



Universities in the Twenty-First Century: Reform Agendas and Emerging Roadmaps

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Abstract: The effects of digitalization, globalisation, demographic changes, budget constraints, and rising expectations for accountability have brought about fundamental changes in the structures of higher education systems around the globe. In this paper, we examine the reform agendas that have led to the changing university of the 21st century. The study is conducted through a comparison of policy documents and case studies from a variety of settings such as India, US, UK, Germany, Australia, and Brazil that suggests five interrelated paths of reform: governance, curriculum, digital, technology change, equity, access and inclusion reform, and partnership for research and innovation. The article further explores the process through which universities have been able to transform their reform agendas into dynamic plans that are not only responsive to external pressure but remain true to their inner values. Special emphasis is put on the adaptability and entrepreneurial abilities that universities have acquired overtime. This paper proposes the concept of a Dynamic Reform Framework, which will help integrate the above-mentioned trajectories into an institutional change management model. Lastly, the paper concludes with some practical suggestions for policy makers, university administrators, and scholars who would like to undertake reforms in a responsive manner.

Keywords: higher education reform, university governance, curriculum innovation, digital transformation, equity in education, institutional change, education policy

Introduction

The situation in higher education finds itself at a crossroads. Throughout most of the twentieth century, universities existed in fairly predictable contexts: as custodians of discipline expertise, as qualifications for the labour market, as generators of national cultures (Marginson et al., 2023). But the widely accepted models are now proving to be useless in the face of the pressures from globalisation, digital disruption, demographic change and increasing public transparency.

Universities have been forced, not always willingly but often happily, to challenge traditional notions of their core roles, structures and ways of producing and disseminating knowledge in the first decades of the twenty first century (Centre for Educational Research and Innovation et al., 2009).

A push for reform in higher education is nothing new. Universities have always adapted to the changing needs of society, from the Humboldtian revolution in the nineteenth century, coinciding with the direct combination of the twin activities of teaching and research, to the massification wave of the post war period, to the marketisation process from the 1980s to the present day (Mayo, 2019). What separates the current time, however, is the unprecedented simultaneousness and systemic aspect of the forces being confronted. Institutions are not expected to respond through changes in one variable alone; rather, they are expected to rethink governance, teaching and learning, research focus, social purpose, and finance simultaneously and often under duress (Serdyukov, 2017).

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The present article surveys the current state of university reform by mapping the key forces behind institutional change and the roadmaps that institutions are adopting in response to these challenging times. While avoiding any prescription of a certain route, the analysis acknowledges that reforms are institution-specific: the needs of a research-oriented university operating in an advanced economy differ from those of a teaching-oriented institution in a low middle income economy (Anh, 2024). However, some common issues prevail, and they provide the framework of the analysis (Skolnik, 1998).

Contextual Background

To grasp the essential elements of reform in today's universities, it is first necessary to consider the broader structural shifts that have recast the university-society relationship over the last three decades. Three sets of changes stand out: the shift to a knowledge economy, the crisis of public funding, and the legitimacy crisis.

The Knowledge Economy Transition

The advent of the knowledge economy has had profound implications regarding what universities should produce and for whom. In an economy characterised by comparative advantage derived from innovation capacity, depth of human capital, and technological entrepreneurship, the university plays a vital strategic role. Governments around the world have increasingly recast the university as not only an educational institution, but also an engine of economic development, innovation system, and producer of talent for internationally competitive industries (OECD, 2025).

Such a recasting has institutional implications. First, there is pressure to favour applied research over basic research, to measure graduate employability, and to establish strong links between the university and industry and governments. Second, it is in conflict with the Humboldtian ideals of the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake and academic freedom (Wernli & Darbellay, 2016). Universities navigating the knowledge economy transition must therefore manage this

fundamental tension between instrumental and intrinsic conceptions of academic work (Westa & Custers, 2026).

The Crisis of Public Funding

Simultaneously, the fiscal architecture of higher education has shifted dramatically (Mirgorodskaya et al., 2023). In many countries, the post-war settlement that positioned universities as publicly funded public goods has been progressively eroded (Stevens & Giebel, 2020). Austerity pressures, competing social spending priorities, and ideological shifts favouring market mechanisms have led to declining public subsidies per student in many systems (Nobanee & Dilshad, 2021). The result has been a transfer of costs to students through tuition fees, an intensification of income diversification strategies, and a growing financialisation of university management.

These funding pressures have generated profound organisational consequences. Universities have invested heavily in professional management capacity, revenue-generating activities such as international student recruitment, and cost rationalisation (Jayabalan et al., 2021). Academic roles have been restructured, with growth in casualised and contingent academic labour at one end of the spectrum and highly rewarded 'star' researchers at the other. The traditional model of the academic as a generalist scholar engaged equally in teaching, research, and service has become increasingly difficult to sustain in the new fiscal environment (Woods & Copur-Gencturk, 2023).

The Legitimacy Challenge

Beyond economic and financial pressures, universities face a deeper legitimacy challenge. Public trust in higher education institutions has been complicated by concerns about student debt, graduate underemployment in some fields, the relevance of traditional curricula, and the perceived cultural insularity of elite academic communities (Veles et al., 2023). Social movements focused on issues such as racial justice, gender equality, decolonisation of knowledge, and



disability inclusion, have put pressure on universities to review and transform their own internal cultures, recruitment processes, and course contents (Eizadirad & Walton, 2024).

Legislative pressures have further complicated the situation. In certain countries, universities have become battlegrounds in the culture wars, with government intrusion into university affairs, constraints placed on the research agenda, and controversy over the values underlying education (Bročić & Miles, 2021). The pressure on legitimacy makes the process of reform not only more pressing but also more challenging, because universities must both address their critics and preserve the conditions necessary for research.

Major Reform Agendas in Higher Education

Against this contextual backdrop, five major reform agendas have emerged as structuring frameworks for institutional change. Each is examined below in terms of its theoretical underpinnings, empirical manifestations, and contested dimensions.

Governance Restructuring and New Public Management

The transformation of university governance has been one of the most pervasive and debated reform agendas of the past three decades (Christensen, 2010). Broadly labelled ‘new public management’ (NPM), this agenda encompasses a range of reforms designed to introduce market-like mechanisms, performance accountability, and managerial efficiency into institutions traditionally governed through collegial academic self-regulation (Roach et al., 2025).

NPM-inspired governance reforms have taken various forms across different national systems. In the United Kingdom, the introduction of the Research Excellence Framework and Teaching Excellence Framework has created powerful performance incentive structures that shape research and teaching behaviour across the sector (Marinson, 2017). In Australia, the deregulation of student places coupled with performance-based

funding has generated market dynamics within public higher education (Parker et al., 2024). In the United States, accreditation frameworks and state-level performance funding systems have created accountability architectures that influence institutional strategy (Madsen, 2024). In many European countries, the Bologna Process and subsequent reforms have introduced degree standardisation, quality assurance bureaucracies, and institutional ranking systems (Economics, 2012).

Proponents of NPM governance reforms argue that they have promoted transparency, improved resource allocation, strengthened institutional accountability, and driven quality improvement. Critics counter that these reforms have generated perverse incentives, commodified knowledge, intensified managerial control over academic work, and produced a culture of performativity in which metrics management displaces genuine scholarly commitment (Craig et al., 2014). The growing body of research on academic labour conditions—documenting intensification, casualisation, and psychological strain—suggests that the human costs of NPM governance have been substantial and deserve serious attention in reform agendas going forward (Ward, 2011).

Emerging governance responses attempt to hybridise NPM efficiency with renewed commitments to academic autonomy and shared governance. Some institutions have developed ‘distributed leadership’ models that devolve decision-making authority closer to academic units while maintaining strategic coordination at the institutional level (Tubino et al., 2026). Others have invested in participatory governance platforms that give academic and student communities greater voice in institutional strategy (Bolden et al., 2009). The most promising governance innovations appear to be those that use performance information as one input among many in deliberative decision-making rather than as algorithmic triggers for resource allocation.

Curriculum Innovation and Competency-Based Education



Curriculum is the beating heart of the educational enterprise, and now here is reform pressure more visible than in debates about what universities should teach, how they should teach it, and how learning should be assessed and credentialed (Kayyali, 2025). There are two related agendas which dominate the discussion on curricula reform. These are the adoption of competency-based education (CBE) and the reconfiguration of the borders of disciplines (Sangwa, 2025).

CBE is fundamentally different from traditional education models in its ontological understanding of learning outcomes. While the former model is based on learning as time-based completion of curriculum units, the latter organises learning in terms of demonstrating certain competencies that need to be accomplished by graduates (Açıkgöz & Babadoğan, 2021). Initially applied within the scope of professional and vocational education, CBE has gradually spread into liberal arts and research universities due to changing demands of the employer market (Pluff & Weiss, 2022).

Competency systems which are introduced in the universities usually cover many aspects. The cognitive competencies can be such things as critical thinking, problem solving, information literacy, and discipline-related analytical skills (Rusmin et al., 2024). Communicative competencies cover written and oral communication, digital communication, and cross-cultural dialogue. Social competencies encompass teamwork, leadership, conflict resolution, and ethical reasoning (Sumaiya et al., 2022). Adaptive competencies address life-long learning, resilience, creativity, and the capacity to navigate uncertainty (Didham & Ofei-Manu, 2020). Increasingly, universities are being asked to make these competencies explicit, measurable, and verifiable in ways that extend beyond the traditional graded transcript.

Beyond CBE, curriculum innovation is manifesting in experiments with interdisciplinary programmes, micro-credentialing, project-based learning, experiential education, community-engaged pedagogy, and global learning partnerships. Many universities have restructured their first-year experiences to emphasise transition,

integration, and foundational competency development before students specialise in disciplinary depth (Felby & Ashwin, 2025). Problem-centred curricula that draw on real-world challenges—sustainability, public health, urban design, social entrepreneurship—have attracted significant pedagogical investment and student engagement.

The decolonisation of curriculum has emerged as one of the most intellectually challenging and politically charged reform agendas within this domain (Moghli & Kadiwal, 2021). Movements challenging the Eurocentrism of established knowledge have demanded fundamental reconsideration of whose knowledge is taught, whose epistemological frameworks are legitimated, and whose intellectual contributions are acknowledged (Siddiqi & Valenti, 2026). Responses have ranged from curricular additions, incorporating non-Western texts and perspectives alongside established canons to deeper structural reforms that question the disciplinary architectures within which knowledge is organised (Banks, 1993).

Digital Transformation and Technology-Enhanced Learning

No reform agenda has attracted more institutional attention, investment, and anxiety in recent years than digital transformation. COVID-19 brought about an expedited process of change for institutions that were gradually trying out e-learning, making them adopt fully digital means of delivering their programs (Tandon, 2021). The pandemic has demonstrated the remarkable adaptability of academic institutions on one hand and the inequalities that online education can increase in terms of students technological accessibility and digital teaching skills on the other (Ndibalema, 2022).

There are many different registers through which digital transformation can occur in universities. In relation to learning and teaching, this can take place through the incorporation of learning management systems, virtual classrooms, delivery of education using online platforms synchronously and asynchronously, immersive simulation environments, and adaptive learning technologies that



offer personalised education to the learner according to their individual data (Sam et al., 2025). In terms of student support services, the use of chatbots, prediction algorithms, digital libraries, and other administrative interfaces in an online mode (Rahman et al., 2025). From the perspective of research, the use of data-driven methods, open science platforms, virtual research environments, and AI algorithms for literature and data synthesis (Ofosu-Ampong, 2024).

Generative artificial intelligence is possibly one of the most revolutionary technological advancements in education in modern times (Wong, 2024). Large language models and other types of generative AI have appeared in the student and academic world at lightning speed, posing problems for traditional forms of testing that are dependent upon individual writing, opening up new opportunities for personalised tutoring and feedback, and presenting fundamental questions about what academic work means in a world that has been supplemented with AI technology (Giannakos et al., 2024). There is great diversity in university policy toward generative AI, and the issue is currently being worked through across the sector (Flogie et al., 2026).

Beyond the learning and teaching process, digitalisation is revolutionising the functioning of universities, research facilities, and even positioning (Carmo et al., 2025). Some universities have dedicated considerable financial resources to becoming ‘digital first’ organisations and making decisions about program development, resource allocation, and interventions aimed at students based on data analysis (Hannan, 2023). Other universities have created impressive digital product lines – online degree programs, professional micro-credentials, massive open online courses – which serve as new sources of income and reach of the institution (Komljenovic et al., 2024).

The risks associated with digital transformation are as important as the benefits of it. There are cybersecurity risks associated with exposure of sensitive information related to research and students to major risks (Salam et al., 2026). The

commoditisation of educational technology has led to the formation of strong vendor networks, which have their own commercial interests, which may be contrary to pedagogical principles. There are serious concerns related to privacy of students, algorithmic biases, and quantification of learning into measurable data (Nichols & Dixon-Román, 2024). Hence, a thoughtful institutional approach to digital transformation must encompass not only technological adoption but comprehensive governance frameworks for technology ethics and risk management.

Equity, Access, and Inclusion Reforms

Ensuring equal access to higher education and the equal distribution of the benefits derived from the experience of attending university has consistently been a part of reform efforts within various national settings. After decades of efforts to increase access to higher education, it is still evident that deep disparities exist regarding who accesses university, where, how, and what for. The gaps obtain in close relationship with the different dimensions of social exclusion, which include economic class, race or ethnicity, gender, disability, place, and immigrant status.

Changes in access have occurred through a number of ways. One way has been through supply side measures, which have involved strengthening institutional capabilities, diversifying programs, and creating new facilities. The second way includes demand-side policies such as scholarship programs, bursary programs, student loans, and outreach programs aimed at marginalised communities. Bridging programs have been used as an attempt to help prepare students whose secondary education has been inadequate for tertiary level education. Contextual admissions programs have been attempted to consider the educational disadvantages of applicants (Silva & Teixeira, 2026).

Inclusion, being different from access, also relates to the process that follows once the students get to the university. There is ample research showing that many students who belong to underrepresented groups often find themselves in



university settings that are alienating in terms of culture, unhelpful academically, and isolating socially (Tavares, 2021). Reforms that relate to inclusion thus refer to the creation of cultural environments where all students feel comfortable participating and thriving. The examples of such reforms include culturally responsive pedagogies, diverse faculty hiring, inclusive assessment strategies, mental well-being supports, and non-discrimination policies (Guberina, 2023).

The idea of belonging is an important theme within contemporary inclusion theory (Ogle et al., 2025). It is shown through research that how much a student feels that they belong to their academic institution is a strong indicator of how likely they will be to persist in school and succeed. In order to establish conditions of belonging, it is not only important to look at the formal structures that are provided on campus, but the informal structures as well.

Disability inclusiveness should be singled out as an issue of equity that has not been adequately emphasised in the past. The idea behind Universal Design for Learning, which suggests designing curriculums and learning environments to accommodate everyone, as opposed to fitting the learner to the design, is an important development in theory (Priyadharsini & Mary, 2024). The implementation of UDL on a broad scale will involve major resources being devoted to academic development, institutional redesign, and cultural transformation within academia that has privileged certain ways of performing intellectual work (Bucheli et al., 2024).

Research, Innovation, and the University–Industry Nexus

The new configuration of the university/industry relationship can be understood in the context of the shift to a knowledge economy and its accompanying policies on research commercialisation, innovation ecosystems, and technology transfer (Yström et al., 2025). Gone are the days when there was the conventional model of the university as the ivory tower of pure scholarship; now there are new hybrid forms that include

expectations for both intellectual and economic gains from academic research.

The development of university–industry collaboration has gone through various stages. Initially, there was a basic approach to the translation of knowledge into commercial products through technology licensing and formation of spin-offs (Inzelt, 2004). Later, more advanced models included collaborative research projects, sponsored industry research centres, and cooperative university–industry laboratories that leverage the combined expertise of different stakeholders in addressing innovation challenges (Kotiranta et al., 2020). The most advanced models involve the concept of university as an institutional hub of innovation ecosystems, which brings together governmental, industrial, civil society and academic stakeholders in pursuing innovative agendas (Lima et al., 2026).

Indeed, the entrepreneurial agenda has transformed not just research management but also the entire experience of being educated at university. Quite a number of universities have made substantial investments in entrepreneurial education, incubation of startups, design thinking, and venture development programmes designed to develop an entrepreneurial mind-set and venture creation capability among their students and staff. The theory of change behind such substantial investment is that universities can make a contribution to economic dynamism not only by transferring technology but also through the creation of entrepreneurs (Ayed et al., 2026).

The issues relating to critical perspectives regarding the industry–research relationship have significant implications in terms of commercial pressures on academic freedom, setting the research agenda, and the sustainability of fundamental science (Golhasany & Harvey, 2022). In cases where the research agenda is influenced by its commercial value, there is a danger that the fundamental research, which is based on curiosity and leads to ground-breaking innovation on a lengthy timeline, may be underfunded. Issues such as conflicts of interest have been noted in



cases where industry-sponsored research demonstrates publication bias (Grove, 2017).

Emerging Institutional Roadmaps

Reform agendas do not implement themselves. Translating policy essentials and competitive pressures into coherent institutional change requires deliberate strategic work: the construction of institutional roadmaps that interpret external demands in light of internal values, capabilities, and contexts (Aghajani et al., 2026). Examining how universities are developing and deploying such roadmaps reveals the diversity of strategic approaches and the complex negotiation processes through which reform is institutionalised.

Institutional roadmaps in contemporary higher education typically emerge from processes of strategic planning that have themselves been reformed over recent decades (Mahardhika & Raharja, 2023). Earlier models of strategic planning borrowed heavily from corporate strategy traditions, emphasising top-down environmental analysis, competitive positioning, and resource allocation decisions driven by senior leadership teams (Biondi & Russo, 2022). More recent models have evolved toward more participatory, iterative, and scenario-based approaches that acknowledge the complexity and uncertainty of the higher education environment (Galang et al., 2025).

A notable trend in institutional roadmap development is the increasing prominence of sustainability as an organising framework. Many universities have committed to ambitious carbon neutrality targets, circular economy principles in campus operations, and integration of sustainability across their research and teaching portfolios. These commitments are not merely performative: they require fundamental changes to facilities management, procurement, curriculum design, and research priority-setting that generate genuine institutional transformation.

Another significant trend is the internationalisation of institutional roadmaps. Universities are increasingly positioning themselves within global

knowledge networks, developing strategic partnerships with international institutions, recruiting globally diverse student and faculty communities, and designing programmes with global learning outcomes at their core. The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent geopolitical tensions have complicated internationalisation strategies, prompting many institutions to develop more diversified and resilient international portfolios (Mena et al., 2021).

Community engagement has emerged as a third important dimension of institutional roadmap development. Recognising that their legitimacy and social licence to operate depends on maintaining meaningful connections with the communities they serve, many universities have made community engagement with local government, civil society organisations, schools, and community groups a strategic priority rather than an optional add-on (Johnston et al., 2024). Anchor institution strategies that leverage university purchasing power, employment practices, and knowledge resources for local economic and social benefit have attracted particular interest (Garton, 2021).

Emerging and Entrepreneurial Ability

A theme that cuts across all the reform agendas examined above is the need for universities to develop new forms of institutional capability—capacities for entrepreneurial action, adaptive learning, and strategic agility that complement and sometimes challenge the traditional scholarly and administrative competencies that universities have historically cultivated.

Entrepreneurial capability in universities encompasses multiple dimensions that extend well beyond the narrow domain of technology commercialisation (Dominici & Gagnidze, 2021). At the organisational level, it involves the ability to identify and pursue new opportunities—whether for income generation, educational innovation, social impact, or research development—in ways that are strategically coherent and mission-aligned (Boparai & Kaur, 2025). At the leadership level, it involves the capacity to mobilise distributed expertise, manage ambiguity, take



calibrated risks, and build coalition across institutional boundaries (Saka-Helmhout et al., 2024). At the individual level, it involves faculty and professional staff who can combine deep disciplinary expertise with boundary-spanning skills, external relationship-building, and entrepreneurial orientation (Perez et al., 2025).

The entrepreneurial university as a theoretical concept was developed most influentially by Burton Clark, who studied how a small number of European universities transformed themselves through proactive environmental engagement, diversification of funding, stimulated academic heartlands, and integrated entrepreneurial culture (Clark, 2001). Clark's framework has been widely adopted as a diagnostic tool for institutional self-assessment and as an aspirational model for institutional development (Findikli, 2017). More recent scholarship has both refined and critiqued Clark's model, underscoring the tensions between entrepreneurial drive and core academic values, and questioning whether entrepreneurial strategies are equally appropriate across different institutional types and national contexts (Rubens et al., 2017).

Adaptive capacity is closely related to entrepreneurial ability but has a somewhat different emphasis. Where entrepreneurial capability focuses on the proactive identification and pursuit of opportunities, adaptive capacity refers to the ability to learn from experience, adjust in response to feedback, and reconfigure capabilities in response to environmental shifts (Hasyim et al., 2023). Universities with high adaptive capacity invest in reliable data infrastructures that generate timely information about student outcomes, research performance, and environmental trends. In doing so, they create feedback mechanisms between strategy and operations so that learning can be fast-tracked into practice within institutions. They also create a culture wherein challenging assumptions, trying out new methods, and learning from mistakes is celebrated and not punished.

The emergence of innovation labs, strategic project funds, and internal venture capital systems within universities is based on an understanding

that adaptability and entrepreneurship need their own organisational spaces and resources (Osorio et al., 2025). Budget systems in universities that allocate resources via established departments and based on historical precedent are inadequate in funding innovative and boundary-crossing activities that do not fit within current departmental classifications. Innovation funds within universities that offer relatively modest and relatively nimble resources for academic and administrative entrepreneurship have been useful in developing a set of innovations that have been tested to determine the most promising ones to scale up (Hamdullahpur, 2021).

Towards a Dynamic Reform Framework

It is important to note that all these different reform agendas and institutional strategies mentioned above are not operating in vacuum. There is an interrelationship between these various streams of reforms, sometimes complementary and competing (Wang et al., 2019). It is therefore necessary to have a synthesised way to understand the relationship among all these diverse streams of reforms (Damiano & Fleres, 2026).

The three key premises that underpin the Dynamic Reform Framework suggested in this paper include the following (Trowler, 2014): first, the university reform process is not one of simple policy adoption and implementation but an iterative and contested process where external drivers are continuously being interpreted, adapted and at times even opposed by institutional players; second, effective reform entails coordination between different aspects of the institution's functioning including values and mission, governance and leadership, organisational culture, resources, and relations with the external environment rather than change in any specific aspect; and third, ability to continuously learn and adapt is more valuable than achieving any particular reform outcome.

The model outlines four interrelated dimensions of dynamic institutional reforms. These include the Values and Mission Dimension which considers the most fundamental aspects of the identity



of an institution: What is this university for? Whom do we serve? What are our uncompromising commitments? Being clear about this dimension becomes the moral compass which guides institutions in making consistent decisions despite conflicting demands for reforms.

The Governance and Leadership Dimension deals with how reforms are decided, who makes those decisions, and by which processes (Yang, 2025). As discussed in this paper, the governance structure of a university has a strong influence on how the reform process takes place. The universities that have both the capabilities for strategic leadership and true governance participation among their academic community can ensure successful reform (Shah et al., 2025).

The Capability Development Dimension looks at the challenge of identifying the new capabilities and skills that reform will require (Brown & McCartney, 2004). There is no doubt that each of the major reform agendas discussed in this paper has implications in terms of capability requirements – for teaching faculty, for researchers, and even for leaders who need skills in data literacy and change management. It is imperative that we invest in developing capabilities rather than just demanding new behaviours.

Environmental Engagement Dimension: This dimension concerns the interactions of the institution with its external constituencies-government, industries, community, students, alumni, and international partners. Organisational reform can be successful not only through organisational change but also through effective management of relationships with external constituencies in order to gain trust and legitimacy and obtain the resources required for building organisational resilience. Universities that neglect such relationships do not have any future in today's environment (Kuzu et al., 2013).

The four dimensions influence each other dynamically. Value and mission shifts result in new governance requirements; innovations in governance make possible capability building; improved capabilities lead to better environmental

interaction; and better environmental interaction provides feedback that recharges the mission of the institution. Thus, the Dynamic Reform Model portrays the development of universities not as a single transformation but as a dynamic process of adaptation. (Abo-Khalil, 2024).

Conclusion and Suggestions

The university is not only an institution of higher education but also a very complex social organisation that mirrors the hopes, fears, and contradictions of the societies in which they are embedded. The five reform agendas discussed in the article: governance renewal, curriculum innovation, digital transformation, equity and inclusiveness, and the research-industry connection are a redefinition of the social contract between universities and society as a whole.

The main lesson for the university administration from this analysis is that change cannot be engineered through the top-down approach. The universities that have undergone the best institutional changes are the ones whose success was based on strategic thinking from the management, coupled with deliberation and ownership by all institutional members. The development of this ability to conduct change is based on communication, consultation, and creation of narrative framework that provides the understanding of what the change should be about.

The next lesson that is to be learned is from policymakers which include several key points. First, coherence in policies is crucial, since the introduction of reforms aimed at governance that increase management control is in direct contradiction with the implementation of curriculum reforms that necessitate creativity and risk on the part of educators. In addition, funding policies based on rewarding the fulfilment of short-term performance goals tend to hamper the development of capability and culture through long-term investments necessary for successful transformation.

For an academic community, the analysis reaffirms the significance of being engaged with



institutional change processes on one side and maintaining a critical distance towards reform processes that may be value-driven in opposition to academic values on the other side. Indeed, in the long history of reforms in higher education, we have many well-meaning reform efforts that have had unforeseen negative impacts on academic freedom, disciplinary expertise, and the life of the scholar. The ability to critically evaluate reform efforts while constructively engaging in them as part of the process of institutional change is itself institutional service.

Lastly, the analysis also highlights the role of students engaged in institutional governance. The contribution of student voice in curriculum development, quality assurance, well-being policies, and strategic decision-making is more than a procedural courtesy; it is an epistemological imperative in that students have knowledge that others do not have.

Way Forward

Looking closely into the future, there are some changes on the horizon that may be very important for the next phase of reform within universities. With advances in artificial intelligence technology such as the further development of large language models and multimodal AI systems, many of our assumptions regarding what people must learn, how they must learn, and what kind of human intelligence and creativity can be considered uniquely valuable will be disrupted. Universities that will embrace these questions by including AI literacy in all courses, redrawing assessment in light of AI capabilities, and using AI for personalising learning will be in a better position than those that will simply turn a blind eye to this revolution or attempt to restrict it.

Climate change and ecological breakdown may be one of the biggest long-run challenges for the reformation of higher education. As institutions, universities bear two kinds of responsibilities with respect to this challenge: firstly, they must themselves be able to decarbonise their activities; secondly, they must teach their students how to move towards sustainable societies. Therefore,

sustainability must be seen not as something peripheral to the agenda of reforms but rather as a key driving force behind it.

Demographic trends will continue to impact the higher education sector in ways that are difficult to predict. The demographic trends of ageing population in high income nations will create a need for continuing education, professional development, and lifelong learning programs that cater to the needs of adult students with varied backgrounds and schedules. The demographic trends of increasing population in low income nations, especially Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, will create a huge need for higher education that is affordable and of good quality, which existing institutions will be ill-equipped to handle.

The matter of defining what it means to be a university, rather than another type of institution that educates, certifies, and generates knowledge, will remain controversial and contested. The collapse of the conventional boundaries of higher education institutions, professional education and training, corporate training, and informal learning poses very real questions for universities regarding their unique identity and positioning. Hence, the path that lies ahead is through reform that is bold in its dedication to improve and change, while being rooted in those most fundamental principles which have ensured the university's status as one of the most permanent and precious human institutions.

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