PLANNING IN A UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

This article is concerned with the internal planning process of the University. It discusses the need for planning, puts forward a definition of planning, looks at the elements and contents of a planning process, notes the levels and units involved in planning and describes the planning cycles. The four charts at the end of the article outline an example of an integrated planning process and other sections of the article discuss the staff work, information, technical and procedural supports required by the planning process.

With the exception of the section on planning and mechanisms — which goes into detail on the uses of student number factors in planning — the article is an outline description of a planning process which could be adapted to meet the needs of any university and at little cost. The description is set in the British context, and the process outlined therefore assumes a certain relationship between institutional and national planning and assumes that the university possesses some freedoms of action. However, although that relationship and the degree of institutional freedom may differ from country to country, the main features of the process should remain appropriate in many different national contexts.

A planning process similar to the one outlined in this article has been operational at the University of Sussex since 1968. Further details of it in that institutional context are available in the Jones, Lockwood and Mackenzie case study on the development of the University of Sussex contained in Planning the Development of Universities, I edited by V.G. Onushkin (UNESCO 1972).

Introduction

There is a tendency to regard the term planning with a reverence which assumes both that it is an end in itself and that it is a solution to all problems. Certainly the term has remained in vogue for much longer than is normal in the changing language of management.

* In 1971–72 the author was part-time co-Director of the Planning and Management in Universities project in the United Kingdom. The report of that project, on which much of this article is based, will be published in book form by the University of Sussex Press early in 1973.
It is difficult to find an article on universities, to read the agenda papers for a University Senate, to study the trends in the suggestions put forward in the internal magazines of universities and so on, without being made aware that the existence of, and the demand for, planning are main discussion points in universities. Claims are made that university plans should be developed as part of a national higher education plan, which is part of a national education plan which forms part of the national development plan. Each university should plan programmes within each of its roles which spring from the basic mission of the university; it should plan specific objectives for each of those programmes. Universities should plan their intakes to meet the demands of applicants and plan their outputs to meet national manpower needs. Universities should plan their curricula and research projects to meet relevant social or economic needs. Universities should plan their relationships with the local community with industry and so on. It is suggested that planning should be the role of leadership supported by special planning units, that planning should be participative or that planning can only take place effectively in small consent groups. In summary, many groups, internal and external to the university, are demonstrating an increasing and varied interest in the existence, forms and aims of planning — including the groups attempting to plan the destruction of the university.

Any administrator working in any university should be interested in each of these various viewpoints. This article is concerned primarily with the organisation of planning within a university rather than with its techniques. It is predicated on the assumption that the environment within which universities function will change at an increasing pace, and that those changes will present universities with opportunities and problems at an increasing rate. The concern of the article, therefore, is how universities can continuously adapt to change, which is largely externally stimulated.

Clearly many factors are relevant to that question. The governmental structure of a university, the characteristics and attitudes of its members, the stage of development of the university, the quality of leadership, the institutional climate and many other factors each affect the university’s ability to respond to the opportunities and problems of change. The organisation of planning, however, not only directly helps to determine the direction and rate of responsiveness to change, but also indirectly through its affects on many of the other factors referred to above.

This article therefore concentrates on the processes of planning internal to a university. Planning exists in all universities and there are planning systems or processes in each university, though they may not be recognised as such. Few developments occur by accident in universities, in