Governance

Working Definitions of Governance

Drawing on a recent report on governance in higher education, I take governance to include

> all activities that can be seen as purposeful efforts to guide, steer, control or manage (quality in) higher education institutions and the sector as a whole. Consequently, (this) includes the structures, processes and (principles and) values by which institutions take decisions in pursuing their objectives.

Following from this, good governance ensures that policies and systems are in place in order to manage and administer institutions in an effective and efficient manner to achieve their, as well as the system's, objectives (CHE, 2002:10)

This definition has a number of merits.

- First, it emphasises the structural, human agency and empirical dimensions of the governance of quality
- Second, it raises the question of system and institutional objectives
- Third, it suggests the elements of policy and decision-making as aspects of the governance of quality
- Fourth, it highlights that principles, values and criteria inform policy and decision-making and system-building
- Finally, it hints at the question of the organisational arrangements for regulating higher education quality

Conceptualising governance: Goals and values

1.1. Governance as an object of concern is linked to the call for the democratisation of the public realm: for institutional arrangements that enjoy legitimacy and authority; rules and procedures that enhance the legitimacy and authority of structures; greater participation of citizens and civil society formations in public policy issues; the recognition of asymmetrical power relations and the aggregation and mediation of competing interests through reciprocal relationships that do not render power a zero-sum game; greater transparency so as to facilitate participation in public policy issues and public oversight, and for accountability of those entrusted with governing for decisions and actions and the exercise of responsible leadership.

1.2. Buckland and Hofmeyr (1993) offer a useful general working *definition* of governance:

> By governance we understand not simply the system of administration and control...but the whole process by which...policies are formulated, adopted, implemented and monitored. Governance

> is an issue not only at the national level but also at every level of the system...Because it is centrally concerned with the distribution of power it is often summed up by the question: Who decides?(1993:1).

The merits of this definition are that it emphasises the structural, human agency and empirical dimensions of the concept of governance as well as the relationship between governance and decision and policy-making.

1.3. In approaching governance in relation to the science councils and other public institutions with a considerable degree of involvement in S&T, key issues that have to be dealt with include:

- the appropriate mode of control and management of science councils
- the organisational arrangements required for controlling and managing the science councils
- the powers, roles and functions that ought to be allocated to science council governance structures
- the criteria in terms of which governance structures ought to be constituted and the related issue of the social composition of governance structures; and
- the processes and procedures for the constitution of governance structures.

1.5. In the light of the above, it is necessary to make explicit the perspectives that serve as a point of departure and indeed frame this report. These are:

i. The creation of structures and mechanisms for decision- and policy-making cannot be seen as purely technical issues and activities. That is, they cannot be abstracted from dimensions such as values, principles and goals. Indeed, the structures that are established must be informed by and grounded in principles and goals.

   Thus, in contrast to approaches that emphasise questions of implementation and affordability, the starting point is the elaboration of principles and goals ("vision" if you like). Questions to do with human resources, implementation and affordability are of course crucial, but

cannot constitute the starting point for policy formation, particularly if the object is fundamental social reconstruction.

ii. Since governance has to do with who decides, how decisions are made and where decisions are made it is strongly tied to the issues of *power* and *legitimacy.* Given our history who makes decisions and how decisions are made is perhaps as important as the actual decisions themselves.

iii. However, since governance also has to do with optimal functioning of the established structures it is necessarily tied to issues to do with *efficiency* and *effectiveness*. Efficiency in relation to the process of governance and effectiveness with respect to the achievement of goals must enter into any consideration of governance.

iv. The continued existence of the present science councils is taken as a given - changes (closing down/amalgamation/ creation of new etc.) to the present spectrum of science councils is a separate issue.

v. The reconstruction of the structures of governance of the science councils will be conditioned by restructuring at higher levels of S&T governance - by the level currently occupied by the Scientific Advisory Council and by the executive level, of government.

vi. The reconstruction of the structures of governance of the science councils will also be conditioned by existing structures of governance, interest group power and negotiations.

vii. The success of a new system of governance will depend on reaching consensus on a framework of values and principles for a new system, agreement around a national policy framework for the distribution of power in the system and the institutionalisation of governance structures through statutory provisions.

1.6. The realm of governance, notwithstanding its significance, is ultimately a means to defined ends. With respect to *goals*, Gilpin (1971) has argued that

> the essential question in any discussion of science policy is: science policy for what?....Science policy is not a disembodied set of national goals but is a means to the achievement of national objectives....Only in the very narrow area of basic research, and perhaps not even there, is science for its own sake a national objective.

From this perspective, one must evaluate 'science policy' structures, the content of policy and research successes in terms of the objectives they are designed to serve... (cited by Wilson (1979:24) in Encel and Ronayne (1979)).

1.12. The implication of the above is that the governance of science councils would need to be characterised by

i. *Democracy* - the establishment of structures that enjoy legitimacy, function democratically and are constituted with sensitivity to issues of race, class, gender and geographical location

ii. *Inclusivity* - the widest possible participation of constituencies in governance of the system, balanced against need to ensure efficiency, coherence and effectiveness.

This entails a definition of the policy rights (decision-making, consultation, access to information) of constituencies and individuals, and also provision for different forms of participation in respect to policy formulation adoption, implementation and monitoring.

iii. *Accountability* - maximum accountability to government as sole shareholder and stakeholders though with respect for autonomy of institutions with respect to defined policy areas.

iv. *Transparency* - open and transparent processes of decision-making with public availability of information

v. *Efficiency and effectiveness* - efficiency in relation to the process of governance and effectiveness with respect to the achievement of goals

The literature on governance appears to identify four broad archetypal roles for boards:

i. *Resource* - buffer between organisation and environment and linkage to external resource networks;

ii. *Watchdog* - monitoring of corporate activity in all its phases; post-factum assessment of performance;

iii. *Trustee* - evaluation of what corporation defines as its operations and how these are conducted; to what extent do corporate activities enhance/deplete image, trust etc.;

iv. *Pilot* - active role in directing activities of the corporation, especially sensitising management to long-term issues; active, information gathering and decision-making role.

It has already been noted that the notion of the board as a "resource" is applied mainly to non-profit institutions. On the other hand the roles of "watchdog", "trustee" and "pilot" are said to pertain mainly to the corporate business sector.

It is not possible to say how universities perceive the roles of Councils or how Councils themselves perceive their roles. To the extent that they are largely treated and see themselves just as a "resource', this is to unduly confine their activity to advising around options and leaving the crucial issues of general vision and overall direction to be formulated by the universities themselves. It does appear that, generally, little attention is paid to the substantive monitoring and evaluation of the performance of universities (made difficult by the absence of strategic plans).

However, the usefulness of the archetypal Council roles identified above is debatable. It should be obvious that each of these broad types of Council roles are hardly mutually exclusive and moreover Councils roles are often shaped by external social pressures and changing conditions. What may be more important to grasp is the following:

In practice most responsibilities of a university are shared responsibilities of the Council and management and require a partnership between the two. The central issues then are:

- "how do the (Council) and management find a balance for sharing these responsibilities?" (Demb and Neubauer, 1992a:63)
- what should be the nature of the involvement of Councils around particular activities of the university in which areas and at what point in the strategic planning process can the Council most meaningfully add value?.

The challenge of a Council is "to distinguish a reasonable and productive threshold between the responsibilities of the (Council) and management" (ibid:66) while maintaining the ability to influence the activities of the university and exercise control over management.