

Arrangements for Coordination Between University and College Sectors in Canadian Provinces

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Abstract

Reports results of study of provincial arrangements for coordination of planning and operations between university and college sectors in Canada.

Findings indicate inter-sector coordination perceived as important issue; coordination structures most developed in provinces where mandate strongest for articulation between sectors; efforts under way in most provinces to refine and improve structures for coordination.

Main

Higher Education has two distinct sectors - universities and colleges - whose operations impinge on each other in areas such as funds, joint programs, transferability of credit, and overlapping markets for adult and continuing education.

Given the interdependence of the sector the question arises if there is a need for inter-section coordination. What arrangements of coordination currently exist? How satisfactory are these existing arrangements? What are the characteristics of effective coordinating structures?

Context

In North America there is usually a binary structure with some intra-sector coordination related to a coordinating agency with some aspect of rationalization.

Need for coordination varies among jurisdictions depending upon the role and mandate ascribed to the sectors. One would expect the need for inter-sector coordination to be greater where community colleges offer the first 2 years of university programs than where the role of colleges is restricted to terminal occupational training.

There may also be need for coordination where employers seek placements for work experience and cooperative education and some programs where training can be in both sectors (such as nursing).

Range of coordination range from comprehensive, formal state level structures to institutional level, ad hoc initiatives.

Australia has a national agency over all postsecondary institutions and intent on treating universities and colleges as a unified national system.

In the United States there is a lack of effective coordination, leaving responsibility to individual institutions. Many educators believe really effective coordination can only be achieved by state agencies which have jurisdiction over all postsecondary institutions.

In Canada because of differences on the part of the two sectors in their respective histories and relationships to government, coordination did not develop as a natural outgrowth of the evolution of the two sectors.

Non-university sectors tended to be directed by a provincial ministry, while universities enjoy considerable autonomy. No provincial government has superimposed a single coordination mechanism or agency over the two sectors.

Methodology

Was unusual in that part of the research activity itself consists of determining whether the subject of research was of perceived significance as to warrant the effort. Did not want to presume that some formal structures and processes for coordination were essential, and then assess our data from that perspective.

Research involved survey of key actors and analysis of relevant documents.

Need for Inter-Sector Coordination

Response suggested there was a need for coordination. A slight majority of senior government officials rates this issue as most important, while a slight majority of sector respondents rated it of middling importance. Difference may be due to fact that government officials have responsibility for both sectors, whereas sector respondents internalized responsibility for only their own sector and are preoccupied with other issues.

Almost three-fourths of respondents from provinces with most highly articulated relationship between colleges and universities rated coordination as a most important issue, while only about one-fourth of respondents from other provinces as a group did so.

Almost all respondents identified transfer as one of the principal concerns warranting efforts at provincial coordination. Three-fourths of respondents also identified system planning or funding, including rationalization of resources and facilities and avoidance of duplication, as additional motivating factors.

Existing Structures of Coordination

A single government ministry or department has the major supervisory responsibility for both universities and colleges in each province. Fact that common ministry oversees both sectors in each province has significant implications for inter-sector coordination. Suggests single Minister and number of senior officials review and discuss policy matters for both sectors.

Only one formal ministry level coordinating committee was identified, the Postsecondary Issues Committee in Manitoba.

Respondents felt that if there is to be meaningful coordination, formal structures for it must involve other besides , or in addition to ministry officials. Such formal structures are two types: one focussing upon broad issues of system planning and development, and attempting to identify and facilitate cooperation in regard to any issues which cut across sector boundaries; and the other which concentrates upon matters related to articulation.

In the initial development of community colleges in Ontario systemic linkages between colleges and universities were eschewed. Colleges developed quite independently.

Recently concern about: inconsistency of treatment by universities of those students who do go on from various colleges to university; the limited opportunity for college graduates in some fields to achieve full professional certification or recognition with a university degree; the increased activity of American universities in the province seeking to address this demand; and alleged gaps in the present postsecondary structure in regard to polytechnic education.

Characteristics of Effective Coordination Structures

Most respondents felt that the major responsibility of coordination must rest with representative of universities and colleges and that institutional members of coordination committees must assume ownership of problem. Other factors identified as enhancing effectiveness were: clarity of coordinating agency's mandate; structure.

General accepted that coordination process involves tension between public accountability and institutional autonomy.

Summary and Conclusions

Analysis suggests university/college coordination is generally considered by key actors to be a matter of considerable importance particularly, but not only, regard to working out arrangements for students who wish to proceed from community colleges or other non-university institutions to universities. A considerable majority of respondents indicated that coordination was important also in regard to system planning, funding, an rationalization of resources and facilities.

Approaches to coordination are most developed and formalized in those provinces in which the postsecondary education systems have had mandated articulation between sectors for quite some time.