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Governance & Accountability: Merging & Major Changes; Leadership

Abstracts

Introducing a governance and executive reform programme

Ian Creagh, University Secretary, City University London

Leadership challenges in the Rhone-Alpes region: marketability, research, cost-effectiveness, partnerships and mergers

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In 1982 the French Parliament created 22 “régions” which were given competence, especially over the local economy. The administration of our educational system remains divided into 28 regional authorities, “académies”, and is still far too centralized. Despite the fact that the law did not grant the regions competence in higher education, they do provide some financial support to our universities and are partners in developing research and teaching projects.

France is also a country where passing a law to reform the educational system is a high risk strategy, for it often leads to strikes which put an end to reforms. We have more than 200 universities and high schools spread all over the country, some of them with more than 30,000 students, others with less than 1000 or even 500 students. Our public research system is in the process of being reorganized by a new law; we are expecting that “centres for research and higher education” will be created which will bring together public institutions and private firms in the same geographic area, together with their local communities, to cooperate in the fields of education, research and development.

World university rankings are not very positive for French universities at the moment.

The “academies” of Grenoble and Lyon are both part of the Rhone-Alpes region, which hosts 230,000 students (10% of the students in France). Grenoble and Lyon are the two main cities of the region but they have different geographic, political, and economic backgrounds. They have developed different methods of cooperation between their several universities and graduate schools so as to gain increased international visibility, improve attractiveness and reduce costs.

In Grenoble, the approach was initially more pragmatic, putting together the means to administer a campus which is shared by several institutions; it is now a true entity called “Grenoble universités”. Lyon adopted a more formal way of dealing with the existence of more than 10 institutions; 4 universities and graduate schools are now joining a plan to cooperate in the research field. An attempt to cooperate between Grenoble and Lyon – the Rhone-Alpes University Conference - was not really a success.

We will explain to what extent our two separate experiences have been successful, what difficulties we have met, and what developments to enforce cooperation may be expected. Mergers are anticipated but do not seem possible yet. We are in a position in which there are for now more questions than answers.

The challenges of a prospective merger – and why it did not happen

Ruud Bleijerveld, Universiteit van Amsterdam (NL)

In the Netherlands students flow freely into university and colleges of higher education, provided they have the right secondary school diplomas and provided the highly specific material requirements for certain study programmes do not necessitate a restriction on intake.

Universities and colleges of higher education see their student intake as an indicator of the attractiveness and quality of their programmes.

As the number of incoming students is one of the parameters for funding further education, universities (and colleges) in the Netherlands compete vigorously with one another for new students.

Dutch Law prohibits mergers between state universities and colleges of higher education. Although the resulting dual system is debated fairly regularly in Parliament, no prospects of a repeal have emerged so far.

The introduction of the Bachelor/Master system has complicated the inflow into the Master’s phase and further heightened the tension between universities and colleges in relation to student intake.

Colleges of higher education in the Netherlands award only Bachelor’s degrees (except for a few very specific professional programmes). A Bachelor’s degree then entitles the holder to join a Master’s programme at a university. Quantitatively speaking, this inflow is not insignificant.

Colleges of higher education have a strong teaching profile and often pay more attention to methodology and didactics than universities, where the emphasis is on research.

As far back as the mid-1990s, the Universiteit van Amsterdam maintained that it would be sensible and prudent – especially with a view to the teaching profile – to team up with a college of higher education. The idea was that a coordinated teaching curriculum would help lower the drop-out rates among more practically oriented first-year university students, as it would facilitate a switchover to the ‘partner’ college. The reverse would, of course, apply to college students with a more theoretical mind.

On the basis of a compatible (broad) teaching profile, the Hogeschool van Amsterdam turned out to be the best prospective partner for the Universiteit van Amsterdam. The university and the Hogeschool both believed that a partnership would significantly enhance their attractiveness for future students – a key factor in cost defrayment.

As the Law prohibited an official partnership between the two institutes, scenarios were worked out in a confidential setting to, effectively, deliver the same result.

An off-the-record meeting with the Minister of Education and Science revealed that the government was not averse to submitting trial legislation to Parliament, which would make it possible for the two Amsterdam institutes to engage in a close partnership. This legislation never materialized, mainly because it was sidelined by a government crisis.

From the outset, the prolonged confidential contact between the management of both institutes and with the Minister of Education and Science precluded 'normal' open discussions with the staff and student representatives. Internal and external communication, which is essential to the success of such an invasive process of collaboration, was sluggish and piecemeal, especially at the start. As a result, each institute (especially the university) became distrustful and suspicious of what the other was doing. The support base for a good partnership between the university and the college – possibly even a merger (if the Law allowed) – became weaker instead of stronger as the process continued.

At the same time, cuts in government spending more or less dashed all hopes of setting up an experimental partnership at discipline level.

As is usual in such cases, the national and university press had a field day, reporting on the atmosphere of unrest and disquiet which had spread in the meantime (among personnel and students) in the university in particular.

In my lecture I shall discuss the administrative and communicative attempts of the management of both institutes to alleviate this unrest. Success is still a long way off at the moment. The question I shall pose is whether, given the background, it might still be possible to realize a strong and productive partnership or merger – and if so, under what circumstances.

Changes in institutional structure: the merger of 65 departments into 19 schools, and the introduction of a new resource allocation model

Michael Gleeson, Secretary, Trinity College, Dublin (IE)

Trinity College is a four hundred year-old university which has had a traditional structure of six faculties under which were grouped 65 separate departments.

Funding and decision-making in relation to finance, staff and academic affairs are largely centralized, with administrative support available at faculty office level.

Staffing and related budgets were also held centrally.

Following detailed consideration and consultation over the past eighteen months, the College is moving, in October 2005, to a new structure which, in effect, abolishes the concept of Faculties and creates 19 separate Schools/Units.

Simultaneously, the College is introducing a resource allocation model, which ensures that all resources will be allocated to individual Schools/Units.

The process by which the College got from where it was, where it originally intended to get and where it now is will be presented. The outstanding issues will be discussed and some of the remaining challenges raised, including issues for management.

This is a work in progress and advice and comment will be welcome.

Recovering from financial and management crisis

John Furstenbach, Head of Administration, Royal University College of Music, Stockholm (SE)

The Royal College for Music in Stockholm is one of six rather small art colleges in Stockholm. With 600 full time equivalent students and a budget of about 13 million Euro in 2000 it had recovered from three years of annual deficits, the worst in 1997 with 5.5 million Euros.

The college was organized in 21 so called “departments”, acting as suppliers of teaching to 11 study programme managers. Each department head had different business relationships to different programme managers.

Among other irregularities, the study programme committees did not meet during 2001. The effects of cuts in the administration also began to show, and the confidence in the Vice Chancellor, appointed in 2000, reached a low in November 2001, when the trade unions rose the issue of non-confidence in the College Board. The only positive signal was that the College got an increase in grants from 2002 to provide for a new building.

Now much has changed. Six departments are responsible for all teaching, the two programme committees are operating, the curriculum is being restructured and plans for the new building is well under way.

These are effects. I will try to describe how we tried to implement a structural rather than personal organisation, build participation in the change processes and build a constructive relationship to the trade unions.

