purpose**

10. The purpose of these guidelines is to facilitate the development and standardisation of policies, regulations, procedures and documentation governing strategic planning in academic units in Irish universities. The intention is that each academic unit and, indeed, university will see this document as containing valid statements of good practice that they may take into consideration to improve the development, management and evaluation of their strategic plans. It is hoped that the guidelines will have applicability also across the entire Irish third-level sector.

## **The sections**

11. Each of the guideline sections starts with some paragraphs that outline the main relevant topics and refer to issues raised from the various data collection activities, from points raised during national and local university meetings, from practices in other countries, and from the pre-finalisation consultation processes. The purpose of these sub-sections is to place in context the specific guideline statements that appear on odd-numbered pages.

Each guideline item is in the form of a non-prescriptive statement that represents 'a good practice'. In most cases, there are many ways in which a particular good practice may be achieved and it is recognised that diversity in this respect may exist. However, each institute should accept that any policy, regulation or procedure that is ineffective in achieving or maintaining any good practice is changed or replaced as soon as is practicable. Consequently, it is essential that each institute has appropriate quality assurance mechanisms in place to identify and rectify such 'deficiencies'.





# Chapter 1

## Nature and Scope of Strategic Planning and the Irish Organisational Context

12. The purpose of this chapter is two-fold:
- To provide a definition of the meaning and scope of strategic planning and its role in institutional change;
  - To develop a feel for the organisational context of Irish universities in which academic unit strategic planning takes place.

### Definition and meaning of Strategic Planning

13. Strategic planning, in essence, is a fairly straightforward concept. It asks three questions of the organisational unit in question:
- What are we doing now? ... i.e. is what we are doing relevant? is it effectively and efficiently undertaken? does it give value for money? and is it what we should be doing? This implies robust and honest processes of audit, review, analysis, etc.
  - Where do we want to go, what sort of organisation do we want to be? ... i.e. are there factors internal or external, which demand a shift in trajectory or momentum, a change in the conception of the organisation and what it stands for, or a refinement in aspirations? This implies clarity in aims, values and mission and an acute understanding of the environmental factors which normally create a dynamic for change.
  - How do we get from where we are to where we want to be? ... i.e. this assumes that aspiration or rhetoric is not sufficient in itself to deliver shifts in attitude, behaviour and performance, especially in a coherent strategic sense. Strategic planning is, thus, to be viewed as an instrument in organisational change, and this implies action plans based on clear priorities, and a series of developmental activities in many domains, accompanied by incentives to change of attitude and behaviour.
14. A little more complex definition would be “Planning is the continuous and collective exercise of foresight in the integrated process of taking informed decisions affecting the future”<sup>1</sup>
- Several key words may be extracted from this rather intense definition, namely ...
- “Continuous”: implying an ongoing cycle of problem analysis/SWOT (Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats); development of objectives and decisions; plan implementation, co-ordination and monitoring; plan evaluation and re-setting of plan objectives and so on round the cycle again.
  - “Collective”: implying an involvement of all relevant internal and external actors and stakeholders to ensure that all useful perspectives are taken into account, and that

<sup>1</sup> Lockwood, G. and Davies, J.L. (1979), *Universities – The Management Challenge*, NFER-Nelson.

## Chapter 1 (cont'd)

ownership of the plan is guaranteed as far as possible – not just at an intellectual level, but also in terms of subsequent behaviour.

- “Exercise of Foresight”: implying an identification of future trends, e.g. in demand for the academic unit’s services; likely changes in client behaviour over time; employment trends for students; scientific trends in the subjects of the unit; nature of competition; expectations for collaboration, etc. This might take the form of scenario building.
- “Integrated Process”: implying that there needs to be a close articulation of academic strategy with other strategic domains (human resource development; finance; Information Technology strategy, etc).
- “Taking Informed Decisions”: implying a consistent, comprehensive and reliable database of trends, performance, etc., rather than relying on instinct or hearsay.
- “Affecting the Future”: implying that the whole point of strategic planning is to control events rather than be dictated by them, and that proposed activities need to be carefully phased and sequenced to ensure maximum impact.

The particular manifestations of these implications in terms of strategic planning instruments will be explored in the following chapters.

### **The organisational context for Academic Unit Strategic Planning in Irish universities**

15. Strategic planning is not an abstraction. It does need to be developed in full recognition of the particular institutional settings, which provide both opportunities and constraints on what is possible, and will certainly condition how strategic planning at the academic unit level may develop.

### **Factors contributing to the evolving position of basic academic units.**

16. The conception of the “department”. Traditionally, the term “department” has been used to denote the basic academic unit in a university, and the normal assumption has been that this corresponds to particular disciplines.

Departments thus represented the custodianship of the integrity of the discipline; a “home” for students where they would be processed efficiently through the programme; the place where academics had their being and academic and social affiliations, undertook conventional research and had their careers. Invariably, they were presided over by the strong “god” professor with significant instruments of authority. Faculties represented collections of cognate departments under a dean of traditional or collegial mode. Whilst this model may still be observed in some settings, its character has really shifted quite significantly in recent years, as a result of a series of factors to which we now turn.



## Chapter 1 (cont'd)

- Institutional requirements for optimum size departments in the interests of economic and academic effectiveness or even survival have tended towards mergers to form larger units.
  - The advent of interdisciplinary and Mode 2 Knowledge<sup>2</sup> Production inevitably has led to larger more multi-disciplinary units sometimes re-titled “Schools” in certain universities.
  - There is the expectation of additional functions to be undertaken at departmental level other than normal undergraduate/postgraduate teaching and research as a result of the widening range of institutional objectives – Research & Development, knowledge transfer, and outreach activities in continuing education, branch outputs for course delivery, cooperative education, and internationalisation.
  - The broadening of this functional profile of universities could either lead to departments themselves becoming very complex entities (which will necessitate a fairly complex, sophisticated and comprehensive strategic plan) or some of these functions being hived off to specialist university organs (centres for continuing education; graduate schools; incubators; university companies, etc.) which creates an imperative in strategic planning terms for a clear engagement/articulation between the strategic plans of these organs and departments to avoid competition, duplication and resourcing problems. This is particularly evident with the rise in department, faculty or university-based research centres, with present issues of staff affiliation and membership, budget allocation and target setting and attainment. Clearly, the university has a role to play in establishing a framework and ground rules for such articulation.
  - The advent of the massive and imaginative development of inter-institutional and intra-institutional collaboration, as stimulated by the various cycles of PRTL, SIF and the research councils Graduate Research Education Programme (GREP) exercise (see Chapter 2), has created issues of complexity in terms of how departments strategically and operationally fit into these conglomerates (PRTL programmes/research council graduate schools), and what the respective domains of responsibility are for project or graduate student delivery between participating departments. Departmental strategic planning certainly needs to recognise and adapt to these relatively new phenomena – as, of course, do universities.
17. As universities have expanded, so has the number and size of units, creating an issue of the proper role of faculties in the intermediary position between the university level and the unit. It is not the purpose of this publication to examine this issue per se, but in many Irish universities, the growth of the significance and authority of the faculty and the dean (or even grouped faculties entitled “colleges”) has consequences for academic unit planning in relation to the authority of the head of the unit in defining the scope and direction of the department – in a possible scenario where the unit is regarded purely as a small cog in a faculty engine.

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<sup>2</sup> Mode 1 Knowledge Production (including Research and Development) is essentially generated by academics in the spirit of academic enquiry, initially for academics. The peer reviewers and users are likely to be academics and modes tend to be based on single disciplines. Mode 2 Knowledge Production (including Research and Development) is primarily initiated in respect of specific problems of practice, and is thus likely to be multi-disciplinary in nature. The reviewers are likely to be the end users, often in a commercial setting.

## Chapter 1 (cont'd)

### Financial issues in the development of units.

18. This is related to the question of what the definition is of a department/unit in terms of financial status; it could be:
  - a cost centre: where costs of operations are attributed and where the head spends within explicit limits and budget headings;
  - a budget centre: where allocations and obligations are indicated in terms of costs and income generation, from various sources, and where break-even would be an expectation;
  - a profit centre: where the unit is expected to generate a surplus of income over expenditure, which clearly implies entrepreneurial behaviour on the part of the unit, paralleled by arrangements whereby surplus (or a proportion thereof) could be carried over to the next financial year, or spent on e.g. appropriate facilities, travel or bonuses.
19. There is demonstrably a difference of practice in this regard across Irish universities. The significance of this variation for academic unit strategic planning is profound, e.g:
  - if an academic unit is a profit centre, then the incentives to develop and diversify income sources are clearly there. Some units are in areas where commercial exploitation possibilities are high, especially technology, biomedicine, Information Technology and business. However, most units have opportunities in this respect, including philosophy and ethics, history and languages (as international experience demonstrates);
  - universities may well wish to assess units on the basis of entrepreneurial potential against entrepreneurial performance amongst other measures;
  - if an academic unit is in financial difficulties, then the way would be open under a budget or profit centre to achieve equilibrium by cost reduction, income generation or, most likely, a combination of the two. A strategic plan should reflect the appropriate approach;
  - increasingly, it would seem that if universities are moving to the adoption of budget or profit centres, this does call for sensitive strategic planning; acute analysis of options; flexible approaches; and a close articulation between academic and resource planning on behalf of academic units.

Clearly, the more that is devolved to units, the broader and deeper the need for their effective strategic planning.

20. The above discussion exposes the reality that academic units in a university will invariably be in different conditions of financial health. This phenomenon will be compounded by the particular combination of factors and weightings in the evolving (Academic) Resource Association Models – ARAM or RAM – being deployed in a particular university setting. These, of course, give different emphases/reward/ encouragement to different policy priorities (e.g. expansion of Masters degree students; doctoral students; part-time students) and it follows that almost overnight, a moderately



## Chapter 1 (cont'd)

healthy unit financially could be in significant financial trouble – with attendant issues of staffing reduction, imperatives for new course development, income generation, etc. Clearly, academic unit plans will be expected to address this situation. Chapter 7 provides a detailed exploration of this issue. It is fully acknowledged that universities are subject to financial constraints in the sector as a whole - which raises the issues in unit planning of both cost effectiveness and income generation.

### ***Institutional cultures and Strategic Planning***

21. As may readily be inferred from the above, the prevalent institutional culture in Irish universities is likely to condition the nature of academic unit strategic planning. The literature on university organisational cultures recognises four general types: collegial, bureaucratic, entrepreneurial and corporate.
  - Irish universities were until the last decade, undoubtedly in a combination of the collegial and bureaucratic modes, marked by considerable decentralisation to the level of the basic unit in academic terms, a strong regulatory framework; particularly steered from the Registrar's Office; forthright collegial organs like academic councils and faculty boards; strong professorial personalities; and limited attention to overall strategy or external environmental analysis. Whilst this is something of a generalisation, it does enable us to differentiate between the above and the ...
  - Current prevailing cultures which seem to be typified by much stronger presidential leadership; strong functional vice-presidential portfolios (paralleled at faculty level); considerable emphasis on environmental analysis and response, and engagement with external stakeholders; a business orientation; a robust strategic planning framework where institutional priorities are driven through the institution; and very explicit quality processes ostensibly linked to strategic planning cycles.
22. In short, the cultural emphasis seems to have moved from collegial/bureaucratic to entrepreneurial/corporate. It is not the function of this publication to evaluate the rights and wrongs of this cultural evolution, but it must be recognised that contemporary university, and therefore academic unit strategic planning, is taking place in a culture which has distilled important elements of the corporate and the entrepreneurial. It is fully recognised that the collegial/bureaucratic modes are still needed and will inevitably be active, thus creating a tension with the entrepreneurial/corporate which may be creative or dysfunctional. This clearly affects the planning process. What follows in Chapters 3 – 7 is consistent with this conclusion. However, it certainly does not follow that unbridled internal or external national competition is an inevitable consequence, though it is certainly national policy to enhance the international competitive status of Irish higher education as a whole. This nationally laudable ambition is more likely to be achieved by strategic collaboration, and strategic planning at unit level should create an environment for this to happen.

## Chapter 1 (cont'd)

23. Finally, there are four other cultural elements on which comment will be pertinent, in terms of academic unit strategic planning.
- It is evident that different subject disciplines or inter-disciplines possess their own cultural characteristics and conventions in the way in which they go about their business, make decisions, and relate to each other – so-called “Academic Tribes”<sup>3</sup>. This is clearly important in terms of processes which may be adopted by academic units to develop and implement plans. It would justify a differentiation of approach within a fairly robust common framework.
  - We do witness the progressive development of a quality culture in Irish universities, greatly facilitated by the activities of IUQB. Of particular importance here are the readiness of units to self-evaluate their performance with rigour; the ability to interpret the findings honestly; and the capacity to use these findings as a basis for setting objectives and joined-up thinking on organisational improvement.
  - As a result of external stimuli, the development of a collaborative culture is certainly accelerating. Thus, whilst strategic plans of academic units do recognise the competitive world of higher education, they should increasingly acknowledge that a strong competitive position is significantly enhanced by productive, strategic, collaborative alliances with similar units or those with complementary expertise.
  - Whilst the Irish national authorities are constantly urging the imperative of developing Irish higher education to “world class” status in the face of rapid globalisation and international competition, the strategic planning endeavours of academic units often tend towards more of a national/provincial outlook, and a reluctance to be forthright in terms of international student mobility, alliances, etc., as will be also observed in later chapters. One challenge of the academic unit strategic planning process will thus be to espouse more comprehensively the elements of an international culture and outlook. No doubt, further evolution of the ground rules and incentive structures of PRTL, SIF and GREP will help in this regard.
24. The purpose of this chapter has been to give some feel for the conceptual and organisational context in which units are being asked to engage in strategic planning. The institutional setting is demonstrably a very significant factor in conceptualising a planning process which is real, meaningful and useful to all concerned.

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3 Becher, T. and Trowler, P. (2001), *Academic Tribes and Territories*, Society for Research into Higher Education – Open University Press.



## Chapter 1 (cont'd)

### ***Guidelines – Nature and Scope of Strategic Planning and the Irish Organisational Context***

- Universities should provide a clear statement of their conceptions of strategic planning in an overarching Strategic Planning Handbook for use across the university.
- Universities need to be clear about the intended role of strategic planning in achieving significant institutional change and related cultural shifts, and monitor its effectiveness in this process.
- The definition of unit for strategic planning purposes should be unambiguous, as should its precise budgetary and devolved status.
- Universities need to be clear what differentiation is needed between strategic plans for faculties, academic units, research centres and other academic units.
- Planning processes need to be sensitive to the nature of institutional and academic unit cultures.
- There should be a clear relationship between strategic planning and financial processes.
- There should be a clear relationship between strategic planning and quality review processes and outcomes.





# Chapter 2

## Why do Academic Units need Strategic Plans?

25. It is reasonable to ask at this stage for a justification of the need for strategic planning at all in university academic units, since many will no doubt point to the fact that academic units, faculties and institutions have been around for a long time without necessarily having a coherent and explicit strategic planning process – and have survived, and often, prospered. That they have done so may be a combination of leadership flair and vision, individual entrepreneurship on the part of academic unit heads accompanied by sound political acumen, and the perceived excellence of the quality of research and teaching programmes. The potency of organisational inertia should also not be overlooked as a fact in survival!

The previous chapter implied a number of emerging imperatives for academic unit strategic planning. We will now develop this aspect further, with reference to both external and internal factors, which of course, tend to reinforce each other.

### Factors external to Irish universities

26. At its most basic, the 1997 Universities Act (Section 34) places an obligation on universities to develop strategic plans, namely:
- 1) A governing authority shall, as soon as practicable after its appointment and at such other times as it thinks fit, require the chief officer to prepare a plan which shall set out the aims of the governing authority for the operation and development of the university and its strategy for achieving those aims, and for carrying out the functions of the university, during the period, being not less than three years, to which the plan relates.
  - 2) A governing authority may, having regard to the resources available to the university, either approve a strategic development plan prepared under *sub-section (1)* without modification or, after consultation with the chief officer, approve the plan with such modifications as it thinks fit.
  - 3) As soon as practicable after it approves the strategic development plan under *sub-section (2)*, the governing authority shall provide a copy of the plan to an tÚdarás and to the Minister.

Similar arrangements are indicated for quality assurance.

Universities have responded, but apart from the recent examples mentioned below, (whilst they have been lodged with the Higher Education Authority), there does not appear to have been a response to date from the HEA to universities, nor a dialogue or evaluation in relation to the ramifications for resources or the articulation with national priorities in any regularised strategic planning cycle. Nonetheless, it is clear that the HEA and other agencies do refer to institutional strategic plans in various guises to inform competitive project-based funding decisions. In this situation, therefore,

## Chapter 2 (cont'd)

universities have been obligated to use the strategic plan itself, and the processes of interaction which have generated the plan, as a means of addressing the issues indicated later and the issues which follow – and, of course, to meet the requirements of competitive bidding.

27. Irish universities have generally espoused the tenets of quality audit and assurance in a sensitive and dedicated manner, within a sound framework of concept and practice generated in partnership by the universities and IUQB. A consistent element of this has been academic unit reviews and from 2002 onwards, an equally consistent theme arising from these reviews has been the need for more systematic academic unit strategic planning, since this has been invariably perceived as having a big contribution to make to the enhancement of teaching, research and personnel development.

### **Imperatives for strategic planning arising from competitive funding.**

28. Increasingly, the funding of Irish universities for special initiatives has included the imperative of producing strategic plans. The prime examples are PRTL, shortly to enter its fifth cycle; SIF; and the various programmes for the Irish research councils – e.g. the Graduate Research Education Programme (GREP).

#### **The clear intent of the HEA and the other bodies is to:**

- ensure that specific proposals are phased within a comprehensive framework of institutional development, rather than exist as an ad hoc phenomenon;
- create confidence that any funds granted will be competently managed, and projected outcomes delivered;
- ensure that funding, for instance, for research, is closely integrated with strategies for teaching and learning, knowledge transfer, Information Technology development, library support, staff development and graduate training;
- stimulate inter-institutional and inter-departmental collaboration (including across the binary line) to create greater critical mass.

Since proposals under these programmes are essentially based on specific projects of research, teaching and knowledge transfer, they will focus on particular academic units or cognate groupings of academic units – hence the need for academic units to have live operational and strategic plans which can be easily adopted for submission with these proposals.

29. The importance and significance of sound university and academic unit plans in the case of **PRTL and SIF** has been evident to date, by the following:
  - Phase I of PRTL Cycles required Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to provide, *inter alia*, a copy of overall Institutional Strategy, supplementary statements on Research Strategy, Teaching and Learning Strategy and Knowledge Transfer Strategy. Assessment was



## Chapter 2 (cont'd)

made by the PRTL Panel of the overall coherence of these strategies, their alignment with regional and national priorities; their comprehensiveness; prioritisation; ends–means relationship and the human resource dimensions. That amounted to a maximum possible of 35 marks out of 100, and in addition, 20 marks were allocated to research strategy implementation and a further 20 to the strategic value-added aspects of collaboration;

- in Phase 2 of PRTL Cycles, the emphasis switched to implementation strategy (40/100) and sustainability plans, especially in relation to funding and human resources;
- it is apparent, therefore that, to date, to score well in PRTL Phase 1 + Phase 2, considerable sophistication in strategic planning was needed. It is predicted that this will continue;
- it is expected that the strong emphasis on the demonstration of strategic planning capacity as part of PRTL submissions will continue into Cycle 5, though the precise formulation will naturally evolve over time;
- since the cases for funding are essentially based on academic units and subject groupings, the moral for units is obvious. The necessity for stable collaboration strategies is also apparent – these cannot be activated simply in response to a call for proposals;
- the same phenomenon and impetus can be discerned in the SIF 2007 scoring rubric which allocated 25/100 marks for collaboration; 25/100 marks for strategy; 25/100 marks for the quality of the proposal; and 25/100 marks for innovation.

30. **The Irish Research Councils** exhibit similar interests in strategic planning. The 2007 Graduate Research Education Programme (GREP), for instance, allocates 25/100 marks for evidence of the link between the proposed programme of the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences (IRCHSS) and institutional strategy in terms of graduate education, and the sustainability and implementation strategies of the programme. Other strategic imperatives in this programme are international positioning, stakeholder engagement and achievement indicators.

### **Other national agendas.**

31. Apart from the above, there are other significant external factors motivating the need for effective strategic planning at institutional and academic unit level, e.g:

- the National Development Plan and Irish Spatial Strategy, with its focus on Gateways, Hubs, etc. necessitates the articulation of university strategies within regional development strategies;
- growing inter-institutional competition on the one hand, creating a need for well defined strategic positioning of academic units at local, regional, national and international levels. The advent of international league tables has certainly sharpened the strategic planning efforts of Irish universities;

## Chapter 2 (cont'd)

- given the size of the Irish higher education system, there has been a wise focus on the imperative of inter-institutional collaboration in respect of disciplines and groups of disciplines, to create high quality (often inter-disciplinary) critical masses, which are very likely to enhance Ireland's international standing in the global knowledge economy. Well chosen sustainable alliances are clearly vital in this regard, and this is not a matter for individual whim at unit level, but for careful strategic analysis, since this will involve sustained resources commitment and academic adjustments over a lengthy period;
  - there is every indication that Irish and indigenous multi-national consumers of Research & Development and knowledge transfer are becoming more demanding of universities in terms of assurance of probity in planning and resource commitment, quality project management and risk assessment – all of which is related to strategic planning.
32. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (**OECD**) in the Review of Higher Education in Ireland 2004 recommended that:
- headships of university academic units be given limited terms to encourage rotation [which incidentally, stimulates the need for an academic unit strategic planning process to avoid stop-start dislocation];
  - resources should be allocated in line with institutional priorities;
  - human resource strategies be reviewed.

There are, here again, clear consequences for academic unit strategic planning.



## Chapter 2 (cont'd)

### ***Guidelines - Factors external to Irish universities***

- Universities and academic units should ensure that university and unit strategic plans are cast in a way that they can readily be adapted annually; for external competitive bidding; and other purposes as necessary.
- University and unit strategic plans should incorporate explicit elements and instruments for the development of inter-institutional co-operation and alliances.
- University and unit plans should demonstrably engage, in appropriate ways, with agendas for regional development and lifelong learning.

## Chapter 2 (cont'd)

### Factors internal to institutions

33. The previous chapter has discussed elements of the current organisational context of Irish universities which impinge on the academic unit planning processes. Universities, of course, are now highly complex organisations, in terms of multiple objectives and domains of activity (often stimulated and conditioned by external political/professional and social imperatives); a resultant expansion in size and geographical coverage; and a proliferation of organisational units dedicated to particular purposes such as Research & Development, continuing education, internationalisation, etc. Such complexity inevitably spawns a problem of fragmentation, and consequently, this paper attempts to resolve the problem.

Among the possible consequences of this phenomenon in Irish universities are:

- ineffective synchronisation of directions and effort between functions such as academic strategy, budgeting, quality assurance, human resource management, etc., which may be replicated at faculty level;
- a defective vertical alignment between the main themes of university strategic planning and the activities of faculties and their sub-units, resulting in university strategies sometimes being elegant but possibly unfulfilled abstractions or desiderata;
- a less than optimum fit between units and faculty aspirations and what emerges as university strategy;
- questions regarding the coherence and timeliness of university responses to external challenges, resulting in different parts of the university reacting in different and often contradictory or non-complementary responses to such opportunities as SIF or PRTL. This, of course, is likely to be damaging to both the academic unit and institution. Coherent integrated strategy is thus a means of combating this issue;
- the tendency for academic units to act as self-contained organisational silos, which is particularly problematic in relation to the prevailing imperatives of inter-disciplinary activity in research and teaching and Research & Development, and inter-institutional collaboration (especially fostered by PRTL, SIF and the research councils);
- a possibility of organisational drift arising from the above, which may be compounded by very strong collegial and bureaucratic cultures in universities and/or their academic sub-units, which can be perceived as inhibitors to strategic planning;
- the desire of new unit heads to establish their mandate during their period in office, in order to ensure an evident legacy for their successors.



## Chapter 2 (cont'd)

34. The European Universities Association (EUA) was jointly commissioned by IUQB and the HEA in 2005 to undertake an external review of quality assurance procedures and their effectiveness in the seven Irish universities. Whilst it was an external intervention, it largely dealt with internal issues with a focus on the universities capacity to change, including their strategic planning and internal quality monitoring. Many of the above points are confirmed in these seven studies, but in addition, the reports<sup>4,5</sup> indicated that:

- many academic unit plans were aspirational, vague and lacked anything specific in terms of actions;
- there was a lack of transparency in the relationship between academic unit plans, university budget and strategic plans, together with some deficiencies in academic unit performance data;
- some resource allocation mechanisms actively discouraged inter-disciplinary collaboration and the move to critical mass – which is certainly part and parcel of the PRTLI rubric;
- there were questions to be asked in some universities over the length of the planning cycle, and the connections between QA/QI and the strategic planning processes.

It is not suggested that these limitations are rampant across Irish universities as a whole, but they are undoubtedly present, and it follows that this publication should address these points.

It follows from the above that strategic planning has come to be recognised as a means of limiting this excessive fragmentation to the benefit of both university and the academic unit, and certainly the strategic plans submitted as part of the PRTLI requirements display a developing and mature institutional acknowledgement of the above.

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<sup>4</sup> European Universities Association Institutional Evaluation Programme/Irish Universities Quality Board (2005), *Review of Quality Assurance in Irish Universities: Review of the Effectiveness of the Quality Assurance Procedures in Irish Universities. University Reports.*

<sup>5</sup> European Universities Association Institutional Evaluation Programme /Higher Education Authority (2005), *Review of Quality Assurance in Irish Universities: Sectoral Report.*

## Chapter 2 (cont'd)

35. A strategic plan needs to be conceived in terms of its contribution to the ongoing development of an academic unit. The strategic plan should constitute:

- an instrument to showcase the academic unit, and in public relations and marketing;
- a framework of academic unit development to locate sensibly ad hoc issues and problems; a compass to steer the unit; a guide to staffing requirements; a means of limiting ad hoc whims and transitory wishes;
- a means of removing blockages and inhibitors to progress;
- a tool to negotiate for resources and support;
- an important corollary to the QA process for the academic unit;
- a means of achieving university buy-in to academic unit development;
- a rolling plan helpful for changes in academic unit leadership.

The above reinforce the notion that there are consequences for units of not having a fully operational strategic plan.



## Chapter 2 (cont'd)

### ***Guidelines - Factors internal to institutions***

- Universities should consider the appropriateness of the length of their planning cycles.
- Universities and units should set up mechanisms to prevent a silo mentality developing around unit plans, and actively facilitate inter-dependent and inter-disciplinary approaches to common problems and opportunities.
- Universities and units should develop a policy on the desirability and nature and range of strategic plan documents designed for different internal and external audiences.
- Universities need to ensure a tight integration between cycles and processes of strategic assurance, budgeting and other key functions.
- Universities should adopt an integrated approach to the scheduling and inter-connectedness of reviews and planning endeavours.

## Chapter 2 (cont'd)

### “Real” and “Paper” plans

36. It is pertinent finally at this point to reflect that, whilst some strategic plans may well be extremely elegant formulations, they may be largely ‘paper’ exercises which have little actual impact on a university or academic unit. From the evidence collected in this study,
- “Real plans” may be recognised by:
    - » ownership of both the process and content of plans by all parties;
    - » commitment to action and support by senior leadership and management;
    - » realistic priorities and timescale;
    - » decanting of priorities to named individuals, areas of responsibility, with subsequent accountability;
    - » incentives to secure delivery of priorities built into an implementation process;
    - » an explicit timetable for completion of actions;
    - » a robust monitoring process;
    - » explicit connections with other organisational processes.
  - “Paper plans” may be recognised by:
    - » imposition from above without adequate involvement in process or design of content;
    - » absence of appropriate timetabling and prioritisation – unco-ordinated “wish lists”;
    - » limited accountability for results;
    - » weak incentives;
    - » “flaky” monitoring;
    - » no consequences for success or failure.



## Chapter 2 (cont'd)

37. The interest of this publication is, of course, in “real” strategic planning, and the following chapters indicate, in terms of process and content, how this may be achieved. It should be re-emphasised that strategic planning is not just a technical process, but one which attempts to harness intellectual, personal and social commitment and enthusiasm, to realise its full potential. It is also fair to flag up some caveats on the use of strategic planning processes, as revealed by the project. These would include:
- that it is just one instrument in the management of strategic change in academic units, and certainly not a panacea for all ills;
  - whilst it needs to become fully operational, it must never become an empty ritual;
  - whilst a strong database is essential, this needs to be accompanied by robust discussion of policy alternatives and honest critique.

This would seem to indicate the importance of continuing reflection by academic units on the effectiveness of the process, and the extent to which expected benefits are being realised.





# Chapter 3

## The Scope, Nature and Content of Academic Unit Strategic Plans

38. This section considers the contents of academic unit strategic plans including:

- The planning period and the concept of rolling plans
- Overall scope, content and structure
- Style and format of individual chapters and their level of detail
- Supporting data and analysis
- SWOT analysis and scenario building

39. It should be clearly noted that there is no absolute or ideal in relation to the above as universities may well have different emphases which they are seeking to deliver through these plans, and indeed, have different expectations of academic units. Additionally, units within a university may differ in terms of their scope and breadth of activity.

Therefore, while it is desirable for there to be a consistent model within an institution, for comparative reasons, there is no necessity for a common model across universities. While recognising this diversity, there is, however, a minimum or common core of content which unit strategic plans need to address. This Chapter deals with the core requirements in terms of the academic unit and university audiences, and does not directly address requirements for external consumption.

## Chapter 3 (cont'd)

### The planning period and the concept of rolling plans

40. At present, the Irish universities differ considerably in terms of the lengths and starting points of planning periods. The 1997 Universities Act did not lay down any precise length of a planning cycle, or its start/finish points.

While it is desirable that the academic unit planning process should be appropriately synchronised with the institutional planning process, there is no necessity for uniformity across the sector. Ideally, planning cycles should be articulated with the budgeting cycle timetable, and QI reviews.

It is helpful if the planning process is a rolling one. Thus, initially a five-year plan would be devised, and at the end of *Year 1*, the *Year 2* becomes the *Year 1* of the new five-year plan and a new year is added to the end of the plan. The new *Year 1* can be updated in the light of achievements and known new imperatives. Also the new *Year 5* would reflect a fresh estimation of likely new trends.

### Overall scope, content and structure

41. It is critical to the successful completion of a strategic planning exercise across units to employ a set of templates for the development of plans. Comparison of plans across several different units is virtually impossible unless a common format exists.

There is no compelling reason to use a single format or template across all universities but Appendix 3 is comprehensive and thus, might be reasonably recommended for wider use.

- Section A - Chapters 1 and 2 set out the context and environment of the unit and resulting key strategic objectives.
- Section B - Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6 set out academic activities and services provided.
- Section C - Chapters 7, 8 and 9 set out resource planning and development.
- Section D - Chapters 10, 11 and 12 deal with questions of organisational support, but these items could conveniently be located in other sections if desired.

The logic behind this sequence is fairly apparent: Section A is about the diagnosis of direction; Section B indicates the principal academic priorities; whilst Sections C and D indicate activities which must be undertaken to facilitate the achievement of Section B objectives.

42. There are other specific examples from participating institutions which are available on the IUQB website.<sup>6</sup> These are also quite legitimate and clearly thoughtful and well articulated. It is evident that different formulations deliver different options for discussion, according to what the university wishes to focus on. The important point is the case for standardisation within a particular university.

<sup>6</sup> Appendix 2 provides a complete list of templates, which are referred to or included in this publication, that are available on the IUQB web site ([www.iuqb.ie](http://www.iuqb.ie)).



## Chapter 3 (cont'd)

### ***Guidelines – The planning period and the concept of rolling plans***

- Three to five years is regarded as the most appropriate length of the planning period. It is generally acknowledged, however, that assumptions/scenarios beyond three years should be provisional, and the value of detailed specifics beyond three years is questionable.
- Five-year plans should have three years which are specific; with the following two years indicative.
- Breakdown of multi-year strategic plans into annual operating plans is essential.
- In order to avoid obsolescence of a long term plan, the process should be a rolling one with annual reviews.
- The agreed period should articulate with the budget and other cycles.

### ***Guidelines – Overall scope, content and structure***

The strategic plan is divided into sections which address the following:

- the context and environment of the unit and resulting key strategic objectives;
- the academic activities and services provided;
- resource planning and development matters;
- questions of organisational support, but these items could conveniently be located in other sections if desired.

## Chapter 3 (cont'd)

### **Style and format of individual chapters and their level of detail**

43. For ease of reading and comparison, it makes sense to have a relatively stable common structure for the lay-out of each chapter of the Plan. It is, of course, for each university to decide what format best suits its needs at any particular point in time. However, it is important to ensure that there is a minimum core of content within each section and the guidelines below set out this core.

It is also important to bear in mind that different audiences will likely respond positively to tailor-made versions of the plan.



## Chapter 3 (cont'd)

### **Guidelines - Style and format of individual chapters and their level of detail**

Each section should include:

- a brief overview of scope of the area of the chapter;
- a critical situational analysis of context, achievements, problems, and developmental opportunities and imperatives for the particular discipline(s);
- overall objectives for the multi-year planning period;
- precise actions for the first year of the plan to give effect to objectives;
- projected actions for the rest of the multi-year planning period;
- resources needed;
- achievement measures and key performance indicators for the area in question;
- supplementary data/statistics/tables, as needed.

The following should also be considered:

- the overall length of the narrative of a particular chapter should be kept to an absolute maximum of 4 – 5 pages. Normally 2 – 3 pages are quite adequate;
- in general, chapters should not need to include vast amounts of descriptive detail related to the *status quo* and continuation of existing practices. The thoroughly routine should be subordinated to that which is about change, development and added value i.e. not everything has to be planned for;
- it is recommended for brevity and clarity that bullet points, short paragraphs, the placement of tables as annexes /appendices should be used rather than long elegant literary expositions;
- statements about action need to be precise to indicate exactly what is intended and to facilitate monitoring of achievements and measurement of outcomes.

## Chapter 3 (cont'd)

### Supporting data and analysis

44. A robust process of diagnosis of the health of an academic unit in a critical and honest manner is a necessary prerequisite to the process of planning. This implies a consideration of relevant factors and access to an appropriate level of timely, consistent and accurate data. The consequences of omission of the above would be a plan based on subjective impressions and one unlikely to address any fundamental or emerging opportunities or weaknesses.

For most Irish universities, significant issues exist in terms of the availability, timeliness and usefulness of data and also consensus on its accuracy. The most common concerns focus on student progression data, student destination statistics, market shares, financial performance and university trend data and stakeholder details (*See also the IUQB National Guidelines on Good Practice for Institutional Research in Irish Higher Education*).

45. It should be noted that some information which units need is subject- or discipline- specific, deriving from professional bodies, specialised research funding bodies, specific client groups and other stakeholders, and it is entirely reasonable that units should be responsible for obtaining and maintaining the data in this case, though it is acknowledged that universities may well have a valuable moderating influence in certain circumstances.



## Chapter 3 (cont'd)

### ***Guidelines - Supporting data and analysis***

The following indicative categories of data are important for effective analysis and should be made available prior to the process of constructing and refining a plan taking place.

- Quality assessment and reviews, including academic unit reviews;
- Information from student satisfaction surveys;
- Research inputs and outputs and performance ratios;
- Course efficiency measures;
- Service teaching;
- Staff profiles and performance;
- Financial data;
- Student application and admission details;
- Student progressions, throughput and completions;
- Student destination statistics;
- Student programme evaluations;
- Data on university trends;
- Data on regional trends;
- Existing and emerging higher education policy from HEA, SFI, IUQB, research councils, Enterprise Ireland, etc.
- Existing and emerging policy from EU agencies relating to higher education.

## Chapter 3 (cont'd)

### **SWOT Analysis and Scenario Building**

46. It is evident that a robust framework is needed to launch a diagnostic self-critical process which is the key starting point in engaging participants in the consideration of the necessary data described above.

A SWOT analysis is recommended as a catalyst for the diagnostic process and the associated extraction of key strategic objectives. In general, the Strengths and Weaknesses aspects of the SWOT analysis will be internally focussed with the Opportunities/Threats elements concentrating on the external environment.

A SWOT analysis may be effectively supported by scenario-building. Scenario building forms a legitimate instrument to be used when considering the Opportunities and Threats which are essentially external phenomena. Scenario building is not examined in detail here but may be considered a useful input.

The Guidelines proposed indicate some technical issues, and Chapter 4 suggests some desiderata in the way SWOTs may be used in group processes.

47. Since the SWOT analysis will have identified elements of concern and also elements of opportunity, these elements must not be overlooked in the drafting of the individual chapters objectives and activities. The emerging objectives and activities, of course, will still need prioritising in terms of importance and sequencing.
48. The above paragraphs have addressed some of the conceptual and technical issues in compiling a strategic plan. However, these need to be put in the context of the group(s) of people who are producing the plan – their expectations, hopes and fears, and the manner in which behavioural and political issues are managed to ensure the resulting document is both “owned” and technically excellent.



## Chapter 3 (cont'd)

### **Guidelines - SWOT Analysis and Scenario Building**

Appendix 4 sets out a suggested SWOT analysis instrument and the following guidelines should be considered:

- Conclusions from the study and analysis of the hard data need to be inserted into the appropriate category of “S”, “W”, “O” or “T”, for example:
  - » budgetary deficits or unfavourable quality reviews reasonably figure in “W”;
  - » scope for the development of academic unit profile through submissions to PRTL research councils or European Framework funding are reasonably elements in “O”.
- Care should be taken to cross-reference findings in the different SWOT categories as a basis for priority action and objectives, for example:
  - » identified budgetary weakness should be coupled with opportunities for external funding and thence converted into precise plans for income generation;
  - » PRTL/IRCSET (Irish Research Council for Science, Engineering and Technology) funding opportunities which require collaborative alliances should be coupled with weaknesses in areas like a reluctance to engage in inter-disciplinary research – or a lack of any policy on consortia. This should immediately lead to the creation of strategic objectives to develop an inter-disciplinary approach and the scouting for likely partners way in advance of any invitation to bid.





# Chapter 4

## Developing the Plan at Academic Unit Level: People and Processes

49. this section considers some common principles which underpin the development of effective strategic plans, critically assesses the roles involved in strategic planning and suggests some key elements of the planning timetable. The section is structured as follows:
- The involvement and ownership of staff, students and others
  - Roles in the development of the strategic plan
  - The planning timetable

### **The involvement and ownership of staff and others**

50. The development of strategic plans is not just a technical exercise, however sophisticated. Strategic plans may be viewed as a sort of arena where decisions have to be made on the range of possible differing expectancies and demands which various stakeholders may have of an academic unit, in terms of its priorities and areas of development. These stakeholders include:
- academics of various types within the academic unit (full-time/part-time; tenured/contract, etc.);
  - students;
  - administrators and support staff;
  - senior university personnel;
  - external stakeholders/consumers of a unit's services – the professions, employers, research contractors, partner academic units in alliances, etc;
  - governing body/authority.

It is quite possible that these groups hold very different ideas regarding what a unit should be about (for example, positioning on a conservative – innovative spectrum; in terms of course profile, learning methodologies, adoption of new agendas like lifelong learning, etc.). Groups may also have very different styles. Where choices are needed, there is the possibility of a perception of “winners” and “losers”. Hence, it is important to achieve as much consensus as possible to minimise alienation.

## Chapter 4 (cont'd)

51. Considerable thought needs to be given in advance as to what constituencies need to be involved; for what; and at what levels; what mechanisms of involvement are likely to be most productive; and what sort of weighting needs to be attributed to each constituency. It is important, for example, to secure systematic input from external stakeholders. Efficient use of one-off or continuing focus groups may be an appropriate device to achieve such input.

It is evident, of course, that the nature of the processes needing to be adopted will vary according to:

- the size of the academic unit;
- its complexity – range of disciplines and programmes;
- whether it has several geographical locations;
- its traditions;
- its particular culture of decision-making (science and technology academic units, for instance, have different ways of doing things than business-related units or those in the social sciences or humanities);
- its particular nature at the time – financial or academic health; internal expertise related to planning; previous experience of planning.

This again affirms the importance of a “Fitness for Purpose” approach.



## Chapter 4 (cont'd)

### ***Guidelines – The involvement and ownership of staff and others***

- All relevant stakeholders are enabled to make their preferences known on issues by a variety of effective means, and are able to participate in the decision process, as appropriate.
- The quality of the final version of the plan is likely to be considerably enhanced by the addition of a range of perspectives outside those of the head or a very small group of senior staff.

As a result of investment in the consultative process, the psychological climate of the unit and the quality of its links with partners are likely to be enhanced by:

- a more acute awareness of budget and resource constraints and opportunities – which in turn produces more realistic expectations;
- synergies produced by a collective identification of strengths and possible opportunities;
- the exercise of collective creativity.

## Chapter 4 (cont'd)

### Roles in the development of the strategic plan

52. Strategic plans do not happen by themselves: various roles and functions are needed, namely:

- a steering role is necessary in the evolution of a strategic plan. This is not unrelated to eventual implementation, in the sense that the head of the unit has a continuing role in initiation of the process, and ensuring it keeps to the overarching objectives and timetable. The management group within the unit is also critical. The Guidelines indicate the nature and range of such “steering functions”;
- depending on the size and complexity of the unit, functions may be undertaken by the academic unit head, a designated strategic planning co-ordinator, a strategic planning group/school committee, or a combination of the above. The important point is that the design of a plan clearly needs to articulate with existing processes and roles as far as possible, with a view to eventual implementation;
- large committees cannot draft conceptual documents. It is, therefore, appropriate for various people (singly or individually) to be assigned the responsibility of producing drafts of chapters or sections. In other cases, a small committee will draft each chapter. This division of labour is important in terms of sharing the load; securing ownership; and recognising specialist interest and expertise. The Guidelines indicate possible approaches;
- it is important that, whenever drafting is delegated, the whole unit has a chance periodically to consider progress and legitimise outcomes, as the Guidelines indicate;
- the use of external facilitators is a helpful option for academic units where:
  - » the internal micro-politics and dynamics are known to be difficult – process facilitation;
  - » there is felt to be a need for an external to challenge internal cosiness or bring external perspectives to bear – resource person; evaluator.

Some universities have usefully set up “help-lines” by which units may call a university-level process facilitator to assist in the resolution of various impasses.



## Chapter 4 (cont'd)

### ***Guidelines – Roles in the development of the strategic plan***

- The following “steerage functions” should be present in the evolution of the plan:
  - » stimulation and sustainability of enthusiasm for the process, especially after the euphoria of getting started and also at the mid-point which may be a time of relatively tedious drafting;
  - » progress monitoring of the production of drafts;
  - » ensuring that accurate data is available to drafters of sections of the plan;
  - » draft co-ordination, including ensuring that drafts of specific chapters meet the overarching objectives and are operationally specific;
  - » consensus seeking;
  - » managing the timetable.
- The drafting process works best where designated drafters:
  - » take the outcomes of SWOTs as the starting point;
  - » look across the whole unit rather than being conditioned by a sectional interest;
  - » incorporate a range of internal and external perspectives;
  - » adhere consistently to the given brief and format.
- Given the necessity of the division of labour, it is critical to maintain the integrity of the process by periodic reference of progress to a planning sequence of academic unit meetings, or one or two-day retreats or away-days where:
  - » drafts are critiqued, referred back or ratified;
  - » essential cross-referencing, or identification of discontinuity takes place;
  - » it is confirmed that drafts meet overarching agendas;
  - » the final plan is signed off.
- The head of the academic unit should be responsible that all of the above are effectively managed.
- The use of an external facilitator is recommended.

## Chapter 4 (cont'd)

### **The planning timetable**

53. It is critical to the development of a strategic plan to establish a timetable for its production and legitimisation.

The university itself should have a coherent, public and transparent timetable with built-in dialogue between academic unit/faculty/university in terms of initial briefing and final “sign-off”. A unit’s schedule will clearly need to articulate with this, as an imperative. Appendix 5 indicates a framework example of this, and the emphasis is clearly on a short sharp process, which is acceptable, as long as the units have already done a reasonable amount of preparation.

54. The previous Chapters 1 and 3 have emphasised the importance of a diagnostic phase in the development of a strategic plan to provide a solid base for future creativity. A SWOT analysis was recommended for this purpose and its technical features outlined. However, there are ways in which SWOT analyses may be used within an academic unit to great effect. The Guidelines indicate a suitable process in this context.
55. Finally, the Guidelines (Summary of the Common Principles Underlying Strategic Planning Processes) attempt to extract some overarching critical success factors which are likely to condition the effectiveness of the design process.



## Chapter 4 (cont'd)

### **Guidelines – The planning timetable**

- Preparation time necessary will be partly determined by the extent of prior experience in the academic unit.
- It is helpful if the period can be dovetailed with parallel processes (such as QI reviews, or staff development planning) which are likely to use at least some of the same data.
- It is important to have both top-down and bottom-up dimensions to the process. The former is about setting broad parameters and issues for resolution as a guide to setting priorities, often derived from previous monitoring or university strategic priorities. The latter is about obtaining colleagues' perceptions about the health of the unit and desired future directions. These two dimensions, of course, need to converge and be resolved. Appendix 6 provides an interesting and effective example of this in practice.
- Appropriate allowance should be made in the timetable for slippage. Whilst this does not need to be acknowledged publicly from the outset, it is prudent to allow for a slippage in schedule of anything up to 25%.
- Circulate the SWOT questionnaires to all internals; and possibly selected externals also, and allow c. two weeks for their completion (e-mail possibilities).
- Synthesis by a small co-ordinating group and the identification of areas of convergence (for agreement) and divergence (for resolution) is undertaken.
- Intensive departmental away-day(s) to consolidate, achieve consensus; distil provisional strategic objectives overall; and produce guidelines and specific objectives for each chapter area for the drafters to refine and produce a strategy are conducted.
- An external facilitator is potentially helpful in stimulating frankness and honesty. Key people, of course, need to be present at such sessions and there is a strong case for obligatory participation by all.
- Discussions focussing primarily on opportunities identified in the SWOT analysis, may be sufficient, and reflects a creative, optimistic view of life and is certainly appropriate if opportunities are directly connected to particular weaknesses or threats. However, to confront the obvious identified weaknesses or threats requires an external facilitator of considerable experience in terms of insisting on issue confrontation.

## Chapter 4 (cont'd)

### Summary of the common principles underlying Strategic Planning processes

56. A number of common principles can be discerned which underpin effective processes of developing academic unit strategic plans.

- **Purpose:** developing a strategic plan involves an opening up of the work of an academic unit to scrutiny, and it would be easy to become side-tracked in fascinating but marginal issues, and in the process, lose sight of the main point of the exercise.
- **Challenge:** to sustain the vibrancy of an academic unit, a questioning of the quality of activities and their consequence with objectives is clearly needed, which implies the unit should be comfortable with this; capable of honesty and frankness; and capable of constructively and sensitively handling any conflict which the process may engender.
- **Co-operation:** it is evident that producing a plan is not a one-person job, but necessitates various internal and external perspectives. A consensus mode of decision-taking on strategy is compatible with this.
- **Comparative analysis:** good practice on so many issues is available elsewhere, within the same university (which implies the university should be encouraging and structuring the exchange of good practice) and in other institutions, nationally and internationally.
- **Iteration:** the drafting of strategic plans is rarely a linear process. It is normal for initial conclusions on desirable actions to be modified in the light of later discussions; as lateral implications become clear (for instance, human resource implications of delivering a particular academic profile); or because consideration of an academic unit plan at the university level may require refinement, reduction or scaling down. Units, therefore, should be aware at the outset that iteration will need handling as a normal part of the process, not as something exceptional or catastrophic.
- **Systematisation:** given the above, it is normal for plans/chapters to go through several drafts. To avoid confusion and its attendant frustration, such apparently obvious points as an explicit schedule for the production of a plan; dating and versioning of successive drafts; picking up points which require cross-referencing between chapters (for instance, the curriculum implications of a forthright international strategy), need to be co-ordinated.

The next section considers how the implementation of strategic plans should best be managed.



# Chapter 5

## Managing the Implementation of Academic Unit Strategic Plans

57. this section explores the elements required for the successful preparation and management necessary to ensure the successful implementation of a strategic plan. The section is structured as follows:
- Preparation for successful implementation
  - Monitoring and Review
  - University/College/Faculty role in implementation

### **Preparation for successful implementation**

58. Strategic planning is essentially a continuing process, rather than a one-off intensive brainstorming exercise. This implies the need for an early clarification of precisely how the plans will be implemented. It should be emphasised at the outset that both the academic unit and university levels have responsibilities in implementation, although from differing perspectives.
59. The strategic plans developed are, of course, multi-year commitments to action. A pre-condition of implementation is that the various proposed actions are decanted into operational plans based on specific years or time-frames, to avoid the possibilities of rampant ambiguity in relation to when specific achievements are intended; an over-optimistic concentration of actions in Year 1; or a rush to complete things in Year 4. Figure 1 indicates a matrix which can be used for this purpose, as it allows academic units to undertake sensible phasing and logical sequencing of commitments. Clearly, the first year's commitments are crucial since they will need to establish building blocks without which subsequent actions cannot be established. The point of this, of course, is that implementation needs to proceed from a realistic base, and is clearly contingent on finances

## Chapter 5 (cont'd)

60. A second dimension of implementation is clarity on who is responsible for implementation. At some point, collectively agreed actions need to be assigned to a colleague's personal work schedule, otherwise, they will remain pleasant rhetorical abstractions. Figure 2 indicates an instrument for achieving this. It will be noted that all actions will invariably need to be broken down into steps; an indicative time-frame provided; and in some cases, a budget assigned. Normally, this does not seem to create too much of an issue if:
- role allocations for particular domains of academic unit activity are well defined in advance;
  - specific individuals have been heavily involved in, or have been responsible for drafting the relevant section of the plan originally and have developed a certain specialisation – and ownership/commitment to successful outcomes;
  - the unit has a well functioning personal development/appraisal process into which these initiatives can conveniently be placed.



## Chapter 5 (cont'd)

### ***Guidelines - Preparation for successful implementation***

- There should be early clarification of precisely how the plan will be implemented.
- Proposed actions should be decanted into operational plans based on specific years or time-frames.
- The first year's commitments are recognised as being crucial since they will establish building blocks without which subsequent actions cannot be established.
- Allocations of responsibility for progressing needs for particular domains of academic unit activity should be well defined in advance and collectively agreed actions should be assigned.
- All actions are broken down into steps; an indicative time-frame is provided; and in some cases, a budget is assigned.

## Chapter 5 (cont'd)

CHAPTER: ACTION PRIORITY	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3	YEAR 4
I	▶ 1	•		
	▶ 2	•	•	
	▶ 3			•
	▶ ETC.			
II	▶ 1	•		
	▶ 2	•		
	▶ 3	•	•	•
	▶ ETC.		•	
III	▶ 1	•		
	▶ 2	•		
	▶ 3			•
	▶ ETC.		•	
IV	▶ 1	▲		
	▶ 2			
	▶ 3			
	▶ ETC.			
etc.				

**CRITICAL YEAR : ESTABLISH BUILDING BLOCKS e.g.**

- DIAGNOSTIC EVALUATIONS PRIOR TO ACTION
- SET UP INFRASTRUCTURES, PROCESSES, KEY ROLES
- OBJECTIVE MEASURES : SET UP KPI
- POLITICAL IMPERATIVES (INSTITUTIONAL/EXTERNAL)
- OBTAIN APPROVALS
- OTHER PRECONDITIONS

Figure 1: Strategic plan action matrix.



## Chapter 5 (cont'd)

CHAPTER OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN					
ACTION PRIORITY	STEPS TO BE TAKEN	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	TIME FRAME	EVALUATOR	COST (if relevant)
1.	1.1	etc.			
	1.2				
	1.3				
2.	2.1				
	2.2				

Figure 2: Planning guide for annual implementation of actions priorities: year 20XX.

## Chapter 5 (cont'd)

### **Monitoring and review**

61. There needs to be an explicit monitoring and review process to ascertain progress or the lack of it, and to undertake remedial or crisis action, if needs be. This can be achieved by a combination of mechanisms, as indicated in the Guidelines.

The importance of periodic reporting to meetings or away-days is normally carried out according to a predetermined schedule and includes several audit points of reporting. The importance of this in terms of sustaining collective awareness and responsibility, as well as imposing some personal obligations, is recognised. Such reporting can operate across a wide spectrum of detail and sophistication, and may be partly conditioned by overarching university practices and demands in this regard. In larger units, a small senior executive group or committee may fulfil this role – professors, major programme leaders, research directors, senior administrators, etc.

### **University/College/Faculty role in implementation**

62. The discussion so far has largely focused on the academic unit level – which is right, since implementation sees its realisation at the level of the base unit. Nonetheless, the levels of institution and faculty are not absolved from some responsibility for facilitating effective implementation. Universities should provide support for strategic planning in the specific context of implementation.

This issue is explored in more detail in chapter 6.



## Chapter 5 (cont'd)

### ***Guidelines – Monitoring and review***

- As the head of a unit is ultimately responsible to the university for a strategic plan's outcomes, so the leadership style should naturally encompass periodic monitoring – and assistance, if needed. However, given the complexity of heads' roles, especially in large units, other devices may be needed.
- Periodic/semesterly reporting by individuals to ordinary staff meetings or away-days/retreats should be carried out according to a published schedule, including accountability audit points of reporting.
- An end-of-year review should be conducted encompassing an honest appraisal by the unit of what was achieved; what was not achieved and why; how limited achievement could affect desired objectives for the year to come; and how the next year's objectives should be re-set.
- Accurate performance data in relation to key performance indicators should be provided in order to assist the monitoring of implementation.
- Effective implementation should be closely related to a close articulation with the academic unit budget, and an appropriate degree of operating freedoms for the unit in academic, financial and human resource domains is provided, so that they may move swiftly in relation to both problems and opportunities.

### ***Guidelines – University/College/Faculty role in implementation***

- The processes of university legitimisation of academic unit plans, and the provision of agreed necessary resources, need to be realistic and serious in nature.
- Regular scheduled and timetabled progress review meetings should be held between university senior officers, relevant deans and academic units.
- Central university units should be provided with clear upfront briefs of where they need to provide targeted assistance to help particular academic units in the realisation of specific elements of their plans. This implies central units having explicit service agreements with various academic units at the commencement of a planning period.
- Ongoing management information is provided in order to indicate to academic units the progress made during a planning period.
- There is joined-up thinking between vice-presidents and their respective administrative units, so that unnecessary co-ordination barriers to implementation are not created.
- Care should be taken to ensure that policy-related incentive mechanisms are having the desired effect.





# Chapter 6

## The Interface between Academic Units and Universities in the Design and Sustainability of Unit Planning

63. This chapter considers the interface and relationships between academic units and universities and focuses on some of the issues surrounding planning in academic units and the relationship of this activity to university planning and suggests avenues for the constructive evolution of the relationship, including:
- Clear university frameworks for academic unit strategic plans
  - Academic unit performance profile
  - Consideration, approval and legitimisation of academic unit strategic plans
  - Central office support for unit strategic plans

64. Academic units are not hermetically-sealed entities: they exist within school, faculty (or equivalent unit), college and university settings and thus cannot be reasonably expected to plan in an isolated vacuum. There is a mutual dependency between the three levels to achieve effective outcomes in planning design and implementation.

Different perceptions exist between the levels, as to the nature, or the desired nature, of academic unit strategic planning. It may be variously perceived as:

- an instrument of central university control of academic units and simply heavy bureaucratic mechanisms of compliance, requiring little innovative thinking;
- a device to assist academic units to think creatively about their own futures, survival, sustainability, etc., and to contribute innovative ideas and practices which the university may incorporate and use in its own planning activities;
- something unrelated to the normal life of an academic unit, or indeed to anything else in university–unit relations;
- a means of improving the financial position of the university (and by definition, academic units);
- an instrument of change;
- reinforcement of the status quo;
- a means by which inhibitions on performance of academic units may be identified and removed.

## Chapter 6 (cont'd)

Where such different perceptions exist, this would explain scepticism, apathy or hostility encountered during the process.

Associated with these observations is a spectrum of different types of university/college–unit relationships in the strategic planning process, from hands-off to mutual engagement to controlling, each of which has particular manifestations. Such gulfs in perception may be mitigated by joint improvement in process design; the use of processes as a form of binding planning agreement, with mutual obligations and a predominantly developmental ethos. It is in the interest of the university to develop strategic planning processes which remove inhibitions to planning and activities as much as possible, and which academic units may reasonably expect. Planning processes may evolve in sophistication from a relatively light touch of limited scope which facilitates thinking and familiarity with planning, to something more comprehensive in later years.

The discussion which follows assumes that the elements described are pre-conditions for the success of academic unit strategic planning, and the university should certainly provide them.



## Chapter 6 (cont'd)

### Clear university frameworks for academic unit strategic plans

65. It is much more straightforward and productive for academic units to produce robust strategic plans if they have a clear framework within which they can contextualise their plans. Planning in the absence of such a well-defined strategic framework is unlikely to result in coherent plans with deliverable goals. An unambiguous briefing on the university framework and its implications for the university are required to facilitate development of good strategic plans by individual units.
66. Provision of a **clear template structure and timetable** for the strategic plan for an academic unit will help to ensure that the information needed by the university will be provided at the right time and that comparative analysis is facilitated (see also Chapter 3).
67. A clear, consolidated **statement of university priorities and overarching agendas** is needed in both general and specific domains. This will vary from institution to institution, but examples would be:
  - internationalising the curriculum to facilitate international student recruitment;
  - servicing high levels of competitive research funding from PRTL, SIF or the research councils;
  - considerable expansion of taught masters and doctoral programmes;
  - overarching university research themes to which academic units may contribute;
  - enhancing university international visibility;
  - strong knowledge transfer initiatives;
  - scenarios of university development;
  - generic university Key Performance Indicators.

Much of this is available in multi-year and annual operating expressions of the university strategic plan, including strategic plans for research, teaching and learning, knowledge transfer, college or faculty strategic priorities; and from external national imperatives and documentation from the Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation (SSTI), etc. Nonetheless, a consolidated updated series of expectations synthesised from the above and provided by the university would certainly focus preparations for development of academic unit strategic and operational plans considerably. The evaluation and collation of individual plans is also made much easier by following this process. The alternative is that academic units are left to infer what these priority agendas might be.

## Chapter 6 (cont'd)

68. Academic units need an indication of the budgetary envelope in which they need to plan. This should provide/indicate an expected budgetary target over the planning period, in terms of projections of expenditure and projections of known likely income and would indicate the general university position and the ramifications for particular units. In the case of projected deficits, the implication for unit strategic action would be cost reduction, additional income generation, or a combination of the two. Increasingly, this is being provided through various resource allocation models, which also contain resource incentives which reward financially some activities more than others.



## Chapter 6 (cont'd)

### ***Guidelines – Clear university frameworks for academic unit strategic plans***

- The university has a clear strategic framework of priorities, agendas, and budgetary envelopes against which an academic unit may react in developing its own strategic and operational plans.
- The university provides a clear, unambiguous briefing on its strategic framework and its implications for all those involved in development of strategic plans within academic units, faculties, colleges, etc.
- The university provides the following to academic units:
  - » guidelines for development of effective strategic plans;
  - » a clear template structure; and
  - » a timetable for the production of the strategic plan, incorporating checkpoints of the roles of various parts of the organisation at particular points.
- The relationship between, and sequencing of, quality reviews and strategic planning is made clear to academic units by the university.
- The university ensures that the various internal and external requests for strategic information from units are synchronised and simplified, as much as possible, to eliminate unnecessary duplication and work.

## Chapter 6 (cont'd)

### **Academic Unit performance profile**

69. Academic units are likely to be in different positions regarding their operating and/or strategic health (discussed in more detail in Chapter 7). The strategic plan for each unit needs to address the particular problems and/or opportunities for development. Thus, as part of its briefing, the university should provide a detailed performance profile on the unit, so that there is no ambiguity on the starting point. Academic units need good and accurate data to facilitate good planning, such as is indicated in the Guidelines.

Production of an academic unit plan will undoubtedly identify weaknesses or problems at both unit and university levels. In any planning process, it will be necessary to address these and it is very important that there is a two-way critique between the academic unit and the college/university.

70. It is fair to say that a very variable spectrum exists of performance and supporting data across academic units and universities. This is the case not only across universities but also within particular universities. The following is likely to be evident:
- whether the data is actually available across the various domains;
  - whether the data is provided by the university as a matter of course;
  - whether it is provided on demand;
  - whether it is provided on time and when needed;
  - whether it is perceived as accurate by all parties;
  - whether it is provided with comment;
  - whether it is provided and discussed in terms of identifying the issues unambiguously.

Without good data, it becomes very difficult for academic units to plan realistically in academic, financial and human resource domains either strategically or operationally.



## Chapter 6 (cont'd)

### **Guidelines - Academic Unit performance profile**

- The university should provide a detailed performance profile, incorporating, inter alia, the following information:
  - » student profile and performance: numbers and trends over a three – four year period in respect of applications, enrolment, progression and completion at the various levels, and including, for example, access, lifelong learning participation, international/EU numbers, quality review recommendations;
  - » student employment destinations;
  - » staff profile and performance: numbers and trends over a three – four year period in respect of full-time/part-time/contract staff; proportions at various grade levels; ratios; percentage of higher degree students; staff-student ratios; staff age profiles, etc;
  - » financial profiles and performance: income and expenditure over three – four year period; sources and proportions of external income; ratios of income generated per full-time equivalent staff member, etc;
  - » research and publication outputs: including research grant income; projects; publications; patents, etc.
- The university should ensure adequate management and accuracy of the data provided.
- Senior administrators from relevant central administrative academic units should work together to supply consistent and accurate data at the right time. This might be called a Data Group, or an Information and Planning Group (or similar title), but would need to encompass financial, personnel, student, research and space data, and pick up any shortcomings in central administration revealed by the process. It follows that this group is also available to give advice and interact informally with academic units.
- The university puts an explicit and robust planning timetable in place.
- The university should regularly review the:
  - » adequacy of its performance data on academic units;
  - » management of such data and its organisational locus – spread out across various central units or consolidated in a Strategic Planning Office, Quality Office or Office for Institutional Research (using other more distributed databases, of course).

## Chapter 6 (cont'd)

### Consideration, approval and legitimisation of Academic Unit strategic plans

71. The engagement of all concerned with the strategic planning process, from the members of the senior management team to those who will ultimately be responsible for delivering the objectives of the plan on the ground, cannot be over-emphasised. All strands of activity in the university need to be part of the process. There is a need to ensure consistency with faculty/college priorities, with outcomes of quality reviews, with realisation of cross-disciplinary initiatives and with planning for time-bounded financial cross-subsidies. It is vital to prevent a fragmentation of the process, and to facilitate lateral exchanges of issues for resolution and good practice, with successful initiatives also incorporated. The entire process needs to be firmly located in an explicit and robust planning timetable, as discussed earlier, and the culmination is the approval of plans.
72. Once academic unit strategic plans have been drafted, it is essential that the plans are discussed, validated and incorporated into the general scheme of things within the university.

At the outset, the **consideration and validation of academic unit strategic plans** needs to be conceived in terms of:

- a mutual re-alignment of university and unit/school/faculty/college priorities;
- a combination of bottom-up and top-down trajectories, with significant levels of iteration;
- a process of mutual commitment and obligation to the delivery of the contents of the academic unit strategic plans by all levels.

The above properties should strongly condition the behaviour of the respective parties in the process, i.e. collaboration rather than confrontation. In line with this objective the timetable for the planning process should take the character of a formative or iterative process (see Figure 3) and incorporate:

- the development of a plan based on the template and informed by data and university agendas;
- university analysis and feedback;
- adjustment of the academic unit strategic plan in the light of feedback, and university acceptance of actions on its part;
- approval of the plan, synthesis and aggregation and conversion into budget.

73. As far as the **university level scrutiny** is concerned, each university will have its own arrangements. It is desirable that the process of generating and dealing with academic unit strategic plans does not generate an additional battery of committees and offices, but fits naturally, wherever possible, into existing arrangements. Thus, a small group (a Strategic Planning Group) derived from the university's Senior Management Team (SMT), possibly chaired by the President or Vice-President Academic/Registrar and including the relevant Dean/Head of College, may be the most

## Chapter 6 (cont'd)

appropriate group to steer and conduct hearings/discussions with units to validate proposals. The criteria for such discussions and hearings should have been made very explicit and evident at the initial briefings and will certainly have surfaced in on-going discussions. Possible criteria are indicated in the Guidelines.

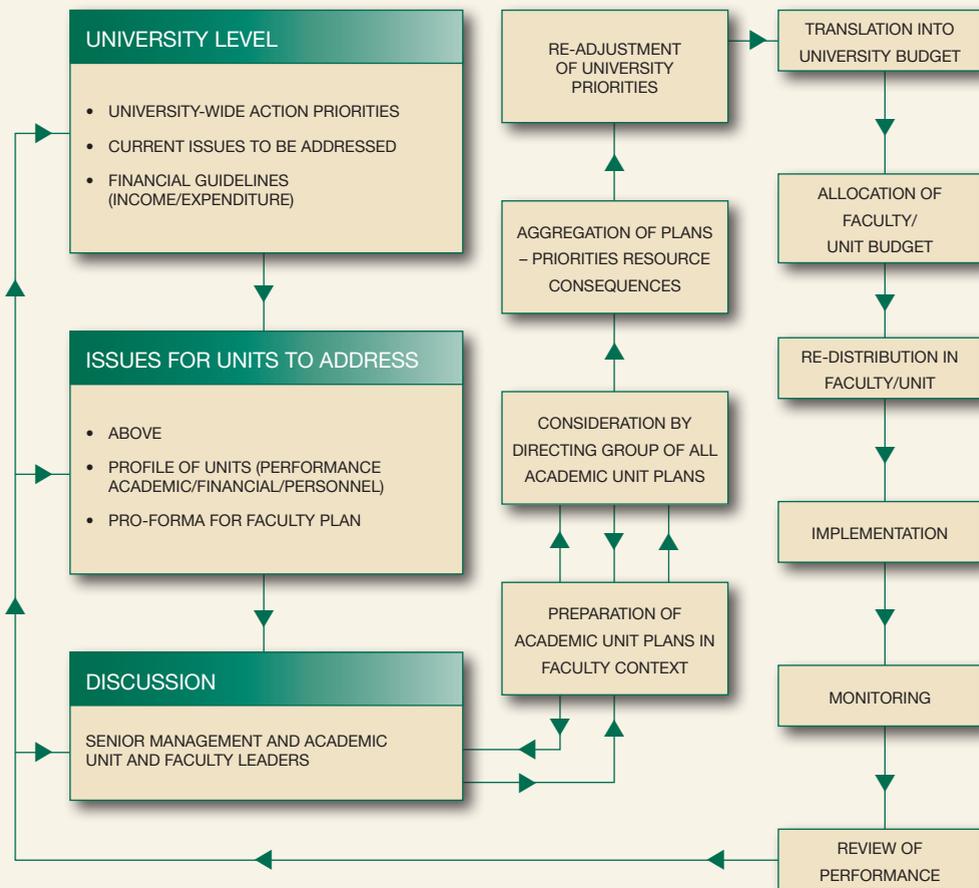


Figure 3: Possible structure of annual planning process

## Chapter 6 (cont'd)

74. The process of these discussions is not a mere receipt of or just noting documentation; this would be ritual. It should be a real process and thus it follows that there will be **consequences**, which may include:

- straightforward approval;
- referral back for tidying up;
- referral back for substantial reconsideration;
- being deemed acceptable, but with referral to central units for subsequent support, advice or intervention;
- incorporation into university level strategies;
- adjustment of university level strategies or operating plans.

It is not the purpose of this publication to go into great detail on strategies and instruments for academic unit turnaround in the case of failing academic units, or, on the contrary, strategies to ensure the long-term sustainability of currently successful academic units. However, it is predictable that both these scenarios are likely to emerge at some point, to a greater or lesser extent, in most institutions, and strategies in each direction are likely to entail creative interventions and support mechanisms in domains such as external income generation; curriculum reform and course rationalisation; learning methods; human resource policies and practices; marketing. International experience would indicate that academic units in different stages of health require different support or treatment, and that uniform policies may not be sufficiently sensitive. Thus it follows that central units will need to:

- be alerted to their roles in this regard and conceptualise their roles as providers of services to clients rather than as controllers;
- be flexible in response to issues identified;
- evolve some sort of service agreement with particular academic units.

It is, of course, perfectly reasonable that units needing support should be expected to collaborate positively with central units.

Chapter 7 provides a discussion on the above.

The point, therefore, of the consideration and validation process is that there should be real outcomes which commit the participants to certain defined obligations.



## Chapter 6 (cont'd)

### ***Guidelines – Consideration approval and legitimisation of Academic Unit strategic plans***

- A small sub-group of the Senior Management Team, possibly chaired by the President or Registrar, takes responsibility for interacting and collaborating with academic units in the steering/conducting of hearings/discussions concerning the strategic plan to validate the process.
- Specific criteria should be developed for these discussions between senior management and the academic unit. These are likely to include areas of questioning such as: does the proposed strategic plan, inter alia:
  - » address adequately the macro-strategic priorities of the university and faculty/college?
  - » provide the compelling credibility and information which would satisfy international panels evaluating PRTL, SIF, research council and other submissions?
  - » address all the specific agendas deriving from academic unit performance data; quality reviews, etc?
  - » demonstrate coherence in terms of ends–means relationships; comprehensiveness in terms of the template; specifics in terms of actions proposed; academic and budgetary realism; realism in terms of time–scale for achievement?
  - » contain robust evidence of the long-term sustainability of the academic unit, especially in an external (market) context?
  - » embrace the notion and practice of collaboration with other academic units inside and outside the particular university in relation to inter-disciplinary teaching and research and national funding opportunities?
  - » avoid duplication and competition between various academic units?
- The university must ensure that, following on the discussions referred to in the paragraph above, specific actions are identified, agreed and are taken, which are documented and followed up within a specific timescale and by defined individuals with particular responsibilities.

## Chapter 6 (cont'd)

### Central office support for unit strategic planning

75. It is clear in a modern strategically oriented university that **universities need to provide support and assistance** beyond the unit's own resources in the preparation and realisation of a plan. The justification for this assistance has been alluded to throughout this publication, and it encompasses:

- technical assistance on drafting; data provision and interpretation; clarification of university policy and remediation possibilities; procedure, etc;
- process assistance which includes training, briefing, encouragement, help in meeting deadlines, problem resolution; lateral connections between departments or between central offices;
- providing specific assistance subsequently in briefing units to understand the context and ramifications e.g. of PRTL/IRCHSS scoring regimes, and how existing unit plans can be cannibalised for these submissions;
- providing support in the subsequent resolution of academic, marketing, human resource or resourcing issues connected with the plan.

All this implies a mutual constructive engagement between university and unit levels, and openness, transparency and honesty in exchanges. In various chapters, we have referred to the importance of a two-way critique, since the production of a unit plan will undoubtedly identify weaknesses or problems at both unit and university levels.

76. It is fair to say that most universities, wherever found, are likely to reveal evidence of lack of clarity and understanding on expectations of various office-holders in support of unit strategic planning, and the above presents a possible approach.

### Conclusion

This Chapter affirms that academic unit strategic planning, whilst focussed on the activity of the unit itself, needs the positive engagement and support of university organs across a whole range of areas.



## Chapter 6 (cont'd)

### **Guidelines – Central office support for unit strategic planning**

Central responsibility and roles for aspects of strategic development will differ across universities and this is to be expected. In terms of discussing good practice, the following emerges:

- the importance of strategic planning as a process clearly needs establishing at the outset through briefing sessions for heads and deans, and it seems that the Academic Vice-President/Registrar would be the appropriate person for this role, with the President's imprimatur and the technical support of the principal university level facilitator/co-ordinator;
- the latter would tend to be the Director of Strategic Planning and/or, in particular cases, the Director of Quality Assurance, given the interface with quality processes. The importance of a visible, credible and active facilitator cannot be over-emphasised in terms of the types of assistance outlined earlier;
- depending on the management structure of the university, it would be expected that the faculty/college dean or equivalent would play a significant role in ensuring consistency with faculty/college priorities; in realising cross-disciplinary initiatives in teaching and research; in planning for time-bounded financial cross-subsidy; and in progress chasing;
- to prevent a fragmentation of the process, and to facilitate lateral exchanges of issues for resolution and good practice, successful initiatives also tend to incorporate:
  - » a senior group responsible for Strategic Planning Steerage generally (which could well be the University's existing Senior Management Team, Council of Deans, etc. to avoid proliferation of groups;
  - » a group of senior administrators from relevant central administrative departments to supply consistent and accurate data at the right time. This might be called a Data Group, or an Information and Planning Group (or similar title), but would need to encompass financial, personnel, student, research and space data, and pick up any shortcomings in central administration revealed by the process. It follows that they are also available to give advice and interact informally with departments;
- the above, of course, needs to be firmly located in an explicit and robust planning timetable.



# Chapter 7

## Substantive Agendas for Consideration in Academic Unit Strategic Plans

77. The previous chapters of this publication have addressed issues of planning processes, both technical and political/behavioural. However, there are clearly a range of policy imperatives which will need to be picked up by academic units in the design and content of their strategic plans. In chapter 2, various national policy agendas were identified (PRTL, SIF, etc). Similarly, each university and parent faculty will have its own macro strategic priorities (e.g. expansion of doctoral programme, lifelong learning, inter-disciplinary research themes, etc). Clearly, academic units will need to ensure that their plans address the above agendas as appropriate and in ways relevant to their profile, thus contributing towards a vertical realignment of effort. This chapter presents some ideas for addressing these matters including:
- Assessing the health of academic units
  - Development of emphases for strategic plans

### Assessing the health of academic units

78. Given the analytical, self-critical and diagnostic character of strategic planning, it is inevitable that the overall 'health' or otherwise of an academic unit will be exposed. It follows that the strategic plan should indicate approaches to the specific conditions exposed, as is affirmed.

There are several ways of considering 'health' or 'unhealth'. Figure 4 indicates an analysis along two dimensions. Financial health of an academic unit is likely to be assessed in terms of surplus of income over expenditure; ample discretionary funds; diverse, buoyant and durable income sources; a healthy balance between full and part-time staff, etc. Academic health is likely to be assessed in terms of teaching quality reviews; high admission/enrolment patterns; international publications record; high levels of research income, etc. The matrix indicates several possible combinations ranging from a position of academic strength/financial strength (Quadrant 1) to one of academic weakness/financial weakness (Quadrant 4). Clearly, the particular quadrant in which the academic unit finds itself should determine the elements of the strategic mix and emphases it should adopt in terms of academic improvement, financial improvement or both – in the worst case.

		FINANCIAL HEALTH	
		STRONG	WEAK
ACADEMIC HEALTH	STRONG	1	2
	WEAK	3	4

Figure 4: Assessing the health of academic units (1)

## Chapter 7 (cont'd)

79. Figure 5 portrays a matrix based on the different dimensions, primarily focused on academic offering. The first dimension analyses the overall academic quality, using similar criteria to that in Figure 4. The second dimension analyses the buoyancy/credibility of the subject area(s) of the academic unit in external terms – the popularity of the subject areas; its articulation or potential articulation with national priorities (economic, social, political or educational). This will thus require an acute market/system intelligence to ascertain the likely buoyancy and potential sustainability of the academic unit in a single – or multi-disciplinary context. Again, several combinations are possible from high quality – high sustainability (Quadrant 1), on the one hand to a position of low quality – low sustainability (Quadrant 4) on the other hand. Again, the particular quadrant which describes the positioning of the academic unit will condition the elements of the strategic mix which will need to be picked up.
80. Strategic plans developed should address the demands of the particular situation of the unit in question. A form of the above could be adopted as a collaborative framework exercise by university level organs and academic units with their faculties. In this way, any strategies or approaches adopted should be mutually supportive. What is apparent, however, is that different strategic actions are needed to sustain the satisfactory position in Quadrant 1; to achieve turnaround in Quadrants 2 and 3; and, in extremis, to manage a process of organisational termination in Quadrant 4. Strategic turnaround in Quadrants 2 and 3 would certainly admit the possibilities of academic unit mergers, especially accompanied by academic paradigm change.

		EXTERNAL BUOYANCY/SUSTAINABILITY	
		HIGH	LOW
ACADEMIC QUALITY	HIGH	1	2
	LOW	3	4

Figure 5: Assessing the health of academic units (2)



## Chapter 7 (cont'd)

### ***Guidelines – Assessing the health of academic units***

- Strategies should be developed which address the particular condition and respond to the different circumstances of 'health' or 'unhealth', in which the unit finds itself.
- The particular condition in which the unit finds itself should determine the elements of the strategic mix and emphases it should adopt in terms of academic improvement, financial improvement, human resource development, marketing, etc.
- The process of analysis and dialogue should be capable of yielding considerable creativity in the generation of ideas regarding academic unit growth and sustainability.
- An acute market/system intelligence is used to ascertain the likely buoyancy and potential sustainability of the academic unit in a single or multi-disciplinary context.
- The central support units of the university (Finance, Human resources, Marketing, Research and Development, Continuing Education, etc.) need to recognise what specific help they should provide for units in different circumstances; and what new or revised policies and procedures need to be developed where issues identified appear to be common or generic.

## Chapter 7 (cont'd)

### Development of emphases for strategic plans

81. It is convenient to explore some more specific examples using the above conceptual frameworks. Figure 6 indicates two typical operational characteristics one would expect to find in each of the quadrants. The challenge for the unit, with the support of the faculty, and university levels, is to develop strategies for either, capitalising on the explicit strengths revealed, or resolving the weaknesses and sources of vulnerability exposed. Typical approaches are indicated in Figure 7. Thus, for a unit with strong academic health, but weak financial health, (Quadrant 3), the emphasis would be on maximising the income potential of its intellectual capital (which would involve acquiring externally funded research or consultancy projects) and also cost effectiveness in internal operations (through, for example, reduced elective provision; elimination of small classes; reducing the volume of teaching, etc). For a unit with weak academic and financial health (Quadrant 4), massive turnaround strategies would be needed, which might well necessitate new leadership; substantial new programme development; staff reductions; strong quality assurance; and possible merger. It should be emphasised that the items mentioned are indicative and certainly not exhaustive.

It is also evident that a particular item might reasonably figure in several quadrants, and in this sense may be regarded as a key generic element. These would include, for instance:

- expansion of the postgraduate research (doctoral) and masters programmes on an economic basis;
- diversification of income sources to reduce dependence on the university;
- the move towards critical mass, both by concentrations into academic unit or faculty centres, and also by inter-academic unit collaborations with other universities;
- exploitation of credit systems for flexible learning, inter-discipline programmes, lifelong learning, enhanced student choice, and international student mobility;
- staff workload formulae which release staff for creative activities;
- intensive, but sensitive quality assurance process with a strong emphasis on programme renewal;
- continuing processes of staff development;
- favourable (A)RAM formula.

It is evident from the above that the process of analysis and dialogue is capable of yielding considerable creativity in the generation of ideas regarding academic unit growth and sustainability.



## Chapter 7 (cont'd)

### ***Guidelines – Development of emphases for strategic plans***

- National imperatives, that the institute as a whole is subject to, should be addressed as appropriate in academic units' strategic plans.
- Academic unit strategic plans must develop responses to university priorities.
- A collaborative framework exercise by university level organs and academic units with their faculties should be used to ensure that strategies or approaches adopted are mutually supportive.

## Chapter 7 (cont'd)

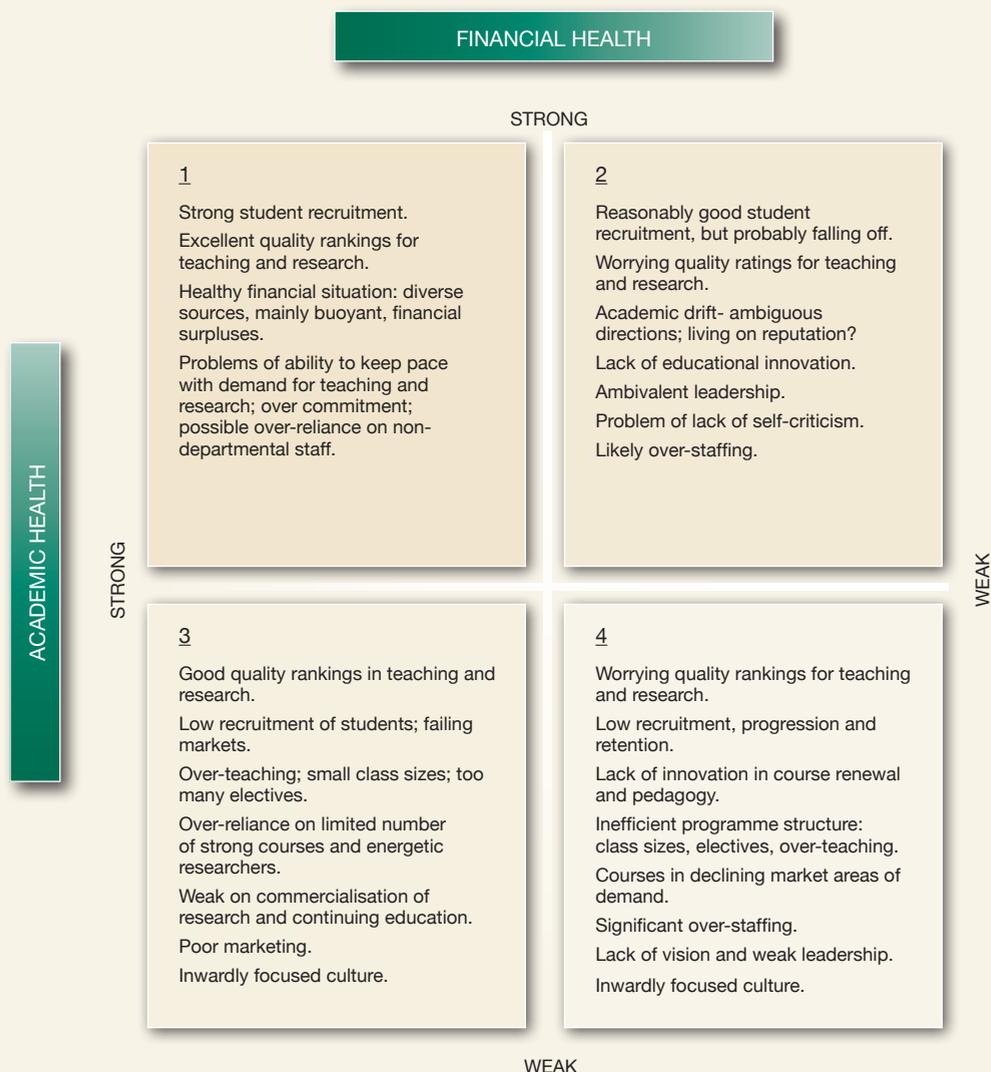


Figure 6: Characteristics of Academic Unit in the various quadrants



## Chapter 7 (cont'd)

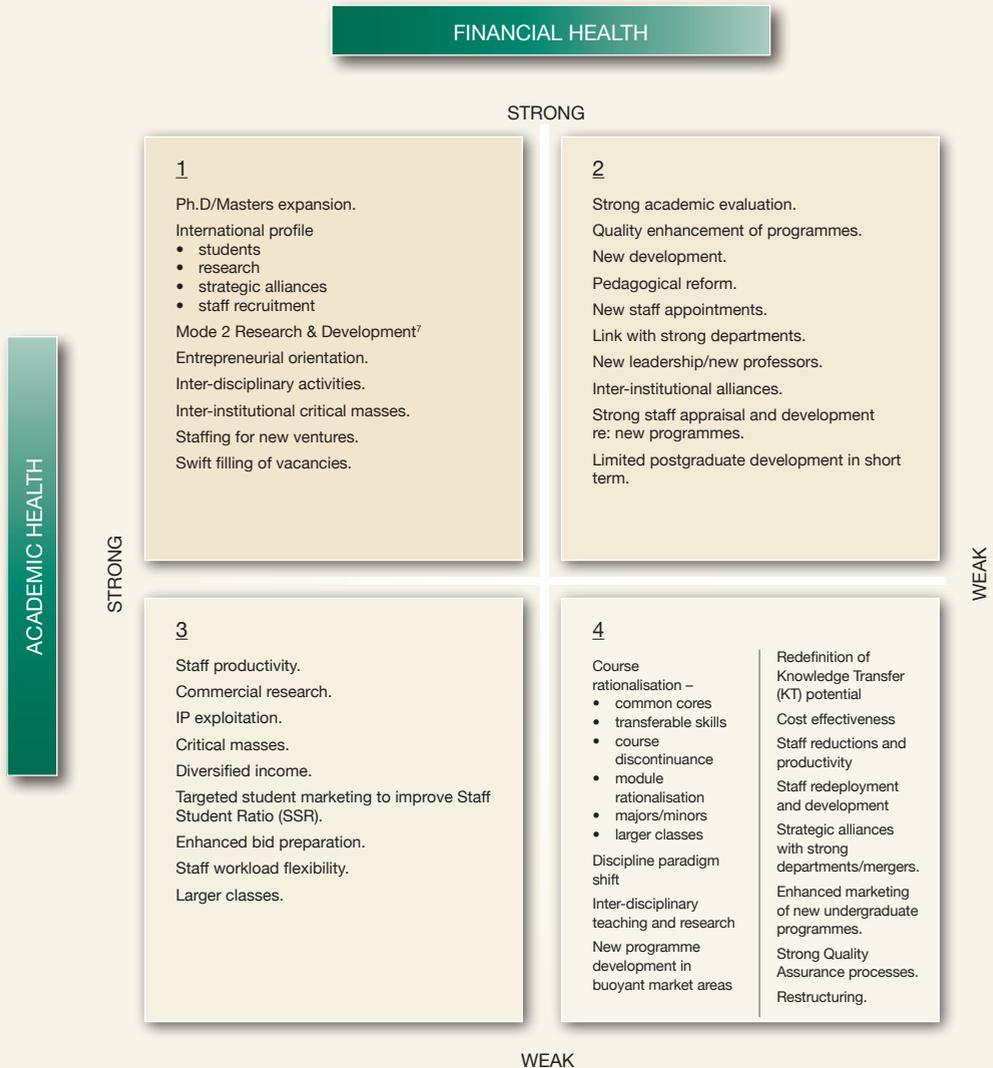


Figure 7: Indicative strategic approaches for academic units to respond to characteristics in Figure 6

<sup>7</sup> See footnote 2.





# Chapter 8

## Overall Reflections on Some Prerequisites in the Success or Otherwise of Academic Unit Strategic Planning

82. The previous Chapters have provided considerable detail on the context, design, instruments and processes of academic unit strategic planning, and it is not the purpose of this Chapter to re-state these findings and recommendations, but briefly to draw attention to some broad overarching factors which might be regarded as pre-conditions for success.
83. These guidelines have focussed on broad templates of a strategic plan and strategic planning process. It is, however, inevitable and desirable, that particular academic units will interpret and adapt these in ways appropriate to their setting, size, traditions, discipline, current condition and university expectations, whilst retaining a consistent common core and framework. This is reasonable, since a particular model must make sense and do the required job in the particular circumstances.
84. Strategic plans must be composed in a way which exudes confidence and credibility for external stakeholders, constituencies and reviewers, and be congruent with their agendas. Otherwise, it is likely that their effectiveness will be open to question. This is an essential component in bids for funding to external agencies. The structure and content of plans needs to be kept under constant review to ensure that any changing external demands or expectations are being incorporated on an on-going basis.
85. Academic unit strategic plans need to focus, not on re-statements of the existing status quo, but on what will be different in order to produce a regular value-added increment. This differentiates the strategic from the purely operational.
86. There are specific pre-conditions for effective launching of the strategic planning process, including:
  - clarity on the purpose and expected benefits;
  - the conscious development of colleagues' understanding as to what it is about, their involvement in and ownership of the process; and an excitement as to possibilities of shifting the academic unit to a higher plane;
  - the provision by the university of a very clear framework, before the exercise commences, including: the structure; process and timetable; support which will be provided on an ongoing basis; procedures for dealing with issue escalation and resolution in sensitive areas, such as data; interpretation of policy; and, of course, data;
  - some limited pilot trials of the proposed process before full implementation;

## Chapter 8 (cont'd)

- systematic briefing, training and staff development initiatives relating to the planning process;
  - ensuring the unit focus does not create a silo mentality in the university, which inhibits lateral co-operation, interdiscipline development and effect resource utilisation.
87. Additionally, there are some specific pre-conditions for the sustainability of the unit strategic planning process, including:
- ongoing training;
  - effective monitoring and review to pick up any emerging problems of content or process, and deal with them swiftly in a collaborative, non-hierarchical manner;
  - continuing evolution of the system, in terms of the sophistication of the process, and its ability to deal with complex issues at various levels and changing circumstances;
  - continuing university support;
  - evidence that the process is actually yielding demonstrable benefits, not only in terms of the desiderata outlined earlier, but also in terms of shifting the unit to a higher level of excellence e.g. successful PRTL, IRCSET/IRCHSS, SIF outcomes; income generation; quality assurance outcomes, etc;
  - strategic plans be accompanied by detailed operational plans and monitored very regularly.

### Conclusion

88. Strategic planning is best contemplated as a potent instrument of organisational change. However, the final – and highly significant caveat – is that universities are people intensive organisations, and that unless unit strategic planning is about maximising colleagues' performance, job satisfaction, sense of pride and sense of professional excitement, it will fall short of its expectations as a catalyst of institutional enrichment.



# Appendix 1

Teams based in each of the universities who worked with the central IUQB project team.

UNIVERSITY	UNIVERSITY PROJECT TEAM LEADER	ACADEMIC UNITS	ACADEMIC UNIT TEAM MEMBERS
DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY	Gordon McConnell	School of Biotechnology	Brid Quilty Thecla Ryan Michael Parkinson Ciaran Fagan Patricia Carty Mary Rafter
		School of Applied Language and Intercultural Studies	Jennifer Williams Juliette Pechenart Angela Leahy
NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND, GALWAY	Patricia Morgan	*Modern Languages	Michael Shields (German) Bill Richardson (Spanish) Catherine Emerson (French) Lindsay Myers (Italian) Kate Quinn (Spanish)
		Department of Earth and Ocean Sciences	Michael Williams Tiernan Henry
NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND, MAYNOOTH	David Redmond	Department of Computer Science	Paul Gibson Des Noonan
		Department of Economics	Sally Ann Gannon Gerry Boyle
TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN	Brian Foley	School of Nursing and Midwifery	Cecily Begley Frank O'Rourke Gabrielle McKee Gerard Tobin
		School of English	Stephen Matterson

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK	Norma Ryan	Department of Applied Social Studies	Carmel Halton Fred Powell Fiona Dukelow Deirdre Horgan Joe Finnerty Paul Burgess
		Department of Geology	John Gamble Ken Higgs Patrick Meere
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN	Philip Nolan	School of Electrical, Electronic and Mechanical Engineering	Tom Brazil
		School of Philosophy	Gerard Casey Dermot Moran Brian O'Connor Brian Purcell
UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK	Eamonn McQuade	Department of Electronic and Computing Engineering	Elfed Lewis
		Department of Languages and Cultural Studies	Martin Chappell

\*THIS INCLUDED THE DEPARTMENTS OF FRENCH, GERMAN, ITALIAN, AND SPANISH.



## Appendix 2

List of templates, which are referred to or included in this publication, available to the reader on the IUQB website ([www.iuqb.ie](http://www.iuqb.ie)).

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A Recommended Structure for Academic Unit Strategic Plans  
*(as per Appendix 3)*

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Academic Unit Strategic Plan-Alternative A  
*(additional material)*

---

Academic Unit Strategic Plan-Alternative B  
*(additional material)*

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An adapted form of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats; Organisational Improvement Plan (SWOT/OIP) Analysis  
*(as per Appendix 4)*

---

Example of Chronological Sequence for Development of Strategic Plan  
*(as per Appendix 5)*

---

High level timeline  
*(as per Appendix 6(1))*

---

Indicative Key Dates- 1<sup>st</sup> Phase - May and June  
*(as per Appendix 6(2))*

---

Decision Sequence and Ground Rules for Discussion Template  
*(additional material)*

---

Strategic Plan Action Matrix  
*(as per Figure 1)*

---

Planning guide for Annual Implementation of Actions Priorities; Year 20XX  
*(as per Figure 2)*

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Strategic Planning Implementation-Working Document: 20XX-20XX  
*(additional material)*

---

Possible Structure of Annual Planning Process  
*(as per Figure 3)*

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Assessing the Health of Academic Units (1)  
*(as per Figure 4)*

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Assessing the Health of Academic Units (2)  
*(as per Figure 5)*

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Characteristics of Academic Unit in the Various Quadrants  
*(as per Figure 6)*

---

Indicative Strategic Approaches for Academic Units to respond to Characteristics in Figure 6  
*(as per Figure 7)*

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# Appendix 3

## A recommended structure for academic unit strategic plans

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### Executive summary

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#### **Section A: Context and environment of the unit and resulting key strategic objectives.**

*Chapter 1 Academic unit vision, mission and positioning: size/scope*

*Chapter 2 Analysis of major issues arising from:*

- University and national priorities: constraints and opportunities
- Trends in discipline area
- Trends in the market, including competition and co-operation
- SWOT analyses – specific results
- Key strategic objectives for unit
- Matrix of key objectives in relation to chapters in which they are picked up

---

#### **Section B: Academic activities and services provided.**

*Chapter 3 Overall academic profile including predicted expansion in:*

- Student numbers for each year of plans in respect of undergraduate, taught postgraduate, research postgraduate, continuing education
- Domestic, EU, Non-EU
- Research

*Chapter 4 Evolution of academic programme (Undergraduate, Taught Postgraduate, Research Postgraduate) and associated teaching and learning strategy*

*Chapter 5 Research*

- Position
- Themes
- Research Activity
- PhD Development
- Research Income Generation
- Support for Research - Instruments

*Chapter 6 External/Society contributions*

- Continuing Education
- Consultancy
- Service
- Knowledge Transfer

---

**Section C: Resource planning and development.**

*Chapter 7 Human Resource Development*

- Needs
- Staffing load projections
- Recruitment
- Staff Development
- Efficiencies

*Chapter 8 Financial Strategy*

- Expenditure
- Income

*Chapter 9 Physical and Learning Resources*

- Locations (if appropriate)
- Physical space (teaching, practical, library, Information Technology, social, office)
- Information Technology strategy

---

**Section D: Organisational support**

*Chapter 10 Organisation*

*Chapter 11 Marketing and development*

*Chapter 12 Quality*

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# Appendix 4

## An Adapted form of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats; Organisational Improvement Plan (SWOT/ OIP) Analysis

### *University strategic planning: academic units*

Institutional leaders need to diagnose where their institutions or parts of their institutions stand, and from this, to establish clear policy directions for the organisation to follow in relation to the circumstances of their particular environment. This is considered significant in terms of avoiding organisational drift, and the multiplication of internal conflict.

A useful means of approaching this challenge is the so-called SWOT analysis, and participants are requested to complete a SWOT, using the attached questionnaire as a guide, as a basis for developing the content of the academic unit's strategic plan.

Please therefore, complete the attached questionnaire and we would be glad if you could:

- make the analysis and objectives full and frank
- discuss with your colleagues
- in each of the sections (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) consider the full range of factors relevant to you (teaching and learning; scholarship; research; governance and organisation; community-related activities; internationalisation; finance; human resources; external issues, etc.)

consider the whole of the unit for this analysis, in order to enable you to explore all the strategic ramifications:

- use as many pages for each section as seems appropriate
- bring the completed questionnaire with you to the Seminar when we shall use your findings in small group discussions. Please bring a spare copy to leave with the group leader for future reflection.

Many thanks

Author (if you wish):

Faculty:

Academic Unit:

Job Title (if you wish):

- 1 What do you consider to be the **STRENGTHS** of the academic unit?

On what evidence do you base these judgements? If this evidence is not strong or useful, how should you get the evidence you need on an ongoing basis? Please refer to the factors indicated in the introduction. Add further pages as necessary.

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*(Expand this section as space is required)*

- 
2. What do you consider to be the **WEAKNESSES** of the academic unit?

What seems not to work so well, and therefore needs improvement, rethinking or development?  
What is the evidence for these judgements? If you don't have useful evidence, how would you get it? Please refer to the factors indicated in the introduction. Add further pages if necessary.

---

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*(Expand this section as space is required)*

- 
3. What do you consider to be the major **EXTERNAL** favourable conditions affecting the **OPPORTUNITIES** available to the academic unit now and in the future in terms of external opportunities (local, regional, national and international/social/university/market/academic/professional)? What is your evidence? Add further pages if necessary.

---

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*(Expand this section as space is required)*

- 
4. What do you consider to be the **EXTERNAL THREATS** that confront the academic unit and the **BARRIERS** to seizing the opportunities? What is your evidence from external sources (e.g. university, government, competition, market, resources etc)?

---

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*(Expand this section as space is required)*



5. In light of the foregoing, what, then, are the major **OBJECTIVES** or management challenges that the academic unit must set or face in order to make necessary improvements to seize the opportunities and to overcome any threats and barriers? Please classify, itemise and number, e.g. (1) Vision, mission and positioning, (2) Educational programme, (3) Research, (4) External Services, (5) Resources, (6) Organisation. Be as full in your answer as possible.

*(Expand each section as space is required)*

(1)

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(2)

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(3)

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(4)

---

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(5)

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(6)

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# Appendix 5

## Example of chronological sequence for development of strategic plan.

Academic unit

Strategic Planning Process Draft version

### *A chronological review of our planning process (over a period of 6 months)*

#### **Briefing**

- Briefing review at Strategic Planning committee

#### **Bottom-Up (months 1 – 3)**

- Strategic Planning academic unit meeting: SWOT
- SWOT questionnaire
- SWOT feedback
- Strategic Planning academic unit committee meeting to structure SWOT to next phase
- Strategic Planning academic unit meeting: SWOT ranked by consensus
- Where we are, where we want to go, how we could get there?
- Strategic Planning meeting with Registrar

#### **Top-Down (month 4)**

- Write a draft plan – not worrying about length or mix of views from different sources – in order to have something concrete for the academic unit to analyse and criticise
- Strategic Planning academic unit committee: Draft plan reviewed
- Iterative Feedback (3 main cycles)

#### **Meet-in-the-middle (month 5)**

- Identify direct links between SWOT outcomes and high-level plan, and shorten plan to more reasonable length
- Strategic Planning meeting with university officials

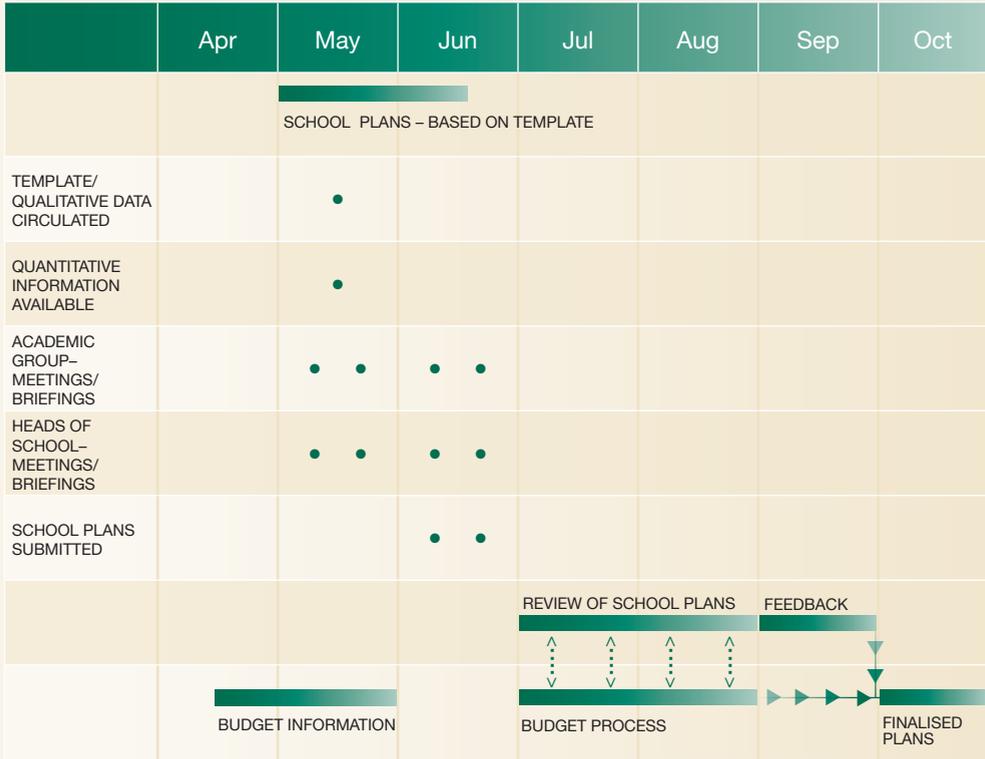
**Complete Plan (month 6)**

- Add references, citations and bibliography
- Add academic unit contact information and figures/logos/ graphics
- Conclude with concrete list of action items, priorities and measurable targets
- Strategic Planning academic unit committee – final *sign-off* from the academic unit.
- Present Plan to



# Appendix 6(1)

## High-level timeline







# Appendix 6(2)

## Indicative Key Dates – 1st Phase – May and June

CHAPTER OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN	DATE	RESPONSIBILITY
TEMPLATE AND QUALITATIVE DATA ISSUED	4th May	Vice-President/Director of Strategic Planning
BRIEF COLLEGE PRINCIPALS	8-10 May	Director of Strategic Planning
BRIEF HEADS OF SCHOOL	8-10 May	College Principals
QUANTITATIVE DATA ISSUED	*w/c 21st May	Vice-President/Director of Strategic Planning
BRIEF COLLEGE PRINCIPALS ON QUANTITATIVE DATA	*w/c 21st May	Vice-President/Members of planning/information group
BRIEF HEADS OF SCHOOL ON QUANTITATIVE DATA	*w/c 21st May	College Principals/Members of planning/information group
DEVELOP SCHOOL PLAN	9th June	Heads of School
DEVELOP SCHOOL PLAN	29th June	Heads of School
MEETINGS OF SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM ACADEMIC GROUP	Fortnightly	Vice-President to chair
PROGRESS MEETINGS WITH COLLEGE PRINCIPALS AND THEIR HEADS OF SCHOOL	Fortnightly	College Principal to chair

\*WEEK CLOSING



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